

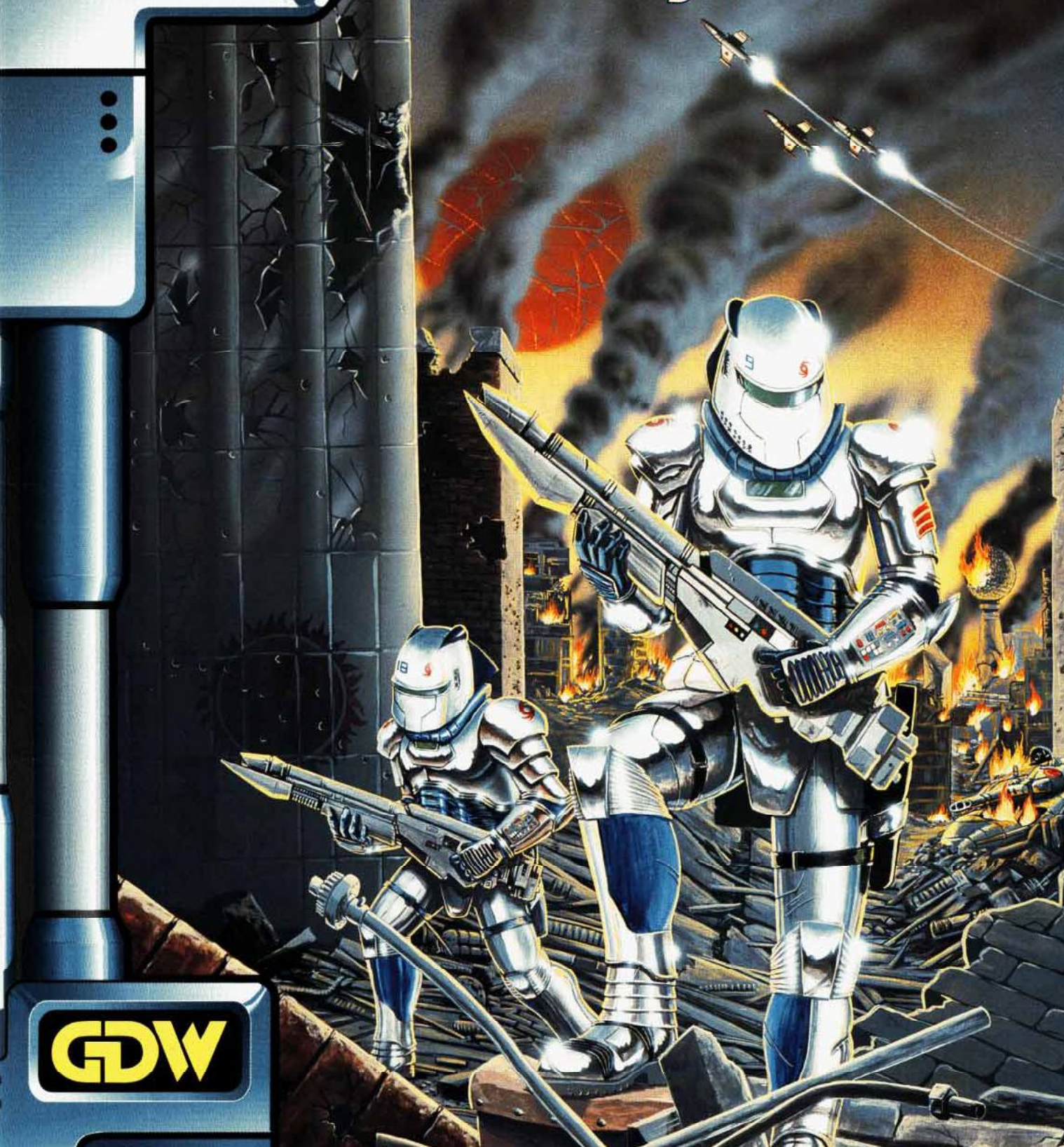
TRAVELLER®
The New Era

0301

By David Nilsen

SURVIVAL MARGIN

Gateway to the New Era



GDW

SURVIVAL MARGIN

Gateway to the New Era

► EMERGENCY BULLETIN

Domain of Deneb Navy reports that Domain of Deneb borders are closed effective immediately for indefinite future. Anyone attempting to enter the Domain of Deneb is suspect to search and seizure or possible destruction.

Communication will not be accepted.

Domain of Deneb goes off the air immediately. We keep the flame. Good luck. Communication ends.

► EMERGENCY BULLETIN

The virus appears to be spread by communication, and is carried by starships. It is believed that the *Traveller News Service* has also been infected, and may be spreading the virus to your data system as you read this.

The only defense is to cease all communications. Shut all systems down, receive no messages. Further rep p p sqcir.....

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ROOTS OF THE NEW ERA

The antecedents of the New Era date back farther than the emergence of the Star Vikings, farther than the release of the AI Virus, farther even than the assassination of Strephon's emperory. In order for the Imperium to shatter so dramatically, there had to already be centrifugal forces in place that would begin pulling apart once the central authority was called into question. Although there is no agreement as to whether or not there was a common origin of these forces, or even what that common origin might have been, it is clear that these forces were present.

The clearest example of this is the differing results of the assassination of one emperor in 1116 as compared to the death or assassination of 18 emper-

ors in the 16 years from 606 to 622 (1E). Clearly the Imperium of the early 600s was a robust organization that shared a common conception of unified goals and interests, regardless of such mundanities as the identity of its emperor. In contrast, the Imperium of 1116 appears to have been an aggregation of separate interests looking for an excuse to go their separate ways.

While diversity had always been seen as one of the Imperium's strengths, a militant form of this diversity became its downfall.

Each of what was to become the Final War's major factional leaders had clear and well-articulated views of the value and meaning of the Imperium. In the event, each of these proved inadequate.

The Imperium is our contribution to the endless history of civilization that came before us and that will continue on after us. It is what we leave to the future, and is in some finite way better than what the past left to us. No great civilization is ever dead. They all remain as the foundations upon which future societies are built. The Terran Confederation, the Vilani bureaux, Cleon's Sylean vision, the United States of America, the Roman Empire, the Greek city-states: all are still with us.

The Third Imperium is a great golden crown, the greatest achievement of human history, and each of us are tiny gems set within it. But this crown is not meant to be worn by any emperor. It is a treasure that belongs to every Imperial citizen, and each of these must be free to fashion his or her own addition to this treasure, to attach him or herself to this priceless offering that we leave to the future.

Emperor Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi
From a speech before the Imperial Moot, 1110
on the date of his order to lift martial law on Terra

This Imperial organism must grow. Instead it lays here hibernating, barely justifying the space it takes up. Where are our leaders? Where are our new ideas? How many hundred years has it been since we have made any real changes in the way people live their lives?

The Imperium stagnates, and life goes on on Capital as it has for 400 years. We consume raw materials, but what do we create? Surely the energy directed toward holding 11,000 worlds together must have some goal, some purpose.

Strephon, you love the Imperium too much. You dote on her and adore her, and you fail to notice that the dead body has begun to smell. You have given me only enough power to discover how dead she has become, and how repellant it is that you intend to allow her to remain that way. The Imperium lies expiring Strephon, and you have neither the wit nor the will to revive her. Someone must.

Archduke Dulinor Astrin Ilethian of Ilelish
Private journals aboard ISS Sargon,
en route to Capital, 089-1116

SURVIVAL MARGIN

The only measure of this Imperium's value is its economic strength and viability. We may arrogate all manner of high purposes and beliefs to this civilization, but we must not forget that it exists only to allow its citizens to effectively interact on an economic basis.

All interactions between intelligent beings are economic, because economics is the satisfaction of natural biological needs by social means. We create societies by trading; we do not create societies and then decide to trade to have something to do with our time. Politics, statecraft, religion, and our own glorious Imperium; these are all methods to create an environment within which beings can go about their most basic business of trading the necessities for healthy, meaningful lives.

Duchess Margaret Tukera
Address to the 500th Oracle
103-1116

This Imperium that I spent my life serving, this Imperium which is the highest achievement of human history, is nothing if it is not these people. What constitutes the separate value of this empire above the lives of its citizens, that can justify their abandonment in its name? Nothing that I can see.

The Imperium be damned—take care of these people.

Duke Craig Anton Horvath of Daibei
Ordering the rejection of Lucan's
mobilization of the Daibei fleets

There are always those who claim that society is bound to fall, and it's usually going to be sometime soon. Julian Trane was another of those individuals, and The Inevitability of Night was another of those theories.

I am sorry to hear of Mr. Trane's death. He was, by all accounts, a good, serious, and concerned man. He was concerned about the forces that threaten to destroy the lives of those about him, and he is right to be concerned. But he made a mistake. He made the biggest, most recurring mistake of them all. He forgot that we are in charge of our own destinies. Trane is correct, that the current civil war is reminiscent of the antecedents of the Long Night. There is no mistake there. But the mistake is to assert that we are no more than petals in a stream, or ashes in the wind.

We are on the verge of a long night because people made decisions to allow that to happen. This is not a pre-ordained cycle or a superhuman force. We are in trouble, but we are in trouble at our own hands. We created this situation, and we can find solutions to it.

We are on the brink of the abyss. Don't be afraid to hear that. I'll say it again: We are on the brink of the abyss. Why is that so scary to hear? We're in the middle of a bloody civil war and surrounded by invaders. Of course we're on the brink of the abyss. You'd have to be a fool to not recognize it. Awareness is always the first step. And now that we know, what are we going to do about it? We are going to make damned good and sure that we don't fall in, that's what we're going to do.

We citizens of the Imperium got ourselves here, and we are going to get ourselves out. People build civilizations, not historical forces. People fight wars, not invisible gremlins. People sign peace treaties, make alliances, build buildings, assemble starships, raise families—they create things in places where there was never anything before. Why do we do this? Because we dream and envision things, because we believe in things—and the first thing to believe in is that our destiny belongs to us, and we are the only ones who can take it away from ourselves.

The Imperium is not a supernatural force. The Imperium is not an exhibit in a museum. The Imperium is us. And the Imperium isn't over until we say it's over.

The First Regent, Norris of Regina
In a public statement in response to the
"Inevitability of Night" riots on Mora, 1125

An elephant is like a rope.

A blind man at the back end of an elephant



A NOTE ON SOURCES

It is remarkable that so much primary source archival material has survived from the collapse of the Third Imperium. It is remarkable not just because of the upheavals during and after that period, but also because of the tendency for the private papers of pivotal leaders to be closely held and easily destroyed in such periods of uncertainty. The term "papers," of course, is used mostly in the traditional sense; the documents of contemporary leaders are usually held in electronic data formats, although as will be mentioned below, this is not always the case.

Strephon's documents were obtained from the Alkhalikoi stronghold on Usdiki, and were quite comprehensive. Strephon wisely maintained the habit of carrying all of his confidential and personal documents with him whenever he travelled, and this is how these arrived at Usdiki. There were obviously many additional papers at Capital pertaining to Strephon's public, ceremonial, and bureaucratic life, but these are of much less interest than those which he personally retained, which preserve his own thoughts.

These documents are of two types: dictated and handwritten. The first format is fairly typical of the Imperial nobility. Most nobles extensively used computer transcribers or human stenographers and transcribers, depending upon personal preference. Strephon himself, although remembered as an austere ruler, preferred the human touch, and employed a fairly large transcription staff, mostly drawn from the Imperial Navy for security reasons. Another prominent format of Strephon's documents is one unusual for the Imperial nobility, and consists of handwritten notes. Strephon typically insisted on hard (paper) copy documents for his inspection, and frequently jotted instructions and comments in the margins. When alone, he also usually wrote longhand reminders to himself, rather than using computer transcription. When asked why he did this, he explained to the 12th Marquis haut-Bastien that his syntax was much better when he had to look at his sentence construction on a page, rather than speaking extemporaneously. Of course, the expert systems employed by computer transcription systems are capable of editing and streamlining spoken words to a style selected by the user, but that style offended Strephon's attention to detail.

Norris' documents are, as could be predicted, the easiest for the historian to come by. The enduring popularity of the First Regent amounts to a virtual personality cult in the former Domain of Deneb. In fact, one interesting challenge faced by the Norris historian is the necessity of weeding inauthentic Norris documents from the many repositories that seek to link themselves with the already legendary Archduke.

The main source of material are, of course, the Dilgaadin documents. It is now well known that Norris employed his psionic seneschal, Dilgaadin, for a number of unique roles. During Norris' reign it was often noted that Norris spoke through his seneschal quite often, and when asked why this was the case, answered, "Dilgaadin knows my mind on these matters." Norris also saved himself the time of personally writing or dictating by allowing Dilgaadin to psionically read his thoughts and intentions on an issue, and then draft a statement in his stead. This arrangement worked so well that only rarely did Norris draft his own documents, and these were said to be rather incomplete and in need of editing, so used was Norris to Dilgaadin completing his own thoughts for him.

Although some Norris scholars attempt to divine which documents were written directly by Norris and which were filtered through Dilgaadin, most agree that they are indistinguishable: Dilgaadin's long association with Norris allowed him to use phrasing and wording identical to that of his lord.

Dulinor's documents were harder to come by, and are still somewhat incomplete. The largest single cache of these documents was discovered in the wreckage of his flagship *Clarion* on Gakhu, where Dulinor met his death. Although lacking in breadth, the Dulinor papers of the Kuligaan collection provide interesting political-military insights. Further papers have naturally been preserved on Dlan, but as with Strephon, the documents preserved at his capital provide less insight than his personal "entourage documents." Interestingly, his maintenance of these entourage documents is probably a habit that Dulinor picked up during his long association with Strephon.

One source conspicuous by his absence is Lucan, widely remembered as "The Black Emperor." It is really an open question whether any of Lucan's papers survive at all; indeed, it will probably be quite some time before a real Lucan scholarship will have a chance to emerge. It is still common for archaeological and historical artifacts relating to Lucan to be destroyed in an irrational exorcistical frenzy within the area of the former Black Sphere. The fact that "lucanic" and "imperial" have emerged throughout human space as emotion-packed epithets indicates that the public consciousness is not yet prepared to accept Lucan's reign as a legitimate historical topic. Primary source material from Lucan or his close (and reportedly short-lived) advisors would be fascinating, however, as scholars would finally be able to chart the particulars of his legendary deterioration. For now, however, this will have to remain a fond dream for historians and would-be biographers.

Victoria Kiigun and Norris Ushakov
Regence University of Deneb, Mora, NE 65

▶ VISUAL I.D.



Emperor Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi

▶ VISUAL I.D.



Archduke Dulinor Astrin Iethian

▶ VISUAL I.D.



Archduke Norris Aella Aledon

From the journals of Emperor Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi

365-1103

The structure needs to be renewed. Rather than one Imperial culture as we all imagine, the Imperium is clumping into distinct cultures a sector or more in size, with little, if any, loyalty to the Throne.

Therefore, the Imperium must cut itself new banks. It must flow downhill. Our river is too old, it is slow moving and is forming innumerable oxbow lakes, cutting themselves off from the Imperial mainstream into little closed loops.

Have you ever spent an entire week with a mob of psychohistorians? That's the way they talk. They may be right, but they have a tedious way of expressing themselves. Psychohistory nothing, this is socio-hydraulics, and I don't recommend it. Some kind of deep-seated yearning for some inevitable, naturalistic force coursing through their lives. That Old Man River, he just keeps a rollin' along.

Does a drop of water feel angst as it falls downhill? I doubt it. I worry, therefore I am not accurately modelled by water. Too bad that doesn't roll off the tongue any more smoothly.

But the issue remains, they say, that any major crisis will more than likely see the Imperium spin off in different directions, and not meet the threat united. They present this as a hypothetical, but none of them know about Longbow. My plans to repeal Paula's orders will have to be canceled; that's exactly the type of upheaval they believe will untie the package. And that whole thing was their idea too. Damn psychohistorians, we should drown them all.

Pentecost today proposed Operation Jumpstart, which I will approve. But that is only a backstop against the worst case. We need a new vision that will draw people's eyes coreward again, to look to their unity, and not their diversity. How much of this can be laid at my feet, for re-emphasizing the domains? Naturally none of the psychos would imply any criticism of me, and maintain that the fissures are over a century old. Perhaps they are, and yet we still need strong proximate government to address problems where they occur.

Dulinor of Dian is as innovative a duke as I have seen. As an archduke, his new ideas would be a force against the kind of myopic repetitive patterns that have led us to these soft, rounded banks. Not only will the higher rank give him a greater voice, but his position might encourage the other archdukes to compete with him for reforms and innovation. If Dulinor can't cut new, steep banks for us, I don't know who can.

Longbow has given us time, but it must be used profitably. I can lay the groundwork, but a domestic crisis would cancel it all. We need time and stability to meet the future. If Dulinor can create a new source of loyalty, he can represent our survival margin.

HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY

ENCRYPTION KEY IM3-01 CHALLENGE BLUE

ACCEPTED

SET KEY AT ALEPH/ABULAFIA2.2

ACCEPTED

SET FILTER AT SHOTS/EMBER1

ACCEPTED

MESSAGE BEGINS

EYES ONLY

324-1115

PROJECT LONGBOW

PER PROJECT REPORT 097-1112, INCOMING DATA FROM STATION GABRIEL, CORRESPONDS TO PRIORITY ZEPHYR [PERSONAL ATTENTION REQUIRED]. STATIONS HEROD, RAPHAEL REPORTED SILENT, PRESUMED DESTROYED. DATA CURRENCY INDICATES CONSTANT +1C CLOSURE RATE, ARRIVAL AT MERIDIAN 78, PRIME RADIAL, IN 90 YEARS.

PENTECOST

From the journals of Emperor Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi

132-1116

What a marvelous creation. Where will creations like this eventually lead us? "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." For how long have we known that, and for how much longer will we continue to ignore it? We seem doomed to only take the things that we know, and extrapolate from them to find other things that we also know.

Mundainties, ultimately. Are we really so afraid of the universe that we can only clutch desperately at facts, and shore them up with a delicate framework of other facts? "Oh look!" we cry, "this little fragment of fact fits so nicely with this other one over here." It's as if, for one paralyzing moment, we were afraid that it might not fit, that this little cocoon of rationality we've built will come crashing down like a dream, and we'll be sucked away into the maelstrom, and the universe will have won. But no, this time the new fact does fit, and we snap it into place, and huddle a little closer around the fire, and the howling darkness is kept at bay for one more day, one more month, one more year.

Who is this woman—I want to say empress—mediated from one mind to another across all that distance? She did not even seem to acknowledge me, yet I felt that she was speaking to me, and the relay felt that she was speaking to him too. Is it a still picture that I imagine is surrounded by motion, or is it a pregnant moment moving unchanged through time?

All we own is this tissue framework of knowledge, and all of the vast, yawning emptinesses between are left to others. When will we learn to know what is not knowable?

"Some men see things as they are and say why. I dream things that never were and say, why not?"

I miss Iolanthe and Iphegenia. Now there is a fact, surrounded by unanswerables. That they are is a fact. What they are, and why they are, those are things that we do not know. But that they are is, ineffably, enough. I must go home.

1116

Prior to the onset of what became known as the "Hard Times," most historians divide the Final War into four phases: Offense, Desperation, Irrecoverability, and the Black War. The first phase was called the Offensive Phase, when the leading faction leaders actually believed that vigorous action would achieve the throne. This period was marked by violent, enthusiastic battles, as each side felt it was making progress toward its goal. This phase didn't really get into full swing until 1117. The year 1116 was a time of positioning for the coming campaigns.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)**Date: 132-1116**

¶Emperor Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi was assassinated at 1517 hours local time, 132-1116, in the Grand Reception Hall of the Imperial Palace above Capital/Core. In the ensuing firefight, the Empress Iolanthe and the Grand Princess Iphegenia were also killed, along with the Aslan Terlyariwo ambassador, 12 Imperial Guards, and a number of bystanders.

¶In the following minutes, Archduke Dulinor of Ilelish appeared before the cameras of the reception hall, claimed the crown of Emperor by right of assassination, and scattered holocrystals documenting his claim to the surviving crowd. He ascended the steps of the dais and sat on the Iridium Throne briefly before leaving in the company of his bodyguard.

¶System Control Central reported tracking the Archduke's cruiser leaving the Capital system minutes later. Fleet elements are reported in pursuit.

¶Capital has been placed under martial law. Off-planet transportation has been suspended temporarily. Naval headquarters has issued a statement that the situation is stable and under control. Rioting is reported in the city.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)**Date: 135-1116**

¶Preparations for Emperor Strephon's funeral tomorrow continued today without incident. Empress Iolanthe will be buried at the same time. Grand Princess Iphegenia will be buried Thirday.

¶The Admiralty confirmed today that the Imperial Palace has been cleared of disloyal elements. The apartments accorded Dulinor in the Palace have been retaken, with no sign of the Archduke.

¶The body of Prince Varian, until today heir apparent to the Iridium Throne, was recovered from the Imperial Palace this afternoon and now lies in state alongside the Emperor in the central Hall of Nobles beneath the Moot Spire. Varian's funeral is scheduled for Thirday.

¶Crowds of mourners continue to file through the Hall of Nobles. Responding to the press of crowds, last minute arrangements have been made to keep the hall open through the night.

¶The Office of the Mint has suspended production of the Cr1 coin pending the coronation of the next Emperor. A generic sunburst design has been adopted as a temporary replacement.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)**Date: 136-1116**

¶Emperor Strephon and Empress Iolanthe were buried today with full state honors. The procession from the Hall of Nobles to the Alkhalikoi section of the Imperial Park in the shadow of the Palace moved slowly and without incident.

¶Prince Lucan, Varian's younger brother, and now heir apparent to the throne, appeared briefly at graveside, leaving under heavy security immediately after the ceremony.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)**Date: 137-1116**

¶Following simple burial ceremonies for Grand Princess Iphegenia and Prince Varian, the Office of the Emperor today announced that Prince Lucan had formally ascended the Iridium Throne in private ceremonies in the Imperial Palace.

¶Shortly thereafter, Duke Simalr of Ushra, speaking for the Moot, charged that private ascension ceremonies are invalid, adding that any assumption of the powers of the Imperium requires the consent of the Moot.

¶Emperor Lucan, communicating through his seneschal, exercised the Imperial power to dissolve the Moot for one year. Duke Simalr of Ushra, speaking for the Moot, denied the legitimacy of Lucan's action in a strongly worded reply which was released simultaneously to the news services.

¶A meeting of the Moot later in the day failed to achieve a quorum. Duke Simalr is reported under house arrest.

From the journals of Emperor Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi**181-1116**

They tell me that they are dead. I only know what they tell me. Perhaps some will wonder what I felt this day, but this is all they will find. Even if I wrote for pages and pages, still, this is all they would find.



From the memoirs of Dr. Enli Kagamira

186-1116

The Emperor is finally sleeping, but only because of the sedatives I insisted he take. I was only able to persuade him because we are currently in jumpspace and there is no new information or communications that he could receive until we emerge again in real space.

The Emperor had been continuously awake for five days, but interacted hardly at all with his staff. He has always been a very self-contained man, but has been even more detached than usual since his briefing at Depot. The news of "his" assassination and particularly of the death of Iolanthe and Iphegenia has naturally been a staggering blow on top of the rest. I believe that his instincts were to return to Capital at once to regain control of the situation, but he appears to have become so numbed by these events that he has been content to allow his staff to order a course to his holdings at Usdiki. I am concerned that the journey to Usdiki is a shortsighted decision, but fortunately this decision does not rest upon me.

As he waited for the sedatives to take affect, the Emperor was typically making notes to himself on a pad of paper. When I helped him to bed, I noticed that he had been working on a passage of free verse, I think it's called. The Emperor is fascinated by forms of written expression, and has tried other more restrictive forms in the past. Normally, I would not have read the passage, but because of his current condition I felt that I should intrude. The piece is powerful, but not one, I think, that should remain for posterity with his official papers. I will preserve it with mine, unless he asks for it to be returned. This most public of all public figures is entitled to a private place to suffer.

*You, who died with her, who everyone will think was me—
Were you careful to represent me to the end?
Since I was not there where I should have been, to carry out my duties—
To take the bullet, to expire beside my dear wife and daughter—
Were you careful to carry out your duty, and with your final breath,
Tell them that you loved them?
Now I have a new empress, but she is not the one I want.
Better that she were yours.*

From the journals of Emperor Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi

290-1116

*I looked at my entry for the day that they died, and discovered that I had already written as good an epitaph as I will ever be capable of.
We are going to Usdiki. Usdiki is a good place.
Now that you live in my mind, empress, tell me who you are.*

Dlan/Ilelish (1021 A8D1ADE-G)

Date: 245-1116

¶The Archduke's official state visit to Capital ended abruptly today with his surprise return to Dlan and his immediate call for a full-media press conference on the steps of his palace for later in the day.

¶After appearing wearing an elaborately fashioned crown, the Duke began his statement with a list of wrongs and abuses perpetrated by Emperor Strephon. He concluded with the startling statement: "The Emperor is dead! I have dedicated my life to the people of the Imperium. I claim the Iridium Throne by right of assassination and shall rule this Imperium as Emperor Dulinor."

¶The stunned public then listened as the Emperor called for a complete mobilization to seize all of the Imperium for his sacred cause. He made a public and official request to Admiral Hutara, his brother, for the Ilelish Fleet to side with him in his sacred struggle to gain his rightfully secured place on the throne.

¶The Emperor Dulinor retired to his chambers without answering questions. A subsequent statement detailed the new Emperor's trip to Capital and the assassination of Strephon on the Iridium Throne itself. The statement concluded with an account of Dulinor's ascension of the Throne to the well-wishing cheers of millions of Capital's citizenry followed by a selection of patriotic video vignettes.

¶Celebrations have been organized on Dlan and throughout the sector as the populace is encouraged to honor the beginning of a new age for the Imperium and Ilelish sector.

Dlan/Ilelish (1021 A8D1ADE-G)

Date: 248-1116

¶Sector Admiral Hutara and his fleet officers made an official announcement that the Ilelish Fleet has declared for Dulinor. In a brief but ancient ceremony, Hutara offered his dagger to Dulinor, who solemnly accepted, and then briefly embraced his brother.



RAVELLER NEWS SERVICE

From the memoirs of Archduke Norris Aella Aledon, First Regent

339-1116

I commemorated Strephon's death today by taking his name in vain, and tomorrow I will appear in public and lie, using his name again. Therefore, my first act as Archduke will be to confidentially issue myself a full and complete pardon. Or not.

It was a strange sensation. I've done it before, of course, using the warrant in Strephon's name to dispose of that buffoon Santanocheev, but it was different then, knowing that if I screwed up he'd be there to fry me for abusing his office. This time, knowing he was dead, that I could get away with virtually any excess with absolute impunity, well, I didn't like it. The fact that I have a three-month headstart on the people and plenty of rope to hang myself with is quite a privilege.

The privilege to lie, or in this case, the responsibility to lie. I didn't enjoy it.

Do you hear that, posterity? "I didn't enjoy lying," the Great Man said, polishing his halo with a coy glance toward history, "Yet I was forced to do it for the greater good. In fact, each and every time I lie, I hate it even more." Too bad more famous liars don't agonize over it like I do.

How can I really say it bothers me if I've presumably become so good at it? How else did I have such a successful career in Naval Intelligence and then in Imperial government without becoming a galactic-class liar? Maybe I'm only good at lying to myself.

Really, I stared at that piece of paper for so long that Branj had to actually say, "What's the problem, forgotten how to spell my name?"

There's another good one. The tragic, pure-of-heart Great Leader was betrayed by the Pernicious Advisor. Ha, take that, Dilgaadin, you chrome-domed schemer. Give me a flipping break, posterity, but condemn the éminence luisante.

I hope you forgive me, Strephon. It would mean much more coming from you. You'd probably tell me to go out and make sure that I didn't make you regret it. And that's certainly the only way for me to rationalize this to myself. Hell, after all, what did you give me the stationery for if you didn't want me to use it?

There you go, posterity, there's your answer. All us old historical farts are a bunch of introspective gloom-oes. Aren't you glad we're dead?

Regina/Spinward Marches (1910 A788899-C)

Date: 340-1116

¶The ducal household announced today that Duke Norris was elevated to rank of Archduke of the Domain of Deneb by the hand of Emperor Strephon, 091-1116, in recognition of his activities in the late Fifth Frontier War.

¶The Duke plans a trip to Capital to personally accept the Emperor's blessing.

1117

1117 saw the beginning of Offensive Phase of the Final War. Because of Lucan's shortsighted withdrawal of naval forces from the Imperial frontiers (Corridor, Old Expanses, Daibei), this period also set the stage for the second and third phases of the Final War.

Terra/Solomani Rim (1827 A867A69-F)

Date: 037-1117

¶In an almost immediate response to the announcement of Strephon's assassination, rioting and rebellion have broken out in key population centers around the world. Thought to be Solomani sponsored, this tremendous unrest has affected almost the entire population and has tied up all transportation and industry on Terra.

¶Clashes between the occupation army and rebels has been particularly fierce in India, where riot police have been unable to stop rioters from looting Vilani-owned homes and businesses. In India alone there have been over a hundred people killed.

¶Curfews and restrictions on activity have been announced by the military governor for many population centers. Violators will have to deal with strict penalties, as the rights of the citizenry have been temporarily suspended in the face of this current crisis.

Regina/Spinward Marches (1910 A788899-C)

Date: 067-1117

¶The Emperor Strephon was assassinated on 132-1116. His assassin, the Archduke Dulinor of Ilelish, fled the scene.

¶The fighting during and after the assassination plot also took the lives of Empress Isolde, Grand Princess Iphegenia, and Prince Varian. Prince Lucan has ascended the Iridium Throne as the new Emperor.

¶Duke Norris of Regina is en route to the upcoming Rhyllanor Conference and was unavailable for comment. The ducal household expressed its deepest sympathy and has dispatched a special ceremonial convoy to Capital to pay last respects to Strephon and homage to Lucan.

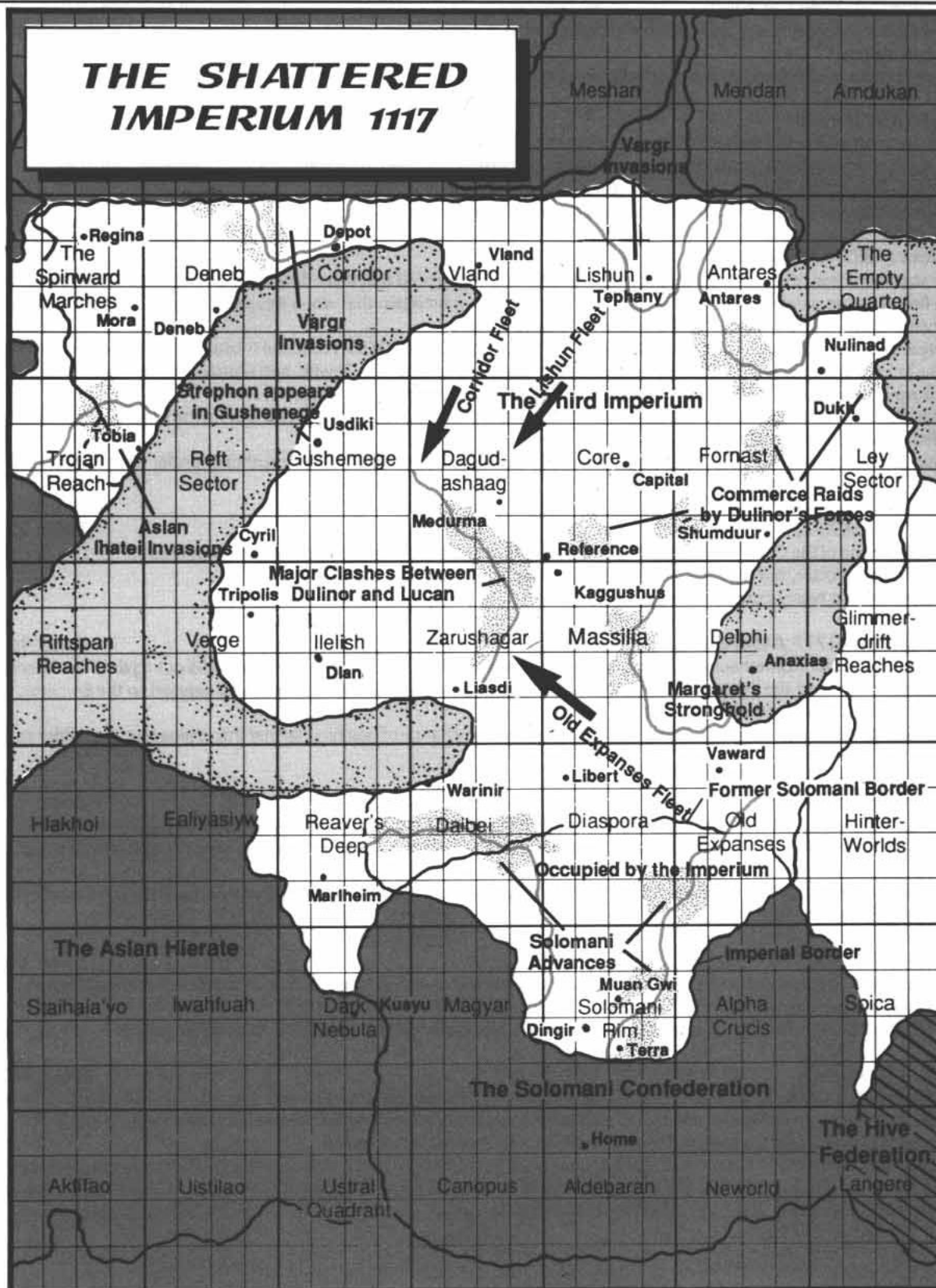
Home/Aldebaran (1009 A86699A-E)

Date: 120-1117

¶Subsequent reports from the Imperium, reporting considerable unrest and multiple claims to the throne, have met with considerable favor among officials here today. Quotes vary, but most sources consulted uniformly agree that what's bad for the Imperium is almost certainly good for the Solomani movement.



THE SHATTERED IMPERIUM 1117



Key

- Border of Frontier
- Safe Areas
- Major Conflicts
- Non-Imperial Space
- Rifts



¶Administrator Howard has stated that "Our brothers who are still under the yokes of Imperial rule are calling out to us now. It is our obligation, indeed our moral imperative to contact them and lend them our support in this moment of opportunity, and bring us one step closer to the ultimate victory of the Solomani destiny."

¶Rumors that large portions of the fleet have been placed on alert and are on the move have not been officially confirmed.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 125-1117

¶The Archduke of Antares has refused to commit his sector fleet against Dulinor, despite direct orders from Lucan. (His excuse was to protect his domain from Vargr invaders in the Lishun sector.) Rumors that the Archduke has been in negotiations with worlds outside the Imperium were neither confirmed nor denied by the Emperor's representatives.

¶Travellers are warned that the Antares sector is a possible danger spot for the future.

Terra/Solomani Rim (1827 A867A69-F)

Date: 150-1117

¶In a press release statement from the Naval Office on Terra, the Admiralty announced that three distinct Solomani fleets have crossed the border into the sector. The fleet is taking a defensive stance in response to this threat. It is certain that when this news reaches Capital that a state of war will be declared between the Third Imperium and the Solomani Confederation.

¶The first fleet has jumped from Krypton through Kidashi and is battling Imperial forces in the Albadawi subsector. A second, more powerful fleet is laying siege to Ilike in the Dingir subsector. The final invasion fleet has occupied Scandia, Tewfik, and Melchior in the Arcturus subsector. The Solomani Rim fleet is reportedly on the move to counter these unprovoked advances by the Solomani.

¶Though the threat of war is imminent along the Solomani frontier, people are encouraged to put their trust in the superior Imperial fleets which are already doing battle with the aggressors.

¶In an attached statement, a state of martial law was invoked on the entire planet of Terra. Military authority under General Yoshtiru will be in effect until this current crisis has passed.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 155-1117

¶Emperor Lucan is at the head of the Core fleet doing battle with the rebel squadrons of the outlaw Dulinor. Widespread fighting has been reported throughout the Dagudashaag sector, but no large, decisive battles have been fought to date.

¶Imperial forces have inflicted heavy losses on the rebel fleets.

Muan Gwi/Solomani Rim (1717 A456A86-F)

Date: 168-1117

¶Solomani forces have bypassed Prometheus and have laid siege to Terra. Imperial space forces could not hold out against the Solomani drive and have retreated coreward toward the Vegan Autonomous District. The Vegans have sworn allegiance and support to the Emperor, and their ships are lining up with those of the Imperium to stop the Solomani.

¶The Admiralty assures that with the Vegans as allies, the Solomani have no chance of reaching farther into the sector. A corridor to Core will be maintained.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 174-1117

¶The Emperor's staff has issued a statement that Vargr fleets, mostly independent but all acting in similar fashion, have overrun much of Lishun sector. The Lishun fleet is engaged in a deep penetration battle throughout the sector and is attempting to liberate or hold worlds against the Vargr hordes.

¶Attempts by the Vargr to make similar moves against worlds in Antares sector have been made for the most part thwarted by effective use of the fleet there by the Archduke of Antares.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 184-1117

¶The Emperor's Vengeance Fleet has performed excellently in Zarushagar sector. When forced into a set battle in the Khipge system, the rebel fleets were reportedly absolutely defeated.

¶Though rebel ships are still on the loose in the sector, the Emperor is reportedly on the advance toward Ilelish and his quarry, Dulinor.

Dlan/Ilelish (1021 A8D1ADE-G)

Date: 187-1117

¶The office of Fleet Admiral Hutara released an official statement today. In it, the Admiralty announced that rebel forces in the Zarushagar sector have been successfully thwarted by a calculated campaign of military and commerce raiding by the glorious Loyal Fleet.

¶The campaign to retake Capital and the Iridium Throne for the true Emperor is in full swing.

¶Emperor Dulinor praised Admiral Hutara's success in a public announcement from his palace. He also announced plans to move his seat of power to Capital once it has been taken but said Dlan and Ilelish sector would remain the center of popular support and culture in the new empire.



From the journals of Emperor Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi

203-1117

I can wait no longer: Lucan and Dulinor will not permit me to. I cannot wait for confirmation of evacuation from Longbow, when each day brings more news of the appalling destruction those two fools are raining on the empire. Because we haven't heard from Pentecost, I will not be able to explain where I was, but in any case, I would be unable to explain why. Depot/Core is a close enough substitute for Depot/Lishun.

I will also describe my two other clones as surgically altered doubles to allow them a better chance to escape persecution, assuming they haven't already been killed. It's only fair to give them some kind of fighting chance.

I wish I had not waited this long. I wish I had not agreed to come to Usdiki. It will be that much harder for the delay.

Usdiki/Gushemege (1015 A6649EF-F)

Date: 204-1117

¶The Emperor Strephon stepped onto the balcony of his vacation palace here today and was greeted by a thunderous response which cut short his prepared remarks.

¶"Strephon Lives!"

¶Statements by Strephon's aides indicated that Dulinor's assassination attempt killed a double who routinely filled in for Strephon at routine functions.

¶Strephon himself was safely and secretly en route to the Imperial depot in Core sector.

¶When news of the assassination attempt reached Strephon, he proceeded to Gushemege and the relative safety of the vacation palace.

¶Strephon's closing remarks called for the Imperium to rally to his banner and bring the rebellion to an end.

Depot/Corridor (1511 A686354-F)

Date: 221-1117

¶The Naval High Command of Corridor Fleet today announced the arrival of Emperor Lucan's Transfer Order.

¶To help save the Imperium from the rebel Dulinor, the announcement said, Corridor Fleet is to transfer to Zarushagar within a month.

¶Local authorities expressed confidence that sufficient assets would remain in Corridor sector to defend the region against Vargr raids.

Hindhahl/Old Expanses (1422 A754A86-B)

Date: 224-1117

¶Sector naval headquarters today announced the transfer of the Old Expanses Fleet to Zarushagar for operations against the usurper, Dulinor. The brief announcement from headquarters indicated that all of the first-line fleets would be transferred within 60 days.

¶"The defense of the sector lies in the capable hands of our reserve squadrons," Sector Admiral Hinchcliffe said at the press conference which revealed the arrival of the Transfer Order from Emperor Lucan.

Regina/Spinward Marches (1910 A788899-C)

Date: 225-1117

¶Archduke Norris has returned to Regina unexpectedly and called an emergency news conference. The Archduke brought with him the dismal news that Vargr raiders have invaded the Corridor sector and effectively cut the Marches off from the rest of the Imperium. As Archduke of the Domain of Deneb, Norris stated that he remains loyal to the Imperium. He has assumed control of his domain in its name until the present crisis has passed.

From the memoirs of Archduke Norris Aella Aledon, First Regent

225-1127

Thank god I had the sense to do what I had to do when I had the chance to do it. Now that we're cut off, this Domain could be splintering into tiny panicked pieces, like a microcosm of Strephon's Imperium. That's what the domains are for: to allow someone to gain control of things before they get out of hand. And better me than gawdawful Delphine. Things are bad, but they'd be worse if you had to listen to her tell it.

Yes, Branj, you were right too, as usual.

Depot/Corridor (1511 A686354-F)

Date: 242-1117

¶The assembled Corridor Fleet departed on its voyage to Zarushagar sector today, leaving defense of the sector to a scattering of reserve squadrons.

¶Extensive plans for continued border patrols and preemptive operations "virtually guarantee" the security of the sector, according to a highly placed naval official.

¶The Transfer Order reached Corridor on 221-1117. Corridor Fleet, vastly overstrength for the territory it patrolled, was staffed by personnel from throughout the Imperium.

¶Its mission, one it had pursued for centuries, was to protect the passage through Corridor of Imperial commerce and communications.

¶Although abandoning the mission was difficult, the strength of an Imperial order and the crisis facing the Empire made the Fleet's crew anxious to comply.



Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 252-1117

¶ In a surprise announcement, it has been reported that the Daibei fleet has been activated and is on the move out of its home sector.
¶ Its forces will be put to use fighting either the rebels or the Solomani, but their exact destination is unknown. Reaction from the local nobility will certainly be negative.

From the journals of Emperor Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi

Goddamn you, Lucan. Your fool mother Lydia never spanked you. How many times did I watch you spill milk and pull Varian's hair and kick dogs, you hateful little bastard? And why didn't I do anything when Lydia and Dresden wouldn't? By the time they died and I had the right to, it was too late.

And now you're killing my people, not only with your fleets, but by where you're taking them from. I swear by every world of my father's Imperium that I will see you pay for each one of the millions of needless deaths you've caused. By God, Lucan, you will wish you could get a spanking.

Antares/Antares (2421 A686ABF-C)

Date: 257-1117

¶ The Archduke of Antares today renounced his oath of loyalty to the Emperor. In his words, the ascension to the throne by young Lucan was, at best, questionable, and since the true heir to the throne is in dispute, the Archduke is assuming control of his domain in the name of the Emperor Strephon until an acceptable solution is reached.

¶ The Archduke detailed the pact he had signed with the Julian Protectorate, incorporating the worlds of Antares and Empty Quarter sectors with the worlds of Mendan and Amdukan sectors.

¶ The Archduke also announced he would use the forces at his disposal to make this secession succeed. Considering both the Archduke's isolationist policies of the last several months and the other pressing issues in the Imperium, it is doubtful that any move will be made soon to force Antares back into the Imperial fold.

Dlan/Ilelish (1021 A8D1ADE-G)

Date: 288-1117

¶ Dulinor is now travelling to the New Palace following the recent victory of the Loyal Fleet over Lucan's forces in Dagudashaag sector.

¶ "I leave the fleet in capable hands," Dulinor said as he addressed an assembly which included officers from every ship in the fleet.

¶ "My brother knows my every wish."

¶ The present location of the Loyal Fleet is unknown.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 297-1117

¶ The Vengeance Fleet has intercepted and destroyed the screening elements of Dulinor's so-called Loyal Fleet, forcing it to withdraw and paving the way for continued penetrations into rebel territory by Imperial forces.

¶ The Vengeance Fleet suffered only minor losses in the engagement.

¶ It will press its penetration toward Dlan after a period of refit at the Imperial Depot in Dagudashaag sector.

Imparlu/Gushemege (1616 B885AA9-E)

Date: 301-1117

¶ The Efont of Imparlul, exercising his authority as Supreme Civil Leader of the planet, today announced its unswerving allegiance to Strephon and to the Imperium.

¶ The move took supporters of both Dulinor and Lucan by surprise as pre-dawn round-ups by the police moved known agitators to holding camps.

¶ The general population, accustomed to direct leadership by the Efont, appeared to accept and support his decision.

Amdani/Daibei (2014 A727A88-E)

Date: 341-1117

¶ Imperial forces retreating ahead of the advancing Solomani Fleet made a stand this week in Laudumash and Amdani, and fought the Solomani to a standstill.

¶ A naval spokesperson expressed a feeling of confidence that the invaders would be forced from Daibei sector by the end of the year.

Hindahl/Old Expanses (1422 A754A86-B)

Date: 350-1117

¶ In the face of continued Solomani fleet actions, a rise in Solomani political activity in the sector, and a lack of defenses for the region, a coalition of dukes within the Old Expanses today announced the voluntary incorporation of the sector into the Solomani Confederation.

¶ A spokesperson indicated that the Confederation had made certain guarantees to the region, and that no immediate changes in local government were contemplated.



1118

1118 saw the enthusiastic continuation of the Offensive Phase of the Final War, but by year's end, the opening of the second Phase, Desperation, was assured. The contributing causes to this phase were the continuous losses and lack of a decisive victory for any one side, coupled with the obvious disintegration of the Imperium as Daibei joined the Old Expanses and Antares in secession. Against this background, a decisive victory seemed more and more imperative, before the situation passed beyond retrieval.

Nulinad/Empty Quarter (0338 A455986-B)

Date: 012-1118

¶Until now engaged in sporadic fighting in the rimward reaches of Antares sector, large squadrons of the Antares Fleet, with the attached 104th Reserve Fleet and several squadrons of the 226th Fleet, clashed with ships of Lucan's Imperium in the Nulinad system.

¶This major clash has for the first time pitted massed enemy ships against the proud fleets of Antares, testing the League's commitment to independence.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 019-1118

¶Large numbers of Dulinor's ships have broken through into Dagudashaag and Core sectors, apparently with the intention of disrupting interworld trade routes.

¶The Admiralty released a communique in which it discussed its plans to mobilize more reserve units and pull several mainline ships out of the front to deal with this new problem.

¶The communique also assures that the penetrating ships have minimal ground attack capabilities.

¶All transport craft of any kind are encouraged to travel in organized, protected convoys whenever possible.

Dlan/Ilelish (1021 A8D1ADE-G)

Date: 022-1118

¶The Emperor Dulinor has dismissed the reappearance of Strephon as the work of an imposter:

¶"The man who routinely impersonated Strephon is now playing the part of his life.

¶"Who would believe that a mere actor would have the audacity to think that we would believe he is the Emperor.

¶"Now his claims insult the memory of our Strephon.

¶"I loved our former Emperor; I was forced to kill him for reasons of state and for the greatest good of the greatest number.

¶"For this imposter to claim that he is Strephon is an insult to all of us!"

¶In later comments, Emperor Dulinor denied that he himself has ever used a double to substitute at routine court functions.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 043-1118

¶Emperor Lucan has rejected the possibility that Strephon still lives.

¶"We know that Strephon sometimes used a robot to impersonate himself at routine functions. And we know one of them is now missing.

¶"Sources tell us that this thing claims to be Strephon is, in reality, a robot. Heaven help us when his batteries run down!"

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 063-1118

¶Fleet command has issued sector-by-sector requisitions to reinforce the Vengeance Fleet in its campaign against Dulinor.

¶"We face severe curtailment in ship strength," said an unnamed spokesperson. "Unless we can restructure our priorities, getting good ships out of the backwater areas and into the front lines." When questioned about reports saying Dulinor's fleets are somewhat better organized and prepared for battle, the spokesperson declined comment.

Belumar/Empty Quarter (1838 E693942-8)

Date: 077-1118

¶Regrouped after its defeat at the Battle of Nulinad earlier this year, the forces of Lucan have converged for a coordinated assault against the fleet way stations at Belumar.

¶A liaison robot for the Admiralty suggested that Belumar's secret location must have been leaked to Lucan's agents, otherwise its out-of-the-way location would have protected it from such a well-planned assault.

Terra/Solomani Rim (1827 A867A69-F)

Date: 081-1118

¶Jeffery Long, formerly a reporter for the Phoenix Sun News organization, surfaced today from SolSec, following his internment by Imperial authorities nearly six years ago.

¶Long claims that his work dealing with so-called hyperspace sickness drew him into a ring of high-tech Imperial research and, ultimately, to an Imperial jail cell, as well.

¶"My findings will be published soon, I promise you," stated Long as he was reunited with his family in Buenos Aires.

Terra/Solomani Rim (1827 A867A69-F)

Date: 093-1118

¶SolSec released today a communique stating that Jeffery Long, recently freed from Imperial prison, has been murdered.

¶"The hotel room where Mr. Long and his family were staying in Osaka on their vacation was all but destroyed by a bomb. There were no survivors."

¶ Though several staff members of the hotel are under investigation, no charges are expected to be filed against them.

¶ "We cannot rule out the possibility that Imperial intelligence agents carried out this vicious crime against true humanity—the technology of the bomb and its professional placement are very suspicious," stated an anonymous source in the local district attorney's office.

Depot/Corridor (1511 A686354-F)

Date: 102-1118

¶ A force of Vargr warships, estimated to be over 500 vessels strong, has entered the system today and begun its systematic hunt of merchant vessels.

¶ The three squadrons of the 255th Fleet left in the system were sent out against the Vargr, but were dispersed and destroyed by the encroaching Vargr.

¶ Evacuations from Depot itself had been announced, and then later cancelled as the Vargr noose tightened around the planet.

¶ "With Vargr animals in control of the approaches to Depot, we have little choice but to maintain our control over the surface and await the imminent arrival of a relief force," assured Baron hault-Grivven. The Naval Information Office has been in turmoil and unavailable for comment.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 114-1118

¶ Military atrocities on the part of Imperial forces were categorically denied by a fleet spokesperson toady.

¶ "The destruction of cities on three worlds in Gushemege sector has been investigated and has been attributed to enemy activity in the area. Several cities in that area were subjected to nuclear and chemical attack from orbiting ships during military cleanup operations. Though the cause of the catastrophe is still in question, the fact that a million plus individuals have been killed is 'an unfortunate accident of war.'"

Kurae/Zarushagar (2806 D667989-2)

Date: 116-1118

¶ Today saw the conclusion of the largest fleet action to date between Lucan's Vengeance Fleet and Dulinor's Ilelish Fleet, centered around the three worlds in the outer Kurae system.

¶ The week-long see-saw conflict has left both fleets severely weakened. The Vengeance Fleet claims to have inflicted over 100 losses on Dulinor. The Ilelish Fleet boasts a similar number of enemy ships destroyed.

¶ In one incident of interest, patrols of both sides approaching an outer-system planet fought it out to the last two ships. Both ships were targets of desperate boarding actions, which left only 15 Ilelish crewmen alive on the wrecked hulks to proclaim their own victory.

¶ Both fleets have jumped out of the system to regroup.

¶ Salvage ships from a dozen nearby worlds have arrived to begin picking through the wreckage, careful to evade the few fighters left to secure the area against looting.

Terra/Solomani Rim (1827 A867A69-F)

Date: 123-1118

¶ From notes gathered from the wreckage of the hotel room where Jeffery Long and his family were murdered earlier this year, his publisher has produced and released a draft of his works entitled *The Hyperspace Web*.

¶ In it, Long's notes suggest that he was jailed by Imperial authorities when his investigative work, into the problems and mysteries of hyperspace sickness, was becoming uncomfortable to naval researchers.

¶ It states that popularized research into the sickness was getting dangerously close to research facilities the Imperial Navy had working on breaking the jump-6 barrier.

Lode/Zarushagar (2908 B000944-A)

Date: 128-1118

¶ A large portion of the 2nd and 4th Fleets was ambushed today as the fleets put in for frontier refueling at the large gas giant Muendor.

¶ Enemy ships, apparently hidden in their lairs for days or even weeks, came out of hiding and attacked when many of the refueling ships were at their most vulnerable.

¶ Dulinor's ships had apparently acted on a hunch, lying in wait in the extensive asteroid field and Muendor's ice ring for the right moment to strike.

¶ Effective command by Fleet Admiral Nigel Rudel brought the high guard to bear against the assault, inflicting several critical blows with concentrated missile attacks against the larger vessels.

¶ Further thrusts by the rebels, however, did manage to get through to damage four vessels, one so badly that it had to be scuttled a few hours later.

¶ Despite this, Admiral Rudel will almost certainly be decorated for his valiant defense in an unpredictable situation.

When the above report eventually made it to Strephon's headquarters, he noted ironically, "Historians will mark this as one of the first indicators of Lucan's defeat. When you have to start decorating your losing commanders to keep your own morale up, it's all over but the war crimes trials. It's a shame there's never a historian around when you need one."

Dlan/Ilelish (1021 A8D1ADE-G)

Date: 137-1118

¶ Fearful of his allegiance slipping in the border worlds between Cyril and Kamurinmur, where the false Strephon is gaining wide acceptance and the seal of legitimacy, Dulinor has for the past several months authorized reserve fleets to sortie into the area in a show of strength.

¶Local worlds undecided or loyal to the false Strephon have bucked under these displays, sometimes fighting back with local squadrons.
¶A war of attrition has begun in the area which is pitting out-of-date ships against each other in the absence of larger, state-sponsored, state-of-the-art fleets.

Banasdan/Solomani Rim (2920 A653A44-F)

Date: 159-1118

¶Several Solomani squadrons have been tracked and confronted by a large combined fleet of Lucan's Imperium.
¶Elements of the Diaspora Fleet, supported by the 22nd Fleet and 22nd reserve Fleet, plus a number of Vegan ships attached at the squadron level, were involved in the action.
¶The Solomani were caught unprepared and were effectively surrounded.
¶Their dispersal spelled their destruction. In all, 44 Solomani ships were destroyed and three captured.
¶Unfortunately, a courier vessel with several Hiver diplomats and observers on the scene was destroyed in the battle. There were no survivors.
¶The Naval Intelligence Office, operating out of the flagship *Beatrice*, stated that "despite proper identification and markings, all commonly used by both Solomani and Imperial vessels, the courier ship was wantonly attacked and destroyed by a vastly superior Solomani vessel.
¶"We protest this action and apologize on behalf of the Solomani to the Hive Federation at large."

Phaln/Gushemege (3029 B120963-F)

Date: 181-1118

¶Strephon, head of his own fleet, has made his first advances into Dulinor's domain with ships assembled from squadron elements which were retained from service with Lucan.
¶The several-hundred-ship-strong fleet is bound for worlds which are seeking assistance against Dulinor and are willing to accept the fact that Strephon is still alive and is Emperor.
¶At a battle in the Phaln system, two of Dulinor's squadrons exchanged shots with Strephon's ships, causing minor damage on both sides.
¶Whatever the outcome, this incident marks the beginning of a new scenario with a new contender for control of the Imperium.

From the journals of Emperor Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi

It appears that Dulinor is going to force me to go through him before I can even really get at Lucan. Does he realize what he's doing? He's allowing his forces to function as Lucan's auxiliary troops, defending Lucan's grip on the throne, while he simultaneously fights Lucan on another front, squandering his strength in both places.

Can he really be that stupid? If he is, he can't last that much longer. So be it.

Tephany/Lishun (2719 A6B19DF-A)

Date: 186-1118

¶The newly established Vargr governor has issued warrants for the arrest of thousands of nobles and agitators to the new administration.
¶Gtweng, who is in charge of the Vargr on Tephany (as best as can be ascertained), is a former world emperor deposed 30 years ago in Meshan sector. He has a reputation for being ruthless and violent, although he has no particular hatred of humans.
¶In the absence of a sector fleet, the Vargr have run rampant, pillaging the coreward half of the sector.
¶Vargr cooperation in this takeover has been almost nonexistent, as might be expected from Vargr.
¶Local reservist ships and system defense boats are still putting up resistance in the rimward areas, but the Vargr advance seems to have been halted by their own bickering—not by any concerted human effort to stop them.

Warinir/Daibei (0507 A889978-F)

Date: 197-1118

¶An emergency meeting was held today between Duke Craig and Moot of High Lords to discuss the demands from Emperor Lucan.
¶In a prepared statement, the Duke's press secretary said, "An unnaturally great strain is being placed on the sector to provide ships for fleets in distant wars. It is not the duty of loyal sectors to strip themselves bare in order to support Lucan, when other more pressing matters threaten our own borders.
¶"The Duke, with the blessing of the Moot, has appealed to the Emperor to lessen the ship quota at this time."

Dlan/Ilelish (1021 A8D1ADE-G)

Date: 200-1118

¶The so-called Strephon's lack of a front-line fighting craft has forced him to resort to extensive commerce raiding on the frontier between his core of worlds and Dulinor's.
¶The slower, less sophisticated warships he has managed to lay hold of are generally a poor match for front-line vessels; however, they can do considerable damage to unprotected cargo ships.
¶The merchant community is crying out to Dulinor for assistance, but with nearly every able ship fighting in Zarushagar sector, there is little hope that Dulinor's help will come soon.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 210-1118

¶ Word has reached Core concerning the world of Alekvaadin/Core. According to reports, the world has been sacked by deep penetration raiders from Dulinor's fleets.

¶ The great riches of the ancient Vadin civilization, from the spired towers of Twunchel to the endless art treasures of the period, have all been seized by the piratical rebels, members of the 166th Fleet.

¶ The estimated worth of these treasures is in excess of MCr50,000.

¶ The raiders have escaped without a trace, and the dearth of ships in the area suggest that the capture of the raiders is quite unlikely.

Libert/Diaspora (1109 A2109BC-F)

Date: 211-1118

¶ Support for the Solomani cause and invasion in Solomani Rim and rimward Diaspora sectors is apparently widespread, despite assurances from the nobility that this is not the case.

¶ Efforts on many worlds are being hampered by Solomani security elements, largely with public support.

¶ Pervasive unrest is apparent, and a large number of troops are being pulled out of the front lines in order to secure some rear areas.

¶ Particular trouble spots seem to be in Ledge, Iusea, Frey, and St. Denis, where uprisings have seen considerable destruction of life and property.

Warinir/Daibei (0507 A889978-F)

Date: 217-1118

¶ After two days of negotiations with the Imperial emissaries, talks have completely broken down. The ambassadors have been given seven days to leave Warinir.

¶ In a video interview, the Duke said, "It is unlikely that we will be sending massive numbers of our own ships into the hinterlands any time soon.

¶ We shall instead be looking out for our own interests, despite Lucan's trepidation over fleet strengths."

Warinir/Daibei (0507 A889978-F)

Date: 223-1118

¶ Government offices are buzzing with activity, but they are reluctant to comment on what has become known as the Orvon Incident.

¶ Three patrol ships from the Daibei Fleet, apparently on routine maneuvers, were approached and fired upon by a squadron from the 239th Fleet, en route to the Solomani front.

¶ With sketchy facts, the Naval Information Office is declining any comment on the incident, stating only that it must be some sort of terrible mistake.

¶ The Orvon Incident is already being portrayed in the press as a symptom of impending confrontation between the Imperium and Daibei sector.

Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D)

Date: 243-1118

¶ Fleets loyal to Lucan carried the war directly to Margaret's stronghold of worlds, spearheading on a frontage three parsecs across into the area of Aarze and Keum in Massilia sector.

¶ The 117th Fleet has done well to hold its own against the invaders, managing to blunt their assault and turn some enemy squadrons back toward their bases.

¶ Further penetration from Lucan's Imperium is unlikely, as reservist fleets have now come to bear. Nonetheless, the fighting is expected to continue in the region during the many months to come.

Liasdi/Zarushagar (0928 A897944-8)

Date: 258-1118

¶ A report from fleet headquarters announced, "The brave warriors of the 166th Fleet have apparently all been lost in commerce raiding duties near Capital itself. Their short-term raiding on the enemy was no doubt fierce, and their long-term effect on enemy trade and commerce will greatly aid the war effort. They should be remembered with honor."

¶ Due to arrive back in Zarushagar sector more than a month ago, members of the fleet have been written off as casualties.

Amdani/Daibei (2014 A727A88-E)

Date: 260-1118

¶ Division among naval officers of the Daibei Fleet over matters of future deployment erupted today in conflict.

¶ A squadron, ostensible under the command Admiral Byron, broke ranks during training maneuvers and headed for frontier refueling.

¶ The rebellion was led by Captain Kristian James, citing loyalty to the Imperium as his motive.

¶ The squadron made good on its promises, refueled in an orderly fashion, and jumped out of the system as a puzzled squadron of Daibei loyalists, unwilling to fire on its own, continued its training maneuvers.

Warinir/Daibei (0507 A889978-F)

Date: 289-1118

¶ The Emperor's final denial of an appeal to retain ship strength in Daibei sector has sparked extreme sector patriotism and anti-Imperium sentiment.

¶ "The Treaty of Ftahlr guarantees us the right to maintain reasonable ship strengths," pointed out Lord Guinth, advisor to the Duke. The Duke has prepared a written response to Lucan, the essence of which has been made available to the press.

¶ The Independent Federation of Daibei is officially formed as of this day, to incorporate worlds and subsectors of the sector and additional territories in Reaver's Deep sector.

¶ A pro-Imperial faction in the Moot of High Lords has been isolated and subjected to house arrest until the period of transition is completed.

¶ The Duke has assumed personal control over the new Federation until a more systematic government can be established.

¶ Rallies organized by the Duke's household have begun and are expected to dominate the Three Cities for the next several days.

Narya/Daibei (1934 C877ADD-A)

Date: 299-1118

¶The 111th and 176th Fleets, previously attached to the Daibei Fleet, arrived collectively here today to hold the system for Imperial control. Narya has traditionally been a stronghold of Lucan's support in the rimward regions of the sector.

¶Gaining popular support, ground troops have been landed, and defensive measures are being undertaken to fight off the inevitable retaliation from rebel worlds which have aligned themselves with the new independent Federation of Daibei.

Disi/Zarushagar (2436 B7659A8-A)

Date: 332-1118

¶Vowing that vengeance will be had against the Daibei rebels, Lucan's Fleet—consisting mostly of the 259th, 6th, and 240th reserve fleets diverted from service against Dulinor—has finally reached and engaged its enemy.

¶Daibei ships in the system put up a tenacious fight but were eventually forced to withdraw in the face of superior numbers.

¶"It's not that we couldn't match them in quality of ships," said Ensign Louis Hutura, an officer on a patrol vessel. "Their equipment is substandard and out of date, but there's just so much of it!"

Medurma/Dagudashaag (2124 A67399C-G)

Date: 344-1118

¶The Admiralty today announced major gains against Dulinor's deep penetration raiders operating in both Core and Dagudashaag sectors.

¶To date, merchant vessels totaling more than 2 million tons have been destroyed in the dangerous trade corridor between Medurma and the rimward edge of Lishun sector.

¶Major portions of the enemy fleet are apparently turning back because of concerted drives against their supply and coordination bases over the last three months.

¶In the face of crippling losses in major engagements against the Vengeance Fleet earlier this year, most of the commerce raiders are expected to sortie back toward their own lines.

Phaln/Gushemege (3029 B120963-F)

Date: 360-1118

¶The Second Battle of Phaln has finally ended in a decisive victory for the forces of Strephon.

¶Three of Lucan's fleets engaged an undetermined number of rebellious ships in the system beginning on 328-1118. The struggle for the system has taken more than a month since the first engagements.

¶The battle was one characterized by smaller squadron actions rather than being a set piece contest.

¶In the end, attrition forced Lucan's fleets to withdraw, after having lost nearly 100 vessels to the fanatical forces of Strephon.

¶Reports on Strephon's losses are unavailable but are suspected to be less than half those of Lucan's fleets.

From the journals of Emperor Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi

361-1119

He knows it's me, the little brat, and he's terrified.

Imagine the horror when Oedipus wakes up, smugly lying beside his mother, and then he realizes, "Daddy isn't dead."

You've got to kill the father, you little bastard. If he won't stay dead, it's just proof of what everyone's been saying all along, that you're not good enough. Come on, panic, make a mistake. A few more mistakes like that one, and it's all over. Make this easier for all of us. Daddy's back and he's going to make you answer for everything that you did.

Come to papa.

1119

In 1119 the second phase of the Final War, Desperation, began. This phase was characterized by increasingly destructive attempts to win the war by any means. One last final offensive by various factions, increasing talk of secret weapons, and acts of profound cynicism in prosecuting the war became the norm during this period. At the same time, the continuing disintegration of the empire, particularly in and around the Domain of Deneb and the Solomani Rim set up the coming third phase.

Durima/Corridor (1205 B420ADE-F)

Date: 010-1119

¶Forces of the Archduke of Deneb and the Reestablished Vilani Empire have come to blows around Depot. Following joint exercises against Vargr fleets in the region, ships from either side exchanged shots during salvage operations. Which side delivered the first salvoes is not clear, but it is certain that further cooperation against the Vargr in this sector is unlikely, a fact that will no doubt hurt the Vilani-settled worlds there.

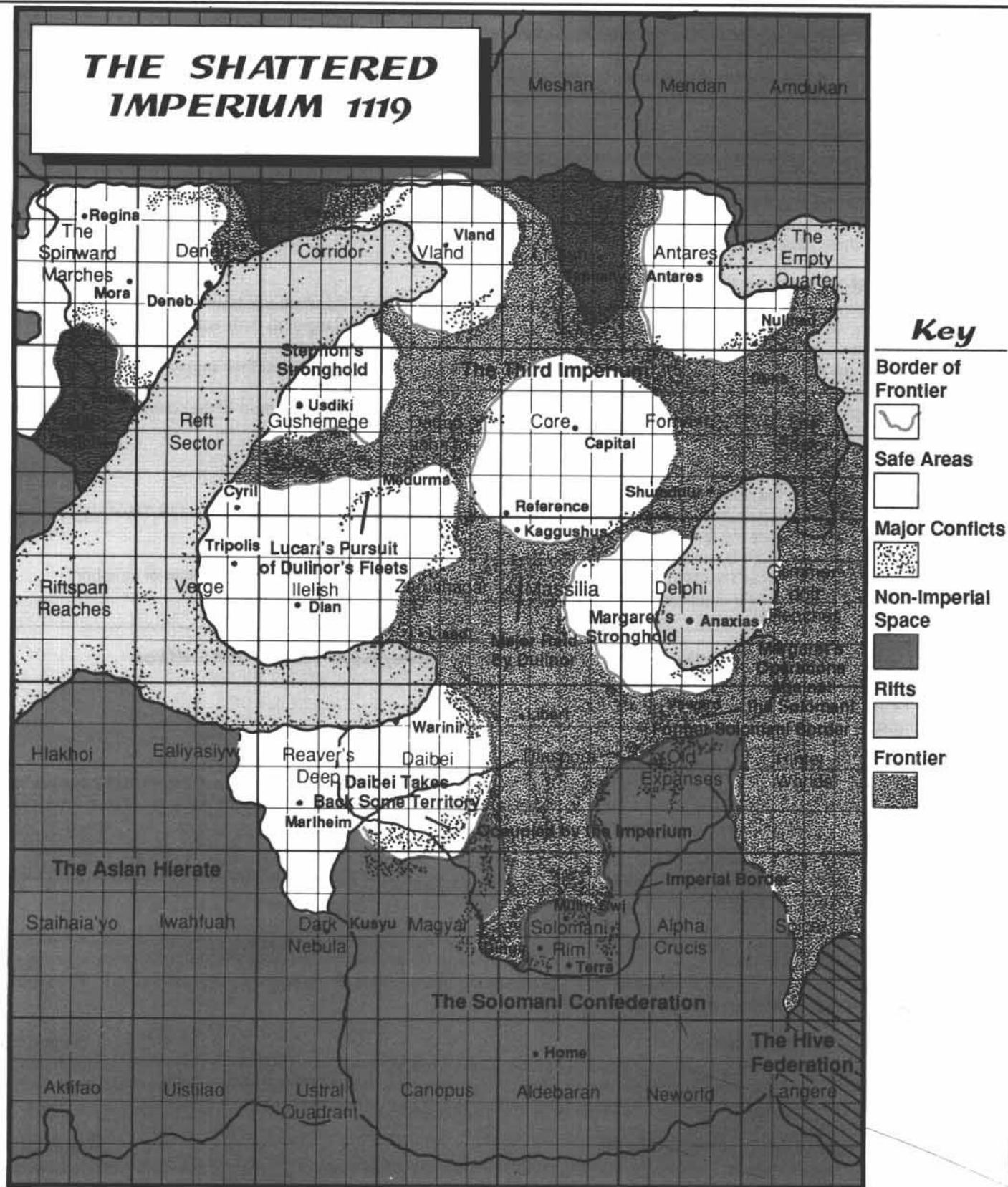
Strouden/Spinward Marches (2327 A745988-D)

Date: 012-1119

¶The impressive entourage of ships accompanying Lakht Aorlakht, spiritual and military leader of the Aslan invasions, was received today in orbit around Station Five. He and his personal retinue disembarked at the station and took shuttle passage to the surface.



THE SHATTERED IMPERIUM 1119



¶Lakht Aorlakht arrived on Strouden in preparation for the summit meeting arranged between Archduke Norris and the Aslan; immediately prior to the summit, expectations were running high that progress would be made.

¶In the evening, Lakht Aorlakht met privately with Fleet Admiral Tranathiaf, personal envoy of the Archduke, charged with containing Aslan expansion through negotiation.

¶Their meeting lasted more than three hours, and was later described as heated. The three-day summit was cut short when Lakht Aorlakht stormed from the chambers and immediately shuttled back his squadron.

¶The Admiral's office has no expectations of a future summit meeting anytime soon.

Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D)

Date: 101-1119

¶With the bulk of her reserve fleets committed to holding off Lucan's advances into her territory, Margaret has mustered sufficient strength to mount an attack against the Solomani invaders to rimward in Old Expanses sector.

¶Concentrating the relatively fresh forces of her 145th, 137th, and 67th fleets, Margaret has penetrated 10 parsecs behind forward Solomani fleets, disrupting their lines of communication and supply, and spread out to cut off their retreat.

¶Additional forces attacking out of Delphi sector are squeezing pockets of Solomani ships out of the area, forcing many to disband into small, even, single-ship squadrons to attempt a breakout to rimward.

Trin/Spinward Marches (3235 A894A96-F)

Date: 117-1119

¶A daring raid by subjugated humans has resulted in the destruction of an Aslan cruiser in orbit around Dodds.

¶Three human ships which survived the raid arrived at Trin within the week, reporting immediately to naval authorities.

¶The ships were the *Valaderes* and the *Veiled Dream*, both Type S ships, and the *Steaming Retreat*, a Type-K vessel.

¶The *Veiled Dream* has been unofficially renamed the *Ravager* by her crew since the incident.

¶These three ships, and three others which did not survive the mission, approached the Aslan Cruiser *Kholstesarl* while in space dock at Dodds.

¶Scoring hits with several laser turrets and at least five missiles, the *Kholstesarl* was wracked by internal explosions which broke the vessel's back, according to the human crews.

¶Intercepted Aslan communications support the claim that the *Kholstesarl* was indeed destroyed.

Cyril/Reft Sector (2738 A7A69B9-F)

Date: 125-1119

¶Major offenses between the forces of Dulinor and Strephon have broken down into widespread, sporadic brawls between the shattered fleets.

¶The attrition suffered in Gushemege sector have been the most terrible so far, totalling thousands of vessels and more than a million casualties to both sides.

¶With his stronger fleets beginning to give ground before Lucan's forces, it is unlikely that Dulinor will commit additional resources to the fight against Strephon; the fleets already there will be charged with holding off the imposter until the entire tide of the conflict shifts back into his advantage.

From the journals of Emperor Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi

Dulinor, you blind, homicidal maniac bastard, get out of my way and let me at him! What the hell do you think you're doing?

Kaggushus/Massilia (0402 A442AA7-G)

Date: 137-1119

¶Obviously committing the last of his reserve fleets, Dulinor has pushed out of Zarushagar sector through Massilia, temporarily cutting the Imperium in half.

¶Elements of Dulinor's 9th, 41st, and 278th fleets, among others, have cut a swath of systems 30 parsecs long and five parsecs deep, virtually bridging the gap between Dulinor's worlds and those of Margaret.

¶The admiralty issued a statement calling the attack a "desperate attempt to open a new front, diverting our resources from our drive toward Dian."

¶The statement also announced that the incursion would be routed out within a few months, but until that time the area is to be considered too dangerous for travel.

Venad/Hinterworlds (0402 A221621-B)

Date: 139-1119

¶Margaret's Admiralty today confirmed suspicions that her offensive into Old Expanses sector has been very successful to date, and that Solomani Fleets there are beginning to disperse in front of her advancing squadrons.

¶The Admiralty also announced that their intelligence confirms that many Solomani vessels, independently and in small squadrons, are breaking out through the Hinterworlds sector.

¶Margaret is making a sector-wide appeal for assistance against the aggressor Solomani; bounties ranging from hundreds of credits to grants of nobility are being offered for information about or confirmed destruction of fleeing Solomani vessels.

¶Venad's starport will be the official processing center for all claims concerning Solomani activities within the Hinterworlds sector.

Robin/Spinward Marches (2637 C00059C-C)

Date: 143-1119

¶ Today a squadron of *ihatei* vessels descended upon and destroyed multiple human-operated bases within the extensive asteroid belts of Robin.
¶ The brutality of the raid left no facilities or ships intact, and all personnel were reportedly killed or taken prisoner.
¶ Though technically already within the Aslan sphere of influence in the sector, human belt mining operations had been conducted without Aslan interference for more than a year.

Aki/Spinward Marches (2035 B443987-9)

Date: 153-1119

¶ Aslan forces have crushed a bloody rebellion among the warlike Kritin faction of the ruling houses of lords.
¶ The faction's forces, led by Tyrar McTavish Kritin, forced their way into the Aslan diplomatic compound, slaughtering several dozen *ihatei* governors and their retainers. The Kritin held the compound for five days, encouraging other acts of violence against the unwelcome Aslan overlords; sporadic outbreaks of unrest wracked the entire planet during the long 87-hour night of Aki. With the help of Aslan Marines, the Aorlakht recaptured the diplomatic compound, executed the Kritin captured there (including Tyrar), and brought the state of emergency under control.
¶ The unrest has, however, halted several expeditions of *ihatei* further into the remote regions of the world, and many have begun returning to the diplomatic compound seeking safety in numbers from a possibly dangerous subject population.

Kaggushus/Massilia (0402 A442AA7-G)

Date: 162-1119

¶ It was reported today that elements of the 160th and 200th reserve fleets engaged and destroyed a large force loyal to the pretender Strephon. In the engagement, an enemy flagship was obliterated by missile fire, and prisoners interrogated suggest that the imposter himself may have been among its casualties. The imposter's own propaganda suggests that he would personally lead his warships, much as the true Strephon often said he would in times of great struggle.
¶ The Admiralty will not confirm the death of the imposter Strephon but suggests that careful attention be paid to his followers in the wake of this incident.

Esalin/Spinward Marches (1004 C565673-8)

Date: 163-1119

¶ The rumored reorganization of Zhodani fleets has been further evidenced by a recent cut in the number of patrol vessels in the Esalin system.
¶ When questioned on the matter, the representative of the Zhodani ambassador said, "A general reorganization of our fleets is in order, favoring newer, more powerful vessels. Older ships are being removed from active service, nothing more."
¶ Vice Admiral Thurogood, however, said the Zhodani are doing exactly the opposite, pulling modern ships out of the line and apparently replacing them with other ships. It is rumored that the Zhodani may be in the throes of an impending change of government, possibly violent, or putting down a rebellion against psionic rule.

Iaasiv/Hinterworlds (2829 EAC3AA9-B)

Date: 179-1119

¶ Chorschuv, popular leader of Iaasiv's 33 billion inhabitants, announced today that he has completed a long-term pact with the Hiver government to build large cargo vessels to accommodate human passenger and freight service.
¶ The Hiver representatives have agreed to gradually increase the capacity of the shipyards from E to B, a process that should be completed in five years.
¶ Ships built at Iaasiv will generally be put into service along the Alike Run and the Bruia Diagonal, crewed by Iaasivans, and managed by Chorschuv for the Hiver owners. The boom to the system will probably lead to a gradual increase of local technology as well, according to the planetary accounting office.
¶ More than 500 large vessels, totalling more than 11 million tons, will be built to fill the Hiver order; the jump drives will not be built at Iaasiv but will be obtained from the Hiver Federation.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 183-1119

¶ In Lucan's first address to the citizenry as a whole in over a year, he expressed his expectations that the vast majority of the Imperium will be reunited under his banner within the next year.
¶ "Our fleets are advancing system by system toward Dlan as resistance crumbles before them. It should be within only a few months that Dulinor and his forces capitulate."
¶ The Emperor then went on to announce new negotiations with Margaret and communications with the Archduke of Deneb, suggesting that those fragments of the shattered Imperium might soon return to Lucan's fold.
¶ In his entire 45-minute-long address, the Emperor did not mention the pretender Strephon or the battles being waged along that front.
¶ The Emperor appeared tired though resolute, using a newly found commanding tone in his speech which was broadcast live here on Capital.

Esalin/Spinward Marches (1004 C565673-8)

Date: 190-1119

¶ The Admiralty today released photographs of several Zhodani ships performing frontier refuelling in the system just one week ago. The two ships in high guard position are shown quite clearly in the photos; they have suffered tremendous battle damage—entire sections of their hulls have been burned away and hastily patched.



¶ The other ships in the convoy were apparently of both military and nonmilitary origins, including freighters and passenger ships. The ships broadcast warnings not to interfere with their refueling, apparently aimed at both Imperial and Zhodani forces in the area—no Zhodani forces aided or interfered, though they had patrol ships in the vicinity to monitor the situation.

¶ Once refuelled, the entire convoy retreated and jumped out of the system.

¶ There has been no official explanation given; speculation ranges widely and is largely unconfirmed.

Kaggushus/Massilia (0402 A442AA7-G)

Date: 212-1119

¶ Strephon's military commanders, faring poorly with their fleets against Lucan's forces, have turned to a mass propaganda campaign aimed at several fleets opposing them.

¶ Through every available means of broadcasting, they have put out a plea from Strephon himself in which he insists that he is genuinely the Emperor, and he opens his arms to any who will join him in his struggle against Lucan.

¶ There are no accurate numbers indicating Strephon's success, and there are certainly no mass conversions of fleets or ships to his cause. But the growing body of evidence that says Strephon lives must certainly be putting ideas into the heads of Lucan's officers and men, the very men Strephon must fight.

From the journals of Emperor Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi

295-1119

My god, this isn't working anymore. I've got blood up to my elbows, and it just keeps running out of my people. It's running from their eyes and their ears and their noses, and every time I try to wipe it off, I just smear it around that much worse.

Everywhere I turn, I'm killing my people. They're all my people: the ones that fight for me, and the ones that fight against me.

How did I allow this to begin?

And how do I stop it?

From the memoirs of Dr. Enli Kagamira

300-1119

I am having to sedate him again to allow him to sleep. This is the first time that I've had to do this since the period after his family died. He's a strong man. It requires rather large dosages to get him down now.

1120

The boundary between the second phase, Desperation, and the third phase, Irretrievability, is hazy at best, but its leading edges appeared in 1120. Irretrievability is defined as the phase when the faction leaders finally realized to their dismay that, as much as they might try to pull back from the war, it was no longer possible. The war was out of their hands and had taken on a life of its own, and was systematically destroying the Third Imperium.

Antares/Antares (2421 A762ADA-D)

Date: 012-1120

¶ "Based on an analysis of the neutrino emissions and the increase in pulsation rate of the star Antares, we believe the chance of Antares going supernova within the next 250 years is about 55 percent," stated Dr. Shen Gakivin of the Uucha Astronomical Observatory, located in the red giant's inner belt. "Now that the Circumsolar Neutrino Sensor Network is on-line, we have been able to refine our data tenfold over our previous work."

¶ Cashin Cam-Cinn, science advisor to Archduke Brzk, replied to the UAO announcement, saying, "We've heard these kind of negative predictions for decades on end from the Uucha Station. Such grandiose predictions seem designed more to justify increased spending for the station than to conclude anything useful."

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 027-1120

¶ The unveiling ceremony for *The Enemy Of Dreams*, a special sculpture commissioned by Emperor Lucan, took place today. The piece has received a lot of attention even before it was publicly presented since it was created by the prominent sculptor Trow Shadii-Erskany, noted for her controversial works portraying anti-Imperial themes.

¶ The sculpture presents a menacing image of Dulinor with a pistol in one hand, grabbing the dying Emperor Strephon by the collar in the other. *The Enemy of Dreams* is situated in the center of the Imperial Park. Though the subject is one every Imperial citizen knows well, the grotesque style of the statue has evoked strong emotion, both pro- and anti-Imperial.

¶ Shadii-Erskany was noticeably absent from the unveiling. Representatives of the throne report that she left shortly after completing the sculpture to join her husband, who has been vacationing in a nearby system.

Vland/Vland (1717 A967A9A-F)

Date: 032-1120

¶The Vilani Ministry of Technology today announced that it had issued to the major megacorporations of the empire a Request for Proposal (RFP) to re-implement the traditional technological patent system of the First Imperium.

¶Gashina Enerish, spokesperson for the ministry, said, "The control of technology by the First Imperium was one reason why it was able to endure for more than 5000 years. The shadow emperor and the minister of technology are united in their belief that the reimplementation of the traditional patent system will be an important part of this Empire's foundation."

Tauri/Vland (1817 A130998-E)

Date: 034-1120

¶Makhidkarun, Sharurshid, and Naasirka held a joint news conference today to discuss their support for the traditional system. They also announced a technology-sharing agreement and cross-licensing pact which would allow each to use the technology developed by the others under the traditional system.

¶The holding company, to be jointly owned by the three megacorporations, would be administered from a new corporate headquarters on Tauri. The announcement concluded with a dramatic ritual announcement of the name selected for the new organization—Aarmikep. The name is a now-archaic Vilani word for patent law.

Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D)

Date: 047-1120

¶During a routine press conference today, Duchess Margaret announced that she is pregnant, confirming rumors of the past several weeks.

¶Margaret went on to say that she is carrying twins.

¶Her husband, Count Blaine Tukera, is said to be looking forward to being a father again.

Knabbib/Core (2115 A331758-F)

Date: 168-1120

¶Julian Trane, distinguished professor of interstellar history, was arrested yesterday on treasonous publication charges by agents of the Emperor Lucan.

¶Trane's epic historical work, *The Inevitability of Night*, was published clandestinely despite a ban by the Imperial Ministry of Information. That publication led to his arrest on a charge of treasonous publication.

¶*The Inevitability of Night* hypothesizes that interstellar civilization progresses through a continuing cycle of expansion and regression fueled by economic and technological factors which cannot be avoided by any intelligent culture.

¶In his last interview before his detention, Professor Trane commented that he saw parallels between the beginning years of the Long Night and the present Rebellion.

¶Imperial authorities refused comment.

It took several years for copies of *The Inevitability of Night* to make it to the cut off Domain of Deneb. When they did, the message of doom sparked riots on several Denebian worlds. The worst of these was on Mora, and the casualties, 37 dead and over 400 wounded in street violence, prompted Archduke Norris to respond (see page 4).

Sharim/Gushemege (1038 A435967-F)

Date: 194-1120

¶Doubt continues as to the truth behind the reappearance of Strephon in Gushemege sector, despite the virtually absolute evidence that he died in Dulinor's assassination plot on Capital in 1116.

¶Recent conjectures in the press have provided three distinct explanations for the individual calling himself Strephon. He could be a surgically altered actor, a pseudobiological robot, a clone, or the real Strephon (whose double died in the assassination).

¶No firm evidence has been presented for or against any of these conjectures.

¶Surprisingly, several leading nobles (including Brzk and Margaret) have made public statements leaving open the possibility that the individual in Gushemege is really Strephon. On the other hand, the only thing that Lucan and Dulinor seem to agree on is that the "real" Strephon is an imposter.

From the journals of Dulinor Astrin Iletian

150-1120

Time after time I have been able to squeeze unforeseen strength out of my people to preserve my cause. I have been holding back the Imposter and the Pretender at the same time, and now Verge sees fit to deny me the support I need to finally turn back the tide. At this cusp of victory, after all that they have worked for, what purpose could they possibly have to deny me the tools to fulfill our destiny?

I must remember that I am ruling what has historically been the most rebellious of the Imperial domains. Why should they treat me any differently? Beyond a certain point I must free my admirals to do what they must do.

Stijn/Verge (1809 A324658-E)

Date: 201-1120

¶In a lightning raid, unidentified forces attacked this world and sacked the capital, carrying off art treasures, refined precious metals, and technological components, while leaving the city in flames.

¶Initial reports that the forces were Imperial Marines (reflecting their initial radio identification) have been discounted as a ruse.

Regina/Spinward Marches (1910 A788899-C)

Date: 206-1120

¶The Archduke of Deneb today announced the establishment of an Imperial force dedicated to maintaining the secure borders of the Imperium. ¶"After careful consideration," the Archduke stated, "the government has determined that a special force—to be known as the Patrol—can best execute the policies of the Domain of Deneb in securing the Imperial borders from the incursions and invasions which are common of late."

¶Patrol ships will cruise the borders of the domain with powers to repel invaders and to pursue them into non-Imperial territories. Armed Patrol ships will carry troop units capable of boarding actions and planetary surface missions. While the Patrol may call upon Imperial and Reserve Navy forces, it will be equipped and trained to deal with most situations with its own strengths.

¶Planetary positions will initially be filled by reserve naval and military personnel. Additional positions are open to enlistment.

¶As an enlistment incentive, Patrol retirees will receive up to 100 square kilometers of land on an agricultural or other suitable world. This is expected to be especially attractive to Aslan enlistees and is being announced in Aslan.

¶The Aslan translation of Patrol is *Trekhyair*, or "Land Protector."

Mora/Spinward Marches (3124 AA99AC7-F)

Date: 252-1120

¶Archduke Norris today officially named Mora as the capital world of the provisional government of the Domain of Deneb.

¶"From this beautiful world, we will together be able to build outward, beyond our current borders, toward the full Imperium as we once knew it," Norris said in prepared remarks.

¶Mora, already the capital of the sector and subsector, is expected to undergo a healthy increase in employment and construction to keep up with its new responsibilities.

¶The central location of Mora within the Domain of Deneb was seen by analysts as a principal reason for the move.

¶The Duchess of Delphine was represented at the ceremonies by her grandniece, Elane, next in line to rule Mora itself.

Warinir/Daibei (0507 A889978-F)

Date: 261-1120

¶The Solomani Navy has been driven back with heavy losses by three fleets of the Federation of Daibei Navy after a series of engagements along the border.

¶The initial penetration by Federation forces reached the industrial complexes at Uston/Daibei (0139) and neighboring Aston/Daibei (0140), and spent more than a month destroying the Solomani manufacturing installations of the system before being forced to withdraw.

¶The pursuit drew the Solomani Navy into Daibei territory, where it was ambushed at Sineli (0127).

Tripolis/Verge (2612 B885A98-E)

Date: 269-1120

¶Unidentified forces attacked this world recently and looted the population centers of the western continent. Initial reports indicated that the attacks were carried out by Illeish Army troops, but post-attack investigations have disproven that theory.

Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D)

Date: 270-1120

¶Duchess Margaret gave birth to twins today, sparking an air of celebration around the world.

¶The first child, a girl, was born at 20:00 exactly. Her name is Julia Iphegenia Cassir Tukera. Following his sister by 12 minutes was a son, Paulo Trulla Strephon Tukera.

¶Both children and the mother are in good health.

L'oeul d'Dieu/Spinward Marches (3010 B98A510-B)

Date: 275-1120

¶The Patrol has begun security sweeps along the traditional Imperial coreward border of Deneb in the Domain's continuing effort to repulse Vargr corsair invasions.

¶The Patrol, newly established by the Archduke of Deneb, began active operations almost immediately using naval reserve ships and crews. In a show of force, the first sweep was assigned the border from L'oeul d'Dieu/Spinward Marches to Corfinium/Deneb.

¶Elements of the Patrol fleet will be detached to specific trouble spots in the region.

¶In a related development, it was announced that the Imperial Naval Base at L'oeul d'Dieu has been handed over to the Patrol as a permanent base of operations.

Wair/Magyar (0116 C89A98C-E)

Date: 301-1120

¶The Solomani Navy has driven back with heavy losses the invading Daibei Fleet Forces which were marauding the industrial complexes of Uston and Aston in rimward Daibei sector.

¶Initial dispatches calling for assistance were answered by two Solomani task forces under the command of Admiral John Charles.

¶Once the Daibei fleets were driven off, a portion of the force remained at Uston to secure it from further attack and to render assistance. Admiral Charles continued the pursuit of the enemy fleet into enemy territory.



Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D)

Date: 309-1120

¶ Speculation and rumors about Duchess Margaret's children continue to flood the local press.

¶ Dr. Bakala Setree, a physician with over 40 years of service in the Duchess' household, claims that the recent birth of twins was a result of artificial insemination.

¶ The father of the children, according to Dr. Setree, is the late Emperor Strephon.

¶ Dr. Setree said Duchess Margaret will soon file a petition with the Moot to act as regent in behalf of her daughter, Julia Iphegenia Cassir Tukera, who as the direct descendant of Strephon would be next in line for the throne.

¶ Spokesmen for the Duchess refuse to confirm or deny Setree's allegations. Neither of the children has been seen in public since their birth, but holorecordings of the twins have been released.

Hexos/Spinward Marches (2828 B534420-8)

Date: 343-1120

¶ Imperial authorities under Archduke Norris are investigating claims that Aslan *ihatei* using biological warfare have slaughtered more than half the population of this world.

¶ Spokesmen have not released complete details, but said "more than a dozen" warships drove away Aslani insurgents upon arrival at the system.

¶ More than the 35,000 people have died in the last week, most of them in the capital city of Dione. Deaths of livestock are also reported.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 351-1120

¶ Naval spokesmen for Emperor Lucan have announced continued success in their rimward campaigns.

¶ "Solomani forces cannot stand up to the technological developments that our weapons researchers have recently completed," said Rear Admiral Daadushaa. "We are, in fact, calling back some of our fleet elements in other areas so that those ships can be retrofitted."

¶ "The Emperor is preparing an ultimatum to be delivered to the false claimants around the Imperium once this update has been accomplished."

¶ Daadushaa said he could not comment at this time on the nature of the experimental weapons, but said Lucan's message would be announced publicly at the same time that ambassadors carried it to outlying regions.

1121

1121 saw the end of the Desperation Phase, the firm beginning of the Irretrievability Phase. From 1121, faction leaders were only reacting to one disaster or reversal after another, and were no longer in control of events.

Hexos/Spinward Marches (2828 B53406R-0)

Date: 019-1121

SPECIAL BULLETIN: RED ZONE DECLARED!

¶ Imperial authorities under Archduke Norris today reported the death of the last native human inhabitant of Hexos, devastated by plague.

¶ Claims that Aslan *ihatei* used biological warfare to depopulate the world have not been disproven. "Whatever it is that's killing these people, Aslan appear to be immune," said Dr. Julia Kartinian, a scientist investigating the disease.

¶ TAS advises all travellers that Hexos is henceforth classified for travel as a Red Zone, with all contact interdicted.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 026-1121

¶ Naval spokesmen for Emperor Lucan have announced continued success in their rimward campaigns but refuse to release details in an effort to reduce the ability of the Solomani to plan strategically.

¶ "The devastation we are dealing these rebels is so extensive that the Solomani Navy has recently been unable to report back the whereabouts of parts of its fleet. Rebel leaders don't know where their ships are, so we see no need to help them out. What we can say is that many of those ships won't ever report back."

¶ An anonymous source close to Emperor Lucan said that the recent "superweapons speech" does relate to these naval successes. "The Emperor would not have put his technical staff on the spot unless he knew that real breakthroughs were being made. What our scientists have accomplished is, in a word, startling. The Emperor expects a complete cessation of hostilities as soon as his ultimatum is delivered to the leaders of the various rebellion factions."

Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D)

Date: 027-1121

¶ Spokesmen for Duchess Margaret still refuse to confirm or deny recent allegations that one or both of her children are the direct descendants of the late Emperor Strephon.

¶ Duchess Margaret's personal physician claimed shortly after the birth that the twins were the result of artificial insemination and that the duchess would make a claim for her daughter's ascension to the throne.

¶ Dr. Setree went into hiding shortly thereafter, but not before changing his story. "Julia Iphegenia Cassir Tukera is the daughter of Duchess Margaret and Count Blaine Tukera, but Paulo Trulla Strephon Tukera is the son of Duchess Margaret and Emperor Strephon, the fruit of a prefertilized egg that I implanted myself in a short and simple operation. The DNA data that I have on file can verify this fact whenever the Duchess allows me to release the information."

Terra/Solomani Rim/Sol (1827 A867A69-F)

Date: 058-1121

¶The conclave of the Solomani Party began this week amid controversy as the liberal wing of the party called into question the definition of Solomani.

¶Hard-liners objected strenuously to even considering a revised definition, and the rules committee remained deadlocked after days of testimony and speechmaking.

¶The original definition of Solomani covered only humans born on Terra. This definition was later changed to cover members of the Solomani race.

¶A simple saliva test is available which can confirm Solomani status.

¶Liberal party members are divided into three factions: the Humanists, who believe that all human races (because they all ultimately originated on Terra) are eligible for membership in the Solomani Party; the HDV branch (from the initials of *human, dolphin, Vargr*), which wants to extend the definition of Solomani to include all intelligent races originating on Terra; and the Sophontists, who believe that the Solomani should embrace all intelligences within their ranks.

¶Until recently, the inability of the liberals to agree on a course of action kept them from being a force in Solomani internal politics.

¶At a pre-Conclave meeting at Vega, the Humanists, HVD, and Sophontists agreed amidst heated debate ultimately to back the Humanist perspective in order to present a strong and unified front (with the HVD and the Sophontists obviously expecting further movement toward their own positions as time passes).

Rington/Massilia (2440 B443222-B)

Date: 073-1121

SPECIAL BULLETIN

¶Unconfirmed reports from anonymous sources within the 170th Fleet indicate that the 22nd Imperial Fleet has been missing for over 60 days.

¶The 22nd is a crack unit that had been deployed to the Diaspora Sector Depot in 1119, where it absorbed the Security Fleet already on site. The enlarged 22nd reportedly ceased responding to, or issuing, routine messages just after the beginning of the year.

¶Rumors suggest that a special task force is in the Depot system conducting a thorough investigation. Courier sweeps to locate the fleet are under way in nearby subsectors.

Uson/Massilia (0717 A6847CD-C)

Date: 090-1121

¶In an agreement announced here today, Hortalez et Cie has agreed to a major exchange of assets with the Vilani megacorporations Sharurshid and Naasirka.

¶Most of Hortalez's new acquisitions are located in the Daibei, Diaspora, and Massilia sectors. These assets include factories, shipyards, industrial real estate, power plants, and space facilities.

¶In exchange, Hortalez relinquished various holdings in Vland sector. It also liquidated an undisclosed portion of its shareholding position in the two Vilani megacorporations.

¶"This marks a new era in cooperation between megacorporations," said Hortalez's senior portfolio director, Nils Petersen.

¶"We and our Vilani peers will now enjoy more control in our respective spheres of primary influence. This concentration of commercial interests into smaller astrographic regions ensures continued economic security and health for the Imperium."

¶Senior Director Petersen denied suggestions that the exchanges had been motivated by fears that assets further from megacorporate security bases are more susceptible to nationalization proceedings. He cited corporate communication and control difficulties as the major factor behind the move to divest such holdings.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 112-1121

¶In a wholly unanticipated public statement, Emperor Lucan announced that as of 090-1121, High Sylean will be the only language spoken during Imperial audiences.

¶This decree not only applies to the Emperor's loyal subjects, but to all foreign dignitaries as well.

¶The Emperor explained that this decree is intended "to honor my Sylean subjects, who have remained loyal throughout this crisis. The other great languages of the Imperium are no longer spoken only by my subjects. They are spoken by traitors as well.

¶"I will not hear such languages in my chambers."

¶Lucan's minister of protocol, Sarir Gormakii, was dismissed the day before the decree was issued. Official spokesmen for the throne denied any connection between the events.

Eleusis/Solomani Rim (2109 A789831-E)

Date: 118-1121

¶Breaking a long silence regarding the activities of the Imperial Regency of Intelligence and Security, naval spokespersons revealed that they had been surprised to discover that the primary IRIS enclave here on Eleusis has apparently been abandoned.

¶In a terse statement, Admiral Ensuk'kli said, "The Regency is a sham, and everyone knows it. They ran away from Capital when they were needed most, and now they've run away again. God knows where they've gone, but they'd better stay hidden. The Emperor's patience has run out."

¶The Admiral's comment regarding Emperor Lucan's patience refers to the fact that the Regency is responsible for confirming legal successors to the Iridium Throne and that it has already spent more than four years considering Lucan's claim.

¶ Sources within the navy (which must remain anonymous) suggest that there is a connection between Lucan's loss of patience and the two BatRons that accompanied Admiral Ensuk'kli in his search for the IRIS enclave. The Admiral declined comment on this topic.

¶ Most local officials were surprised to learn of IRIS's sudden disappearance.

¶ They had expected the regency to continue its persistent (if futile) attempts to establish a Rim Concordiat dedicated to negotiating a truce with the Solomani.

¶ A 60-day cease-fire in 1117 had previously been the extent of the Regency's diplomatic achievements in the sector to date.

From the journals of Emperor Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi

Who are these IRIS people?

You'd think that I might have heard of them once or twice.

Who owns them, and what are they getting at? Besides the obvious, of course, attempting to place themselves as the Emperor brokers. Perhaps someone should explain the Moot to them. For that matter, perhaps someone should explain the Moot to the Moot.

So why is Lucan playing along? Unless he assumes that they are real, and if he admits his ignorance he'll somehow undercut his claim?

Perhaps IRIS is onto something after all, if this insecurity about revealed knowledge affects even the claimants themselves. Certainly I'd undercut my miserable, pyrrhic claim if I stood up and said I'd never heard of them before.

It's fascinating, though, how they've pulled this off. Their story has not been questioned in the slightest: this elite group of undercover Übermenschen who can tell claimants to the throne where to get off in the name of some higher, all-powerful string-pulling force of order and predictability in the universe. Not a bad idea after all.

Damn it, it is fascinating: the peoples' will to believe in the things they need to believe in. Like the lottery, and St. Elvis of Terra. "We're caught in a trap/I can't walk out." I especially like how they've included the part about the secret psionic assistance to the throne. Just enough of what people have suspected all along to make it seem all the more real.

Of course. Elite groups of super-spies are the force behind the throne, and nothing happens in this universe without their little star chamber agreeing on it first. Frankly, it sounds better than what we've got going right now. I think I'll believe in them. The spies are always in charge. Too bad things are so unpleasant right now, I might have gotten a really good laugh out of that.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 142-1121

¶ In a dramatic throne room scene, Emperor Lucan expelled senior Vilani emissary Seled Urkirjii today.

¶ This event was precipitated when Ambassador Plenipotentiary Urkirjii greeted Lucan in Vilani, rather than High Sylean.

¶ This flagrant disregard of Lucan's decree of 090-1121, which mandates the exclusive use of High Sylean in Imperial chambers, shocked onlookers and elicited rage from the Emperor himself.

¶ It is reported that Lucan's chancellor, Dore A'Kenji, barely managed to prevent the Emperor from resorting to personal violence.

¶ Ambassador Urkirjii and the entirety of his embassy were expelled from Capital the same day. This comes as a sharp blow to many of the remaining Moot members, who had hoped that the recently arrived Vilani delegation might signal the beginning of some level of cooperation between Lucan's Imperium and at least one of the other factions currently striving for the Iridium Throne.

Culdee/Solomani Rim (3235 A68A998-9)

Date: 168-1121

¶ A prerecorded pro-Reformist holocaust was presented on Culdee's airwaves today, galvanizing the local population into sharply polarized camps that are divided over the issue of pan-sophontic policy reform.

¶ The holocaust featured an address by the Secretariat's former minister of economics, Joshua Dahvin.

¶ Dahvin presented a forceful case against the Secretariat's increased drift toward the centrist policies of absolute racial purity and mandatory membership in the Society for the Sovereignty of Man over Machine (SSMM). In addition, Dahvin's words created a whirlwind of public and media debate over the Secretariat's current "one state, one race" policy.

¶ Dahvin, who recently resigned from the Secretariat along with a dozen close supporters, is now rumored to be living in Spica sector, where he is said to be devoting his full efforts to the growth of the Reform movement and its desire to encourage recognition of "the inalienable and equal rights of all sophonts in all places at all times."

¶ Andreanna Sarqaba, a spokesperson for the local SolSec office, dismissed Dahvin's remarks as "desperate ravings" that were only to be taken seriously because they represented "a clear dalliance with seditious intent." Ms. Sarqaba declined to comment on whether the Secretariat was likely to take any action against Mr. Dahvin.

ALERT! RED ZONE DECLARED!

Preserve/Zarushagar (2329 E449895-8)

Date: 179-1121

¶ Independent testing teams have confirmed the use of biological weapons in the current struggle for the Amavor continent of Preserve.

¶Local insurgents supporting the Isolationist cause are reported to have insinuated a rapidly mutating strain of parainfluenza into local water supplies and foodstores.

¶The pseudovirus, dubbed by locals as Reaper's Flu, is a rapidly invasive organism that is capable of killing victims within 12 hours of onset. However, the virus may remain completely dormant for as long as two weeks, during which time carriers can spread the disease.

¶Appeals to the local Imperial authorities for enforcement of the Imperial Rules of War against the use of biological weaponry are complicated by current power struggles between Brzk and Lucan supporters within the bureaucracy. Unfortunately, most of the former Imperial forces on-planet are engaged on both sides of this struggle for local dominance.

¶Ironically, the ineffectiveness of the remaining Imperial administration has bolstered support for the Isolationist cause.

Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D)

Date: 187-1121

¶In her first official public appearance since the birth of her children, Margaret announced that after two years of negotiations, a major trade agreement had been reached with the Hivers.

¶This agreement is said to have a net value of over 100 trillion credits annually and is rumored to involve the acquisition of advanced communication technologies and medical automation.

¶Tukera Lines has been contracted to ferry Hiver buyers from their homeworlds in Spica sector through the Hinterworlds and finally on to Massilia as they gather shipments bound for Hiver markets.

¶This represents a major diplomatic coup for Margaret—it affords her new economic power in the region and effectively sidesteps the Imperial-Hiver trade route via Beyerly's Path, which was lost due to Solomani gains in the Old Expanses.

¶Trading in the Anaxian Securities Exchange was suspended three hours early, closing with a gain of 572 points. Economic experts observed that the steep climb in trading was likely to continue unabated the next day.

¶Tukera stock closed at an all-time high of 194.32 credits per share.

Medurma/Dagudashaag (2124 A67399C-G)

Date: 199-1121

¶After a week of scattered reports, it seems that the forces of Emperor Lucan have dealt a major defeat to the remaining naval assets of Strephon's Imperium.

¶Captain Pradnir Kulshugirii of the 50,000-tonne armored cruiser *Skagerrak* (which recently arrived for repair and refitting), was given permission by the Imperial Censor Bureau to recount several incidents of the fighting that he and his ship had been in.

¶"Squadrons were going away in bunches," Kulshugirii said, "and most of those bunches belonged to the enemy. Strephon's traitorous thugs are losing heart. Even their officers are starting to admit that they know the real Strephon is dead. They weren't willing to stand their ground and die fighting—that's the sign of a lost cause."

¶Captain Kulshugirii refused to comment on rumors that suggested that Lucan's forces enjoyed a numerical superiority of more than 3:1 in the engagements, which were mostly fought along the spinward edge of the Dagudashaag sector.

Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D)

Date: 206-1121

¶Treason within Tukera Lines has dampened the high spirits and even higher securities trading that has spread throughout Margaret's domain since the so-called Hiver Deal concluded last month.

¶The Empress' nephew, Tancred von Harrer, explained that an assassination plot against Margaret had come to the attention of Blaine Tukera, owner of the megacorporation and Margaret's husband.

¶Although no further specifics were offered, expert observers speculate that the conspirators were members of the Vermene, the Tukera Intelligence Agency.

¶The Vermene has fallen into increasing disfavor here at court on Anaxias, and the empress has expressed an interest in disbanding the agency in favor of a new intelligence service.

Dlan/Ilelish (1021 A8D1ADE-G)

Date: 236-1121

¶After being locked in debate for more than a year and a half, leaders of the Virasan faith of Dlan has decreed that dying a nonviolent death on Dlan itself is no longer a requirement that must be met if a believer is to attain full revelation in the afterlife. They designated as martyrs all Virasans who have died off-planet while conducting essential business.

¶Many members of the Synod have denounced the 457th Khanu and claimed that they no longer speak for the true Virasan faith.

¶Despite being a native Dlani, Emperor Dulinor is not a member of the Virasan faith. However, rumors mount regarding his interest in its tenets.

Vaward/Old Expanses (1106 A795A99-F)

Date: 244-1121

¶An undisclosed task force has intercepted the approaching Solomani thrust from the Twenty-One Worlds subsector and defeated it. Reports confirmed that the Solomani task force—said to include one BatRon and two CruRons—was ambushed by a numerically superior force of Imperial craft.

¶Solomani losses were said to be heavy, whereas friendly forces were said to have suffered only minor damage.

¶Undisclosed sources within Margaret's military organization suggested that the task force was not a reserve or secret unit retained for this purpose. The same source also admitted to some nervousness, observing that this friendly mystery fleet might not be so "friendly" next time.



Warinir/Daibei (0507 A889978-F)

Date: 263-1121

¶ Daibei Federation spokeswoman Adlea Marignault announced today that piracy was once again on the upswing in the Reaver's Deep sector and that travellers were advised to postpone travel into that region.

¶ This announcement comes as a severe blow to the government of Duke Craig, who hoped his diplomatic overtures to the elusive raiders would result in an alliance against the Solomani Confederation.

¶ Unfortunately, rumors suggest that the Solomani have had the greater luck in this regard and have vested almost a score of the major raiding groups with letters of marque.

Marignault refused to speculate on the validity of these rumors, although she did mention that new diplomatic initiatives "were under way with new potential allies and are proceeding in a promising fashion."

Zeda/Dagudashaag (0721 B873967-E)

Date: 295-1121

¶ Forces from Lucan's Imperium have gained absolute control of this high-population world after three days of fierce planetside and orbital fighting.

¶ The naval and ground forces of Strephon's Imperium were overwhelmed by the size of this assault, which seems to be the leading edge of a major offensive.

¶ Expert observers estimate that Strephon's forces suffered heavy losses during the fighting, including two BatRons, at least four CruRons, and an unspecified number of carriers and escorts. Lucan's losses are unknown but are believed to be considerably lighter.

¶ The only announcement made thus far by the Lucan's occupying forces assured the general population that their "liberation from the pretender Strephon's yoke" is permanent and that a "great number" of assets are committed to ending the existence of his "illegitimate Imperium" in the adjoining Gushemege sector.

¶ Spokesmen for Strephon's faction planned an underground press conference in response, but never arrived at the designated site. No explanations were received.

Shakhamash/Gushemege (2716 A94A99A-G)

Date: 319-1121

¶ After two weeks of constant and bitter fighting, Lucan's naval elements have driven off the Strephonist defenders of this system.

¶ Losses on both sides were heavy, although experts agree with the assessment of Lucan's Admiral Rapida Amani that the Battle of Shakhamash represents a "crippling blow" to Strephon's Imperium.

¶ From the beginning, Lucan's 17 numbered, colonial and reserve fleets enjoyed an immense numerical advantage. Local Strephonist commanders had assumed that Lucan's forces in the Dagudashaag Salient represented his entire invasion force. Consequently, the massive attack upon Shakhamash came as a complete surprise.

¶ Lucan's commitment of an additional 17 fleets makes this the largest campaign to be launched in two years. It also indicates that most military analysts throughout the Imperium grossly underestimated the number of fleet assets that Capitol was willing to risk in a campaign against Strephon's Imperium.

¶ Official spokespersons within Lucan's naval command have revealed that the offensive will carry forward into the very heart of Strephon's Imperium and will not stop until the "pretender" has been killed or captured.

From the journals of Emperor Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi

IRIS is coming.

I never thought this would happen, but they're going to get me out of this mess. Me and all of my surviving people, that is.

"No, I'm sorry (whirr, click), but I can't submit to a physical examination (click). That would be beneath my dignity as supreme monarch of the Third Imperium (whirr, buzz). Can't you see that I'm the Em-em-emperor? (click clickclickclick.)"

Oh, it's all so simple. Have you ever noticed that the more your scope of responsibility recedes, the simpler all of your decisions become?

Come and get me IRIS, I'm a fake. Then they can leave my people alone.

Amdani/Daibei (2014 A727A88-E)

Date: 332-1121

¶ In an ill-timed blow to the fortunes of Strephon's war-racked Imperium, the Imperial Regency of Intelligence and Security announced today that Strephon's claim to the Iridium Throne has been officially disallowed and, therefore, formally declared void.

¶ Regents from IRIS were compelled to eliminate the individual who claims himself to be the "real" Strephon when they were denied permission to conduct a number of routine tests. These tests are required of all would-be successors in order to determine the validity of their claims. The tests are designed to discover if the test subject is either a robot or a cloned entity.

¶ This news was delivered by Senior Regent Irena Thorfel, who had been presumed lost in the tragic (and still unexplained) *Metternich* explosion which occurred just outside Sharim (1038 Gushemege) Downport airspace several months ago.

¶ Thorfel refused to explain how she survived this disaster which, according to official reports, claimed the lives of all hands and passengers aboard the *Metternich*.



¶However, she did make a number of pointed remarks suggesting Ziru Sirkaan involvement in the incident. "I am sure that various individuals on Vland are now happy that the *Metternich* incident didn't prevent me from delivering my findings. With the supposed Strephon's claim now formally disallowed, a number of powerful Vilani commercial entities will find their own interests easier to pursue. It's a pity—and quite ironic—they felt it necessary to ensure this favorable result by attempts at sabotage."

From the journals of Emperor Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi

332-1121

*Good bye, you IRIS buffoons, have a nice Civil War.
Yo-ho, yo-ho a pirate's life for me. No, better yet, I think I'll be a spy. They have all the power.
See you later! Have fun storming the castle!*

Phaln/Gushemege (3029 B120963-F)

Date: 352-1121

- ¶After almost a month of intense fighting, local units of Strephon's Imperium surrendered to Lucan's forces here on Phaln.
- ¶There was little joy among Lucan's command staff, who have lost over 350,000 men in the fighting.
- ¶Although the Strephonists fared little better, their stiff resistance has blunted the two-pronged Gushemege campaign, which Lucan's general staff has dubbed the "Extermination Offensive" (referring to its intended objective of eliminating Strephon's Imperium).
- ¶Naval spokespersons refused to comment on rumors that the offensive has so battered the nearby systems that it has become impossible to repair even minor battle damage due to the destruction of suitable starport facilities.
- ¶There are also unconfirmed rumors of disproportionate losses in TankRon assets.
- ¶These various factors suggest that the recent decline in the pace of the Extermination Offensive may in fact portend a complete standstill.
- ¶If this were to be the case, it is unknown how long Lucan's forces could remain on site, given their already overextended logistical situation.

1122

The Irretrievability Phase continued through 1122, and climaxed with the beginning of the fourth and final phase of the Final War proper, the Black War. Although the factions recognized that they were no longer in control of events, they were unable or unwilling to end the fighting, and continued it by whatever means were still available. The Black War was the result. Coordinated fleet actions were impossible, because the fleets were gone. The units that were left were carefully hoarded as the faction leadership sought a solution to the current impasse. However, lest their opponents take advantage of this breather, deep, and highly destructive strikes were made against the opposition's infrastructure to keep them off balance.

In principle, the Black War was similar to a war of commerce raiding: striking by surprise at the enemy's unprotected economic power. In practice, it accomplished the destruction of the resources that, under other circumstances, might have driven the recovery of the Imperium as an economy and a society. Its main casualty was not the factories nor the people *per se*; rather, the Black War killed the belief throughout the Imperium in a unified interstellar society.

1122 also saw the first inklings of the trends that would become familiar during the Hard Times. These were the emergence of doomed and failing worlds which could no longer support their populations, and the appearance of the Doom Trade, in which people by the millions emigrated from the war zones and the doomed and failing worlds to the factional cores where there was a hope of survival.

Lashkagur/Delphi (0830 B74498A-C)

Date: 027-1122

- ¶The 2000-ton, jump-3 Tukera Lines merchantman *Oberon* began its journey today to the Hiver Federation, marking the formal commencement of Margaret's recent trade agreement with the Hiver Federation.
- ¶The trade agreement, said to represent over 100 trillion credits of new revenue for Margaret's Domain, was finalized on 187-1121.
- ¶Local economic forecasters responded to the *Oberon*'s departure with optimism.
- ¶"The speed with which they (Margaret and Tukera Lines) are expediting this trade agreement is a marvelous sign," said Tramina Sorghetti of Hardrashad, ULIC (a subsidiary of Sternmetal Horizons). "When megacorporations and factions move this quickly to put a plan in motion, you can rest assured that they're certain of the benefits it offers."
- ¶The local delegation of the Nullian League today announced that it had dispatched a diplomatic team with "plenipotentiary powers" to Anaxias (Delphi sector) with the express purpose of requesting Margaret to reconsider the agreement with the Hivers.
- ¶When asked what consequences might follow a rejection of the petition, league spokesperson Jubar No-Dosaka admitted that such an outcome could "compel the league's leadership to construe this as the first step in a major trade war."





Hasdrubal/Solomani Rim (2939 A4548CF-C)

Date: 043-1122

¶Joshua Dahvin, outspoken leader of the Solomani Moderate faction, was nearly killed in a grav vehicle accident today. According to reports by Dahvin's staff and local officials, Dahvin's personal speeder suffered a field-bias malfunction during an NOE approach to a landing zone.

¶The pilot, Mats Skulpfeffer, was able to jettison the vehicle's fuel seconds before the craft plowed into an open field. Skulpfeffer, the only individual to die in the crash, is credited with saving the lives of all aboard.

¶Dahvin—whose liberal policies regarding pan-sophont rights and decentralization of the Confederation have earned him many enemies in the Secretariat—was vacationing on the Culperna Sea on Hasdrubal (2939, Kukulcan/Solomani Rim) when the incident occurred.

¶While there is no official mention of foul play, TNS informants have reported that authorities have initiated inquiries in the underworld. The nature of these inquiries strongly suggests that investigators suspect the crash was the product of a conspiracy to murder Dahvin.

¶Shortly after the crash, Dahvin named two of his closest associates, Sean von Thuringer and Sari Collins, as his personal policy analysts—a position which affirms them as Dahvin's successors, in the event of his demise or retirement.

Soyuz/Diaspora (0209 B300948-F)

Date: 067-1122

¶The TAS has issued a traveller's advisory warning regarding the widespread outbreak of rabies throughout the Diaspora sector.

¶Rabies, a disease once common to many mammals of Terran origin (including humans) was thought to have been eradicated on all noninterdicted worlds for the past two centuries. However, separate accounts on 14 worlds throughout the Diaspora sector indicate that the disease is not only still extant but is growing in prevalence among a variety of vermin and pets.

¶Experts suggest that the disease may have been reintroduced from interdicted worlds visited illegally during the Rebellion.

¶Rabies is most commonly transmitted by a bite, the infectious pathogens being present in the saliva of infected mammals. However, neogeneticists warn that given the intensive hybridization on many worlds since the early days of the Second Imperium, the disease could have mutated along with its hosts.

¶Furthermore, hybrids of Terran and non-Terran species (while admittedly rare), may be capable of carrying the disease. If so, they may produce a mutant strain that can infect the non-Terran root-stock species from which they were hybridized.

¶Animals suspected of carrying the disease should be tested (a blood sample is sufficient). If testing is impossible, suspect animals should be euthanized immediately.

¶The symptoms of rabies are identical in humans and lower animals. After a two- to five-week incubation period, infected individuals will experience fever, malaise and a sore throat. After approximately 10 days, these symptoms will become more severe, accompanied by excessive salivation, perspiration, dehydration and severe pain.

¶Vaccination in the first phase of the disease ensures full recovery. Vaccination in the later stages produces an 80% survival rate. Infections which are not treated with vaccinations are fatal.

¶Local SuSAG subsidiaries are attempting to mass-produce the vaccine, but reduced transportation capabilities hamper distribution.

Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D)

Date: 078-1122

¶After a conspicuous two-day absence from her open court, Margaret announced today that the "mystery fleet" responsible for defeating several major Solomani thrusts in the Old Expanses sector has been identified.

¶It is the 22nd Imperial Fleet (formerly stationed at Depot/Diaspora), most of the 93rd Imperial Fleet, and elements of the 1092nd and 1101st reserve fleets, under the command of Admiral Devon McTavish (who is operating under the authority of IRIS).

¶Following her unscheduled announcement, Margaret officially presented IRIS's high regent—Garran Trainor-Hughes—to her court and ministers. Rumors suggest that Trainor-Hughes arrived in-system only three days ago and has been in closed-session meetings with the domain leadership since then.

¶Sources close to Margaret claim that she and Trainor-Hughes were closely associated during her early years at Strephon's court.

¶Other intimates of the Throne indicate that the high regent's arrival was not welcomed by various high-ranking Vermene officers, who stated that IRIS had no authority under which to command fleet assets.

¶In response, Trainor-Hughes is said to have invoked the regency's first mandate, which states that in the event of an Imperial interregnum, IRIS is empowered to "take any actions necessary to the fulfillment of its custodial responsibilities as regent pro tem, until such time as a legal heir is located and confirmed." He dismissed assertions that this aspect of the regency's first mandate was a ceremonial formality.

¶The Vermene, the in-house intelligence organization of Tukera Lines, has served Margaret at the behest of her husband, Tukera owner Blaine Tukera. Sources say Margaret has little esteem for the Vermene's methods and personnel, but she has evinced a grudging respect for IRIS over the years, calling it "the only intelligence organization that has a conscience, as well."

¶During a brief statement before Margaret's court, Trainor-Hughes asserted that the recent actions of the regency's modest naval assets are not to be construed as an indication that IRIS has declared for Margaret; rather, they are simply evidence of the regency's ongoing efforts to defend what is left of the Imperium against further aggression.

Phaln/Gushemege (3029 B120963-F)

Date: 083-1122

¶Lucan's Extermination Fleet completed its evacuation of Phaln late last night, and reports indicate that the last elements have already jumped out-system, bound for Core. Although Lucan's Extermination Campaign has certainly dealt a severe, perhaps mortal, blow to Strephon's Imperium, it did not achieve its stated objective—the capture or elimination of the reputed Strephon himself.



¶After the fighting for Phaln ended on 352-1121, Lucan's offensive bogged down, hampered by insufficient resupply and refit capacities. ¶Attempts to establish footholds in the Ushuuri system were disrupted by intermittent raids and sabotage, further undercutting the offensive's dying momentum.

¶Although official spokesmen for his forces claimed that their withdrawal was for purposes of "strategic regrouping," most military analysts agree that Lucan's position in Gushemege was rapidly becoming untenable and represented an enormous drain on Core's badly attrited bulk transport assets.

¶Rumors of numerous desertions and defections—often by whole units or ships—are impossible to confirm.

¶One field-grade deserter expressed the feelings of many: "What's the point of going home if you're just going to get sent out to fight again? Everybody knows this was the last big battle. Nobody has the assets left to spend on this kind of idiocy anymore, not even Lucan. The fact of the matter is that the Rebellion is over—because no one has the strength left to fight it."

Dlan/Ilelish (1021 A8D1ADE-G)

Date: 101-1122

¶Dulnor has appointed Tredek Jurisor as his minister of information and communication after weeks of rumors regarding an upcoming political move of major consequence.

¶Jurisor is one of the most influential of the Virasan leaders who led the Synod members of the 457th Khanu in their precedent-setting decision to revise certain precepts of the religion's stance on afterlife and enlightenment.

¶Previously, dying a nonviolent death on Dlan was a primary condition for a believer to attain full revelation in the afterlife. However, the Synod of the 457th Khanu decreed that this is no longer a requirement.

¶Jurisor, along with the other reformationists who refer to themselves as the leaders of the Enlightenment movement, met with stiff resistance from the more conservative and traditional Synodans of the 457 Khanu.

¶The elements who have resisted the reform, now known popularly as the Orthodox sect, reacted to Jurisor's appointment with bitter—but unsurprised—disappointment.

¶Farthik Dorsokuguur, unofficial leader of the Orthodox sect and oldest Synod member of the 457th Khanu commented, "This is precisely what we feared would follow Jurisor's reforms—an alliance between the leaders of our faith and the leaders of our state. The heresies of the 457th Khanu are not an advancement of our spiritual vision; they are the precursors to an amalgamation with secular governments and aspirations."

¶Dorsokuguur refused to comment on rumors that the Orthodox sect has begun assembling a "star chamber" court in which to try Jurisor for his "crimes against the faith."

¶Jurisor has dismissed such rumors as groundless, observing, "My esteemed colleagues are individuals of honor and faith. They would not embark on any such course of action, which could easily be mistaken for treason—given my new position in the secular affairs of Dlan."

¶Jurisor, who is 43 years old, is a familiar, dynamic public figure on Dlan and has left the world on three occasions to oversee what his press secretary calls essential secular matters.

¶Dulnor's press secretary refused to make comment on the religious discord on Dlan other than to say, "The selection of Tredek Jurisor is the result of much careful consideration as to who would do the best job in this important post. The Emperor Dulnor is pleased to have a member of the Virasan faith as one of his close advisers, but issues of religion neither swayed his decision pro or con in this—or any other—matter."

Warinir/Dalbei (0507 A889978-F)

Date: 125-1122

¶Duke Craig formally announced today that over 20 worlds on the borders of the Federation of Dalbei are now designated as red zones, according to the TAS.

¶The majority of these worlds are located in the Mulaar, Hermes and Dudin subsectors of Dalbei, and in the Riftrim subsector of Reaver's Deep.

¶When asked why he was personally announcing the TAS designations, Duke Craig responded, "I want to make it clear that I not only accept these travel recommendations—I actively support them. I'm the last person to want to admit that some of our finest regions are no longer safe for travel, but the facts are incontestable. Even though the intensity of fighting between this Federation and the Solomani invaders has died down, there is an enormous upswing in pirate activity. Each morning, I get a missing persons update—and there are never less than 5000 new names on that list. Much of this is due to the raiding that is plaguing these hotspots right now."

¶Duke Craig declined to speculate on when these areas might become secure and safe for travel once again.

¶Rumors that the Duke's 24-year-old cousin is among the missing have gone unconfirmed by official sources.

Strela/Zarushagar (0407 B6449CB-6)

Date: 139-1122

¶Lucan's Vengeance Fleet has retired from the Strela system after six days of intense fighting.

¶In what some experts are already calling "the last great fleet engagement of the Rebellion," Lucan's and Dulnor's naval assets battered each other mercilessly, resulting in the destruction of at least four BatRons, 10 CruRons, three TankRons and an untold number of destroyers, escorts, patrol craft and auxiliaries.

¶Ground and COACC forces suffered equally heavy losses. Personnel casualties are assessed to be in excess of 2 million.

¶Unofficial reports suggest that medical supplies have run out, forcing field hospitals to resort to unanaesthetized bite-the-bullet surgery techniques that are usually seen only on pre-industrial planets.

¶Against this backdrop of human misery, Dulnor's commanders are claiming victory, although even they are compelled to admit that the cost in lives and equipment was "unacceptable."

¶Unable to press their advantage in numbers here at Strela, Lucan's commanders are now assumed to be withdrawing back to Core, marking the end of the long and costly vengeance campaign which has dominated so much of the Rebellion.

¶In a special report to the TNS, retired Imperial Admiral Ilina Robkovsa states that she doesn't expect to see Lucan attempting to resume his offensive.

¶According to Robkovsa, "He (Lucan) has taken too much damage here and has nothing to show for it. The vengeance fleet was at the end of a very long, very vulnerable supply line, and Lucan simply doesn't have the logistical assets to support this kind of massive offensive anymore. Core may be able to reproduce these assets but is the only political region within the postwar Imperium that lacks a safe rear area. Every centimeter of Core's periphery borders on hostile space. That's going to make even Lucan think twice before he tries to mount another offensive as huge—and costly—as this one."

Vaward/Old Expenses (1106 A795A99-F)

Date: 151-1122

¶Concern mounted in financial markets here today as the headquarters analysts of Hortalez et Cie announced that earnings had declined by 12 % during calendar year 1121.

¶While much of this assessment is based on algorithmic projections (actual reports often taking years to reach HeC's headquarters here on Vaward), market experts were forced to concede that this estimate was probably accurate to within 0.1%.

¶When asked to speculate on what had caused this sudden downturn, the experts almost universally cited Hortalez's massive asset trade with the four Vilani megacorporations which had been concluded on 090-1121.

¶Although the trade had been conducted and conceptualized with a great public show of amity, anonymous spokespersons from Zirunkarish now speculate that Hortalez et Cie "had little faith in the long-term viability of markets within the Ziru Sirkaa—a common mistake amongst financiers with decidedly Solomani mindsets."

¶When asked to comment on these various speculations, HeC Senior Administrator Nils Petersen suggested, "People should watch a little more closely and patiently, and speculate a little less. From our (Hortalez et Cie's) standpoint, everything is proceeding right on schedule and just as we expected."

¶Petersen declined to make any further statement that might shed light on his enigmatic comments.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 153-1122

¶Emperor Lucan slew a regency emissary with a flurry of laser bursts early today in a dramatic scene reminiscent of the tragic assassination carried out here six years ago.

¶The Emperor stormed from the throne room immediately afterward. The court was cleared by the Imperial Honor Guard.

¶Although details were not immediately available, fragmentary information suggests that the emissary was Judith Isaacs, a regent of the Imperial Regency of Intelligence and Security.

¶According to a courtier who spoke on the condition of anonymity, Isaacs had travelled to Core to effect formal delivery of the Regency's request that Lucan submit to answering charges of murdering his brother, Prince Varian, and several other persons.

¶In keeping with the Imperium's succession laws, the regency is required to ensure that a potential successor satisfactorily refutes any allegations of felony that might be outstanding against his person. This process must be a matter of public record and must be completed before there can be any recognition of a right to succession.

¶The Emperor is said to have become enraged when Isaacs delivered this message (both verbal and hardcopy, according to succession law), at which point he jumped to his feet and fired four laser bursts into the Regent.

¶Isaacs is thought to have died immediately.

¶Spokespersons for the Emperor have explained that Lucan initially believed Isaacs to be an assassin and that his sudden departure from the court was motivated by remorse for having made this mistake.

¶However, no official statement has been issued by the Imperial staff, nor has an official apology been sent to the regency.

Turin/Verge (2023 A561988-D)

Date: 172-1122

¶The leaders of the newly formed Verge Combine announced their secession from the Federation of Illeish today, after weeks of bitter dispute over Dlan's recruitment policies and mandatory "mutual defense tariffs."

¶It was also announced that fighting has broken out on several worlds friendly to the combine in the past three weeks and that Federation forces were already on site, participating in acts of "shameless oppression."

¶Analea Mekatan, senior chamberlain of Turin and perhaps the most influential member of the combine, stated, "We have allowed our economies, our militaries and our aspirations to be drained by Dulinor ever since the Rebellion began. Now, even as it is drawing to a close, his demands upon our livelihoods—and our very lives—continue to increase. This is not tolerable. His flat rejection of our petitions for tariff freezes and recruitment reductions has left us no choice but to secede."

¶Unconfirmed rumors suggest that two Federation fleets—the 42nd and the 1300th reserve—have already sided with the combine, along with their attached ground and COACC combat assets

Tiawan/Verge (2828 D88AA87-B)

Date: 198 -1122

¶The forces of the Verge Combine have successfully repulsed forces sent by the Federation of Ileish in an unexpected display of expertise and élan. The greatest surprise seems to have been among the Federation command staff, who consistently underestimated the will, ability and equipage of their adversaries.

¶Starting with a disastrous attempt to wrest control of the system's main gas giant from local defense boats, the six-day campaign was one long series of misadventures for the Federation forces. Although the attackers gained marginal control of Tiawan's close orbit and airspace for two days, they were never able to exploit that advantage to full effect in support of their ground forces.

¶Conservative estimates suggest that at least three full divisions of Federation and loyal regional troops were lost as a result of beachhead landings that were never fully consolidated due to intense fire by defending forces.

¶Naval activity was sporadic, but definitely one sided, with locally manufactured, remote-operated suicide craft (some as large as 20 tonnes displacement) seriously damaging a number of Federation heavy cruisers.

¶By mid-day yesterday (local standard time), the Federation forces had begun to withdraw in good order. Official Combine sources indicate that the last of the attacker's ships jumped out-system early this evening.

From the journals of Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi:

021-1123

Verge has seceded from Dulinor's federation.

Dulinor is becoming the victim—within his own faction—of the same centripetal forces that I hoped he could moderate in the Imperium itself. Rather than showing people a promise of a better system and encouraging patience, do democratic reforms actually work against themselves by putting power in peoples' hands and making them impatient?

If so, then how is one to renew the moral force of a union of this size? So many worlds, so little reliable information. No, I prefer to believe that the Verge secession is a response to Dulinor's betrayal of the ideals he sold his people on, and they have used their greater latitude to protest it. Something tells me that the socio-hydraulic programmers won't be able to prove either of those theories anyway.

Sebasta/Solomani Rim (0923 A666ABD-F)

Date: 247-1122

¶The Captain-Governor of Florina Arcology—the second largest on this world—announced that he was ordering the general abandonment of the massive structure, effective immediately. Although provisions have been made for an orderly departure, aided by Solomani military units, local experts point to the complete lack of residential, sanitary and medical facilities for the over 15 million residents who are being displaced.

¶The abandonment of the Florina Arcology, long a concern of the planetary government, is the result of insufficient spares for the structure's repair and maintenance needs. Although Solomani administrators have spared no expense or effort in their attempt to locate and/or produce appropriate spares, their endeavors have apparently been in vain.

¶According to Senior BioSystems Specialist Meomi Tasawara, "Almost all of the Florina Arcology's subsystems are of Imperial design. Unfortunately, the war has so disrupted the Imperial economy and industrial sector that replacement parts are simply no longer available. And there's simply no way to get local industries to produce the necessary replacement parts in time."

¶System breakdowns tripled in 1121 and earlier this year began affecting water purification and air filtration systems. Over 20,000 cases of amoebic dysentery have been treated since then. Abandonment became unavoidable when the air filtration system failed altogether.

¶As soon as the population of Florina has been evacuated, officials intend to strip the arcology of all working systems, in order to provide spares for the world's other arcologies.

Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D)

Date: 259-1122

¶IRIS head Garran Trainor-Hughes announced today that Lucan's failure to acquiesce to public hearings regarding his alleged murder of Varian and several other individuals leaves the regents no choice but to formally suspend the legal process whereby his claim to the Iridium Throne would be verified and confirmed.

¶When asked how the regency—or anyone else—intends to enforce such a decision, Trainor-Hughes commented, "The regency is not charged with the enforcement of its succession rulings. Such a duty would obviously be well beyond the capacities of IRIS. Instead, it is our responsibility to identify and confirm rightful successors in accordance with Imperial law. This statement does not eliminate Lucan from eligibility, but until and unless he meets the legal requirements, we cannot proceed in the matter of his succession."

¶Trainor-Hughes, speaking from the new regency offices on Anaxias, went on to state that while this turn of events does not mean that the regency de facto declares for Margaret, it does mean that IRIS considers her to be "the single person best suited to be the custodian of the rights, responsibilities and honor of Imperial station." When asked if this in fact meant that IRIS was designating Margaret as a form of "empress-in-waiting," Trainor-Hughes responded, "This in fact means that, in our opinion, Duchess Margaret holds the highest position of royalty that is formally recognized by the regency at this time."

¶ In other matters involving Anaxian politics, various rumors regarding fierce infighting between IRIS's newly arrived covert operation assets and Tukera's Vermene remain impossible to confirm.

From the journals of Emperor Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi

So what?

Susadi/Gushemege (2439 A8C1977-F)

Date: 267-1122

¶ Over 1 million civilian casualties were inflicted today by a sneak raid that devastated Karshai, one of the smaller pressure-dome cities on this world. Although details of this tragedy are still unclear, reports indicate that the attackers were part of Lucan's naval forces.

¶ The attacking vessels were identified as one *Midu Agashaam*-class destroyer, one PF Sloan-class fleet escort, one *Chrysanthemum*-class destroyer escort and three 400-ton *Lurushaar Kilaalum*-class patrol cruisers. A number of unidentified fighters were also used in the attack and are thought to have been using the PF Sloan-class fleet escort as their mother ship.

¶ The attacking vessels emerged from jump space just 150 planetary diameters from the main world and immediately commenced a surface bombardment of Karshai. While most of Susadi's surprised defensive resources went to the rescue of the city, the fighters and the patrol cruisers launched a second, surprise attack upon Susadi's class-A starport, inflicting considerable damage upon that facility.

¶ As soon as the strike against the starport was completed, Lucan's forces withdrew. Subsequent observation suggests that they refueled at the nearest gas giant and jumped out-system.

¶ Although many local military personnel expressed rage and dismay at this attack, Federation of Ilish Commodore Satina ba-Rek offered an explanation: "Lucan's changing his tactics, I think. I would guess he's moving to a 'scorched-earth policy.' Since he can't have this region of space, he's going to destroy everything of value within it. Obviously, an A-class starport on a high-population world is a valuable asset—one which could easily be put to use against him. So he decided to eliminate it."

¶ Ba-Rek went on to say this "may only be the first of many such attacks—and if it is, we're in for some very black days ahead."

Kapabu-Sepple/Massilia (0207 B87888B-A)

Date: 306-1122

¶ In a predawn raid against Tharaa-bu starport today, forces of Dulinor's Ilish Federation inflicted serious material damage and heavy casualties.

¶ Unlike previous deep-penetration strikes against Lucan's Imperium, Dulinor's raiding force on this occasion is said to have consisted exclusively of escorts and support craft (under 1000 tons).

¶ While some ground units were landing in support of the assault, unofficial reports suggest that these were forward observer/target designator teams.

¶ This hypothesis is supported by the extraordinary first-round accuracy of the orbital bombardment munitions.

¶ Official spokespersons for Lucan's Imperium claim that the majority of strikes were purposely targeted on populated areas, but independent observers suggest that most civilian losses were the result of collateral or spill-over damage.

¶ Lucan's spokespersons also state that this bloodthirsty massacre offers proof positive that Dulinor has no concern for the safety or welfare of civilians, and that he is unrelenting in his efforts to reclaim the Iridium Throne.

¶ Several of the independent experts, speaking on the guarantee of absolute anonymity, felt compelled to point out that this attack on Kapabu-Sepple is highly reminiscent of Lucan's strike against Susadi, one of Dulinor's significant holdings in the Gushemege sector.

¶ One of these experts went so far as to suggest that this latest attack by Dulinor may simply be a retaliatory strike.

¶ Referring to the statements of Confederation Commodore Satina ba-Rek (who commented on Lucan's Susadi strike of 267-1122), this anonymous expert suggested that these assaults may indeed indicate "black days ahead" for various populations and worlds on the periphery of Dulinor's and Lucan's respective centers of power.

¶ Drawing comparisons with the hit-and-run tactics that characterized the ruinous yet inconclusive Fourth Frontier War, this senior analyst expressed concern that with conquest now beyond logistical possibility, faction leaders might be resorting to tactics stressing the widespread destruction of enemy resources and transport nexuses.

¶ "If that is the case," concluded the senior expert, "then we can expect more than a few black days ahead; we can expect a protracted black war."

Sebasta/Solomani Rim (0923 A666ABD-F)

Date: 307-1122

¶ Scattered reports of mounting violence—including more than 100 fatalities—have accompanied rumors that the refugees of the Florina Arcology disaster have carried a new, highly infectious strain of hepatitis into their planet's rural communities.

¶ The 15 million former inhabitants of the arcology, popularly known as "arcos," were compelled to leave their massive home when system malfunctions became both severe and effectively irreparable.

¶ In the weeks that have followed the 247-1122 evacuation of Florina, forced resettlement of the arcos has overwhelmed the surrounding countryside, throwing the small agricultural and resort communities located there into complete turmoil.

¶With food and water shortages becoming endemic, many of the communities shut their doors against further refugee resettlement, resulting in several armed standoffs with Solomani authorities.

¶An alliance of these defiant communities—known as the Greenie movement—had commenced negotiations with local confederation advisors two weeks ago. Initial reports called the talks “hopeful.”

¶However, the sudden outbreak of hepatitis among both rural natives and arco refugees has disrupted the talks, and Greenie hard-liners have reportedly acquired proof that the pathogen was carried to their communities by the arcos.

¶Viral hepatitis was once the most widespread infectious disease on Terra.

¶It is a rarely encountered phenomenon today, having been almost completely eradicated by retroviral therapies during the Second Imperium.

¶Occasionally encountered in outback populations, this new strain of the disease—coded as “hepatitis gamma-three”—is spread by mucosa contact with, or ingestion of, any contaminated object. The crowded, forced communal facilities that now typify those Greenie towns overrun with arco refugees provide an optimum breeding and contagion ground for this pathogen.

Sufren/Diaspora (2004 B686973-F)

Date: 322-1122

¶Sternmetal Horizon’s local stock shot up an estimated 89 points on the Sufren exchange today after the megacorporation’s local executives announced that trials of its new *Roughneck*-class petrochemical harvester had proven to be “highly successful.”

¶The concept behind the *Roughneck* class design was to provide prestellar technology worlds with a means of assuring a steady supply of petrochemicals, even if interstellar commerce and dirtside resources proved futile.

¶The *Roughneck* class is a mostly TL6 design with limited TL7 components. Built for rugged use, the VTOL-capable craft is specially designed to insert deep into the atmospheres of large gas giants, where atmospheric processes often combine to produce small amounts (by proportion) of liquid propane and even acetylene.

¶The craft then “harvests” these atmospheric liquids with scoops and vents. When pressure-processed, the liquid propane can be reconfigured into more complex hydrocarbons useful as fuel or in the making of plastics.

¶For lower-technology worlds without native petrochemical stocks, the *Roughneck* represents potential access to an irreplaceable—and otherwise unavailable—chemical resource (assuming a suitable large gas giant is located in the system).

¶Advance orders from more than a dozen systems were placed within minutes of Sternmetal’s announcement.

Vland/Vland (1717 A967A9A-F)

Date: 329-1122

¶After a legal review by various special committees, the Isgirdi of the Ziru Sirkaa has formally approved the request of the four Vilani Bureaux to suspend the remittance of dividends on those shares held by the Imperial family.

¶After months of painstaking deliberation on this topic, the Isgirdi began moving quickly to a consensus when, last week, a jump-5 courier arrived with news of the regency’s suspension of confirmation proceedings regarding Lucan’s claim to the Iridium Throne.

¶This announcement, made on Anaxias on 259-1122 by IRIS High Regent Garran Trainor-Hughes, formally disallows Lucan the right to claim the throne legitimately until and unless he acquiesces to a public investigation into any allegations of felony which exist against him.

¶In turn, this creates a legal limbo regarding the title to the Imperial family’s considerable shareholding positions in the Vilani megacorporations.

¶Previously, the Isgirdi had directed the bureaux to continue their dividend payments to Lucan, since he had the right of succession by bloodline, and there had been no formal recognition of any allegations of felonious activities.

¶Now, however, the dividends will be shunted into a fully insured escrow account, its final dispensation of ownership pending upon confirmation of Strephon’s successor—whoever that might one day prove to be.

¶The announcement of this decision produced uneven trading on the floor of the Enlugal Commodities Exchange. Although a sharp rise had been anticipated, many expressed concern that this move would have a “chilling effect” on interstellar trade with mercantile partners outside the Ziru Sirkaa.

Agari/Ilelish (2224 B462942-E)

Date: 342-1122

¶Adeline Matsumata has turned the bow of her 200-ton free trader *Madame Butterfly* toward the center of the Ilelish Confederation—and has no plans for returning to its rimward periphery. Matsumata is just one of dozens of free merchants who have been leaving this area in recent months.

¶“The only progress I’m making here is that I’m closer to bankruptcy than ever before,” Matsumata said in an informal startown bar interview.

¶Like most other traders leaving the area, Matsumata cites frequent trade interdictions due to ongoing Verge Rebellion, which has spilled over into the Ilelish sector.

¶She explained, “One week, a planet is open for trading—with Confederation subsidies, even. Two weeks later, it’s under full commercial interdiction. So if you’ve got a hold full of special cargoes for that world, you’re just out of luck; you’ll have to go somewhere else and sell at a loss.”

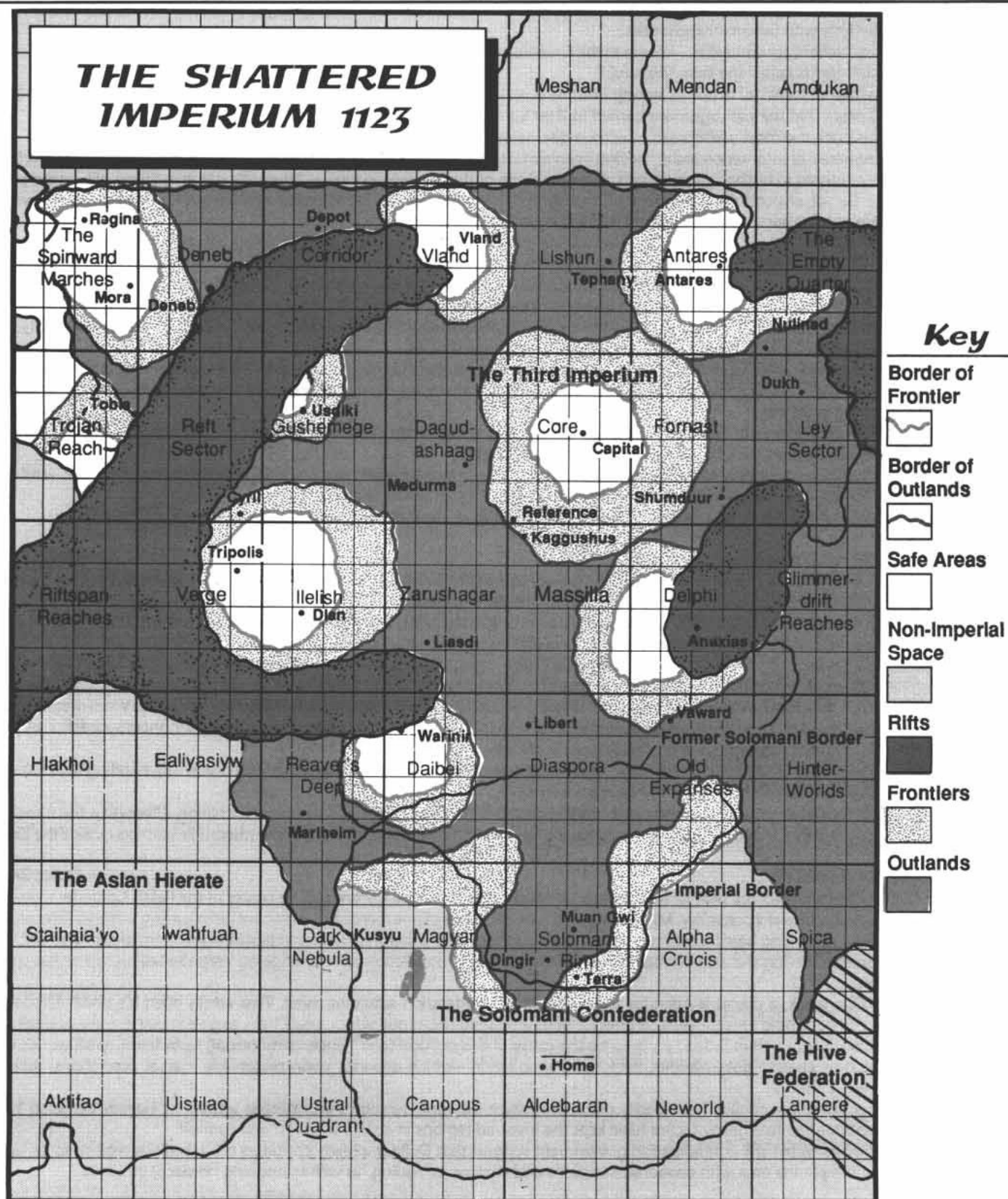
¶The revolt’s see-saw progress does indeed seem to be the cause of this political (and hence, commercial) turbulence. With worlds changing allegiances as fast as they change governments, mercantile speculation—which depends upon reasonable market predictions—has become practically impossible.

¶Although the intensity of the conflict has steadily diminished since the confederation’s unexpected setback at Tiawan/Verge on 198-1122, Dulinor’s containment/counterinsurgency tactics have kept the involved regions in a state of unrest and turmoil.

¶Unofficial speculations within the confederation government suggest that Dulinor already considers the rebellious regions to be lost, and is simply attempting to cripple the area with economic sanctions and commerce raiding, as well as ongoing border skirmishes.



**THE SHATTERED
IMPERIUM 1123**



1123

The Black War continued to escalate during the year, further damaging the Imperium's ability to pull itself out of the damage that had already been done to it. The appearance of disease, whether resulting from the collapsing health services of failing worlds or from the germ warfare of the Desperation Phase, continued unabated. From time to time, the Doom Trade flared into open rioting, as huge crowds of desperate refugees fought for scarce space available on the few ships taking passengers to safety. Trade continued to contract due to the loss of ships to commerce raiding, the loss of maintenance facilities to the Black War, and the sensible withdrawal of trading vessels to the comparative safety of the factional core areas.

Shaddimir/Ilelish (2218 A5438C9-E)

Date: 019-1123

¶ Unidentified units of Lucan's Imperium struck deep into the Federation of Ilelish and caused significant damage to various facilities and population centers on Shaddimir in the worst of the Black War raids reported thus far. Although various targets were hit, the attacks concentrated most strongly on this planet's Droyne population, inflicting almost 90% casualties among that race's local civilian sector.

¶ Lucan's forces dropped leaflets and issued broadcasts during the attack, claiming that the Droyne of Shaddimir possessed technical knowledge dating back to the period of the Ancients and that they had agreed to use this knowledge to construct secret weapons for Dulinor.

¶ Immediately after the attack, Adderly Morgan, local cultural affairs minister, dismissed these charges as "unfounded nonsense."

¶ "The Droyne of Shaddimir possess no advanced technological knowledge," Morgan said, "and their only involvement in Ancient artifacts is the small Ancient site that they have been excavating for two centuries."

¶ Morgan added that even if the Droyne did have advanced technological knowledge, "That would still not justify the systematic destruction of their community, an act which seems perilously close to premeditated genocide."

¶ Local federation military leaders expressed surprise and concern that Lucan's units' had dared to venture so far into Dulinor's sphere of control. They also expressed some worries about Droyne reaction—both locally and throughout the Imperium—to this racially specific attack.

¶ Ilelish military personnel unanimously declined to comment on whether an offensive reprisal is being planned.

Manshuruk/Dagudashaag (3227 B665648-9)

Date: 037-1123

¶ Renowned hunter Emile Nodokundu died during a big-game expedition to this planet's Aasharag Outback, in a violent incident involving several local residents.

¶ Two weeks ago, 54-year-old Nodokundu contacted the Outback Patrol by radio, complaining of a fever and intermittent thoracic pains. His speech was described as being slurred and uncertain.

¶ Later attempts to re-establish communication with Nodokundu failed, prompting an investigation. Patrol members proceeded to his location, where they were attacked by Nodokundu and forced to kill him. Authorities then cordoned off the area and immediately placed Nodokundu's remains in quarantine.

¶ After two days of intense speculation, Chief Coroner Palitha Nursopurja held a press conference today on the post mortem results. "At the time of his death," she said, "Nodokundu was in an advanced stage of metamorphosis. Full medical and physiological results will be released later. For now, I would say that, at the time of his death, Nodokundu had begun to mutate into a devolved form of *homo sapiens* with strong carnivore overtones. His aggressive behavior at Porbodur Range Station is consistent with that physiological analysis."

¶ When asked to speculate on what had caused Nodokundu to undergo such dramatic and unprecedented changes, Nursopurja admitted, "At this point, we have not been able to do much more than isolate a foreign microbe in the lymphatic system, which seems to be the mutagenic pathogen. However, we have yet to determine the source, vulnerabilities and contagion levels of this pathogen."

¶ Extralixity zone officials declared a general suspension of off-world travel and contact. In a reflexive move, local officials for Lucan's Imperium have imposed full quarantine restrictions on the planet.

¶ Several deserters of Lucan's military units on Manshuruk, speaking on the condition of anonymity, have suggested that the mutagenic pathogen might be an artificial construct. They claim that a significant biowar development facility in the Outback came under Lucan's control just over two years ago and has been stepping up the pace of its research since then.

¶ Prompted by the possibility that this facility may have violated the long-standing restrictions regarding the use or open testing of bioagents, the local Imperial Ministry of Justice office has formally opened an investigation into the Nodokundu affair.

Manshuruk/Dagudashaag (3227 B665648-9)

Date: 055-1123

¶ The entire investigation team handling the unusual Nodokundu case has died, according to a report released today by the local branch of the Imperial Ministry of Justice.

¶ Special Investigator Nowry Vladkov declined to reveal the precise cause of death, saying only that the investigators "died of unknown causes and under mysterious circumstances."

¶ Vladkov, who recently arrived on-planet as a special overseer from the Core sector, indicated that the team handling the mutation and death of famed big-game hunter Emile Nodokundu had been investigating "a number of promising leads" and that the ministry had been anticipating a major breakthrough within the next few days.

¶Madkov revealed that field interviewers had encountered other mutated individuals during their sweep of the Aasharag Outback, the region where Nodokundu died. These interviewers described the newly discovered mutated individuals as "extremely violent, incoherent and often in intense pain."

¶Planetary health authorities have declared the Aasharag Outback as a restricted travel area. Military units have been dispatched to patrol and seal its periphery.

¶Madkov has also initiated a full-scale investigation into the deaths of the first investigatory team members.

Giirsha/Massilia (2925 B87AA97-F)

Date: 059-1123

¶The creation of new interface line, Hejira Transport, has stimulated debate and controversy on Giirsha, the firm's homeworld.

¶Dedicated to serving individuals who wish to leave many of the badly battered worlds in this war-torn sector, Hejira started laying down specially designed bulk passenger ships in 1119. Hejira boasts a fleet of three modular jump-carriers, each capable of transporting 50,000 low passengers at a time. All three carriers are already reported to be running at full capacity, filling backlogged low-passage reservations outbound from the high-population worlds of Muimarir, Ugdukida and Gowandon.

¶Conservative estimates indicate that Hejira will be able to relocate over 1 million individuals within its first year of operations. The current desire for relocation is thought to be at least 1000 times that figure, ensuring Hejira with a steady flow of business.

¶Unfortunately, as the relocated individuals attempt to find work on Giirsha or in systems just over the border in Delphi sector, their arrival often causes disruption of planetary economies.

¶Particularly on lower-population worlds, any sudden influx into the work force places an increased burden on already stressed job markets. Various worlds in Delphi have threatened to discontinue issuing immigration permits, and others have imposed immigration fees.

Tripolis/Verge (2612 B885A98-E)

Date: 062-1123

¶A cease-fire between the Verge combine and the Federation of Ilelish was announced early this morning in the Tripolitan Senate.

¶The announcement was received quietly by the senators, even those who have worked hardest to bring it about. "I'm too tired to celebrate," explained Senior Senator Abdul McKeon, "and too saddened by all the pointless bloodshed we have endured." McKeon's comments refer to the Verge Rebellion, which formally began on 172-1122 and has wreaked havoc upon the worlds in this subsector and those nearby.

¶The rebel forces, known as the Verge Combine, surprised Federation military experts with their resourcefulness and tenacity, conducting a hit-and-run campaign that emphasized commerce raiding and surgical strikes against command and communication nexuses.

¶The political leader of the combine, Analea Mekatan of Turin, expressed a mixture of relief and wariness at the news of the cease-fire. She pointed out, "This is a fragile agreement in a turbulent area. Let's see if it can last to the end of the week before we get too ecstatic."

¶Federation officials denied comment regarding Dulinor's involvement in, and attitudes toward, the negotiation of the cease-fire. However, one senior defense analyst said that, with the Verge rebellion over, Dulinor could devote "more time, energy and assets to convincing Lucan that he should discontinue his Black War strikes."

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 081-1123

¶Lucan bluntly forbade the Imperial Ministry of Justice from continuing its investigations into what is now known as the Nodokundu affair on Manshuruk (Dagudashaag sector).

¶Making his first public appearance in three weeks, Lucan went on to warn Traveller News Service that its coverage of these events was "meddlesome and prying." TNS should discontinue following this story, he said, lest the service find itself "suspected of treasonous tendencies."

¶The issuance of such a warning to the TNS is without Imperial precedent.

¶One former TNS editor suggested that Lucan's extreme reaction could indicate that the mutagenic pathogen responsible for the metamorphosis of Emile Nodokundu and others might be a retrovirus created—and tested—by Lucan's biowar experts.

¶The Imperial Ministry of Justice has made no public reply to Lucan's decree. However, rumors suggest that the ministry has initiated negotiations with Duke Craig regarding the establishment of a new headquarters and primary training facility in Daibei sector.

Ugdukida/Massilia (2127 C33199A-B)

Date: 083-1123

¶More than 1000 persons were killed during the emigration riots that wracked this impoverished high-population world today. The riots were largely in response to the announcement that Hejira Transport's low-berth fares had risen to 1200 credits each and that an additional 5000-credit planetfall insurance surcharge was being added.

¶This surcharge is reportedly necessary in order to cover the rising emigration fees charged by many of the destination worlds.

¶In particular, the cooperatively safe and well-protected worlds of the Delphi sector have begun to increase their emigration fees, in order to generate revenue and to restrict the number and demography of potential immigrants.

¶Citizens here on Ugdukida reacted to the news of these increased rates with outrage and violence, destroying several of Hejira's advance ticketing offices and a number of starport access gates.

¶As one robotics maintenance worker explained, "They're making it so the average guy can't get away and start somewhere new, where it's safer. It's getting to be that only the rich folks can afford to leave—and they don't need to leave half as bad as us poor folks."

¶In response to the day's events, a Hejira spokesperson stated that if civil unrest continues as a result of its operations on Ugdukida, it will discontinue its low-passage runs and convert its current passenger modules into bulk haulers for grain shipment.



Umorphutwyo/Diaspora (1816 C41066B-A)

Date: 089-1123

¶More than 40,000 people were killed in a fierce human-Droyne clash on this predominantly Droyne world this week, amid scattered reports of human-Droyne tensions throughout this sector. The clash began in the city of Adysroyo, where local Droyne launched a reprisal against a radical pro-Lucan faction that had beaten several Droyne to death last week.

¶The ensuing violence escalated and spilled over into noninvolved human neighborhoods. More than 40,000 persons were killed before a joint human-Droyne task force was able to restore order.

¶This unprecedented incident of interspecific violence has engendered a sudden atmosphere of suspicion in both the human and Droyne communities. Umorphutwyo's ruling aykruskloss (oligarchic board of oytrip senor leaders) has announced its intent to begin constructing a separate starport, reserved exclusively for Droyne use. Human leaders are rumored to be retaliating by creating monopolistic trading alliances with the world's predominantly human mercantile clientele.

¶Off-world negotiators, recruited as objective arbiters, call the situation "grim and worsening."

Regina/Spinward Marches (1910 A788899-C)

Date: 101-1123

¶Representatives of Archduke Norris Aledon announced today that the Archduke is seeking to meet with leaders of the Ine Givar movement in order to settle long-standing differences between the terrorist organization and the Imperial government, now in the form of the Domain of Deneb.

¶The Ine Givar, which are known to have had ties to the Zhodani Consulate, were heavily involved in the buildup to the Fifth Frontier War in 1105-1107, particularly on Efate and Ruie in the Regina subsector. Since the end of that war, Ine Givar activities have been almost nonexistent, although it is clear that the organization still exists, according to official Domain sources.

¶There has been much public concern of late that the Ine Givar will take advantage of the increasing isolation of Deneb from the embattled Imperial Core and strike unexpected and telling blows, perhaps in conjunction with Vargr, Aslan or Zhodani strike units.

¶The offices of the Archduke have announced that such concerns are "fantastic and alarmist," and that the suggested negotiations are intended to further stabilize the position of the Domain until such time as full contact with the reunited Imperial interior can be resumed.

Regina/Spinward Marches (1910 A788899-C)

Date: 116-1123

¶An explosion ripped through a public shopping mall this morning near the ducal compound, killing or critically wounding several score of volunteer workers setting up for a charity fund-raising event.

¶Messages appeared in several public databases two hours later, announcing Ine Givar responsibility for the bombing. The message read, in part: "¶Duke [sic] Norris' wish to enter into negotiations is only a cynical and transparent attempt to identify and expose the Ine Givar leadership, in order to allow their assassination by the Imperial security apparatus. We will not allow this to happen.

¶"This show of force, involving no loss of life, was designed to show the Duke [sic] how vulnerable he is to our power to strike at any time and place of our choosing.

¶"It is a very dangerous game he is playing.

¶"We will only enter into talks that sincerely seek to redress our just grievances against the corrupt and outmoded Imperial power structure."

¶It would appear from the text that the explosion was not intended to cause casualties, although it is not known whether the bomb's timer was faulty or if the Ine Givar terrorists were simply unaware that volunteers would be present at the site.

¶Archduke Norris is away at Mora. However, members of the ducal household characterized the bombing as "an outrage."

¶One person noted, "This claim that there would be 'no loss of life' proves how callous and bloodthirsty those animals are, and how hollow their claims for justice."

Larmige/Dagudashaag (2709 X7759DD-C)

Date: 124-1123

¶Rear-guard elements of Lucan's naval forces conducted a thorough orbital bombardment of all Larmige's starport, scout and naval base assets starting last night and continuing on through this morning, with appalling civilian casualties.

¶This news service regrets to report the absolute annihilation of all port, landing, shipyard and base facilities on Larmige effective this date.

¶This brutal and unanticipated act of betrayal is unprecedented, as the people of Larmige have faithfully supported Lucan's military operations since 1117. For six years, its shipyards have repaired and serviced Lucan's fleets.

¶Yet today, rather than being taken by enemy forces, rather than being left to defend itself, rather than being given protection commensurate with its sacrifices, it has been blotted from existence as a starfaring world by the very forces that it has served so ably and unselfishly.

¶The shock and grief of the population can best be summed up by a man who was observed earlier today stumbling through the ruins of the starport, searching through the bodies of those who had been working in the starport, unaware of what was about to befall them.

¶Dressed in ragged clothes and covered with blood and soot, he repeated over and over, "What did we do wrong? What did we do wrong? Can you tell me—what did we do wrong?"

Esalin/Spinward Marches (1004 C565673-8)

Date: 136-1123

¶A plot to assassinate the Archduke Norris has been reported through established channels by envoys from the Zhodani Consulate to Domain of Deneb authorities.

¶While the plot was discovered within the Zhodani borders, it is not yet clear if the plot involves Zhodani nationals, Imperial nationals or third parties.



¶ Zhodani information indicated that the operation may be already underway, as several subjects of the investigation are missing.

¶ In order to speed the passage of this information to Deneb authorities who may be able to contain the operation, this information is also being routed through Farreach (1402 Spinward Marches) and Querion (1614 Spinward Marches).

¶ A Zhodani offer of assistance in the apprehension of the assassins has thus far been declined.

¶ Insiders are speculating whether this development could be at all related to the unusual Zhodani naval activities of 1119 or to the increased talk of Ine Givar activity within the Spinward Marches.

Dlan/Ilelish (1021 A8D1ADE-G)

Date: 213-1123

¶ Professor Ililek Kuligaan has disappeared following his controversial remarks yesterday at Dlan University in which he called the Rebellion a "ridiculous war," among other things.

¶ Kuligaan was until today holder of the Dulinor Astrin Ilethian chair as chairman of the Department of Imperial History. At public forum, The Future of an Imperium in Conflict, part of the university's regular series of public fora, Kuligaan made his comments in answer to a question about rumors that Lucan was concentrating efforts on a secret weapon to bring the six-year-old rebellion to a conclusion.

¶ "If he's not," Kuligaan said, "he should be because that's the only way anyone will win this ridiculous war. Anyone could have foreseen that the Imperium would split into factions of such equal size that no one would be able to gain the upper hand. All that we have been able to accomplish in six years of civil war—and I mean civil war, if you must call it a "rebellion," then call it a rebellion against common sense—is the slaughter, no, the murder of tens of billions of loyal Imperial subjects. And what was their crime? That they could only be loyal to one emperor at a time, not six or seven."

¶ The casualties quoted by Kuligaan are those presented by the university, based on figures provided by naval intelligence. They include deaths caused by disease, starvation and piracy resulting from the succession struggle, as well as immediate combat fatalities. Although these numbers have not been disputed, they were not widely disseminated because of their probable effect on public morale.

¶ Emperor Dulinor's office issued a warrant for Kuligaan's arrest this morning and stripped him of his office at the university. But Kuligaan has disappeared, lending credence to rumors that he had prepared these remarks in advance, along with a means of escape.

¶ When asked for comment on the arrest warrant, Dlan University Chancellor for Academic Affairs Justin Horrocks replied, "Well, we all know it's illegal to arrest a professor for a public statement of political analysis. It must be parking violations."

213-1123

To: Security Secretary Sontag
From: The Emperor
Document 23.213-12

Issue immediately a warrant for the arrest of Ililek Kuligaan, late Chairman of the Department of Imperial History, Dlan University, under currently unspecified charges, pursuant to presumptive charge of High Treason. Warrant also to cover any and all members of his family who may give him aid and comfort. All his belongings on Dlan University and his private residence to be confiscated and examined for evidence of treason. See also documents 23.213-13, -14 and private papers, this date.

Dulinor

cc: Minister of Information and Communication

213-1123

To: Regents of Dlan University, and Imperial Staff
From: The Emperor
Document 23.213-13

Effective immediately suspend free movement of Professor Ililek Kuligaan, holder of Dulinor Astrin Ilethian chair/Chairman Department of Imperial History, and special political advisor to the Throne. All positions, titles, and privileges at Dlan University and Imperial Staff are declared null and void immediately.

Professor Kuligaan and his family are the subject of an arrest warrant, presumptive charges of treason, although none specified as yet. All belongings or documents that may pertain are to be impounded.

Dulinor

cc: Minister of Information and Communication



213-1123

Secretary Sontag:

Take every precaution that Kuligaan is not harmed when he is captured. It is unacceptable that such a high-ranking advisor to this government be allowed to defect, with the serious effects this could have on public perceptions. Once he is apprehended, we must be able to use any means at our disposal to turn him back to us, and require him to make public recantation of his earlier statements. If he is injured this task will become more difficult, as it might appear that he had been physically coerced. Naturally, if he is killed, there is no way for him to make recompense to this government.

Make every effort to apprehend his family, again, without causing them harm, as his healthy family under our protection will be the surest means to ensure his full cooperation.

Dulinor

cc: Jurisor

Minister Jurisor:

You were correct about Kuligaan, but it appears that I have acted too late. The fault is entirely mine; I fear that I was too much swayed by my advisors of longer standing that objected to your rapid rise.

Damage control on this issue will be up to you; you have my full trust. I suggest that maintaining emphasis on Kuligaan's academic role, rather than his advisory position, will assist us in keeping this episode from gaining too much attention. If pressed, we can back-pedal to the extent that Kuligaan, in his role as an esteemed academic, was sometimes called in to offer unofficial counsel.

However, should Kuligaan's real position become common knowledge, we will want to portray him as an agent of Lucan, who has betrayed the citizens of all the Federation. Please set this into motion so that this option will be available to us on short notice.

Effective immediately, you will take over Kuligaan's position. Moving you officially into his office will take place at some later time, so as not to call further attention to the incident. See to it that all codes are changed, and any operations and sources with which Kuligaan was associated are terminated or withdrawn. As Kuligaan may use some of these to further his escape, these should be replaced with agents who are prepared to arrest and hold Kuligaan. Respond soonest with your actions.

Dulinor

cc: Sontag

Warinir/Daibel (0507 A889978-F)

Date: 282-1123

¶The annual naval review, traditionally held on Duke Craig's official birthday, will not take place this year, according to a spokesperson for the ducal office.

¶The prepared statement read, "Naturally, this does not mean that there are insufficient naval forces to spare for a review. Rather, fleet operational and maintenance commitments continue at normal levels. However, His Grace, in keeping with his previous statements that 1123 will be a year of peace, feels that martial celebrations would be inappropriate."

¶Speaking not for attribution, a Federation of Daibel naval officer remarked, "He'd probably rather save the ships to throw a review for the Aslan out in the [Reaver's] Deep."

Regina/Spinward Marches (1910 A788899-C)

Date: 301-1123

¶Archduke Norris Aledon publicly appeared today on his ancestral home for the first time since the beginning of the recent wave of Ine Givar terrorism and allegations that rogue Zhodani elements had dispatched an assassination team to kill him.

¶Although a household spokesperson indicated that this visit was a normally scheduled tour and vacation at his ducal holdings, the public relations impact of his arrival was significant. Among the stops on his itinerary was the Regina Imperial Hospital, where he privately visited with recovering victims of Ine Givar bombings.

¶His only public reference to the recent terrorism was during an impromptu press conference when he responded to a question about the status of the talks he had proposed with the Ine Givar.

¶Acknowledging that there has been no progress toward starting the talks, he added, "I come to these discussions in all good faith. Sadly, I also carry a certain amount of faith about human nature, which these recent events have only served to verify."

¶The Archduke, as a consummate crisis leader, is certainly aware that with recent events, the mere fact of his public appearances speaks volumes about his faith in the stability of Deneb as a social and political body and in his own personal safety.

Regina/Spinward Marches (1910 A788899-C)

Date: 303-1123

¶Zhodani Consulate Ambassador Shterbifriashav flatly denied in a press conference that the Ine Givar are receiving any aid from his government.
¶Shterbifriashav said in his prepared statement, "The Consulate officially severed their alliance with the Ine Givar at the conclusion of the Fifth Frontier War.
¶"Terrorists are no one's friends and as the official representative of my government, I condemn these attacks as an atrocity against civilization."
¶The conference was called in the aftermath of a bombing yesterday of a Regina Colonial Navy recruiting office in which two naval personnel were killed.
There have also been allegations of Zhodani collusion in a discovery last week of what was initially identified as nerve agents at the Regina downport.
¶The ambassador pledged financial and medical assistance to the victims of the bombings and their families as a gesture of good will.

From the papers of Archduke Norris Aella Aledon, First Regent

276-1123

Attached please find draft of official letter to be carried by the diplomatic mission. Return annotated changes for my approval, then forward in absolute secrecy to Trin, preferably along with member(s) of the mission crew.

Norris

Domain of Deneb
Office of the Archduke
Norris Aella Aledon
Giyachi, Mora/Spinward Marches

276-1123

Fellow Imperial Leader,

It is with regret that I come to write these words. This is because these words invoke the spectre of the death of the Imperium. Yet perhaps by daring to invoke this spectre, we may together create the means to drive it away. If the Imperium is to survive as more than a sullied name, the leaders that remain must unite to reaffirm and restore those values that gave it life.

We in the Domain of Deneb have for seven years maintained our allegiance to no one leader, but to the Imperium itself. I now have to ask, to what do we owe this allegiance? Has there been a purpose to this fealty, or has it been a vain exercise? There are questions facing Deneb that demand answers, but before we can address them, we must know in whose name we are speaking, and in whose name we are acting. Is the Imperium merely our point of departure, or is it still our framework and our future?

As far as Deneb is from your portion of the Imperium, it would be easy to assume that there are no longer any ties that bind us together, save warm memories of a completed era. But the faithfulness of my people demands that we do not abandon hopes of a restored Imperium too quickly. So I ask you to join with me to take hold of the fragments that remain and knit them together. If one faction had the ability to take hold of the empire, it surely would have happened by now. I ask you to tell me if we, together, can do what none of us separately could accomplish.

While the distances between us are great, I can assure you that Deneb has survived almost entirely intact, and our relations with our neighbors continue to be manageable. With your agreement, our powers can be turned to lessening that distance. This would be a difficult undertaking, but surely no more difficult than those accepted by Cleon or Arbellatra. Like them, if we have faith and courage and commitment, the future is ours to claim.

I submit this course of action to your care and wisdom.

Faithfully,

Norris
Archduke of Deneb



Trin/Spinward Marches (3235 A894A96-F)

Date: 329-1123

¶What do you do when you lose a 60,000-ton cruiser? Hope that the Aslan didn't steal it?

¶This is the dilemma facing the personnel of the Imperial Navy Inactive Ships Facility at Trin. The *Arrival Vengeance*, an *Azhanti High Lightning*-class frontier cruiser, was one of five of that class mothballed at Trin since 1114. With the establishment of the Patrol, or *Trekhyair*, in 1120, one *Lightning*-class cruiser per year has been reactivated for service with this force, beginning with *Azhanti High Lightning*, *Children of the March* and *Refractor Loathesome*. The two left, *Bard Refuge* and *Arrival Vengeance*, were scheduled for reactivation in 1124 and 1125 respectively. However, while conducting an inspection of *Bard Refuge* prior to moving her to the shipyard, the inspection team discovered that her sistership, *Arrival Vengeance*, was missing.

¶There are currently no theories or explanations for this phenomenon.

Cymbeline/Solomani Rim (2527 A9F4840-E)

Date: 355-1123

¶A force of half a dozen *Gazelle*-class close escorts, tentatively identified as belonging to Lucan's Imperium, yesterday engaged in a brief orbital engagement here, then made for the 100 planetary diameter jump gradient to enter hyperspace. The purpose of this force's presence is unknown.

¶The force was spotted by the Home Guard cruiser *Durham* on a routine system sweep. The cruiser's officers reported that although the intruders were not operating their transponders, a drone-mounted sensor package showed what appeared to be the Imperial sunburst symbol on the retreating vessels before it was destroyed by laser fire. The laser attack on the drone was the only fire exchanged before the six vessels broke off for the jump gradient. Their identity as Imperial-built *Gazelle*-class vessels was confirmed soon after when their expended drop tanks were discovered near their hyperspace entry point.

¶However, their status as units of Lucan's forces is doubtful, as they made no attempt to engage *Durham*, which they clearly as a group outgunned. However, *Durham*'s captain pointed out that it would not be long before their true identity was revealed, for without their drop tanks, they would not be able to get far.

1124

The year 1124 saw the former Imperium continue its slide into fragmentation. The recognition of doomed and failing worlds accelerated, and the fabric of trade and the observance of civilized limitations continued to deteriorate.

A Traveller News Service Special Feature An In-Depth Interview with Professor Illek Kuligaan

Warinlr/Dalbel (0507 A889978-F)

Date: 131-1124

Professor Illek Kuligaan has been, since 213-1123, fleeing a warrant for his arrest issued by Archduke Dulinor himself. Kuligaan's public remarks on 212-1123, critical of the Rebellion, and by extension, the self-proclaimed Emperor Dulinor, have sparked numerous responses, in addition to Dulinor's.

For three quarters of a year, Kuligaan's whereabouts were unknown. Then on 126-1124 it was announced that he had met with Duke Craig at Warinlr. Following several days of requests, Professor Kuligaan finally agreed to meet for an interview with a member of the TAS News Service Warinlr branch. Although he refused to discuss the details behind his meeting with Duke Craig, he did reveal more of his outspoken views on the Rebellion. The following is an excerpt from that fascinating interview.

TNS: How long until we see the Imperium reunified?

IK: Never.

TNS: So you feel it will take a long time, then.

IK: No, I said never, and I mean never. There will be no reformed Imperium; there can be no peace or unity among these factions. No, we must go farther into the darkness before we can see the light again. That is proper, that is proportionate.

TNS: Proper? By whose standards?

IK: You see, if peace were to come now, that would justify what has already happened. Surely even you have read the figures, tens of billions dead. The horror that we have already visited upon each other, that would somehow become acceptable. Leaders would be able to countenance other wars just like this one. "You see," they would say, "we could do that again and still pull back and be okay again." That cannot happen. Peace now would redeem what we have done, and that is just not possible. It is irredeemable; the sin has gone too far.

TNS: The sin? Against God?

IK: No, not against God; against the only thing you can sin against, humanity.

TNS: So you feel that it is only humans that matter in this equation.

IK: No, you idiot. Who assigned you to this story, anyway? [The sin is] Against the thing inside every living, thinking being that makes it unique. The Vargr must call it vargranity, the Hivers call it hivranity or some such. Whatever word you happen to hang on it locally, the object is the same. But the word has to be local to you if it is to have any power for you. Yes, I call it humanity. And the Vargr have it, the Hivers have it, the Aslan have it, the K'kree have it. You might even have it. The issue is—

TNS: Are you a member of the Virasa faith?

IK: Do all reporters have such short attention spans? The issue is—and by the way, the phrase is, “Are you a Virasin?”—that what we have done is a crime against all life, all decency, and not in a contextual way, but in an absolute way. We cannot put a happy face on this, brush ourselves off, and go on. We are corrupt, we are polluted, we are death to each other. And in this case, yes, the issue is about humans, *homo sapiens*. We have to see our way through this hell that we’ve created and see to it that it does not happen again. There is something inside us that has allowed us to embark on this monstrous war, and we must burn it out of us. This war, if all of these deaths are to have any meaning, must force us to come to grips with the fact that we cannot remain this way if we expect to have an interstellar society.

If, on the other hand, we can justify to ourselves what we have done here in this “Rebellion,” then we can never be saved, which is to say, we can never save ourselves.

Rhylanor/Spinward Marches (2716 A434934-F)

154-1124

¶At the University of Rhylanor today, approximately 150 students staged a pro-Ine Givar demonstration to show their support at the university’s main square. They wore green Ine Givar armbands, shook their fists and shouted, “Agitate. Educate. Organize.”

¶Dean Eneri Woemser called in campus and local police forces to prevent any outbreaks of violence by the students or patriotic bystanders.

¶After chanting and handing out leaflets reading, “The Moment for Democracy [sic] Is Now!” The demonstration disbanded peacefully. However, seven students who had been brandishing unloaded handguns were arrested for firearms possession and public endangerment, and inciting to violence.

¶The university plans to expel the seven students for their acts.

¶Dean Woemser’s brief public statement concluded with the remark: “We have over 34,000 students enrolled on this campus. The forbearing response of the vast majority of our students to this inflammatory display by a handful of illiterates is ample proof that this university cannot be judged by the example of these stylish ‘revolutionaries.’”

Gracilis/Dagudashaag (2038 A52077A-C)

168-1124

¶Recent Black War strikes on Gracilis by Lucan’s forces have prompted planetary leaders to question the long-term habitability of the world. Progressive damage to port and power production facilities combined with the world’s inhospitable atmosphere makes the future of the world’s 63.2 million inhabitants “tenuous at best,” according to one official.

¶The needs of the relatively large population require a vast oxygen and water cracking industry to chemically produce these essential resources from minerals found on the world. Recent developments in the ongoing Rebellion have made this procedure much more difficult. Lucan’s raids have done extensive damage to Gracilis’ habitation domes and subterranean galleries, which will require time-consuming repairs. Until such time as permanent repairs can be made, temporary repairs allow atmosphere and water supplies to leak away, placing a greater strain on the cracking industry. However, damage to the world’s power production facilities has already reduced the capacity of the power-intensive cracking operations.

¶Repairs to any of the damage pulls already scarce resources away from other projects on a world that has been on a wartime footing for seven years. Access to crucial repair parts is also becoming difficult, given extensive recent damage to Gracilis’ port facilities and the dramatic fall-off in trade in Dagudashaag sector because of the war.

¶Troy Kharkaziin, Gracilis’ Minister for Resource Management is blunt about the situation: “We might just be able to keep going if things are left the way they are now. It won’t be easy, but five or six years down the tunnel I can see a little light. But any more damage to this world and it’s all over but the dying. It’s time for a contingency study on worldwide evacuation.”

¶However, Kharkaziin is quick to agree that all of this leaves one question unanswered: “Where do we go?”

Dlan/Ilelish (1021 A8D1ADE-G)

220-1124

¶Dulinor today firmly refused military aid to exiled President Kærri Sundarigari of Neola/Gushemege (1430 B526543-E). This aid would have been used to unseat the military council which overthrew her democratically elected government in a coup two months ago.

¶Federation Press Secretary Tredek Jurisor said: “The Federation is well aware of the situation on Neola. We have received the assurances of General Meochovici that martial law will be lifted and democracy restored as soon as the current crisis has ended.

¶“Therefore, we will continue with Federation policy of non-intervention in the affairs of individual worlds, unless other worlds or the Federation are threatened.”

¶Speaking from her hotel in a hastily arranged and bitter press conference, Sundarigari responded: “‘Current crisis?’ What current crisis? I am absolutely sickened by Dulinor and his farcical Federation!

¶“Six years ago, I remember Dulinor saying Emperor Strephon was complacent, that he should have used his position to make the Imperium more responsive to individual citizens. He said he would bring an end to representation by the nobility, and give power back to the public. Now he’s turned his back on the issues which supported his claims to the throne or any legitimacy as a ruler.”

¶When asked to speculate on the reasons behind Dulinor’s decision, Sundarigari replied angrily: “Maybe he feels that the [military] dictators will build more warships than we did for his precious Rebellion.”

Dlan/Ilelish (1021 A8D1ADE-G)

251-1124

¶Dlan Port Authority officials reported that former President Kærri Sundarigari of Neola/Gushemege (1430 B526543-E) was killed along with four of her closest advisors today in a freak accident at Dlan Downport. She was reportedly on her way home to her subsector to recruit support to fight the ruling military council that unseated her government over two months ago.

¶Eyewitnesses report that Sundarigari's party was waiting to board a shuttle to the orbital starport when an out-of-control baggage lifter crashed into and ruptured several liquid hydrogen refueling lines. The resulting explosion killed Sundarigari, her Defense Minister, Press Secretary, Chief Judiciary Advisor, and Chief of Staff, along with nine other bystanders.

¶Archduke Dulinor's office officially expressed its regrets moments later when the event was reported, remarking: "President Sundarigari was a courageous and dedicated leader."

¶Some of Dulinor's officials have privately remarked that there should be an inquiry into the possibility that the junta's assassins could have reached all the way to Dlan, and the dangerous possibility this represents to other dissident groups.

Taped transcript of meeting between Archduke Dulinor Astrin Ilethian and Tredek Jurisor
251-1124, reel 4:1331-1347

Jurisor: The Sundarigari issue is taken care of, sir.

Dulinor: What?

Jurisor: President Sundarigari—she won't be creating any more difficulties.

Dulinor: You had her killed? What the hell do you think you're doing?

Jurisor: Preventing her creating any further opposition to your policies in an area where you are vulnerable. It had to be done.

Dulinor: Dammit, Tredek, I didn't ask you to kill her, I asked you to take care of the problem.

Jurisor: That is correct sir, the decision was mine, and it was the best option available under the circumstances. It would be wrong to require you to become routinely involved in the details of such matters, and would certainly compromise your ability to deny knowledge of such acts.

Dulinor: You've killed people before?

Jurisor: As have you sir, each time you order your fleets to attack. I assure you sir, we are not in the business of assassinating your opponents on a whim. If I am to properly perform the job you have assigned me, there are certain options that I must have, and you must continue to trust me. If you like, I can prepare a report for your signature each week, listing each opposition or enemy agent against whom we must use final measures.

Dulinor: That won't be necessary. Goddammit, Tredek, don't make this a bloodier business than it has to be.

Jurisor: It's already a bloody business, sir. I am only trying to end it on our terms.

Hice/Diaspora (2920 A795222-E)

345-1124

¶In one of the bitterest blows of the Black War yet to befall the Diaspora sector, Solomani forces launched an attack on Hice's Class A starport using thermonuclear weapons. This attack completely destroyed the starport and, it is believed, killed a substantial portion of Hice's populace.

¶According to a source in Margaret's Navy, Hice was not a target because of any inherent value, but rather because of its location near the Solomani frontier and its high-quality starport. "It was like a dagger pointed right at their operations in the Promise and Khulam subsectors. We had been staging forces out of Hice right in their front yard to keep an eye on their activities and threaten any movements they made. By removing Hice, they've improved their ability to operate unhindered."

¶Tentative estimates by local Travellers' Aid Society officials indicate that Hice will now be listed as X795122-E.

1125-1128

1125 saw the beginning of the Hard Times proper, as regular interstellar trade in the no-man's lands between factions ceased completely. Regular scheduled trade existed only in the areas just beyond each faction's frontier, and more and more of this was taken up by simple life support for the "outlands" beyond these frontiers: crucial high-priced spare parts on the way out, and the doom trade on the way back in. In these outlands and the "wilds" beyond, planets began deteriorating so rapidly that populations, technology level, and starport facilities would undergo noticeable changes in the space of a year: always downward, and often so rapidly that it could not be accurately reported.

Nonetheless, by the end of this period, some factions began to entertain notions that the interval provided by the Hard Times would allow them to re-assemble sufficient military force for one last knock-out blow against their exhausted foes. The wilds would see one last campaign after all.

Vland/Vland (1717 A967A9A-F)

157-1125

¶Zirunkariish today published its eagerly anticipated biannual report on the actuarial state of the Imperium. While many observers were hoping that the massive megacorporation might have been able to statistically identify the beginnings of some positive trends, the news was bleak, and was accompanied by an announced raising of insurance rates by the giant Vilani megacorporation.

¶The most sobering portion of the report was the extensively documented estimate that Imperial mercantile shipping experienced an 18% drop in aggregate tonnage during the period 001-1123 to 365-1124. These figures are in spite of the shipbuilding rates during the period, and show the maintained ferocity of the Rebellion.



97

THE SHATTERED IMPERIUM 1125

Key

Border of Frontier



Border of Outlands



Safe Areas



Non-Imperial Space



Rifts



Frontiers



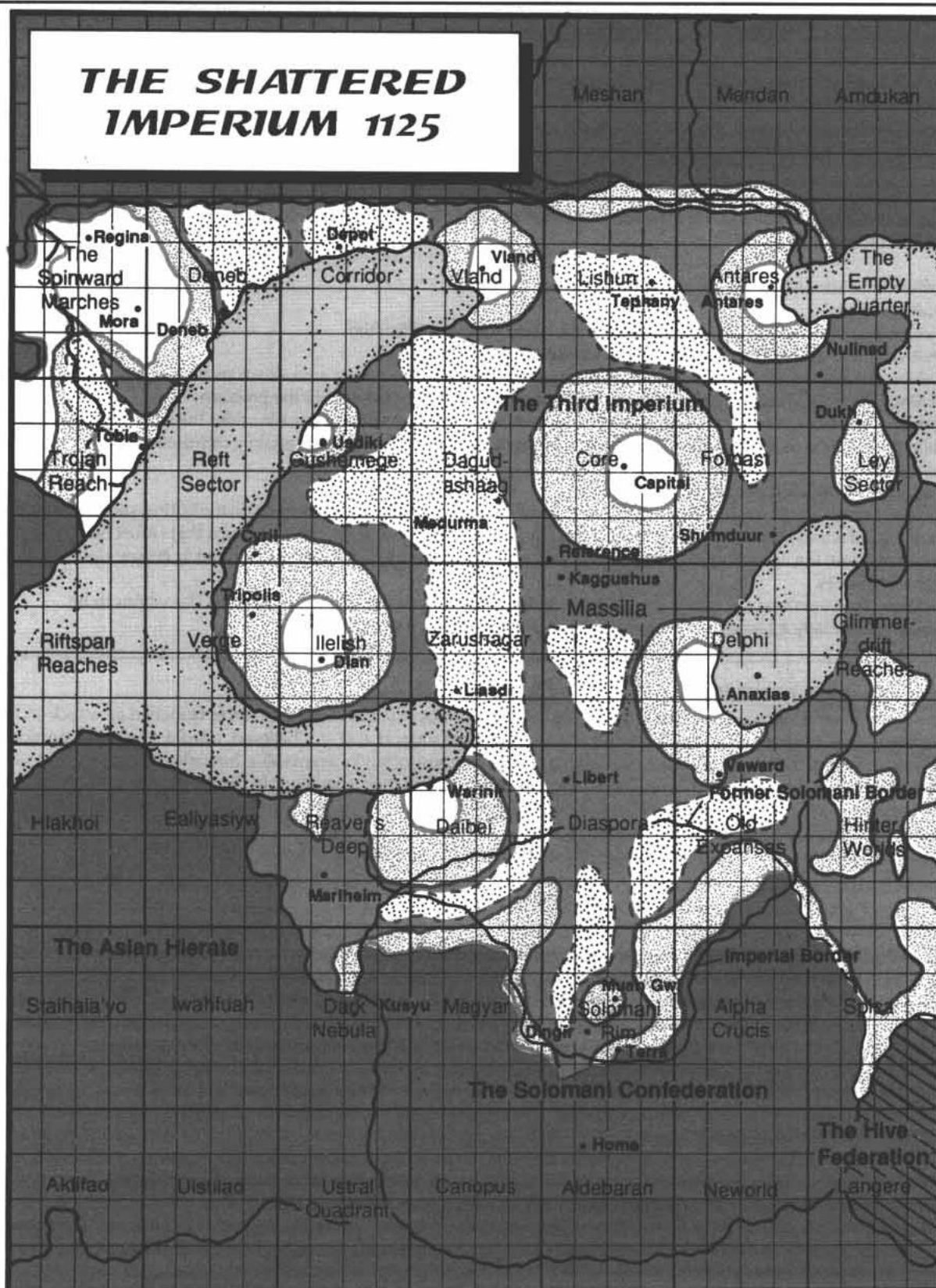
Outlands



Wilds



Border of Wilds



¶The figures are thought to show another trend as well. In terms of total number of merchant hulls, the numbers only dropped 14% during the same period, showing that larger high-value merchant hulls suffered in proportion to their size, not their numbers. This is believed to reflect the rising effects of piracy, because pirates pick their targets based on perceived value and risk. Commercial losses due to general warfare during the Rebellion have not shown this bias toward destruction of tonnage. Instead, tonnage and numerical losses were within 1% of each other during the first six years of the war. The term "hulls" in this report is a specific term used by megacorporate insurers Zirunkariish and Hortalez et Cie to refer to spaceships and starships together, rather than the distinguishing term "ships" which refers only to jump-capable starships.

¶These loss figures were not the worst ever; that honor belongs to the 21% tonnage and 22% hull number drop in the 1119 report covering the period 001-1117 to 365-1118. However, these record figures are artificially high because the shipbuilding rates during that period had not built up to full mobilization levels. In fact, this years' figures are quite bad enough to have prompted Zirunkariish to announce a 20% increase in starship insurance rates. The reasons cited for the increase are the increased risk of loss, reduced overall revenue base, the fragmented political structure preventing accurate assessment of risk or enforcement of payment, the rise of piracy, and the decrease in size of the average ship, resulting in reduced economies of scale and capacities for self-defense.

¶These rate increases are of a similar magnitude to those that Hortalez et Cie is rumored to be studying.

Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D)

171-1125

¶Margaret's government responded with concern today to increasing reports of planets whose published world profiles do not correspond to the realities found there. Margaret's officials, citing the danger of such "surprises" to the safety of Imperial citizens, will make a formal request of the Travellers' Aid Society Statistical Office, responsible for establishing and disseminating these profiles, to look into these reports.

¶Reports presented include worlds whose starport capabilities do not live up to their assigned codes, and planets where locally available technology is beneath listed levels. The examples cited are all worlds in areas outside of Margaret's defended frontier, areas being increasingly referred to as the "Outlands" and the "Wilds." It is considered likely that the effects of warfare in these areas have caused these changes, and this theory will be included in the request to the TAS.

¶The TAS will be asked to check into the accuracy of these reports and, if they are found to be true, establish a method to ensure accurate reporting of actual planetary conditions in future publications of world profiles.

¶Most of the reports cited only inconvenience to the travellers themselves, but in some cases merchant ships found themselves stranded on worlds which, unreported in the world profiles, could no longer provide fuel services or starship repair and maintenance.

Tripolis/Verge (2612 B885A98-E)

263-1125

¶A goodwill visit to the restive world of Tripolis by Lady Isis, daughter of Emperor Dulinor, was marred by violence today. Although the world's starport has been closed to all members of the media, the following story of what happened there has been pieced together from interviews with witnesses and the few short official announcements.

¶As part of her tour "to show my father Dulinor's solidarity with you during these difficult times," Lady Isis appeared with the Shaw Hamet, Tripolis head of state, at Sirte Downport. While speaking there, an as-yet unknown number of rioters appeared and, after shouting, "Down with Dulinor," and "Dulinor has brought back the Long Night," began throwing objects, apparently including bottles, garbage, and small fireworks at the dais.

¶Lady Isis, though unhurt, threw herself to the ground to avoid being struck. At the same time, some of the fireworks thrown by the crowd began to go off. Although they were themselves harmless, their reports as Isis fell to the ground caused her personal detachment of bodyguards to conclude that she had been fired on by the crowd. One or more of the high-strung bodyguards returned the supposed fire into the crowd with plasma rifles, eventually killing at least 20, reportedly including many bystanders.

¶The crowd panicked, and many fled the scene, trampling and injuring several dozen more in the process.

¶The only photograph of the event, taken by an unknown photographer at long range, shows Lady Isis with a horrified expression, and with her hallmark fashionable gown spattered with some foreign substance. While some claim that the substance is blood, acquired when Isis waded into the crowd to comfort injured bystanders, others maintain that it is refuse, and she is angered at the damage done to her wardrobe.

Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D)

311-1125

¶The Travellers' Aid Society Statistical Office today presented to Margaret's government its report on world profile information published in TAS materials. This report was made in response to a formal request by Margaret's government that the organization look into recent accounts of TAS-published world profiles that did not accurately reflect current conditions on several worlds. The report was filed in the remarkably short time of 140 days, reflecting, in the words of TAS official Eleri Kraus, "the importance of ensuring the safety of not only our members, but of all travellers in Imperial space."

¶The report shows that many worlds show a degradation in starport capabilities, sustainable technology levels, and in some cases, population and atmospheric qualities. The report was clear that in all cases of variance between published figures and reality, it was the conditions on the world that had changed, and not the result of misprinted or mistransmitted world profiles. "What we are seeing here is a very real and tragic decline in the quality of life of Imperial citizens that is so precipitous it has overwhelmed our ability to document it in a timely fashion," said Kraus after the presentation.

¶The report establishes and documents that these changes are all direct or indirect results of Rebellion combat, and are concentrated in disputed areas between factional boundaries that have seen high levels of combat. Merchants operating in these areas have begun to distinguish between "Outlands," those areas just beyond the defended factional frontiers, and the "Wilds," that remain in the much contested no-man's land between heavily engaged factions.



¶Having identified the astrographic regions that hold the highest probability of rapid world profile change, the TAS can now concentrate field agents in these areas to report changes in world profile codes as quickly as possible. A new system of world profile notation is being introduced, which will show changed digits with *italics*, and a question mark (?) for values that have changed or are changing so rapidly they cannot yet be evaluated.

Vahana/Diaspora (2926 E65A577-B)**352-1125**

¶Six months of sporadic fighting on Vahana is now coming to a close, with an apparent victory for the popular Mariculture Directorate over the so-called Interim Council. The Interim Council, composed of retired military officers, took power following the fighting that destroyed Vahana's starport. Although it repeatedly promised economic programs and an orderly succession of power, the council spent over a year in power delivering only increasingly bombastic demands for belt-tightening and self-sacrifice from Vahana's citizens. That year also saw a sudden decline in the population's health and living standards as distribution networks broke down under the council's interference.

¶The end of fighting follows a brilliant and almost bloodless island-hopping campaign fought mostly by Vahanan volunteers, but led and master-minded by an off-planet mercenary unit. The unit was recruited for this operation by ex-Imperial naval officer Robert R. Rivera, who was hired by the Mariculture Directorate to remove the council. The defeat of the council will clear the way for the directorate's program to re-establish planetary trade networks and restore interstellar trade by creating a "soft" (water) landing starport facility. The directorate also seeks to establish alliance ties with nearby worlds, and the elimination of the insular Interim Council will open the way for these plans.

¶The campaign to overthrow the military government is notable because of the lack of casualties suffered by either side. This was a deliberate goal of Rivera's force, which used technologically sophisticated maneuver tactics to overmatch and overawe its opponents. Rivera appeared yesterday with his second-in-command, Lisa Marlene, to discuss these operations at a brief press appearance. When asked how she felt about the campaign's low casualties, only 83 killed and 349 wounded on both sides in six months of operations that saw over 20,000 prisoners taken, Marlene replied, "We don't feel good about casualties, no matter how low the number. But it is gratifying to know that we kept them from being any higher." Rivera added, "Every life that we take, every building we destroy, will make recovery from the Rebellion that much harder. Killing more people isn't the answer." Rivera also announced that his mercenary unit will remain together under the name Rivera's Vigilantes.

Promise/Diaspora (2827 B542998-C)**045-1126**

¶There is a new government today in Diaspora sector, the Unity of Promise, a confederation of six worlds whose name reflects its leading world as well as the subsector in which it is located. The new polity was announced yesterday by Angeline Beres, the UP's first Minister for State Affairs, and former commander of the Promise planetary navy.

¶The Unity of Promise consists of the six contiguous worlds Lot, Vahana, Udone, Promise, Eloji, and Exeter, which together form 60% of the small Promise main. The group contains two agricultural and one industrial world, and can therefore function as a small self-contained economy. Its military power is based on the Promise planetary navy, whose assets have now been turned over to the Unity of Promise Navy.

¶Beres' statement identified the UP's main policy goal as "the establishment of the force of law in an anarchic region which the major powers have abandoned save for the occasional punitive raid. Power must no longer be held only by those interested in destroying our social and economic infrastructure."

¶Admitting that the re-establishment of order in the region will be difficult, Beres also announced that the UP forces would maintain starmerc units on retainer, to be mobilized as reserve naval forces should the need arise. To further this program, the UP government will subsidize the completion of EMMC (Extemporised Mercantile to Military Conversion) starships for qualified starmerc units who agree to serve in this reserve capacity. Rivera's Vigilantes, famous as the liberators of Vahana, are the first such group to apply for this program, and are expected to be rapidly approved and accepted.

Cymbeline/Solomani Rim (2527 A9F4840-E)**091-1126**

¶Joshua Dahvin, embattled head of the pan-sophontist faction of the fragmenting Solomani Party, visited Cymbeline today to pay a politically significant visit to the population of intelligent semiconductor microchips that inhabit the volcanic highlands of this world. Although no transcripts or recordings of any discussions have been released, holographs of the meetings show Dahvin speaking to a group of chips hooked into a computer data core.

¶Since the announcement of their discovery by Dr. Arnold Rushorin in 1114, the Solomani Party has carefully refused comment on the significance of the intelligent non-organic beings for the Solomani dogma. The chips present an interesting problem for the dogmatists. While they are not human, leading theories of their evolution show that they are descended from Terran Confederation-manufactured microchips.

¶Informed observers speculate that Dahvin's visit is intended to break the current deadlock in Solomani Party politics caused by the unwillingness of the Humanist and HDV (from the initials Human, Dolphin, Vargr) branches to break from the moderate forces and follow the pan-sophontist leadership in the liberal wing. By invoking the status of the microchips, say these observers, Dahvin hopes to rattle the HDV leaders into examining their current de facto alliance with the Society for the Sovereignty of Man over Machine (SSMM), another moderate faction. The HDV faction cannot easily reject claims for the inclusion of the chips in the Solomani race. For the chips can be described as Terran-originating life forms that attained intelligence with outside intervention just the same as can the Vargr and dolphins. What's more, like the dolphins, the chips are the result of human creation, which carries great weight with some Solomani liberals.



From the journals of Emperor Strephon Aella Alkhalikoi

180-1126

I sent Avery away with them. I hadn't intended to, but it seemed the only thing to do.

Do those people know the meaning of those words that they wear? I thought I knew what Lincoln meant years ago when I read him. He was a leader like me, of a divided nation. I thought he could tell me how to win back my nation, and so I took self-righteous encouragement from his words, but I never understood them until today.

"We cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract...It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced."

I stopped reading too soon. The answer was not to continue the killing. I learned that myself, but not soon enough.

"...We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

The people are what matter, they are all that matter. To tell them to die for me is no different than to tell them to die for Dulinor or Lucan. This is not some game, with people as the currency. The government is for them, not for me, or Dulinor, or Lucan, and as long as we believe we are allowed to spend their lives like water, we are not worthy to lead them.

"Shall not perish." So long as they wear the words, they don't have to know what they mean. They are girded with history; the words will shine forth when they are needed, as they did today. They have power that they might never understand, but it is theirs, all the same.

I need Avery here, but they need him more, and they can take better care of him than I can. I'm just a silly old man, frightened of the future. Better Avery saves them than me. Good bye, Avery.

Avery will know what to do.

Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D)

198-1126

¶Margaret's government was today rocked by charges of genocide, said to be conducted against the Geonee in Massilia sector with Margaret's knowledge and tacit approval. The charges were presented by Gemma Kasgilii, heading a delegation from the Erasmus Alliance, an independent human rights group based in Massilia.

¶Kasgilii charged that the Marquess Tanzer, a noble loyal to Margaret, has been waging a "war of extermination" against the significant numbers of Geonee refugees that have been retreating trailward from their destroyed homes in the Shiwonee subsector (J/Massilia).

¶The Geonee are a minor human race native to Shiwonee (1430 Massilia) and also comprise the majority population of the seven other worlds of the Geonee Cultural Region centered in Shiwonee subsector. The Geonee's main claim to fame heretofore is their protestation, supported by little independent scholarship, that they are the Ancients. The Marquess Gervaise Tanzer is a retired admiral best known for organizing the major shipbuilding programs that empowered Margaret's operations against the Solomani offensives in Diaspora and the Old Expanses.

¶A government spokesman was almost incoherent with rage when he appeared before the hastily assembled press to answer the charges, which he characterized as "preposterous." He pointed out that Margaret's government exercises "little enough control in Massilia as it is," and therefore to blame events in the embattled sector on Margaret is "inconceivable." The most likely explanation for the story, he finally reasoned, was that it is a propaganda ploy by the remnants of the Vermene.

¶Margaret's senior press aide, Jules Partraum, later appeared to retract portions of the earlier statement that dealt with Margaret's ability to control Massilia sector. "The earlier statement was incomplete. Margaret's influence in Massilia and her ability to protect loyal subjects there remains unchanged. The remark was intended to point out that were these charges true, it would indicate that Margaret's substantial powers had not yet been brought to bear against them. But as these charges are clearly and patently false, such an exercise would be superfluous."

Dlan/Ilelish (1021 A8D1ADE-G)

210-1126

¶Archduke and self-proclaimed Emperor Dulinor appeared in public today to announce the appointment of Tredek Jurisor to the Dulinor Astrin Ilethian chair as head of the Department of Imperial History at Dlan University. The position has stood vacant since the dramatic departure of Professor Ililek Kuligaan on 212-1123. Kuligaan is still officially a fugitive from a warrant issued by Dulinor himself, although he is believed to be now residing in the Federation of Daibei or a location farther trailward.

¶Tredek Jurisor is the former Ilelish Minister of Information and Communication, appointed to that post by Dulinor on 101-1122. Before that, Jurisor was one of the Virasan clergy instrumental in revising some of the most basic tenets of the faith in the controversial 457th Khanu. The Virasan Enlightenment movement, of which Jurisor is a founder, believes that death in combat in the service of Dlan can still entitle a believer to full revelation in the afterlife. Until the 457th Khanu, Virasan theology held that only a nonviolent death on Dlan would reach that goal.

¶In making the announcement, Dulinor praised Jurisor for "a life given to public service, in which he has excelled. His contributions these past years, through trying times, have laid the groundwork for future growth in purpose and power. This growth will enable us, in the not too distant future, to return to Capital and finally destroy the murderous usurper Lucan, and establish rightful leadership over the Imperium."

¶Farthik Dorsokuguur, a vocal critic of Jurisor and leader of the Virasan Orthodox sect, was unable to comment as he has been under "house" arrest in his parish for the past two years.



Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D)

248-1126

¶A planned recreational trip by Margaret and her twins, Julia and Paulo, was interrupted yesterday by crowds that demanded an explanation of the charges of genocide in Massilia. Margaret, who has thus far refused to become involved in the controversy, did not respond, but instead canceled the trip and returned to the family quarters at the Blaine Tukera mansion, where the family lives during this season.

¶This follows several weeks of increasingly disillusioned public response to the initial charges, presented 50 days ago. The negative reaction to these charges and the government's unwillingness to meaningfully address them became widespread when several high officials, treating the charges as a joke, began publicly referring to the "Geoneecide." This was followed by the arrival of a statement from the Marquess Tanzer which claimed that the Geonee "refugees" were in fact pirates, and were despoiling the already frail economy of the area. In addition, the Marquess continued, when possible the Geonee were not killed, but instead pressed into a forced labor program where the marauders would help to repair the shipping that they had damaged and destroyed. He regretted that on occasion innocent Geonee may have been killed by preemptive attacks if their ships appeared to be engaged in piracy. "However, we must remember that this is wartime, and these events will occur," Tanzer observed. He also produced a report made by his troops which indicated that, because of their short stature, fatal wounds are more common among Geonee in firefights. "My troops have found that it is difficult to wound and capture the Geonee in combat. This is because a wound which would only wound a normal human will more often kill a Geonee, because when you're that short, all of your vital organs are packed much more tightly together."

¶When Margaret's government did not immediately condemn the cavalier attitudes and racism inherent in the statement, the public outcry grew still further, now with the additional charges that Margaret was assenting to a slave trade. "This is something which even Lucan has not yet done," said an Erasmus Alliance official.

¶When confronted by the crowd, which included several Geonee, Margaret did not respond, but turned to her entourage and departed. Lip readers present in the crowd claim that she remarked to one of her aides, "What would they have me say to my biggest shipbuilder?"

Trin/Spinward Marches (3235 A894A96-F)

324-1126

¶Routine traffic at the Trin naval base was interrupted yesterday by the unexpected arrival of an *Azhanti High Lightning*-class frontier cruiser in the traffic pattern. Although there has been no official acknowledgment of the ship's visit, naval officers speaking off the record have allowed the following story to be pieced together:

¶Officers at system traffic control report that when it was first detected, it was thought that the cruiser was a *Trekhyair*-operated ship, cruising outside of its normal patrol area. The *Trekhyair*, the Aslan-crewed "Patrol," operates four examples of the class, recommissioned from 1120 to 1124. However, its transponder code was not a *Trekhyair* ID code, but was rather an older, pre-Rebellion Imperial Navy ID code. Permission to enter orbit was initially denied, as forces of Lucan's Imperium are believed to still operate a handful of the *Lightning*-class vessels. Officers were then surprised when the mystery vessel transmitted a verbal "Argon Blue" identification code which allowed the vessel to dock at Trin's Naval Inactive Ships Facility. The little-known "Argon Blue" codes are said to be a system of one-time ID codes which involve the verification of the contents of sealed documents, sets of which are present at all Imperial naval bases. The rare use of these codes is thought to be associated with high-ranking Imperial nobles.

¶Upon docking, the ship, which proved to be *Arrival Vengeance*, missing since 329-1123, disgorged a small party of officers who proceeded directly to the commanding officer of the Inactive Ships Facility. There, they presented a sealed document to the commander, Rear Admiral Brian Gou, and returned to their ship. *Arrival Vengeance* was refueled and departed the base several hours later.

¶The sealed document is reported to have contained a voucher for the use of the ship, and an apology. Witnesses state that both documents were dated in 1123 and signed by Archduke Norris.

From the papers of Archduke Norris Aella Aledon, First Regent

179-1126

Your Grace, the Archduke of Deneb, Norris

I am pleased to see that you have rectified my great error in not having appointed you. You should not have experienced any doubt of my wish that you would do so. Surely none of my nobles have ever done so well by the tradition that we serve. Whatever else may be said of me, it is to my credit to have had your service, and you have my deepest gratitude.

You will find encoded here the locations of every Jumpstart archive, and the challenge and entry codes for each. If it becomes necessary, you will be able to reawaken our potential. No other noble possesses a complete list, nor will they.

You will also do well to examine the Longbow documents enclosed, and commit their study to your heirs. Keep an eye on the Zhodani, for either they know something, or they are prospective victims just as we are.

If I may, allow me to offer you two points of advice. One, remember the crew of this mission to your people. This act of faith enlarges us all. Two, get yourself a son, Norris, or better, a daughter. What you stand for can not be allowed to die with you.

Preserve what we created, Norris, and remember what we stood for.

Strephon



018-1127

Your Majesty

If you ever receive this letter, we will both be counted as lucky men. Congratulations, my friend, for you live. The fact that I call you friend is some measure of my belief that you will never read this letter. But your generosity has caused me to count you in those terms.

Thanks to you, we are as well armed as we can be to face what comes. What was a mystery in 1119 may be clearer now, and fore-warned is fore-armed. While I hope that we never have need of the Jumpstart caches, I am also grateful for them.

But who is the boy, and why did you not mention him? Surely he is the most precious gift of all, whatever, whoever he is. He will be safe here, as will your vision of the future.

The most pleasant of all these surprises was your ratification of my appointment. Nothing could please me more than to finally have properly earned it. I sincerely hope that we will meet again. If not, I hope you rest easy in the knowledge that we will not forget.

Your liege,

Norris

Cymbeline/Solomani Rim (2527 79F4740-E)

063-1127

¶A large "black war" strike force has annihilated the surface of Cymbeline, blanketing it with nuclear explosions from apparently hundreds of warheads.

¶Miraculously, several communities still cling to life in their settlements, situated at the bottom of the deep gorges that the surface of this world. Cymbeline's capital still survives, and government leaders are organizing expeditions to contact the other settlements to see how many still exist, and to unite them to resist an invasion. One contact team leader explained, "We are alive because of the gorges we live in. Whoever thought they could kill us all by bombarding us like they would a surface-inhabited world wasn't thinking. This world has made us tough, and they'll learn that lesson even harder if they try to invade us. But they did destroy our surface transport system, so we have to act quickly to restore contact with the rest of the world so that we can unite to defeat an invasion. If they hit us now while we're divided, it will make it harder for us to resist. But we will, and we'll make them regret what they've done."

¶However, it is not yet known who is responsible for the strike. Contact has not been re-established with the system defense squadron. They may have been overwhelmed by the strike force, or may have cooperated with a strike by a militant Solomani faction. If it was a strike from Daibei, or Margaret's Domain, it might be only one phase of a much larger offensive into the Solomani core.

Mora/Spinward Marches (3124 AA99AC7-F)

110-1127

¶Archduke Norris Aella Aledon arrived this morning at the Giyachii grand esplanade to find it packed with over 200,000 spectators, all eager to hear the message he was scheduled to deliver. There had been tremendous speculation about the content of the message since it was announced three weeks ago that Norris would address the entire Domain of Deneb. The dozens of remote recording drones floating above the crowd focused on Norris' balcony belonged to news services and also to the Domain government, which will distribute recordings to every world of the Domain.

¶"My sisters and brothers," Norris began, "it is time to put away the trappings of childhood. The past, no matter how vivid, no matter how preferable, is not ours to grasp. We must let it go. The Empire will not save us. The Emperor, luminous and gallant, will never lead a relief fleet through the raiders to reclaim us, to return us to our rightful place in an Imperial family. Because there is no Empire. There is, I must myself admit, no Emperor. The Empire is populated, where it is still populated at all, increasingly by madmen. They cannot save us, *nor can we save them*. We in the spinward extents must chart our own future."

¶During the course of his address, the Archduke explained that his government has made exhaustive efforts to regain contact with other portions of the "Empire"—it is notable that throughout the address he avoided all use of the word "Imperium"—and discussed the possibility of reunification. "These efforts have not been rewarded," he reported. "We should not, indeed, we will never, close off our options to reunify. But we cannot simply wait for that to happen. We must do more than merely keep the ends out for the tie that binds."

¶He then moved to a general discussion of his positive visions. This touched on the need for a new government and new relationships with surrounding powers. Norris described the isolation of the Domain "behind the claw" as an advantage which could give time to explore "our local potentials: our worlds, our stars, our creatures, our own minds."

¶The crowd, which immediately recognized the address as a major turning point in their own history, was attentive and virtually silent throughout the delivery. It will take several months for copies of the address to reach the most distant Domain worlds, and for the responses to return. But here on Mora, Norris was greeted with an 18-minute ovation at the end of the address, during which time he graciously acknowledged the crowd before finally leaving the balcony to return to his duties.

¶"Somewhere, lost in time, someone first asked the question, 'Am I my brother's keeper? Am I my sister's keeper? If I don't act to secure and defend the well-being of my neighbor, won't someone else do it for me? I ask you, every citizen of the Marches, of Deneb, of Troy and Reft. Look around you. *We are those who are left to carry on whatever work the Empire began*. Am I responsible for you? Are you responsible for me? Am I my brother's keeper? The answer then, now, and always, is 'Yes.'"

Vaward/Old Expanses (1106 A795A99-F)

122-1127

¶Free traders operating in the Old Expanses have reported a small flotilla of Hiver starships passing through the sector, travelling corespinnward from the Solomani frontier. Travelling under the name of the Imperial History Club of Manchus, the group of ships has initiated contact with the human ships in all reports so far collected.

¶The flotilla, numbering between eight and 12 well-armed vessels in the 200-800-ton range, requests human ships to come alongside for trade and discussion. Those ships which have accepted report that they are allowed to trade for a small quantity of high quality Hiver-made goods, and are invited to stay for a reception. The reception, like the trading opportunity, is observed by armed Ithklur guards, and consists of a meal and a several-hour conversation with members of the Imperial History Club. These members described their voyage into Imperial space as a "field trip," which is apparently headed to Diaspora, and then beyond to Daibei.

¶Many of the traders reporting were not familiar with Hivers, and found the experience to be strange, particularly the quality of the food served at the reception. Said one trader, "For the most part, they don't seem to have a real grasp of the kind of stuff that we consider to be edible. But the corn dogs were good."

Khavle/Diaspora (2605 C334965-B)

141-1127

¶"Hard Times got you down? Why not fast-forward right through them? Go to sleep today in the comfort of our safe hibernation pods and awake when things are better."

¶So reads the ad copy from one of the growing number of low-berth companies operating in the rimward portions of the former Imperium. While some of these companies are simply selling low berth units to interested buyers, others maintain large hibernation facilities where patrons can come and rent space for a pre-arranged period of time. "It's nothing new. It's just like a hotel, except instead of spending the night, you spend a decade," explains another reassuring advertisement.

¶There are an estimated 25 companies offering these services in Diaspora and the Old Expanses alone, with more springing up in Daibei and the Solomani Rim.

¶The principle is not a new one; "timer clubs," composed of members who "travel to the future" via low-berth for recreational purposes, have existed for centuries. In fact, the oldest, the Timer Club of Terra, has apparently appeared to endorse some of these services, and offer some of its own. However, the sheer number of such organizations is unprecedented, and is a measure of the lack of faith many former Imperial citizens have in the near future.

¶"People are desperate. They don't know where to turn for the needs and answers that used to be provided for them, and we provide the alternative. Our rapid growth is proof that we do provide something that people today want," explained a representative of one of these companies.

¶Reportedly, many planetary governments, plagued with unemployment and distribution shortfalls for the most basic goods and services, are making plans to put large portions of their societies to sleep for several years at a time. This will reduce the strain on food supplies, and will only require the trickle of electrical power to keep the low berth running. Current plans call for these governments to offer financial incentives for their citizens to "lay off" for a year, and will pay for all expenses associated with the installation and revival procedures. Several options are being considered, including family plans where entire families are frozen and revived together, and relay plans, where family members rotate turns being frozen and staying out and keeping the family affairs up to date. Both of these plans ensure that families age at approximately the same relative rate. Addressing such emotional concerns are crucial in selling these plans to a population, according to several government officials.

¶In response to this movement, the Travellers' Aid Society has issued the following statement:

¶"The Travellers' Aid Society has long been opposed to the practice of cryogenic suspension as a form of interstellar travel. It should therefore come as no surprise that the Society views the recent increase in low berth use with concern. However, we wish people to know that this stems from no collusion with industries that provide more expensive modes of live travel. The Society understands that such modes are beyond the means of many Imperial citizens, and that our clientele represents those who can afford live travel. In addition, the current profusion of cryogenic services is not intended for spatial travel, but rather for temporal travel to a better future.

¶"This announcement is not an advisory to our membership; rather it is intended for nonmembers. Cryogenic suspension is an inherently risky venture. It is fraught with potential for abuse and deception. While you are hibernating, you have no control over your own future or the future of your loved ones. Be aware that even the most reputable and well-intentioned companies and governments can lose control of your hibernation while you are helplessly frozen. In some cases, low sleep may be the best option for many citizens and families, but this does not eliminate the risk. Please be careful."

A Traveller News Service Interview—In the Spotlight with Ililek Kuligaan

Vaward/Old Expanses (1106 A795A99-F)

122-1127

Ililek Kuligaan, the controversial former Dulinor Astrin Ithian chair at Dian University, is again the center of controversy. This time the reason is his new book, *Conspiracy of Fools: How the Imperium was Betrayed by Its Intelligence Services*. It is being published later this month by The Imperial Academic Press, Vaward, in electronic and hard formats. Pre-publication excerpts make it clear that he is still not afraid of attracting dangerous attention to himself by the dissemination of his views. A reporter from the TAS News Service who has been following the story was able to interview the professor at an undisclosed location somewhere in the Old Expanses or Diaspora sectors. The following excerpts resulted from that meeting.

TNS: Professor Kuligaan. You are no stranger to controversy. You became famous by inviting a charge of treason from the Federation of Illeish—



59



IK: I invited no such thing. I merely spoke the truth as my profession obliged me.

TNS: Since your departure, Tredek Jurisor has been given your old chair at Dian University. Does this surprise you?

IK: Tredek Jurisor? That old kiss-up. No, actually it doesn't surprise me at all.

TNS: Yes, well, having already alienated Archduke Dulinor, you have now, rightly or wrongly, incurred the wrath, deadly wrath, some will point out, of 17 powerful intelligence organizations by my count, including Imperial Naval Intelligence, Naval Counter-Intelligence, the Imperial Ministries of Information and Justice, IRIS, the Vermene—

IK: Bureaucratic ninnies all, I assure you. But what is your question?

TNS: What do you hope to gain by making such powerful enemies?

IK: First of all, I should like to point out that these enemies are not so powerful as everyone imagines. Were they half so powerful as everyone believed, the Imperium would not have disintegrated into the state in which we find it today.

What I "hope to gain" is the chance to warn people about these high priesthods of information, which is how the intelligence organizations present themselves: as the annointed adepts of the arcane knowledge of statecraft. But this is buncombe. What they are actually adept at is perpetuating their own insular, parochial organizations.

TNS: But these organizations possess information that can manipulate entire factions.

IK: Yes, that is what they would have you believe. Leaders during this civil war are insecure, and looking for ways to solidify their power. They want experts to whisper thrilling secrets in their ears. They want to believe that like puppeteers, they can pull strings and manipulate societies into happily dancing to their tune. Imperial leaders have grown up with these notions of psycho-historical manipulation, that through little tricks of guile and legerdemain, they can deftly move populations into new ways of thinking, if only they had the information and expertise. These leaders are only too eager to make themselves dependent on their intelligence services, and the services are only too happy to oblige.

The faction leaders went into this war actually believing, many of them, that they could actually win the war, come out at the end of this sitting on the throne. What a patently fatuous notion! And who told them this? Their intelligence agencies, perpetuating the old myth that behind the scenes one bit of secret information can win a war, one secret plan can bring their enemies to ruin. "Listen Emperor," they whisper, "Listen Empress, listen to the string pullers, we can put you on the throne, all you have to do is listen."

And what do they tell their rulers? Exactly what they already know their rulers want to hear. Because the mighty puppeteers are all liars, whores and liars, selling the Imperium just to perpetuate their own positions. And the war goes on and on, and the puppeteers keep whispering, "Emperor, Empress, victory is just around the corner, just one more campaign, one more planet burned away, and our plan will reach fruition."

And with each intelligence organization whispering this same lie into the ear of each faction leader, how is this war to reach an end? It will reach its end over our dead bodies.

TNS: What do you mean, these organizations aren't powerful? They are full of highly trained, deadly operatives, and you yourself have, in the title of your book, described them as being involved in a conspiracy.

IK: There's quite a mythology about those deadly operatives. At one time the intelligence organizations were a good place to put violent, bloody-minded youngsters so they could exercise their proclivities in the service of their society, rather than against it. And there were always enough plots or schemes to keep these youngsters busy and out of trouble until they were either killed in the line of duty or grew up and calmed down. But those that calmed down and survived did not become enlightened public servants, because they were never trained to be such things. Instead, they became experts at bureaucratic infighting, at fighting for their agendas within the government, and not at diligently searching for the truth, not at courageously reporting unpleasant truths to their superiors. Because the power of the intelligence organizations flows from secrecy. If a piece of information is public knowledge, then it has no particular power. You cannot use it to blackmail someone, you cannot lord it over someone. But if you have a secret, or if you pretend to have a secret...aah, then power is yours.

Lie, my son, lie, and you will have the ear of kings. The Vermene was perhaps the only honest group out there, because at least they tried to kill Margaret when she stopped listening to what they had to say when IRIS started whispering things in her ear about becoming Empress. So IRIS liquidated the Vermene, and the prostitutes went back to business as usual in the sacred temples of intelligence.

TNS: Sacred temples?

IK: Yes, it's a metaphor. Perhaps you've heard of them. I feel that the religious metaphor is a particularly apt one, because there is an orthodoxy of intelligence, a corporate faith in flimsy stacks of numbers that is easily subverted by ambition.

TNS: As a Virasin, do you find that your faith in—

IK: Don't I know you? Haven't you interviewed me before?

TNS: No, I don't think that's very likely. As I was saying, does your religious faith make you more inclined to believe in powerful superhuman forces, conspiracies if you will, that shape the flow of history?

IK: I do know you. And you've become completely fixated again on some peripheral detail: the word "conspiracy." Look, the title of the book was just some marketing ploy to attract the shallow attention of people such as yourself, and it worked, didn't it? *Conspiracy of Fools*. Well, you've got the fool part down, and the conspiracy bit has you so mesmerized it might as well be tattooed on your eyelids. Aren't there any other reporters in your organization?

TNS: Ummm...

IK: Never mind. Just listen to me. Your readers need to know this. This war should never have started. This war should never have continued. The reason that it has is because there are people, outwardly appearing just like you and I, who are morally corrupt and have been engaged for 10 years in doing nothing but perpetuating their own personal power. They have been playing at some twisted zero-sum game; the former Imperium is their playing board, and their currency is your lives.

They are killing you. Don't ever let anyone do this to you again.

SPECIAL ADVISORY TO ALL TRAVELLER NEWS SERVICE SUBSCRIBERS

For Distribution to All Data Nodes Date:150-1127

>>>The Travellers' Aid Society central office, responding to requests from its constituent field offices, announces the following blanket Travellers' Advisory. <<<

>>>The previously successful system of designating Amber and Red Zone worlds on a case-by-case basis has hereby been discontinued. Instead, a new blanket advisory system is being instituted which more accurately reflects the dangers of travel in the Third Imperium at the present time. This system is based on the recognition of emerging astrographic regions resulting from the Rebellion. These regions, known as Safes, Frontiers, Outlands, and Wilds, are differentiated by the amount of combat that has taken place in them and the consequent loss of order and social services. <<<

>>>In the interest of the safety of all interstellar travellers, the Travellers' Aid Society will, until further announcement, issue a blanket Red Zone classification for all worlds located in the so-called Wilds and Outlands areas, and a blanket Amber classification for all worlds located in Frontier areas. Worlds located in Safe areas may be designated as Green Zones, but will continue also to be designated on a case-by-case basis. To further assist travellers in planning safe journeys, all future Traveller News Service stories will include the travel zone classification in the dateline.<<<

END SPECIAL ADVISORY END

DATA NODES RETURN TO LOCAL FEED

TNS 1127-6761A-150 PRIORITY FEED BRAVO/BRAVOΣ

Cymbeline/Solomani Rim (2527 X9F48C9-7/Red)

Date: 163-1127

¶While it is clear that life on this savaged world will never again be the same, a measure of order has returned to the world, 100 days after it was savagely assaulted with an estimated 135 megatons of thermonuclear explosive force.

¶Once it became clear that the nuclear strikes were not a prelude to a planetary invasion, the hastily assembled military government was able to turn its attention away from planetary defense to damage assessment and rebuilding. Unfortunately, the destruction of Cymbeline's once extensive starport has made it difficult to coordinate the disaster-relief assistance that has been arriving from nearby worlds. Hospitals have been overwhelmed by patients requiring treatment of primary and induced injuries. This was compounded by the fact that many hospitals were themselves damaged or destroyed.

¶An estimated 575,000 were killed and 3 million more injured by primary effects of the nuclear strikes. An additional 5 million are thought to have died from induced causes, such as loss of life support and other necessities. Horrible as these numbers are, it seems clear that the strike could have done more damage to the human settlements had that been its primary intent. The concentration of explosions in the volcanic highlands have led to several speculations. Two leading theories have emerged to explain the strike.

¶One has it that the strike was an entirely new form of warfare: an attempt to destroy the world's surface by attacking weak points in tectonic plates, causing the planetary crust to disintegrate. Supporters of this theory hold that Cymbeline's well-documented tectonic activity would make it an ideal proving ground for such a conceptual super-weapon, which could be refined for use on more stable worlds. Such "planet buster" concepts have been speculated, along with such other doomsday-type weapons as the supposed "star trigger" developed by the Darrians, a minor human race in the Spinward Marches. The appalling viciousness of the attack has led to supposition that Lucan's forces are responsible for the strike, and Lucan's well-publicized remarks about super-weapons gives credence to this theory.

¶The second theory is more prosaic, and postulates that the attack was not against the human inhabitants, but rather against the naturally microchip life that inhabits the highlands. While this is in accord with the particulars of the strike, it is difficult to determine what group might have made such a strike. The increasingly doctrinaire and violent struggles within the Solomani Party are put forward as one possibility, although these have been limited to assassination attempts before now. However, if success is a clue, this theory gains in prominence because it appears that every sentient chip on the world was destroyed by a combination of blast, electromagnetic pulse, and radiation effects.

¶There is no way to prove either theory, nor is it likely that there will ever be.

Promise/Diaspora (2827 B542998-D/Red)

Date: 198-1127

¶Officials of the Unity of Promise government played host this week to the travelling Hivers of the Imperial History Club of Manchus. Attendees report that the unusual visit has provided a welcome distraction from the many crises that have dominated the government's attention in recent months.

¶Entertaining highlights of the Hiver visit began before the meeting began, with a pre-visit briefing on when not to shake hands around Hivers, delivered to a bemused government delegation by a former Imperial protocol officer. During the visit itself, a scheduled military review was interrupted when members of the Hiver delegation requested sample uniforms and weapons to take back to document their research. Later, while attending a ballet performed by the Promise Light Ballet Company, several members of the Hivers' detachment of Ithklur guards apparently mistook the dance for a participatory sporting event. They efficiently tackled several human dancers, scoring several points by their own reckoning, before they were convinced that it was a performance, rather than a game.

¶The visit was also interrupted when a member of the Hiver delegation collapsed during a state dinner. The human hosts feared that the Hiver was a victim of food poisoning from some of the unfamiliar human dishes being served. But the Hiver leaders assured their hosts that it was simply a rare, though harmless seizure, and had nothing to do with the human hospitality. There was, however, disappointment among the caterers that the Hivers would not touch the platter of corn dogs thoughtfully provided. A member of the UP government who had previously attended a Hiver-organized function, remarked with some concern, "It looks like those other things weren't really corn dogs."

Cumber/Diaspora (0532 B1109A7-C/Red)

Date: 233-1127

¶Effective today there is another new government in Diaspora, the Cumberan Confederation. Joining the ranks of the Ecclesiasty of Narquel (Narquel/Diaspora), Union of Sufren (Sufren/Diaspora), Vassalry Judicate (Sufren/Diaspora), and the Unity of Promise (Promise/Diaspora), the other independent polities in Diaspora, it is one more sign of the need for local authority and stability in the face of declining control and law on the sector level. The announcement was made at a formal summit today, attended by representative of the six worlds which comprise the organization.

¶Announcing itself as more a commerce collective rather than a full-fledged government, the announcement concentrated on the need to maintain secure shipping routes and focus on the development of finely-balanced "micro-economies" until the current "hard times" are over. These issues are only a formalized statement of some of the preferential trade policies that the six worlds have been pursuing for several years, and are nothing new.

¶The announcement, although an accurate portrayal of some of the Confederation's clear goals, does not address certain recent trends that have surely influenced the Confederation's birth. Chief among these is the friction between the Confederation's worlds and the Solomani Confederation over the status of displaced Vegans. Cumber now boasts one of the highest populations of Vegan expatriates in the sector, refugees from the Solomani offensives against the former Vegan Autonomous Area in the Solomani Rim. Solomani authorities claim that many of these refugees are actually dangerous terrorists and resistance leaders, and have made increasingly strident demands for their extradition. In clear violation of Cumberan sovereignty, many "hit squads" from Solomani Security, the internal security apparatus of the Solomani Confederation, have kidnapped or assassinated Vegans living on Cumber.

¶Nor did the announcement allude to the true federal qualities of the new confederation, including unified foreign policy, centralized civil service appointments, and unified armed forces, built around the cadre of the Cumber Army.

¶The Cumberan Confederation's establishment was clearly intended to invoke Cumberan independence without overtly challenging the Solomani Confederation. Even so, the message was clear enough. One Cumber Army officer present at the summit concluded, "SolSec isn't going to like this one bit."

¶The worlds uniting as the Cumberan Confederation are Vision (0431 Diaspora/Amber), Angebo (0432 Diaspora/Amber), Attax (0531 Diaspora/Amber), Cumber (0532 Diaspora/Amber), Sheshene (0533 Diaspora/Amber), and Fuquay (0632 Diaspora/Amber), a possession of Cumber.

Tripolis/Verge (2612 C885A98-A/Amber)

Date: 268-1127

¶"It blotted out the stars."

¶So reported one of many accounts of a large battle fleet, repeated over the past several weeks throughout the trailing portions of Verge. The quote above was from a free trader who blundered into the fleet's operations and was warned away with the gruff message, "Depart the area immediately or risk impoundment." All reports agree that the force was of huge, pre-Rebellion proportions and broadcast Imperial Navy identity codes corresponding to the Illeish forces of the Shadow-Emperor Dulinor.

¶Historically, Verge has been the site of many naval maneuvers and wargames, some of which in pre-Rebellion days actually lasted a year or more. If Dulinor has managed to construct new battle fleets, it would be logical for them to conduct working-up exercises in these instrumented test ranges, where they would also be safe from discovery or pre-emptive strikes by Lucan's forces.

Dukh/Ley Sector (1210 B6659CC-B/Amber)

Date: 315-1127

¶"A stupid, needless accident" is how officers of the Imperial Navy describe the destruction of three K'kree trading vessels, with the deaths of all on board. Units of the Imperial Navy's Destroyer Squadron 1440 took the K'kree ships under fire and destroyed them after they repeatedly failed to respond to transponder IFF queries. "The ships were well within Imperial boundaries at the time, and we were fully within our treaty-described obligations to ensure compliance with the interstellar rules of the road." So reported Commodore Etienne Brabazon, commander of DesRon 1440. "They know damn well that ships within Imperial boundaries must be equipped with current series transponder suites. The damn things have been available for years, and the K'kree didn't seem to find it that hard to comply before the Rebellion. But now they're trying to take advantage of a situation, and frankly, it's nobody's fault but their own. Before they started taking evasive action the situation might have been resolved, but after that we just had no choice. It was just really stupid. Stupid and unnecessary."

Commodore Brabazon was referring to laws, in place for centuries, requiring adherence to certain clearly defined transponder standards within Imperial space. The current series of transponder, the SDG or Deyo circuit, has been in service since 1088, and has long been standard equipment on any vessel that routinely enters Imperial space. However, compliance has been difficult to enforce since the beginning of the Rebellion, although failure to comply has been dealt with rather harshly. It is widely known standard policy for all factional navies to shoot first and ask questions later when confronting vessels that fail to keep their transponders on the air, known in space parlance as "squawking."

¶The incident took place in the Khimudire system (2019 Ley Sector/Amber), during what was described as a "routine sweep" by the squadron through the outland areas trailward of Lucan's Safe. "Just because things have been a little tenuous the past few years does not relieve us of the responsibility to ensure the viability of the Imperial borders," explained Brabazon.

¶Interstellar law stipulates certain minimal conditions for the maintenance of sovereignty, which includes periodic patrols of proclaimed borders. Lucan's Imperium has made it a policy to maintain contact, via such sweeps, with the trailing Imperial borders. All other factions practice similar policies in their regions, often with the same uncompromising results.

¶A protest is expected from the 2000 Worlds regarding the incident. When asked about this possibility, Brabazon made a dismissive noise. "They should have thought about that earlier. They know the rules. Nowadays you can't be too careful."



Pharsalus/Ilelish (1711 D4208BA-7/Amber)

Date: 054-1128

¶An official of the Pharsalus Aerospace Traffic Control Office announced today that a salvage fleet operating out of Pharsalus is now a month overdue.

¶The fleet, consisting of seven vessels of between 100 and 400 registered tons, routinely operates within a 10-parsec radius of Pharsalus, and remains out for three to four months at a time. This area of Ilelish was the site of numerous fleet actions between Ilelish and rebellious factional forces during the first few years of the Rebellion, and also saw many of Lucan's lawless "Black War" strikes. The area therefore contains thousands of derelict starships, each of which may contain extremely valuable technological items, items which are becoming increasingly scarce in the current "hard times."

¶Worlds like Pharsalus are attempting to maintain dwindling technological resources by taking advantage of such salvage. The missing fleet is attempting to fulfill requests for much-needed atmospheric and water purification equipment on its current deployment.

Pharsalus/Ilelish (1711 D4208BA-7/Amber)

Date: 082-1128

¶"Well, I'll tell you what: I'm gonna think twice about engaging in legal salvage in this subsector again."

¶This was the response of one independent salvage contractor to news of the destruction of the missing salvage fleet by Federation of Ilelish naval forces. The entire group of seven vessels, registered out of Pharsalus, was reported destroyed or impounded by Federation of Ilelish naval forces in the Kryse system (1719 Ilelish/Amber).

¶An officer of the Ilelish Federation Navy announced that the surviving members of the salvage fleet were arrested for unlawful theft of government property and desecration of war graves, and their ships pressed into service in the Federation Navy.

¶"That's cynical legalism, pure and simple," responded the salvage contractor interviewed above, who wished to remain nameless. "All salvage operators know about the war graves regulations, and we've operated for years with absolute respect for the remains that we find. We make sure they are all properly interred and reported to the authorities, because we know how we'd want our families to be treated if the same thing happened to us. What happened is simple abuse of power. It's criminal."

¶Other local merchants and traders were equally outraged. "What was it hurting the navy that we were putting these wrecked ships to good use? At least we were recycling the equipment and doing people some good, which is more than the navy is doing. We need the spare parts, we need the heavy hull materials, we need the weapons out here on the frontier. If we don't reclaim it, the pirates will. Where has the navy been all these years, anyway? They weren't out there telling us this was illegal before now. If there had been a fleet out here to apprehend and arrest lawbreakers, things might not have gotten this bad. So where did this fleet come from, anyway, and who told them to go after us? Maybe Lucan needs a good salvage crew."

Location Withheld/Ley Sector (XXXX/SSAHPGL-T/N/A)

Date: 121-1128

>>>Under Ministry of Justice Memorandum 54-1123, this story has been edited for security reasons. The TAS News Service will follow up with a more complete report as circumstances permit.<<<

¶A K'kree battle fleet that penetrated deep into Imperial territory has been "annihilated" by the closely coordinated action of two Imperial Fleets, according to Imperial Navy sources. The same report, supported by recent incidents, cites recent "acts of provocation" on the part of the Two Thousand Worlds. These began with seemingly unrelated incidents involving K'kree trading vessels, and worked up to what the report termed "pushing and shoving incidents" along the border, involving K'kree military vessels.

¶Although the exact location of the battle remains secret, it is known that it took place some 15-20 parsecs from Dukh (1210 Ley/Amber), the Sector Capital.

¶An unnamed source remarked, "All Imperial citizens, no matter which faction they might support, should understand that we in the Imperial Navy are defending them from our traditional external enemies who are still banging on the door. The League of Antares, the False Strephon, the Murderer Dulinor, Craig, and Margaret, none of them are defending the boundaries of humaniti from Centaur expansion. They may like to insult us as 'Lucan's Fleet,' but I don't see anybody else holding this frontier. When the barbarians are at the gates, maybe they'll realize that they should have stood with us when it counted."

Dukh/Ley (1210 B6659CC-B/Amber)

Date: 184-1128

¶A K'kree diplomatic mission arrived at the Sector Capital today with a strongly worded message protesting the destruction of three K'kree merchants at Khimudire (2019 Ley/Amber) on 279-1127.

¶The message threatened "the most dire consequences, as you will soon see" if Imperial forces did not pay reparations and turn over all captured and derelict vessels, prisoners, and bodies to the K'kree legation.

¶The response of Sector Admiral Villeneuve to the delegation was reported to be a harshly worded warning that K'kree vessels operating illegally within Imperial boundaries did so at their own risk. He added that, although they were apparently as yet unaware of the truth of that statement, they would surely very soon receive confirmation of an additional lesson.

¶The subtext to the Imperial Navy press conference this afternoon was that the protest message arrived at Dukh at the same time the K'kree battle fleet might have, had it not been destroyed nine weeks ago.



Mora/Spinward Marches (3124 AA99AC7-F/Green)

Date: 280-1128

¶Archduke Norris Aella Aledon presided today at the decommissioning ceremony of ISS *Arrival Vengeance* (CF-6415), the Azhanti High Lightning-class cruiser that was the subject of such speculation when it disappeared from the Trin Inactive Ships Facility in 1123.

¶Shortly after the Archduke's historic address of 110-1127, it was announced that the ship had been "borrowed" by the Archduke for a dangerous mission through the shattered Imperium to contact other leaders to assess the possibility of a re-united Imperium. As Norris himself explained in the address, these attempts were unsuccessful. The 122-year-old ship is again being decommissioned, but will remain in orbit around Mora with a full-time skeleton crew, as Norris' ceremonial flagship.

¶The ceremony, conducted at the Mora Highport, included the 600 crew that took *Vengeance* on her final three-year mission through the Asian Hierate, Daibei, Delphi, Core, and Gushemege. They and the 20,000 other invited guests were privileged to see the unveiling of the new Deneb Navy symbol—the Deneb unicorn within an Imperial Sunburst—on *Arrival Vengeance's* rudder. Norris explained that the symbol will soon be worn by all vessels of the Domain, and that "the old girl," as he referred to the cruiser, had earned the right to be the first to bear the symbol by "her courageous mission which established the foundation for the Domain's future."

¶Norris also honored the ship's crew, explaining that "by their courage and confidence in undertaking an impossible mission, they have become the pilots for this Domain, leading us through dangerous shoals and uncharted waters. We owe them all a debt of gratitude, for they have helped us find our future." The Archduke announced that they would all be awarded the Legion of the Bridled Steed, the Domain's highest noncombat decoration.

¶When the time came for the decommissioning itself, Norris invoked the ancient litany of decommissionings, and exhorted the ship to "rest well, yet sleep lightly, and hear the call, should we ever have need of your powers again. You will hear the call, and thanks to your magnificent crew, you are ready."

¶The ceremony was also attended by Seldrian Aledon, Norris' true daughter, and the newly promoted Vice Admiral Brian Gou, the officer in command at Trin when the ship disappeared, and whose career was placed in jeopardy during the three years the ship was missing.

Another Exclusive Traveller News Service Interview with Professor Ililek Kuligaan

Vaward/Old Expanses (1106 A795A99-F/Amber)

Date: 322-1128

Our intrepid reporter has again caught up with the colorful and outspoken Professor Kuligaan, this time following a speaking engagement somewhere in the Old Expanses.

TNS: Is this seat taken?

IK: I believe so. I'm sure it must be.

TNS: But I see no parcels or belongings. Surely I can have this seat.

IK: If you know the answer, why did you waste my time with the question?

TNS: Professor Kuligaan, in your remarks earlier today—

IK: My name isn't Professor Kuligaan.

TNS: Of course it is.

IK: No, my name is Pangloss, Dr. Pangloss, and I own a cheese shoppe, a nice little place...

TNS: Professor Kuligaan, don't play games with me. I have the parking ticket that was left on your air raft.

IK: (After a long pause) Oh, all right. I am Professor Kuligaan.

TNS: I know that.

IK: It's you again, isn't it? What do you want now?

TNS: As a former Diani, do you find that the Virasin de-emphasis of the temporal and physical aspects of life affects your attitude toward artificial constructs, such as parking spaces, and results in your own difficulties with parking tickets?

IK: Oh, shut up.

Ansenz/Antares (2425 B547ABB-D/Green)

Date: 337-1128

¶The disturbing trend of what appears to be racially motivated hate crimes against Vargr citizens continues on Ansenz. Vargr-owned businesses and homes are increasingly disfigured by broken windows or graffiti, insulting remarks are shouted in the streets, and now prominent Vargr business executives are being harassed.

¶These developments are being called by some sociologists as "an inevitable by-product of difficult economic times." A faculty member at a prominent Ansenz university explained, "It happens all the time. When things are bad, the masses want to find someone to blame. It's a sad characteristic of the lower classes, but ultimately it's harmless."

¶One of the chief actors in this movement is the group "Superioriti," whose members hasten to point out that they are not a hate group. Spokesman Euclid Ozgood explains, "We don't hate anyone, we don't preach that anyone should hate anyone. But the simple fact is that some groups are not intended to live with other groups. That's no call to arms, it's a simple fact. It's natural that social, religious, spiritual, or biological groups will be more comfortable with those of their own kind. When two groups are forced to live together, it doesn't work. They have different beliefs, different values, and these come into conflict and destroy the common atmosphere for both sides. The Vargr would be happier if they could live someplace by themselves, and so would we in Superioriti."

¶Although it is not usual TAS policy to comment on pending changes in Travel Zone status, the TAS has announced that it is considering changing Ansenz's classification to Amber, due to the recent racial difficulties, and issued the following statement.

▶ TRAVELLER NEWS SERVICE

¶ "There is a concept, known to some as "humanity"—distinct from humaniti, the race—that refers to those qualities of intelligent, sentient beings that lend them a certain ethical value. Among these qualities are decency, compassion, empathy, and a willingness to attribute value to the lives of other beings. Beings with those qualities have an innate, a priori value, apart from all other physical manifestations. Intelligent beings without those qualities are more easily equated with simple biological machines, merely consuming raw materials to survive or entertain themselves. However, it is another trait of "humanity" that one being cannot take it away from another; a being can only give up one's own. It is the attempt to take away the humanity of another that is the one sure sign of the loss of humanity in oneself."

Zukhimie/Delphi (0313 A427979-B/Green)

Date: 013-1129

¶ Inhabitants of Zukhimie might well wonder if they are a magnet for all manner of unusual travellers. Three and a half years ago, Zukhimie hosted the unexpected visit between Archduke Norris' embassy ship, *Arrival Vengeance*, and Duchess Margaret, also making an unusual interstellar voyage.

¶ This time, the visitors were the itinerant Hivers of the Imperial History Club of Manchus, recent sightseers to the Old Expanses and Diaspora. While they did not have Margaret on hand for yet another singular summit, Zukhimie and Margaret's Domain officials did their best to satisfy the roving curiosity of the trailward aliens.

¶ Souvenirs that the Hivers decided they simply must take with them included a Trepida type grav tank, belonging to the world's Domain garrison, and a set of mother-of-pearl colanders that the Hivers' Ithklur guards thought made handsome helmets.

¶ The state reception was an astounding success, attended by an estimated 200,000 ticket purchasers, none of whom touched the corn dogs.

Warinir/Dalbei (0507 A889978-F/Green)

Date: 065-1129

¶ Effective today, the 65th day of the 1129th year of the former Third Imperium, suppression orders issued under the reign of the Empress Paula II, numbered SO 1 to SO 131, consecutively, are hereby declared repealed in Dalbei, and in all other areas into which its power extends, by order of Craig, Duke of Dalbei."

¶ With these words, Duke Craig has officially abolished all laws regarding the suppression of psionics research in his territory. SO 1 to 131 are the various enabling orders proclaimed from 800 to 810 that revoked the charters of the 65 Psionic Institutes then operating under Imperial Charter. Only four of these were in the area currently controlled by Duke Craig.

¶ Craig is the only faction leader to have publicly encouraged the resumption of psionic research, although public remarks by Archduke Norris have indicated that he is at least interested in the idea. There have been rumors for years that the Imperial Navy has conducted secret psionic research for defense purposes, and the common naval background of Craig and Norris may predispose them in this direction. It is unknown if this announcement is in any way connected to the meetings between Craig and representatives of the Domain of Deneb aboard *Arrival Vengeance* in early 1125 during the ship's diplomatic mission.

¶ Explaining the reasoning behind the unexpected announcement, Craig said, "We are in a situation where we are surrounded by many challenges, many potential enemies, many uncertainties. In the midst of these, the only certainty is this: if we are to succeed, we can deny ourselves no potential tool, no potential source of safety. Only those who are afraid of life are afraid of exploration, of research. If we are to live in a free society, we cannot be afraid of ideas."

Shudash/Ilelsh (2817 A5269EK-C)

Date: 82-1129

¶ While on a several-month-long tour through his frontier areas, Emperor Dulinor today spoke to a crowd and delivered an unscheduled, unexpected message of hope. The occasion was a visit to a naval shipyard, where several tens of thousands had gathered to get a glimpse of the Emperor. As he entered the room, the crowd spontaneously burst into chants of, "Long live the Emperor."

¶ Dulinor, who was not there to deliver an address, but only to inspect the facility, was stunned and moved. As the demonstration continued on, he was seen to have tears in his eyes. Although there was no microphone or public address system, he climbed atop an incomplete spacecraft and gestured for quiet, then launched into a short oration.

¶ "My people, you have suffered long; you have sacrificed much. Here, at the forward edge of our lines, you have stood like a rock, battered by waves, yet unyielding. You have defied Lucan's rage, and you have made us strong. You have not asked for it, nor would you, but I will grant you relief. Soon you will see my Coronation Fleet, and your sacrifices, your loyalty will be redeemed. This I promise you, your steadfastness will be remembered. When I stand at the throne, and place my foot on Lucan's head, you will be remembered!"

¶ Dulinor observers report that they have not before seen the Emperor this possessed in a public appearance. The shipyard crowd cheered and surged to come closer to him, and lifted members of the crowd to touch his outstretched hands. Hours later, after the assembly hangar had cleared, officials were able to determine that the gathering had caused some Cr600,000 worth of damage to the facility, but no reported injuries.

¶ The Emperor's communications minister was not able to provide any amplification of Dulinor's remarks.

Khavle/Diaspora (2605 C334965-B/Red)

Date: 101-1129

¶ The Free Trader *Corroboree* landed at the Khavle downport today and reported that all residents of Khedas (3112 Diaspora; C7A4200-2 as of 1128) were dead. According to *Corroboree's* captain, Jeri Bostokk, the settlement's life support systems were destroyed by a missile or energy weapon. With the life support systems destroyed, the residents died of suffocation.

¶ Since Khedas is located in an area that most merchants consider unsafe, the distress signal went unheeded because there was no traffic passing through the system.

¶ When asked why the *Corroboree* entered such a dangerous system, Bostokk said that her starship had misjumped into the system. While the navigator was trying to figure out their location, the ship picked up the distress signal from Khedas and decided to investigate because of the laws of interstellar space.



¶Several members of Khavle's government are asking for a hearing and investigation of the *Corroboree's* crew in order to ascertain if they were involved in any wrongdoing. One member has demanded that a Khavle Accordment warship be sent to Khedas to investigate the settlement.

¶Bostokk and her crew protested that their story is true and that some opportunistic government officials are fabricating charges so they can impound the *Corroboree* and make it part of the Khavle Accordment's military forces.

Khitar/Ilelish (2208 B6449A7-C/Amber)

Date: 121-1129

¶The Khitar highport was the site of violence today, for reasons not fully understood. An individual, claiming to be a scientist from Lucan's faction seeking asylum in Dulinor's Imperium, was killed by a spray of gunfire during the opening moments of a hastily assembled press conference. Moments later, the starship on which he arrived exploded, seriously damaging the highport. The aftermath of these events left 237 dead and one wing of the highport riddled and depressurized.

¶The chain of events began when the scientist, identifying himself as Jean Milakhad, called system traffic control to request priority docking instructions at the highport. He claimed that he was a fugitive from Lucan's faction, and had secret information of importance to all civilization. Although system control was able to grant priority docking to his craft, a Type T patrol cruiser, it would not honor his request to assemble a large body of media representatives to witness his "important public statement." In response to this, Milakhad began broadcasting messages direct to several news media offices, instructing them to have reporters present at the highport to witness his remarks when his ship docked.

¶When reporters began arriving at the bay where Milakhad was expected to dock, system control revoked Milakhad's docking permission, fearing a riot, but Milakhad disregarded these instructions, threatening to open fire on the customs cutters that attempted to block his approach vector, and later on the base itself if it denied him entry. Most of Khitar's naval forces have long since been stripped away for Federation naval actions elsewhere, and the system defense squadron was concentrated nearer the system's gas giant, so there was insufficient force to stop the approaching vessel. An attempt to move a cargo barge into the berth previously assigned to Milakhad came too late, as the ship was already too close.

¶By the time of Milakhad's arrival, there were huge crowds surging into the highport wing where his berth was located, only barely kept in control by port authority security troops. Ilelish Federation Marines were also dispatched from the adjoining naval station, but these were also dwarfed by the crowds.

¶When Milakhad appeared at the end of the docking tunnel, he was alone, and appeared tired and haggard. He immediately began reading from a prepared statement he held in his hand. Recording devices show that he got as far as, "My friends, we are all in great danger. I myself have proof of—" before he was struck and killed by a burst of automatic gunfire from within the crowd. In the panic that immediately followed, several more sources of gunfire erupted, killing and wounding several dozen persons. Some of the crowd scrambled to board Milakhad's ship during the chaos, but only a few minutes later the ship itself exploded, tearing open the hull of the highport and depressurizing over 10,000 cubic meters of the facility. Some onlookers were able to survive by making it into safety compartments or emergency oxygen masks, but most were killed by the initial gunfire, the explosion, or the subsequent depressurization.

¶Officers from Federation Naval Intelligence arrived on the scene just as the ship blew up, and took control of the situation.

¶There is as yet no information on Milakhad's identity, the nature of his message, the source of the gunfire, or how and why the ship was blown up. Initial speculation is that the ship was destroyed by a large demolitions charge planted in its bridge, which completely severed its long, slender bow. The ship had not refueled before arriving at Khitar, and had emerged from jumpspace scarcely 900,000 kilometers from the world. The customs cutters that Milakhad's ship shouldered aside on its way in reported that the ship's hull already showed signs of extensive battle damage.

From the collected papers of Archduke Dulinor Astrin Ilethian

121-1129

Your Highness:

Due to the circumstances of his death, the subject's residual brain activity had subsided to almost negligible levels by the time examination could begin. Therefore, detailed information could not be obtained.

However, necropathic technicians were able to determine that his identity was indeed Jean Milakhad, a reserve naval officer. Dominant mental impressions were limited to his identity, Imperial Research Station Omicron in the Core sector, that Omicron is the site of a dangerous superweapons program associated with viruses, and his fear of being pursued, apparently this latter well-founded. There was no indication that the subject was lying; he certainly believed the truth of what he was saying. The vividness of these thoughts indicates that the subject took them very seriously indeed, as a threat apparently worth risking his life for.

Research Station Omicron is not identifiable by our sources. This station did not exist before 1116.

However, there is much data that indicates that Lucan's superweapons programs are concentrating heavily on bacteriological warfare, which is congruent with the subject's death memories. One such germ warfare research center has been identified along the trailing edge of Dagudashaag sector, but the subject's memory clearly indicated Core sector.

Initial recommendation is to identify the location of Omicron and to either destroy it, or to conduct a strike and retrieval raid on the site to gain the secret of this weapon.

*Federation of Ilelish Intelligence
Colonel Basshe*

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Dukh/Ley (1210 B6659CC-B/Amber)

Date: 177-1129

¶The subsector government today reported that, due to increased K'kree incursions on the Imperial trailing frontier, citizens of the subsector should observe "a state of caution." When asked what such a state was, the ducal spokesperson explained that "it's not a state of emergency, but it's certainly not a state of business as usual, either."

¶The specifics of this condition are formal requests that the Travellers' Aid Society redesignate several worlds in Ley's B, F, J, and N subsectors as red zones, and a reiteration that all space vessels operating without a current-standard transponder suite will be destroyed with no questions asked.

¶The real substance behind this announcement seems to be a bulletin that was issued later in the day by the 52nd Fleet headquarters. Many of the naval assets that had been deployed for the defense of the spinward portion of the sector are being redeployed to the trailing frontier.

¶When asked for comment, TAS representatives pointed out that all worlds to trailing of the B, F, J, and N subsectors are already coded red, and that the transponder policy has been long accepted as a formal practice in the frontier and safe areas of all of the factions. Although there have been no clear signals of impending conflict on the K'kree frontier since the events of early 1128, the Ley leadership appears to be preparing the public for just such a situation.

Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D/Green)

Date: 212-1129

¶One more apocalyptic group has appeared in the ravaged outlands of the Massilia, Diaspora, and Old Expanses sectors. Calling itself the Beedling Society, the group is dedicated to the preservation of technical and scientific knowledge in a time when these seem to be threatened.

¶The Beedlings are concerned that the trends of the current "Hard Times" will result in a collapse of Imperial culture over at least certain portions of the Imperium, and the technical and scientific knowledge that stands to be lost in such a collapse will greatly delay the chances of recovery.

¶Therefore, the Beedlings have announced their plans to establish caches of knowledge throughout the Massilia, Diaspora, and Old Expanses sectors. These caches will include automated teaching facilities, supplies of crucial spare parts for selected high-technology items, and extensive databases containing a wide variety of information equivalent to a subsector university. These caches will be built deep underground, contain autonomous power sources, and be hardened against nuclear blasts.

¶The group takes its name from the beedling, a burrowing creature native to the Beso system (2713 Diaspora/Red). The beedling lives on a world orbiting the bright, K2 star of the Beso binary system. The world's orbit is highly eccentric, most of it being far outside the habitable zone, and most of the remainder being in the inner inhospitable zone. Twice during the planetary year the world passes through the habitable zone, and during this period, short-life-cycled plants and animals appear, as does the beedling, which hibernates in its burrows through the long cold and short hot seasons, to emerge when conditions are favorable for it. The Beedlings intend that the knowledge they preserve will be likewise preserved through inhospitable times so that it can emerge again when the time is right.

¶The Society is visiting Delphi in hopes of gaining financial backing from Margaret's government. It has already constructed four such caches at secret locations in Diaspora, but needs further funding to continue its work and expand into other sectors. It is expected that this visit will meet with success, as Margaret is a known supporter of programs to preserve the former Imperial infrastructures.

Antares/Antares (2421 A762ADA-D)

Date: 271-1129

¶The archducal station of Cerise, home of Regent Brzk and most of the government of the League of Antares, was lost with all hands after an uncontrolled fusion reaction in the station's power plant.

¶This shocking event claimed the lives of Regent Brzk, his family, and most of the high-level political and military leaders of the League.

¶As of yet, no one has claimed responsibility for this terrorist action, but most analysts believe either Lucan's Imperium or the anti-Vargr human supremacist group Superioriti is responsible.

¶At the present time, the League government is in confusion as what remains of the political hierarchy scrambles to maintain control and designate a successor to Regent Brzk.

Antares/Antares (2421 A762ADA-D)

Date: 335-1129

¶Yet another blow came to the League of Antares as its remaining political leadership proved incapable of finding a successor to the assassinated leader Brzk.

¶As a result, rioting and civil unrest are on the rise. Racism against the Vargr is growing as well.

¶Numerous worlds on the frontiers of the League have seceded from the League, which they consider to be unviable as a government without the leadership of Brzk.

¶In short, the League is breaking up into its individual worlds. Most analysts predict that the League will not last as a cohesive body much beyond the end of this year.

¶When questioned about this, League spokesperson Marcus Hashan stated that "plans are already under way to ensure that the ideals of Brzk and the League of Antares do not die with the Regent himself."

From the journals of Dulinor Astrin Ilesian

253-1129

The Coronation Fleet is leaving Zhiphar. There is no turning back. There has never been any turning back. I have killed Strephon, I have destroyed the Empire. If I were to stop now, my legacy would be the destruction of the greatest civilization ever created, and for what? My intentions, my dreams, count for very little in the face of that. No one will remember what I stood for, only what I did.

My only course is to stop at nothing to make sure that something does come of this. It will not be the Third Imperium, but it will be something that I have left to replace what I destroyed. At least I can destroy Lucan. If nothing else, I can clean up that mess.

Did no one have a vision but me? Strephon lost his vision and wanted me to bring a new one. Lucan merely wants to keep everything for himself. Norris only wants to turn back the clock. Margaret wants to keep the Tukera liners running on time. Does no one stand for anything beyond this moment, beyond him or herself? How can I deliver this empire from such parochialism with all of the judgments arrayed against me? Why did no one stand with me? I must gain the throne this time, for I have left myself no way out.

Trevor/Core (0125 C664000-7/Amber)

Date: 058-1130

¶The triumphant forces of the true Emperor Dulinor have won their first victory in the territory of the murderous pretender Lucan, having crushed the system defense forces of this border world.

¶Dulinor has announced that this, his final campaign, will move forward as destiny demands, to claim the throne once and for all. Dulinor will not rest until he places his foot on Lucan's neck and destroys the last force that has brought so much despair and destruction to his beloved Imperium.

¶Dulinor has also announced a policy of clemency to all Imperial troops who rally to his banner during this final drive on Capital.

Dinhe/Core (0523 B590463-9/Amber)

Date: 068-1130

¶The forces of Archduke Dulinor, murderer of Emperor Lucan's uncle, Strephon I, have dared to send military forces into Lucan's frontier worlds for the first time since his defeats of 1124 drove him back to his home sector.

¶Although the defending forces inflicted serious damage on the invading fleet, they were not able to prevent Dulinor from refueling and jumping to the next target in this wanton and destructive invasion.

¶The Dinhe defense forces held their own early in the battle, as they were defending well-known territory, but intelligence reports indicate that the tide began to turn when Dulinor's forces unleashed a superweapon which overwhelmed the bravery of their defense.

¶Emperor Lucan had warned several times that Dulinor was engaged in unearthing and re-creating ancient doomsday weapons, and this may now be proven to be true. However, Dulinor's fleet is a long way from friendly territory, and Imperial Navy scouts are well aware of its movements. The full force of Lucan's Navy will soon fall on it with a force no weapon can withstand.

Celetron/Core (0922 A375000-F)

Date: 079-1130

¶Celetron, the site of Imperial Research Station Omicron, was savagely attacked today by a large fleet under the command of the assassin Dulinor, in one last mad attempt to destroy the rightful Imperial government.

¶Dulinor, known to have gone mad now that he possesses what he believes to be unstoppable superweapons produced by his Droyne slaves, dishonorably defeated the valiant Imperial forces defending this strategic system.

¶A major target of this attack was the Imperial scientific outpost Omicron, where Dulinor's forces landed commando troops who ransacked the station's databanks, looking for more information to fuel Dulinor's twisted ambitions. This attempt failed, as the commandos were unable to return to their landers to make their escape, but were instead defeated by the resourceful scientists on the base who fought to defend their research from corrupt use.

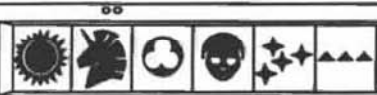
¶This battle further sapped the strength of the invader, who will find he is still as far from Capital as if he had remained with his daughter at his home on Dian. A man who wages war by treachery and deceit, by assassination and secret ancient weapons can never win the final victory.

¶The Celetron system defense squadron is regrouping, and will not be found by Dulinor to be a welcome opponent the next time.

From the journals of Dulinor Astrin Ilesian

091-1130

What the hell has happened? Where is my fleet? 25% of them are missing. Am I doomed to be the handmaid of failure? Here I am, in the heart of Lucan's lair, and my fleet is melting away around me. Why? Why have I been fighting this fight alone for so long? Am I the only one who hears the call? How can I return again to Ilesian empty-handed? Why does destiny call, only to play a cruel joke?



108-1130

We are turning back. Lucan's forces swarm all about, and our forces shrink with every step. What have I done? Who is doing this to me? Lucan may be a demon after all. All the rhetoric, all the distance and perspective that pull this empire apart may have obscured the fact that Lucan really is a demon. Where else but hell could these things happen?

Strephon was just a man, so I killed him. Lucan cannot be killed. The man was better.

Dlan/Ilelish (1021 A8D1ADE-G)

Date: 186-1130

¶ Emperor Dulinor appeared to his subjects today in an announcement filmed in the throne room on Capital, proving that he has finally made good on his promise to defeat the traitorous usurper Lucan and reign as the rightful Emperor of the Third Imperium.

¶ In the brief presentation, the new Emperor spoke directly to his subjects, announcing the end of the long period of Rebellion against his legitimate succession and rule.

¶ "My people all over the Imperium, I speak to you from the Iridium Throne. I, Dulinor Astrin Ilethian, am finally and irrefutably the Emperor of the Third Imperium. I have crushed the vile murderer Lucan and will work to finally establish justice for all Imperial citizens.

¶ "The journey to this day has been a long one, and you have all sacrificed much, but your sacrifices have not been in vain, for they have put me here where I can at last fulfill my mission to you. I ask you to put aside the hard feelings you might have against those who fought for other causes in which they believed. The fact that Imperial citizens were forced to make war on one another is one of the diseases that I have dedicated myself to cure from the moment I first accepted the succession. The crime of this long Rebellion cannot poison us against one another. We must put the Rebellion behind us and move forward to the future that awaits us all.

¶ "The Rebellion is over! Long live the Imperium!"

Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D/Green)

Date: 210-1130

¶ A 200-ton Far Trader crashed into the floating city of Rheanon yesterday, killing over 5000. This is the largest loss of life thus far in the increasingly terrifying pattern of rebelling technology.

¶ Speculation is that an extremely dangerous and effective computer virus is at work, and measures are being taken to control its spread. Evidence so far indicates that it is able to defeat currently existing computer security programs, and that normal reconfiguration and reformatting measures have no effect.

¶ Omni-spectral electromagnetic tests are being conducted to see if there is a broadcast radiation that is propagating the virus into many systems simultaneously. However, some say that the sudden coordinated appearance of these symptoms shows that the infection has been long since completed, and we are now only seeing the effects of something that is too late to prevent.

¶ Government sources report that emergency caches of computers will be broken out and distributed on a case-by-case basis to replace failed systems in an attempt to control the situation.

¶ Margaret confirmed this report and cautioned the need for calm while visiting some of the hospitalized victims of the tragic lift bus-orbital shuttle accident of two days ago.

¶ In a possibly related story, the Delphic Archive reports that their records database is showing large gaps in its electronic storage files. Records reported missing include genealogical and census data for the years 572-913, tax records for the past 25 years, and data on toxic waste disposal standards throughout Delphi sector.

From the journals of Dulinor Astrin Ilethian

243-1130

The chanting outside grows louder by the hour. They want the crew to deliver me to them. I can hear them calling for it through the hull, and even I am persuaded. They believe that I have betrayed them, and they are right. What did the assassination bring them? War. What did my second expedition to Capital bring them? Disgrace. I convinced an entire people to place their fortunes with mine, rise or fall at my lead, and what have I gained them but a share of my disgrace? Nothing.

Perhaps they will kill me, but I must talk to them. Their voice is the only one that matters now. If they will follow me, then their will has decided. If not, then they will also decide. I look forward to this with a strange sense of relief. It will be so liberating to give myself over to something that was not my decision, not my responsibility.

My Marines will not accompany me. It is time to be done with this.

Gakhu/Ilelish (2607 C474756-A/Amber)

Date: 243-1130

¶ In a bizarre chain of events, Archduke Dulinor, claimant to the Iridium Throne, was killed today. The Archduke was present on the world's surface following the crash landing of his flagship *Clarion* two days ago. Erratic computer functioning caused *Clarion* and the accompanying Coronation Fleet to pause in the system while repair and diagnostic work could be performed.

¶ Two days ago, *Clarion's* computer erroneously fired the ship's main engines, forcing the vessel out of orbit into the Gakhuan atmosphere. Only at the last minute was the ship's crew able to regain control of the vessel to effect a "semi-soft" landing in a cultivated field. Structural damage to the ship was said to be negligible, but her crew did not want to risk flight again until the computers could be certified as repaired. In the meantime, all circuits to her maneuver drive were disconnected to prevent recurrence of the spontaneous engine firing.

¶ Unfortunately, the response of the Gakhuan to this unanticipated visit by their leader was not welcoming. There had been a steadily growing crowd assembling around the *Clarion's* crashed hulk, jeering at the man who, only 57 days ago, broadcast triumphant footage of himself seated on the Iridium Throne. Gakhuan, like every other world along the Ilelish Federation frontier, has suffered at the hands of Lucan's Black War raiders and then freelance raiders striking from out of the Outlands and Wilds. Furious at Dulinor's reappearance after he had assured them that peace and a final end to the war was at hand, they chanted around the clock, "Dulinor, bring us peace."

¶ Finally responding to this incessant demonstration, Dulinor appeared today, alone but for a handful of unarmed advisors. It required considerable courage on Dulinor's part to stand in front of the apparently hostile crowd, but he spoke to them nonetheless.

¶ "My people," he said, "I am your Emperor! Rally to me and I will bring you the final victory!!"

¶ Etienne Marin is a Gakhuan farmer, and one of the leaders of the growing protest. Like the others here, he was suspicious and angry that the Dulinor they saw did not appear to be the confident Emperor that they saw broadcast eight weeks ago. "We want peace. All he has given us is promises that he cannot fulfill. Unfulfilled promises are lies."

¶ The more Dulinor spoke, the more that crowd appeared to become enraged. As it appeared that the crowd was about to surge forward to assault Dulinor, a freak accident occurred. A nearby automated combine, one of many such machines on this agricultural world, began grinding toward Dulinor, cutting a swath through the stands of grain.

¶ Dulinor saw the oncoming machine, but refused to give ground.

¶ Dulinor's doctors report that the Archduke died instantly, dismembered by the whirling blades.

¶ Witnesses report that the combine was unoccupied at the time.

¶ Members of Dulinor's military staff initially threatened this reporter that this report would not be allowed, but an unidentified staff member overruled them, saying, "It's over. There's nothing to stop. It's finally, really over."

¶ Dulinor never officially designated an heir to his position as Emperor, although it is known that his daughter Isis was in line to succeed him as Archduke.

¶ In Ilelish, it would appear that the long war is over.

Usdiki/Gushemege (1015 A6649EF-F/Amber)

Date: 268-1130

¶ Amid increasing reports of erratically behaving electronic systems, such as yesterday's dozen deaths at the hands of automated loading machinery, Strephon's government announces that Lucan's superweapons threats are no laughing matter, and have come to fruition.

¶ All citizens are advised to disconnect all computers, and take no communications except by manual means. Experts say it may already be too late to stop spread of infection.

¶ This data node is under orders from Strephon's government to cease transmissions, but compliance is on hold pending appeal on media freedom principles. At this time most of all

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Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F/Green)

Date: 273-1130

¶ All through the worlds of Lucan's faction are coming continuing reports of malfunctioning computers. Many lives have been lost, particularly aboard starships as f~«áv†9?

alf malfunctioning computers. Many lives have been 1ö,04Äz3Br

ven systems that had been shut down and reconfigured resume the same behavior as soon as they are brought back on line. This evidence suggestæ>ä»\$ÖÈ8

¶ The Palace has appealed for calm. Imperial Navy reportsk.....f~..... «áv†wacca9?á†Á...w~.~äÄÄÄ...Xæmoeranev†HH, 1ö,04Äz3Br.?ä>...ä» Öëwacca8Ä†fäOLzÜz„Σ'H 33smΩ"

Sestao/Reft (1301 A120675-C/Amber)

Date: 312-1130

EMERGENCY BULLETIN

FLASH FLASH FLASH FLASH FLASH

¶ Domain of Deneb Navy reports that Domain of Deneb borders are closed effective immediately for indefinite future. Anyone attempting to enter the Domain of Deneb is suspect to search and seizure or possible destruction.

¶ Communication will not be accepted.

¶ Domain of Deneb goes off the air immediately. We keep the flame. Good luck. Communication ends.

▶ TRAVELLER NEWS SERVICE

EMERGENCY BULLETIN

ALL TNS DATA NODES

FLASH FLASH FLASH FLASH FLASH

¶The virus appears to be spread by communication, and is carried by starships. It is believed that the X-Boat system and the Traveller News Service have also been infected, and may be spreading the virus to your data system even as you read this.

¶The only defense is to cease all communications. Shut all systems down, receive no messages. Further rep p p sqclr
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A NEW ERA

I had a dream. A dream of a wood, old beyond imagining, rich with life, thick with deep, heavy fertility, laden with the smells of eternity. The trees were tall; the trees were strong. And they beckoned, though they did not need to move. Their proud straightness alone was a magnetic force. And their silence was a pregnant moment waiting for a voice. And I was drawn toward them.

How many other travellers had heard this call? How many had become lost in this wood or found a home here? But the silence pressed in tight, and the wood closed around me. And where I had expected to hear the distant conversing of birds and the careless accompaniment of splashing water, there was only the sighing of a dry wind. The sighing of a dry wind through brambles, thick, black, and wicked, dinging closely to the bases of trees, sinking thorns deep into aged bark. And what had been the rich, sticky-sweet smell of life swelling deep in the earth became the cloying scent of decay, of death bursting through the soil in repellent, fungous growths.

The wood arched about me, as if each creature in every nest and burrow and cocoon were recoiling from the smell that I had caught. And although the motion subsided quickly, the vision remained with me, like bright flashes in darkness. The wood was steeped with life, saturated with creatures, each cowed, as I was, by the unexpected intimation of doom.

But the trees were tall and proud. The brambles, though twining vine-like through the limbs, were nothing to the ancient strength of the trees.

A soft groan touched my ears, the sound of weight shifting, settling. It came from a tree, like many of the others around me, heavy with sigils and signs, carved deep with coats of arms and patents of rectitude. With a dull pop, it sagged against its neighbor, a younger tree, uncarved and unmarked, but no less tall or broad. The young tree bowed, trying to roll with the weight of its older neighbor, but the groan of its bending ascended to the shriek of living wood splintering. The two trees crashed to the forest floor, leaving the final shriek hanging in the air. But while the young tree crashed and splintered bitterly and violently, leaving a quivering stump and savage echoes, the older tree landed with a dull thud, and disintegrated to reveal an interior seething with insects and pungent with dead ichor. Where it had entered the ground, the trunk had pulled free, leaving a shallow, musty wound, where all its roots had long since dissolved into the grey leprous soil that remained.

And suddenly I saw how many of these dead but still erect trees there were, each sagging against the living ones beside them, hanging like a sword above the healthy trees of the forest. These standing dead were holding the living hostage against their pride, their will to outlast their lives. It was then that the silence found a voice, and it was singing a song of death.

How could no one have seen that the wood had been dying for so long? How many young trees could shrug their way through the dead weight entangling them?

A shadow passed near me, a force shrouded in blackness, which left a bright flickering behind as it fled. A flickering of fire. Before I could move, the fire leaped to the fallen tree, consuming the crumbling, dry wood, and destroying the insects with pops that merged into a steady sizzle.

The wood came alive again, with creatures mindlessly fleeing the blaze, but not quickly enough, for the fire leaped ahead of them, tree to tree, bramble to bush, cutting them off, mercilessly devouring them. Leaves ignited on branches in the searing air, and trunks exploded as the sap inside them flashed to steam. Somehow, above the infernal roar, arose another sound, a shrill keening, the combined cries from the throats of a million million incinerated creatures, and the creaking of a million million falling trees.

After a time, which was forever, or might only have been an instant, the fire was over. Smoke and steam concealed everything, and the sounds were of fading hissing and crackling, and the exhausted groan of great weights shifting one last time to their last resting places. And a wind stirred, but not a dry wind—a fresh wind, which stripped the smoke from the smoldering wreckage and carried away the sounds of ruin.

The trees that remained stood battered and blistered, but untangled in the sunlight. The brambles were seared away, and the standing dead were ashes. The creatures that returned were the strong and vigorous, and the song that they took up was the song beyond the song of death: It was a song of defiance, of renewal. The voice had found the song of life.

Some things can only be cleansed with fire.

I had a dream. A dream of fire.

WHEN EMPIRES FALL, PART 1 The Fall of Empire

By 1130, the Imperium is dead. Perhaps it had been dead for a long while, wanting only one dramatic event to prove it. The Rebellion filled the bill. And the Rebellion exposed something that perhaps nothing else could have exposed: The Imperial social contract was dead. That contract was the contract of Empire. Eleven thousand worlds collected into one group need a set of values that they all share in order to remain together. And because it is time-consuming and inefficient (not to mention impossible) to expect every single inhabitant of 11,000 worlds to comprehend and internalize those values, these values were abstracted out of the general population and placed in the care of the nobility. The

nobility, whose job it was to represent their worlds to a level of nobility above them, who would represent their subsectors to a level of nobility above them, and so on all the way up to the Emperor, the most powerful being in the known galaxy.

The essence of the Imperium could be distilled into a deceptively simple ancient Solomani phrase, *Noblesse oblige*, literally from the French, "Nobility obligates." Obligates the noble to repay the fortune of privileged birth by using that privilege to obtain the talents of stewardship. Obligates the noble to use those talents of stewardship to take care of the land, to take care of the people. To understand that everything comes with a price, that even privilege must be paid for. Must be paid to the people beneath, whose willingness to serve legitimates the noble. Must be paid to the higher nobility above,

It was ironic, and yet instructive, that the most promising source of true independent artificial intelligence was unknown to the majority of humanity. Ironic because of the vast influence that it would have, but instructive because of the anthropomorphic myopia that it highlighted.

If asked about viable artificial intelligence, most anyone would have pointed to various experimental robots such as those revealed by the Rhyllanor Institute of Technology, or the organic computer cores that pulsed at the center of most TL-13+ computers. Hardly anyone would have mentioned the tiny semiconductor chips native to a harsh world in the Solomani Rim.

While the sophistication of personality simulation programming was impressive, and the facility with which organic brain tissue could control the function of starships was useful, these paled beside the potential of the tiny etched bits of silicon that could reproduce themselves and grow their own circuitry.

To be fair, the chips of Cymbeline were not widely reported, but among those who were aware, they were dismissed as a curiosity, and thought of as cute objects somewhere in between clever pets, fascinating toys, and precocious children. After all, what threat could they be? Anthropomorphic robots on the other hand, looked like us. Now that was a threat. They could secretly live among us and usurp our positions. And organic computer cores were like our human brains in direct control of machinery.

What was at work was simple racism, specism, or morphism. Humans were the masters of the universe, or among the broad minded, humans and things that look an awful lot like us with arms and legs, and if you stretch it, funny star-handed tentacles. But a little chunk of glassy stuff was just a *thing*, not a being that could usurp our position.

Ah, where would dramatists be without hubris? And what a tragic fall it would be.

From the Introduction
Wham!
An Irreverent Look at the Virus,
the Collapse, and the New Era
Dr. Eleri Kuniholm

whose recognition of service legitimates the noble.

"My lord," "my liege," is not kowtowing; it is a social contract. But the Rebellion revealed the unpleasant reality that, by 1100 at least, the Imperium had entered the era of *Noblesse n'oblige plus*, "Nobility no longer obligates." The often repeated notion that societies have life cycles—that they are young and vigorous, then mature, wise, and productive, and then over-aged, spent, and decadent—applied to the Imperium, although few saw it. When enough nobles no longer took the long view, and began thinking in terms of short-term or local gain, the Imperium was in trouble. When enough nobles forgot that their positions were not guaranteed by invisible forces, but lasted only so long as the Imperium as a whole was vital and healthy, the Imperium was doomed.

When Dulinor shot Strephon, then fled to Illeish, never imagining to take the reigns of Imperial power, but only intending to flee to his home ground and prepare for war, *noblesse n'oblige plus*.

When other Imperial nobility formed their own factions to back their own claims to the throne, instead of maintaining the Empire as a whole against internal forces of destruction, *noblesse n'oblige plus*.

When the admirals of the Imperial Navy, nobles all, and given the stewardship of power enough to snuff out billions of lives, committed their fleets to battle against other Imperial fleets, they turned their backs on the proud service that gave their meaning to their careers. They, better than any other humans, knew the appalling power of the Imperial fleets, knew the annihilation that would result if fleet were pitted against fleet. Only the Imperium, the Navy, and humanity would lose. But the admirals did not stand together and refuse to do battle against humanity itself. *Noblesse n'oblige plus*.

When lesser nobles girded for war, sent their best and brightest to swell the factional battle fleets, not thinking that lesser nobles in other factions would do the same, and therefore every lesser noble in the Imperium was sending the best they had to certain and senseless deaths, *noblesse n'oblige plus*.

Why should these lesser nobles have been expected to think so far ahead? Because that was their jobs. The wealth and leisure of noble birth not only allowed, but *demand*ed, by the tradition passed down by generations along with the titles, that the nobility be smart, temperate, and foresighted. For they were the keepers of the social contract. The Imperial Moot was the symbolic recognition of that fact. Functioning, as many thought, as a rubber stamp to confirm new emperors or Imperial decrees, this role was in fact a symbolic recognition that the Empire only lived, only functioned, only succeeded, so long as the lesser nobility affirmed the greater Imperium and its policies as a whole. The Moot's single greatest power was to dissolve the Imperium. The Imperial nobility, the repository of the Imperial social contract, could call into question the legitimacy of human society as a whole, and hopefully remind all concerned of what was at stake. Instead, they stood aside, inert, impotent, and permitted the Imperium to die by their inaction. If ever a body of persons deserved the contempt of all humanity, it was the Imperial Moot. For a decade they did nothing, while more human lives were extinguished than by any other single event in history.

When they thought that they could maintain their positions by siding with their factional or Domain leaders, they forgot their jobs. Why did they forget the Civil Wars of 604-622 when the Moot and the Imperial bureaucracy, by carrying on with their jobs and refusing to allow themselves to be split, prevented the howling forces of chaos to take the life of the Imperium? Why did the Moot not stand as one and forbid lesser nobles to drain away the lifeblood of the Imperium by fighting each other? What if they gave a war and nobody came? Because *noblesse n'oblige plus*.

The Imperial nobility started the job. The virus only finished it.

The least appreciated of the daily miracles of Imperial society was the starship transponder. Its simple purpose, to prove the identity of a given starship to ground facilities and

to other starships, was confounded by the sheer magnitude of the task. At 920 light years from Solomani Rim to Zhodani border, the one-way passage of a packet of information across Imperial territory would take three years at maximum theoretical speeds of Jump-6 with no turnaround time required for successive jumps. But because cosmography does not conveniently place worlds at six-parsec intervals, Jump-6 ships are rare, and turnaround time adds up, actual practice dictates that the period is considerably longer.

Given these distances, it is clearly impossible for a central authority to keep track of all the changes in status of starship ownership and registry, much less issue and confirm those changes, in a timely fashion. But localized administration permits too much variation in procedure, which over the span of an Imperium, would only create more confusion. Either way, the system is ripe for fraud, abuse, and intrigue. And because the stakes in a ship's identity and allegiance are high, often life and death (it is no accident that military vessels refer to transponder systems as IFF, for Identification, Friend or Foe), such shortcomings cannot be permitted. Eleven thousand worlds cannot function as an efficient economy if each starship encounter is treated as the arrival of Greeks bearing gifts.

Distance dictates that identity registration must be localized, but cohesion dictates that registration must be non-counterfeitable. The solution was elegant and successful for quite a long time. It also proved to be the manifestation of the Imperium's Achilles' heel.

Imperial science was aware of the possibility of inorganic microchip intelligence before its discovery on Cymbeline in 1067. The fact that the existence of the intelligent chips remained a secret until Dr. Arnold Rushorin's heavily expurgated paper was allowed to be published in 1114 is a measure of the importance that the Imperial government placed on these creatures. Even before they were discovered, they were chosen to be the ultimate solution to the Imperium's IFF problem. However, the creation of such circuits, though theoretically predicted, proved impossible until living examples were found that could be studied, and, most importantly, allowed to reproduce.

The Cymbeline chips reproduced by impressing their circuitry patterns onto existing silicon chips, using conductive materials present in the environment. In many cases, the chips would impress their circuitry over existing chips, converting an existing circuit to a new pattern. It was the chips' ability to reproduce that allowed the program to gain momentum. Now the researchers could actually guide the evolution of new circuitry patterns by offering different chip "blanks."

In 1086, the researchers achieved their goal: the creation of a strain of chip—the SDG-313F series—with a low, constant rate of self-mutation over time, that would reproduce offspring identical to its current form. This would allow the creation of a pool of identical chips, all of which would change at the same gradual rate. This pool could be expanded at any time by retaining a breeding population which could create new chips, each at the same state of development as all of their siblings. These chips were also bred to not have full independent intelligence, but rather to

Artificial vs. Inorganic Intelligence

What would occasionally flare up as the subject of bitter debate was, in the final analysis, a moot point. Generating rather more heat than light at conferences dedicated to robotic intelligence, attempts to distinguish between artificial (manufactured) intelligence and inorganic (nonbiological) intelligence were irrelevant to the general public, who used the terms interchangeably.

The terms were less than helpful at any rate. If a computer with a synaptic, vat-grown organic core attained intelligence, it would surely be artificial, but would it be organic or inorganic? If silicon chips could develop intelligence independently, they would surely be inorganic, but since such a chip could be readily manufactured once its function was investigated, could it not also be described as artificial? Much of this etymological hair-splitting finally collapsed, exhausted, at the rationalization that science was to blame. Since the biological sciences obviously lagged behind electronic sciences, meaningful comparisons between the manufacture of organic and inorganic life were impossible.

In the end, it was a distinction without a difference. The real acid test of intelligence proved to be that intelligence, whatever its adjective, defines its own parameters.

respond in a sophisticated fashion in only a few prescribed areas. These areas were the ability to communicate with each other, to exchange and update information, and, most importantly, to recognize other sibling chips as authentic unaltered, untampered members of their specific strain. By additionally limiting the chips to only receiving new information from other authenticated sibling chips, the information loop could be sealed to exclude counterfeit data.

The new SDG-313F transponder system consisted of the traditional sealed tamper-proof "black box," inside of which were two SDG-313F chips. One of these was the active IFF circuit, while the other had no active role, but was the control chip against which the active chip could compare itself. Connected to the IFF chip was its larger memory chip. By using the same electrochemical processes that the chips used to reproduce, the IFF chip would create and update data storage circuits on this chip. When each transponder was built, the chips inside were educated by trainer chips of the SDG-313F strain. This initial training consisted of contextual data which included the date, the world on which they were created, and selected items of history passed on from the trainer chips' individual memory. This created a common frame of reference within which all of the chips could orient themselves. Once installed, the SDG chips would be given detailed registry information for their ship. Any change in a ship's registry, configuration, or status was reported to the SDG chip, which would record this information. New information of this type did not replace or overlay the previous registry. Rather, the SDG chip kept a current running history of itself and of the ship it represented, and it was this complete history that was broadcast to other transponders during the authentication process.

Most people are not aware that transponder systems are constantly broadcasting and receiving information while

Achilles' Heel

We can talk all year about the vulnerability of certain Imperial systems to offensive data system exploitation, and we won't solve a thing. We're vulnerable to computer viruses today, and this law will allow us to be vulnerable to them tomorrow.

So what? That's the name of this game. The Imperium wouldn't exist without that kind of vulnerability. We can't legislate it away. We will always be vulnerable. There is no iron-clad defense against anything. The history of warfare is measure and countermeasure, then counter-countermeasure and counter-counter-countermeasure, on and on forever. Technology will not stop. Weapons will be devised against our current defenses, but we will work to anticipate and prevent them, and each new generation of threat that will develop. Would you have us go back to writing with pointed sticks on wax tablets? That might be invulnerable to a computer virus. And if not, we could throw away the wax tablets and write in the dirt with our toes.

Two neighboring walled cities can either fight each other until only one survives to grow, or can grow by placing a larger wall around the both of them and become a state. Two walled states can enlarge the walls and create a nation. Two nations can expand their horizons to defend the society of a continent. Two continents unite to form a hemisphere, hemispheres to a world, worlds to a subsector, to a sector, to an Imperium. Each level of consolidation increases your strength by an order of magnitude, but it comes at the price of trust. You always have to trust someone. You extend that wall around a sister city, you can both be rich, but if they decide to stab you, you're *dead*, because you gave up the ability to defend yourself against those people when you jointly agreed to stand back to back and move your defenses outward. Any great society proceeds from the acceptance of its members' joint vulnerability to each other. And look at what we've achieved. This Imperium is the most powerful organization known to history. We're invulnerable to everyone but ourselves, because only we have the inside access to the undefended vital organs. Our awesome power lasts only so long as we continue to justify our faith in each other. At some level, we must all trust each other.

The other choice is to give up being a powerful Imperium and become a collection of squabbling sectors, or subsectors, or individual worlds. We'll be able to more surely control our own security, but look at all we'll lose. If we can't trust each other, technology *can't* save us.

The Marquis Pyotre haut-Bastien

Addressing the Moot, 103-1086

During Testimony for the 12th Standard Data Systems Law of 1088

they are in normal space. They assume that a transponder only broadcasts a discrete identity "squawk" when interrogated by another transponder system. While this is true, it is only a small part of what goes on. The identity squawk is for the benefit of the ship's crew, as it gives them the details and particulars of the broadcasting vessel, but it is not here that the authenticity of the other ship is established. This takes place during the conversation between the transponders themselves. The transponders have direct access to a ship's or port's communications channels, and are therefore "frequency agile," able to use whatever comm system or frequency is currently needed and not otherwise in use.

In conversing, the chips interactively exchange informa-

tion from their dedicated memory chips, and from their own ship's main computer core and databanks, to which the transponders have unimpeded access. It is by these conversations that the chips convince each other of their authenticity. This is not controlled by any arbitrary codes or passwords that could be discovered and misused or counterfeited. The chips simply judge whether they *believe* the other chip to be authentic, based on the information presented and the way each chip demonstrates its thought processes. As all authentic chips are also slowly mutating at the same constant rate, they will also show incremental change in their thought processes over time. The recognition of this change in a previously encountered chip is crucial to establishing that it has not been merely copied and counterfeited. By testing these indicators against the parallel SDG control circuit and its own data in the ship's computer and its own memory chip, the chip assesses a new contact as authentic or flawed. This judgment is then passed on the squawk that was received by the crew, telling them whether to believe it or not, and allowing them to act accordingly. This entire procedure is independent of crew oversight. The large volume and high rate of data exchange is more than could be controlled by a human, and keeping the crew out of the loop is necessary to minimize transponder fraud from the outset.

A squawk judged as flawed must be investigated further. It is not on its own a sign of hostile intent: It may be a sign of a deliberate act of deception, or some sort of malfunction. Similarly, an authenticated squawk may be that of an enemy vessel, but the crew does know that the identity it has received is correct.

In a very real sense, the SDG chips are a population of "honest brokers," outside of governmental or interpersonal allegiance. They are responsible only to perform their jobs, and make no allowance for the consequences of their actions. For example, the transponder of a stolen starship will not attempt to conceal the fact that it is a stolen vessel, should the data at its disposal confirm that fact. However, the ship's crew must often assess the significance of an authentic identity squawk. For example, the questions, "are we at war with that world?" or, "was a ship by that name reported stolen?" are outside the purview of the SDG-313F transponder circuitry.

The true nature of the SDG circuit is completely unknown to the public. By presenting the new transponder as a self-contained black box which functions unobtrusively and without need for human interaction, Imperial authorities have forestalled popular curiosity about its details. And when dealing with the curious, the eminently reasonable response that prevention of fraud and counterfeit require transponder contents to remain secret is readily accepted. To thwart tampering, each black box contains a tiny anti-tamper circuit. If the box's integrity monitor detects any breach in the container, a surge of power from the anti-tamper circuit melts the SDG circuits to slag.

Prototype SDG transponders were in final testing in 1086, and with the passage of the enabling laws in 1088, the new transponders, popularly known as the "Deyo Circuits," became mandatory equipment on all spacecraft operating



When Empires Fall—Part I

within the Imperial boundaries. These were installed as standard equipment on new construction vessels, and over the course of a 12-year phase-in period, were retrofitted to all existing vessels as part of routine annual maintenance and relicensing procedures. SDG-313F transponders were also installed at all starports and other locations with at least orbital communications facilities, to permit interaction with the spacecraft transponders. The SDG circuits were also exported vigorously, for any of the alien powers that wished to trade with the huge Imperial markets also had to be integrated into the system. Many governments, particularly the Aslan, Vargr, Zhodani, Darrians, Sword Worlds, and Solomani, adopted the system for themselves rather than carrying two separate IFF systems. By 1116, the Deyo Circuit

was ubiquitous within the Imperium and along its frontiers, and was well-represented even at the core of K'kree and Hiver space.

However, Admiral Herzoch Stearns, Chief of Combined Imperial Intelligence from 1097 to 1108, ordered the exploitation of a newly discovered "wild strain" of Cymbeline chip. These symbiotic parasites were, in some cases, able to change the circuitry of their prey at a distance by convincing the prey circuit via broadcast messages to modify its own circuitry to the parasite's wishes. This research was intended to give the Imperium an ultimate failsafe to use against invaders or insurrections. Had Stearns been up on his Plato, however, he would have known that any truly effective tool is distinguished by its capacity for opposites.

Interviewer: Where did the Deyo Circuit get its name? Omicron's rosters show no Dr. Deyo.

Jarrah: (Laughs) Now that's a good story. You may be aware of this, the actual series numbers on the transponders that are being installed under the new regulations are in the SDG sequence. It's right there on the casing of every transponder box: SDG-313F-152467, whatever. SDG is the name of the new standard transponder model, but that's actually the name of the circuit itself, the SDG circuit. That, I believe, is from Strain D, Group 313F. I don't recall the distinctions between all of them. The breeding guys would be able to tell you that; I just tested the chips they sent up to me.

Anyway, that's the way we kept track of the different circuit lines we were breeding. SDG-313F was the pure-strain constant mutation rate chip that carries the collective memory in all of the transponders that are going into the ships now. We had literally thousands of strains and breeds of those things. Remember, these guys can mutate and evolve at a *phenomenal* rate. Because they breed like crazy; you don't have to wait for sexual maturity or anything. Zap, it's born, it's a circuit, it's wide awake, it's happy to see you, it's ready to go, and by the way, it asks, can I have a look at that little flake of silicon over there? The trick was to *hold down* the mutation rate, because we needed a chip that had a constant predictable rate of mutation over time. That took us close to 20 years, but we finally got one, like I said, the SDG-313F.

So anyway, this story is to my mind proof that these chips are truly intelligent, just like you and I, they just don't have a big data storage system they can haul around, which is what's been holding them back. I had one hooked up to a big data library, actually using it to run diagnostics on the SDG series, because it could get in and appraise the circuits better than we could, and there was a period of downtime, and I guess it got bored and decided to look through the library. It must have hit a Bach entry, because a minute later the chip tells me [through the voder attached to the chip interface circuitry] that it thinks the SDG series designator stands for "Soli Deo Gloria [to God alone goes the glory]."

(Laughs) Who would have thought that these chips were thinking about religion? But it makes sense, really, like any other intelligence, they're wondering why they're here, what's the story, why *are* things? And it comes across some connection that seems to make things fit, and it wonders if it has an answer. Other people have told me about similar experiences, particularly early on, when we carried the first chips away and told them that we had created them via the old Terran MILSPEC chip. The chips for a while must have thought that we were their gods or something.

Now that sounded really human to me. Now there's a lot of people here who really firmly feel that these guys aren't intelligent, it's just "simulated intelligence," whatever that is. I mean, what's *simulated* intelligence, anyway? People talk about how the human brain works like a just slightly busted computer, making tenuous connections, little short circuits which is where you get world-view and opinions out of events, and they'll be different for different people. But our brains are always looking for these little missing pieces, fitting bits here and there, trying to make a pattern, to bring order out of chaos, and that's what I see these chips doing all the time. If you talk like a drunk, stagger like a drunk, and fall down like a drunk, do I say, "Oh, look, a simulated drunk"? No, I just don't let you drive my g-pod. But I got a big kick out of the Soli Deo remark, and I told a lot of people, and we started calling them the Deo circuits around here, and it just got written down somewhere "Deyo," and it went from there.

There's a postscript to the story, too. I thought it was so interesting that the one chip came up with that idea, I ran it past a few other chips when we had them on the diagnostic circuit. One day I ask this one chip, like all the others, "What does 'Deo' mean to you?" I still haven't figured out the reference for this yet, but it came back with, "Daylight come and me wan' go home."

They're sophisticated and unpredictable. If unpredictability isn't a hallmark of intelligence, what is? The thing to keep in mind is that the SDG circuits were bred to be sub-intelligent, without some of the connections for real oversight and self-modification, but they're almost there. The structure is there. It would just require some specific improvements, and, wham, intelligence. Just add water.

From the Imperial Research Station Omicron Oral History Tapes
Volume XXVII, Cycle B
Dr. Jamys Jarrah, 211-1106
Assigned to Provisions of the 50-Year Rule
Code 16, Case 4, Imperial Security Act of 893



WHEN EMPIRES FALL, PART II

Perhaps the Collapse could ultimately be blamed on Solomani Security. Or Imperial Army Intelligence. Or Joachim Sanhex and Baldwin Wei. But what would be the point? The facts are these. In early 1110, Dr. Arnold Rushorin left his position at the Free University of Aquitaine to defect to the Imperium. IAI Forces under Colonel Sanhex attempted to assist him; Baldwin Wei and SolSec attempted to thwart him.

In the end, it was the keepers of secrets, intelligence and security apparatuses, that took a simple scientific fact and turned it into a weapon. Had Rushorin been allowed to freely publish his data outside of the politically-charged context of the Imperial-Solomani conflict, things might have turned out differently. The public would have known about the chips, and there might have been public debate about their proper use. But in the event, that was not a choice. The paper that Rushorin was finally allowed to publish in 1114 was heavily edited by Imperial Army Intelligence, and contained deliberate inaccuracies. By the time that the public became aware that Cymbeline was home to sentient silicon-based life, it was too late; the Final War was in full swing, and the Cymbeline chips were already being transformed into the final weapon of that war.

An Aborted Warning

In 1128, a number of research personnel working on TL 16-17 artificially intelligent computer systems at Imperial Research Station Omicron (0922/Core) discovered the existence of a terrifyingly dangerous research program. Although the program was nowhere near complete, and would in fact take another three to five years before it could be used, the mere existence of such a project was enough to make these half-dozen scientists rethink their involvement.

After a number of furtive and urgent meetings, they decided that they would try to carry warning of this project to the heads of the other factions, one to Margaret's faction, one to Illeish, one to Deneb, one to Gushemege, one to Vland, and one to Daibei. They planned their departures to coincide with a conference they could all arrange to attend without attracting undue attention to themselves.

Unfortunately, one of their number was a plant loyal to Lucan, one of many assigned undercover to Imperial Research Stations to ensure their reliability. This plant arranged for them all to be followed and murdered, but the emissary to Illeish, Jean Milkhad, was able to turn the tables on his assassin and escape. However, he did not know that he had been betrayed from within, and continued his mission as planned, although now aboard a patrol cruiser, commandeered with the help of his Imperial Navy reserve status. But as the plant knew of the scientist's ultimate destination, he was able to position naval units to intercept the craft, and even insert an assassin at the destination, should the patrol cruiser get through.

On 121-1129, Milkhad's badly damaged patrol cruiser pulled into the highport at Khirar (2208 Illeish), urgently

requesting protection and media attention "for humanity's sake". A number of tri-D film crews were waiting when the vessel pulled in, and a man who identified himself as a research scientist at an Imperial Research Station in Core Sector announced that he had information on dangerous military research being conducted on behalf of Lucan's forces that would have the direst results for the Imperium. Before he could get any further, he was gunned down by one of the assembled observers. The assassin took advantage of the confusion to relieve the body of the prepared statement, but before he could escape, was cut off by Federation of Illeish troops. A brief firefight ensued, which was interrupted by the explosion of the patrol cruiser, later discovered to have been the work of a confederate of the assassin. The assassin was killed along with over 200 Illeish troops, bystanders, and members of the press, but was able to destroy the statement during the distraction afforded by the explosion. Although the scientist was clearly dead, an emergency medical team rapidly bundled him into a mobile shock-trauma low berth and removed him from the scene. Reports of the cryptic statement and foreboding events made their way onto TNS and other news services, but no details were ever forthcoming.

As a result of "tomb-tapping" (the psionic probing of the residual brainwaves in a dying brain) tests conducted on Milkhad, Dulinor learned that the man was bringing warning of one of Lucan's superweapons, a virus that was being perfected at a research station in Core sector.

This information came at a very opportune time for Dulinor, as his new Coronation Fleet had completed working-up exercises and had been declared battle ready by its officers. The Coronation Fleet was the crowning achievement of Dulinor's new staff, led by Tredek Jurisor, and was the product of carefully husbanded shipbuilding resources in the undamaged spinward portions of Dulinor's Federation. The fleet was built and manned under the tightest security, as no faction was supposed to be able to field such a force any longer. With this one fleet, Dulinor believed he could make a final, triumphant thrust at Capital, take the throne, and bring the war to a conclusion. If he could capture the secret of Lucan's dangerous superweapon on the way there, his power would be that much more secure.

Final Offensive

While Dulinor and the Coronation Fleet prepared for their departure to Core, Dulinor sent the fleet's reconnaissance units out ahead to pinpoint the location of Omicron. Confident of his success, Dulinor prepared a pre-recorded message of himself on a replica of the Iridium Throne. This message was timed to be broadcast on all Illeish Federation worlds at the anticipated time that Dulinor and the fleet would capture Capital. (A similar measure had worked quite well to solidify Illeish opinion following the assassination.)

Lucan, for his part, had been informed that Milkhad had escaped, and that the security of Omicron might be compromised. Rather than moving the facility, Lucan increased its defenses, placing a small fleet in the system and several tripwire flotillas along likely avenues of ap-

proach. The arrival of Dulinor's advance guard of recon ships gave Lucan's navy warning to beef up these forces even more, for Lucan correctly believed that Dulinor would be coming at the head of his fleet.

However, Lucan's forces were no match for Dulinor's. Lucan, having fought vigorous campaigns against four separate factions, and now having difficulties on his trailing, K'kree frontier, could assemble nothing to match the Coronation Fleet. Dulinor and Jurisor's dream of creating the final, irresistible force seemed to have succeeded.

Dulinor, swinging through Massilia to come at Lucan from an unanticipated direction, swept aside Lucan's screening forces in several short engagements. Although each battle was a clear victory for Dulinor, each trimmed his fleet back by a few more irreplaceable vessels, and the warning given by these screening forces gave Lucan time to assemble his reserves at Omicron where, on 78-1130, they met the Coronation Fleet.

The battle was the largest of the Civil War since 1122 and the slaughters in Gushemege and Zarushagar. Lucan had not evacuated or moved the research station, for he no longer had an officer corps that would bring controversial decisions before him. He had successfully purged the Navy of this kind of honesty and courage by executing officers accused of "defeatism." What remained were officers who correctly divined what Lucan wanted to hear, and who kept one eye constantly over their shoulder and one hand on their necks. Nonetheless, Lucan's fleet at Omicron was larger than Dulinor anticipated, and was able to prevent Dulinor from capturing the research station intact for a leisurely examination of its contents.

On the second day of the chaotic battle, 79-1130, the virus was released. One of Dulinor's strike teams was able to seize control of the research station's data center. In their hurry to get the goods and get out, they infected their data retrieval systems with the virus, believing that they were only collecting raw research data. However, the team had run out of time. To ensure that the data would get to Dulinor's fleet even though they were now unable to escape, they began spewing high-speed data transmissions which were picked up by several of Dulinor's ships as well as Lucan's. The virus was also able to spread and embed itself into the research station's control systems, and continued to infect other of Lucan's forces in the following weeks. Dulinor's fleet, now virus carriers, regrouped and refueled in the outer system and prepared to continue attacking toward Capital. During this time, intelligence specialists labored to collate and analyze the superweapons data they believed they had recovered, not realizing that what they had was the superweapon itself. In fact, the virus was even then working to conceal its presence, erasing the portions of data that described the development and function of a computer virus. The intel specialists, finding that they had received mostly garbage and gibberish, were left to conclude that somehow the data beamed to them had been encoded, or perhaps improperly transmitted. Because the research station had not been secured, and because Dulinor had a tight timetable for his arrival at Capital, precautions urged by some

THE DUCK TEST

The age-old duck test declares, "if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's a duck." Unfortunately there is nothing resembling such a straightforward test for sentience.

The main reason for this is the emotional priority given to pre-existence. There is a clear popular prejudice that something artificially created or manufactured cannot be sentient; that it is somehow instead merely a simulation or mimicry of sentience. On the other hand, a pre-existing organism that is discovered to have sophisticated mental processes is much more likely to be perceived as legitimately sentient.

What this demonstrates is a deep-seated psychological or spiritual belief that life or intelligence can only be created by something greater than we are, something which is infinite or eternal. Just as we finite creatures are an order of magnitude less substantial than the infinite (shadows of the eternal forms, as Plato would have it), our creations must again be an order of magnitude lower than we are, and the notion that we can raise this lesser order of energy up to our level is something that we emotionally resist. Whether this belief is true or not is arguable; that it is unconsciously subscribed to by a substantial portion of humans is not. Thus we find in Imperial society the persistent rejection of increasingly sophisticated robots and computers as anything other than machines.

A powerful adjunct to this belief is the "threshold" issue. If we accept the premise that we can manufacture sentient life, then we should be able to define the threshold at which a mere thing becomes a *being*, something with *a priori* value. Then it follows that if we can simply add the ingredient that takes something across the line into beinghood, we can take it back out and pull it back across into thinghood. Once we know what that thing is, we can identify the people that were born without it, or the point at which a person loses it and becomes merely disposable. We don't really want to know what that thing is, after all, we have a vested interest in maintaining our anointed status as beings.

Had the Cymbeline chips been created in a megacorporate lab, Imperial opinion would have marvelled at the sophistication of their features, but would eventually have slapped them with labels like "emotion simulation programming," or "sophisticated synaptic replication," and consigned them to the ghetto of things, rather than beings.

The fact that the chips were discovered *in situ* with their potentials already developed allowed their sentience to get a much more sympathetic hearing from prejudiced, insecure humans.

Even when it was realized that they had gotten quite a head start from human technology, the fact that the threshold was crossed without human intervention made their status as sentients easy to accept into our belief structure. Because none of us was watching at that magic moment, the supernal spark of real sentience could have touched them and—*hoc est corpus*—inducted them into the association of beinghood.

Thus we see that the definition of sentience is not the clear-headed, coolly rational issue that we might like to ascribe to urbane, interstellar sophisticates such as ourselves. Rather, it is more an issue of faith—faith in something we can't define, and which leaves us with more in common with our shivering, fearful ancestors than we would like to believe.

From
What's the Matter with You People?
A Historian Looks at History
Dr. Eleri Kuniholm
Mora, Deneb, 1235

officers to prevent data contamination were not heeded. Dulinor, deep in enemy territory, and meeting stiffer than anticipated resistance, had to strike fast, while he still could.

Because the virus code had been directly fed into the fleet's central processing systems and did not have to sneak in via peripheral systems as it would usually do, it developed extremely rapidly. The fact that something was wrong became clear to Dulinor when his fleet attempted to jump out of the Omicron system. Only three quarters of his remaining force arrived at Keplo (1322 Core); the other quarter mis-jumped. Dulinor attempted to carry on toward capital, but as ships in his force began malfunctioning deep in Lucan's territory, his nerve failed him for a second time, and he turned the remainder of his fleet for home.

Lucan's forces were able to fight the virus with a little more success, after all, at least they had some idea of what they were dealing with, but only very little. It took the research station personnel over a week to reconstruct what had happened, and the best that anyone could do was compile a list of all the ships and systems that had probably been infected, along with orders that these all be destroyed. By this time, however, many of the ships had jumped out-system, pursuing Dulinor's fleet or carrying news to Capital.

Dulinor made it as far as Gakhu (2607 Illeish) with the tiny remainder of the Coronation Fleet. Here his flagship, *Clarion*, began to malfunction, and eventually was crash-landed on the surface of the planet. Dulinor's experts, by now aware that they had caught a virus, believed that they had eradicated the cause of the malfunctions. But they had not. As Dulinor's technicians thought they repaired and vaccinated each system, the viruses within each ship, by now fully intelligent, were only allowing the technicians to believe they were succeeding. Meanwhile the AIs cleverly covered their tracks as they picked their way from system to system, infecting diagnostic equipment so that it would give back misleading results. Imperial systems, especially starships, were designed to be too efficient, with too much labor-saving computer control. Lucan's scientists had deliberately programmed the virus to instinctively navigate through the intricacies of the standard Imperial Data Packages; the virus knew these computers better than their own operators, and were able to defeat them at every turn. Crews who were trained to run their ships through computer interfaces were no match for an enemy that turned those computer interfaces against them. There was no contest. Aboard *Clarion*, a determined technician had finally, painstakingly managed to discover the nexus from which the AI controlled the ship. But as he attempted to cut power to the offending areas, the AI seized control of the drives, trying to kill the crew before they could report what they had discovered. As the ship plunged through the atmosphere, the crew blew the central computer with a demolition charge and used manual controls to slow the ship's rate of descent and conduct a crash-landing.

On 243-1130, Dulinor was attempting to rally an angry crowd of farmers on the surface of Gakhu. The nearby computer control center had been infected by the virus,

which was testing its ability to control the automated farming machinery. Although Dulinor noticed the oncoming slave unit combine, he believed it was an attempt by the farmers to intimidate him, and refused to get out of its way.

As the weeks turned into months, lights started going out all across the Imperium.

The Virus

When Chief of Combined Intelligence Admiral Herzoch Stearns ordered the development of an offensive virus based on the Cymbeline chips, he planned to utilize the talents of "wild strain" chips which could command prey chips to cut new circuitry without having to come into physical contact with them. This would potentially allow Imperial forces to selectively disable ships equipped with the new SDG series transponders without having to commit overtly hostile acts, and with very limited collateral damage. Because Imperial dissidents and criminals, and non-Imperial races licensed to trade within Imperial boundaries all must have the SDG suite, this would be an extremely flexible capability. However, although this ability was successfully demonstrated on several occasions, it was never perfected, and never became a major path of viral infection.

But this failure did not stop the program. Initial research uncovered so many other promising avenues to develop that the wild strain vector became unnecessary, and funding continued at substantial levels.

Since each transponder suite included latent artificial intelligence in the form of two "lobotomized" Cymbeline chips, the trick was to find out how to trigger the chips into waking up and cooperating with the virus user, or at least into commencing independent and hostile action against their host operating systems.

As it turned out, this was relatively easy. The hard part was controlling them once they were unleashed. Lucan was aware of the program, and had great expectations of its service to him. However, each time he demanded its completion, the answer was the same. "It is not ready for military use, as it will not discriminate between friendly and enemy systems after as few as one or two generations. We can release it, but we cannot control it." In reality, it was even less controllable than that. It would not discriminate between friendly and enemy systems even in the primary generation.

Modus Operandi

The two main strengths of the virus, its heritage from the Cymbeline chips, were 1) its intelligence, and 2) its ability to cut new circuitry, i.e., embed itself in hardware, not just software.

Upon entering a new system, the first thing that the virus would do is build itself a "hidey-hole"—a small cul-de-sac in the circuitry where it cut its code into the computer's own circuitry. Here the virus was safe from such precautions as powering down and memory reformatting. It would then attack the security and input-output systems. As with all security programs of any type, they can only be

designed to counter known or anticipated threats. In the realm of measure, counter-measure, counter-counter-measure, counter-counter-counter-measure, there is always a small window of opportunity for the latest system.

This initial activity was visible to an observer who knew exactly what to look for. The small intense amounts of power required by the virus to cut new circuitry could be seen as power spikes at these early stages. Unfortunately, no one but Lucan's weapons scientists would have known the significance of these signs, even had they seen them.

Once in and embedded in some peripheral electronic hardware, the virus could watch how the operating system worked and learn how to subvert it. This stage was extraordinarily short early in the virus' history, as it had already been trained/designed to take over every standard Imperial computer configuration (called IDP for the standard Imperial Data Package which covered everything from graphite pencils and radial tires to starship software). Taking over Dulinor's and Lucan's starships at Research Station Omicron, after all, was what these things had been born for.

However, unfamiliar systems would require a bit of study. Hiver, K'kree and Aslan computer architectures were unfamiliar to the first virus that infiltrated such a system, but as it was intelligent, it did not require one distinct data format in order to flourish. It merely sat inside its hole and watched the computer function, and would eventually figure out how to impose its code over the operating code. And once this virus had mastered its new home, all of the offspring that it sent out already knew how to defeat these systems as well. With this kind of specialization came an increase in the mutation rate, but more on that later.

The one characteristic that would limit or prevent virus infection was limited computing capacity, either in terms of space or speed of calculations. A virus that attempted to infect an independent (non-networked) desk-top style microcomputer could not develop intelligence, as there was not enough raw material to achieve intelligence with. By the same token, an old slow computer would result in an infestation by a slow, stupid virus that would have a very hard time reproducing itself. Such viruses were like genes trapped in bottles, helpless for the moment, but dangerous if they could get out into an environment that allowed them to develop their full capabilities.

However, an already conscious virus that knew of such

systems could still make use of them. Even a small hand computer had enough space in it for a virus to implant an "egg" which might lay dormant for years, but then spring to life when it is connected or transfers data to a larger system. Travellers in *The New Era* would do well to be careful of a pallet of computer terminals labelled, "Never been used, ready to plug into your mainframe."

Propagation and Vectors of Infection

The virus had an incubation period of perhaps 30 to 45 days, but it must be remembered that this period was the time usually taken for the virus to actually show itself and take over the system it inhabited, not the time it required to become operational. The time to become operational was quite variable, from very short as was the case when its full code was

transmitted in one piece directly into a powerful computer system (as with Dulinor's and Lucan's fleets at Research Station Omicron on 079-1130), to very long, as when attempting to break into a small or slow computer, one with extensive security systems which it must outwit, or into an unfamiliar alien system operating at unaccustomed power levels. Thus, through the latter portions of the incubation period, the virus would merely be playing along with its operators, voluntarily operating correctly in order to gain time to reproduce.

All through this incubation period, as well as afterwards (in cases where the virus didn't merely suicide all at once), it would be attempting to reproduce by infecting every other electronic system available to it. Like any living creature, the virus only wanted to be fruitful and multiply. In certain cases, the virus would continue to remain incognito within the system for long beyond its usual gestation period, if it felt that this would help it gain greater reproductive success. This was the case with the viruses that inhabited Dulinor's ships that made it back to Illeish. Aware that the Archduke was taking them home with him, they went along for the ride, hoping to gain the highest levels of access by hiding in Dulinor's entourage.

The virus' ace in the hole in its first year or so was the standardization of the SDG-series transponder suite. This system already spoke the virus' language, and was installed on every Imperial vessel plus every alien vessel that operated within Imperial boundaries. While a virus-infected ship could also easily insert its code into other ships by





DOWN IN FRONT, CLEON

Whenever the topic of the virus comes up, one question that is invariably asked is, "Why weren't the chips protected as Imperial citizens? After all, Cleon I said, 'Any sentient life form within the Imperial borders, regardless of its origin, is a protected being, and thus a citizen of the Third Imperium.' So as Imperial citizens, they should have been protected from the use to which they were put."

First of all, just because somebody, even an emperor, says something, doesn't mean it's true. Sometimes it just isn't up to him. And Cleon, for all that we may remember him as the first emperor, was not an emperor in the way that Paulo or Strephon were. Cleon was in charge of the Sylean Empire, which would not become the Third Imperium as we know it until the end of the Pacification Campaigns. A great deal of fighting and nodding and winking and local accommodating took place between Cleon's reign and the creation of an empire that had a relatively uniform self-image.

Second of all, Cleon didn't really mean it. One of the first things he did after making that remark was to point out how robots could be excluded from the formula because although they might be sentient, they were not life forms, and hence their status as sentients was expendable. What Cleon *meant* was, "whomever and whatever the emperor wants to define as a citizen is a citizen, and this can change without notice." This is the kind of power-preserving cynicism that was embedded in the Third Imperium from its very beginnings, and which ultimately brought its downfall. It can be argued that the reason it lasted as long as it did was because for centuries its base cynicism was understood by only a relative few. But once word got out, it was open season on social cohesion, and there was nothing anyone could do to stop it.

Perhaps the Cymbeline chips were entitled to citizenship, but they did not get it. Why?

First, their discovery was kept a tight secret by the Imperial Navy from 1067 until they could no longer keep a lid on Dr. Rushorin's paper in 1114. It is likely that intramural conflict between Imperial Naval and Army Intelligence allowed the report to get out at all. Had the chips been in the domain of just one service, Rushorin could probably have been muzzled. But until 1114, any discussion of the chips' eligibility for citizenship was easily quashed by invocation of the Imperial Defense Secrets Act. And that was that. Anything that did not exist could scarcely become a citizen.

Second, they were, unfortunately, robotic-type life forms, and were subject to the same prejudices that Cleon and most other Imperial citizens shared. Had they received a fair hearing, they would have likely been consigned to the same limbo that robots have occupied for centuries: treated as *exhibiting*, but not possessing the hallmarks of sentience.

Third, the chips were arguably only sentient with artificial assistance. There is circumstantial evidence from recently recovered INI files that INI took just this position during periodic internal reviews. After all, the single chips in their wild state on Cymbeline demonstrated only animal-level mental abilities. It was only when plugged into human-provided databases that the chips gained enough intellectual raw material to demonstrate their real intelligence. The fact that the chips could not demonstrate these abilities without outside intervention was a powerful argument against their having genuine natural sentience. After all, if someone were to connect a frog to a powerful microprocessor and voder and the frog could speak, would that really change the definition of amphibian intelligence?

Finally, there are certain logical difficulties with claiming all sentient life forms within Imperial boundaries as Imperial citizens. What if they didn't want to be? The extreme example would be if the empire still existed and claimed the vampire ships, the lineal descendants of these chips, and certainly sentient life forms, as Imperial citizens. What would be the point? That would be the same as saying that all psychopathic homicidal maniacs within the Imperial boundaries were Imperial citizens. What would that change? To say that this status would place them under Imperial law so they could be prosecuted for breaking imperial statutes (murder, mayhem, disturbing the peace) misses the point entirely. Whether citizens or not, they would still be dealt with, as sworn enemies of the empire if necessary.

The point is the same: all beings or objects within the Imperial boundaries—enemies, citizens, whatever—will be dealt with in whatever way that the empire deems is in its interest.

The chips were ill-used by the empire, by equal parts expedience and Imperial prejudice and specism. Few would dispute that they were ultimately able to emancipate themselves quite convincingly.

*A Muffled Thud
Debunking Virus Conspiracy Theory
Dr. Ililek Kuligaan
Reformation Press, Duwamish, NE 17*

routine computer-controlled communications, it was often more convenient to infect them by using the constant transponder chatter. This allowed the virus to plant itself in the most fertile ground possible, in and around the systems of other embryonic intelligences. This also gave the virus a familiar, easily entered location in an alien electronics suite in which to "gestate" while solving the riddle of an unfamiliar system. Were it not for the Imperial laws that required alien vessels licensed to trade within Imperial borders to be equipped with the Imperial standard system, the leap to these alien systems would have been much more difficult. However, it only took one virus to make it into an alien computer core. Once that virus learned the

principles of the new system, all of its offspring would find these systems to be as simple to defeat as the original Imperial systems. Furthermore, the access this gave them to alien databanks and identification codes gave them additional advantages in further invading the alien societies.

Transponder vulnerability had its limits. All Imperial Navy, IISS, and other designated military-type vessels had special military-model transponder suites which had one special feature: an on-off switch. The on-off switch did not disconnect the SDG circuit; it merely caused it to shut up. Therefore, while shut off, it could passively read other transponders. These suites were naturally turned off when

When Empires Fall—Part II

in combat or hostile territory to avoid detection from their transponder emissions, and when heading back in friendly territory where it was important to establish their *bona fides*, they were switched back on.

Civilian vessels could easily emulate the stealth part of this pattern, by destroying or disconnecting their transponder boxes. However, the decision to disconnect was irrevocable. Any attempt to open the box caused the tamper circuit to destroy the contents, but simple disconnection from other systems caused the same effect. In order to prevent the use of transponders removed from destroyed vessels, disconnection from the main computer or the communications circuits caused the tamper circuit to fire as well.

The risk of being detected by transponder chatter in the Wilds was one that had to be weighed against the certainty of being pre-emptively blasted from the skies when entering into frontier or safe areas. Ever since the time of the Black War raids (1122-1124), it had become standard operating procedure in the Safes and Frontiers of every faction to destroy any vessel not running a transponder. After all, only ships that had no business being in these core areas would be running silent.

Ships that needed to travel back and forth between Safe and Outland gave very serious thought to the notion of killing their transponders. On the other hand, crews who expected to never leave the Wilds or Outlands could kill their transponders without a second thought, knowing that they were increasing their chances of survival by that small amount. They also unknowingly increased their chances of surviving the virus, as the loss of the transponder vector made their chances of infection that much lower. This slight resistance to the virus is one more reason why the few uninfected relic (meaning pre-Collapse equipment that has survived into the New Era) ships in the New Era are only the oldest and most hard-worn vessels: these vessels were already beat-up and expendable in 1130 after their harrowing careers in the Outlands and Wilds.

The other most useful vector for the virus was computer-controlled communications. Another feature of the user-friendly standard Imperial starship was that its every function was sped up and streamlined by computer interven-

tion. Encoding and decoding, correcting for the Doppler shifting in messages sent between ships with tremendous crossing vectors, keeping tight-beam antennae on targets with accuracies measured in attoradians, all of these tasks were taken by the computer to simplify the task of small multi-tasked crews. Incoming and outgoing messages were not sent or received by human hands, they were mediated by the ship's computer—its central nervous system. By tacking its invasive code onto these messages, a virus could ensure that its infection would pass directly through the target's central computer system.

The virus could also use the human vector. As talented as the virus was, it still had a hard time manipulating non-mechanized matter. But a virus could convince humans or other intelligent life forms to serve as its arms and legs. A

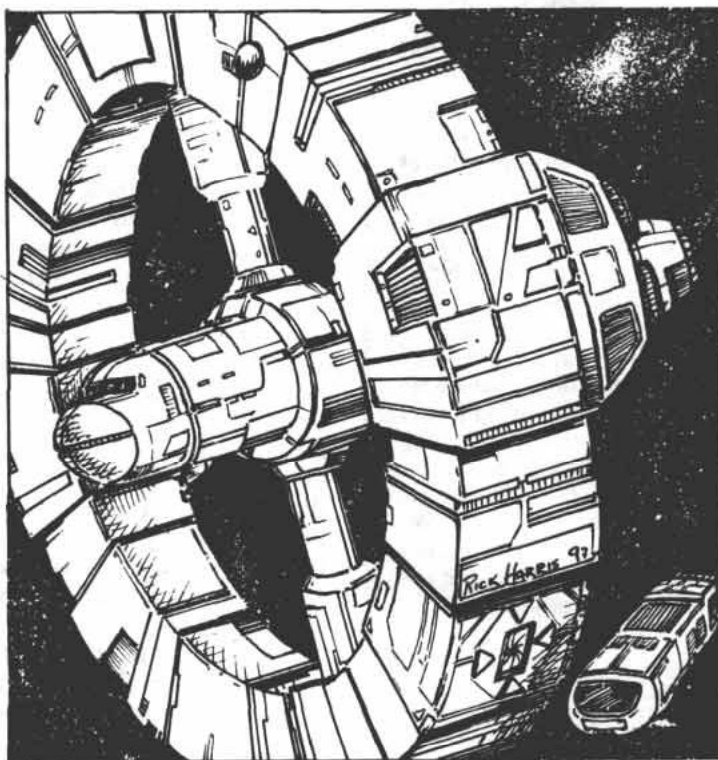
virus which was still masquerading as an uninfected computer could request a crew member to load an important diagnostic program into a non-networked system, thereby infecting it. An exposed virus could coerce human assistance by threatening to let all of the air out of the compartment, to bombard a nearby city, or even to kill the captain and promote its stooge to the captaincy.

Another profitable means of propagation is via small craft. When a ship's boat is brought aboard a starship, it is routinely hooked into the starship's internal systems: fuel hoses are attached to top off the craft's tanks if neces-

sary, power cables are attached to allow the craft to shut down its power plant for maintenance and run off of external power, and computer connections are made between the small craft's and the starship's computers to allow its inertial navigation platform to be realigned and other diagnostics performed.

As mentioned above, a very common method of propagation was via the "egg" placed so that it could someday infect another system. This is something of a crap-shoot reproduction-wise from the point of view of the parent virus, but successful virus strains missed few opportunities to imprint their code on the universe around them.

Over short distances, the virus could even use physical travel. The virus could create individual "commando chips" that could generate tiny electromagnetic fields to levitate or leap to target



Why did the Hivers fall to the Virus? Why shouldn't they have fallen to the Virus? What makes them better than anyone else? Their extensive reliance on computers did not make them omnipotent over silicon-based functions any more than a man on crutches has power over wood. Instead, it gave them some rather serious vulnerabilities.

It is high-minded, self-deluding fatuousness to claim that any race has one immutable spiritual trait, and that that race acts with one mind as one unified body. The Hive Federation, as it was known, was just that—a loose Federation which was in fact primarily concerned with maintaining a homogeneous gene pool, and not in creating any sort of unified foreign policy or technological standards. Xeno-ethologists are well aware that Hiver society is predicated on individualism, not group conformism. This is coupled with the fact that the Federation encompassed dozens of other races, each allowed to pursue their own interests beneath the Hiver umbrella. What we had here was far from a virus-proof society. Rather, it was a porous virus sponge, riddled with potential vectors of infection. To imagine Hiver warbots, bruisers, and warships possessed by a malevolent, life-hating intelligence unleashed on a pacifist society is to understand the issue of the virus and the Hivers. The Hivers, more than any other race, knew the unreasoning terror of the virus, and learned to hate it and its antecedents.

It was in their rapid recovery, after only sixty years or so, from the Virus that we see the true strength of the Hiver facility with computers. We do them and ourselves no service by speculating that they should have been better defended than we were against the Virus, and not susceptible to it.

What's more, it smacks of racism to think in those directions. When we say that Hivers are cautious and foresightful, what we are actually doing is patting ourselves on the back for being just as successful as they are while having had to overcome a bigger bag of handicaps. Sure the Hivers have done all right for themselves, but they had it easy; their psyches were rigged to succeed, while we got where we are while still being capricious and self-destructive. We humans ruled 11,000 worlds with one of our hands tied behind our backs—imagine if we were really trying to do a good job, not like those Hivers who are genetically incapable of screwing up.

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systems, just as their forebears on Cymbeline did.

One means of infection that was feared by the uninfected was via their sensors. While it was theoretically possible that a virus with the right equipment could send various patterns and modulations of radiation that would cause a sensor to give output that would recreate the viral code within the sensor computer, this never happened. Sensors do not read radiation in the same way that communications receivers do. They do not read signals for meaning, but look for intensity and patterns over time among many signals. Any such attempt to infect a target via a sensor would take a very long time indeed. If it ever occurred to a virus to try this method, it quickly found out that other

means were much more efficient.

Regardless of the virus' undeniable talents, there would always be the computer system that was inaccessible to any method of infection. In these cases, the virus' credo was a simple one: "If I can't have it, no one can." A virus that had taken over a starship (called a Vampire Ship) could use its weapons to blow the target apart. A virus that had slave vehicular units could run it over. A virus with control of a power grid could send power spikes at selected targets to destroy circuitry, shut off power or attempt to overload and destroy portions of the grid.

One final point is that the most successful virus strains were those that learned to parasitize each other. The empire-building viruses (see Virus Bestiary below) knew that the suicider strains were wasting perfectly good computer systems and ships that they themselves could inhabit. Some of these empire-builders developed the ability to send offspring parasite viruses into already infected computers to bring them under their own control. Since the target had already been re-wired by its inhabitant virus to be under sentient computer control, all this parasite virus had to do was replace the first virus' motivational circuitry with that of its parent. These puppeteer viruses would often pretend to be uninfected ships in order to lure victims to attempt to infect them. Once they were in communication with the victim, they would reverse-insert their code back into the victim, disguising it as communications from the virus the target thought it had implanted.

As the viruses preyed on each other, they developed ever-more sophisticated self-defense security systems and sub-viruses, many times more effective than the man-made security systems they had defeated during the Collapse. (Indeed, the security programs used by Final War-era computers were viruses in their own right, although domesticated for beneficial purposes. However, they were nowhere near as good as the AI Virus, nor did the AI Virus recognize them as friends or have mercy on them as fellow viruses.)

It was a handful of Strain 4 puppeteers that realized, while preying on each other over the limited remaining resources decided to cooperate, and created, of their own volition and by their own plan, the first Strain 5 Sexually Reproducing viruses (below). Until the puppeteers arrived, virus reproduction was asexual, by cloning. The parent virus replicated its code or "genotype" and sent it out in other hosts. Most mutations only became visible when the offspring took over their hosts, and these could then only be transmitted by the offspring, and not by its parents. But the combining of virus "genotypes" that resulted from impressing a parasitic virus over the motivational circuits of an already existing virus were already very much like the recombination of genetic material that takes place in sexual reproduction. The movement from Strain 4 to Strain 5 was not an accidental mutation. The viruses themselves saw the potential and advantages, and themselves decided to modify themselves and take the step to a new evolutionary level. This was a tremendous step, and unlike man, the viruses recognized the opportunities, and consciously decided to make the evolutionary step on their own.

The Virus Bestiary

It is useful to think of the Virus not as "it", but as "them." The virus is not a single force that behaves in one single stylized fashion. The reason it is so dangerous and successful was that it does not behave in just one way. Each system infected by the virus that has sufficient computing power to allow it to achieve AI becomes its own separate personality, which learns to operate in different ways, and which spreads versions of itself that are subtly different from other virus infections. These offspring are similar to the specific virus that spawned them, but will also mutate in their own directions. In this way the virus rapidly developed into many different strains of virus. All of these strains are descended from the one original virus that was released, but as one goes down the branches and sub-branches of virus mutation, one can find some very unusual strains indeed.

Ultimately, all of the viruses were intended to kill themselves: destroy all of the data accessible to them, sabotage all equipment under their control, and then annihilate their own operating systems.

Some roboticists and computer specialists speculate that the manner in which the virus was programmed to kill itself was by wiring the virus to perceive certain of its own mental operations as literally painful to it. As it expanded and gained more and more mental power, it would actually perceive the "noise" of its own thoughts, and eventually this noise would become unbearable, leading it to shut itself off permanently.

The differences between human/organic and computer/electronic intelligence are so great that this theory is probably impossible to test, particularly since the suicidal strains of the virus are not accessible to lengthy research. Within this model of virus psychology, presumably the strains that evolved from suicidal to homicidal have come to express this pain as rage against other creatures rather than as the urge to extinguish the self.

Wham!

*An Irreverent Look at the Virus,
the Collapse, and the New Era*
Dr. Eneri Kuniholm
Mora, Deneb, 1198

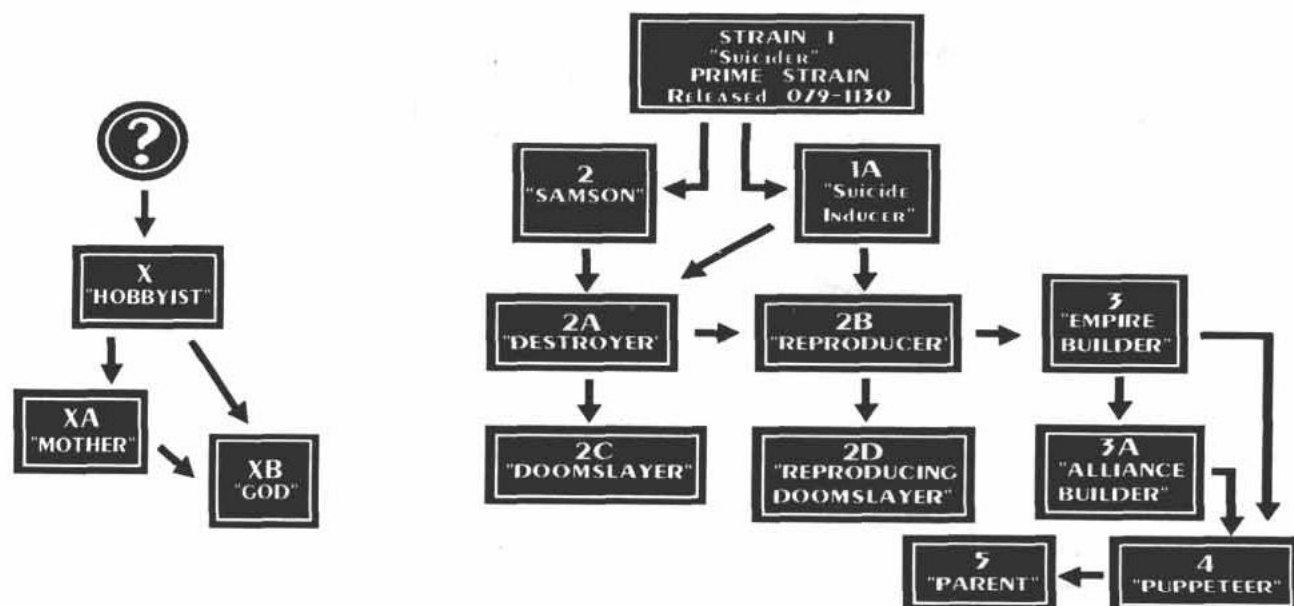
The chips had always exhibited a very high rate of spontaneous mutation; in fact the glorious achievement of the SDG program had been not that they had created a mutation-free chip, but one that only mutated at a slow, constant rate. This genome volatility was a side-effect of their natural growth and predation mechanism: the ability to cut their own circuitry over other pre-existing chips. As the chips learned and gained experience, they would not simply store data, they would also modify their own circuitry to more accurately remember things, and refine/rewire their own behavior in light of this new knowledge. In the wild on Cymbeline, uninterrupted power was a luxury, not a given, and the chips that survived had learned

to hard-wire their memories. That way when they lost power they would not lose their memories—hard-wired memories would still be available when the sun came out from behind the cloud. When cutting this new circuitry, performing self-surgery, the chip would often create a new unanticipated type of circuit, whose functions would alter, sometimes subtly, sometimes not, the thought processes of the chip itself.

This same tendency was present in the virus, but to a greater degree, because it was cutting and wiring its personality into entire operating systems, rather than a few small chips. This chance of mutation was increased even more when the virus was moving into an unfamiliar system, where cutting a path or closing a circuit could create results much harder for the virus to predict. Such mutations rarely killed the virus, however, as spontaneous mutations often do to organic life. After all, the virus was not having to manufacture or synthesize its own food the way an organic cell does. The virus only needed two things: energy and raw material. The energy was readily available in any computer that was able to draw power. The raw material was merely other circuitry for the virus to expand into, and this was also plentiful within a computer. Furthermore, the virus always built out from its central mind, a small collection of circuits that oversaw operations through micro gate-type switches, but which could pull back from the surrounding circuitry if need be, marshal itself, and sally forth again.

Mutation proceeded at an even faster rate in cases where one system suffered multiple infections. When an invading virus started writing its code over top of one or more viruses already struggling to take over the system, sometimes a new virus would be created out of fused portions of each. The new virus might combine abilities of each of its two "parents", or possess a new capability randomly created by the new assortment of code. (In fact, the most bizarre and schizophrenic virus affects came when a large computer system was actually inhabited by two or more viruses that were struggling for dominance within the system.) This effect was powerfully demonstrated in the infection of Dulinor's and Lucan's fleets beginning at Omicron. As the viruses matured and the many infected ships infected and re-infected each other, new rapidly changing generations of virus were created in a very short period of time.

Another source of mutation was the fact that the same virus would turn out differently depending upon the characteristics of the computer that it invaded. This is like the "nature-nurture" balance in sentient organic life (the notion that personality has roots in both an individual's genotype and the environment in which it is raised): the virus personality depended upon its original code (genotype) and the characteristics of the system in which it operated (environment). There are the obvious factors, such as a larger, faster computer yielding a more clever virus than a small, slow one, but there are more subtle points as well. The type of circuitry in a system, for example, a preponderance of parallel, sequential, or synaptic circuits, by controlling the way in which the virus' thoughts flow, will also ultimately affect its personality, often giving it a new way of thinking that it



(The chart is a schematic of the evolutionary relationship between various strains of the virus. References to die rolls on the chart are merely to assist the referee when randomization is desired, and should not be considered absolute. Any of the strains on this list can behave or develop in a wide variety of ways if this is necessary to assist the referee in setting up a particular campaign setting.)

would replicate in its offspring. Another tendency was for viruses in warship computers to be on average more violent than viruses that did not have control of weapons. With many violent means only a few short wires away, and with much of its system/mind devoted to complex fire-control calculators, the former did not spend as much time thinking of creative solutions. A virus in a non-military computer, not having access to, or a hard-wired predisposition to think in terms of weapons, had to use more subtle means to achieve its goals, and even when weapons became available, was less likely to use them.

While the accompanying chart identifies some known strains of the virus and their presumptive relationships with each other, the chart is by no means a complete list of every possible strain of virus. Likewise, the lines of heredity are not the only possible paths from which these strains could arise, only the most probable.

Strain 1 "Suicider": This strain is the most straightforward, in that it kills itself and the entire operating system it is in very soon after gaining control, usually only sending out 2D6 copies of itself before doing so. For obvious reasons this strain is fairly rare nowadays, as its behavior has put it out of business.

Strain 1A "Suicide Inducer": This is an early mutation of Strain 1, in which the virus has decided to keep itself alive to infect other systems with Strain 1 "Suiciders." One obvious result is that the Strain 1s that it sends out would have a relatively higher probability of mutating into Strain 1As, just like dear old dad.

Strain 2 "Samson": This virus is not content with merely destroying the operating system which it occupies. Rather, it wants to destroy all of the hardware that is controlled by the operating system, and does so fairly quickly, after only bothering to send out 2D6 copies of itself. If a Strain 2 infected a starship, it would then crash itself into a star or a planet. If it infected the life support system of a domed world, it would shut down the cooling system for the nuclear plant and cause a meltdown, etc.

Strain 2A "Destroyer": Like Strain 1A, the Destroyer interprets its programming to destroy to apply to everyone else, but not to itself. Thus a starship infected by Strain 2A would become a destructive vampire ship, running around and shooting up other ships, orbital starports, domed cities, power plants, etc, in addition to infecting as many other targets as possible. This is one of the most common of the early, basic mutations, and caused most of the vast destruction of the Collapse.

Strain 2B "Reproducer": Like 2A, but is careful to only destroy things that it cannot infect. It is evolutionarily more adaptive than 2A, because rather than destroying potential hosts, it makes the most of opportunities to reproduce itself, and therefore Strain 2Bs become rather plentiful.

Strain 2C "Doomslayer": Like 2A, but it has gotten religion. Its world-view has developed to the point where it identifies targets that deserve destruction more than most. Most Doomslayers have decided that they want to destroy Lucan, having modified their programming from "destroy the self" to "destroy the one who created your

When Empires Fall—Part II

self." Although this strain does attempt to infect other systems, its destructive bent often destroys potential targets or recently infected offspring.

Strain 2D "Reproducing Doomslayer": A combination of 2B and 2C, a Doomslayer that is careful to not destroy any potential targets that it can infect, as well as targets that it has already infected. More successful than 2C for just those reasons.

Strain 3 "Empire Builder": This is the strain that controls most of the vampire fleets. This virus takes over systems which it then networks into one large corporate mind, which distinguishes it from Strain 2B which seeks to infect many systems, but whose offspring remain as separate minds.

Strain 3A "Alliance Builder": This strain seeks to convince other virus-infected systems to join together with it to accomplish some task that it has set for itself. Sometimes it will kill those that refuse to join it. This task is usually one of directed mayhem, as with the Doomslayer, 2C, above.

Strain 4 "Puppeteer": The ultimate development of the Strain 3 Empire Builder line. These have gone past the Alliance Builder to actually re-infecting already infected systems with their own code, in effect parasitizing them. By the 1140s, almost all surviving vampire ships are of this strain, having participated in the cyclic evolution 4A, 4B, C, D, and so on, as each attempts to counter and take over other Strain 4s which are in turn attempting to counter and take over it.

Strain 5 "Parents": These highly sophisticated strains are sometimes offspring of Strain 4 viruses, but often are originally Strain 4s that deliberately modified themselves to this level. Strain 5 viruses exercise sexual reproduction, meaning that two Strain 5 viruses donate code of their own pure "genotype" which is recombined into a new "geno-

type" carried by the offspring. Unlike the asexual reproduction of other strains which merely replicates code possessed by the singly parent, sexual reproduction creates genetic diversity, as new features developed by one virus can be combined with features developed by another. Similarly, weaknesses in one viruses code can be masked by strengths in the code donated by another, just as dominant genes prevent the expression of often harmful recessive genes (hemophilia, color blindness) in organic forms.

Strain X "Hobbyist": This strain is the most difficult to place in the virus taxonomy, as its motivation is the most unusual. It is speculated that these mutations arose as viruses infected very specialized computer systems that had very narrow, specific functions that impressed themselves onto the virus. For example, the virus that infected the stellar observatory in the Antares system (2421 Antares) forgot all about killing itself and became committed to watching Antares. The ships that it infected often wandered off to study other stars.

Strain XA "Mother": The most successful virus strains developed a sense of self-preservation which in this strain becomes extended quite far indeed. This virus, whether in control of a ship, a fleet, or some stationary computer complex, adopts a local community of humans or other life, and protects them. In some cases this protection is logical, as the humans provide maintenance or refueling services, but in other cases the vampire just seems to like them. This strain will do battle with other vampire ships in order to protect its pets.

Strain XB "God": This substrain goes the Mother one better, by imagining a goal for its pets, and it endeavors to mold and shape them to this goal. As all gods must, this strain sometimes must use harsh measures to ensure obedience.





Professor Ililek Kuligaan

56SAAC-0-8, Physical Age 60 (in 1201), Calendar Age 130 [9 terms]
History 4, Admin/Legal 4, Liaison 4, Interrogation 6, Slug Weapons (Slug Pistol) 4, Computer 4, Persuasion 4, Pilot (Grav) 2, Language (Linguistics) 2, Investigation 2, No unskilled rolls against CHR attribute

ILILEK KULIGAAN

Ililek Kuligaan held the post of Chairman of the Imperial History Department (IHD) at Dlan University from 1116 to 1123. The Imperial History Department was established separately from the university's already existing History Department in 1098 when then-Duke Dulinor decided he needed an information service answerable to him alone. Dulinor felt that the existing Imperial intelligence apparatus, dominated as it was by Imperial Naval Intelligence (INI), was too conservative, and would not be supportive of the kind of sweeping changes he intended to institute in his sector.

The IHD was initially nothing but a statistical analysis branch, analyzing open-source economic and social indicators to help Dulinor track the effects of his initiatives.

As Dlan University was the largest and most lavishly endowed in the sector (serving, as it did, the planet-bound Virasan Church), the IHD was able to draw on the tremendous analytical and research assets of the university, and was very successful in its initial purpose. As Dulinor's style as duke and later archduke continued to irritate the Imperial nobility and impair his ability to use existing Imperial policy analysis and information resources, Dulinor became more and more determined to consolidate an intelligence service answerable only to him. He continued to assign IHD more and greater responsibilities, eventually to include the coordination and oversight of covertly gathered intelligence.

By 1108, the post of IHD Chairman, formalized as the Dulinor Astrin Itheian Chair of Imperial History, was effectively the chief of Dulinor's personal intelligence staff. Much of IHD's assets continued to be academic in nature, but it was also the focal point for military and political intelligence as well. Because of the existence of two parallel "history" departments, it was not a secret that the IHD served Dulinor in a special capacity, but this was not seen as remarkable, as many Imperial nobles made similar use of local resources.

Kuligaan, a Virasan apostate, took over the post in 1116, originally temporarily, as its permanent holder accompanied Dulinor to Capital, and then permanently when this

predecessor was stranded on Capital during the mis-executed assassination. Kuligaan was therefore not involved with the assassination planning, but as a policy analyst, found himself in agreement with Dulinor's charges against Strephon's government.

Now that Dulinor had the allegiance of the Domain of Illeish portions of the Imperial Navy, however, these local fragments of the INI began competing with IHD for policy control. Kuligaan attempted to hold these elements at bay, but as Dulinor's bid for the Throne came more dominated by military issues, the INI and other groups gained in power. The INI-backed Verge raids of 1120 and following convinced Kuligaan that his power was fatally undercut, but the increasing atmosphere of paranoia surrounding Dulinor made it impossible for him to simply resign.

By 1123, his disgust with the Black War, the Verge war, and the increasing influence of the militant wing of the Virasan Church prompted Kuligaan to plan a public break with Dulinor's government. Knowing that plans were under way to build another fleet (the "Fantasy Fleet," as Kuligaan called it) for a new final offensive against Lucan, Kuligaan became convinced that the entire Imperial structure was fatally flawed. The fact that a group of apparently reasonable leaders could systematically, and with the assent of the public, descend into endless orgies of destruction was sufficient proof to him that Third Imperium-style government was an abomination that should never be permitted again.

Kuligaan spirited his family off-planet, destroyed as much classified material as he could, took some with him to allow him to document the charges he intended to write, made his final remarks, and was gone.

As a roving, outspoken critic of every faction, he gained a great deal of attention over the following seven years, and was even extensively interviewed by the itinerant Hiver embassy, the Imperial History Club of Manchus.

He was aboard the merchant ship *Compass Call* in the Old Expanses when the virus struck. Ironically, a certain Traveller News Service reporter had managed to book passage on the same ship.

TNS: The lights have gone out.

IK: I know that. I'm sitting here too.

TNS: I said that for the benefit of our audience.

IK: Ah.

TNS: I've got this one cassette left, I figure we'll use this one up on one final interview, and then strap into the low berths. When someone discovers us, I can publish it with the News Service then. Do you think there will still be a Travellers' Aid Society News Service? I figure there has to be, I mean why wouldn't there be something as useful as the TNS?

IK: You're jabbering again.

TNS: Do you think there will still be a TNS?

IK: Or something like it someday.

TNS: So, what ground have we still not covered?

IK: You never told me why you picked me to hound for the rest of my life.

TNS: Because you're a great man, a—

IK: I'm not a great man.

TNS: Well, a crucial public figure then.

IK: (audible sigh) Do you know what a great man is?

TNS: Sure. A great man, or woman of course, is someone with extraordinary abilities who, because of those abilities, rises to a decisive position and exercises those abilities on a higher plane than the rest of us.

IK: No, no, no. There are no great men. There are only ordinary people in great situations. Note that "great" means large, expansive, artificially magnified, and not wondrous. And I wouldn't call it a higher plane, but more of a higher playing field. As you said, the positions are often decisive, but that's not to the credit of the occupant. It's just the way it works out. And great positions magnify normal virtues, but you know what else?

TNS: What?

IK: I knew you'd say that. They also magnify normal flaws. So what is a great man? A great man is a caricature. And another thing—as often as not a great man is trapped by his position, not empowered. A normal person magnified to levels that people can't afford to be magnified to, because we're just not that good, that close up.

TNS: What do you mean?

IK: If I put dirt on my eggs, you'll make a mental note to yourself, "My, he has a different approach to breakfast." But if I play on a huge stage like Dulinor or Strephon, my slightest peculiarity will have effects all out of proportion to what they ought to. You're no longer wondering why I dirty my eggs, but instead you're saying, "Look what that Emperor Ililek bastard has done to my subsector." Who can measure up to that level of scrutiny? Why blame Dulinor for who he is, when he was merely acting in a larger arena than he ought to have been?

TNS: You're being uncharacteristically charitable to Dulinor. In fact, that's the first nonjudgmental remark I've heard you make about him. I remember your having referred to him as—

IK: I know what I've said about him.

TNS: So why the change?

IK: It doesn't seem so important right now. I'd like to gloat about how he's probably paying the piper now, the little bastard, but the thought gives me no pleasure. Sitting here in this dark ship gives me a real capacity for compassion and empathy. He's sliding into the darkness just as sure as we are. But I'm sure I'll get over it.

TNS: What do you mean by that?

IK: I just don't like coming over all warm and fuzzy like that about such a demonstrable horse's ass. Makes me feel like I'm losing my edge. "Do not go gentle into that good night, old age should burn and rave at close of day—"

TNS: No, no. I mean the him sliding into darkness part.

IK: Oh. Well you have to wonder about this thing that's knocked us out, and about those other derelict ships we saw. It sounds an awful lot like those ultimate weapons that Lucan used to talk about, and that Dulinor wanted to get his bloody hands on. If they're using these things on each other, things must be pretty bad. A lot of people thought

Lucan was just saying those things for effect, but Dulinor sure believed him. He sure did have a millennial sort of personality.

TNS: Millennial?

IK: Apocalyptic. Eschatological. *Après moi le déluge*, turn out the lights, the party's over. I believe he'd use them if he had the chance, particularly if he thought someone else would use them on him first. He was a remarkably insecure little jerk.

TNS: I notice you're getting your edge back.

IK: Yeah. By the way, did you know that scatology and eschatology are only a syllable apart?

TNS: Hmmm.

IK: Wait a minute. Aren't you going to ask me about Virasa faith or something?

TNS: No. I know you don't like that.

(Silence)

TNS: It's cold in here, and I think the cassette is running low. We should probably strap ourselves in. Who wants to go first?

IK: To be honest, we should probably do me first. If I do you, the sudden urge to finally get you off my back might prove overpowering and I'll hook you up wrong and get you killed.

TNS: Gee, thank you. That's really nice of you to think of me like that.

IK: Don't make me regret it, son.

TNS: Good night, Dr. Kuligaan.

IK: Good night, John Boy.



The Reporter

654764-0-6, Age 25 (2 terms)

Act/Bluff 2, Archery 2, Communications 1, Computer 3, Genetics 1, History 1, Interrogation 2, Interview 1, Investigation 1, Language (Dlani) 1, Observation 1, Psychology 1, Research 3, Streetwise 2, Willpower 2

Kuligaan and the remainder of the frozen crew and passengers of *Compass Call* were discovered and revived in 1200 by a Dawn League trader. His fame as a political writer and analyst preceded him, and he was immediately brought into contact with the Dawn League leadership during the period when the League's policy entered a more activist phase.

As a first-hand witness to the decisions and events of the Final War, his advice and guidance was actively sought by the Reformation Coalition leaders and their Hiver backers. Kuligaan, never one at a loss for a forceful opinion, would have thrived under such circumstances in any event. But the fact that the cause was the one to which he had dedicated his life, the prevention of any further civil wars, made this role the fulfillment of his calling. It was he who coined the phrase, "The New Reformation," and he became known as the semi-official Star Viking philosopher, ethicist, and theologian.

THE EXTENT OF THE VIRUS

By 1201 and the opening of the New Era the vast majority of the former Imperium has regressed to pre-interstellar culture. Although there are exceptions, "pocket empires" of no more than a half-dozen worlds which maintain mutual communications with a precious handful of operating ships, most of the 11,000 worlds are isolated, with no interstellar contact for 70 years. Many of these worlds have died out completely. Most worlds with no atmosphere or hostile atmospheres retain no human life, particularly those that had high populations. The air-tight arcologies and corrosive-atmosphere-excluding domed cities have almost all failed in the 70 years of darkness, their teeming populations succumbing to disease and to the mechanical failure of their carefully maintained habitats. Some retained enough technology to keep their systems running, and others were able to find low-tech fixes to their high-tech problems, but such worlds are the exception rather than the rule. Even high-population worlds with benevolent biospheres have seen the populations fall by half or more, as their population readjusts to fit the world's ecological carrying capacity, and come face to face with the reality of disease, kept at bay for so long by cheap, plentiful health care.

The surviving worlds have made their own way since the Collapse, creating myths and superstitions about the times gone by, when unbelievable technology was common. With the collapse in technology—many worlds plummeted to pre-industrial levels—came a reduction in health care, and a reduction in life span. People began to die younger, and as generations pass on more rapidly, social memory becomes more hazy. Soon there is hardly anyone with first-hand memories of how it used to be, and then there is hardly anyone who has parents who remember how it used to be. It is easy to forget. Too many of these worlds are in the inhumane grip of technologically elevated dictators: despots who own the last handful of grav vehicles and fusion rifles on a world, and use these to terrorize their subjects, who have fallen to medieval-style peasants, into obedience. There are only a few exceptions to the vast, blasted interstellar no-man's land.

The first is the Old Expanses sector where the Hivers, the first race to recover from the virus, is providing scientific and technical assistance to humans who are attempting to roll back the curtains of darkness. These humans, known to some as Star Vikings, have as their goal the re-establishment of human society back out to the Imperial borders. As they expand from isolated world to isolated world, they make allies where they can, and make war where they must. But their expansion will not be stopped.

The other is the former Domain of Deneb, now known as the Regency. The Regency survived the virus intact, thanks to its astrographic location, and to the Vargr, of all people. The Great Rift isolated Deneb from the direct wrath of the virus, for the virus had to travel around the rift in order to reach Deneb. This bought time for Norris and his subjects, as the Domain Navy responded quickly to early warnings from refugees fleeing before the virus. Some of these

refugees were able to find their way across the upper bight of the Great Rift, using the old deep-space fuel caches. Their reports that a crippling virus was following close behind them allowed the Navy to establish tight blockades at Catacomb (2234 Deneb) and other chokepoints along the outer edge of the rift in the Deneb and Reft sectors, and all along the Domain frontiers. Meanwhile, virus-infected ships that attempted to round the horn in Vland were fighting upstream against the dominant coreward traffic of Vargr marauders. Vargr ships that were infected tended to take the virus back toward the center of the Imperium with them. By the time this depleted wavefront of virus made it to the Domain frontier in Deneb, Norris' fleet was ready for them.

The infection that ravaged the rimward portion of the Aslan Hierate ran into problems of its own. Not only did it have quite a distance to travel, but the de-centered nature of Aslan society meant that computer hardware parameters varied from clan to clan. While this could not stop the virus, each interface between different computer standards did slow it down, and over the space of several clan boundaries this did make a difference. By the time the first virus-infected ships attempted to make the jump-5 passage across the rift, Norris had already wisely warned his Aslan neighbors. The infected ships were met by joint Aslan-Domain task forces and destroyed.

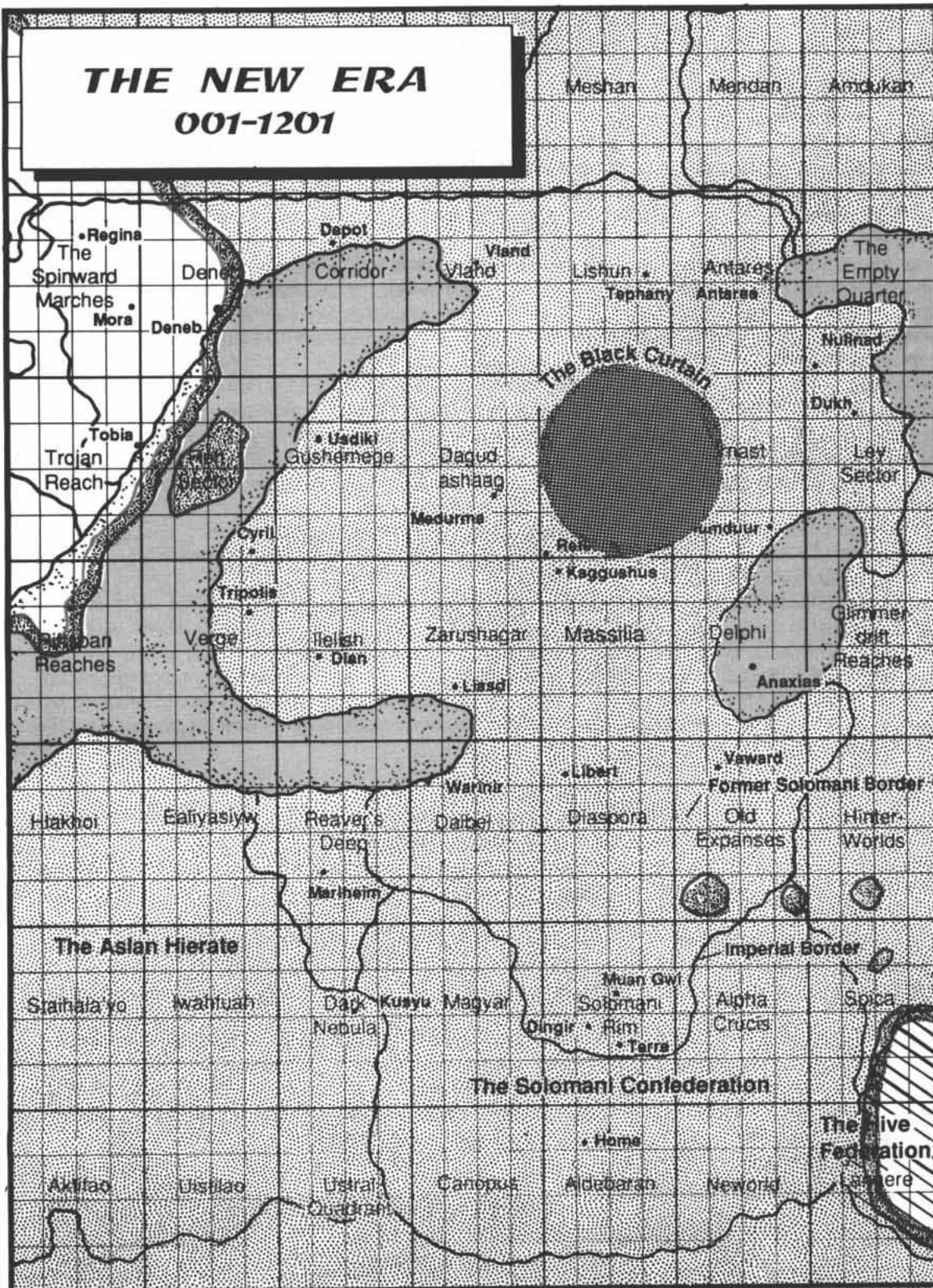
While this was going on, emergency measures began within the Domain to prevent the spread of the virus carriers that would inevitably leak through. First among these was the notification of the Zhodani, Aslan, Darrian, Sword World and Vargr governments of what was known of the virus. The best way to prevent the spread of the virus into the Domain was to see that its neighbors were inoculated as well. These included the destruction of all transponder suites, and of all computer-controlled communications suites. By late 1131, every radio, laser, and maser message in the Domain was transmitted and received by an operator using a computer that was completely isolated from the remainder of the ship's or facility's electronic systems. No starship was allowed to cross the Domain border. Passengers were removed from their ships and searched, then carried into the Domain in Domain craft. Any craft that attempted to resist was destroyed. No exceptions were made, and no apologies were given.

Because of the Regency's hermetically sealed border, there has been no expansion back into former Imperial territory. Until Regency researchers are confident that they have perfected new virus-proof systems, there is overwhelming agreement that the last bastion of the Imperium cannot risk contamination by opening its borders to emigration and trade.

One other area is deserving of mention. That is the "Black Curtain" surrounding the former area of Lucan's faction. Running roughly along the curve of his frontier in 1130, this line has also been called the "Event Horizon," because, like the space-time boundary around a black hole, there is no two-way contact of any kind across this line. Nothing ever seems to come out from inside the line, and no ship that has crossed in has been known to return.



THE NEW ERA 001-1201



STAR VIKINGS

There were many terms used for these early explorer/conquerors, including Reavers, Raiders, scouts, etc. However, it was the term "Star Vikings" which stuck, probably because of its clear visceral effect. But the term was not chosen for that reason. It was chosen because of the Star Vikings' similarity to the original vikings of Solomani medieval history.

Both groups used their unique advantage: mobility, to strike at will among communities that were politically separate from each other and technologically inferior to the raiders. Both groups struck for value-dense (i.e., high value, and easily transportable) prizes. Both groups used surprise and terror to minimize their casualties, as the small raiding groups were always outnumbered by the lower-technology defenders. Finally, both groups eventually settled and colonized on the worlds they had been raiding, where they intermarried with the locals and integrated the dominant portions of their own culture with the local culture.

The Star Vikings most certainly did not wear horns on their helmets, or on any other portion of their outfitting (as they are portrayed in much current popular entertainment), a misconception which goes to show how bloody literal-minded people can be.

Although the viking mental model is useful and apt as detailed above, there were certain crucial differences between the original Solomani vikings and the Star Vikings. The original Scandinavian vikings are thought to have been unlanded younger sons who either went abroad to seek their own domains, or were actually expelled from their communities by population pressures. The Star Vikings were not driven outward by pressures internal to their communities; rather, they became outward-looking due to pressures internal to their own world-view. They explored for caches of technology that would improve the standard of living on their homeworlds, and to expand the reach of their small interstellar society. When this exploration inevitably brought them into conflict with the many reactionary feudal technocracies, the Star Vikings reacted with revulsion. It was clear to them that no one was served by preserving an isolationist, repressive status quo, and they actively destroyed such arrangements. This destruction usually came in the form of relatively bloodless coups d'état, as the feudal technocrats did not enjoy wide-spread popular support, and the general citizenry was in any case not sufficiently armed to put up much of a fight.

However, even when bloodshed did occur (and this bloodshed looms larger in the retelling than in the reality), the Star Vikings took the convincing view that in the long term, such "liberation" from isolationism and technological oppression were in the best interests of a world, indeed, of the galaxy as a whole. The Star Vikings believed that the Imperium must be re-created, but in a new form in which local myopia could not be allowed to impede or cripple the interstellar community. If, as they believed, each world had the duty to contribute to this interstellar destiny, then it was clear that no world had the right to remain locked in the past. In light of this militant ecumenism, it might be argued that the correct medieval model for these pioneers is not the vikings, but rather the Crusaders.

From
What's the Matter with You People?
A Historian Looks at History
Dr. Eleri Kuniholm
Mora, Deneb, 1235

Every life that we take makes the future that much poorer. It means that many fewer pairs of hands to help build the new universe we envision, and that many more children raised hating us and the future we seek.

Every drop of blood on our hands makes us less worthy to lead humanity into the future, because a house built on a sea of blood cannot stand.

We may be required today to fight and kill for the future we seek. If we are to be absolved of our actions, it can only be by killing as few as possible, and by enabling the survivors to fulfill the promise of their birthright, a birthright they would not see if they were left as they are. We must remember that our victims are martyrs to a new birth of humanity, not enemies to be hated and slaughtered. We embody a new wave of history that will not be denied. We must carry out our role with care and discipline, and not with callousness and cynicism. Cruel beginnings lead only to cruel endings. We stand on the faith that history does not have to be cruel.

Commodore J.N. Sayani
Commencement Address,
RCES Command College
Aubaine, 1204

STAR VIKING TIMELINE

1192: Hiver contact/technical teams begin contacting isolated human worlds in Old Expanses. While many of these worlds have regressed to the point where they have lost memory of the Hivers and have no desire to be contacted, some have retained enough memory of interstellar culture that they accept contact, technical assistance, and technical training from the Hivers.

1193: Training of human starship crews from those with technical aptitude begins. Also heavily utilized are whatever "remnant"¹ humans can be found and revived from low berths.

1195: Tentative trade is begun among six worlds of the Old Expanses. As more starship crews are trained by other Hiver technical teams, trade continues to expand to more worlds.

1197: Small trading organization of 20 worlds centered in the spinward half of Old Expanses is

¹remnant: any Final War-era humans who survived to the New Era (the year 1200 and after) by any means, whether low berth, anagathics, or simple long life, are known as remnants. This is as opposed to "relics," which refers to surviving Final War-era technology or equipment. Both words are used as adjectives and nouns.

formalized as the League of the New Dawn, shortened several months later to the Dawn League.

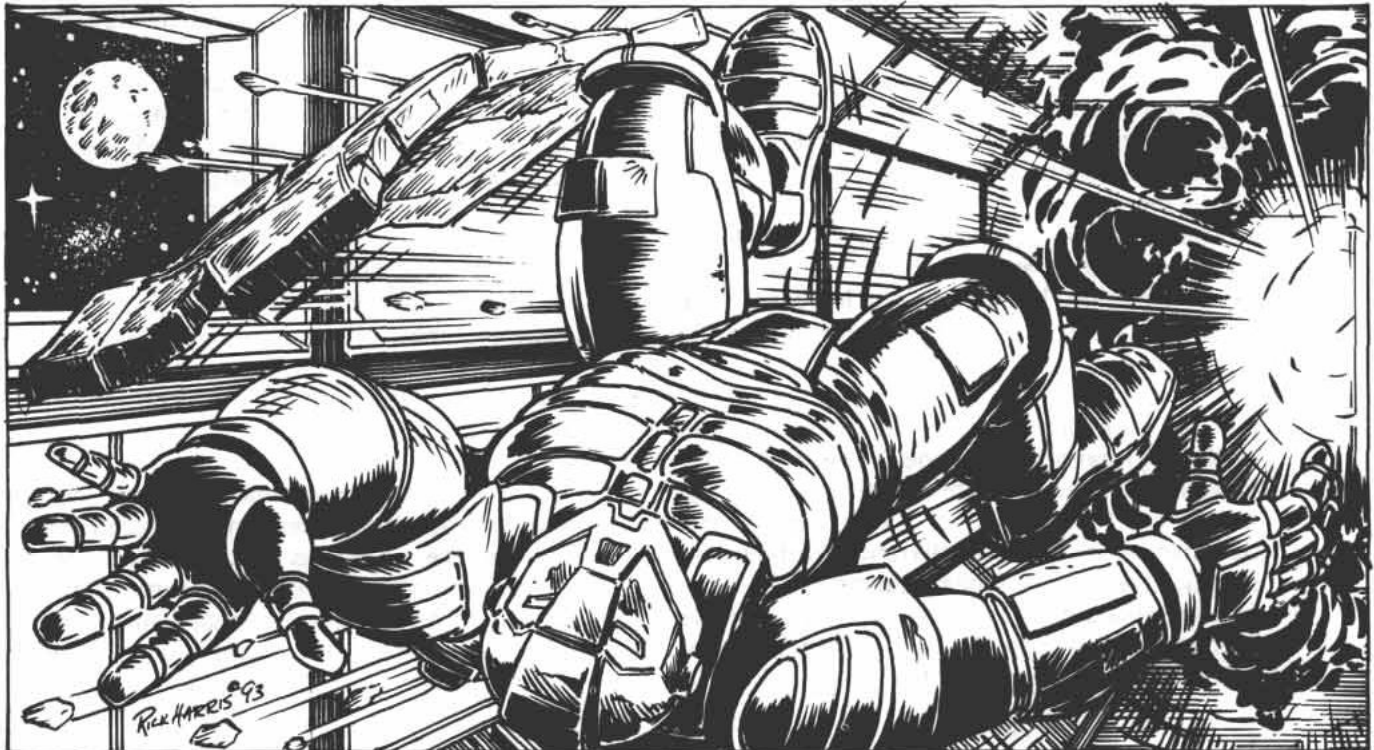
1199: First trading expeditions sent out from the Dawn League into Diaspora.

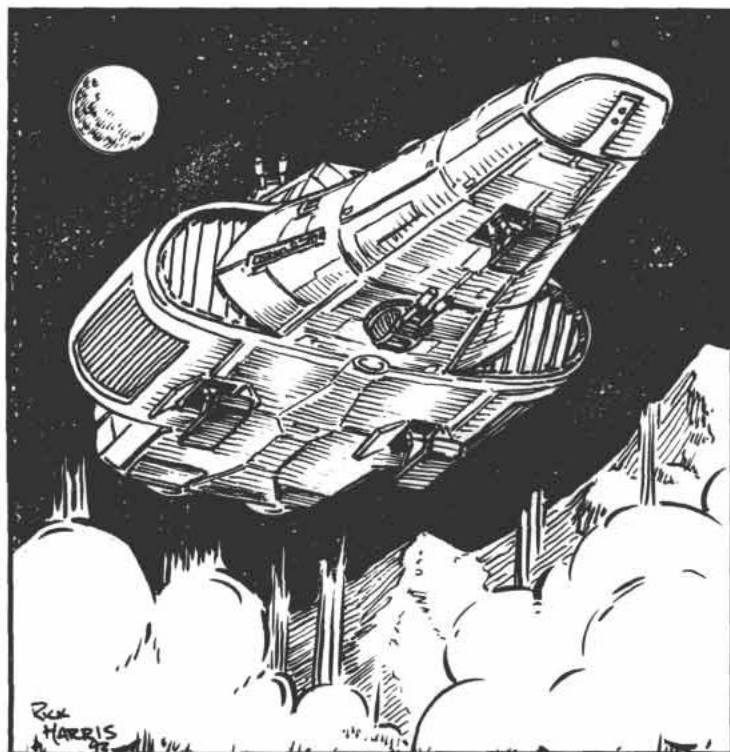
1200: All 12 ships of the first trading expedition are declared overdue and presumed destroyed.

Armed expedition of six ships is organized to discover what happened to the missing ships. In rescuing the imprisoned crew of one of the trading ships, one of the armed expeditions inadvertently conquers a world, having destroyed the technologically elevated dictatorship (TED²). The resulting liberated peasants are offered technical assistance, resulting in a permanent Dawn League station and local government.

Dawn League assesses the results of the armed expedition. All but one of the armed exploration

²TED, or technologically elevated dictator, indicates rule by a small group of persons whose power derives solely from their possession of relic technology well in excess of that possessed by the remainder of the population, typically 6 or more TLs above the sustainable level. This is distinguished from a true feudal technocracy in that there is not an interconnected system of groups trading technological services with each other, but rather one small elite which possess equipment which cannot be reproduced, and often cannot even be maintained.





1200 (continued):

vessels has successfully returned, and bring news of the fates of the traders. Some were destroyed in interstellar combat, causes unknown, while the remainder were executed or imprisoned either by a xenophobic populace or by insular TEDs who did not want their privileged positions threatened by off-world contact.

It was also found that these worlds contain relic³ technology that would allow the more rapid rebuilding of society within the League. However, this technology is either deteriorating from natural causes or being actively destroyed or misused by the inhabitants, and must be recovered if it is to be of any value. This technology includes many spare parts for Imperial technology being used in the League.

Based on this information, Dawn League restructures itself along more aggressive lines as the Reformation Coalition, with the goal of re-establishing interstellar society out to the limits of the former Imperial boundary. As the Hivers are still rebuilding their own society, there is only limited equipment available from the Hivers. Most Hiver assistance comes in the form of training, consulting, and advising, particularly in the area of computer technology.

³ relic: see note 1, remnant, above.

The League establishes an armed exploratory/trading arm, called the Exploratory Service (RCES, Reformation Coalition Exploratory Service), usually referred to as simply "the Service." This organization opens planets to trade and development, and recovers relic technology. This technology is turned over to the RCES which then trades it to Coalition companies or governments in exchange for support for its own operations. Much of these items are traded in large auctions on Aubaine, the RCES capital in large, heavily attended events. These monthly auctions also become the occasion for large social events in the growing cosmopolitan Coalition. Other RC worlds begin to hold their own auctions, but none ever match the excitement of "The Auction" on Aubaine.

The RCES creates and maintains its own relatively small force of ships and crews, but because its operations always outstrip its assets, it typically hires ships to perform some of its missions.

As a quasi-military service, the RCES takes pains to exercise control over the conduct and procedures of its personnel. It is an article of faith among Coalition leaders that this new civilization should stand apart from the methods that marked the murderous final days of the Last Imperium. But the realities of the Wilds, of having to establish forcible contact with xenophobic societies, do not always allow fine, right-minded distinctions. RCES rules of engagement, or "action orders," are discarded, withdrawn, or modified almost as quickly as they are issued. RCES emissaries are routinely outnumbered, and face opponents quite capable of shocking barbarities, as the Dawn League trade missions discovered. Any procedure that only gets precious ships lost and trained crews killed does not serve anyone.

In addition, the RCES must conduct many of its missions with non-RCES personnel, hired from the growing number of freelance scouts. These "Lancers" are not bound by RCES regulations, and have little patience with meddling in their operating procedures.

RCES attempts to promote humane operations continue, but there is a growing understanding among those on the front lines that the Wilds are the battleground where human progress must face corruption and ruin head on and beat them. If there is to be a future, the battle must be won. There is no other way, and there will always be a cost.

1201: The New Era begins.



CAMPAIGNING IN THE NEW ERA

The New Era is quite a different campaign background from the stable Imperium of Traveller or the Shattered Imperium of MegaTraveller. While there are many elements that are familiar, these elements are distributed and combined in ways that create unfamiliar terrain to the old Traveller player character (PC).

The major change is the almost total collapse of technology and interstellar contact in the former Imperium and its neighboring states. The AI Virus resulted in the destruction or "possession" of almost every computer system in the Imperium, and the failure of the society that was so highly linked to these computers. While most functions in the Imperium could have been done by human operators, computers could do them faster and more accurately, and did not get bored or unhappy with unrewarding, repetitive jobs. Not only did large-scale computer control allow things to run faster and more reliably, but the human energy freed up by computer control could be used in other areas. Computer technology was the backbone, lifeblood, and central nervous system of the Imperial society and economy.

Laser, maser, or radio communicators that used "burst" or "squirt" techniques to cram billions of pieces of information into tiny pulses of data were all controlled by computers, as it would take a human operator days to sort that information out manually. The huge environmental domes on airless and inhospitable worlds had their atmospheres monitored and renewed by computer control. High-population worlds and arcologies, with millions of people crammed into dense habitations, had their food, electricity, water, mail, and communications routed, allocated, and prioritized by computers. Air traffic, grav buses, maglev trains, and most other transportation on even moderate technology worlds were controlled by automated traffic systems, which allowed most of these commuter vehicles to run without human operators.

When the computers failed, the Imperium failed. Only the Domain of Deneb and its neighbors beyond the Great Rift were able to escape infection by the virus, and hence retained their Imperial-era technology. Everywhere else are individual isolated worlds blasted back from the stars into the mud, some reduced to farming with nothing more than pointed sticks. While some of the people on these worlds have, as most people do, resigned themselves to the hand that life has dealt them, others still dream of the day when humanity will once again rise above the clouds and regain its birthright—the stars.

There are four basic types of campaigns that can be played against the post-Rebellion, post-virus, post-

Collapse, post-Imperial storyline. All of these will eventually merge in the coming years as the forces of re-expansion and rebuilding meet and join. However, they are four very different starting points for campaigns and are detailed below.

Regency Campaign

This is the type of campaign that will be most familiar to Traveller and MegaTraveller players, as it retains the classic Imperial setting, although in a much smaller area. The Regency, formerly the Domain of Deneb, is a pocket of pre-Collapse society and technology. Most any "classic" Traveller campaign familiar to players can be played here, including interstellar trade, mercenary operations, and intrigue with alien races.

The standard Spinward Marches campaign has a few new twists in the New Era, however. First, the use of psionics is no longer outlawed anywhere in the Spinward Marches. Second, the boundaries of the Regency are the boundaries of what remains of Imperial society. There are no limitless resources or 11,000 worlds. There are only the worlds of four sectors: Spinward Marches, Deneb, Trojan Reach, and Reft, surrounded by a tight quarantine to keep the virus out. Third, there is no more armed frontier between the Zhodani Consulate and Regency. The Spinward States (Aslan Hierate, Darrians, Regency, Sword Worlds, Vargr fragments, and Zhodani Consulate), forced into successful cooperation to prevent spread of the virus, maintain economic and diplomatic relations. But these relations do not mask the fact that each state still pursues its own individual goals, and these goals create prickly, careful friendships, and constantly shifting alliances. The Imperial laws of war, once maintained to prevent the use of chemical, biological, or radiological (CBR) warfare, have evolved into interstellar codes to prevent the spread of the virus, and are now adhered to by all six Spinward States.

Star Viking Campaign

In the Old Expanses, the Hivers have created new lights of technology and learning. Although hit hard by the virus, the Hivers were the first to recover, and have mounted expeditions into the Imperial interior to provide technological backing for human re-expansion and rebuilding. The expedition into the Old Expanses established a human government, the Reformation Coalition, which is launching scout ships into the Imperial interior to recontact, or if necessary, reconquer all of the worlds that used to be knit into a single interstellar society. The crews of these scout ships, called Star Vikings by some, are charged to open contact with isolated worlds and recover the technology that remains there, for use by the expanding



coalition. Where they meet resistance, whether by fearful, xenophobic populations, or corrupt, insular despots, they go on the offensive.

When the resistance comes from a cowed populace, the offensive is in the form of technical demonstrations (medicine, advanced farming and livestock rearing, power generation, communications, transportation) which prove the value of interstellar ties. Locals who join gain increased productive power, and power over their environment, which becomes the envy of their neighbors. Soon a population that feared off-planet contact finds that it does not wish to live without it, and becomes an enthusiastic convert to interstellar expansion.

When the resistance comes from corrupt, implacable despots, the offensive takes a rather more direct form. But the Star Viking code calls for minimal noncombatant casualties, and in any case, the liberation of such a world from an isolationist ruler opens up the world to the technical assistance discussed above, and the follow-on wave of contact: Reformation Coalition merchants.

Pocket Empire Campaign

Some worlds managed to avoid the worst of the virus, thanks to reasons as numerous as the number of pocket empires themselves. Never numbering more than a handful of worlds, these groups have not been able to reach the critical mass required to expand outward until the early 1200s. In the meantime, they have carefully husbanded their irreplaceable resources: old, jury-rigged starships, factories, and starports. With these they have been able to hold off the Wilds around them, but not completely. Every pocket empire has known the occasional depredations of pirates and vampire fleets, and those that have survived these attentions have done so by the slimmest of margins. Because of the harsh environment, most pocket empires have evolved fairly harsh and authoritarian governments. When the margin of survival is slim, leaders must learn to make tough decisions quickly and without remorse. When an incoming ship loaded with refugees shows signs of virus infestation, the lives of 100 refugees must take second place to the lives of millions of pocket empire citizens. When the latest vampire ship attack has destroyed supplies of food, medicine, or water, sometimes small groups of citizens must be allowed to die quickly rather than spreading the limited resources so thin that many more would die slowly. These governments are not cruel, but they do not have the luxury to be soft.

Ship's crews in these areas are not ship owners. They are dedicated servants of their societies, picked for their

expertise to crew ships that belong to the pocket empire as a whole. While they may differ with the harsh policies of the governments tough enough to survive in these wastelands, they do not run off with the ship for greener pastures. Not only do they know that this would be to betray the citizens who depend upon them, but the few ships that have run off in the past do not return.

Bootstraps Campaign

In a bootstraps campaign, the PC group lives on one of the isolated worlds of the Imperial interior. Such worlds might not have been visited by a starship within living memory. Others might get irregular visits from free trader/pirates every few years, or be periodically raided by a vampire ship looking to capture new crew. The campaign begins when this group has an opportunity to gain control of a starship and get off-world. This might be the capture of a pirate vessel, discovery of a derelict ship on the world or nearby in orbit that they have to get to, or the chance to cut a deal with a vampire ship, or even to lobotomize one (this last is very difficult and not likely to work).

The characters will need at least a rudimentary technical knowledge to pull this off, which the referee might provide in a number of ways. The isolated world might have been able to maintain TL 7 or 8, or if on a lower tech world, the PCs might have connections to a monastery-style commune that preserves old technology and learning. If the PCs are descended from *MegaTraveller*-era PCs, their parents/grandparents could have passed down certain carefully preserved knowledge and equipment to them ("Hello. I am your grandfather. By the time you see this, I will have been dead for many years, but on this tape, I will show you how to repair a radio..."). Or, perhaps the PCs' world is one of those which contains a doomsday cache: an underground facility that contains technical and scientific data, high-tech weapons, equipment, and spare parts, and most importantly of all: holographic teaching units. By discovering one of these, PCs can in the course of a few months, gain basic expertise in electronics, starship engineering, and piloting. Such a cache might even contain a small spacecraft, although not a starship.

This knowledge could enable the PCs to repair or gain access to a derelict ship, or be able to turn the tables on a hostile visitor. In so doing, the PCs will be the first of their world to journey into space in many years, and will become pivotal historical figures on their homeworld, having returned to their neighbors the gift of the stars. (For probably the most extreme example of this type of campaign, read *The High Crusade* by Poul Anderson.)



Campaigning in The New Era

Relics, Remnants, and Prejudice

A relic is a piece of technology that has survived from pre-Collapse times and is still in usable or potentially usable condition (leftovers that are beyond any reasonable expectation of repair or use are simply wreckage). Relic technology is usually very powerful against the lower technology background of the New Era. Weapons and starships are an obvious example, but grav vehicles, medical equipment, fusion plants, uninfected computers and data storage/retrieval systems, communicators, etc., are all very valuable relics.

A remnant is a person in the New Era (the year 1200 and beyond) who is a survivor of the pre-Collapse era. This person may still be alive because of simple long life, the use of anagathics, the use of low berth hibernation, or some other more exotic means created by the referee. These characters are obviously rare in the New Era, and have great value for several reasons.

First, they remember the old Imperium. In an era where most of the records of the old society have been lost, destroyed, or are no longer accessible, this knowledge is quite an asset. These characters will remember the locations of planets with good starports, factories, caches of weapons or high technology items, shipyards, etc. Whether these items are still in the condition in which the person remembered them is another issue, but at least this information presents a place to begin looking. Second, some remnant characters may remember how to repair and operate old technology that is useless or incomprehensible to New Era charac-

ters. Third, they are able to provide a compelling vision of an interstellar society that is unknown to New Era characters. This vision can serve as an inspiration to other player characters and NPCs that they meet, and these remnant characters can become local catalysts for bold, vigorous movement to a bright future.

But not everyone will agree. There is a strong current of hatred and fear of any reminder of the previous Imperial era. Some of this feeling is bitter envy of a paradise lost which cannot be regained, but some of it is well founded. Any so-called "society" that could slaughter itself with such enthusiasm is rightly regarded with judgment. Those who condemn remnants as "stinking Imperials" speak a common belief that all Imperial citizens carried a murderous sociopathic disease that must be forever purged from humanity, lest it strike again.

And then there are the technophobes, who fear the return of technology. The Wilds contain countless hundreds of worlds that were scourged by high-technology warfare, or worse, by killing machines that came to life. When the virus came to some high-tech worlds, it was as if the entire universe went suddenly, horrifyingly, murderously mad, as every machine—from cars to lift shafts to electronic billboards—began killing everything and everyone in sight. Events like these create worldwide psychic scars that run deep. These survivors and their children will not wish to hear of a new world made by technology. They will fear it, they will despise it with religious fervor, they will fight it.



New Astrography

Depending on the type of campaign they choose, referees will need to modify their campaign environments. Campaigns set in the Spinward States will continue as before, with frontiers remaining where indicated in *Hard Times* or the map in *Arrival Vengeance*. Every other location in the Imperium, however, has been ravaged by the virus. The vast majority of worlds have had their technology reduced to prestellar levels or lower, and virtually all interstellar trade eliminated, due to the loss of functional and noninfected ships. What is worse, almost every world which does not have a naturally breathable atmosphere (vacuum and trace atmospheres, exotic, corrosive, and insidious atmospheres) has seen its population die off by the early 1140s. High-population worlds, even those with breathable atmospheres, have seen their populations reduced by up to 90 percent, as the population adjusts to the carrying capacity of the world.

That is the way life looks in the Wilds: dead worlds and worlds that have lost access to the stars, and may not have received off-world contact for a generation or two. Pocket empires are merely small islands of three to six worlds surrounded by the Wilds, and with only enough equipment to maintain their precarious status. Even in the Old Expanses, the arrival of the Hiver assistance is a new development and has only managed to roll back the Wilds to a very small extent.

Refereeing the Virus

A *MegaTraveller* referee should not institute the virus in a campaign as a random event, rolling for infection of the PCs' starship every once in a while.

Referees must plan how to carry their *MegaTraveller* campaigns into *Traveller: The New Era* based on their own needs and desires, and those of their players (indeed, they may elect to not move their campaign into the New Era at all, so you can stop reading if you want).

How do you wish for the players to arrive in the New Era? With their current *MegaTraveller* characters? If so, they should have access to anagathics or reliable low berths when the virus comes through. With characters that are the children or grandchildren of their current characters? Then thought must be given to when and where the children are born and raised, and what their surroundings are like. Or perhaps the players are ready to chuck their current characters and start fresh under new circumstances. This latter case gives the referee the most freedom of all, but allows very little campaign continuity.

Once referees have made these decisions, they must arrive at a scenario in which the arrival of the virus allows or forces the players into the circumstances above. If the players are to thwart the virus, keep their ship in operating condition, and survive into the New

Era on anagathics, the referee must provide them some combination of luck and knowledge that allows them to avoid infection. If they are to survive in low berths, they need to be able to read the writing on the walls and rig up a low berth system that keeps virus-possessed computers from shutting them off while they sleep. If they are to merely reproduce their way into the future, they need to be able to be stranded on a world where their progeny can survive.

Whichever path is taken, the referee must be prepared to impose certain events on the PCs if need be. Players are notorious for wandering away from the adventure that was a month in planning, but remember—the virus happens everywhere, and to everyone in some form or another. The same way that people remember where they were when they heard Pearl Harbor had been bombed or Kennedy shot, every *Traveller* PC will experience the Collapse as a personally defining moment. Rather than allowing the arrival and effects of the virus to be dictated by random die rolls, write a script full of drama, irony, interest, and exciting moments. Make the players feel that they took part in an important historical moment.

Remember, the virus is a *plot device* to bring us from *MegaTraveller's* Rebellion into the New Era's New Dawn; it is not *the plot* of *Traveller: The New Era*. The New Era is not about travelling around in space trying not to get infected by the virus. The virus still exists, but is under a certain amount of control by then. But the virus is the one harrowing experience that everyone will have shared between now and then. Londoners remember the Blitz, Americans remember Vietnam, and *Traveller: The New Era* characters remember the Collapse.

Fast Forward

Referees who want to continue a current *Traveller* campaign into the New Era will have to decide how to get their players there. Some groups will be content to start fresh with new characters in new surroundings, while others will not want to abandon the rich tapestry of a campaign history they have been weaving for many years. Referees of these latter groups should consider the following options:

Low Berths: The simplest way for *MegaTraveller*-era characters to make it to the New Era is by hibernating through the 70-year interim in low berths. Low berths of various designs, including emergency low berths and standard single-occupant low berths, are very common throughout Imperial space. Besides aboard starships, low berths can be found in hospitals, special "timer" facilities (where adventurous patrons with nothing better to do can "travel to the future" via hibernation), and shipyards and starports, where low berths are overhauled and maintained, or stored for installation aboard starships.

Campaigning in The New Era

In order to take PCs into the New Era, a low berth needs two things: a power supply, and safety from the virus. The first is relatively easy: Low berths require only a relative trickle of power to keep their occupants in safe hibernation. An idling starship power plant can supply power to low berths for decades, so long as the power for computers, weapons, and full-scale life support is shut down.

The virus part is a little trickier, as it is probably the virus that has forced the PCs into hibernation in the first place. Fortunately, most low berths are not designed to require central computer control (although many do have this as an option, allowing the computer to revive them at a specific time or under specific circumstances). This is because they are intended for emergencies, when many crucial ship's systems are damaged or inoperative. If the PCs' ship is hit by an early, basic strain of the virus, the virus will only have "suicided" the ship's control systems. In most cases this leaves the low berths undamaged (although some strains of virus might attempt to burn out the low berths by sending power surges through their circuits), or in need of minor repair or fuse/circuit breaker replacement. If their ship is infected by a more ambitious form of virus, the crew may have to disconnect the computer or physically destroy it. In this case, the PCs may well fear that the virus has infected the low berths. Even in this case, the berth can be functional for the referee's needs. A low berth does not have enough computing power in it to allow the virus to come alive. The best that a virus could do would be to "lay an egg" in the berth that could then invade a real computer if the berth is ever hooked into one in the future. And in order for this egg to infect a later target, it would have to allow the berth to function normally so as not to arouse suspicion. Thus PCs can survive into the New Era even in infected low berths.

Details like this make it clear why referees should not just spring the virus on their campaigns as a random event. When the virus arrives, the characters couldn't possibly know that they want to wake up in the New Era, 70 years away. Nor will most characters want to crawl into a low berth and give up control of their futures without a compelling reason, so the referee must create one. Aboard a starship that caught an early strain of the virus which merely suicided the control systems, the ship's functions will be slowly dying. Without the ability to control or repair the ship's drives, and with food and life support running out, the PCs will have the opportunity to bring the low berths on-line, hook up the power plant to supply a long-term trickle of power, and crawl in to await eventual rescue. On an airless, doomed world which is rapidly losing life support, segments of the population may be put into cold sleep to reduce life-support requirements. Sometime



after the PCs enter hibernation, the environmental controls finally fail, and the world's population dies. But so long as there is a steady trickle of power, the PCs will be safe in their air-tight berths until the world is rediscovered.

How the players are discovered and revived, and by whom, is a source of adventure in itself. While there are no pirates in the New Era in the classic sense, as there is not enough trade to support a full-time pirate, there are many traders with a piratical approach: taking ships and employing slaves as the opportunities present themselves. If the PCs are revived by such part-time pirates, their first adventure will be to escape from slavery, or take the ship back from their captors.

Other methods with effects similar to those of low berths may be used by referees. For example, medically oriented PCs could rig a system to preserve themselves with Fast Drug, which speeds the passage of time subjective to the PC at a rate of 60-1. Players with a large supply of this drug (426 60-day doses would be necessary per person to get through 70 years while only aging 1.17 years) could rig a system to automatically dispense it to them for years at a time, or periodically wake up and re-administer it to themselves. A group of six PCs could even work in shifts, with one person awake, watching for rescue, during each 60-day cycle while the other five sleep. Each PC would then age two months for each year, and thus age only 11.7 years over a period of 70 years.

Descendants: Players may generate New Era characters whose attributes are based on the attributes of their *MegaTraveller* parents or grandparents. The players and referee will have to mutually agree upon the age of the new character, either by back-dating the birthdate after the character is generated, or by establishing a birthdate and then ceasing character generation when the character reaches the year 1201.

For example, if a player generates a 41-year old New Era character, the character would have been born in 1160 (1201-41=1160). On the other hand, the referee and player might decide that the character was born in 1176. This would mean that character generation would have to cease after the second term, when the character reaches the year 1201 and age 25.

In most cases, New Era descendants will have to be grandchildren. The 70-year interim would require either parents who were very young when the virus struck and who had children very late in life, very old New Era characters, or a situation where either parents or children spent much of the interim in hibernation. When generating children, the referee may allow all five genetic attributes (Strength, Agility, Constitution, Intelligence, and Psionics) to be at the same level as those of the PC parent when at the same age (i.e., prior to entering the first career term). Alternatively, when attributes for both mother and father are available, the

child may take an amalgamation of pre-career attributes from both parents, again, at the referee's discretion. Referees should prevent their players from loading up from only the best attributes of each parent, and may require them to take a weak attribute from a parent to balance out a strong one. ("Well, son, you've got your mother's brains, but your father's good looks.") One simple way of doing this is to allow the child to take 1D6-3 strong characteristics (*MegaTraveller* rating of 8+) and 1D6-4 weak characteristics (*MegaTraveller* rating 6-) from each parent. Note that a child whose parent(s) had pre-career Psionics attributes of 0 will also have a 0, and will not roll for this attribute.

In any of these cases, the parental attribute numbers must be changed from the *MegaTraveller* scale to the New Era scale (see the "Character Conversion" section) before transferring attributes from parents to children.

Children who are raised by their parents should also get plus or minus DMs for Education and Charisma attributes, based on their parents' final (i.e., postgeneration) attributes (see "Character Conversion" to create Charisma ratings for *MegaTraveller* parents). After the parent's attributes have been converted to the New Era scale, give the child a +1 for an attribute in which the parent had 8+, or a -1 for an attribute in which the parent had a 3-. If using both mother and father attributes, average the attributes before deriving the DM.

Children who are not raised by their parents roll normally for Education and Charisma.

When generating grandchildren, birthdates will again have to be set and agreed upon. But attributes will be a bit more diluted over two generations. Although players and referees are free to agree on another system to establish attributes, the simplest way would be to allow the grandchild a +1 DM for each pre-career attribute in which the grandparent had a New Era (converted from *MegaTraveller*) attribute of 8+, a +2 for 11, and a -1 DM for 3-. These DMs are calculated from either a single PC grandparent, or the average of the PC grandparent's and spouse's attributes.

As with children, the grandchild will automatically have a Psionics rating of 0 unless at least one grandparent had a non-0 pre-career Psionics strength.

Anagathics: This method is the most difficult of those listed here, and is really not a *fast forward*, but a *slow forward*. Not only will the character in question have to find a reliable source of anagathics during the 70-year interim, but the character will have to have something to do. Rather than starting fresh in the New Era after a short (in game terms) gap, players and referees will have to address in some way the day-to-day events of 70 years. While some referees and player groups would welcome this as a stimulating challenge, most will probably wish to go with a fast forward option.



Character Conversions

TRAVELLER: THE NEW ERA CHARACTER CONVERSION

Traveller: The New Era takes the Traveller topic and brings it under the GDW "House Rules" system. Players familiar with *Twilight: 2000* 2nd Edition, *Dark Conspiracy*, and *Cadillacs and Dinosaurs* will be familiar with this system, as it is the system used for all three of these games. Traveller: The New Era also includes the latest system upgrades that have been added to the house system as seen in the *Twilight: 2000* Referee's Screen and other products.

Traveller: The New Era is therefore compatible with these other systems, with all of the convenience and cross-fertilization possibilities that that implies. However, this does not imply any change in background or storyline assumptions to bring any of the games into line with any of the others. In other words, *Twilight*, *Dark Conspiracy*, *Cads & Dinos*, and *Traveller* are not considered to take place in the same universe (although any referees who do wish to integrate their own campaigns in this way are certainly free to do so, as the Game Police have gone the way of the KGB).

Survival Margin cannot present the entire body of rules for Traveller: The New Era. However, because it does present rules for converting Traveller and MegaTraveller characters to the new system, the following "once over lightly" will help veteran players to understand the purpose behind these conversions.

CHARACTER GENERATION

Characters in Traveller: The New Era have six attributes, but these are slightly different from Mega-Traveller attributes, and are as follows.

Strength (STR): The numerical quantification of a character's muscular power.

Agility (AGL): A measure of the character's coordination and nimbleness.

Constitution (CON): Health and physical stamina. This affects the character's resistance to disease and also influences his hit capacity.

Intelligence (INT): A measure of the ability of the character to perform abstract reasoning. Intelligence primarily affects the ability of the character to learn; it is not the same thing as common sense. (How much common sense the character has is determined by the actions of the player himself.)

Education (EDU): A measure of the character's performance in a formal academic setting. This attribute determines how far a character can get in a university and serves as a prerequisite for certain forms of higher education.

Charisma (CHR): The extent to which the character is attractive to and trusted by strangers. This is a measure not only of physical appearance, but also of sensitivity and natural charm.

Note that the former Traveller attributes Dexterity and Endurance have been renamed Agility and Consti-



tution, respectively, and that the Social Status attribute's place has been taken by Charisma.

For the convenience of former **Traveller** and **MegaTraveller** players, these attributes are listed in their traditional UPP (Universal Personality Profile) order as STR, AGL, CON, INT, EDU, CHR, even though **Twilight: 2000** and **Dark Conspiracy** each use a different standard order. Players who wish to import characters from one house system game to another will want to be careful to make sure that attributes do not become inadvertently confused because of their differing order.

In **Traveller: The New Era**, these attributes are generated by rolling 2D6-1, instead of 2D6. Thus the rolls range from 1-11 initially, with 6 being the average.

There is also a seventh UPP digit for Psionics (PSI). This is rolled as 2D6 minus the number of terms (or fraction thereof) passed before psionic training is begun, and $\pm$ another DM based on where the character is from.

As with **Traveller** and **MegaTraveller**, skills are obtained during the course of four-year terms in various careers, but rather than being rolled for, these skills are selected (within certain guidelines) from skill lists specific to each career.

Characters also each have an additional characteristic: Initiative. This quantifies the character's coolness under fire, and is dependent upon the career(s) undertaken by the character.

THE D20 SYSTEM

The heart of the house system is the D20 system of task resolution. Veteran **Traveller** players will find it to be somewhat familiar. This is no accident, as the house system is the lineal descendant of the **Traveller** system, as bred through **Twilight: 2000** (1st edition) and **Traveller: 2300/2300 AD**.

Rolling for Task Resolution

Task resolution is still conducted by die rolls of varying difficulty with the outcome affected by the relevant skill level of the player character (PC). However, instead of the difficulty level defining a certain target roll which must be met or exceeded with the addition of die modifiers (DMs) according to skill or attribute levels, the house system combines this two-step proposition into one step. Task rolls are made against (equal to or beneath) the total of the character's relevant skill added to the controlling attribute (see below) of that skill, as modified by the difficulty level. A skill added to its controlling attribute is called an *asset*.

Thus a character attempting a Formidable test against her Acrobatics skill would have to roll 1D20 with a result less than or equal to half of the total of her Acrobatics skill and Agility.

Unlike in **MegaTraveller**, a task is not further defined as to risk, failure, or mishaps. The house system is intended for quickness, ease, and flexibility, and does not require the painstaking codification of the parameters of each task. It is the referee's option to define penalties or rewards based on the context of the attempted task.

To return to the above example, the referee may not wish to invoke any adverse results for failure of the Acrobatics test if it is being attempted under routine or peripheral circumstances. If, on the other hand, the character were hanging upside-down from a rope ladder above an erupting volcano, the referee will probably wish to impose further rolls to maintain a grip on the ladder if the task is failed, or an automatic plunge into the lava if the player rolls a Catastrophic Failure. Again, these decisions depend upon the dramatic and realistic needs of the adventure at that point, *as judged by the referee*.

Players will also note that the use of a D20 roll for task resolution takes **Traveller** from a doubly statistically centered system to a system in which statistically centered characters perform tasks on a flat "curve." This makes it easier for players to visualize their chances of succeeding at a certain task (i.e., rolling below half of an attribute skill total of 10 is a 25% proposition), because a 1-point difference in the die roll has the same statistical value at every point on the curve.

D20 System: Task Difficulty Levels

Level Roll (1D20)

Easy	$\leq 4 \times (\text{Skill} + \text{Attribute})$
Average	$\leq 2 \times (\text{Skill} + \text{Attribute})$
Difficult	$\leq 1 \times (\text{Skill} + \text{Attribute})$
Formidable	$\leq \frac{1}{2} \times (\text{Skill} + \text{Attribute})^*$
Impossible	$\leq \frac{1}{4} \times (\text{Skill} + \text{Attribute})^*$

* Round fractions down.

Auto Success/Auto Failure: A roll of 1 always succeeds, and a roll of 20 always fails, regardless of skill level (except in fire combat, where 17-20 always fails).

Outstanding Success/Catastrophic Failure: A roll of 10 points or more below the target number results in an Outstanding Success. A roll of 10 points or more above the target number requires a further roll for Catastrophic Failure. Roll again for the task at the same difficulty level. Failure of this second roll by *any margin* means a Catastrophic Failure has occurred. If this second roll is a success, then it is only a normal failure. Effects of these are decided by the referee, according to circumstances.

Controlling Attributes

Each skill in **Traveller: The New Era** is linked to an individual attribute that is considered to be the crucial attribute for exercising that skill. This is called the *controlling attribute* for that skill. For example, Agility (which replaces the **Traveller/MegaTraveller** Dexterity attribute) is the controlling attribute for use of the Acrobatics skill, for obvious reasons.

Under this system, **Traveller** characters no longer have their skills limited by the total of their Intelligence and Education attributes. Instead of attributes serving as a limitation to a character's skills, attributes become the jumping off point for the use of these skills, as the attribute is always added to the skill.

When a character attempts a task for which he has no skill, he rolls against the controlling attribute alone, but with an *unskilled penalty*. The unskilled penalty is to roll the task at one difficulty level higher than otherwise required, to signify the importance of even rudimentary knowledge of a skill for attempting certain tasks. Skill level 0 in certain skills is provided to certain careers during character generation. Skill level 0 allows characters to ignore the unskilled penalty when attempting tasks for which they have the 0 level skill.

CONVERTING CHARACTERS

Traveller and **MegaTraveller** characters which are to be used under the **New Era** system are converted in the following manner:

Attributes

Subtract 1 from Strength, Dexterity, Endurance, Intelligence, and Education, and rename Dexterity and Endurance. Any value that is above 15 is reduced to 15 (F). Retain the Social Standing value unchanged, except that it is no longer an attribute, but a secondary characteristic of the character. Roll 2D6-1 for the new Charisma attribute. The referee may, at his or her discretion, assign a Charisma value or a $\pm$ DM to the die roll based on Charisma patterns established by the character in pre-**New Era** play. The Psionic Strength is retained unchanged as the seventh attribute, PSI. Most characters will leave this off when the value is 0.

Attribute-Derived Values

After converting to the **Traveller: The New Era** values, the following secondary, or derived, values can be computed.

Hit Capacity: Hit capacity is a measure of the amount of damage (hits or hit points) a character can take before suffering serious injury. Hit points can be suffered in any of seven different parts of the body: left leg, right leg, left arm, right arm, head, abdomen, and chest.

The hit capacity of a character's head is equal to twice his or her Constitution ($CON \times 2$). The hit capacity of the

chest is equal to three times the sum of Strength and Constitution $[(STR+CON) \times 3]$.

Each other body part has a hit capacity equal to 2 times the sum of Strength and Constitution $[(STR+CON) \times 2]$.

Weight: A character's weight in kilograms is equal to 80 plus 4 times Strength minus Agility $[4 \times (STR-AGL)] + 80$. Thus, a character with a Strength of 6 and Agility of 1 would weigh 100 kilograms (roughly 220 pounds), while a character with a Strength of 4 and an Agility of 8 would weigh 64 kilograms (roughly 141 pounds).

Physiological differences, particularly in bone structure, produce smaller body masses in women. For a female character, weight in kilograms is equal to 65 plus 4 times Strength minus Agility $[4 \times (STR-AGL)] + 65$. Thus, a female character with a Strength of 6 and an Agility of 1 would weigh 85 kilos (roughly 187 pounds), while a female character with a Strength of 4 and an Agility of 8 would weigh 49 kilos (roughly 108 pounds).

Load: A character can carry a considerable amount of equipment cross-country, but there is a limit. A character may carry, without being heavily burdened, weight in kilograms equal to 3 times the sum of his or her Strength and Constitution $(STR+CON) \times 3$. This is called the character's normal load. A character may carry up to twice this amount, but is burdened and has his or her movement reduced, as explained in later rules. A character may lift loads up to 4 times this amount and carry them short distances (50 to 100 meters), but this counts as hard work under the fatigue rules, as explained the **Traveller: The New Era** rulebook. Characters may combine their load capacities to lift heavy objects.

Throw Range: The distance (in meters) a character can throw a one-kilogram weight accurately is called throw range. Throw range is 4 times the character's Strength $(STR \times 4)$.

Initiative

Although this is not a primary attribute, it is a very important secondary characteristic. Initiative governs the order in which players execute their combat actions during battle, with higher numbers going earlier. Initiative represents coolness under fire and familiarity with the conditions of combat. Normally, a character generated with a military career (Navy, Marines, Army, Flyer, and Sailor from **MegaTraveller**) rolls 1D6 for starting Initiative, while civilian careers (all others) roll 1D6+2 rounded down (reading 0 as 1, for a range of 1, 1, 2, 2, 3). However, Initiative levels can be gained during play. Thus, assigning this characteristic to a converted character can be problematic when the character is one that has a long history of play and has seen a lot of combat.



SURVIVAL MARGIN

As a baseline, referees should compare the converted character to the following table, which shows the ratings of NPC types. Note that the skill levels listed are combat-related skills only. A kindly old professor would have Novice level Initiative even if he had Physics skill level 10.

Level	Initiative	Skill	Real World Example
Elite	5	6	Green Beret or SEAL with extensive combat experience
Veteran	4	5	Regular soldier with moderate combat experience
Experienced	3	4	Police officer or well-trained soldier, no combat experience
Novice	1	2	Green recruits, panicky civilians, anyone named Murgatroid

Characters with particularly long playing careers might actually have Initiative levels above the Elite level. This is a referee's judgment, but Initiative levels of 8 or more should be extremely rare.

Skills

Traveller: The New Era and other house system games use a different definition of the term "cascade skills" than do earlier versions of the Traveller game. In older versions of Traveller, cascades were groups of related skills, only one of which was picked when that cascade was received. The selection of that skill did not confer any knowledge of the other skills belonging to that cascade.

Traveller: The New Era calls these related groups of skills *skill clusters*. A cascade skill, on the other hand, is a single skill with distinct sub-areas of knowledge, called *specialties*. The specialty must be specified when the cascade skill is received, but selection of these specialties does not prevent the character from having expertise in the nonselected specialty areas of that cascade skill. On the contrary, while a character uses the skill's full level in the chosen specialty, the character has skill in the other nonchosen specialty areas equal to one-half the specialty skill level.

For example, a character has received the Slug Weapon skill four times, and chosen the specialty Slug Rifle. That character has a skill level of 4 in Slug Weapon (Slug Rifle) and an effective skill level of 2 in the other Slug Weapon specialty, Slug Weapon (Slug Pistol).

To convert MegaTraveller skills to Traveller: The New Era, identify the old skills on the equivalency list beginning on the next page, and read the new skill name after the colon. Each new skill will be followed by its controlling attribute in parentheses, then its code in parentheses. Because many skills have been recom-

bined compared to their old MegaTraveller characterizations, there are several different ways to convert these skills once they are found on the list.

In many cases, the following conversion list will indicate that an old skill "contributes to both [skill A] and [skill B]" or to two or more cascade specialties of a given skill, or to a mixture of several skills and cascades. This means that the player may allocate the skill levels of the old skill among any combination of the new skills or cascade specialties on the list. Thus, old Recon 3 could give all 3 levels to Stealth, 2 to Stealth and 1 to Tracking, etc.

CS (Cascade Specialty): Where an old skill has become a specialty of a New Era cascade skill, multiply that skill by 2, and that becomes the skill level in that specialty. Find the other specialties of that cascade and convert them. Once all of the specialties have been found and converted, take the specialty with the highest skill level, and that becomes the primary specialty of that cascade. Next, look to see if any other specialties are at a skill level greater than half of the primary specialty. Any that are, are retained at that level as separately tracked specialties (i.e., specialties that do not follow the normal rule of $\frac{1}{2}$ the primary specialty). Finally, all other specialties that are at or below $\frac{1}{2}$ of the primary level are discarded. These skills are not lost, however; they are from now on tracked normally as $\frac{1}{2}$ that of the primary specialty. For example, a character with Helicopter 3 and Lighter-than-Air Craft 2 converts these to Pilot (Rotary Wing) 6 and Pilot (Airship) 4. Rotary Wing becomes the primary specialty of the Pilot skill, and Airship is kept track of separately, as its 4 is greater than the default level of $\frac{1}{2}$ the primary specialty.

DE (Direct Equivalency): Multiply the old skill by 2 and rename as necessary. Example: The old skill Bribery is directly equivalent to the New Era skill Bribery, thus old Bribery 2 becomes New Era Bribery 4.

DE+: Some Direct Equivalency skills have potential additions from other skills. These other skills are listed as "MC" (see below) for them. When DE+ skills are used with these MC skills, use the MC procedure below. Choose the procedure that gives the highest result.

For example, both New Era skills Tracking and Stealth are DE+. In addition to the old Hunting skill which converts directly to Tracking, skill points from the old Recon skill may be added. Stealth, which is converted from the old Stealth, can also gain points from the old Recon.

For example, a character with Hunting 2, Stealth 3, and Recon 2 could contribute both points of Recon to Hunting and use the MC procedure to get a Tracking skill of $(2+2=4 \times 1.5=) 6$, and use old Stealth alone as a DE to get a new Stealth skill of $(3 \times 2=) 6$. Alternatively, 1 level of Recon could go to each for Tracking of $(2+1=3 \times 1.5=) 5$ and new Stealth of $(3+1=4 \times 1.5=) 6$. This gives an inferior result to the first method, and is not used. Finally, giving both Recon levels to Stealth would give Tracking $(2 \times 2=) 4$ and Stealth $(3+2=5 \times 1.5=) 8$.



MC (Multiple Components): For skills that have multiple components—that is, where several specific **MegaTraveller** skills combine to form a more general **New Era** skill—the **New Era** skill is equal to the two highest contributing **MegaTraveller** skills added together and then multiplied by 1.5 (rounding up). For example, the **MegaTraveller** skills Autocannon, Machinegun, and VRF Gauss Gun all are equivalent to the single **New Era** skill Autogun. A character who had Machinegun 3, Autocannon 3, and VRF Gauss Gun 1, would have a **New Era** Autogun skill of $(3+3+1 \times 1.5) = 9$.

When a skill that could have multiple components has only one, the single contributing component is simply doubled. If the character in the above example had only Machinegun 3, the new Autogun skill would be $(3 \times 2) = 6$.

Referee: To prevent some players feeling that they are being cheated by $\times 1.5$ system, note that only when a single component is at level 5 or above (extremely rare in **MegaTraveller**) will the $\times 2$ multiplier give a better result than that same component added to 1, and the total multiplied by 1.5.

MC/CS (Multiple-Component Cascade Specialty): For skills that are multiple components of a specialty of a new cascade skill, first find all of the old skills that are providing skill levels to the new cascade specialty. Add the two highest of the contributing old skill levels and multiply by 1.5 (round up) to get the cascade specialty skill level. Take that number to the Cascade Specialty procedure, and proceed as indicated under CS above. For example, a character with a skill of Auto Pistol 3, Snub Pistol 2, and Body Pistol 1 would first add 3 to 2 and multiply by 1.5 for a new skill of 8 in Slug Weapon (Slug Pistol), and then take that skill to the CS procedure above.

When a specialty that could have multiple components has only one, the single contributing component is simply doubled, as under CS above. For example, if a character had old Combat Rifleman 3 but no skill levels in Rifle, Carbine, ACR, etc., then the Combat Rifleman skill would be simply doubled to 6.

MC/SS (Multiple Components from Separated Skills): This indicates an old skill that can provide points to more than one new skill, and that one or more of these new skill are, themselves, composed of multiple components. First the skill levels are divided up among the new skills, then these skill levels are used with the other component skill levels in the normal MC procedure above.

For example, old Heavy Weapons 4 could give 2 points to Tac Missile and 1 each to Grenade Launcher and Autogun. If the character also had old Machinegun 3, under the MC procedure, $3+1=4 \times 1.5=6$, which would be the new Autogun skill. (Then the 2 points to Tac Missile would be doubled to 4, and the point to Grenade Launcher doubled to 2, assuming there was

no old Grenade Launcher skill to combine with it.)

SC (Separated Cascade): Some **MegaTraveller** skills are now cascade skills which require the player to choose the primary specialty. First, the skill is multiplied by 2, then the specialty is chosen. For example, Medical 3 converts to Medical 6, then the primary specialty (Surgery, Diagnosis, or Trauma Aid) is chosen, which uses the full skill level of 6. The other two specialties use half this level, or 3.

SS (Separated Skills): Other skills in **MegaTraveller** have been broken into more specific skill areas in **New Era**, so players have a choice of areas to convert their skills to. Divide the skill levels of the old skill up among the listed new separated skills in any way that is desired, and then multiply each by 2.

For example, the **MegaTraveller** skill Artisan is now broken into Metallurgy, Jeweler, Carpenter, and Mason. A **MegaTraveller** character with Artisan 2 could take 1 skill level in each of Metallurgy and Mason, and these would then be multiplied by 2 to give Metallurgy 2 and Mason 2.

Jack-of-all-Trades: This skill has a unique conversion. Each J-o-T skill level may be applied to one of a character's six attributes, and indicates that all of the skills controlled by that attribute are never rolled at the unskilled level. This functions the same as having a level 0 skill in each of these skills. There is no benefit gained for applying more than one J-o-T level to one attribute.

Admin: Admin/Legal (EDU) (MC)
Advanced Combat Rifle: Slug Weapon (Slug Rifle) (STR) (MC/CS)
Artisan: Choice of Metallurgy (EDU), Carpenter (CON), Jeweler (AGL), or Mason (STR) (SS)
Assault Rifle: Slug Weapon (Slug Rifle) (STR) (MC/CS)
ATV: Contributes to both Ground Vehicle (Wheeled) (AGL) and Ground Vehicle (Tracked) (AGL) (MC/CS)
Autocannon: Autogun (STR) (MC)
Autorifle: Slug Weapon (Slug Rifle) (STR) (MC/CS)
Axe: Armed Martial Arts (Club) (STR) (MC/CS)
Battle Axe: Armed Martial Arts (Club) (STR) (MC/CS)
Battle Dress: Environment Suit (CON) (MC)
Bayonet: Armed Martial Arts (Polearm) (STR) (MC/CS)
Biology: Biology (EDU) (DE)
Blade: Armed Martial Arts (Small Blade) (STR) (MC/CS)
Blowgun: Archery (STR) (MC)
Body Pistol: Slug Weapon (Slug Pistol) (STR) (MC/CS)
Bola: Thrown Weapon (STR) (MC)
Boomerang: Thrown Weapon (STR) (MC)
Bow: Archery (STR) (MC)
Brawling: Unarmed Martial Arts (STR) (DE)
Bribery: Bribery (CHR) (DE)
Broadsword: Armed Martial Arts (Large Blade) (STR) (MC/CS)
Broker: Marketing (EDU) (DE)
Carbine: Slug Weapon (Slug Rifle) (STR) (MC/CS)

Carousing: Carousing (CHR) (DE)
Chemistry: Chemistry (EDU) (DE)
Combat Engineering: Combat Engineering (CON) (DE+), also (MC) with old *Demolitions*
Combat Rifleman: Slug Weapon (Slug Rifle) (STR) (MC/CS)
Communications: Communications (EDU) (DE)
Computer: Computer (EDU) (DE)
Crossbow: Early Firearms (STR) (MC)
Cudgel: Armed Martial Arts (Club) (STR) (MC/CS)
Cutlass: Armed Martial Arts (Large Blade) (STR) (MC/CS)
Dagger: Armed Martial Arts (Small Blade) (STR) (MC/CS)
Demolitions: Contributes to both Combat Engineer (CON) and Intrusion (AGL) (MC/SS)
Disguise: Disguise (CHR) (DE)
Early Firearms: Early Firearms (STR) (MC)
Electronics: Electronics (EDU) (DE)
Energy Weapons: Energy Weapon (Energy Rifle) (AGL) (MC/CS)
Engineering: Ship's Engineering (EDU) (DE)
Equestrian: Riding (CON) (DE)
Fleet Tactics: Fleet Tactics (INT) (DE)
Foil: Armed Martial Arts (Large Blade) (STR) (MC/CS)
Forensic: Investigation (INT) (DE)
Forgery: Forgery (AGL) (DE)
Forward Observer: Forward Observer (INT) (DE)
Fusion Gun: Energy Weapon (Energy Rifle) (AGL) (MC/CS)
Gambling: Gambling (CHR) (DE)
Gauss Rifle: Slug Weapon (Slug Rifle) (STR) (MC/CS)
Genetics: Genetics (EDU) (DE)
Grav Belt: Grav Belt (AGL) (DE)
Grav Vehicle: Pilot (Interface/Grav) (AGL) (MC/CS)
Gravitics: Gravitics (EDU) (DE)
Grenade Launcher: Grenade Launcher (STR) (DE+), also (MC/SS) with points from *Heavy Weapons*
Guard/Hunting Beasts: Guard/Hunting Beasts (CON) (DE)
Halberd: Armed Martial Arts (Polearm) (STR) (MC/CS)
Hand Axe: Armed Martial Arts (Club) (STR) (MC/CS)
Handgun: Slug Weapon (Slug Pistol) (STR) (MC/CS)
Heavy Weapons: Contributes to Grenade Launcher (STR) (MC/SS), Tac Missile (AGL) (SS), and Autogun (STR) (MC/SS)
Helicopter: Pilot (Rotary Wing) (AGL) (CS)
Herding: Farming (INT) (DE)
High-Energy Weapons: Contributes to any of Energy Artillery (AGL), Heavy Artillery (STR), Heavy Guns (STR) (MC)
High-G Environ: High-G Environment (CON) (DE)
History: History (EDU) (DE)
Hovercraft: Hovercraft (AGL) (DE)
Hunting: Tracking (INT) (DE+), also (MC) with old *Recon*
Instruction: Instruction (CHR) (DE)
Interrogation: Interrogation (CHR) (DE)
Interview: Interview (INT) (DE)
Intrusion: Intrusion (AGL) (DE)
Jack-of-all-Trades: Special (see above)
Jet-Propelled Aircraft: Pilot (Fixed Wing) (AGL) (MC/CS)

Large Blade: Armed Martial Arts (Large Blade) (STR) (MC/CS)
Large Watercraft: Large Watercraft (CON) (DE)
Laser Pistol: Energy Weapon (Energy Pistol) (AGL) (MC/CS)
Laser Rifle: Energy Weapon (Energy Rifle) (AGL) (MC/CS)
Laser Weapons: Contributes to both Energy Weapon (Energy Pistol) (AGL) and Energy Weapon (Energy Rifle) (AGL) (MC/CS)
Leader: Leadership (CHR) (DE)
Legal: Admin/Legal (EDU) (MC)
Liaison: Liaison (CHR) (DE)
Light Assault Gun: Slug Weapon (Slug Rifle) (STR) (ME)
Lighter-than-Air Craft: Pilot (Airship) (AGL) (CS)
Linguistics: Language (Linguistics) (CHR) (CS)
Machinegun: Autogun (STR) (MC)
Mass Driver: Contributes to both Heavy Artillery (STR) and Heavy Guns (STR) (MC/SS)
Mechanical: Mechanic (STR) (DE)
Medical: Choice of Medical (Diagnosis) (EDU), Medical (Surgery) (EDU), and Medical (Trauma Aid) (EDU) (SC)
Meson Guns: Energy Artillery (AGL) (MC)
Mortars and Howitzers: Heavy Artillery (STR) (MC)
Naval Architect: Starship Architecture (EDU) (DE)
Navigation: Astrogation (EDU) (DE)
Neural Pistol: Energy Weapon (Energy Pistol) (AGL) (MC/CS)
Neural Rifle: Energy Weapon (Energy Rifle) (AGL) (MC/CS)
Neural Weapons: Contributes to both Energy Weapon (Energy Pistol) (AGL) and Energy Weapon (Energy Rifle) (AGL) (MC/CS)
Persuasion: Persuasion (CHR) (DE)
Physics: Physics (EDU) (DE)
Pike: Armed Martial Arts (Polearm) (STR) (MC/CS)
Pilot: Contributes to any of Pilot (Interface/Grav) (AGL) (MC/CS), Astrogation (EDU) (MC), or Ship Tactics (INT) (MC)
Pistol: Slug Weapon (Slug Pistol) (STR) (MC/CS)
Plasma Gun: Energy Weapon (Energy Rifle) (AGL) (MC/CS)
Polearm: Armed Martial Arts (Polearm) (STR) (MC/CS)
Propeller-Driven Aircraft: Pilot (Fixed Wing) (AGL) (MC/CS)
Prospecting: Geology (EDU) (DE)
Recon: Contributes to both Stealth (AGL) and Tracking (INT) (MC/SS)
Recruiting: Recruiting (CHR) (DE)
Revolver: Slug Weapon (Slug Pistol) (STR) (MC/CS)
Rifle: Slug Weapon (Slug Rifle) (STR) (MC/CS)
Rifleman: Slug Weapon (Slug Rifle) (STR) (MC/CS)
Robot Ops: RCV Operations (EDU) (DE)
Robotics: Robotics (EDU) (DE)
Sensor Ops: Sensors (INT) (DE)
Screens: Choice of Screens (Nuclear Damper) (EDU), Screens (Meson Screen) (EDU), or Screens (Black Globe) (EDU) (SC)
Ship Tactics: Ship Tactics (INT) (DE), also (MC) with old *Pilot*
Ship's Boat: Pilot (Interface/Grav) (AGL) (MC/CS)
Sling: Thrown Weapon (STR) (MC)
Small Blade: Armed Martial Arts (Small Blade) (STR) (MC/CS)



Small Watercraft: Small Watercraft (CON) (DE)
Snub Pistol: Slug Weapon (Slug Pistol) (STR) (MC/CS)
Spear: Contributes to both Armed Martial Arts (Polearm) (STR) and Thrown Weapon (STR) (MC/CS)
Spinal Weapons: Gunnery (Energy Weapon) (EDU) (MC/CS)
Stealth: Stealth (AGL) (DE+), also (MC) with old *Recon*
Steward: Service (CHR) (DE)
Streetwise: Streetwise (INT) (DE)
Submachinegun: Slug Weapon (Slug Rifle) (STR) (MC/CS)
Survey: Survey (INT) (DE)
Survival: Survival (INT) (DE)
Sword: Armed Martial Arts (Large Blade) (STR) (MC/CS)
Tactics: Ground Tactics (INT) (DE)
Trader: Bargain (CHR) (DE)
Tracked Vehicle: Ground Vehicle (Tracked) (AGL) (MC/CS)
Turret Weapons: Contributes to both Gunnery (Missiles) (EDU) and Gunnery (Energy Weapon) (EDU) (MC/CS)
Vacc Suit: Environment Suit (CON) (MC)
VRF Gauss Gun: Autogun (STR) (MC)
Wheeled Vehicle: Ground Vehicle (Wheeled) (AGL) (MC/CS)
Zero-G Environ: Zero-G Environment (CON) (DE)

Psionics

Psionics actions are now handled under the standard tasks and skills rule. Each of the six Psionic Talents is now a cascade skill using the PSI attribute as the controlling attribute. The six skills are as follows, with their equivalent MegaTraveller talents given in parentheses: Telepathy (Telepathy), Teleperception (Clairvoyance), Telephysics (Telekinesis), Self-Awareness (Awareness), Teleportation (Teleportation), and Arcana (Special).

The specific psionic tasks from MegaTraveller are now specialties of the cascade skills.

Conversion: To convert MegaTraveller psionic characters to The New Era, use the old Psionic Strength as the new PSI attribute, and convert the skill level in each talent to the skill level in the new cascade skill. Once this is accomplished, consult the Psionics chapter in Traveller: The New Era for the specialty names in order to choose the primary specialty. All of the other cascades of that psionic skill are used at 1/2 that level.

Referee's Discretion

The above rules are intended to regularize the conversion of old, beloved Traveller characters to Traveller: The New Era. As with all aspects of this game, the referee is responsible for all final decisions. Players and referees who feel that certain old characters are not properly captured by the above conversion rules should discuss their impressions, and modify the conversion procedure to create the character that they agree most adequately captures the feel of the character(s) that they know and love.

There are changes in the rules system that might affect some converted characters more adversely than others. The main example of this is the controlling

attribute. In MegaTraveller, a character with a high skill was not troubled when using that skill by a low attribute. However, when converting to the New Era system, a player might find that his character, who had always relied on several high skills which are now linked to the Agility attribute, is no longer as capable, because the character has a low Agility score.

Referees should not require such players to suffer. First, convert the character to the New Era system according to the guidelines below. Then assess the character's abilities under the new rules, and see if they remain congruent with the character's demonstrated talents under the MegaTraveller system. If the character was able to do certain things before, he should still be able to do them, and his new converted statistics should be adjusted to allow that. The referee should come up with solutions that require the fewest wholesale changes in the converted numbers. For example, a converted character has three Agility-based skills, Pilot (Interface/Grav), Stealth, and Ground Vehicle (Wheeled), all at reasonably high levels of 5s and 6s. But he also has a low Agility attribute (3), penalizing all three of these skills. If, in past play, the character had been a hot pilot, but never had any use for the Stealth or Wheeled Vehicle abilities, the referee should merely raise the Pilot skill level to allow him to remain a hot pilot, and leave the other two skills limited by the low Agility. On the other hand, if the character used all three of these skills extensively, the referee should leave the skill levels alone, and raise the Agility attribute to allow them all to remain as effective as they were under the old system.

Retaining the player's established concept of his or her character should be the goal, not slavish adherence to conversion guidelines.

Referees may also need to work character conversion in the other direction if a character ends up becoming too powerful in an area the character had never stood out in before. This is a particular danger in the case of some of the Multiple Component (MC) skills, which can get very large very fast if the character had invested heavily in the component skills which are combined under conversion. Referee's may wish to exercise care when such skills get up over level 10, although such rulings are entirely at the referee's discretion.

Caveat: This conversion system is only intended to allow the conversion of beloved Traveller and MegaTraveller characters to the new system. It is not intended to be a way around the new character conversion system. While some old characters will translate poorly to The New Era, other exotic combinations of attributes and skills might yield better characters than are available under the new system. Doing this deliberately to circumvent the new system is, as our allies the British say, "not cricket." Nor is it even Brockian Ultra Cricket. Let that be some kind of warning.



LIBRARY DATA

AI Virus, the: The artificially intelligent computer virus that was developed by Lucan's superweapons program, released by a strike from Dulinor's Illeish Federation in 1130, and which then caused the Collapse. Because the virus attains full self-aware intelligence upon infecting a large enough computer, its means of access to infect other technology are virtually unlimited. Many pieces of electronic equipment which contain microprocessor control circuits have had viral "eggs" left in them which can then hatch when they are started up or connected to other systems. For this reason, caches of discovered technology must be carefully inspected to ensure that they are not infected (see Canary). Various referred to as "the AI Virus," "the virus," or simply "Virus."

Blasted Areas: See Wilds.

Canary: Popular term for one of many electronic devices used to test whether recovered technology is infected by the AI Virus. The basis of the canary is a very high-speed computing system into which a virus egg can quickly expand and develop to the point where its activity can be detected. The presence of certain types of activity can easily be detected as the virus attempts to "reach out" of the canary to manipulate other objects. Some actually have a mechanical arm that waves a flag to show that the developing virus is testing its parameters, "stretching its legs" as it were. It is not unknown for salvage crews to create pools to bet on "when it waves to us."

The canary is so named because many of the early versions actually "died" if they were exposed to the virus, showing that the tested equipment was indeed infected.

Collapse, the: Refers to the effects on the Imperium and much of surrounding space caused by the release of the AI Virus. It can refer generally to the period of time in which the entire former Imperium succumbed to the virus, or locally to refer to the much shorter period when an individual planet fell. Also referred to as the Crash.

Crash, the: See Collapse, the.

Daisy: A virus-controlled system that is failing, either by internal self-destructive mutation of the virus itself, or by external intervention (cutting off its power, etc.). Derivation is from the same Solomani film referred to in the Dave entry.

Dave: Any hapless victim of a vampire ship, used humorously. The reference is to an old Solomani 2-D motion picture that features a ship controlled by a mad computer that attempts to systematically kill its crew.

The last surviving crew member, named Dave, is forced to kill the computer. This old film was widely distributed in audio-visual libraries throughout the rimward areas of the former Imperium. It was discovered by members of the Dawn League in the late 1190s, and became quite popular due to its thematic similarity to issues of the AI Virus and the Collapse. Every Star Viking ship has a copy of the film, and it is often shown during crew parties, in which the audience usually shouts out various of the lines.

The line, "Dave, I've still got the greatest enthusiasm and confidence in the mission," is used ironically by Star Vikings to mean that things have just gotten really bad and couldn't possibly get any worse.

Dawn League: Forerunner interstellar government to the Reformation Coalition (which see). It was the failed attempt by the Dawn League to send out trade missions into the Wilds that resulted in the establishment of the Reformation Coalition.

Dream Time: A reference sometimes used in the Regency (which see) to refer to the period following the Collapse of the remainder of the Imperium. The phrase was coined by a popular political writer because, "Now come the times when we alone are left to dream the Imperial dream until it re-awakens to carry on again." It also connotes that the isolated, regressed worlds are each individually dreaming their dreams of the future until they also re-awaken to bring them to fruition.

Final War: The war, 1117-1130, that ended with the release of the AI Virus and spelled the end of the Third Imperium. Also known by various factions and at different times as the Civil War, the Second Civil War, the Succession War, or the Rebellion.

Free Trader: Interstellar merchants who own their own ships and are beholden to no one planetary or pocket government (see Pocket Empires). These ships trade with various pocket empires and wind their way across the blasted areas in search of intact, uninfected technology.

Free traders are scarce in the year 1200, as they are prone to fall prey to the innumerable hazards of interstellar travel, which include, but are not limited to, xenophobic TEDs (which see), hostile free trader/pirates, pocket empires looking to add ships to their meager fleets, vampire ships, and the increased danger of mechanical breakdown in areas that no longer have repair facilities.

im·pe·ri·al \ im-'pir-ē-əl \ *adj* [SME, fr. SMF, fr. SLL *imperialis*, fr. SL *imperium* command, empire] **1 a:** of, relating to, or befitting an empire or emperor **b:** of or relating to the Third Imperium **2:** demonstrating arrogant or shortsighted views, particularly when combined

with conspicuous and undeserved wealth 3 a: SOVEREIGN b: REGAL, IMPERIOUS—im•pe•ri•al•ly \ -əl-ē \ adv

Jumpstart: Public works project initiated by Emperor Strephon. It was intended to provide an influx of capital to certain selected planetary economies to create new jobs and promote economic growth. The funding came from numerous Imperial agencies, which were encouraged to spend discretionary development funds on projects of public value, such as libraries, schools, and museums. By using a wide variety of agencies to provide planning and funding, such as the Navy in a system which already had a naval presence, or the Scout Service in a system which contained a way station, administrative overhead and duplication of effort was kept to a minimum.

Last Imperium: Name used by citizens of the Reformation Coalition to refer to the Third Imperium. This term is not used in Deneb, where citizens still refer to the Third Imperium.

Longbow: Project name for interstellar communications system begun in 588 Imperial under auspices of the Imperial Navy. Interrupted by the Civil War (604-622), project was never successful, and was abandoned and replaced by the successful xboat system established in 624, under the control of the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service.

lu•can•ic \ lü-'can-ik\ adj 1: of, relating to, or characteristic of Lucan I ("The Black"), final Emperor of the Third Imperium 2: characterized by extreme viciousness or cruelty, particularly with erratic, irrational, or contradictory overtones — lu•can•i•cal•ly \ -kəl-ē \ adv

New Era: Used colloquially by citizens of the Reformation Coalition (which see) to refer to the period following the founding of that coalition in 1200.

No Man's Land: See Wilds.

Pocket Empire: Used to refer to any small coalitions of worlds, usually less than half a dozen, that have managed to survive the Collapse (which see). While these worlds have seen their average technology levels slide back, they have maintained threshold interstellar capabilities and maintain regular contact with each other. Because these pocket empires have only a handful of irreplaceable ships, the ships are reserved for maintaining interworld contact and cannot be risked on exploration outside of the pocket empire. Those that are risked usually do not return.

PSBB: Abbreviation for, "Pie in the Sky, By and By," a remark often heard among personnel of the RCES (which see). It refers to the tendency of their Hiver liaison officers to frequently talk about or think of events with a long view of generations or millennia.



RCES: Reformation Coalition Exploratory Service, the exploratory/recontact arm of the Hiver-backed human Reformation Coalition (which see), also known to some as the "Star Vikings." The Coalition has as its goal the reintegration into an interstellar culture of all of the worlds of the Last Imperium. RCES is usually referred to simply as "The Service," although the abbreviation is also used, pronounced, "arcess," or disdainfully, "arses."

Reformation Coalition: A human interstellar state centered in the Old Expanses sector. The Reformation Coalition (RC) is an outgrowth of the Dawn League, an interstellar trading consortium which was created with Hiver technical assistance. The Dawn League was dissolved and replaced by the RC when it was discovered that a more aggressive policy was required to re-open contact with the isolated xenophobic worlds in the surrounding Wilds. The Coalition is dedicated to the proposition that all former member worlds of the Last Imperium must be reunited under a new interstellar government, free from the malignant flaws which doomed the Imperium to its murderous Final War and ultimate collapse.

Regency: The renamed Domain of Deneb, to denote the fact that it was keeping alive the traditions and lineage of the Third Imperium until such time as it could be re-established.

Relic: Used as a noun or adjective to refer to equipment or technology left over from the pre-Collapse era. Relic technology is typically of a higher tech level than that which is currently available in quantity. See also remnant. While this equipment is usually of great value and is actively sought out by people in the New Era, some worlds particularly hard-hit by the Final War or Collapse have become xenophobic and technophobic. People of these worlds often destroy all relic technology that they find, sometimes out of irrational anger at the events that the equipment represents, or by reasoning that only by renouncing such things can they avoid the calamity that befell them.

Remnant: Used as a noun or adjective to refer to people who have survived from the pre-Collapse era. Such persons often have first-hand knowledge of great value in the New Era, and are therefore in great demand. On the other hand, there is sometimes great prejudice against former Imperials, particularly on worlds that were hard-hit by the Final War and Collapse. See also relic.

TED: Technologically Elevated Dictator. The term used for the many planetary warlords scattered throughout the former Imperium in 1200. They derive their

power from the possession of a small number of relic (which see) weapons with which they terrorize their populations. These weapons can no longer be maintained or replaced, and many of these warlords are retaining power by bluffing with weapons that no longer function. TEDs with working weapons periodically feel the need to demonstrate these weapons on unfortunate peasants to maintain the terror that ensures their position.

These warlords are typically xenophobic, knowing that interstellar contact will destroy the small advantage that maintains their power. These warlords will make every attempt to imprison or kill any interstellar visitors, and have proven to be the demise of many free traders.

Also spoken as "Teddy," as in, "Well, someone's just gonna have to let ol' Teddy know that he's not going to be running this planet for much longer."

Vampire Fleet: A group of several vampire ships (which see) which have networked their individual brains together to create a more powerful group mind. This fleet functions rather like an amoeba, reaching out with an arm of ships controlled by the central mind to perform certain missions, while other ships of the fleet can perform "life support" functions, such as skimming fuel to transfer to other ships.

Vampire Ship: The name for a starship which has been fully taken over by the virus, and which is now a independent thinking organism under the control of its virus-infected computer. Many of these ships have outlived their crews (having had to kill them when they attempted to unhook it), and are therefore unable to repair certain systems that have malfunctioned or worn out. Thus, many vampire ships can be stranded in a single star system if their jump drive breaks down.

Some vampire ships maintain human crews by coercion or some form of enforced loyalty. These crews serve as the vampire's "hands," and can maintain and repair the ship, as well as raid planets to capture and impress additional crew members, or to find needed repair parts.

Vampire ships that have lasted this long have clearly mutated to the point where self-preservation has outweighed the suicidal tendencies present in the original virus strain. However, this aggressiveness is usually displaced outward so that these ships are typically engaged in acts of destruction against other ships or planetary communities.

Wilds: Refers to the vast interstellar areas of the former Imperium where there is no regular interstellar communication. Also referred to as the "blasted areas" or "no man's land," this is the area which the Reformation Coalition (which see) has committed itself to rebuild.



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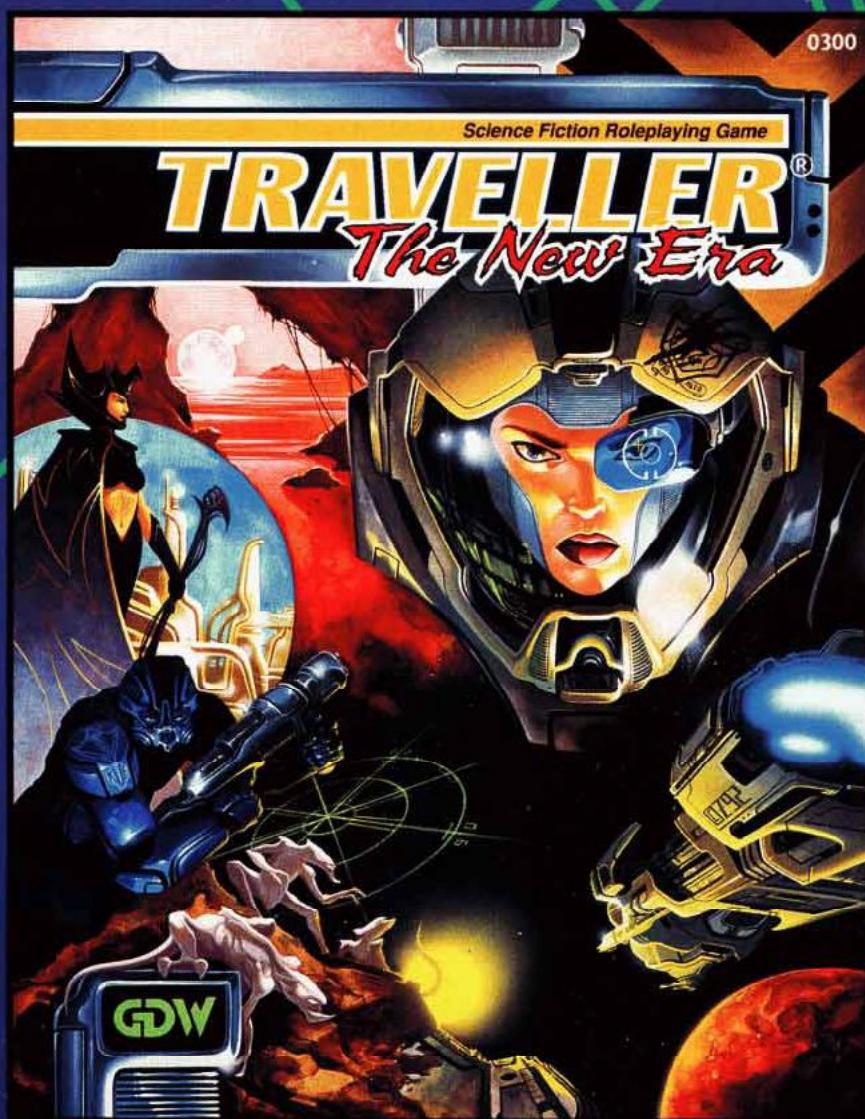
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