

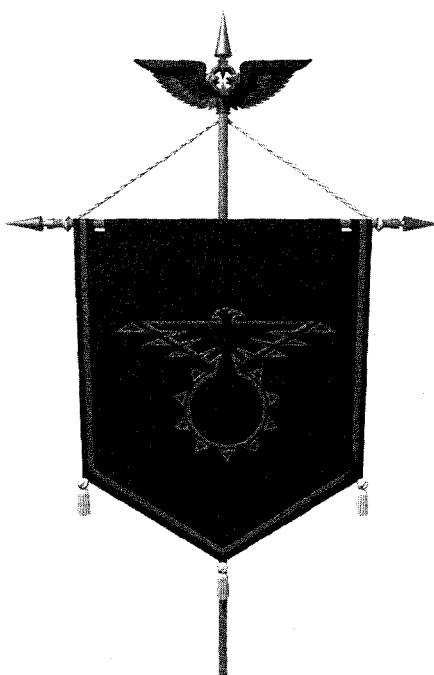


BYZANTIUM SECUNDUS



FADING SUNS™

BYZANTIUM SECUNDUS



by
Christopher Howard,
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and Bill Bridges



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Thanks to Brian Mead for the rendered planets gracing our Known Worlds map in the rulebook and Gamemasters Screen.

A Note on Emblems

The left-hand strip on the cover displays three new emblems (House Cameton, the Authority guild, and the Imperial Eye). This supplement details the groups these emblems represent.

Pilgrims: The path to Understanding twists and turns torturously, and is riddled with sharp rocks underfoot. May the Pancreator guide your steps on this path, and may this tome act as a guidepost through the treacheries of the universe. Woe to he who spurns the light shaded within its pages. May he shiver in the icy depths of the black void as punishment for his hubris.



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Prologue: The Letter

Monday, August 15th, 4996 (Holy Terra calendar)

Brother Guissepe Alustro,

A month has passed since I received your letter. I read it, though I debated burning it as you suggested. Still, if nothing else, I believe you deserve the dignity of a reply.

I send this missive through the hands of the most worthy Lady Tira Li Halan, as you suggested. She is a gracious woman, and I heard from her a somewhat different accounting of your stay on Midian. Her family saw your conversion away from the Orthodox Church and to the Eskatonic Order as more than the "minor scandal" you described to me. Her son, the Baron, told me that he suspected you in the theft of Saint Urda's bones, a sacred relic of the Li Halan. I assured him, truthfully, that you were in no way responsible for the outrage. I told him that you were young and naive, yes, but that you were in no way a thief. You may wish to carefully scrutinize your choice of friends in the future, however. One of them was a well-known thief from the planet's Ipswich region. (And yes, in answer to your unspoken question, I have been keeping watch over you. I owe this much, at least, to my sister.) I suggested that the baroness have him arrested; they recovered the relics and you are, at least partially, returned to the good woman's graces.

I relate this story for two reasons. The first is to make you aware of your choice of companions. While your liege, Erian Li Halan, is no doubt a worthy, though overly-spirited, young lady, you must watch her retinue. The worst ruffians follow even the best noble trains. Your eyes are so fixed on the stars that you do not watch where you set your feet. Still, that is the way of your order, is it not? If nothing else, consider your lady's safety in all this and exercise greater diligence in the future. I do not believe I need to further belabor your responsibilities as her spiritual counselor. The second reason for this parable is to illustrate what consequences your order's lack of respectability may have on your future career, if any, in the Church.

Petty miscreants, such as the one you met on Midian,

are the least of your concerns. Although you know my disapproval of your newfound sect, at least they, in the end, are mostly loyal clergy of the Universal Church. If you hearken to the Eskatonic Order's more responsible injunctions then you are, perhaps, not consigned to the icy shades of perdition after all. You see? I am not as humorless as you had supposed. You must, however, beware the siren song of alien and heretical philosophies. Ideas have a seductive quality. A heresy of deed almost inevitably follows a heresy of thought. Some priests of your order are free-thinkers, anarchists or secret Republicans.

I say nothing here that I have not said more forcefully before the bishopric council. The Eskatonic Order is overly concerned with ephemeral matters. They teach that ideas in and of themselves are not dangerous. "A heresy restricted to one's private meditations is not a true heresy." Some in your order even preach the odious doctrine of moral relativism. Still, it is not your sect, per se, that is my concern. I once knew a curate of your order who spent a year among the Ur-Obun on an "anthropological grant." The Church paid for this expedition, yet when he returned the unfortunate sinner was parroting the Ur-Obun's dubious, animistic philosophies. That a primitive race such as they would have anything to offer the Universal Church beyond their admittedly technically proficient art is a notion more foolish than heretical. (And, yes, I detect something of their style in the sketches you sent me.) Their work is currently en vogue among certain Byzantine nobles. But enough; I trust I have made my point. I believe I need not fear you becoming a tree-worshipping pagan.

Still, one of your acquaintances is Ur-Ukar, is she not? In your letter you quoted to me some of her no doubt endless homespun wisdom. If the Ur-Obun are dangerous only in thought, the Ur-Ukar are dangerous in thought and deed. Despite our ministrations among them, many remain malcontents, saboteurs and murderers. They live in the sewers and feed on filth. I have known a respectable Ur-Ukar or two in my time, but few have found the

light of the Pancreator, despite the words they so readily mouth. If nothing else, I suggest you hide your relationship to me while you are among them. There are many of their number who would ransom or kill you just to strike a blow against the Holy Church and me.

There are many such pitfalls throughout the Empire for one such as you. Alien fallacies and human perversions are rampant. All this despite the benign efforts of the Church, of which (I will again remind you), you are still a member. As a youth I too met with many such temptations. Cleverly wrought sophistry and salacious lies conjured by honeyed tongues can divert even the most devout believers from the true faith. You were always an intelligent youth; you excelled in all but a few of the Church's disciplines, and I admit that your accomplishments filled me with a sense of pride. It is because of this that your recent sea-change in attitude proves so vexing to me. Intelligence, however, is no defense against the many false paths of knowledge. Indeed, promises of false wisdom bait some of the surest traps. Others are baited with more fleshly, worldly desires. Your order's overemphasis on the Prophet's sermons on questing make you particularly vulnerable to such snares. You were ever an obstinate heretic in your quest for knowledge; I read little in your letter to allay my fears in this regard.

It is not easy to watch the child one cared for as a son defy all that one has taught him. Unthankful child. So I saw you then; so I see you now. I will further note that your conversion has caused me some small political discomfort in my administration of the Holy See. Still, I will give you what you so guardedly asked for — my forgiveness. In answer to your conditions on my forgiveness, however, I must add one of my own. As I must extend you my forgiveness without your contrition, so too must you accept my forgiveness without my approval. I ask not for your repentance; for I see that you are not yet ready to do so. There are places on the roads between the stars where I fear this lack of penitence and humility will serve you ill. I say this, not as some sinister veiled threat, but as a simple observance of spiritual truth.

I look at you and I see myself at your age. I was young, brash and so sure that I was on the threshold of all the secrets of the universe. They called it hubris, and so it was. The old father at Saint Horace's shook that out of me soon enough. I went to the Cloud Caves against temple law. The old father caught and rightly punished me, for the caves were filled with carnivorous rats the size of Bannockburn hounds. He put a penance on me, greater than any I have ever laid at your door. Still, I learned a great lesson that day: The hand that chastises also protects.

And so I come, at last, to your question of what I say to my flock. Do I give them the "standard canon," that their sins are in some way responsible for the darkening skies? That we humans, as a race, are not in some way responsible is inconceivable to me. Can it be that you doubt this truth? During the Second Republic we spat our contempt



to the heavens. "See?" we said. "We have conquered all the powers of nature. We have controlled the force of earthquakes and storms with our terraforming engines and weather control satellites. Behold! We are no longer merely beasts imbued with a divine spark; we are ourselves divine!" The Pancreator justly punished us for this blasphemy, just as the Prophet foretold. The Pancreator notices the fall of the smallest dust mote on the most dead and distant world. Think you that he does not see the wickedness in the human heart? A heretic may hide his sins from his community, his family and even himself, but not from the all-seeing eye of Creation.

You are knowledgeable in the arts of rhetoric and debate. The Prophet said "quest," and so you do. The Prophet said: "A sun must burn to birth light. When your passion burns, you give off light." You take this as an admonition against what you see as the burdensome responsibilities of order and tradition. You, like many who follow this new Emperor, misinterpret the Prophet's teachings on the Quest. The Prophet spoke not of an outward seeking passion, nor was he a proponent of a dubious quest for "self-enlightenment." The Prophet spoke of a passion for building the one true Church, so that all throughout the Known Worlds may know the divine touch of the Pancreator. Humans are creatures of two instincts, one base and profane, the other divine. If the Church must discipline its flock to save their souls, so be it. If, as you said, many ignore the "petty" laws of the Church — what of it? Dereliction of duty by the weak should in no way dictate the actions of a man of conscience. At the end of all things, our souls must be in right order, before the final judgment of the Pancreator.

But again, enough. I will not rebut your letter point for point. You no doubt view it as your "Manifesto of Freedom" against the stifling old ways. I wrote many such documents in my own youth; they molder even now in the great cathedral vaults beneath my feet. No, the impetuosity of youth will in no way admit to the wisdom of age in its quest for "truth." I understand, perhaps even envy,

the unbridled freedom that you believe your travels afford you. You must, in the final analysis, make your own mistakes (although many Inquisitors may be less lenient in their judgment). As long as you remain true to the ideals of the Universal Church, I will strive to protect you as best I can. I do this out of a love for my dearly departed sister, and because of a lingering belief that you may yet become a productive member of the Church. I have spoken with Bishop Vestrus. He assures me that his parish is still open to you, despite the unfortunate events surrounding your final parting with him.

If not, you are set on an altogether more dangerous path than any I ever attempted. You have traveled much, from Midian to Leminkainen. If you in any way still heed my word, then take heed of this: Midian is a relatively stable world, Leminkainen less so. Yet, still you have not walked the dark paths. There are planets, and you know of which ones I speak, that are far more treacherous than any you have yet encountered. As you and the Prophet said: "Darkness walks among the stars." I have had visions of hidden hands at work throughout the Known Worlds. I fear that a time of great tribulation is upon us. There are nightmare paths, some unknown to the Charioteers or the lower castes of your order. Questing does not mean the reckless courting of needless dangers. If you walk these cursed paths, you pass beyond the borders of all help and I will not be able to aid you.

You are, no doubt, tested by my old man's warnings. So I will end by allaying at least one of the fears addressed in your letter. I bear you no animosity for the choices you have made... thus far. I may still feel the brunt of your rejection of Orthodoxy, but if you repent it must be to yourself and to the Pancreator. If your path should bring you to the seat of the Empire, you will find my door open to you.

Your Uncle,
Marcus Aurelius Palamon
Archbishop, Byzantium Secundus



Introduction

Byzantium Secundus. The name means power to all in the Known Worlds. Throneworld of Emperor Alexius and Emperor Vladimir I before him. Home to a long line of regents, some great leaders, many weak puppets. Former capitol of the glorious Second Republic, birthplace of humanity's greatest achievement — or grandest sin.

Many serfs and peasants yearn to see the center of human civilization, to visit the world where their fates are decided by nobles, priests and guildsmen, but most know they will never get the chance. For them, Byzantium Secundus will remain a legendary palace beyond the reach of any jumpgate. Those who rule, either through might, litany or money, also yearn to reach Byzantium Secundus. A position here can be a stepping stone to ultimate power — but a misplaced step can lead to a fall of utter disgrace.

It is said that Byzantium Secundus casts its light to all the Known Worlds — and that its shadows reach just as far. A good deed on Byzantium can improve the lives of people on many worlds, but an evil action can wreak havoc on just as many. A well-known folk saying states that when a noble on Byzantium Secundus raises his hand, thousands of subjects throughout Human Space lift their heads, but when the hand drops, thousands are pushed down into the muck. An exaggeration, perhaps, but one with a strong basis in the decades-long Emperor Wars that fractured the tenuous unity of the Known Worlds. Now, it is said that Alexius' hand is raised and has yet to come down. The gauge of optimism among peasants is how soon they believe the hand will fall.

The new Emperor's reforms have already greatly affected the Known Worlds. He has created a new institution, the Questing Knights, and sent them forth to rediscover the lost worlds of Human Space. As these knights travel the universe, they inevitably take Alexius' values with them, spreading Imperial authority as they right local wrongs. This has greatly angered the local lords, who feel the new Emperor's minions take their roles too seriously, and misunderstand the delicate balance of power on the frontier. But Alexius has yet to stay the hand of his

free agents, and the popularity they have engendered causes the lords to fear moving against them lest they ignite revolts among the populace.

The next few years will be vital to the stability of the new Empire. Alexius' enemies move in secret to build coalitions against him, and no one knows when they will make their move. The Emperor must be careful as he cements his rule, and cannot act as sternly against his former enemies as some wish him to. Both sides are gathering allies for the inevitable confrontation.

Never before has the common man stood in such an important position, especially on Byzantium Secundus. In the wary détente following the Emperor Wars, all parties fear to openly enact their agendas. They instead recruit agents from outside the halls of power to act for them, those who they could deny were their schemes to fail or promote to greater power in the case of success. Some of these agents are aware of their position and willing to carry out the tasks set them, while others are ignorant of the greater game being played around them, and risk becoming expendable pawns. On Byzantium Secundus, as no where else, ignorance can be deadly.

What's In This Book

Below is a brief outline of this book's contents:

- **Prologue:** A response to the Prologue from the **Fading Suns** rulebook. Guiseppe Alustro's uncle responds to his nephew's letter in typical Byzantium Secundus fashion — authoritarian, stern and steadfastly sure of his course.

- **Introduction:** Some general notes concerning the use of this setting book, including the outline you're reading now.

- **Chapter One: History:** The long history of Human Space's pivotal world, from its early days as a Sathraist hide-out, its middle years as the capitol of the Second Republic, to its present, elder years as the throneworld of the Empire.

- **Chapter Two: Places:** Details the island continents



of the swamp-world and its steadily rising waters. From the high-tech city sprawls of the central continent to the deserted wastelands and unexplored jungles in the far corners of the globe.

- **Chapter Three: People:** The movers and shakers of the throneworld. The people listed here range from high to low, but each of them may greatly affect the fate of the universe.

- **Chapter Four: Conspiracies:** The power groups and their agendas, sometimes obvious, but more often covert and underground. The various politics detailed here can be used, abused or ignored as the gamemaster sees fit.

- **Chapter Five: Dramas:** Some possible dramas to confront player characters, from small seeds to long epics.

- **Appendix: The Imperial Eye:** Six new character roles from Byzantium Secundus' homegrown but interplanetary busybodies — the Emperor's spy service. Their travails may leave them shaken, but never stirred.

How to Use This Book

Byzantium Secundus is the first setting book for the **Fading Suns** science fiction universe. It is designed to give the gamemaster a starting point for her **Fading Suns** dramas, providing non-player characters, plots and suggested dramas for use in her games. The **Fading Suns** rulebook provided an example of a frontier world, Pandemonium; this book provides a look at the center of the Known

Worlds, the capitol of Human Space and ground zero for many of the epic politics and power plays affecting history.

There are a number of ways this world can be used in games, depending on the type of dramas the gamemaster and players want to play. While this book concentrates on high-level politics, these do not have to be directly introduced into a game; they can provide mere background for the characters' adventures if they choose not to get involved in such complicated issues. The gamemaster can use as much or as little of the fractious web introduced here as he chooses. If he prefers to run a more black and white, good and evil game, he can do so by concentrating on those who are trying to aid or destroy the newfound unity of humankind. Or he can run a complex espionage thriller game, playing up the double-agent aspect of just about everybody involved in the Emperor's court or any lower court. Byzantium Secundus can be simple or complex, depending on the needs of the drama.

The atmosphere of this setting is up to the gamemaster to forge. A game wherein the characters are all Questing Knights may have the feel of an Arthurian fantasy of high adventure and epic morality, or perhaps the feel of a Three Musketeers adventure of daring deeds, high intrigue and companionship against the various powers which threaten to foil the heroes. A game could be about Imperial Eye spies, with the feel of an Impossible

Missions task force or a James Bond thriller, or about intrepid explorers in "Indiana Jones"-style adventures, uncovering the mysteries hidden in the ruins of previous civilizations. Or a game could be something unique, with elements unlike any game run before.

While Holistic Design will use the plots introduced here to fuel some of the stories and dramas to be introduced in later supplements, knowledge of this book is not required to use the vast amount of material we plan to publish in the future. We hope that you enjoy the ideas given here and that they make for exciting gaming.

Byzantium Secundus

The following is Byzantium Secundus' vital statistics, using the planet design outline introduced in Chapter Nine: Planets in the **Fading Suns** rulebook. Full details on each subject can be found throughout the rest of this book.

Ruler: Emperor Alexius

Cathedral: Cathedral of Saint Maya (Orthodox)

Agora: Port Authority (the Authority, a local guild)

Garrison: 10

Capitol: Imperial City

Jumps: 0

Adjacent worlds: (All Nightside) Aragon, Criticorum, Leminkainen, Madoc, Pentateuch, Pyre, Shaprut, Sutek, Tethys

Solar System: Vesuvius 1, Santius 2, Byzantium Secundus 3 (Jericho), Aden 4 (New Malta), Magog 5 (Tuszla, Amida, Cyril), Iblis 6 (Derelict).

Spacestations: Diadem (Imperial Fleet), Cumulus (Merchant League)

Tech: 6

Human population: 6 billion

Alien population: 600,000

Resources: Grain

Exports: Grain, starships, politics

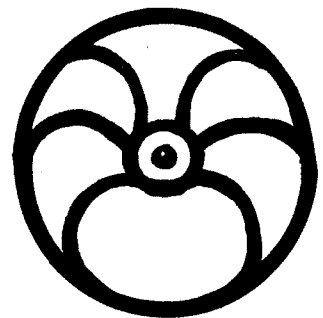
Landscape: Mostly water, with swampy island continents dotted with city sprawls



House Cameton
(a gurdvulf,
now extinct)



The Authority
(oceans and dikes)



Imperial Eye
(webspinner)



Chapter One: History

By the time humanity took to the stars in the 24th century, the First Republic had already surrendered much of its power to Earth's giant corporations. These zaibatsu led the way into space, seeking out new resources, establishing company towns and gaining a stranglehold on interstellar trade. They proceeded quickly, racing each other to try to stake their claims to any new worlds they could.

Byzantium Secundus was the target of one of the earliest such races. Using both research and trickery, four companies discovered the jumpgate codes from Sathra's Boon (now Sutek) to Byzantium Secundus at almost the exact same moment. Each of the four companies sent explorers hurtling through the gate as fast as they could, while secret agents on each ship tried to sabotage the voyage. All four made it through the gate within a day of each other, but all had suffered damage in the process.

The first ship through, belonging to a multinational zaibatsu specializing in information technologies, crashed on the planet Iblis. The second, the property of an Eastern European zaibatsu with interests in every field, crashed on the moon of New Malta which orbits Aden, but at least some of its crew members survived. The third ship, owned by a North American mining concern, disappeared, and the media of the day blamed the owners of the fourth ship. That fourth ship, belonging to the massive IOPEC energy consortium, landed in a swamp on Byzantium Secundus, and that has set the tone for all human involvement with the planet since.

Founding

The planet the IOPEC scouts discovered was far different from the Byzantium Secundus of Emperor Alexius. A wild planet, it bore no mark that intelligent life might ever have walked its surface. Instead giant carnivorous reptiles wallowed in its many dark swamps, sea creatures of immense size swam in its vast oceans, and wild herds of brutes roamed the open plains. The new colonists moved quickly to change all that.

IOPEC opened the planet to colonists from its existing operations, bringing in geologists, technicians, oil field workers, security guards and their families. However, since rival zaibatsu claimed the system's other planets, and were covertly landing operatives on Byzantium Secundus (named New Mecca by the pilot who discovered it), IOPEC found itself forced to bring in more, and less loyal, colonists.

IOPEC needed these new colonists to help enforce its claim to the planet, and the zaibatsu opened the world to any who would come and pledge loyalty to IOPEC. It ran extensive background checks on all prospective colonists, and began bringing in new inhabitants in the year 2325. IOPEC viewed these colonists primarily as a source of cheap labor and security, but the colonists had their own ideas.

At first relations between IOPEC and the colonists was cordial enough, but as more colonists came to the planet, and as a generation of New Mecca natives grew to maturity, those relations became more strained. In 2350 the planet saw its first civil unrest, as inhabitants demanded the freedom to do more than farm and work IOPEC business concerns. IOPEC blamed some of its zaibatsu competitors for the troubles and reacted harshly. After the immediate crackdown cost the company many of its best workers, however, IOPEC's hierarchy reconsidered.

With the discovery of a number of jumproutes from New Mecca's gate, the solar system had become an especially active place. None of the system's other planets offered much for those making their way between systems, but New Mecca had a great deal of potential. Thus those IOPEC executives responsible for cracking down on the planet's dissidents were themselves sacked, and a new group of profit-minded individuals took over, selling land to new colonists, allowing them to set up new businesses and inviting passing ships to stop off during their travels. By 2400 New Mecca had turned into an extremely successful venture, and pilots from all around began mak-



ing their homes there. It became a center for all space-related activities — including the new religion of Sathra.

Sathraism

The first pilot through the jumpgate to Sathra's Boon experienced feelings of transcendent peace and harmony. Those who followed often felt similar feelings, though they were always most intense for the ship's pilot or navigator. Indeed, for most people the passage was a pleasant experience, but nothing reality shattering. For the pilots, however, each jump was a ceremony and a revelation of the highest order. They could never put into words exactly what they saw and felt, but each pilot understood what the others meant when they talked about the jump.

At first, government scientists spent a great deal of effort trying to figure out what was happening, equipping the pilots with all sorts of monitoring equipment, but they had no luck. The pilots would go on about indescribable visions, universal connections and cosmic senses, but the machines could detect nothing. The scientists never stopped studying the pilots, but never found what they were looking for. In time, scientists learned to block the effects but not duplicate them.

The pilots, on the other hand, felt that they had stumbled upon all that they had ever sought. As years went by, and pilots flew more and more, they became less dedicated to the various zaibatsu which employed them. IOPEC pilots met with those from Soyasan Ltd., and Benz-Senault GmbH navigators gathered with those from IDH. They made no secret of the fact that they were meeting, but went to great pains to keep the uninitiated away from their rendezvous.

Rumors began to spread about just what went on at these meetings. The pilots themselves denied that there was anything treasonous in what they did, and even disputed that they were founding a new religion. They claimed that their members still followed the traditional religions, be they Christians, Moslems, Jews, Buddhists or whatever. This did not satisfy the zaibatsu, however, which began taking greater and greater efforts to find out what the pilots were up to.

An additional fear began to grow as zaibatsu scientists developed a greater understanding of psychic phenomena. Humanity had documented similar wonders before, but such reports mushroomed following the discovery of the first jumpgate. These were most commonly linked to Sathra adherents, and accounts of their powers gave added weight to zaibatsu concerns.

Finally, the accounts of pilot duplicity became too much for the zaibatsu to ignore. Their security forces moved quickly to put buffers on all ships and round up or eliminate suspect pilots, which included all but the least experienced. While the zaibatsu enjoyed initial success, pilots who had been off-planet when the crackdown started fought back. New Mecca and Aden became centers for resistance, and the battles in this system were hard

and bloody. Fighting between the two groups went on for 10 years before the conflict ended.

Despite their higher levels of expertise and psychic abilities, the Sathra devotees had little chance against the combined strength of the zaibatsu. The surviving pilots disappeared following final defeats near Earth, Sathra's Boon and New Mecca. Most people believed that they had died in battle or on distant planets, but rumors persisted that many of them had used psychic (or darker) powers to infiltrate humanity, and that Sathra cells continued to operate wherever humans went.

Diaspora

One unintended effect of the zaibatsu crackdown was the disruption of the lines of communication and commerce between the stars. By the year 2500 humanity had discovered 25 solar systems and started colonies on at least 20 of them. However, with no experienced pilots left, and many of the best ships destroyed in the war between the zaibatsu and the Sathraists, the zaibatsu found it difficult to enforce their will upon their distant investments. Most worlds, including New Mecca, had spawned families of rich landowners, all of whom tired of the distant rule of nameless executives and inhuman corporations.

No one remembers the name of the first landowner to claim corporate land as his own, but once one did so, there was no stopping the process. It began on the most distant worlds and spread quickly, with many assets seized before the zaibatsu even knew about such rebellions. When the zaibatsu finally moved out to protect their resources, they found the landowners armed and ready, with their fleets ably armed and commanded. The zaibatsu at first considered this threat an extension of the Sathra insurrection, and were slow to realize it for what it was — full-scale revolt.

On the outer planets, the powerful property owners either bribed or eliminated the zaibatsu security forces. The zaibatsu felt certain of eventually reclaiming their holdings, however, since only they could build new jumpships. What the corporations did not know was that the landowners had secretly met with Red Moon Syndicate, a league of anti-zaibatsu technicians and anarchists, some of whom had sided with the pilots during the recent hostilities. In an operation worthy of the most flamboyant spy novel, members of the Red Moon smuggled jumpengine designs off of Earth and gave them to the landowners during a clandestine meeting on Aden, a planet in the New Mecca system.

The tides of battle quickly shifted in the landowners' favor. Zaibatsu minions began deserting their bosses in exchange for offers of land and independence on newly opened worlds. The zaibatsu themselves were slow to react, and had immense trouble working together when they did try to take the offensive. For more than a century the conflict proceeded, with both sides fighting a most disorganized civil war. By the time the zaibatsu fi-

Timeline

2320	IOPEC ship first lands on New Mecca
2350	First colonist unrest recorded
2490-2500	Sathra insurrection
2590	First Republic crackdown on New Mecca
2599	House Hamid claims the system and re-names the planet New Istanbul
2600	Battle of New Istanbul
3338	House Cameton seizes control of New Istanbul from House Hamid
3500	Byzantium Secundus becomes capital of the Second Republic
3996	Welfare computer banks sabotaged
3999	Orthodox sect recognized as state religion
4000	Rogue worlders and aliens attack Byzantium Secundus; the Ten seize the planet
4271	House Gesar claims Byzantium Secundus
4537	Barbarians pillage Byzantium Secundus
4550	Emperor Vladimir assassinated
4664	Houses al-Malik and Decados destroy House Gesar
4979	The Hazat sack Byzantium Secundus
4983	Alexius becomes regent
4993	Alexius is crowned emperor
4994	Last great space battle in Byzantium Secundus system; bombardment destroys life support on Jericho moon.
4995	Emperor Wars end
4996	Emperor Alexius forms the Questing Knights

nally agreed to work together under the auspices of the First Republic, it was too late. The First Republic could only count on the loyalty of five worlds — among them, New Mecca.

Despite its many problems, the First Republic still controlled most of humanity's money and people. Earth's solar system itself accounted for almost half of the human race, and the other solar systems under its control were also the more populated and developed. The nascent nobility also realized this, and moved quickly to change the situation. The rebellion's leaders concentrated first on New Mecca and Vera Cruz, hoping that freeing these powerful worlds would force Earth's leaders to capitulate.

IOPEC was still New Mecca's biggest employer and also funded the planet's security forces. The conflict began small, with the rebels funding small acts of terrorism and supporting labor organizations on the planet. Then came word that the First Republic planned to use New Mecca as a staging ground to enforce its control over the rebellious worlds. This counterattack began with a severe crack-

down on all suspected dissidents. This backfired almost immediately, with the populace rising up in force against this oppression. This uprising was far more organized than the security forces had anticipated, and it coincided with a devastating attack on the IOPEC space station orbiting the jumpgate.

The forces of the First Republic were thrown into immediate disarray. The newly created noble houses saw their chance and moved swiftly, bringing their largest assault force into the system before the First Republic could finish outfitting its own fleet. The nobles managed to drive away most of the IOPEC and First Republic ships before landing on New Mecca itself. They were greeted as saviors and, at the urging of some of the planet's leading citizens, renamed it New Istanbul.

By the time the First Republic fleet first began pouring through the jumpgate, the nobles' forces had been reprovisioned. Additionally, they had put New Istanbul under the control of its own noble house, House Hamid, which recruited a huge number of skilled pilots from the planet. The noble fleet came under the command of Baron Santius Hamid, himself an exceptionally able pilot.

The zaibatsu fleet was larger and more powerfully armed, but the nobles had the more capable troops. In the largest clash of space ships humanity had ever been a part of, the two fleets battled across the solar system. At first the nobles fell back before the advancing zaibatsu, but as the ships neared New Istanbul, resistance stiffened. The greatest encounter occurred near New Istanbul itself, when noble warships finally broke through the zaibatsu screen to attack the troop transports. Most of the First Republic soldiers died in space, their ships destroyed in great fireballs.

After this, the conflict degenerated into a number of running battles which took the combatants across the

solar system. Baron Santius himself died in a skirmish near the planet which now bears his name, and many other ships were destroyed before the First Republic fleet finally fled for the safety of Sutek. Both sides had lost most of their ships in the Battle of New Istanbul, but New Istanbul was firmly in the hands of House Hamid, and the First Republic could never again threaten the world.

While the First Republic lingered on in one form or another for 500 more years, it never regained its power. The nobles seized its remaining territory on New Istanbul and divvied it up among the winners, creating a number of new noble houses in the process. New Istanbul became one of the centers of noble power, as important for its strategic position on the First Republic border as for its technology and resources. House Hamid controlled the planet for most of this time, though many of the planet's other houses also gained a great deal of power.

Second Republic

As the new noble houses fought and squabbled over control on each and every planet, a new force rose to power. New corporations and merchants, far less authoritarian than the zaibatsu, came into existence. They sold nobles the weapons the nobility used to wage war with itself, and gave loans with which to buy the weapons. They created new technologies which they sold freely, distributing to both noble and freeman. Most importantly, they helped spread word of the new Church, which preached equality and freedom — at least in its early days.

As humanity spread during the Diaspora, the noble houses found their power waning. Most only had influence on their planet of birth, and those who had expanded farther never controlled more than a handful of solar systems. House Hamid, while one of the most powerful noble houses, never could extend its reach to any neighboring system. The only groups with true interstellar influence were the new merchant interests.

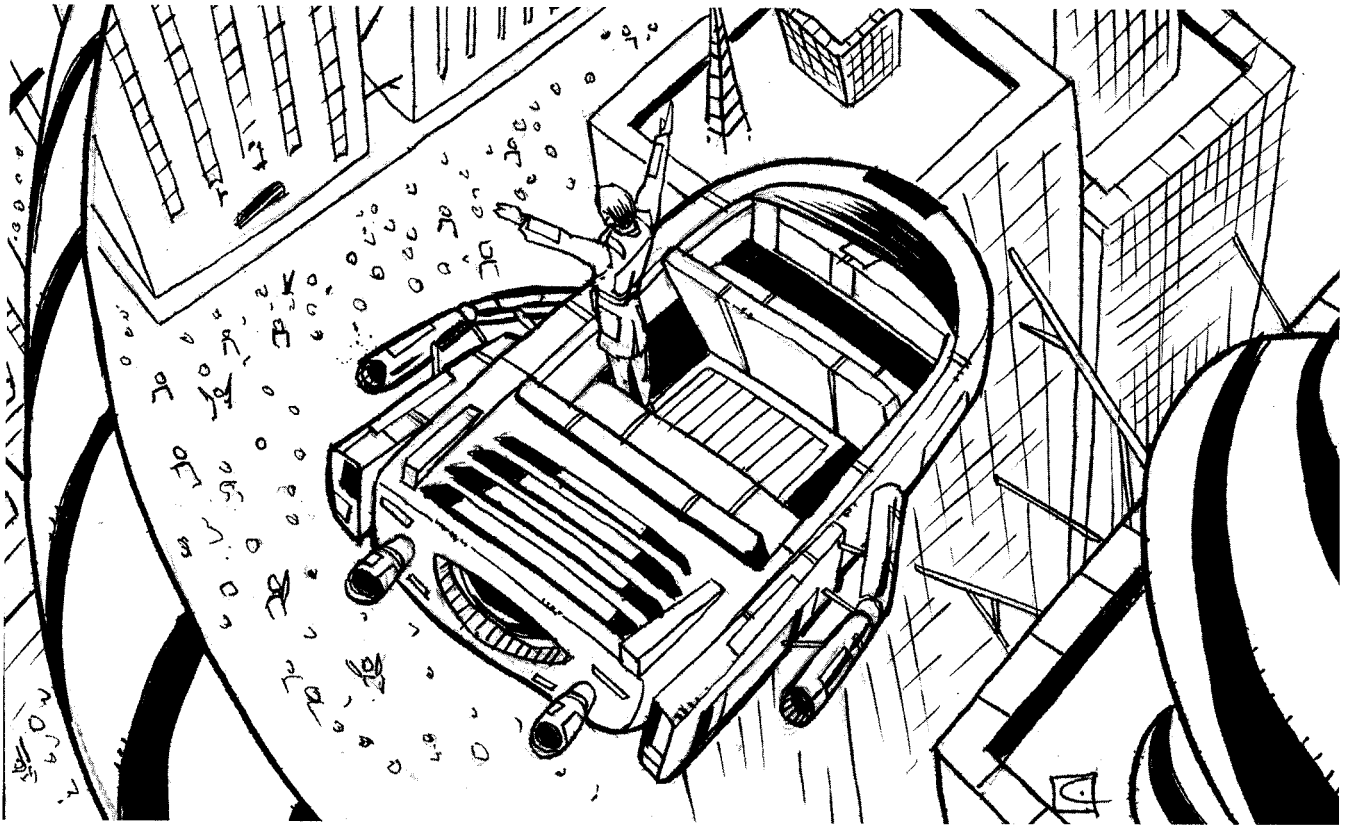
New Istanbul, as one of the most visited systems, became one of the trading centers. In the early days of the Diaspora, the merchants had little trouble with the nobles, primarily because the nobility provided what little security that troubled time enjoyed. As the merchants' interests developed, however, they found the multitude of noble houses to be a distinct hindrance. At first the merchants' complaints centered around issues such as custom duties and taxes. Each noble house had its own way of collecting these fees, and merchants found themselves having to pay ever-increasing amounts at each jumpgate they passed.

As a result, the merchants began organizing, growing from small trading houses to giant cartels. They also began dealing more and more with the smaller noble houses, seeking out ones who would agree to a new order in exchange for power in that order. One of the more agreeable was Viscount Psellus Cameton, leader of one of the small-

The Ukar War

New Istanbul was one of the planets most threatened when the Ur-Ukar declared war against humanity. When the war began, the nobles had effectively destroyed the First Republic, but had nothing to take its place. Despite their numerical inferiority, the Ur-Ukar made significant gains by taking advantage of humanity's disorganization. New Istanbul itself suffered several raids.

As a result, House Hamid came to the forefront as noble leaders, calling for the counterattack against the Ur-Ukar. The nobles of House Hamid hoped to use the event to grab power outside of New Istanbul. During the war, however, its commanders never led the winning battles. They never seized defeated planets. When humanity divided up the spoils of war, House Hamid found itself with little. Murmurs of discontent could be heard across New Istanbul.



est but most ambitious houses on New Istanbul. The merchants began funneling weapons and other technological goodies to the members of House Cameton, with Viscount Cameton agreeing that after his house seized control of the planet, it would work with a group of merchants in administrating the world.

When House Cameton finally did go to war against House Hamid, it was with a level of technological superiority no one else had anticipated. Additionally, House Hamid found it was suffering from an unusually high amount of substandard equipment and having a hard time replacing damaged equipment. It took House Cameton a remarkably short time to seize control of the planet. As part of his victory conditions, Viscount Psellus married Duchess Malikah Hamid, ensuring both his dominance of the planet and that his heirs would be descendants of Baron Santius.

Psellus also helped the merchants establish their council, called the Market Authority, on New Istanbul. From New Istanbul, the merchant cartels began organizing similar forces around the worlds humanity had come to inhabit, without the nobles even knowing of this threat to their power. By the year 3400, the leading noble houses were all indebted to the Market Authority in one way or another, and it was then that the merchants began agitating for even greater political freedoms.

Much of what the merchants accomplished they tried out on New Istanbul before taking it elsewhere. Thus New Istanbul became a center for education, communications and information technologies. The Market Authority also

invested heavily in various entertainment media, all of which came to be centered on New Istanbul. Finally the merchants became sure enough of their power to make their move.

This revolution was almost bloodless and caused far less devastation than did the one which toppled the First Republic. It started on New Istanbul and spread like wildfire through the human worlds. While the nobles still owned much of the land, they saw their wealth and power eclipsed by the mercantile interests. World after world forced its rulers to accede to democratic demands, and most nobles acquiesced rather than risk losing everything. Those nobles who did resist found their fiefs cut off from the rest of humanity and their subjects in revolt, inspired by the movies and videos the merchants spread.

In a century the merchants felt secure enough in their power to create the first truly interstellar government — the Second Republic. Instead of making Earth the capital, with all its reminders of the First Republic and the strength the Universal Church had there, the merchants opted for New Istanbul. Here delegates from more than 100 worlds arrived, hammering out a constitution to unite Church, nobles, merchants and everyone else.

Collapse

For 500 years New Istanbul remained the most powerful of worlds. As humanity continued to spread, and as worlds lost during the Diaspora were rediscovered, more and more political leaders and wanna-bes flocked to the



planet. The argument can (and has) been made that New Istanbul became too caught up in its own glory, and lost track of what was happening on the periphery.

The Market Authority continued to exist, setting economic and trade policy throughout the Republic. House Cameton grew in wealth and stature, though it never managed to accumulate any influence outside the solar system — a fact which came to grate on house leaders. Most of the old noble houses found this era to be an especially trying time. Where once open space loomed, theirs for the taking, the Second Republic forced them to content themselves with their current estates.

New planets went to colonists ruled by administrators. The Second Republic leased rights to the resources of a thousand worlds, and no one but the Republic could claim ownership. Many of the noble houses which rose to prominence during the Diaspora withered away, either disappearing completely or being swallowed up by other houses. House Cameton managed to take over the holdings of two other noble houses on New Istanbul, House Tal and House Webser, but could go little farther.

Those houses which prospered the most during this time were far enough from New Istanbul that the Second Republic could not control everything they did, but close enough to the center of humanity that they could take advantage of the most recent innovations. Ten of these houses rose to prominence, and as the 41st century approached, they came to House Cameton with a proposal.

Their agents needed assistance with a plan to infiltrate New Istanbul's mammoth bureaucracy. No one would be hurt, the Ten promised, but their agents would begin working to have more of the government's power transferred to local authorities — authorities who often had noble ties. The Cameton's agreed in exchange for a promise to help it acquire power on nearby worlds.

When all the records of the Second Republic's welfare bank crashed at the same time, House Cameton was hit as hard as anyone. The riots on New Istanbul might have been squelched more quickly than those elsewhere, but they still did a great deal of damage in the process. House Cameton's own estates and investments suffered dramatically, and it turned to the Ten in anger. The Ten denied having destroyed the welfare bank, but it did offer House Cameton a chance to benefit from the chaos.

If House Cameton would continue its allegiance with the Market Authority, and act as inside agent for the Ten, then the Ten would help it gain control of some of the systems one jump away from New Istanbul. Blinded by visions of power stretching from Sutek to Obun, and Pentateuch to Madoc, House Cameton agreed. It offered all its resources to the Market Authority and worked closely to bring order back. The Second Republic might have regained its footing, but then the suns began to fade.

The Ten's agents moved immediately to turn the anxiety into anarchy. The Church, which had grown especially strong since the crash of the welfare bank, moved with

equal speed. Both blamed the Second Republic for all humanity's problems. The riots that had shaken the Known Worlds when the welfare system collapsed were nothing compared to what happened now. The Second Republic could do little to keep the peace, and world after world claimed their independence.

In a final fit of desperation, Second Republic leaders begged the Church to step in. The holy fires ignited by its recognition of what became the Orthodox sect burned even brighter than the riots which had preceded them. Now the battles hit New Istanbul with a vengeance. As the center of government, every religious sect had adherents on the planet — and these were the most dedicated followers. The government began calling in troops from all neighboring systems, and even these were not enough to stop the violence.

It did mean that the planet's defenses were too badly stripped to stop an attack by a number of rogue worlds and vengeful aliens. Their attack devastated what was left of the Second Republic's authority, and the citizens of the Republic cried out for a savior. Into this chaos rode the Ten. The fleet came through the jumpgate to New Istanbul, nobles in the lead. Its troops defeated the rogue worlders, the aliens... and the Second Republic. The Ten's troops raised the noble banner over the capital building, and the Second Republic was no more.

The Dark Ages

House Cameton had nearly met its end as well. The violence had almost completely destroyed its holdings, and when house leaders pressed the Ten to abide by its promise of extended influence, the Ten pointed to Cameton's weakness on its home planet as proof that it could not manage even its own affairs, much less those of other planets. As a final insult, it set up a council of its own members to administer the world which, in a grand ceremony, it renamed Byzantium Secundus.

This council officially ruled the planet for almost 500 years, though its influence faded as Byzantium Secundus rebuilt. The Market Authority was no more, but some of its leaders survived and passed their knowledge and wealth to their heirs. These heirs formed the Authority, which has remained the planet's most powerful guild ever since.

House Cameton cannot make the same claim. Following the Ten's attack, it was at the lowest ebb in its history. Its one-time ally, the Authority, knew of its treachery, and did all it could to make life miserable for house members. Other noble houses rose out of the ashes, and certain members of the Ten pressed their own claims to the planet. Then the barbarians charged out of the darkening sky.





Hundreds of worlds had already been cut off (or cut themselves off) from the center of humanity. The loss of one key jumpgate could destroy connections to dozens of other worlds. Byzantium Secundus' fortunes rose and fell repeatedly during the centuries of the regency. Some of these cut off worlds would band together, however, and reestablish their connection to the rest of humanity with violence and savagery. At a time when House Gesar ruled the planet, a barbarian horde made its way to Byzantium Secundus. The devastation the barbarians wreaked was amazing, and House Gesar cried out for bloody vengeance.

Duke Vladimir Alecto heard its pleas and made House Gesar one of his first allies in the war against the Barbarians. As Vladimir gained power, so too did House Gesar and Byzantium Secundus. The remnants of House Cameton also joined in Vladimir's crusade, and Byzantium Secundus began to regain its earlier prominence. Vladimir's rise continued with the determination of a bulldozer, and when he finally proclaimed himself emperor, it was to almost universal rejoicing.

In 4550, Vladimir landed on Byzantium Secundus for his coronation. He walked from his lander to the Maya Cathedral, took the crown from the patriarch and placed it on his head. Instantly flames shot out, and Vladimir slumped to the floor, his head a burned wreck. Recriminations began immediately. The nobles blamed the Church, the Church blamed the guilds, and the guilds

blamed Vladimir's noble enemies. They followed through with the system Vladimir had established to choose new rulers, but only gave the elected leader the title of regent. At the same time they began maneuvering to see who would become the next emperor, and war broke out once again.

House Gesar had been weakened in the wars against the barbarians, while House Cameton had risen in strength. The Gesar still tried to press their own claims for the Emperor's crown, but House Cameton made its own deals. House Gesar began to lose badly, and on one night in the year 4664, a fleet of al-Malik, Decados and mercenary ships came through the jumpgate. By the time they had destroyed all the Gesar ships in orbit, Cameton troops (with the assistance of more than a thousand mercenaries who had been hidden on Aden) had seized all Gesar holdings, killing all the house's members in the process.

House Cameton was once again the planet's leading house, but others have challenged it regularly. House Lambeth and Setevis remain its two native competitors, though there have also been attacks from off world. When the Emperor Wars began in earnest, Byzantium Secundus became a target for countless assassins and malcontents. Following the assassination of one of its nobles, the Hazat sacked the planet, killing thousands and making off with whatever they could.

Empire

Four years after the Hazat attack, and after the assassination of Regent Samitra Li Halan, Prince Alexius Hawkwood became regent. By this time the noble houses had already passed the peak of their power and were beginning to feel the effects of the long war. They were desperate for an end to the conflict, and Alexius had little problem lining up support from most minor houses. House Cameton was a major exception to this, and it maintained its old ties to House Decados even after Hawkwood and al-Malik nobles signed an alliance. Part of the reason for this was a snub by Alexius predecessor, Darius Hawkwood, who tried to proclaim himself emperor on Delphi instead of Byzantium Secundus.

When Alexius managed to gain the support of Prince Flavius Li Halan, the votes of the League and the grudging acceptance of the Patriarch, he declared himself emperor. The response was as fierce as anyone expected, and Byzantium Secundus found itself caught in the middle. Hazat and Decados attacks occurred with amazing regularity, and Alexius ordered his forces to keep careful watch on Cameton loyalists. The final battle, known as

the Siege of Jericho, left that moon in ruins after a bombardment destroyed its atmosphere plants. Thousands upon thousands died horrible deaths, and Alexius' forces were left reeling from the attack.

What he had no way of knowing was just how much that attack had cost House Decados. The next year both the Hazat and Decados leaders accepted Alexius as emperor. Alexius finally made his peace with House Cameton as well, though his administrators and House Cameton nobles have regularly been at odds over how the planet is being run. Both groups agree that a major redevelopment plan is necessary, however, and rebuilding has progressed at an amazing rate.

One of the major areas of contention has been the establishment of the Questing Knights, a group which Alexius describes as a force for unity and justice throughout the stars. House Cameton sees it more as a force for brawls and drunken revels throughout its territory, and fears that these young nobles may demand fiefs on Byzantium Secundus itself. But then, House Cameton seems to see everything happening on the planet as a threat to its rule, so no one knows exactly what it might do next.



Chapter Two: Places

This chapter contains information on some of the most important places on Byzantium Secundus, as well as a description of the planet's geography.

Note: For more information, see the map at the end of this book.

Solar System

Byzantium Secundus orbits a dimming star, one of the suns suffering from the phenomenon first recognized by Second Republic scientists but little understood by them. This fading sun, like others in the night sky, serves as proof to many that humanity is sinful and must change its ways. To others, it signals a mystery begging investigation, spurring adventurers and idealists on epic journeys to distant worlds in search of an answer and a cure for the dying light. This sun is called by many names: Solaris Primis, Vita Imperia, The Emperor's Torch and The Throne Star.

Six planets orbit the Byzantine sun, in orbits not dissimilar to some of Holy Terra's planets.

Vesuvius

The closest planet to the sun is a small, hot and fiery orb similar to Mercury. While it was studied extensively during the early Second Republic, it was deemed too costly to extract what little valuable resources it could provide. It is largely ignored by modern space travelers.

Santius

A volcanic inferno world renowned as the death place of Baron Santius, a Diaspora-era noble whose starship plunged into the planet after a heated space battle defending Byzantium Secundus from First Republic fleets. The Baron's forces were victorious, pushing back Earth's zaibatsu navy, but at the cost of Santius's life. He is now a revered hero in Byzantine history. As with Vesuvius, the planet named after him was never colonized or developed, considered too costly to terraform.

Byzantium Secundus

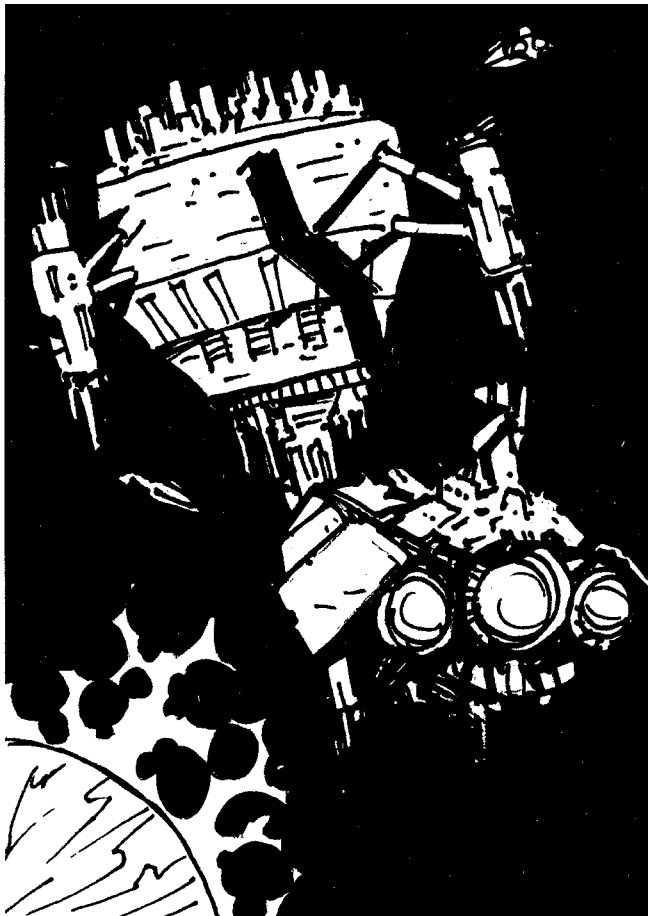
The throneworld of the Known Worlds, detailed in this book.

Byzantium Secundus has a moon called Jericho. While Jericho was colonized and terraformed with an atmosphere during the Second Republic, the atmosphere was burned off when the life support engines were accidentally destroyed during the Emperor Wars. House Decados suffered the blame for this vile act, which resulted in the death of thousands of colonists, but House Hawkwood was actually responsible for the bombardment which destroyed the atmosphere plants — a fact which it has been able to hide from most citizens. There is still a working moonbase here and a minor mineral extraction industry, but few workers can live here long. Many claim to have been haunted by the shades of dead colonists, seen scratching at the airlocks and gasping desperately for air. A Church funeral ceremony and exorcism has not stopped the sightings.

A number of satellites and spacestations orbit the planet:

Diadem: A Second Republic-era spacestation and headquarters of the Imperial Navy, Diadem sits in a geosynchronous orbit above the Imperial Palace and monitors the Imperial Eye compound. It has 25 docking ports capable of latching ships of varying sizes (extremely large ships may take up more than one port). A large contingent of officers and troops lives on the station at all times, and it is perhaps the best technically maintained spacestation in the Known Worlds. Crafter Erdo Sedgewick of the Engineers, considered to be the Known Worlds expert on Second Republic-era spacestation technology, has a permanent post here, and is maintained in high style by the Imperial Navy.

There is always a sizable Imperial fleet in space, placed in various locations between the jumpgate and Byzantium Secundus. The fleet's movement are coordinated through the naval command at Diadem.



Cumulus: Another spaceport, administered by the Merchant League, serves as a customs outpost and repair facility. While it is smaller than Diadem, it is still one of the largest spacestations in the Known Worlds. Under the directions of the League, Cumulus has developed into a trading post for travelers wishing to sell goods which might be illegal on Byzantium Secundus (the local Church proscribes certain goods seemingly on a whim, and reverses these decision just as capriciously). While, strictly speaking, it is illegal for the League to deal in these proscribed goods in Byzantium Secundus's system, such trade takes place on Cumulus nonetheless. The Church has learned that interfering on Cumulus often causes smugglers to risk selling their goods on Byzantine black markets, with the result that more proscribed goods slip through their net. This does not stop the occasional Church official or Inquisitor from visiting Cumulus to sniff out illegal trading.

Cumulus is also the main repair facility for starships incapable of entering a planetary atmosphere. Since Diadem is open only to Imperial ships, all civilian traffic comes through Cumulus instead. Cumulus orbits in space between Magog and Aden.

Aden

A rocky, barren world, considered too large to terraform. Various Second Republic corporations fought

for resource rights, but no mining was ever begun. Although the planet has no atmosphere, it is rumored that a sect of nomads lives beneath the surface in a vast network of tunnels and caves. What few surveys sent to investigate these rumors found few caves, let alone people. Nonetheless, a mendicant monk has appeared in Port Authority of late claiming to have been taught secret religious rites by the nomads of Aden and promising to teach them to those who join his cult.

New Malta is Aden's moon, terraformed as a military outpost during the Second Republic and currently used as an Imperial Guard training facility. The moon's remoteness allows the guard to practice elite infantry, cavalry and naval maneuvers far from potential spies. The oxygen atmosphere is weak however; the soldiers must live in atmosphere domes, although short term activity can take place outside without masks or suits. Imperial ships routinely monitor the spaceways near the planet to dissuade would-be visitors.

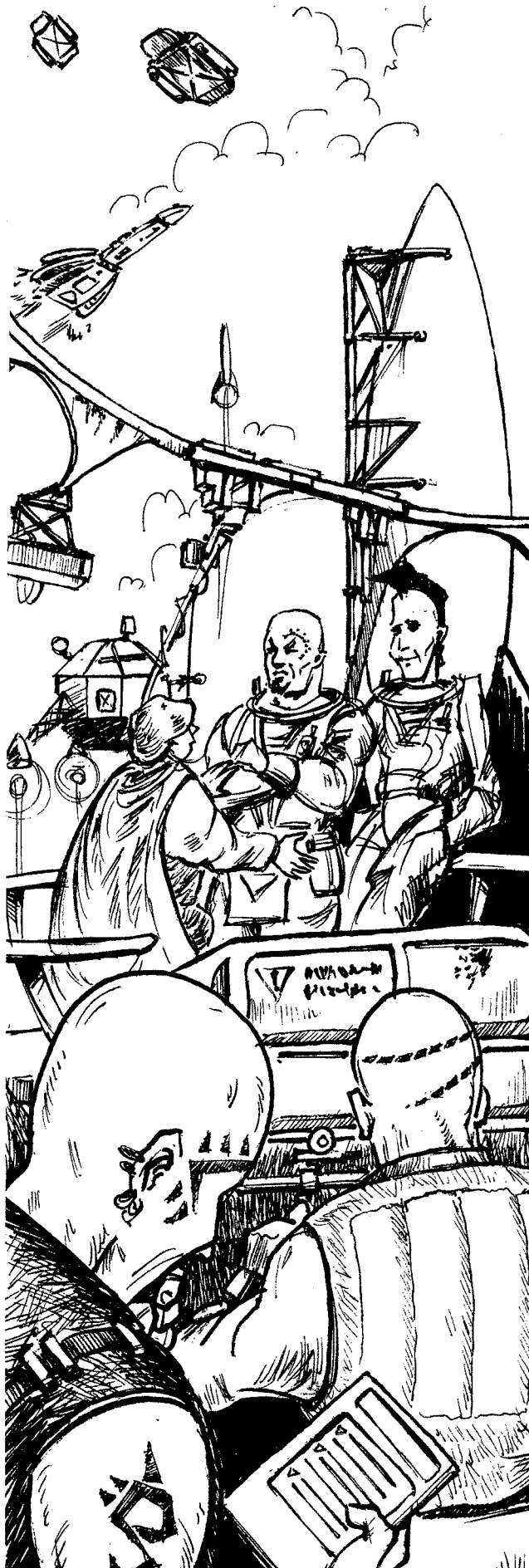
Magog

A gaseous world originally believed to be lifeless until an Engineer proved that tiny, nonsentient jellyfishlike creatures lived in its middle atmosphere. This discovery initially caused little excitement. However, another Engineer discovered that a powerful and nearly undetectable toxin could be extracted from the creatures' nervous systems (although killing the specimens in the process). The creatures were dubbed "jelly vipers" and became a hot commodity during the Emperor Wars, sought out by assassins from every house. One of Alexius's earliest actions as regent was to blockade access to Magog, cutting off the supply of jelly vipers (who cannot breed elsewhere). He has not lifted the blockade since, but no vessels are currently assigned to guard access to the planet. Nonetheless, it is considered a capital offense to be dealing or smuggling jelly vipers.

Magog has three moons, Tuszla, Amida and Cyril, each of which has the ruins of a former Second Republic domed city. Tuszla held rich veins of luminite, but was evacuated during the battle for Byzantium Secundus when the Ten made their assault; it was never recolonized. Amida was an artists' colony that was seized by the Church soon after the Fall. Most of the citizens were forced into destitution, their "sinful" work blackballed by the Patriarch. Cyril was a trade city that attracted ships on their way to Byzantium Secundus, often offering illegal wares. Like Amida, it was shut down by the Church; its merchants either cleaned up their businesses or fled to distant worlds.

Iblis

An ice world similar to Pluto. Many dark folktales make Iblis the home of demons, who reside in icy tombs far beneath the surface. A Charioteer recently detected something large on the surface of the planet, buried be-



neath layers of ice. Before he could return with an archaeological expedition, the Inquisition blockaded the world, denying access to anyone. As explanation, they produced ancient documents speaking of an elder evil which lay entombed on "Faralon 6", an ancient name for Iblis. This began a host of debate and rumors about the nature of the object, whether it be a demon, an alien or some Second Republic experiment gone bad. The Inquisition does not intend to let anyone find out; they have not even sent down their own investigators, such is the fear within the Inquisitorial Synod which surrounds icy Iblis.

Iblis has a small moon called Derelict. A tiny, Imperial sentinel outpost is still in operation here. It is considered to be the most dismal assignment in the Imperial Navy, and appointees are said to go insane with cabin fever if they spend more than three months here. The Church denies the rumors spreading among the army that appointees to Derelict experience dreams wherein they are enticed to fly a shuttle to the planet below, drawn to a fathomless black chasm by a disembodied but persuasive voice.

The Jumpgate

Byzantium Secundus' jumpgate is similar to that found in the Holy Terra system. Unlike many systems in the Known Worlds, Byzantium Secundus has the manpower to guard its gate full time. An Imperial Navy vessel or two are always on duty nearby to watch for unwanted vessels. They will only bother vessels they have been ordered to halt, such as barbarian ships, unless they have orders otherwise from Diadem. Piracy is almost unknown in the Byzantium system, although some local pirates dare occasional raids on small vessels and then disappear onto Aden or one of Magog's moons.

Maya's Star

It is said that the Pancreator blessed Byzantium Secundus with three suns. Besides its own yellow star, Byzantium Secundus has the Reborn Sun (the distant star said to have brightened after the Emperor's coronation) and Maya's Star, a comet which circles the solar system.

While the Reborn Sun is only weakly seen from Byzantium Secundus, Maya's Star lights up the night sky upon its arrival. Once every three years, the large, icy comet circles a galactic hair's width (80,000 miles) from Byzantium Secundus and is plainly visible for all to see. Most Byzantine citizens believe that the comet is a celestial avatar of the planet's patron disciple, Saint Maya. While some fear that the comet may soon crash into the planet, most believe the Charioteers' assurance that there is no such danger.

Maya's star is an older phenomenon than the Reborn Sun; most records say that it appeared shortly after the death of the Prophet. The comet has created a wealth of folk and Church lore. The Charioteers consider it a good luck omen, but some pessimists mutter that "three suns make it triply hot." A large number of people experience

visions when the comet passes, and although most people consider it benign, its presence in the Byzantine sky has been blamed for driving some people mad.

The comet is visible for one month, once every three years.

Byzantium Secundus

Byzantium Secundus is a wet, warm world only slightly larger than Urth. Oceans cover over 85% of its surface and torrential rains wrack most of the planet's six major continents. Ocean levels have risen steadily over the last 500 years, due largely — it is believed — to the Fading Suns phenomenon. Most continents were low lying to begin with; half a millennium of near-constant rain and inland flooding has turned four of the six continents into continental-sized island groupings.

The four main continents are Galatea, Harmony, Tamerlain and Aldaia. Shallow inland seas separate most of the islands in a given continental grouping. Deeper, older oceans divide the continents themselves. Of the two continents that have not flooded, one is Tarsus, an arctic wasteland. The last continent, Ghaist, is entirely desert and is sparsely populated. The vast majority of the planet's six billion people live on the four flooded continents.

Lush vegetation covers the majority of the four most populated continents. The profundity of verdant green that coils around and within the planet's urban centers is often unnerving to many visitors from the Known Worlds. The planet is situated in a vast, naturally occurring hydrogen cloud, and its water content is actually increasing every year as more hydrogen precipitates into the atmosphere. The planet's dimming sun and other unknown forces have greatly increased this pattern, and new and unnatural weather patterns have gripped the planet for the last five centuries. The original Second Republic terraformers built much of the planet's geography to resist flooding. Vast earthworks the size of mountain chains protect some of the midlands from flooding, but the terraformers could not have predicted the massive floods of the present era. Byzantium Secundus is somewhat warmer than most Imperial planets. Tourism minded nobles promote the planet as a tropical paradise.

Land Forms and Regions

On a macroscale, Byzantium Secundus's features have a jagged, geometrical magnificence. The planet's terraformers sculpted ornate, almost arcane patterns into the planet's large contours. Coastlines are generally either jagged fault coasts (cliffs) or truncated fjords (more cliffs). Sand beaches are extremely rare and cordoned off for the super elites of Byzantine society. Many smaller islands are also sandy, and thus coveted by the wealthy. More than one skirmish has occurred between islanders and mainland land speculators.

Continental interior regions are also predominantly geometric in form. Large hills and mountains have a ter-

raced, ziggurat quality to them. Mountains are steep, jagged pyramids of granite. There were once many more mountains than at present, but earlier (preflood) colonists used these resources during waves of building expansion (Byzantium exported much of its mineral wealth during the Diaspora and Second Republic). Now, many see this as a monstrous mistake. Mountainous regions are the most resistant to flooding; earlier generations unwittingly tore down much of the planet's most needed landforms.

A thick layer of limestone covers many of the remaining continental regions. The Engineers believe this means the planet has flooded before. Unfortunately it also means that much of the low- and midland regions are of a "karst" topography (treacherous sinkholes and magnificent limestone caves are common). Caves, subterranean streams and lakes riddle most of the planet's land surface. Stories about local cave monsters gobbling up naughty children are a mainstay of harried Byzantine parents everywhere. Unfortunately, these stories occasionally prove true. Monstrous predators of unknown origin lurk and hunt in the planet's deepest caves. These bogeymen rarely come near the surface, but may find their way into the planet's undercity regions. A few have reached the surface to terrorize isolated communities and urban regions alike.

Most of the planet's inhabited regions consist of three major categories: The Heights, midlands and lowlands. Unlike most planets, distinctions of physical altitude are very important to the slowly sinking world. Where a person lives on Byzantium Secundus is one of the ultimate arbiters of social status. Additionally there are several manmade regions, such as cities and slums (so endemic, each slum is considered to be part of one vast region: the Slum). None of these regions is geographically specific, but may be found almost everywhere on the four major continents.

The Heights

The Heights (highlands) are the mountainous regions well above sea level, which consist of only about 10% of the planet's land mass. While still lush and verdant, the Heights do not suffer the regular flooding of lower lying regions. Because of this, only the planet's wealthiest citizens live here. Most of the planet's population view the Heights as untouchable golden cities on the hills (they are usually what off-worlders think of when they imagine Byzantium Secundus). A series of high walls, electronic defenses and well-trained police forces protect the Heights from the lower strata of civilization. Grand Second Republic and modern Imperial edifices dominate most parts of the Heights. Gleaming towers of marble, glass and luminite intertwine with intimate townships, lush public parks and private reserves. The Empire's machinery of state is here, as are the planet's greatest cultural and artistic achievements.

Even during the Second Republic, the rich preferred higher altitude locations; some of the greatest and best-preserved architectural monuments in human history are

here. Restored buildings a thousand years old or more are not uncommon. Even during the worst times of the dark ages, Byzantium Secundus managed to maintain many of these great structures of antiquity. There is currently a major construction boom going on throughout most of Byzantium Secundus; no areas have benefited as much as the Heights. Unfortunately, this building boom has caused much acrimony in many levels of society. The super-rich on Byzantium Secundus flaunt their wealth, causing jealousy among the poor.

Furthermore there can be major conflicts between the various power groups over even the smallest tracts of highland territory. Land is the most precious commodity on Byzantium Secundus. "Worth its weight in Shapritan gold," as the Reeves often say. While everyone steals land from the poor, a Heights land-grab is a power game played by only the most powerful figures on the planet. This game has no rules. Usually it is the nobility who annex land, but the guilds often battle each other for the lucrative building contracts that accompany such takeovers. These bidding wars sometimes turn violent. There are always rumors about merchant deans ending up as part of their buildings' foundations. The best land is high altitude, but near the ocean front for scenic and trade reasons. The Emperor has annexed most of the planet's few remaining hard rock regions for strategic purposes.

The Midlands

The 35% of lands that are slightly above sea level are called the midlands. While these areas suffer from periodic floods, they are generally stable and house the vast majority of the planet's population. Byzantium Secundus is one of the few Imperial planets with a sizable (though still dwindling) middle class.

Second Republic buildings influence many midland altitudes, though these structures are in poorer repair than those in the Heights. These are just as often abandoned or leveled to make room for more modern structures. The vast majority of midland citizens live in houses made of maxicrete, a white, silicon-based building material manufactured by the Engineers guild. Most of these structures are highly weather resistant and are often molded to imitate grandiose highland architecture.

Citizens in the midlands, while generally safe from flooding, feel hard-pressed by natural forces nevertheless. Areas that were midlands a mere generation ago are sliding towards lowland status as waters rise worldwide. Many midlanders revile lowlanders, because these unfortunates represent what they may eventually become. Major dam projects to shore up the middle class are currently underway at the behest of the Emperor, but even the Imperial coffers have their limits. Some flood control projects are draining vast tracts of lowland property, turning them into midlands or even highlands. This is especially common in regions with desirable Second Republic architecture.

Second Republic buildings that have survived the



millennium since the Fall are among the best buildings ever made; many are still structurally sound and quite comfortable, although some are crumbling. Land speculators often evict those who live in such structures (middle class or poor), and force them into even lower lying areas. This is a special point of friction between the planet's natives and the property hungry off-worlders. Midlanders are traditionally well armed, though their weapons technology is rarely advanced. More than one skirmish has ignited due to off-worlder attempts to claim midland regions. While midland land grabs are often contests between two nobles, the defending noble often needs the loyalty of his midland tenants if he wishes to retain power. The Byzantine middle class has traditionally used this power to its benefit, gaining various concessions from the nobility over the centuries. Midland citizens are fractured into a thousand factions, however. They are rarely able to defend their land against a serious incursion by the powerful nobles or guilds.

The Lowlands

The majority of the land on Byzantium Secundus (around 55%) is comprised of lowlands. These regions are at, or slightly below, sea level. The unfortunate poor who live here must fight a neverending battle against the perennial floods that wash over them. Thousands drown every year in these disasters. Millions more become homeless and destitute as floods destroy their life's work. The majority of the lowlands consist of urban slums or desperate sub-subsistence level farms. Opulent, vine-covered Second Republic buildings dot much of the landscape in these regions. Squatters, criminal syndicates and greedy landlords battle for control of these structures. Many lowland dwellers live in poorly constructed hutches made of bristlereed and gold mud.

The lowlands are more dangerous than the other two regions because of the countless natural and human predators that abound here. Natural and genetically manipulated monstrosities roam the lowlands, and there have been several zombie plagues in recent years. Despite everything, some lowland communities manage to eke out a pleasant and even dignified living. Not all lowlands are part of the Slum. The lowlands are also the only source of scylax root, a rare delicacy throughout the Empire.

Battles over lowlands are muddy, brutal and bloody. Those from upper economic social and geographic strata rarely covet lowland lands. As a result, lowland territorial disputes occur when communities launch bloody forays into neighboring townships that are only slightly less wretched. Hundreds may die in a battle over a muddy sandbar, just to watch it slide beneath the waves a week later. Sometimes a lowland region may flood completely, forcing refugees into already overcrowded neighboring communities. Conflicts over living spaces often turn violent. A few refugees may be fortunate enough to find their way to a Church sanctuary or one of the newly created Imperial Aid Centers, but the floods have badly pressed

the resources of both Church and state, whose representatives cannot come close to alleviating the lowland suffering caused by the continuous deluges. The Imperial Army may intervene in larger lowland battles, but they rarely involve themselves in smaller local disputes.

The Cities

The vast majority of Byzantium Secundus consists of urban or semiurban areas. Even most lowland regions, now completely abandoned to flood plains, were once vibrant cities from earlier human civilizations. Shallow seas and fetid swamps have inundated entire urban regions. Spires of opulent Second Republic structures protrude from thousands of intermittent inland lakes or along receding coast lines. Most of the current population view these ruins with superstitious trepidation. There is little of Byzantium Secundus that has not been built over at one time or another, though in many regions nature is beginning to reclaim its own.

On the four main continents, the planet's designers built most populated areas around a system of dikes and canals (much like Venice). While many off-worlders consider this romantic, it can cause trouble. Many urban areas are practically rotting at the foundations. Sanitation is a major problem in certain low lying areas. Hull rats and other vermin run wild in the lowlands and sometimes invade even the most opulent regions. Cholera, dysentery and various varieties of the plague sweep through entire regions like wildfire. Local subjects often blame epidemics on demons and evil warlocks, though the scapegoats targeted by frightened subjects are more often unpopular locals or occasional groups of odd looking strangers who come to town.

The Slum

The Slum is actually many unconnected urban slums, sprawling wastelands of hopelessness, grinding poverty and despair. The Slum refers to any conclave of grimy tenements and rural shacks anywhere on the planet. Those who do not have to live in these hovels consider one slum much like another, and thus refer to them all in the singular.

An ongoing cycle of degradation with little way out is the abject fate of almost 35% of the planet's six billion population. While the Slum is almost exclusively a lowland phenomenon, it is not geographically contiguous. Often these hovels are within sight of the most opulent highland locations. Such vistas speak profoundly of the planet's social incongruities. Many residents of the Heights build great walls or plant trees to block out such eyesores.

Ironically, the Slum extends into what were once the planet's most opulent regions; flooding has made these once-desired locations untenable to all but the lowest on the social scale. The Slum also houses most of the planet's alien population. These minorities sometimes share the burden of poverty side-by-side with humans, although most often live in the worst regions, outcasts among even



the pariahs. The majority of aliens in the Slum are Ur-Ukar, who fight with other alien races for Dregs Town territory (see below). The authorities rarely become involved in these fights as long as they don't spill into other neighborhoods.

Besides all the other dangers encountered in the lowlands, Slum dwellers must also deal with predatory economic bottom feeders such as loan sharks and slum lords (primarily of House Cameton). The Slum is also a major base of operations for the criminal elements of many power groups, especially the Scravers and the Chainers. Despite the Church's teachings, these organizations induct many Slum dwellers against their will into a permanent state of economic or physical slavery. Other criminal activities such as prostitution, drug dealing and dangerous games of sport occur openly here, with little challenge from the authorities of Church or state. The activities of these urban predators have raised the ire of some Slum dwellers, and a growing rebellion movement is spreading in many disaffected areas.

Slum areas, while viewed collectively by some, usually consist of noble holdings, just like any other region. Many Slum areas maintain local names from earlier, better times, usually the name of a former township or village. However, newer, more colorful names are also used, such as "Hombor's Gutter", "Little Ukar" or "##!@ Town".

The Emperor's rumored paramour, Lady Theafana, has recently brought the plight of the Slums to the rest of the planet's attention. The priestess has crusaded (some say naively) to aid the poorest of the poor. A recent flood

wiped out a children's hospital because of a poorly maintained Authority floodwall. Authority protestations that the wall was too expensive to fix have fallen on deaf ears for once.

The worst Slums are in the industrialized Harmony and Gasperah lowlands. Many Slum areas are in a state of constant, low-level turmoil. Even the nobility must be wary of ruling over such territories. A crowd in Harmony recently pulled an important Decados count from his skimmer and hacked him to pieces on his own Slum property. The Decados suspect Ur-Ukar terrorists; they are offering a large reward to those who find the killers.

Drown Town (The Undercity, Stygriat)

Drown Town refers to the millions of square miles of underground tunnels built by the planet's Second Republic and Diasporan founders. Vast tracts of the planet are catacombed by a nearly endless maze of subterranean tunnels, buildings and sweeping vistas. The tunnels underlying the Heights and parts of the midlands are well maintained, sometimes serving as gentrified centers of trade, art and commerce. These regions contain trendy shops, grand architecture and wonders such as crystal caverns and artificial waterfalls. They are climate controlled and carefully cordoned off from trespassing by the planet's powerful military.

The majority of the undercity, however, is in poor repair and completely abandoned to criminals, squatters and the many bizarre creatures that have taken up resi-

dence here. Much of Drown Town is completely underwater. Stagnant, brackish water fills many tunnels during part of the year, but occasionally recedes during dry seasons. Almost anything that ever existed in Byzantine culture is here somewhere if one knows where to look. Only the best equipped salvage teams may plumb the depths of Drown Town, and even they rarely find sufficient reward to justify the dangers of such an arduous undertaking.

The Ur-Ukar and other Slum dwellers sometimes refer to the catacombs as Stygriat, after an Ur-Ukar creation legend. Many criminals and political dissenters often find Stygriat useful when hiding from the authorities. While the Empire has staged some spectacularly successful raids into Drown Town, no one has mapped it completely.

Drown Town is replete with countless species of flora and fauna. These creatures grow unnoticed and unhindered in the perpetual midnight miles beneath the feet of the planet's citizens. Even such sewer dwelling groups as the Ur-Ukar and the Matharites (see Chapter Four) are careful to avoid these monstrosities. Additionally, these tunnels link up with the planet's endless natural caverns. Few dare speculate what foul creatures may be awakening in the deepest bowels of Stygriat.

Walking through Drown Town is like traveling through a great archaeological dig. Structures from every age of Byzantine history, from the First Republic through the near-present, exist here (the oldest ruins are in Harmony). Some tunnels lead directly into the vast ocean stretches and spew foul, brackish water into city streets

during storms and high tide. Although urban geographers have thoroughly mapped all the Heights and most midland regions of the undercity, few have dared to explore the lowland tunnels as the various sewer dwelling groups have long ago claimed most of the valuable artifacts and territories here. While most of Drown Town exists in perpetual and complete blackness, some areas have an eerie iridescence due to the luminescent cylofungus found in the dampest areas, growing in different colored colonies.

Drown Town is an omnipresent threat in many regions. Much of the planet is catacombed with these tunnels, and a poorly understood ecosystem thrives here. Many consider Drown Town to be some sort of supernatural underworld or hell, where souls of the wicked plunge after death, dragged down by the weight of their sins. There are regular skirmishes between the planet's security forces and the denizens of the undercity. These battles take on an almost mythic quality in the minds of many, wherein the forces of good battle undercity demon spawn. Both local and planetary governments use this perception to maintain control over the planet's citizenry.

Dregs Town

Dregs Town refers to any concentration of aliens living on the planet. The majority of these are Ur-Ukar slums, though humans may just as easily apply the term to a colony of Ur-Obun artists or merchants. While some aliens live pleasant and fulfilling lives on Byzantium Secundus, the majority live in the most squalid conditions. Humans from all strata of society have forced the



majority of the planet's alien population into the lowest lying areas. While laws protect alien property rights, the government rarely enforces them. The Scravers and many of the off-world noble houses have been especially responsible over the centuries for evicting aliens from their properties. House Cameton has been one of the few major powers on the planet which has fought to reverse this trend (perhaps hoping to gain the lands for themselves, cynics say).

This trend has nonetheless slowed somewhat of late for several reasons, one of which is the Emperor's reforms, but the main reason is that most contemporary Dregs Town regions are so horrible that no human would want to live in them. More than a few greedy human real estate speculators have shown up dead. Many alien living areas flood on a weekly basis. Desperate for food and land, many aliens turn on each other. The pressures of so many disparate cultures and physiologies crammed into a few tiny spaces often cause violent riots and crime. Alien regions often have their own semiautonomous governing bodies and police forces which are too underfunded to effectively deal with many situations. Nonetheless, the human authorities have long sanctioned these as the most efficient way of maintaining order in the various alien communities.

Continents

There are six major continental groupings, each consisting of a series of smaller fragmented land masses.

Galatea

Byzantium Secundus is perhaps the most densely populated planet in the Empire. A population of over six billion clings to a total land mass about two-thirds that of Urth. Of the four most densely populated continents, the most important (both geographically and historically) is the Imperial center, Galatea.

Like all the planet's major continents, Galatea has a maritime economy with vast fleets of modern ocean-going vessels to serve its needs. The Sailors' Guild is thus one of the planet's more powerful guilds. Galatea covers an area about twice the size of North and South America combined, though most of this is ocean. Like all the four major continental groupings, Galatean geography consists of the three major regions; midlands, lowlands and Heights.

Viable living space is at such a premium that settlements dot even the lowland's worst flood plains, though only the poorest serfs and social outcasts live here. The Galatean city-state includes several distinct but intermingled regions: the Imperial City, the Holy City, Port Authority (the agora), the Slum and others, listed below. Most off-worlders rarely see anything but the major centers of power and so Galatea's reputation as the Empire's greatest center of wealth, style and power grows.

Galatean Geography

From space, Galatea appears as a massive geometric crisscross of gray and gold intermingled with tropical green jungles.

Galatea is a continental system of islands with a total land mass of 3,500,000 square miles (slightly smaller than 20th century China). Galatea consists of three major land masses, twelve medium-sized islands and over three thousand smaller ones. Many of the smallest islands are uncharted. Several islands slip beneath the waves every year, while others slowly rise from the sea in the continent's volcanic northern regions. With a population of over two and a half billion, land is at a premium in Galatea. Even a small island, if deemed stable by the Imperial geologists, is of great value.

The largest land mass is Veridian, the center of Imperial power. Veridian is roughly the size of twentieth century India and contains the Imperial Palace, Port Authority and most of the planet's bureaucratic apparatus. Veridian is slightly drier than the rest of Galatea (dry being a relative term on Byzantium Secundus) and is the most densely populated region in the Empire, though even Veridian has its uninhabitable regions. A system of advanced, interlocking dikes, dams and earthworks protects most of the land mass from flooding. Veridian is the wealthiest region on the planet but suffers the highest crime rate, being the site of some of the Empire's most spectacular robberies. One of these was the theft of the Ala'ar stones, the crown jewels of Duchess Velasa Hazat. The jewels disappeared while she was visiting a Hawkwood duchy. This theft is adding strain to an already touchy political situation.

The second largest land mass is Old Istanbul, a residual homage to the planet's original name. Old Istanbul consists of both midland and lowland altitudes. Entire regions flood during the continent's wet season, leaving only a short dry season during which farmers can cultivate the land. The Church controls the few highlands on Old Istanbul, and the planet's great cathedral is here. Citizens of Old Istanbul tend to be more conservative than most people on the rest of the planet, although there is also a higher degree of superstition among the locals here than anywhere else in Galatea. There are a host of folk legends about ghosts, evil warlocks and other supernatural menaces.

The third largest land mass in Galatea is Gasperah, a disaster of lowland flood plains and insect plagued swamps. The northern part of the island has one active volcano. House Cameton and the Authority have leeched the region dry of its financial reserves, and there are sporadic revolts by the oppressed populace. The majority of Gasperah is Slum area and is not part of most Imperial tours. Gasperah has a sinister reputation known throughout the planet. People disappear here on a regular basis. Most disappear forever, while others resurface as badly

mangled corpses. Urban Antinomist cults are more than mere rumors here.

The Imperial City

The Imperial City is a grand, walled complex roughly the size of Rhode Island. The city sits in the mountainous, coastal Trans-Terra region of east Veridian. This region is somewhat comparable to Urth's Scandinavian provinces in appearance, temperature and biome. The Imperial City houses the Emperor's palace, Embassy Row, the hanging gardens and many government institutions. It also hosts museums, lesser cathedrals, agoras, parks and areas of open wilderness. There are many theaters, magic lantern palaces and two gigantic arenas. The city is protected by several elite divisions of the Imperial Guard, squadrons of aircraft and a military spacestation that remains parked in a geosynchronous orbit directly overhead (Diadem), and is served by a monorail, an excellent system of highways, a small spaceport and a medium sized harbor.

The Imperial City is the home of some of the most subtle politics in the Empire. While these politics are usually the model of mannerly comportment, this thin veneer of civilization conceals an often vicious culture of political skirmishes and treacherous backstabbing. Civilized agreements made between two nobles over a fine bottle of Ravennan wine may mean untold misery for Imperial subjects on distant worlds throughout the Empire.

The Palace

The palace is a massive conglomeration of Second Republic and modern Imperial architecture. The palace's center is a series of high, crystalline towers built during the height of the Second Republic as the Presidential Estate, but added to throughout the dark ages by various regents. Stretching out from this center point in a radial pattern is a series of more modern Imperial buildings made from marble, gold and rainstone. These modern edifices accent the earlier structures. Each spoke of the wheel terminates in a minaret tower. Interspersed with this radial pattern is a series of parks, gardens and ornate hedge mazes. Over five hundred square miles of pristine wilderness (mostly high altitude forest and lakes) surround the palace on all sides. The Emperor's elite personal guard and a series of high-tech remote perimeter guards patrol the walls and grounds, and there are also over twenty golem protectors secreted in the palace's deepest tunnels. There is also a small private spaceport.

The palace's interior varies greatly in appearance from area to area. There are over eight thousand rooms ranging in size and function, from the grand ballroom to the throne room — where Alexius presides over his court from his firebird-shaped throne — to the lowliest servant's quarters (far more luxurious than most fine homes on many planets). Examples of high art from throughout the Known Worlds adorn the walls. One recent addition is an atrium filled with Vau el'ash sculptures and carvings do-

nated at the time of Alexius's coronation depicting Vau from various castes (worker, soldier and mandarin). An anti-alien Eskatonic priest destroyed one of the statues shortly after the coronation and went insane shortly thereafter. She was interred in a madhouse in Old Istanbul, but recently escaped.

The Holy City

He had only a few days on the planet for the synodal council, before returning to Pyre. Brother Mainard of Temple Avesti walked the streets for hours. He was in the Holy City's fifth ring, a place of glass skyscrapers and well-tended highland pedestrian malls. The novice's eyes were nearly blind from the splendor of it all. He had never left the deserts of Pyre before, and here he was on Byzantium Secundus! If only it was not so hot and... What did the deacon call it? Humid! Mainard was thirsty and longed for a good, warm Pyrean ale.

The deacon sighed when Mainard had asked to see the sights, but acquiesced. "Just be wary. This may be the Holy City, but even here heretics and dissemblers abound. I won't have my novice corrupted by some silver-tongued Eskatonic woman." Brother Mainard blessed himself and shuddered at the wrongful thought. Yes, the deacon was right; such a place could corrupt the soul. Perhaps he should return to the safety of the rectory. He had seen Saint Maya's Cathedral already and no sight could top that. Still, the buildings, the people, the clothing... And there was that smell, a glorious smell. He followed it in a daze.

There were richly dressed people, sitting in a streetside cafe. They smiled easily and laughed among themselves. Brother Mainard inched closer warily. Surely this was what the deacon meant by "dissembling." Mainard craned his neck to see what they were drinking; probably one of those "vile foreign concoctions" of which the deacon always spoke. The glasses made strange twinkling sounds as the revelers lifted them. The novice peered even closer, then gasped in astonishment. Pieces of ice. The drinks had pieces of ice in them! He hooted with astonishment; this was the most amazing thing he had ever seen! In a daze he ordered one drink, then two and three. Each refreshed him like an Empyrean wind. He staggered from the tavern. Just wait until the deacon heard about this...

The Holy City resides on mountainous terrain, similar to Urth's Mediterranean, in Galatea's Old Istanbul region. Archbishop Palamon and his predecessors have imported fauna from the Mediterranean at great expense and planted thick groves of olive, grape and fig trees throughout the city. The Holy City houses clergy from each sect.

The city consists of a series of concentric circles (the Church considers the circle to be the most holy and perfect of forms). A high wall, maintained by Church knights, separates each ring. The Church's symbol, the jumpgate, flies from ten thousand guard towers. People can travel freely within each circle, but the Church closely monitors passage from level to level. The parts of Old Istanbul outside the Holy City vary, but are mostly failing lowland communities. Some very bad Slum areas huddle against the city's outermost wall. These slums have a high crime rate and even the most devout servants of the Pancreator

are not safe here.

Corona Sextus: Lower lying, but well protected, farmlands fill the outermost ring. The Holy City is a natural magnet for trade; people of every description gather here.

Corona Quintus: The fifth ring from the center — the second ring encountered by travelers from the outside — is a bustling metropolis almost 2000 years old. Buildings from every age exist side-by-side here, though surprisingly few Second Republic buildings have survived. Many of the buildings are modern skyscrapers, though all these follow the Church's stringent building guidelines. Gothic spires and frightening gargoyle images encrust seemingly endless vistas of glass and steel towers. This circle is the most populated and cosmopolitan of the city. Nestled among the skyscrapers, a wide variety of restaurants, hotels, theaters and museums offer a vast array of diversions. There is also a fair amount of crime, despite the efforts of the city's police force. Some believe ley lines or an ancient curse is responsible for a series of recent Ripper-style murders in the city.

Corona Quartus: The next circle is largely rural residential. The Church's lower clergy live here. Most of these are the Church bureaucrats who oversee the administration of the Church's many endeavors. Despite its sacred status, the Holy City is every bit as rife with political intrigue as the Imperial City and Port Authority. In the last few years, three important priests have died under myste-

rious circumstances. One died from poison, one leapt from a cathedral bell tower and a third died in the catacombs of Saint Maya's Cathedral (not even his family was allowed to view his remains.)

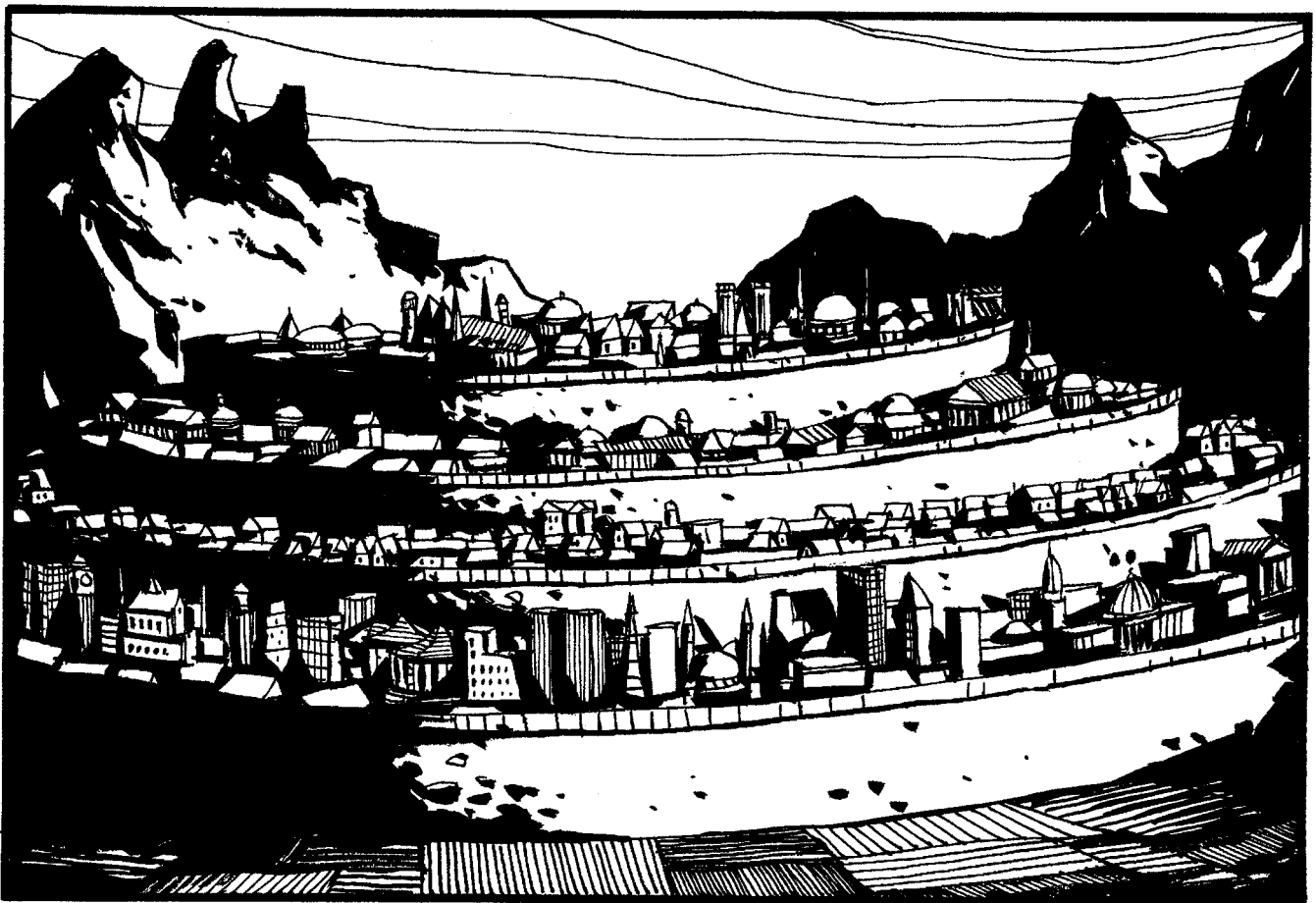
Corona Tertius: Next is the administrative circle. This ring contains almost five hundred administrative buildings. These are mostly ivy-covered, red clay brick with terra-cotta or slate shingles, most of them with a Romanesque look.

Corona Secundus: Within the next ring are seven lesser cathedrals and nearly a hundred shrines of various sizes. In few places, apart from Holy Terra itself, is there such a concentration of Church grandeur. This is also the location of the Byzantine Church's most heated political debates.

Corona Primus: In the final circle, on the highest point of the island, is the great Cathedral of Saint Maya.

Saint Maya's Cathedral

Located on the Heights of Mount Virago, the Saint Maya's Cathedral is a grandiose seven-sided building constructed in the Gothic style. The structure has one massive central pinnacle, surrounded by seven lesser ones at each of its seven corners. The cathedral is made mostly of rainstone and takes on a melting (and somewhat disturbing) appearance during storms. The windows are expertly cut shards of Shantorian crystal. The cathedral is ancient, built in the tumultuous final years of the Second Repub-





lic. It houses some of the most sacred relics from throughout the Empire in its reliquary, and there is a complement of Brother Battle knights to guard them. The central cathedral is exactly on the planet's equator so that its steeple points toward Holy Terra's sector of the sky once a day.

Few common services are held here, for it is not easy to reach. It is the goal of many pilgrimages, which begin on some far continent of the planet and eventually arrive at the gates of the Holy City. The pilgrims must then walk through all rings until they reach the cathedral. They must not accept offers of transportation, such as rides on landcraft or beastback, although they can accept walking canes or other aids. Many take days to reach the top, tiring often on the journey.

The cathedral has been the site of several divine miracles over the centuries. One of the greatest miracles is the Wounded Maya. This is a statue of the cathedral's founder, the disciple Maya. The statue is ancient; its creator is unknown. Shortly after Vladimir's assassination, the statue began to bleed copious amounts of real blood. Over the centuries it has bled less and less. Now it only bleeds on rare occasions, and every pilgrim hopes to witness the miraculous event. No one knows why the statue bleeds, not even the Eskatonic Order. Most consider the event a blessing from the Pancreator, though some believe the statue bleeds for darker reasons.

Of the more controversial attractions, Eskatonic priests say that several ley lines converge at the cathedral, though others refute this notion as preposterous. Some folk whisper that the shades of past clergy roam the cathedral's catacombs as well.

Port Authority (Agora)

Byzantium's agora, Port Authority, is the largest structure on the planet. Located a short flitter jump from the Imperial City, Port Authority is a city unto itself. The marketplace looms above the Galatean sea on a countless series of ceramsteel trestles. The aptly named Golden Highway connects it to the mainland (real Shaprutan gold covers the many lamps that flank it). Port Authority is predominantly a ceramsteel and maxicrete edifice. Its exterior appearance is far less ornamental than most of the other major structures on the planet. The agora has a permanent population of over one hundred thousand, and there are over a million visitors at any given time.

Inside Port Authority is a neverending whirlwind of activity. Merchants from the farthest Imperial worlds come here to ply their trade. One may buy almost everything and anything in Port Authority. There are dozens of hotels and hundreds of restaurants and taverns. A spaceport serves interstellar traffic and an artificial harbor serves traffic from the seven seas. The firebird is the preferred medium of exchange, both here and throughout Byzantium Secundus.

There is also a thriving black market in Port Authority. Both the nobility and the Church have made half-

hearted attempts to curb the situation, with varying degrees of success. Since Alexius's coronation there has been a great surge in business; crime, too, has made an exponential leap. The nervous guilds have hired additional guards and there have been some violent showdowns and drive-by shootings (the Scravers deny responsibility for these incidents). The Authority is the main power in Port Authority, but most major guilds maintain forces here. Perceptive visitors may also detect a small al-Malik presence.

An almost endless stream of wealth, rare items and bizarre alien artifacts comes through Port Authority. Many of these are illegal, but in the grand agora tradition, money buys discretion and protection. However, this wall of silence almost shattered completely when a Symbiot plant creature was "inadvertently" transported to Port Authority in a shipment of Shaprutan plant cultures. The creature went on a killing spree through the thoroughfares before the local guard finally destroyed it. Few outside of Port Authority know about this incident, but it is still a subject of speculation within the agora. Some say that the plant creature spewed out airborne spores before it died.

Embassy Row

Most of the major houses, sects and guilds throughout the Empire have an embassy on Byzantium Secundus. Most of these are within the Imperial City. The Vorox, the Ur-Ukar and the Ur-Obun also have embassies, which the Empire watches closely. Even the Vau have an embassy, although it is far removed on Tarsus and visitors are forbidden. There are no embassies for the barbarian nations of the Vuldrok and the Kurga Caliphate, but the Emperor has spoken with their ambassadors.

A few groups have chosen to build their embassies elsewhere on the planet. The Hazat recently tried to move their embassy away from the others, placing it on a treacherous precipice outside the Imperial City because of a snub by the al-Malik (no one but the al-Malik and the Hazat remember what this was), but they abandoned their plans when the new foundations slid down a hill and into the sea during a mudslide.

Each embassy is like a miniature sovereign nation, whose rulers do as they like on their grounds. A person can request asylum from an embassy and, if granted, no one can enter the embassy grounds to extract him. While the Emperor could conceivably order his guard to retrieve such an applicant, there would be major political repercussions. Embassies with little political power are very careful about to whom they offer asylum, in case a rival group decides to test their ability to protect the applicant. Alien embassies rarely involve themselves in such affairs for fear of retribution by their enemies.

There is a constant hubbub of secret diplomacy and backstabbing at any embassy party. A whispered conversation overheard at an embassy soiree may catapult characters into adventures anywhere on the planet or beyond.

University of Veridian

The Church-sponsored University of Veridian is one of the most respected institutions of higher learning throughout the Empire. The university teaches debate, oratory, philology, Church history and all the other disciplines needed by the elite. Wealthy students from all backgrounds attend classes here; graduates include such august individuals as the archbishop and the Emperor himself. However, the university is somewhat more progressive in its theology than some in the Church would like. The Avestites criticize it regularly and even killed one professor whom they claim went too far in his heresy (the priest regularly praised the Second Republic, despite many warnings against such aggrandizement). There are also many conflicts between the university students and the local inhabitants. These may range from elaborate pranks to riots and murder.

Harmony

Harmony was the original name given to this continent by the planet's earliest Sathraist settlers. Named for its originally Elysian landscapes and its abundance of material riches, early settlers considered Harmony the planet's most attractive continent. Unfortunately, thousands of years of poorly planned development and overpopulation have turned the once-attractive continent into a squalid hellhole. Much of Harmony is lowland Slum. There is a greater disparity of wealth here than on any other continent. Unscrupulous nobles and guilders from throughout the Empire flock here to take advantage of the continent's miserable citizenry. Several of the planet's dirtiest industries are here, including the Decados-owned Novgorad ship yards. Centuries of unchecked industrial expansion have left the lowland regions of Harmony some of the most polluted in the Empire. The ecosystem has broken down completely in some regions; the perpetual rain in places is black and poisonous. Due to the low level of industrialization throughout the Empire, few people see it as a significant problem. Most people consider pollution an unfortunate, but necessary aberration. The Drown Town area here is home to more misfits than any other place on the planet.

In past centuries, House Lambeth, with Hazat backing, attempted war on the neighboring continent of Tamerlain. Imperial power and the Authority now keep such regional conflicts in check, but there are many who maintain dreams of expanding Harmony's reach beyond its current borders. The smallest and most overcrowded of the continents, Harmony remains solidly under House Cameton's control. Much of the area is currently under martial law, ostensibly because of a sizable Ur-Ukar uprising.

Novgorad Shipyards

The Novgorad shipyards are the largest on the planet. Founded during the Second Republic, the Novgorad yards have a reputation for turning out some of the finest military vessels in the Empire. House Decados owns the Novgorad yards, but employs talented designers, builders and test pilots from many guilds. Ships from here may take years to build, but are sold to almost every power group in the Empire. There have been several unexplained incidents of sabotage at the yards in recent years. House Decados publicly blames the Ur-Ukar and other malcontents for these incidents, but some privately suspect "Hawkwood perfidy" as the true cause.

The Landcraft Industry

The Byzantine landcraft industry has existed on Harmony since the early days of the Diaspora. While it has changed hands many times during its early history, the Authority has maintained it for the last five hundred years. The industry makes everything from fusion driven skimmers to wheeled landcrafts powered by fossil fuels (primarily meant for export). The Authority has deliberately built their vehicles at a lower technology level (Tech Level 5 or below) to fend off takeover bids by the Engineers. The Authority maintains, rightly, that lower technology vehicles are easier to repair. Subjects throughout the Known Worlds drive Harmony-made vehicles because of their reputation for quality craftsmanship (many models are +1 or +2 Quality). Despite this, the Harmony landcraft industry is puny in comparison with the massive landcraft guilds on Leagueheim.

Tamerlain

Tamerlain is the largest and most sparsely populated of the main four continental groupings. It is constantly wracked by volcanoes, seismic disturbances and the harshest storms on the planet; only the hardest of the planet's citizenry live here on a permanent basis. Permanent construction here is a costly investment, though there are areas of relative stability in the continent's southern and eastern regions. Even the Second Republic terraformers had difficulty taming this continent. As a result, Tamerlain does not host the contiguous series of urban areas found on other continents. Instead, cities here are more independent, near city-states separated by vast stretches of pristine wilderness. The prehistoric region known as the Veldt has resisted all attempts to colonize it.

Despite the continent's harsh environment and small population, it is (next to Galatea) the most popular continent with tourists and pilgrims from throughout the Empire. The planet's magic lantern industry has clung to the southern coast for hundreds of years, as have a wide array of artists' colonies. Socially experimental, Tamerlain remains at the forefront of independent intellectual thought throughout the Empire. The region also has the

highest alien population on the planet (mostly Ur-Obun); some cities' populations are nearly 20% alien. Byzantine Avestites have aimed numerous tracts on the sin of invention and the evils of mysignation at this region. Tamerlain's Church, while still predominantly Urth Orthodox, is generally more progressive than almost any other in the Empire. There is also a large contingent of Eskatonic priests investigating the planet's worsening weather patterns. These geomancers believe that there are a great number of mystical lines of force (see Ley Lines, later this chapter) which are coming unraveled here. This unraveling is, some suspect, partially responsible for the planet's rising waters.

The Authority here is weak because it was never able to grasp the idiosyncrasies of the Tamerlain marketplace. As a result of this, the Charioteers and the Scravers run most of the local agoras. Houses Cameton, Hawkwood and al-Malik each run independent cities as semiautonomous duchies.

Tamerlain Institute of Technical Redemption

The Tamerlain Institute is on the stormy, eastern coast of Tamerlain. Despite, or perhaps because of, its location the institute is a magnet for geniuses from throughout the Empire. The majority of students here are prospective Engineers, although only the best graduates are chosen to join that exclusive guild. Most students are yeomen, young nobles, Church members or members of various guilds. Here in the wilds of Tamerlain students study various schools of science in an atmosphere of rational inquiry. The university has also gained something of a reputation for its students' sometimes libertine social morals. Some students also secretly pursue illegal disciplines, such as the study of golems.

The Veldt

The Veldt is an endless expanse of grass and jungle in the northern reaches of Tamerlain. It is the wildest place left on the planet. Plagued by powerful and unpredictable seismic disturbances, few settlers ever planted roots here, even during the population booms of the Second Republic. Left untouched by the early terraformers, the region still boasts most of the planet's indigenous flora and fauna. Species too numerous to catalogue roam the interior and increase the area's reputation for danger.

People come here for a number of reasons; prospectors search for precious minerals, university naturalists seek specimens, Eskatonic priests look for mystical clues to the planet's geological problems, and nobles hunt big game. But the Veldt is nature in its rawest sense, and humans are not the highest thing on the food chain. There is also a secret Matharite cabal hidden somewhere within the jungles.

The Emperor, in the spirit of manifest destiny, is offering free land and other rewards to those who can "tame"

the Veldt. There has been a steady trickle of would-be homesteaders. Most of these quickly return to more civilized regions with horror stories about vicious beasts and nature gone awry. An entire colony of one hundred people, lead by Sir William Hawkwood, recently disappeared into the jungles without a trace. A rescue team found food half eaten on settlement tables, as if people disappeared before they could finish their meals.

The Magic Lantern Industry

Tamerlain's magic lantern industry has existed since the planet's beginnings during the Diaspora. Renowned for its high art during the Second Republic, the industry did not disappear during the Fall, as similar efforts did on most planets. Today, it is the biggest and most respected entertainment industry throughout the Empire.

"Magic lantern" is the word most people use to describe a variety of entertainment media. A magic lantern show could be a movie (video or film), a holographic drama, a visual reality experience, or any number of passive or interactive entertainments (usually story-based). More sophisticated citizens, those who follow the work and careers of magic lantern performers, directors and writers, call them "realities", or "reals", short for reality plays or reality dramas. The Church frowns on this term, noting the illusory and ephemeral nature of these dramas, which can so easily fool viewers' senses and lead their behavior astray. Nonetheless, the Church is well aware of the power magic lantern dramas have to influence the likes and dislikes of the populace.

On most planets, magic lantern shows are purely a distraction for the very rich. On Byzantium Secundus, however, middle class and even some poor areas have magic lantern palaces. While the Reeves are the main financiers behind the Byzantine magic lantern industry, various independent guilds perform and create most of the shows. Art lovers in many noble houses help finance magic lantern shows or become patrons to select magic lantern creators or performers.

All magic lantern shows must carry a seal of Patriarchal approval, as administered by a multi-sect review panel. Occasionally some subversive reals sneak through, though the review board has become increasingly sophisticated at screening out such pieces in recent decades. The Byzantine magic lantern industry has always exported its shows to other planets, where they are in great demand (and very expensive). The industry is a traditional target of the more reactionary forces in society.

The subject matter in Byzantine reals ranges from adventure tales about heroic noble and Church warriors to sly comedies and sophisticated dramas. The reals help many people temporarily escape the increasingly bleak realities of life under the Fading Suns.

The Authority is currently attempting another takeover of the industry. Their methods in the past have included extortion, political demagoguery and even mur-



der. There are also some illicit reals made by small, underground reality guilds (often Scraver run). These shows do not carry a Patriarchal seal of approval. The penalty for owning such reals may be anything from a large fine to execution, depending on the planet it is discovered on and the nature of the real. While some of these illegal reals are politically subversive, most are merely salacious in content.

Aldaia

Aldaia is the most insular and spiritually orthodox of the main four continents. Shrouded in dense fog and mystery, it has the most draconian immigration laws on the planet. The population of Aldaia adheres to a much stricter and more stratified caste system than the rest of the planet, though this makes it relatively normal for the

House Cameton and the Eye

When Emperor Vladimir gave the Eye official recognition, House Cameton was understandably nervous. After all, as the Internal Investigation agency, its agents had almost ruled Byzantium Secundus once, and had often supported Cameton's enemies. In order to allay the house's fears (and firm up its support), Vladimir promised that it would not conduct operations on Byzantium Secundus. The regents who followed Vladimir to power also promised the Cametons that the Eye would keep its focus off planet, though how much of this promise was earnest and how much was lip service is debatable.

Then Alexius became regent. He made no such promise, and House Cameton became nervous. Those watching the situation assumed that Alexius was trying to bolster his bargaining position with Byzantium Secundus's rulers. Still, throughout his term as regent, Alexius would not renew the old pledge, though no one uncovered any Eye plots on the planet during that time. Not until Alexius declared himself emperor did he finally promise Cameton that the Eye would do no more than run its headquarters on Byzantium Secundus, and this was in exchange for the Governor's pledge of support.

So the Imperial Eye and House Cameton's security forces watch each other warily. The Cametons don't object to surveillance of the other houses' embassies (after all, embassies are not under Cameton jurisdiction), but anything more is frowned upon. As a result, the Eye frequently uses independent agents whose connection it can deny. Most of these agents just provide information, but others take an active role in operations. Cameton also makes use of independent agents to watch the Eye, and the two groups continue to circle each other warily.

Empire at large. The most powerful sect here is a regional variant of Urth Orthodox. The Aldaian Church strongly adheres to Church doctrine on justice and humility. One of the Prophet's disciples, the scholar Horace, built a great library in the continent's mosquito-ridden inner seacoast. A small but potent caste of Eskatonic and Orthodox priests vies for possession of the library's secrets. The Imperial Eye's central headquarters is also here.

Aldaia has a strong mystical and martial tradition; many of the Emperor's Imperial Guard come from here. Aldaia is also House Cameton's home continent, although the Li Halan established a strong foothold here during the Dark Ages, and now holds valuable highland real estate on the east coast. Skirmishes between the two houses occur occasionally.

The Authority was always weakest on Aldaia and its presence has slipped still further in recent years. During the Emperor Wars, the Charioteers and Scravers allied with each other and launched a hostile takeover of the Aldaian agoras, forcing the Authority into a peripheral position. The Authority now bides its time as Charioteer and Scraver bickering intensifies into increasing violence.

Aldaia is almost all midland altitude, with highlands to the east and lowlands on the northern and eastern coasts. The eastern highlands are part of a volcanic chain and the center of many animistic folk legends. Aldaia is also home to the densest jungle regions on the planet, some of which are home to secretive covens such as the Matharites, and other low technology, spiritually controversial groups. There is also a sizable but secret population of pagan animists. Aldaia is the third most populated of the main four continents.

Imperial Eye Central Command

Imperial Eye Central Command is a sinister, Second Republic building built for the secret police of that time. The Imperial Eye inherited the building and its many secrets during the time of Emperor Vladimir. Located in the northernmost Aldaian jungles, few know its true location.

The building resembles a great, bloated steel spider. Saucer-shaped and forged from an especially strong black ceramsteel variant, the complex is virtually unassailable. A series of sharp, crooked insectlike legs hook out of the sides, pointing both upwards and into the ground. The building hums slightly. A series of nearly seamless doors with no apparent locking mechanisms provide the only access into the building (they are Gen-locked).

An elite company of Field Troops and VS Perimeter Guards protects the building. The guards wear black stiffsynth or ceramsteel armor with assault shields. Their weaponry includes screechers, stunners and various assault weapons. The building has several pieces of heavier artillery, and Diadem, the Imperial Navy spacestation, observes the building from space at all times.



The Great Library of Horace

The Horace Library is a massive Ravennan marble structure deep in the wilds of the Aldaian jungles. The labyrinthine building is a vine-covered repository for much of the Empire's lost knowledge. An arcane, indecipherable luminite pattern covers much of the building and casts a ghostly green light in the eternal twilight of the surrounding rain forest. No one, not even the competing Eskatonic and Orthodox sects who administer the library, understand all its secrets. The local forest inhabitants consider the library haunted and avoid it at all costs.

Tarsus

Tarsus is a craggy, arctic wasteland of forbidding peaks and massive glaciers at the planet's southern pole. Glacial rift valleys, fjords and yawning precipices dominate the landscape here, making Tarsus the least populous continent on the planet. Natural steam vents create some Icelandic-like regions of vegetation, but these are rare. A few small townships hug the continent's northern ring. Most of these are guild posts bent on extracting the planet's few unexploited mineral resources. Explorers here have discovered rich veins of luminite, several other strategic minerals and even fossil fuels (very rare) in recent decades. Although technically under Hawkwood and Cameton rule, the citizens of these inhospitable climes are generally individualists who scoff at Imperial rule. Tarsus

is the only continent with no undercity. While Second Republic geographers mapped the continent, these records have disappeared. Rumors of lost Diasporan cities and of an ancient alien spaceship crash site are but a few of the more believable stories of Tarsan treasures.

The Temple of Vladimir

Shortly after Vladimir's assassination, a Brother Battle sect who supported him built a mountainous fortresslike temple high in the Tarsus mountains. The temple is an austere gargoyle-encrusted structure made of hard Byzantine granite. It overlooks a lush grassy valley warmed by volcanic steam. Farmers and other settlers live on the far corner of this valley around a mist-shrouded lake. The Brother Battle sect has cordoned off the rest of the valley with high granite walls. They do not encourage visitors. Many in the valley consider the sect cursed, because the temple's Orb keeps dimming and goes out sporadically. Many rumor that this is because the temple's founder broke a solemn vow. Others suspect the machinations of the Garugal, a murderous Antinomist or Anima (depending on who one listens to) rumored to live in the nearby glacial mountains.

Vau Embassy

On a harsh peninsula covered in ice and snow is a small tower surrounded by a field of blue grass, decorated with hedges carefully sculpted into odd shapes. A force

field generated from the tower keeps the weather at bay, enclosing the field in a bubble of mild weather. A landing strip for a Vau courier ship is near the entrance to the tower.

The tower itself is a slender, curving edifice molded out of a single substance that is neither stone nor plastic. Open windows can be seen rising in rows to the top, but no person has ever been glimpsed through these windows. Only one human has ever entered the building, and that was Alexius. On the Emperor's coronation day, a Vau mandarin arrived with his escort to recognize the new Emperor. After gifting Alexius with the el'ash carvings in the Imperial Palace, Alexius invited the Vau to open an embassy on any land he desired. The Vau responded: "It shall be done." He later left the palace with his retinue and landed on Tarsus. Within three days, the tower was erected and the hedges cut. Two days later, the Vau and his retinue left Byzantium Secundus, and no Vau has since returned. The embassy has remained untouched since then.

Alexius declared it a capital offense to trespass upon the empty Vau embassy, but has also ordered that no Imperial, house or Church knights are to keep watch over it, in case the Vau are watching from afar. Alexius is steadfast in his efforts not to offend the mysterious Vau.

Even in light of this dictate, rumors abound in Port Authority of thieves who tried to loot the embassy, never to be heard from again. Some who dared to get close enough to see the embassy swear that some of the hedges are human-shaped.

Ghast

Ghast is better mapped than Tarsus, but no less mysterious. It was once a lush wilderness before the suns began to fade. Within a single generation hot new winds reduced the continent to a desert wasteland. Now the ruins of Second Republic buildings lay sun baked, sand blasted and deserted throughout the continent's interior. Ghast is the only continent not broken up by the rising oceans. Earthquakes have badly fractured the northern coast. Northern Ghast is the planet's most unstable seismic region. Due to the relative speed of the continent's desertification, few indigenous species had time to adapt to the Fading Suns holocaust. Vast stretches of this continent are almost completely lifeless. Ironically, Ghast does attract some immigrants from other planets. There are citizens from desert worlds who wish to be near the Imperial seat of power, but who find the cloying vegetation throughout the rest of the planet disturbing. The Avestites, in particular, find the region hospitable because of its similarity to their homeworld, Pyre. Many other people settle on Ghast, but even those from desert worlds find all but its semiarid eastern regions too inhospitable.

The Tepest Desert

Recently an Eskatonic archaeological expedition to the most inhospitable part of the interior (the Tepest

desert) found a blasted area over thirty kilometers wide. At the epicenter they found two ancient Ur-gargoyles. The Tepest desert was a wasteland, even before the suns began to fade. Most assume that the gargoyles have been there for millennia, even before the first human settlers. Additional digs are currently underway for more treasures. Almost all of the planet's power groups have converged here to claim their share of the spoils. Competition is fierce and there have been violent incidents.

The only humans able to survive for any length of time here are (literally) bloodthirsty bands of Changed. An odd feature of these creatures is that almost all of them have black eyes that glisten like pools of stagnant black water. They have a primitive animist culture and worship ghoulish desert spirits. Few people dare to disturb these nomadic desert bands.

The Vespa Region

Once a heavily populated urban region on the continent's volcanic northern rim, the Vespa region was the first area on Ghast to become desert. Historians believe that large stretches of urban land sank below the desert sands in a sudden sandstorm that buried even the tallest skyscrapers in less than a year. Now only the tallest pinacles rise from the desert floor. Tales of a powerful Antinomist, or of a wicked populace who turned their eyes from the Pancreator, are usually the reasons given for this catastrophe. The Vespa region is rich in various valuable minerals, and is sparsely populated. Occasionally desert prospectors may find caches of lost Dark Ages treasures in the region's interior, but the desert swallows up most artifacts.

The Ghast Undercity

Unlike the Drown Town regions on other continents, Ghast's undercity is free of water. Instead, howling desert winds keen through the upper tunnels, while the lower reaches are ghostly desert tombs. The only water here is a foul black liquid in the deepest caverns. It is poisonous to humans and some believe that the water has an evil, perhaps infernal, quality. This putrid mixture may be what gives the Tepest tribes their dark-eyed countenance. A recent Eskatonic expedition to the region's undercity also discovered the skeletons of huge, amphibious armored beasts in the caverns. These creatures may still live in the deepest undercity catacombs on other continents, but did not survive Ghast's sudden desertification. Despite this fact, other creatures have adapted to the region's more arid climate. Few prospectors have braved the undercity here and lived to tell the tale.

Byzantine Architecture

Byzantium Secundus architects, by necessity, built most of their structures along vertical lines due to the lack of building space. Land is at a premium and only the very rich can afford large tracts of land. Urban planners are very



inventive in using every scrap of mid- and highland territory to good effect. Cities built near canyons or mountains often recess directly into the slopes like prehistoric cave dwellings. Byzantine architects built latticed, multilevel terraces of steel and maxicrete in many areas, allowing several layers of city dwellers to live stacked one on top of another. Some liken these urban complexes to ant colonies because of the structures' tunnel-like quality. Prime real estate here is on the top level because they are the most open and receive the most sun. Each tier below receives adequate sun and air through the lattices, but each floor down is more cavelike (though none are as bad as Drown Town). Still, crime and social unrest are far less common in these areas. A massive road system supported by pylons connects these structures, called "stacks" by residents. The stacks cover roughly 20% of the urban midland and Heights regions. Urban stacks rarely exceed three levels except in the most densely populated areas. These terraced structures are found predominantly in the midland regions of Galatea, Harmony and to a much lesser extent, Aldaia.

As with many Imperial planets, Byzantium Secundus has a wide range of architectural styles. These range from the clean, efficient lines of early Diasporan settlers (these are very rare) to the ornate art deco structures of the Second Republic, to the hovels of the deepest Dark Ages. Unfortunately, the populace scavenged many earlier struc-

tures for materials after the Fall. More recently, during the post-Emperor War period's building boom, land speculators leveled buildings to make way for more "modern" structures. Most official buildings on the planet are of the finest quality, and were erected by the Ten noble houses. Nobles, hoping to leave their eternal mark on the planet, built each one to outdo the others in beauty and architectural innovation.

Walls surround many cities on Byzantium Secundus. Most of these walls went up shortly after the Fall when many of the Known Worlds fell to petty bickering. Many cities built walls out of terracite with ceramsteel ribbing to repel invaders. (These were mainly effective if the defenders also had air and space superiority to repel airborne attacks.) They are also useful for repelling marauding monstrosities. Many of these walls are still intact, though often covered with moss and ivy.

There is currently a great interest in restoring Second Republic architecture, despite the Church's protestations of vanity. The Emperor, the guilds and the nobility are on one side of this issue, and the Church is on the other. Despite its protestations, the Church has been just as busy building greater and more glorious monuments to the Pancreator.

Second Republic architecture and many modern Imperial structures are built along classical lines. Many are reminiscent of ancient Greek architecture, with a touch

Building Materials

Besides such standard building materials as wood, brick, marble, gold, ceramsteel and concrete, Byzantium Secundus builders use a number of rarer native and imported building materials.

Bristlereed: Bristlereed is a strong, flexible fibrous reed similar to bamboo. It is plentiful in almost all lowland regions throughout the planet.

Gold Mud: Gold mud is a common yellow-orange mud; rich in silicates, it makes strong, water-resistant bricks when baked. Unfortunately, because of its crystalline nature, it changes shape in unpredictable ways, even in a mold. Structures made from gold mud bricks have a lumpy, turtle shell appearance.

Maxicrete: Maxicrete is a relatively inexpensive synthetic concrete reclaimed from ancient Diasporan records by the Engineers. It is lightweight, easy to shape, long lasting and highly resistant to the elements. Many worlds throughout the Empire use it in a wide array of structures.

Luminite: Luminite is a soft, luminescent stone that shimmers prettily in low lighting situations. Artisans predominantly use luminite as filigree on other materials. The material has the added advantage of creating a subtle electromagnetic field that repels almost every kind of insect (which is important on Byzantium Secundus). Engineers prize luminite for its many uses in high-end electronic components. Luminite exists in small deposits throughout the Empire. Byzantine miners have recently discovered veins of it in Tarsus.

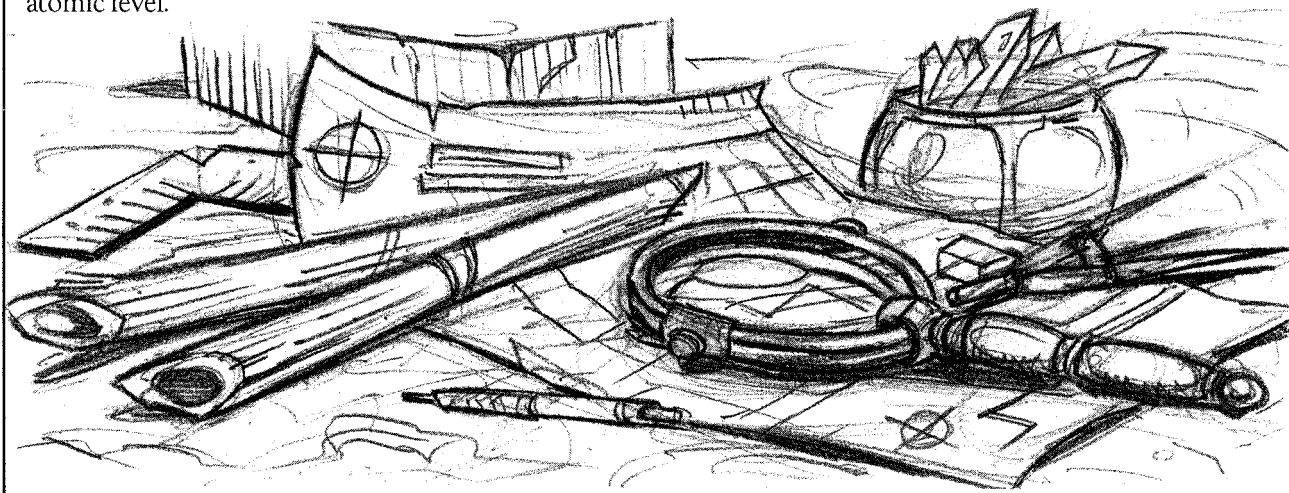
Ravennan Marble: Stronger and more beautiful than the more common Shaprutan variety, only the very wealthy throughout the Empire can afford Ravennan marble. It comes in many varieties. The most highly prized is cerulean blue with purple veins.

Rainstone: A soft material, the primary use of rainstone is as a veneer over other materials. Rainstone is a beautiful multicolored stone; it is particularly prized on Byzantium Secundus because its colors become far more vivid and "breathe" slightly when wet. Rainstone is the material of choice for cathedrals throughout the planet.

Shantorian Refractor Crystal: Shantorian crystal is a transparent, polychromatic crystal found only on Shaprut. On a molecular level, the crystal combines many of the characteristics of crystal and glass (it is technically a liquid). Each variety of crystal is predominantly one color, but shifts intensity and hue in a fractal rainbow fashion when tapped. Each color also has a specific chiming tone. Its main use is as stained glass in noble mansions and cathedrals. The Shantor use these crystals in their religious ceremonies, but have access to less and less of it as human miners export it to the rich throughout the Empire.

Terracite: Terracite is lighter, stronger and far more durable than maxicrete. A lost Second Republic wonder material, terracite resists the Engineers' best attempts at duplication (it is Level 7 technology). Most surviving Second Republic buildings are made of this material. Terracite is three times stronger than maxicrete and was far less cost-prohibitive to produce during the Second Republic. It is also 50% lighter than maxicrete and even more malleable. Second Republic artists created exquisitely detailed sculptures from it. Terracite comes in many colors and has a pearly opalescence that becomes more beautiful as it ages. Artisans can recycle terracite into other forms, but its strength makes it difficult to sculpt with modern methods. There is a market for stolen terracite.

Despite its strengths, terracite has one major flaw. Terracite remains strong for millennia. Then suddenly, over the course of several years, it becomes porous and loses much of its durability. Total collapse is inevitable after no more than a decade of this deterioration. Terracite failure was first noted 300 years ago. The number of reported incidents has increased significantly over the last century. The Engineers believe it is breaking down on a sub-atomic level.



of art deco or art nouveau influence. Many Second Republic buildings survive through the present simply because they are so sturdy. Humans throughout Known Space have alternately cherished and sacked Second Republic buildings. Those on Byzantium Secundus vary widely from region to region.

Currently the best architects and artisans from throughout the Known Worlds are flocking to Byzantium Secundus. Many find rich rewards “restoring the planet to its Second Republic glory,” though in truth many of the techniques employed by these earlier builders have disappeared forever. The Emperor has also introduced an element of Ravennan architecture to the mix. Church structures tend more toward a flamboyant gothic style.

Some subjects call Byzantium Secundus the “concrete capitol.” (A public relations man on Byzantium Secundus’s planetary competitor, Criticorum, originally coined this phrase.) This appellation mainly refers to the gray and unimaginative government buildings built during the depths of the Dark Ages. The majority of these buildings are in Harmony, where squalid gunmetal gray buildings cover much of the continent. Most of these were built during Harmony’s brief period of independence over four hundred years ago. Most of these structures stylistically combine the worst architectural conventions similar to pre-Diasporan Urth’s fascist and communist regimes. Very little preindependence architecture still exists on Harmony.

Byzantium’s wealthy highland altitudes have, perhaps, the most opulent structures throughout the Known Worlds. Even before Alexius, Byzantium was a center of trade and authority. The planet is now, arguably, the wealthiest in the Empire. Heights architecture is grandiose, often bordering on ostentatious. Vast fleets of ships routinely visit the planet, carrying precious cargoes of building materials from many far-flung planets. The primary source of these materials is from the rich quarries on the Emperor’s home planet, Ravenna. Ravennan marble and rainstone are the building materials of choice. Additional, rarer materials come from the mines of Shaprut and include such materials as luminite and Shantorian refractor crystals. Many merchants throughout the Empire have become immensely rich by sending their planets’ mineral wealth to Byzantium Secundus. Many Known Worlds citizens resent Byzantium’s absorption of their planet’s resources, however.

Most of the middle class lives in modern buildings made of maxicrete. Many middle class structures are modular boxlike affairs, though some of the more successful merchants in the midlands customize their homes to emulate Imperial or even Second Republic architecture; nobles consider this quaint. The citizenry of Byzantium Secundus enjoy more in the way of consumer goods than any Imperial planet except, perhaps, for Leagueheim, Istakhr, and Criticorum. Many middle class homes have radios, refrigerators and other consumer electronics and

labor saving devices. Even a sizable minority of serfs have indoor plumbing and electricity, though they rarely use power for anything but lighting.

The poorest of the poor usually live in ramshackle huts made of bristlereed and gold mud. Many serfs decorate their homes with pieces of glass and other cast-off materials from more wealthy areas. Some people of lower social status are lucky enough to live in dilapidated older buildings; some of the poorest of the poor live in cramped ramshackle Second Republic mansions. Many of the urban poor live in hellish multistory tenement buildings. Competition for living space in these regions can lead to bloodshed.

Slums are disaster areas, though many of the most opulent Second Republic buildings are in the poorest Slums. Land is precious, and these buildings are especially valuable. Greedy nobles, guilders and Church officials all want these buildings. The Authority guild is especially ruthless in evicting tenants from desirable properties.

Other Places

There are, of course, many other places of interest on Byzantium Secundus. Every manner of diversion entertains subjects from all backgrounds. There are high and low theaters, public parks, sports arenas, museums and many other types of entertainment. There are also speak-easies, brothels, illegal gambling dens and other sources of illegal pleasures. Both Church and state frown on these entertainments, but they thrive nevertheless.



Infrastructure

An advanced and varied infrastructure connects many places on Byzantium Secundus. A gleaming web of gold colored monorail trains ties many continents together internally. The monorail was once a truly planetary system during the Second Republic. Unfortunately, most intercontinental lines fell into the sea during the Dark Ages (there is still one line operating between Old Istanbul and Harmony). There are ambitious plans currently underway to rebuild these connections. A vast system of roads crisscross much of the land's surface. These thoroughfares range from the smooth superhighways of the Heights, to the worst lowland dirt roads. Many lower altitude roads are dangerous. Highway brigands attack travelers on more secluded roads and corrupt minor nobles charge high protection taxes for passage through their lands.

Transportation

Many urban areas have efficient means of local mass transportation. Bus and train systems get people to work in the high and midland areas, while most in the lowlands go by horse or brute cart. Well-paved urban areas also have a good deal of bicycle traffic. Many of the well-to-do have their own private skimmers or flitters. Wheeled landcraft are also ubiquitous and somewhat more affordable to the middle class. Even some serfs may own cars, though these are usually old and in poor repair (many serfs are from families that were middle class a mere generation ago). Many Byzantine-made skimmers and landcrafts are, by necessity, amphibious. They are watertight and able to traverse short stretches of water. Some are even submersible and carry their own air supply, though these are more expensive and rarer. Most landcraft use fusion engines, though others may use chemical batteries, solar panels or wind sails.

Fleets of ocean-going vessels and luxurious aircraft ferry the nobility from place to place. A wealthy Hawkwood count in Veridian has started a small dirigible concern. Custom built luxury zeppelins are becoming something of a fad among the nobility. There is always a vast array of spaceships orbiting the planet. These include everything from Imperial dreadnoughts to tramp shuttles and luxurious space yachts for the ultra-wealthy.

Spaceports

There are three major spaceports on Byzantium Secundus. The Veridian spaceport on Galatea is a Second Republic building surrounded by a modern superstructure. Opulent in the extreme, it is the second busiest in the Empire (next to Criticorum's). Most Byzantine space ports also double as airports. All spaceports maintain private landing pads for important dignitaries. The Veridian spaceport has a special pad for the Vau, though they have only used it once (during Alexius's coronation). The Authority is the main power here.

The other two ports are Gerbach on Harmony (next to the Novgorad shipyards) and Solcis on Tamerlain (the smallest). In addition, the Manx and Triest shipyards have their own landing and liftoff pads, though these are not open to the public. There is tight security at all spaceports to screen out undesirables. Besides the planet's spaceports, there are hundreds of smaller airports to handle the planet's commercial air traffic. Spaceports are prime targets for both foreign and domestic terrorist attacks.

Shipyards

There are three major spaceship construction yards on the planet, and numerous ship yards for the construction of oceangoing vessels. The starship plants construct the majority of a spaceship in modular components. The ship builders then tug the components into space and complete the ships in one of the Cumulus spacestations' four spaceborne construction platforms.

The three yards are the Novgorad (on Harmony), the Manx (on Galatea, owned by the Hazat) and the Triest (also on Galatea, owned by a joint Engineer/Charioteer consortium). Of the three ship yards, two are military (the Novgorad and Manx yards) and serve multiple clients. The last shipyard (the Triest) builds luxury space yachts (the Engineers and Charioteers have put aside their internal differences to make stellar profits with this facility).

Recently someone murdered the Manx shipyard's dean and stole the plans for a new generation of military vessels. The authorities have no real leads and are offering a sizable reward for the capture of the assassin and the return of the plans.

Water Control Systems

A highly elaborate system of dikes, dams, locks and canals protects most people from floods. Built over the centuries, water control systems are now a high art form. Built-in redundancies protect the planet against the advent of sabotage or a particularly bad rain. Authority money has historically maintained this system.

Many people have indoor plumbing, or access to some sort of running water (although it is recommended that any lowland water be boiled before drinking). Unfortunately, the sewer and flood control systems in many poorer areas are deteriorating faster than the Empire can fix them. This is another wrong which the Emperor promises to right with the Imperial coffers' resources. The Emperor's seeming interest in such ventures is making him quite popular with the serfs and guilds, but less so with many nobles. There have been several unsolved incidents of sabotage.

Power

Energy production is, for the most part, cheap and plentiful throughout most regions on the planet. More people have electricity on Byzantium Secundus than on any world except Leagueheim. Along with fusion, Byzantium Secundus derives energy through extensive wind, tidal, hydroelectric, solar and geothermal power

works. Even many poorer regions have some electricity, though they rarely use it for anything but light. Emperor Alexius is pushing some major public works programs, much to the chagrin of some nobles and the delight of the guilds. Sister Theafana is a particular proponent of these programs. The Tamerlain Institute predicts that at the current rate of expansion, everyone on the planet will have electricity in 20 years. Some critics view this as too optimistic. They note that the Emperor is talking about big projects but showing little in the way of actual results.

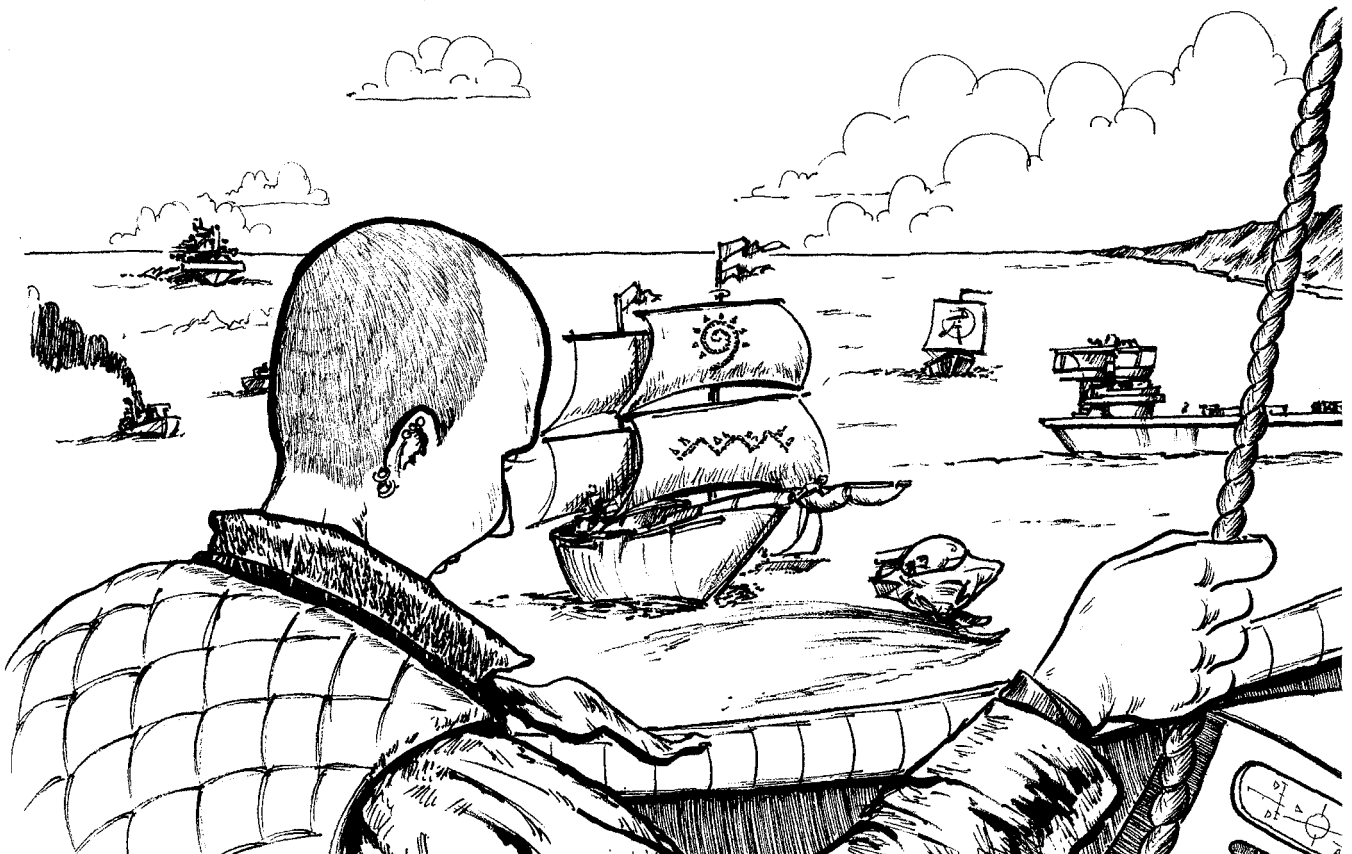
Crops

Food is a strong cash crop for Byzantium Secundus and is one of its few exports. Rich soil deposited during wet seasons makes for abundant crop yields. Millrice grows like wildfire over almost the entire planet. The people are also highly adept at raising food from the water. Byzantium's use of hydroponics farms and its fishing industry means that the planet is self-sustaining, in this regard at least. The planet even exports and lends food aid to less fortunate planets. This generosity helps ameliorate charges by some that Byzantium Secundus is a giant bureaucratic leech that only absorbs Imperial resources. In accordance with the Prophet's teachings, the Church collects a 10% food tithe to guard against times of famine or siege. Despite the overabundance of food, some regions go hungry because the nobles and guilds take food for export. There are occasional famine revolts in Harmony, Gasperah and Ghast.

Oceans

Water covers over 87.5% of Byzantium Secundus's surface (as opposed to 78.8% on Holy Terra), and the level is increasing. It is, thus, no surprise that much of the planet's economy, folklore and pastimes revolve around water. The majority of the planet's water is in the vast and ancient oceans that surround the continental groups on every side. There are seven such oceans: the Gabler, the Vistaka, the Obsidian, the Naiad, the Moliach, the Caspian and the Borachio. Throughout its history Byzantium Secundus has been a maritime power; there are thousands of legends about each sea. The Sailors' Guild kept good charts, even through the depths of the Dark Ages. There is little about the oceans' surface that they do not know. While there was extensive mapping of the oceans' depths during the Second Republic, most of these records have disappeared. Only now are a sizable number of submersible ships (submarines) beginning to rediscover the oceans. Even these concentrate on the shallower inland seas, however.

The inland seas are little more than 500 years old and are not nearly as deep or vast as the outer oceans. The debris of several millennia of civilization cover the floors of these inland seas. Those willing to risk these unknown depths may gain great riches. Stories of fabulous wealth plumbed from Second Republic warehouses lure prospectors from throughout the Empire. There are forever rumors of treasure maps. (The Scravers make a killing sell-



ing fraudulent maps to naive pilgrims and tourists.) The inland ocean floors, while better explored, are no less treacherous. Strange genetically altered sea creatures have attacked lone humans, small boats and even ships and submarines.

Ley Lines

Byzantium Secundus, like most planets in Human Space, was heavily terraformed during the Second Republic. While the terraformers gave custom treatment to every planet, most are fairly similar in general technique and contour. A few, however, were created according to arcane blueprints provided by the greatest geotechnic scientists of the period. The greatest of these was Doramos, the man who terraformed Pentateuch.

Historians know little about the terraformer who sculpted the jagged ziggurat contours of Byzantium Secundus. His name was William Tamerlain. He was Doramos' student, but broke with his master over creative differences. He fell into disrepute when he protested the

Second Republic corporations' destruction of his mountains for commercial purposes. Some modern scholars believe Tamerlain sculpted the planet's surface features to protect the planet from flooding. When the corporations developed the planet, they disarmed many of these topographic safeguards.

Eskatonic scholars are desperately searching for rumored geomantic safeguards, in the hopes of restoring them. Three Eskatonic priests from the Horace Library recently disappeared into the Aldaian jungles. Fellow priests found the eviscerated bodies of two of the trio (Matharites or pagans are the prime suspects). The third priest resurfaced a few weeks later. He returned to the Holy City and threw himself from a tower shortly thereafter.

Early geotechnicians usually referred to these planetary energies as geomagnetic lines of force, Gaia curves, etc. Today's modern geomancers in the Eskatonic Order call these forces ley lines. Some believe that Second Republic geotechnicians used these lines of power to fuel their massive planetary control engines, as well as other super-

The Seven Oceans

Borachio: Borachio is the planet's mildest ocean. Sunny, warm and temperate, the ocean is almost incongruous, bordering stormy Tamerlain as it does. (The ocean does become rougher near Tamerlain's coast.) Most sailors view the Borachio as a plum assignment, and many of the planet's rich prefer to come here for recreational purposes. There is excellent deep sea fishing. Unfortunately, due to this concentration of wealth, there are also pirates who sail in from the four adjacent oceans (the Vistaka, the Naiad, the Caspian and the Obsidian) to plunder it.

Caspian: In many ways similar to the Gabler, sailors consider the Caspian the navy's worst assignment. The Caspian is hot and fetid, except for its northern regions where it is cold and fetid. The ocean is also a chemical soup. Millions of varieties of algae create a lush environment for the planet's strangest fish (many of which are poisonous). The Caspian also receives most of the pollution from Harmony's worst industrial regions. Sailors call it "the bleeding ocean," because strange scarlet algae tides open up like bloody gashes in the ocean's black and green waves. The planet's only functional, intercontinental monorail line runs through here. The Imperial Eye recently foiled an attempt to bomb the bridge, but did not catch the saboteurs. The Caspian navy is on the lookout for additional attempts.

Gabler: Steamy, hot and difficult, the Gabler is a torpid, extremely salty ocean. The sun beats down relentlessly here and giant sea dwelling insects harry the crew of any ships that sail this sea. The ocean is generally blue with clinging green algae tides. Threats here include giant jellyfish creatures as large as 40 feet in length.

Moliach: The Moliach is a cold, tempest-wracked ocean bordering the northern coasts of Veridian and Ghastr. The Moliach's waters vary from a deep blue to black or gray depending on the weather. There is a strange area near the coast of Ghastr where ships disappear, never to return.

Naiad: The Naiad is a freezing, arctic ocean surrounding Tarsus. Perpetually shrouded in mist, it is usually calm, almost placid. Unpredictable Tarsan ice storms may shatter this calm at any time, however. The Naiad is the most poorly charted ocean and, like the Obsidian, its sailors are wary of ghosts. Recently an unidentified spaceship crashed somewhere in the Naiad, setting off seismographs throughout the planet. Both the Imperial Navy and many guilds are combing the area, attempting to find and salvage the wreck.

Obsidian: The Obsidian is the deepest and most ancient of the planet's oceans. Its waters are cool and black, owing to the basaltic black ocean floors that underlie it. It is also one of the most feared oceans; the crews who sail it believe the shades of dead sailors haunt its fathomless depths. Some believe that enormous sea monsters live coiled in its deepest trenches and prey upon passing ships. The ocean floor is rife with active volcanoes; geysers of molten rock may erupt from the ocean's surface with no warning.

Vistaka: The Vistaka is the largest and the stormiest of the planet's oceans. Tropical hurricanes in the ocean's northern latitudes give way to freezing squalls and Naiad like fog in the South. Most of Tamerlain's worst weather rolls in from the Vistaka. The Vistaka is very similar to Urth's Pacific Ocean.



scientific wonders. Most officials are dubious of the existence of ley lines.

Today's geomancers (Eskatonic priests, Engineers and rumored antinomists) believe that the ley lines are beginning to fray. They think that the lines are fracturing in some places, especially on Tamerlain and in parts of Harmony. This phenomenon has also somewhat affected Gasperah and the northern regions of Ghast and Aldaia. Many geomancers believe that this is due to an imbalance of planetary humours. This unraveling, along with the fading of the sun, may be a possible explanation for the planet's worsening weather. Others blame a hidden Second Republic weather engine gone awry.



Chapter Three: People

Byzantium Secundus has perhaps the broadest array of citizenry of any planet in the Known Worlds, from the poorest serfs to the richest nobles. The middle class — the freemen crafters, artisans, minor landholders, or unaffiliated merchants — is here in strength and represents a political power not to be ignored, although certainly they do not wield the same power that that their twentieth century counterparts did.

Class lines are distinct on Byzantium Secundus, with clear geographical divisions between rich and poor, but these same people nonetheless rub shoulders in the markets and thoroughfares. While people are divided in their professional lives, there are often similarities in social life. It is not unusual to witness a noble and a crafter chatting amiably about the latest magic lantern shows or the sleek lines of this year's skimmer models. However, these are mere moments in an overall society of firm class hierarchies.

Nonetheless, on Byzantium Secundus, the classes are more mobile than anywhere else, except perhaps for Leagueheim. Here, valiant or popular deeds that catch the eye of a noble seeking favor with the populace can result in the deed's performer being granted a job in the noble's house — or even a knighthood, if the deed is important enough (and if it will prevent the populace from rioting). Many are the tales of serfs raised up to become householders, rich guildsmen or even priests. Certainly, the tales are more numerous than the actual number of rescued serfs, but they serve to provide hope to the lowest classes, who are convinced that their lot as citizens of the throneworld is ten times better than that of serfs on any other, less important world.

Perhaps this feeling comes from the fact that Byzantium Secundus is a world of immense political significance. Everyone even close to the corridors of power knows that at any time, they could be thrust into the spotlight to make decisions that could have repercussions on many worlds. Many of the characters listed here are just

such people, whose actions or associations could place them in the center of destiny's stage.

The Powers That Be

As the seat of imperial power, Byzantium Secundus hosts some of the most important people in the Known Worlds. These are the sort of folk that the average serf or freeman cannot conceive of ever meeting, and for whom they make up the most extreme legends. "Emperor Alexius? I hear that he's nine-feet tall and breathes fire!" "Marquessa Lekoya? She's made out of metal and powered by a holy furnace!"

The players' characters will rarely, if ever, meet these august personages, and when they do they should be suitably impressed. Characters may know their names and duties, but little more. For this reason this book does not include their traits or powers, but gives enough information for simple meetings. If players insist on having their characters try to fight someone like Emperor Alexius, have his bodyguards treat them accordingly before letting them create new characters.

The Nobility



Emperor Alexius

No one, not even the Patriarch, wields as much power as Emperor Alexius. The most obvious manifestations of his might are the imperial legions, its navy, the Imperial Eye and the tax collectors. In addition, House Hawkwood still professes complete support, and other young nobles have begun flocking to the Emperor's banner to serve as Beacons, spreading the Imperial Light to the darkest parts of the Empire and the lost worlds.

Still, Emperor Alexius does not maintain his power through brute strength. He knows that if any three of the other royal houses joined forces, or if the Church or League turned against him, they could drive him from power. He

must constantly balance competing demands made by one or more of these factions, all the while trying to further his own plans. He never discards a useful person unless that person becomes too much of a threat, and even then he will try to have his underlings find some way to put that person to good use — far, far away.



Emperor Alexius I

House Hawkwood



Lady Regnus-Octavia Hawkwood ("The Dowager Mother")

Lady Octavia was born to a life of wealth and privilege in one of the most powerful branches of the Hawkwood family. The duchess was raised with a strong sense of superiority and self worth. As a child Octavia studied at the feet of such now legendary figures as Valadas Hawkwood, legendary musician, and



Lady Regnus-Octavia Hawkwood

Archbishop Potemkin of the Eskatonic Order. She has a razor keen intellect and a ceramsteel-hard strength of will. Inculcated since birth with the duties inherent to the highborn, she was nevertheless something of a mystical dilettante as a young woman. She caused a minor house scandal when she married Alexius's father, Utar Vincius Hawkwood, who came from a slightly less reputable branch of the family tree. Some of the Emperor's critics use this to hint that the Emperor's lineage is not as pure as it should be. Utar was killed when the *Basilisk*, his Hawkwood dreadnought, was destroyed in the final days of the Emperor Wars.

In recent decades the Dowager Mother, as some call her (not to her face), has become far more serious about her family responsibilities. A stern taskmaster feared by many, she has access to her own sizable Hawkwood fleet

Longevity Serums

According to Church doctrine, one of the primary conceits of the Second Republic was its overuse of antiaging serums. Some of the greatest scientists of that era put their minds to delaying the effects of growing older, and they succeeded. At the height of the Second Republic, the lifespan of the average person reached 150 years, and more than a few people lived 200 years.

The Church now labels this a transgression of the Pancreator's will. While they do not object to people extending their life expectancy through judicious use of antiaging formulas, overuse of these can definitely call down unwanted attention from the Inquisition. Of course, the price of these chemicals puts them well out of the range of anyone but the richest nobles, merchants and leading religious figures.

The serums are actually part of a series of treatments, of which the pills and injections are the most important parts. People generally start this regimen when they reach their 30s or 40s, and the effects are not reversible. In other words, following the therapy once and then breaking it off will not cause the character's age to catch up with him. He will not have aged from the point where he began treatment until the point where he needed it again.

When people first begin to take antiaging serums, a one-month treatment will effectively halt the aging process for up to five years. However, the treatments become less successful the more a person does them. At some point people have to remain constantly in therapy to get any benefit. Since the treatments cost at least 1000 firebirds each, this can wreak havoc with the budgets of even the wealthiest families. Additionally, even the best medical technology in the Known Worlds is nowhere near the equal of its Second Republic predecessor. As a result, at some point the treatments just stop working.

and routinely shuttles between Byzantium Secundus, Delphi and Tethys, where she is especially powerful. The duchess disapproves of Sister Theafana, but loathes Lady Salandra Decados, hoping Alexius's attentions might turn to Lady Penelope Hawkwood, a beautiful, if excessively tractable, noblewoman from Delphi. Octavia has a certain sense of noblesse oblige toward the serfs, but is far more interested in using her position to strengthen House Hawkwood. She can be extremely ruthless in this regard.

Lady Regnus-Octavia Hawkwood is a thin, almost gaunt, woman in her early seventies. She has preserved much of her youthful beauty with longevity serums, however, and appears to be a well-preserved woman in her early forties. She has luxuriant wavy red hair, which she wears in a constrained courtly fashion in public.



Sir Chamon Mazarin

Mazarin first came to Alexius's attention when Alexius was still a child. The would-be Emperor noticed the stunted little man working in the courtyard of a Hawkwood mansion on Ravenna. More importantly, Alexius noticed how closely Mazarin kept an eye on everything going on around him. Alexius began seeking Mazarin out for information on other family members and, when he took control of some of the house's legions, he took Mazarin along with him.

Mazarin took control of both Alexius intelligence-gathering forces and bodyguards. With Alexius he had real power. Without Alexius he did menial labor for House Hawkwood. Faced with these options, he threw himself into his duties with incomparable vigor. He created a network of agents loyal to Alexius first, himself second and House Hawkwood third. These agents proved capable of not only accumulating necessary information, but of countering the many threats posed by Decados agents as well.

When Alexius became regent, he made Mazarin his



Sir Chamon Mazarin

liaison to the Imperial Eye's special operations teams. When he became Emperor, he knighted Mazarin and put him in charge of some of his most critical operations. Alexius also gave Mazarin almost unlimited authority to pursue his own activities. Mazarin has managed to keep his old network going, though now bolstered by the authority of the Imperial Eye. He constantly stays alert for ways to expand its influence.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Hawkwood Knight

Quote: "I know the Muster is after you. You have friends among the Avestites. Let's make a deal."

Description: If Alexius's family had not taken in Mazarin as a youth, he may well have been labeled a demonic child. Barely over five-feet tall, and with a twisted body and gnarled face, he is no one's idea of a debonair spy.

Roleplaying: Mazarin really tries to stay in the background, but he delights too much in field work. He will take a personal role in any operation he feels is too critical to leave to others, or when the Emperor has a particular interest. He always negotiates from a position of strength, and will do almost anything to get into that position. However, age is beginning to tell on him, and securing a steady supply of antiaging formula is becoming a greater and greater priority.

Entourage: Trained killers follow Mazarin everywhere he goes. They may remain in the shadows and inconspicuous, but they will appear the second he needs their aid.

Body: Strength 5, Dexterity 9, Endurance 6

Mind: Wits 8, Perception 8, Tech 6

Spirit: Extrovert 6, Introvert 3, Passion 3, Calm 5, Faith 2, Ego 6, Human 3, Alien 2

Natural skills: Charm 6, Dodge 7, Fight 5, Impress 8, Melee 5, Observe 9, Shoot 6, Sneak 7, Vigor 5

Learned skills: Academia 4, Artisan (Forgeries) 4, Bureaucracy 8, Disguise 4, Drive Aircraft 4, Drive Landcraft 6, Empathy 5, Etiquette 6, Focus 2, Gambling 2, Inquiry 8, Knavery 8, Lockpick 5, Lore (Conspiracies) 7, Read Latin 2, Read Urthish 6, Read Urthtech 4, Remedy 2, Search 6, Social (Leadership) 5, Speak Scaver Cant 3, Stoic Mind 5, Streetwise 9, Torture 3

Wyrd: 5

Equipment: Innumerable surveillance and countersurveillance gadgets

Weapons: Palm laser, small jagged hook (+1d fist damage)

Martial Arts: Martial Fist, Martial Kick, Martial Hold, Block, Claw Fist

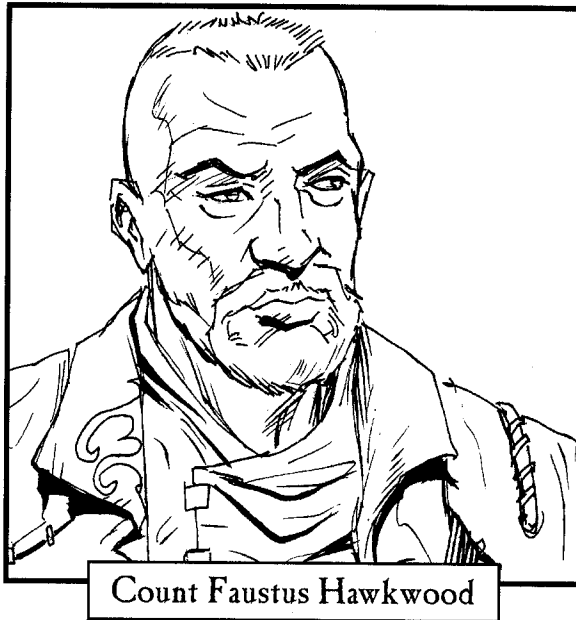
Armor: Dueling shield, synthsilk

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

Count Faustus Hawkwood



Faustus Hawkwood fought hard for his Lord, Prince Darius Hawkwood. When Darius died, Faustus supported first Alexius's brother as family leader, but switched once it became apparent Alexius would take the helm. He fought just as hard for Alexius, proving instrumental in



several victories and sacrificing hundreds of his own troops for his prince. Vuldrok barbarians even razed his own fiefdom on Gwynneth at the end of the Emperor Wars while Faustus was away on Byzantium Secundus helping defend the planet from the Decados.

For his loyalty, Alexius honored him with a prime seat at his coronation, a jewel-studded sword and an invitation to join Alexius's Questing Knights. Faustus's hints that he might deserve Imperial lands went unheeded, and the Count returned to his devastated manor to fume. Over the course of the next year, Faustus received numerous visits from other Hawkwood nobles feeling equally slighted. Still, it was not until the Vuldrok raiders began attacking in force that Faustus felt compelled to act. Calls for Alexius to send the Imperial Fleet to deal with the raiders went unheeded. Instead Alexius sent a Reeve diplomat to meet with the barbarians, and the Reeve had the audacity to bring a Vuldrok ambassador back with him.

Finally at his breaking point, Faustus joined the two ambassadors in their voyage to Byzantium Secundus. There he settled into a mansion near the Hawkwood embassy and established himself as part of the planet's social whirl. He leads those who urge action against the barbarians and seeks a position as a leader of Imperial troops. He also meets secretly with those who want to see Alexius lose his power and has begun to bring such a group together.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Hawkwood Count

Quote: "Loyalty to one's family is the greatest virtue."

Description: An older gentleman, though still lean and fit, Faustus is one of the few Gwynneth Hawkwoods with a beard, which he grew to cover the scars he received during the Emperor Wars. He prefers simple clothes, but has begun to wear the flashier outfits of Byzantium Secundus's social leaders.

Roleplaying: Faustus was once the epitome of the loyal

Hawkwood, but now passionately believes Emperor Alexius has betrayed the family. He feels sure that Alexius hopes to create a new house to supplant his old one, and will risk everything to topple the new Emperor, hoping that Alexius's brother Ezrus will succeed him.

Entourage: Faustus brought only a few bodyguards and aids with him, but these are all extremely skilled at what they do. Only one of his followers, a former Hawkwood intelligence agent named Ilanya Histetic, knows about his more secret activities, and she helps set up rendezvous with possible allies.

Body: Strength 6, Dexterity 7, Endurance 8

Mind: Wits 6, Perception 7, Tech 6

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

Natural skills: Charm 5, Dodge 6, Fight 7, Impress 7, Melee 9, Observe 6, Shoot 6, Sneak 4, Vigor 7

Learned skills: Beast Lore 6, Bureaucracy 5, Etiquette 6, Inquiry 5, Read Urthish 5, Ride 9, Social (Leadership) 8, Social (Oratory) 7, Spacesuit 5, Speak Vuldrok 2, Stoic Body 7, Stoic Mind 4, Streetwise 1, Survival 5, Warfare (Military Tactics) 8

Wyrd: 6

Equipment: High quality and secure communication devices

Weapons: Rapier, laser pistol

Martial Arts: Martial Fist, Martial Kick, Martial Hold, Block, Martial Throw

Fencing: Parry, Thrust, Slash, Flat of Blade, Disarm, Feint, Parry Riposte, Pierce

Armor: Dueling shield, synthsilk. Also owns a high-quality suit of powered ceramsteel armor.

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



Baron Eviathan Hawkwood

Eviathan lives for a good battle, or at least that is what he tells everyone. He served the Hawkwood cause ably during the Emperor Wars, and fought with skill and flair in support of Alexius's claim to the Empire. As a landless knight, Eviathan saw the wars as his only chance for advancement and took full advantage of them. When the wars finally ended, Alexius asked Eviathan to become one of the first Questing Knights. Eviathan, who had hoped more for land or money, agreed on the condition that Alexius make him a baron.

Since becoming a Questing Knight, Eviathan has made a few forays off of Byzantium Secundus. He has visited Stigmata (though he never saw a Symbiot), helped defeat two mercenary bands which had turned to banditry after the wars ended, and has gone on a few quests, the results of which have gotten grander as time has passed. He now spends most of his time on Byzantium Secundus, primarily to help manage the growing number of Questing Knights, though the plush accommodations Alexius has given him may be an even more important incentive.



Baron Eviathan Hawkwood

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Hawkwood Baron

Quote: "Let me tell you about the time we routed the Decados at Katerina Pass. It all began when I..."

Description: A tall, rugged man, his once-solid frame has begun to show the effects of the soft life at court. As a result, he has stopped wearing the form-fitting dueling outfits he once preferred and has let his once-close cropped hair grow out a little to make him seem leaner.

Roleplaying: As the self-appointed leader of the Questing Knights, Eviathan has become a fixture on the Byzantium Secundus social scene. Many of the other knights do look to him for leadership, and he is glad to lead them from party to party. Still, he does think of himself as a leading warrior and, should anything threaten that (like the arrival of a more skilled knight), no one knows how he might react.

Entourage: Popular with the other Questing Knights despite his boasting, Eviathan usually travels in the company of three to four other knights and their associated servants. This means his group usually includes at least 20 people.

Body: Strength 8, Dexterity 7, Endurance 8

Mind: Wits 6, Perception 6, Tech 6

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

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

Learned skills: Drive Spacecraft 2, Etiquette 6, Gambling 3, Performance (Singing) 4, Read Urthish 4, Remedy 4, Ride 8, Search 6, Social (Leadership) 6, Spacesuit 3, Stoic Body 5, Survival 6, Tracking 7, Warfare (Military Tactics) 4

Blessing: Bold (+2 Passion when others hesitate), Legendary (+4 Human for recognition)

Wyrd: 6

Equipment: War horse

Weapons: Broadsword, blaster rifle

Martial Arts: Martial Fist, Block, Sure Fist

Fencing: Parry, Thrust, Slash, Flat of Blade, Disarm, Feint, Parry Riposte, Athletic Strike

Armor: Dueling shield, stiffsynth, round shield, assault shield, powered ceramsteel armor

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

House Decados



Duchess Salandra Decados

This major player in Known Worlds politics is currently involved in an affair with Emperor Alexius. No one knows how far this will go, but some whisper that she may one day become Empress. Salandra's traits are given in the **Fading Suns** rulebook.



Earl Denzzi Fascho Ehrtanit Decados

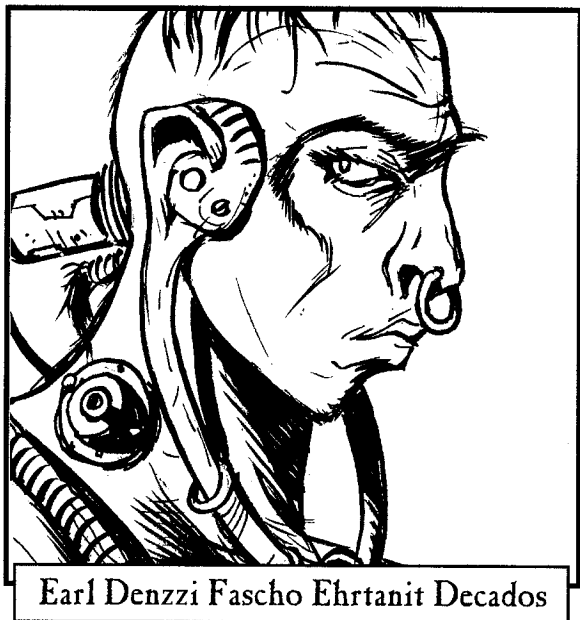
The Earl Ehrtanit is an artist of wide renown in those circles that consider surgical enhancement an artform. This makes him an artist of ill repute in other circles, those which consider such alterations obscene or blasphemous. Denzzi only laughs as such prudery. He knows that he is a master of cybernetic art and that the likes of him have not been seen since the latter days of the Second Republic.

The earl lives in his opulent estate in Tamerlain amidst a swirl of social hangers-on, from art merchants and patrons to those who plead to become his next canvases — cybernetic recipients and walking art pieces. Only few are chosen for this honor, and it is impossible to tell ahead of time who the earl will work upon next; his whims are like the wild waves off the Tamerlain coast — fickle and everchanging.

A recent work of his — a freeman left blind to all senses except for the virtual reality box the earl controls — has created a controversy and raised the ire of the Church (the freeman was the nephew of a priest in the Holy City). The earl is in danger of attracting the Inquisi-



Duchess Salandra Decados



Earl Denzzi Fascho Ehtanit Decados

tion, but rather than halt his activities, he has decided to become bolder, and now seeks to create his most audacious work yet. He has told no one what it shall be, but only smiles to himself when asked.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Decados Earl

Quote: "The natural endowments of the body are so aesthetically poor — Nature designs for function, not art. It is up to me alone to transcend Nature's palette."

Description: The earl is a freak extraordinaire. Plastic and cybernetic surgery has altered him almost beyond any human resemblance. His eyes are precious stones with cleverly hidden cameras providing more than natural eyesight. His skin is silky to the touch yet resembles quartz, and acts like a sort of Stiffsynth — soft to touch, but hard if hit by impacts. He has other alterations which alternatively fascinate or horrify his sexual partners.

Roleplaying: He is always on the lookout for a new canvas with which to work his masterpiece and will be gracious to anyone who may provide it. When he realizes that someone is not fit for his art, he will ignore them in disgust or have his guards escort them away.

Entourage: All of the earl's householders (guards, cooks, maids, etc.) have been altered in some way beneficial to the performance of their jobs or to improve the aesthetic atmosphere of the mansion.

Body: Strength 3 (6), Dexterity 8 (14), Endurance 4

Mind: Wits 7, Perception 7, Tech 9

Spirit: Extrovert 6, Introvert 4, Passion 7, Calm 2, Faith 0, Ego 7, Human 1, Alien 9

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

Learned skills: Arts (Body Alteration) 9, Etiquette 9, Inquiry 7, Physick 9, Read Urthish 7, High-Tech Redemption 9, Volt Redemption 6, Mech Redemption 4, Science (Cybernetics) 8, Sleight of Hand 6, Speak Urthish 7, Think Machine 4, Torture 6

Blessings/Curses: Curious (+2 Extrovert when seeing something new)/ Condescending (-2 Extrovert among the unenlightened), Scary (+2 Impress), Unnerving (+2 Alien when dealing with serfs)

Benefices/Afflictions: Riches (9 pts)

Wyrd: 7

Equipment: The best surgical and cybernetic equipment available, most of it Second Republic era tech

Cybernetics: Stiffskin (6 pts: 4 + 4d armor like Stiffsynth, Organic, Tech Level 8, Expert Tech), Cyberlimbs (+3 Str, +3 Dex: all arms and legs; concealed), Lithe Wire, Spy Eye, Sword Arm (3 pts: Concealed; a surgically attached rapier can slide from a concealed skin sheath)

Weapons: Sword Arm (see cybernetics)

Fencing: Parry, Thrust, Slash, Draw & Strike, Off-Hand

Armor: Stiffskin (see cybernetics), synthsilk robe, dueling shield

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

The Hazat



Duke Jose Alfonso Louis

Eduardo de Aragon

In the last, most furious days of the Emperor Wars, alliances shifted and metamorphosed on a regular basis. Alexius's bid to become Emperor threw everything into chaos, and only the most astute participants could keep up with the rapidly changing circumstances. Duke Jose Alfonso Louis Eduardo de Aragon may well have been the most aware of these, and he proved his value to his house and the empire repeatedly.

His skilled bargaining and savvy negotiations did much that Hazat might could not, and when the Hazat found themselves on the wrong side of the Emperor as the wars drew to a close, he mediated the peace talks which



Duke Jose Alfonso Louis
Eduardo de Aragon

finally brought the war to an end. No one has ever questioned his honor or integrity, and he commands immediate respect from across the Known Worlds. A word from him is treated as precious as a fusion reactor, and his support can create opportunities where none existed before.

He now lives on Byzantium Secundus as a sort of Hazat ambassador emeritus, avoiding much of the day-to-day drudgery of embassy duties. Instead he involves himself only in the most high-level discussions, as well as the planet's legendary social whirl. His main priority now appears to be either negotiating an end to Kurgan incursions into Hazat space or else bringing in more allies to crush the Caliphate.

Squire Avila Gondo



Every noble house has a host of servants and employees whose duties include the running of the house's menial but necessary affairs — someone has to do the laundry, sew the ripped bodices, organize the lord or lady's correspondences and meetings, or guard the mansion from intruders. Squire Avila Gondo is a seneschal, or head householder, in charge of the large servant crew owned by the Hazat on Byzantium Secundus.

His job has become rather harried of late, for he is reorganizing the house's move back into its old embassy palace on Embassy Row; the new embassy had to be abandoned when it slid into the sea after a massive mudslide. In addition to the many tasks he must oversee to comfortably re-esconce his masters, he has a more secretive task: enacting revenge against House al-Malik for the slight which led to the Hazat's disastrous and embarrassing move.

The slight has become rather harried of late, for he is reorganizing the house's move back into its old embassy palace on Embassy Row; the new embassy had to be abandoned when it slid into the sea after a massive mudslide. In addition to the many tasks he must oversee to comfortably re-esconce his masters, he has a more secretive task: enacting revenge against House al-Malik for the slight which led to the Hazat's disastrous and embarrassing move.

The slight was a minor courtly romance tragedy, wherein Lady Poohna Salanin al-Malik snubbed Count Charlemagne de Hazat's too unsubtle advances. In accordance with the overwrought rules for such things, Count Charlemagne feigned a wound deeper than the one inflicted, and to prove his hurt lover's soul, he moved his entire embassy to a dangerous precipice. When the embassy not surprisingly slid down the cliff, the count gained the upper hand in the game of one-upmanship. Now, Lady Poohna Salanin appeared to be the offender — had not the Hazat count suffered enough at her callous dismissal of his affections? The man had lost his entire palace!

Few outside the house, however, remember the slight; just a minor skirmish in a greater game of intrigue. Most within the two houses have forgotten it, but Avila Gondo has a long memory, and — in the old tradition of the Hazat — sees it as his duty to organize the retribution. He takes the entire event too seriously, misunderstanding the amount of grandstanding his master feigned during the affair. He believes the al-Malik lady broke his master's heart.

Count Charlemagne is wholly unaware of this, and would order Gondo to desist if he knew — which is why Gondo keeps it secret. He believes that, since Alexius took the throne, the Hazat has compromised its honor too much of late. If the lords of the house could not openly



Squire Avila Gondo

act to defend against slights because of political concessions, then their loyal servants must take up the duty. To bolster his confidence in this endeavor, he has reread many of the ancient house ballads wherein bold householders sacrifice their reputations and very lives to perform deeds when the rules of decorum prevented their slighted lords from acting — such deeds as sabotage of a rival house's holdings or even assassination of the offending rival.

Avila Gondo is not above any of these actions. For now, he is merely at the sabotage stage of the operation, hiring scum from all quarters of Byzantium Secundus to monkeywrench al-Malik holdings and operations. While he is concentrating on their local holdings, he is prepared to organize an action against holdings on their own planets. He is always on the lookout for those who could discreetly aid him in this endeavor.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Hazat Seneschal (householder)

Quote: "While all the other houses have forgotten what it is to defend one's honor, the Hazat remember."

Description: Avila Gondo is 55 years old, balding with a well-maintained and large goatee. He dresses in the finest tunics and suits, eager to prove that the Hazat's servants are better maintained than those of most noble houses.

Roleplaying: Gondo's behavior is impeccably proper, for he comes from a family of high-ranking householders, a long tradition of quality service. He would do nothing to harm his own or his lord's reputation openly at court. In the shadows, however, he believes his plottings are fully supported by his masters.

Entourage: Avila commands all the servants of the Hazat embassy; little happens there without his knowledge.

Body: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Endurance 4

Mind: Wits 7, Perception 7, Tech 4

Spirit: Extrovert 6, Introvert 2, Passion 3, Calm 5, Faith 2, Ego 3, Human 3, Alien 0

Natural skills: Charm 5, Dodge 3, Fight 3, Impress 6,

Melee 3, Observe 6, Shoot 3, Sneak 3, Vigor 3

Learned skills: Academia 4, Bureaucracy 7, Etiquette 9, Inquiry 6, Read Urthish 4, Search 3, Social (Leadership) 4, Speak Urthish 7,

Blessings/Curses: Keen Ears (+2 Perception, hearing only)/Righteous (-2 Calm when judgment questioned)

Afflictions: Gossip Network (1 pt)

Wyrd: 5

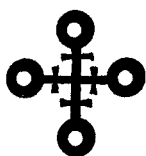
Equipment: Checklist of duties

Weapons: Stunner

Armor: Synthsilk

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

House Li Halan



Count Alrich Li Halan, Ambassador

A thin, pale man who appears to be in his late fifties, Ambassador Alrich Li Halan looks at the world through a pair of slightly mad, gray eyes. He is actually only 39 years old and prematurely gray; his sparse, flaxen white hair lies limply on his head. He purses his thin lips in a twitching fluster of half smiles and frowns and wears tightly fitting white and purple Li Halan vestments, which are fastidious but very conservative by court standards. Over these he wears a voluminous greatcoat.

Count Alrich is from one of the most religiously conservative branches of House Li Halan. An intense theology student, he studied at the Orthodox Seminary Institute on Kish. Tutored in politics and diplomacy, he quickly rose to the top of his class. Initially a disciple of Archbishop Palamon, he split from his mentor over what he describes as theological differences. An ordained Orthodox priest, he is highly adept at theurgy rituals. At court he curries Alexius's favor, just as any ambassador, but secretly works to undercut the Emperor's power. He does this out of no personal animosity toward Alexius; he merely believes



Count Alrich Li Halan

that the Known Worlds would be better off under a Li Halan/Orthodox theocracy. To this end he has committed several ethically questionable acts, not the least of which was his involvement in the death of a theology professor at the University of Veridian who preached Republican values.

His loyalty to the Church is total and fanatic, even outweighing his familial responsibilities. Most nobles of House Li Halan would be against Count Alrich's religious excesses, so he keeps these activities secret. The count practices a bizarre theological calculus that allows him to determine whether people are devout or not. He finds most people sorely lacking and occasionally metes out what he believes are divinely inspired punishments. He eschews the use of longevity drugs as heretical and against the holy designs of the Pancreator.

A fixture at the royal court, the count also spends much of his time in the Holy City. He travels with a company of Li Halan knights and Orthodox priests while at court. He may employ less reputable assistants when the need warrants it.

House al-Malik



Poohna Salanin al-Malik

The al-Malik scoff at stories that portray them as demon worshippers and heretics, but Poohna's family could have provided the Inquisition with enough ammunition for years. In their isolated castle in the mountains of Aylon, they hid away from other people, spending their money on ancient tomes and heretical manuscripts. The few people who did visit them were fellow seekers after dark knowledge, and it was at just such a convocation that things went horribly wrong.

Poohna was just a young girl at the time, but she remembers the horrible screams that tore through Salanin castle that night. She scrambled down the long stairway to the subterranean dungeons where she knew her family was meeting. She threw open the door only to have the headless torso of her uncle fall on top of her, its clothes shredded and blood oozing from a thousand wounds.

She stood still, too terrified even to scream, and saw her father carving a sigil into the door leading to the deepest parts of the dungeon. He turned to her, and now Poohna screamed, for she saw that all the hair on his head had burned off, that one eye, ear and his nose were missing, and that the flesh was missing from around his mouth. As she screamed her father repeated "Leave the door barred! Leave the door barred!" until she could remember no more.

The next ten years were spent shuttling between League and Church schools. As the sole remaining (sane) member of her family, she had an extreme amount of wealth at her command. Family servants administered the estate for her, remembering the single command to leave the dungeons untouched. With no worries except the fear



Poohna Salanin al-Malik

which gnawed at her soul, she plunged into the study of demons and evil, reading the same books her parents did, not for pleasure, but to learn how to battle these creatures.

In her 18th year she pledged herself to the Church, and studied its ways with fiercesome intensity — an intensity which frightened some of her teachers. She has never sought nor been given a priesthood. Instead she travels through space, seeking the evils which destroyed her family. She has quietly and capably defeated a number of vile threats, partially by spending much of her family's wealth on the tools necessary for the job. She is not afraid to sacrifice herself (or her companions) to destroy evil. Through all her quests, however, she has yet to return to her castle on Aylon.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: al-Malik Baronet/Orthodox Canon

Quote: "To doubt that evil exists in the void is to give it strength."

Description: Poohna is a tall, dark woman with black hair and eyes. She is slender from fasting and sacrifice, but remains extremely strong all the same. She wears canonical robes, but these conceal a state of the art battlesuit.

Roleplaying: Poohna cares little for anything outside of her mission. She has an unwavering intensity in her tracking down of demonists and antimonists, however, and suspects almost everyone with whom she comes in contact.

Entourage: Poohna travels alone, but she has a host of servants and soldiers at her command on Aylon. She may introduce herself as a lowly servant of the Pancreator, but she has both influence and power at her command.

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

Mind: Wits 6, Perception 7, Tech 7

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

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

Learned skills: Academia 5, Alchemy 2, Empathy 2, Etiquette 3, Focus 7, Inquiry 4, Lore (Occult) 6, Lore (Theology) 4, Read Latin 5, Read Urthish 6, Read Urthtech 2, Mech Redemption 4, High-Tech Redemption 6, Remedy 2, Search 4, Social (Leadership) 2, Speak Latin 4, Stoic Body 3, Stoic Mind 5, Tracking 4

Blessing: Disciplined (+2 Calm in combat situations)

Occult: Theurgy 5/Hubris 1

Rites: The Devotional Liturgy, The Prophet's Censure, Consecration, Armor of the Pancreator, Faithful Heart, Dispersal of Darkness

Stigma: Her stigma manifests as burn marks on her flesh which appear when she casts her theurgic rites but which heal within a day.

Wyrd: 7

Equipment: Censor, Jumpgate Cross (Wyrd Tabernacle: 3 Wyrd), Ultraviolet/IR vision contact lenses, mini-breather (holds one hour of oxygen in a small facemask), fireproof Blur Suit (-8 Perception to see her when she stands still, -2 when she is moving) with body enhancers (+1 Strength and Dexterity)

Weapons: Flux sword, flamgun

Fencing: Parry, Thrust, Slash, Feint

Armor: Standard shield, Blur Suit (2 Defense), robes made from synthsilk

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

Minor Houses



Marquessa Lekoya Scarenon

Astanyani, Governor of
Byzantium Secundus

Marquessa Lekoya rules Byzantium Secundus with an iron hand — or so she likes to think. In reality she scurries like mad trying to curry favor with her social betters, all the while trying to ignore those she believes her inferiors. On a planet of status-seeking bureau-



Marquessa Lekoya

crats, she is perhaps the most class conscious of the lot. As head of House Cameton, she wields a significant amount of power. As the head of House Cameton, she constantly feels inferior to the magnificent Royal House leaders who visit her planet, the rich and sophisticated merchants who land there regularly, and the powerful religious figures who pass through with their legions of sycophants.

However, just because she constantly craves the attention of those above her and denigrates those below her does not mean she is incompetent at what she does. She manages the planet's affairs rather effectively, aided to a great extent by the ancient bureaucracy which has grown up around her. She does not have much military might at her command, since the Imperial army and navy are the planet's official protectors, but she controls Byzantium Secundus's extensive police network as well as a strong surface navy.

Her father, Duke Cameton, gave up the position of governor more than a decade ago when his health began to decline, and people have seen him less and less often since then. He still has some sway over his daughter, but no one knows just how much.

Duchess Oelestre Xanthippes,

Head of the Imperial Eye

An inveterate schemer, the Duchess was the perfect candidate to command the Imperial Eye. She is a modern disciple of psychic Fayvian scientific principles and methods, although few are aware of this. She has, over the past 11 years, brought these methods to bear within the agency. The Eye is now a far more efficient organization than it once was. The duchess has also pushed her agents to recover any advanced technology they find in the field. Oelestre supports the concept of empire and is, thus, loyal to Alexius. An able commander and inspired tactician, few have dared challenge her for the job. Oelestre has dirt on many powerful people on Byzantium and throughout



Duchess Oelestre Xanthippes

the Known Worlds and is not above using it to get her way. Duchess Xanthippes has worked to covertly recruit psychics into the Imperial Eye, although she is receiving resistance from the Old Guard within the Eye.

Oelestre appears to be a woman in her mid-thirties. She is really in her early seventies and takes longevity serums to preserve her youth. Her hair is long and has been white since childhood. She usually wears the standard black and burgundy uniform of an Imperial Eye officer. An extremely cold and commanding figure, she is the first head of the Imperial Eye in almost a century to outlast a 10 year term (the Emperor asked her to stay on during his transition into power). The duchess usually travels with an elite squad of Imperial Eye agents and enforcers.

Dame Octavia Justinian

The last years of the Emperor Wars were not good ones for House Justinian, but Dame Octavia made the most of them. The House had suffered grievous defeats at the beginning of the wars and never recovered. By the time Octavia took the field, its leaders were desperate to hold on to anything they could, and this provided the perfect opportunity for Octavia, the last child of a minor Justinian, to prove her worth.

Her victories went unnoticed amidst the great empire-affecting battles of the time, but they were critical ones for her house. She repeatedly managed to drive off those who would take the last of the house's wealth, aided by the smallest band of soldiers and the oldest of spacecraft. While some might argue that her opponents were hardly the most fiercesome, none can deny that she won consistently in the face of overwhelming odds.

Once the wars ended, Octavia had ensured her own place in the family, but she knew that would not amount to much. She did what she could to repair the House's fortunes, but when word of Alexius's call for Knights and Dames to serve as Beacons went out, she responded. Due to a nonstop stream of adventures along the way to Byzantium Secundus, she has only now reached the planet and presented herself to the Emperor. While almost no one knows of her past deeds, she is determined to make a name for herself that none will forget.

While Octavia may appear to have little concern for personal glory, it has a way of following her. As a result, she has a firm but unconscious belief in the importance of her own destiny. She always acts in the most honorable way, though she never expects others to act as well. Her first days at the Emperor's Court have only reinforced this. An accident forced her into a duel with two of the more established Questing Knights, both of whom she beat handily. Now others are eyeing her warily, and no one knows what might happen next.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Justinian Knight (Dame)

Quote: "I fight for the honor of House Justinian and the Emperor."

Description: Octavia has no illusions about her appear-



Dame Octavia Justinian

ance. She was an ugly child and time has only changed her age, not her face. Years spent on the battlefield have done nothing to improve this, and while she is an extremely strong and agile woman, many opponents dismiss her as short and squat.

Roleplaying: Generally quiet and reserved, Octavia prefers to let her actions speak for her. The only times she becomes animated are when the weak are threatened or her honor is at stake.

Entourage: Octavia came to Byzantium Secundus on her own, but any one who has known her in the past would be honored to come to her aid if she required it.

Body: Strength 8, Dexterity 8, Endurance 9

Mind: Wits 7, Perception 7, Tech 5

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

Natural skills: Charm 4, Dodge 8, Fight 8, Impress 6, Melee 9, Observe 5, Shoot 7, Sneak 4, Vigor 9

Learned skills: Beast Lore 7, Drive Spacecraft 7, Empathy 3, Etiquette 5, Focus 2, Lore (Chivalry) 6, Performance (Singing) 3, Read Urthish 5, Read Urthtech 1, Remedy 7, Ride 8, Social (Leadership) 8, Social (Oratory) 4, Spacesuit 6, Speak Latin 3, Stoic Body 8, Stoic Mind 3, Streetwise 1, Survival 6, Warfare (Gunnery) 6, Warfare (Military Tactics) 8

Blessings: Bold (+2 Passion when others hesitate), Compassionate (+2 Passion helping others), Unyielding (+2 Endurance when honor at stake)

Wyrd: 6

Equipment: Letter of Credit from the Reeves (gives her the equivalent of Good Riches)

Weapons: Two-handed sword, stunner, assault rifle

Martial Arts: Martial Fist, Martial Kick, Martial Hold, Block, Martial Throw, Claw Fist, Tornado Kick, Sure Fist, Leaping Kick, Speed Fist, Throw Group, Block & Strike

Fencing: Parry, Thrust, Slash, Draw & Strike, Disarm, Feint, Off-Hand, Parry Riposte, Athletic Strike, Pierce

Imperial and Church Knights

The Imperial Navy is a large organization with the mission of defending the Known Worlds from threats inside or outside the Empire. The institution was greatly abused during the Emperor Wars, having become the tool of a string of regents who sought personal or house goals over the best interests of the Known Worlds as a whole. On more than one occasion the Imperial Fleet was withdrawn from a sensitive Symbiot or barbarian border post to pursue a petty affair for the Fleet Commander (a political position awarded by the regent), only to witness the compromise of the border post, often requiring the aid of Muster mercenaries to reclaim. Most Imperial Navy knights appreciate the Emperor and are loyal to his goals.

Officers are all nobles, with freemen filling the ranks of noncommissioned officers and sailors. Occasionally, a freeman who has risen in rank near to officer status will gain an officer's rank through superlative performance, but such a practice is looked down upon by nobles, who feel it is somewhat scandalous to mix the classes and ranks.

The Church has its own guard, usually young knights who pledge fealty to a particular order or task for a set period of time, as a form of penance before engaging in the political pursuits of the nobility. However, there are many freemen in the ranks of the Church Guard, men and women who have raised themselves to prominence through their own actions or faith. Sometimes, these freemen outrank noble knights. This often raises the ire of the knight's family, but the Church is firm that such a lesson is good for the future ruler's soul and character.

Armor: Battle Shield, buckler, leather jerkin, plate armor

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

The Church

Urth Orthodox



Archbishop Palamon

Marcus Aurelius Palamon was the son of poor farmers on Sutek. After his parents' deaths he joined the monastery to escape a life of grinding poverty. Marcus proved adept at both theurgy and political maneuverings and soon traveled to Holy Terra for advanced tutoring. On Urth he apprenticed himself to Bishop Barley, an influential Orthodox archbishop. With Barley's support, Palamon rose to his present position after almost 30 years of often ruthless political battles. Palamon has been archbishop of Byzantium Secundus for 15 years. His accomplishments include a prominent part



Archbishop Palamon

in negotiating the end of the Emperor Wars. Despite this, most consider the archbishop to be slightly hostile to the Imperium.

Theologically conservative, Palamon has also made some surprising overtures to more progressive forces within the Church. He is something of an enigma to both sides, seeming to exist somewhere between the two camps. His primary concern seems to be the preservation of Justice, as exemplified by the Cathedral's founder, Maya the Scorned Woman (Palamon also administers Maya's alternate attribute: Retribution.).

The archbishop must dance on the head of a needle to satisfy the good of the Empire, his orders from Holy Terra and the dictates of his conscience. He has an idealistic streak, but he buries it beneath an ocean of dogma. Some fear for the hierophant. He is growing old and shuns the use of longevity drugs. They see his behavior as distracted, even erratic. The pressures of his office weigh heavily on him and he has recently seen visions of dark forces creeping over the horizon. These visions are born out by both the archbishop's private Eskatonic advisors and his Penitents. He also secretly meets with strange, mendicant friars from barbarian worlds.

The archbishop reluctantly supports the Emperor, though he disapproves of his reforms. Palamon believes that a cataclysm is approaching and thinks that the Known Worlds need an Emperor to survive it. The archbishop never married and is estranged from his only living relative, the young Eskatonic scholar, Guiseppe Alustro.

Archbishop Palamon is a wizened old man in his late sixties. He has a long white beard and a craggy, dour face. In contrast, his eyes are youthful, alert and sometimes display an inner joy that belies his careworn face. He wears a skullcap and an ornate, blue Orthodox bishop's cassock. Despite his careful aged movements, there is a strong aura of hidden power about him. The archbishop always trav-

els with a sizable retinue of lesser clergy and acolytes. These are mostly Orthodox, but members of other sects are always present. These include a compliment of Brother Battle guards, two private Orthodox and Avesti inquisitors (Bishop Phipps and Father Kadar), and an Amalthean healer (Sister Elspeth).



Bishop Yetari

Bishop Yetari's history is one of pious service and unchallenged orthodoxy. Her climb up the ranks of Church hierarchy has been regular and steady, and none deny that she would be a prime candidate to take Palamon's place should anything happen to the current archbishop. She has a number of friends among the church electors, and no one has anything bad to say about her.

This is only true because none of her friends know that the real Yetari died more than a decade ago at the hands of a Metonym Decados spy capable of changing its shape (sometimes referred to as a Doppelganger, not to be confused with the Dark Twin or Doppelganger of psychics). That Metonym has taken her place and slowly climbed the rungs of Church power while wearing her face. The Metonym itself remembers nothing of its life before becoming Yetari, fulfilling the Metonym obligation of sublimating its own life to its duty to its masters. Indeed, "Yetari" barely remembers that she is a Metonym following someone else's dictates. For now the Decados require that she do little more than advance in the Church while remaining inconspicuous.

Last year, as part of her duties, Yetari took command of the Great Library of Horace. This led her to encounter some of its most ancient books, some of which predate humanity's first space flight. The ones in the very deepest vaults of the library are barred to any but the Church's leaders, and here Yetari found tomes filled with blasphemous writings and images. Her first readings caught her attention as nothing before ever had, and she felt herself



Bishop Yetari

compelled to read more and more.

Since discovering these manuscripts, Yetari has delved further and further into forbidden knowledge. She has become increasingly afraid of another Church leader discovering her studies, but cannot stop. In fact, on three different occasions her secret was discovered by priests, who each mysteriously wound up dead in the catacombs of the Maya Cathedral. She does not remember being discovered by them or even killing them, but she is the murderer — or rather, her real personality, the Metonym, is the murderer. To protect her secret, this personality shifted to the foreground of her consciousness, killed the intruders, hid their bodies, and then retreated deep into her unconscious again. Yetari remembers none of this. In addition, she has begun to put her learning to use, enacting rituals in the darkest parts of ancient churches. She has no idea why the idea of demons excites and drives her so much, but it does.

Race: Human Metonym

Rank/Class: Orthodox Bishop

Quote: “Why are you so worried about what the Church will do? Look to the blackness in your own soul first.”

Description: A stooped, middle-aged woman with black hair and dusky skin. She belongs to an Orthodox sect that believes in wearing the signs of the Pancreator on one's own body, and her skin is covered with iconic tattoos and symbolic jewelry.

Roleplaying: Yetari's mask of pious earnestness is beginning to give way before the heretical thoughts rampaging through her head. The craziest looks and sentences have begun to escape her tightly controlled facade, and she is desperately fighting to keep these in check.

Entourage: Yetari has a number of acolytes and priests at her command, but she has not confided in any of them. She has begun to test them, however, to determine which are ready for her corruption.

Body: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Endurance 6

Mind: Wits 8, Perception 7, Tech 4

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

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

Learned skills: Academia 9, Alchemy 5, Arts (Rhetoric) 5, Bureaucracy 4, Disguise 10, Empathy 5, Etiquette 4, Focus 8, Inquiry 6, Knavery 9, Lockpick 3, Lore (Occult) 6, Lore (Theology) 7, Physick 6, Read Arabic 5, Read Greek 6, Read Hebrew 6, Read Hieroglyphics 4, Read Latin 8, Read Urthish 8, Read Urthtech 2, Search 5, Social (Acting) 10, Social (Debate) 6, Social (Oratory) 6, Speak Latin 8, Stoic Body 4, Stoic Mind 9, Streetwise 2, Torture 3

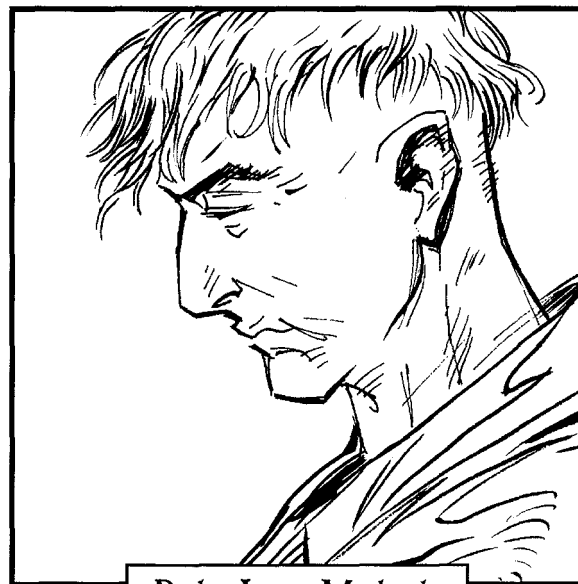
Occult: Psi 5/Urge 2

Powers: Psyche (Intuit, Emote, MindSight), Sixth Sense (Sensitivity, Darksense, Subtle Sight)

Wyrd: 7

Equipment: Ancient tomes, innumerable amounts of body jewelry

Weapons: None



Padre Jorge Medardo

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

Special Notes: While the most powerful Metonyms are said to be able to change their bodies with but a thought, Yetari required a great deal of body sculpting from her Decados masters. She is capable of minor physical changes, and ensured that she looked just like the old Yetari before killing her. She also uses her talents to mimic the changes of aging.

Padre Jorge Medardo



The Pancreator's fire touched Jorge at a very early age, and even as a boy he preferred preaching to his schoolmates to playing or doing anything else. When Jorge was ordained in 4986, he envisioned a career of service to humanity, helping soothe troubled souls and shepherd the Pancreator's flock. He dedicated himself to one of the most evangelical wings of the Orthodox Church, resolving to avoid all temptations which might distract him from his purpose. His initial ministry kept him on Byzantium Secundus, his native planet, but took him from the Heights where he grew up to the slums where he had never walked before. He welcomed this, hoping to serve where he was most needed.

He threw himself into his duties with a fervor inspired by love of the Pancreator. Within three years his congregation, started with but a dozen souls, swelled to a hundred and then thousands of followers. He preached everywhere people gathered, and word of his exploits spread through the slums. He established mission houses where the poor could get food and lodging, hospices for the ill and chapels for wayward souls.

Then, seven years ago, he met someone who threw all his work into doubt. On a humid, stinking night he went to preach on the outskirts of the slums, where a passing courtesan heard his words. The impact those words made on the woman who would become the Avestite Sister

Scarleta was undeniable. As Jorge held her in his arms, he felt the complete triumph of the Pancreator sweep through him, and never had he felt more fulfilled.

Since that night, he has been unable to get the memory of Sister Scarleta out of his mind. As long as she was cloistered away, this was not a problem. Unfortunately, she has left seclusion and Jorge has encountered her far too often. His ministry has begun to suffer, for now all he thinks of is her.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Orthodox Priest

Quote: "In the vast storehouse of human wisdom, somewhere there is knowledge of how we can love one another."

Description: Jorge's appearance completely belies his power. While his sway over his many followers makes him one of the most important religious figures on the planet (something his superiors fail to realize), he dresses in simple monks robes, his gray-brown hair is unkempt and he ambles along with a stooped, tired demeanor. Some of his followers have begun to note that he has lost some of his old passion, and that the gleam which once lit him is gone from his eyes.

Roleplaying: Jorge still goes through the motions of charity and good works, but they no longer have meaning for him. He now spends much of his time brooding over his situation.

Entourage: Jorge has legions of followers, all of whom would willingly do anything he said. Of all his followers, only the man who handles his ministry's finances, Saduj Seliman, fully realizes the extent of Jorge's influence.

Body: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Endurance 6

Mind: Wits 7, Perception 7, Tech 3

Spirit: Extrovert 8, Introvert 2, Passion 6, Calm 4, Faith 6, Ego 2, Human 7, Alien 1

Natural skills: Charm 9, Dodge 4, Fight 3, Impress 10, Melee 3, Observe 6, Shoot 3, Sneak 3, Vigor 6

Learned skills: Academia 1, Empathy 10, Etiquette 1, Focus 3, Physick 6, Read Latin 1, Read Urthish 2, Remedy 7, Social (Leadership) 5, Social (Oratory) 10, Streetwise 3

Blessing: Devout (+1 Faith, +1 Passion when spreading word of Pancreator)

Wyrd: 6

Equipment: Robes, basic physick kit, jumpgate cross

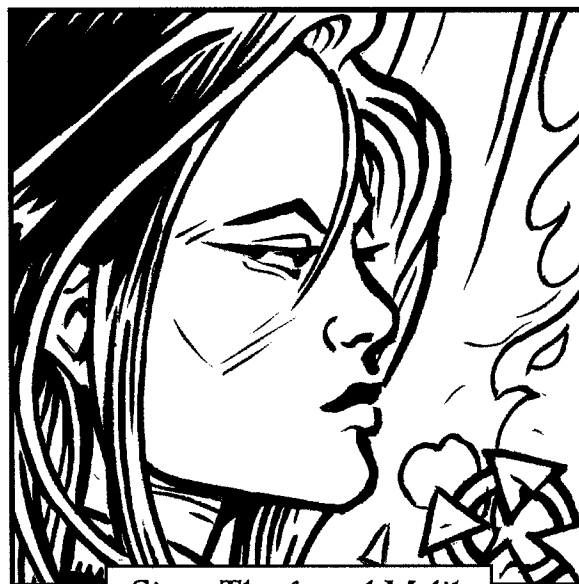
Vitality: -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0

Brother Battle



Sister Theafana al-Malik

The Countess Theafana al-Malik was born on Stigmata as her parents helped fight the war against the Symbiots. After the Symbiots butchered her parents, the Brother Battle garrison found and raised her. Taking vows at an early age, Theafana grew up battling the Symbiots, winning many awards for valor. During Alexius's rise to power, he led a Hawkwood



Sister Theafana al-Malik

force to bolster the faltering Stigmata front, relieving the beleaguered Brother Battle monks there. The grateful monks, led by Brother Emerson Long, quickly formed an alliance to aid Alexius's bid for the crown. In the battles that followed, Theafana saved Alexius's life a number of times, and the two became very close. After countless battles Alexius finally ascended the throne and the universe seemed on the brink of a new dawn. Many people assumed that Theafana would be empress.

Now, however, Sister Theafana and the Emperor are estranged. While still on friendly terms, their romantic attachment has faded. No one quite knows why. Additionally, Alexius has also made too many unpalatable compromises for Theafana's liking and has not delivered on many of his intended reforms. Things may be healing between the two, but their brief separation allowed the Duchess Salandra to make a play for the Emperor.

Countess Theafana and the Duchess now angle around the Emperor and the court, each trying to sense any weakness in the other. Both women are equally matched in most respects. Theafana still retains the good will of most of the people, while Salandra has access to greater resources. One of Salandra's slanders is the rumor that Theafana is a Symbiot. They have had numerous skirmishes and some believe a major showdown is on the way. Sister Theafana has spent the past three years making allies, aiding the poor and exorcising the hubris she gained during the wars.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Brother Battle Priestess

Quote: "Heed not the traumas of battle. Peace is in the heart, always. The turmoil of the material world cannot touch she who bears tranquillity within."

Description: Sister Theafana is a golden-skinned woman of Asiatic descent. She wears her dark brown hair loose, rarely compromising her manner for courtly fashion. She is wiry and athletic. There is usually little al-Malik about

her dress, however, which is typical Brother Battle. In combat, she wears a battered but effective ceramsteel suit of Brother Battle armor, inherited from a fallen comrade whose memory she honors still. For formal occasions, she wears a modest white synthsilk robe with a gold sash. She always carries her blade, even on occasions of state.

Roleplaying: Theafana is an intense individual, thoroughly dedicated to the defense of the Pancreator's servants. If her social skills suffer from her harsh Stigmatan upbringing, she more than makes up for it with a frank and honest charm.

Entourage: Theafana often travels with a small retinue of loyal Brother Battle monks, all Stigmatan trained. Occasionally, she will be joined by Hawkwoods wishing to ingratiate themselves to the person they believe may become Empress, or al-Malik who honor her former title though she foreswore it when she took Church vows.

Body: Strength 9, Dexterity 10, Endurance 9

Mind: Wits 8, Perception 9, Tech 5

Spirit: Extrovert 5, Introvert 5, Passion 7, Calm 3, Ego 2, Faith 8, Human 8, Alien 2

Natural skills: Charm 8, Dodge 9, Fight 10, Impress 9, Melee 10, Observe 8, Shoot 9, Sneak 7, Vigor 9

Learned skills: Academia 6, Archery 5, Arts 5, Beast Lore 4, Bureaucracy 4, Crossbow, Drive Landcraft 5, Drive Spacecraft 4, Drive Watercraft 4, Empathy 4, Etiquette 5, Focus 10, Gambling 4, Knavery 3, Stigmata Lore 7, Physick 1, Read Latin 5, Read Urthish 4, Remedy 6, Mech Redemption 4, Ride 7, Search 5, Social (Leadership) 9, Speak Latin 5, Speak Urthish 6, Stoic Body 7, Stoic Mind 5, Survival 8, Warfare (Artillery) 6, Warfare (Military Tactics) 8

Blessings: Beautiful (+2 Charm for those attracted to human females), Compassionate (+2 Passion when helping others), Disciplined (+2 Calm in combat situations), Well liked (+1 Charm)

Benefices: Riches (3 pts)

Occult: Theurgy 7

Rites: Church (The Prophet's Holy Blessing, Devotional Liturgy, Laying on of Hands), Brother Battle (Soul's Vessel, Rightfully Guided Hand, Armor of the Pancreator, Righteous Fervor, Liturgy of the Wrathful Host)

Wyrd: 8

Equipment: Wyrd tabernacle (8 Wyrd points), rosary beads, Elixir, wrist squawker

Weapons: Saint Cuthbert's sword (Theurgy relic: +2 goal and +2 damage against Symbiots), vibrating dirk, blaster pistol

Martial Arts: Martial Fist, Martial Kick, Martial Hold, Block, Claw Fist, Choke Hold, Speed Fist, Block & Strike

Fencing: Parry, Thrust, Slash, Draw & Strike, Disarm, Feint, Parry Riposte, Athletic Strike, Pierce

Armor: Synthsilk gowns, ceramsteel armor, battle shield

Cybernetics: Cybernetic right (sword) arm (+3 Str, +3 Dex, concealed; she lost her natural limb to a Symbiot)

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



Master Panard

The Brother Battle monastery on Byzantium Secundus has had a long and checkered history, sometimes siding with the sect's reigning regent and other times on the run for opposing her. It has had equally fickle relationships with the planet's archbishop, and at the start of the Emperor Wars almost got driven from the planet on charges of heresy. It currently houses only a dozen Brothers, and an ancient decree prevents the order from recruiting on Byzantium Secundus. While Emperor Alexius has close ties to the order, he has not permitted it to recruit on the planet or to bring in many new members.

Master Panard has run the small monastery — the Temple of Vladimir on Tarsus — for 20 years, and in that time he has managed to keep it from being outlawed or destroyed. However, he has spent almost every day of those 20 years fighting for his monastery's survival, and has gotten to the point where he sees evil conspiracies in every dark shadow. No one is safe from his paranoia, and he suspects everyone. His obsession has grown to the point where he has begun trying to enlist anyone he can into various secret societies, hoping that this will force them to reveal their true natures.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Brother Battle Master

Quote: "You say you support the Church. Are you sure?"

Description: An older man, Master Panard's robust physique belies his great age. His lined and haggard face, however, makes him look older than he really is, and warts have recently begun sprouting on his hands. His theurgic stigma manifests as wrinkles which grow longer and longer whenever he uses his powers.

Roleplaying: Panard does not want to talk to anybody, but his paranoia forces him to. When he does converse, he will often stop in mid-sentence as if debating whether he should be talking at all. He will just stand and stare at the



Master Panard

character for a minute before resuming the conversation.
Entourage: While Master Panard trusts no one, he can call on some of the most talented soldiers on Byzantium Secundus, the members of his Brother Battle monastery. They will do his bidding without question.

Body: Strength 7, Dexterity 8, Endurance 7

Mind: Wits 6, Perception 6, Tech 6

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

Natural skills: Charm 6, Dodge 8, Fight 9, Impress 9, Melee 8, Observe 7, Shoot 8, Sneak 8, Vigor 7

Learned skills: Academia 3, Alchemy 2, Arts (Rhetoric) 4, Bureaucracy 2, Disguise 1, Drive Landcraft 4, Empathy 3, Etiquette 2, Focus 5, Inquiry 3, Knavery 1, Physick 2, Read Latin 6, Read Urthish 6, Read Urthtech 2, Remedy 5, Ride 4, Social (Leadership) 7, Spacesuit 1, Stoic Body 8, Stoic Mind 5, Survival 5, Warfare (Demolitions) 6, Warfare (Military Tactics) 5

Occult: Theurgy 6/Hubris 3

Powers: The Prophet's Holy Blessing, The Devotional Liturgy, The Laying On of Hands, The Prophet's Censure, The Pulpit's Gift, Faithful Heart, Soul's Vessel, Rightfully Guided Hand, Armor of the Pancreator, Righteous Fervor, Liturgy of the Wrathful Host, Smiting Hand

Wyrd: 8

Equipment: Crosier, blessed robes, jumpgate cross, rosary beads, MedPac

Weapons: Blaster pistol, axe

Martial Arts: Martial Fist, Martial Kick, Martial Hold, Block, Martial Throw, Claw Fist, Tornado Kick, Sure Fist, Leaping Kick, Speed Fist, Throw Group, Block & Strike, Power Fist

Armor: Assault shield, plate armor

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



Brother Emerson Long

As a Brother Battle, Emerson Long battled the worst that the Symbiots could throw at Stigmata, and always came out on top. This changed, however, when a regent appointed Baron Carmetha Decados head of the planet's garrison. Carmetha immediately took most of the troops off planet to help her house in the Emperor Wars. The Brother Battle contingent and a number of Eskatonic priests were all that was left to defend the planet.

For several years this made no difference, but then, as if they knew the planet's defenders were gone, the Symbiots launched a massive assault. The remaining troops lost years of progress in a month as Symbiot abominations roamed freely over the planet, attacking where and when they chose. Giant living dirigibles sprayed the world with virulent puss which seemed to multiply upon touching the ground. Brother Battle fortresses fell to Symbiots who looked almost human, but whose differences revolted anyone who looked upon them. Soon all that was left was the main Brother Battle monastery, and here the warriors and priests huddled together and prayed.

As if in answer to their prayers, giant starcruisers



Brother Emerson Long

dropped from the heavens to bombard the Symbiots. Troops streamed out of landing crafts that bore the crest of House Hawkwood. In the lead charged Prince Alexius, just recently made head of his house. Under his inspired leadership, the Hawkwood legions and the Brother Battle knights drove back the Symbiot infestation. By the time Imperial reinforcements arrived, the Symbiots had been defeated and Alexius's name was praised throughout the Known Worlds.

Emerson Long was one of those leading the praise. At his request, the order assigned him as an ambassador to the prince. He traveled alongside Alexius as the prince fulfilled his plan to become Emperor, only leaving when the Order called him back to De Moley. By the time Long had finished his consultations with the leaders of his Order, Alexius was Emperor and beginning his quest to reunite the stars. Now on sabbatical, Long has secretly returned to Byzantium Secundus, where he quietly renewed his friendships with a number of Alexius's other followers.

He has brought a number of these followers together to clandestinely help promote the Emperor's policies. All of these followers fervently believe that Emperor Alexius is the only hope for humanity. Indeed, their meetings are structured much like Church ceremonies, but with images of Alexius taking the place of those of the Prophet. Long has not sought out Alexius since returning to the planet, but he keeps abreast of everything the Emperor is doing and does his best to facilitate Alexius's success.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Brother Battle Acolyte

Quote: "Would you give your life for the Emperor?"

Description: A tall, solid warrior, he has grown a beard and let his hair grow long. He no longer wears his Brother Battle symbols and only sports the most basic jumpgate cross.

Roleplaying: Long realizes the gravity of what he does and tries to remain in the shadows as much as possible. When

he does deal with people, he tries to be as inspiring as possible, hoping to win their trust for his cause and the Emperor.

Entourage: The only time he associates with other followers is at their secret meetings. Otherwise he sends them messages through a few trusted couriers. He also has no contact with Byzantium Secundus's Brother Battle monastery.

Body: Strength 9, Dexterity 8, Endurance 7

Mind: Wits 8, Perception 8, Tech 7

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

Natural skills: Charm 6, Dodge 8, Fight 8, Impress 8, Melee 9, Observe 8, Shoot 9, Sneak 7, Vigor 9

Learned skills: Academia 1, Archery 6, Crossbow 5, Disguise 1, Drive Landcraft 8, Inquiry 5, Knavery 4, Lockpick 3, Lore (Conspiracies) 5, Physick 3, Read Latin 1, Read Urthish 4, Remedy 7, Search 8, Social (Leadership) 7, Spacesuit 4, Stoic Body 8, Stoic Mind 7, Streetwise 3, Survival 8, Think Machine 3, Tracking 6, Warfare (Artillery) 5, Warfare (Demolitions) 8, Warfare (Gunnery) 4, Warfare (Military Tactics) 8

Blessing: Shrewd (+2 Wits against attempts to fast talk)

Wyrd: 5

Equipment: Codebreaking think machine, MedPac

Weapons: Blaster pistol, broadsword

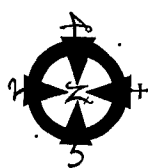
Martial Arts: Martial Fist, Martial Kick, Martial Hold, Block, Martial Throw, Claw Fist, Tornado Kick, Sure Fist, Speed Fist, Throw Group

Fencing: Parry, Thrust, Slash, Draw & Strike, Disarm, Feint, Parry Riposte

Armor: Dueling shield, synthsilk

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

Eskatonic Order



Chartophylax Pulsford

There's something strange going on at the Great Library of Horace, and Chartophylax Pulsford is unsure what to do about it. He is the Keeper of Records at the Library, second only to Bishop Yetari, and it is his duty to investigate the strange goings-on. He has informed the bishop, but she is too busy with high-level Church affairs in the Holy City to personally see to what amounts to, for now, only rumors. Thus, it is up to Pulsford to shed light on the situation — but he is afraid.

Noises are heard in the lower levels at night, when no one is allowed into the stacks. Pulsford had made an effort to ensure that no one hides among the shelves after closing hours, personally checking all admittance passes and enforcing their time limits fanatically. But the noises persist. Books are moved, misplaced from shelves which haven't been touched in years — the dust still on them, no sign of handling.

One young novitiate who was mopping the floor in the lowest stack before closing claimed to see pale lights

moving through the shelves on the far side of the cavernous room. He slinked along the shelves until he reached them, whereupon they disappeared without a trace. No footprints were found in the dust.

Pulsford has told no one, but he believes the Library is haunted. But whether by an unholy or restless shade or by a demon, he does not know. He is afraid to act, fearful that Yetari will replace him. He hopes that a powerful Eskatonic theurge will visit the library, someone he could confide in and whose aid he could enlist in exorcising the spirit.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Eskatonic Deacon (Keeper of Records of the Great Library)

Quote: "What noise?! No, I didn't hear anything! By the Pancreator, I swear I didn't!"

Description: Pulsford is ancient, nearing his 93rd birthday. He dabbled with longevity serums once in his youth, when he followed the retinue of a Hawkwood noble, but that was a long time ago. He is in fit shape nonetheless, but requires a walking cane to help him navigate the Library's corridors between the grand shelves. He wears the same robes he has for years, which are getting somewhat ragged on the hem and are not washed often enough. When reading, he requires large spectacles, which he keeps in a fine case gifted to him by Archbishop Palamon.

Roleplaying: Pulsford was never a people person, preferring the company of books and data screens to people. He has many odd ticks and mannerisms — excessive blinking when looking others in the eye, waving his arms in dangerous, palsylike motions — which are unnerving to highborn visitors.

Entourage: Pulsford finds it difficult to climb the winding spiral staircases used to reach the tall shelves, so he often has a local boy or novitiate follow him and fetch the highly placed books.



Chartophylax Pulsford

Body: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Endurance 4
Mind: Wits 6, Perception 4, Tech 6
Spirit: Extrovert 1, Introvert 8, Passion 1, Calm 6, Faith 7, Ego 0, Human 3, Alien 1
Natural skills: Charm 3, Dodge 3, Fight 3, Impress 3, Melee 3, Observe 5, Shoot 3, Sneak 5, Vigor 3
Learned skills: Academia 9, Alchemy 2, Bureaucracy 7, Focus 4, Inquiry 3, Lore (Occult) 5, Lore (Library books) 9, Read Urthish 9, Read Latin 9, Read Obun 5, Remedy 5, Search 4, Speak Urthish 5, Speak Obun 2, Think Machine 5
Benefices: Vestments
Wyrd: 6
Occult: Theurgy 2
Rites: Prophet's Holy Blessing, Divine Revelation
Stigma: Cries when casting rites
Equipment: Walking cane, spectacles
Vitality: -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0

Temple Avesti



Sister Scarleta

Sister Scarleta remembers when she first felt the Pancreator's power. As one of Byzantium Secundus's most sought-after courtesans, she was going to a session with a leading member of the Authority when she chanced upon a street preacher going through his exhortations. Most passerbys gave him little more than a passing glance, which usually would have been all Scarleta would have spared, but for some reason he caught her attention.

She stood, mesmerized by his words. They were the same ones she had heard as a child in church and which had failed to ever make an impression on her. She had ridiculed them and thought them a thing of her past. This time, however, they slammed into her with the force of a charging Vorox. Without realizing it, tears began streaming down her face at the same time a feeling of complete

and utter happiness swept over her. She threw herself at the preacher's feet, begging the Pancreator's forgiveness for her past sins. The evangelist, Padre Jorge Medardo, took her in his arms and recited the litany of the Prophet. All at once Scarleta felt the sins of her past flow away and felt herself filled with the Pancreator's fire.

That was seven years ago. During that time she joined a cloistered order of penitents in the lowlands of Galatea, but recently left to carry on the kind of missionary work which brought her back to the Church. Upon encountering members of Temple Avesti, she felt she had found her true calling, and has become one of the most fervent Avestites on the planet. While leadership positions within the Temple are usually reserved for members from Pyre, she has made herself one of the most recognized on Byzantium Secundus. She has led cleansing missions against some of her old clients and now seeks to burn sin from the entire planet.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Temple Avesti Priest

Quote: "Your sins threaten to corrupt everyone around you. Prepare for redemption."

Description: Sister Scarleta is an incredibly beautiful woman with long red hair and jade green eyes. She wears only the plain, fire-resistant robes of her order but leaves her hair free.

Roleplaying: Scarleta believes she knows sin, and her previous intimacy with the subject makes her especially unyielding. She has little of the Prophet's mercy in her and follows her duty with unyielding devotion.

Entourage: Believers, especially members of Temple Avesti, flock to Scarleta. She usually has a horde of lay members around her, a fact which the order's leadership has not failed to recognize.

Body: Strength 7, Dexterity 8, Endurance 8

Mind: Wits 6, Perception 7, Tech 5

Spirit: Extrovert 7, Introvert 1, Passion 8, Calm 2, Faith 6, Ego 2, Human 6, Alien 2

Natural skills: Charm 10, Dodge 6, Fight 5, Impress 9, Melee 4, Observe 7, Shoot 7, Sneak 4, Vigor 6

Learned skills: Empathy 8, Etiquette 5, Inquiry 2, Lore (Byzantium Secundus) 6, Physick 2, Read Urthish 2, Remedy 3, Search 6, Social (Acting) 6, Social (Leadership) 5, Social (Oratory) 6, Streetwise 7, Torture 6

Blessing: Angelic (+3 Charm to those attracted to human females), Disciplined (+2 Calm in combat), Pious (+2 Extrovert among sinful)

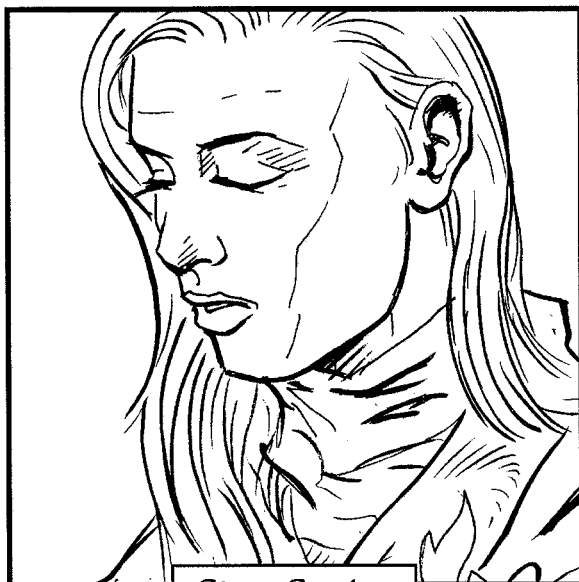
Wyrd: 8

Equipment: St. Maria's fingerbone (Wyrd 5, The Righteous Assignation of Penance)

Weapons: Flamegun

Armor: Flame-retardent heavy robes

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



Sister Scarleta



Deacon Sheb Mokria

Sanctuary Aeon



Deacon Sheb Mokria

Port Authority can be a dangerous place; fights break out between haggling merchants and customers, drunken rowdies at the many inns often purposefully engage in combats, and the Authority guards chasing fleeing burglars shove innocent bystanders aside with brutal force. Medical assistance is available here but, like everything else, it comes at a price. Many cannot afford the high prices charged by guild apothecaries or chiurgeons, or cannot wait in line for their services. These unfortunates wind up at the Sanctuary Aeon shrine, tucked away in a back alley out of sight of the merchant stalls. The physickers guilds don't appreciate the competition, so they arranged with the Authority for the Amaltheans to be placed out of sight. The Amaltheans are only allowed here because no one dares deny the Church its place.

The small shrine — too small to accommodate all the supplicants — spills over into the streets. Luckily for the shrine, the nearest neighbor, an aging brute dealer, has allowed it to use one of his untenanted pens. The priests have erected a tent over the muddy field and placed make-shift cots for the injured. But on rainy days (most days on Byzantium) the ground is insufferably muddy, and cots sink deep in the muck. Disease is kept at bay only by the theurgic rites of Deacon Sheb Mokria, the shrine's leader.

Sheb Mokria was raised here in Port Authority, a wayward urchin destined for the beggars guild — or the thieves guild if he was lucky. Instead, a visiting Amalthean took mercy upon him after he failed miserably in an attempt to steal her purse. He was sent to Artemis and trained as an orderly in the great hospital there. He displayed a passion for his work and a compassion strange for one of his upbringing. Eventually, the order ordained him, and he chose to return to Port Authority as his mission of mercy.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Amalthean Deacon

Quote: "You look upon these wretched and see despair. I see hope. There is not one of them who could not surprise even the Pancreator with miracles."

Description: Sheb Mokria is only 25 years old, but he runs his shrine with a shrewd ability many of his elders lack. He is of average height and build and wears mud-clotted robes and tunics, too busy administering the shrine to clean them after every walk in the streets.

Roleplaying: Sheb is struggling against the profit motives of many around him, but is convinced that compassion will win in the end. And if not, he is not unprepared to use the many contacts he is building in the Church and the Inquisition to get his way.

Entourage: Sheb Mokria leads a contingent of only three novitiate Amaltheans and a band of local boys and girls who serve as orderlies in return for meals.

Body: Strength 4, Dexterity 6, Endurance 7

Mind: Wits 6, Perception 4, Tech 3

Spirit: Extrovert 6, Introvert 3, Passion 5, Calm 4, Faith 7, Ego 0, Human 3, Alien 1

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

Learned skills: Academia 3, Artisan (Woodwork) 3, Bureaucracy 4, Empathy 6, Inquiry 4, Lore (Port Authority) 6, Physick 7, Read Urthish 5, Read Latin 4, Remedy 8, Mech Redemption 3, Social (Leadership) 3, Speak Urthish 4, Speak Latin 2, Stoic Mind 4, Streetwise 5

Blessings: Compassionate (+2 Passion when helping others), Charitable (+2 Charm), Honest (+2 Extrovert)

Benefices/Afflictions: Contacts (3 pts), Protection (local soldier)

Wyrd: 5

Occult: Theurgy 5

Rites: Church (Prophet's Holy Blessing, Devotional Liturgy, Laying on of Hands, Pulpit's Gift; Sanctuary Aeon (Cleansing, Hearth, Claming, Knowing Heart)

Equipment: MedPac, cheap surgery equipment

Weapons: Knife

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

The Merchant League

Charioteers



Gar Levet

Many folks who work the spacelanes know that Gar Levet is one of the most reliable pilots you could ask for. They also know that it's better to ask for someone else. Gar has been unable to hide his spooky reputation, due only partly to his psychic powers. His past pursuit of information on demons and the Annunaki got him into trouble more than once. Indeed, his dabbling in demonic rituals caused the barbaric and superstitious natives of Leminkainen to capture him, drag



Gar Levit

him to a midnight bonfire and brand his left palm with a mark so that all would know him as an evildoer. He has forsaken his curiosity in black magic but the mark on his reputation has been hard to erase. Nonetheless, he has refused to fall upon the mercy of the Church and seek public absolution. Thus, despite his piloting skills, Gar finds it hard to line up the choice routes and customers, instead flying tramp freighters for the Scravers or lesser guilds.

Or so most people who know or have heard of him believe. The truth is that Gar is far from giving up his obsessions. He is a secret member of the Invisible Path and uses the resources and manpower available to him from this coven to investigate the darker ruins of the Annunaki. On one of the moons in the Bannockburn system, he was contacted by what he believes to be an extradimensional intelligence who promised power for a service. Gar agreed and has begun a long-term endeavor for the entity in the hopes of receiving unlimited power. He must capture five nobles and sacrifice them on the entity's moon. He has already captured one (a knight of House Juandaastas) and keeps her caged in a cave on Bannockburn, guarded by local serfs to whom he has promised power. He will incarcerate each of his captives here until he fills his quota. Then the sacrifices begin.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Charioteer Manager (member of the Invisible Path psychic coven)

Quote: "When does the persecution end? I was young and foolish. I paid the price. Whatever happened to forgiveness?"

Description: Gar is a tall and thin man in his late thirties. He tries to stay clean-shaven but often goes a few days without a trim. He wears dark leathers sewn with various patches representing each planet he has flown to (25 of the Known Worlds) and wears gloves in public.

Roleplaying: Gar is successful at building a public persona as a repentant heretic, a crack pilot who just wants to be

allowed to do his job. He has a bit of a temper, however, and may let this escape under stress, in which case his true face as a mean-spirited bastard is revealed.

Entourage: When operating in his public persona, Gar travels alone, a freelance pilot for hire. When on a personal mission for himself or the Invisible Path, he usually has a small group of bully-boys who work for the Path.

Body: Strength 5, Dexterity 8, Endurance 6

Mind: Wits 8, Perception 7, Tech 8

Spirit: Extrovert 7, Introvert 3, Passion 6, Calm 4, Faith 0, Ego 9, Human 3, Alien 6

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

Learned skills: Drive Spacecraft 8, Drive Aircraft 7, Drive Landcraft 6, Focus 5, Gambling 6, Inquiry 5, Knavery 7, Lore (Jumproads) 8, Lore (Occult) 5, Read Urthish 4, Read Urthtech 5, Remedy 4, Mech Redemption 7, Volt Redemption 5, High-Tech Redemption 4, Sleight of Hand 5, Speak Urthish 5, Streetwise 6

Blessings/Curses: Shrewd (+2 Wits against attempts to fast talk), Crack Pilot (+2 with all Drive skills)/ Callous (-2 Passion when asked for aid)

Benefices/Afflictions: Allies (6 pts), Gossip Network (4 pts)/ Branded, Dark Secret (3 pts)

Wyrd: 7

Occult: Psi 7, Urge 3

Powers: Omen (Shadows Gone By, Shadows to Come), Psyche (Intuit, Emote, Mindsight, Mindspeech, Heart's Command, HeadShackle, BrainBlast)

Stigma: Uncontrollable facial tick when using powers

Equipment: Jumpkeys

Weapons: Blaster pistol, knife

Armor: Leather, standard shield

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



Captain Jacob Vander Meer

Captain Vander Meer was an obstinate heretical youth, and has grown more since his first Sathraist experience. Now he rejects almost all the Church's dogma, sometimes too loudly. "The Pancreator? Sure. The Prophet? Yes, I can see that too. But the Church? Nobody tells Jacob Vander Meer what to do!" This has raised some eyebrows. Still, there is no denying that he is useful in a squeeze. A doer rather than a thinker, the captain is nevertheless proficient with the controls of his red fintailed ship, the *Sleipner*. Jacob's father was a Sathraist and removed the Sathra damper from his ship (his engines are now somewhat unstable as a result). A Criticorum native, the captain has seen action on both the Stigmata and Vera Cruz fronts and knows some things about recent developments there. He keeps his Sathraism secret, though he may share it with those he trusts. He knows of a secret "night road" (a secret jump route), and may use it if things get too hot on Byzantium Secundus.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Charioteer Director (Sathra Underground Leader)



Captain Jacob Vander Meer

Quote: "Let's go for a ride — then you'll see my point of view!"

Description: Captain Vander Meer is a giant, red bearded Charioteer of ancient Urth Nordic stock. He braids his hair and beard in complex warrior's knots. He wears red lacquered ceramsteel armor or tunics of stiffsynth. He carries a curved saber and an ornate blaster pistol.

Roleplaying: Roar a lot, whether you're laughing at a joke or yelling in anger. Loud and boisterous, but not stupid. Jacob knows when to shut up — except when it concerns the Church.

Entourage: Captain Vander Meer has a small crew of two: a young Engineer who helps maintain his faulty engine (addicted to the Sathra experience), and a dog who has proved useful in anticipating trouble (growsls at priests).

Body: Strength 9, Dexterity 7, Endurance 8

Mind: Wits 5, Perception 7, Tech 6

Spirit: Extrovert 7, Introvert 1, Passion 7, Calm 2, Faith 5, Ego 3, Human 3, Alien 0

Natural skills: Charm 8, Dodge 6, Fight 7, Impress 7, Melee 8, Observe 7, Shoot 9, Sneak 4, Vigor 8

Learned skills: Beast Lore 1, Bureaucracy (Guild) 5, Disguise 1, Drive Aircraft 5, Drive Spacecraft 8, Gambling 5, Knavery 4, Lore (Jumproads) 7, Read Urtech 3, Craft Redemption 4, Spacesuit 6, Speak Kurgan 3, Streetwise 3, Survival 4, Tracking 2, Warfare (Gunnery) 7

Blessings/Curses: Bold (+2 Passion while acting when others hesitate)/ Bluster (-2 Extrovert when recounting deeds)

Benefices/Afflictions: Well Traveled (5 pts) / Dark Secret (Sathraist)

Wyrd: 4

Equipment: Starlight LRCD, specially refitted lander starship (Sathra damper disabled)

Weapons: Vibrating scimitar, blaster pistol

Martial Arts: Martial Fist, Martial Kick, Martial Hold, Block

Fencing: Parry, Thrust, Slash, Disarm

Armor: Ceramsteel armor, synthsilk shirts, dueling shield

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

Engineers



Doctor Finman

Doctor Finman believes that he is the planet's savior. "Let them look to the Reborn Sun as their guiding light — their savior has really been here in the sewers all this time!" Finman has an obscure Changed power that allows him

to speak with fish. The communication is imperfect, but Finman believes that they are telling him to give humans gills, so that humans can live on under the sea after the world floods. To this end, Finman has performed ghastly surgical experiments on people to give them gills. These operations have been partially successful. His patients (mostly unwilling Slum dwellers) have gained working gills, but can only survive in water with strong currents. They can only survive out of the water for about two hours a day. Finman uses these unfortunates to further his plans. A few of his patients have escaped and live in the rivers of Gasperah, Tamerlain and Harmony.

Race: Changed Human

Rank/Class: Engineer Manager (college professor)

Quote: "With the help of my finny friends, I will one day rule the planet!"

Description: Doctor Finman is one of those odd creatures known as the Changed, although few realize this. Doctor Gaspard Finman has the words "dangerous crackpot" written all over him, in letters far too big for anyone but a fellow Engineer to see. Most people see him as an eccentric but otherwise harmless, aquatic researcher at the Tamerlain Institute; he is an Engineer of good standing. Finman is an almost comical figure. He is tall, lanky and has weak, almost fishlike features. He pays little attention to his fashion sense and wears suits that were out of style 20 years ago. When researching fish in Drown Town, he wears a galvanized black swimsuit (2 pts armor) and car-



Doctor Finman

ries an electrically charged spear gun. Finman is a far more formidable fighter than his gawky form at first suggests. **Roleplaying:** Obsessed with his plan, Finman is easily angered by those who openly wonder why he “wastes his time with fishes.” He will merely smile at such foolishness, but plot revenge against the malefactor. He has a long hit list.

Entourage: Several Gillmen (see Misfits, later in this chapter), who serve him out of fear.

Body: Strength 9 (max 11), Dexterity 10, Endurance 10

Mind: Wits 8, Perception 8, Tech 9

Spirit: Extrovert 1, Introvert 8, Passion 6, Calm 2, Ego 8, Faith 2, Human 2, Alien 6

Natural skills: Charm 4, Dodge 9, Fight 6, Impress 7, Melee 5, Observe 7, Shoot 7, Sneak 10, Vigor 9

Learned skills: Academia 7, Beast Lore (Fish) 10, Disguise 3, Drive Watercraft 9, Etiquette 1, Inquiry 2, Lore (Drown Town) 4, Physick 9, Read Urthish 7, Science (Biology) 9, Chemistry 8, Survival 4, Torture 4, Tracking 7

Blessings/Curses: Innovative (+2 Tech when inventing something new), Keen Ears (+2 Perception hearing), Keen Eyes (+2 Perception with sight) / Homely (-1 Charm)

Benefices/Afflictions: Secrets (Second Republic Genetics Cache) / Dark Secrets (Mad Physick, 2 pts), Indebted (2 pts)

Occult: Changed

Powers: Enhanced Body characteristics, able to breathe underwater, must bathe in water at least two hours a day
Wyrd: 7

Equipment: A wide array of poisons and drugs, NanoTech MedPac, fusion torch, two Wet Jackets

Weapons: Stunner spear gun, hand laser, knife

Martial Arts: Martial Fist, Martial Hold

Armor: Stiffsynth wetsuit and clothing, standard shield

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

Scravers



Consul Oliver Lords

Consul Lords came from a well-to-do family of bakers on Ravenna, but life in the city bored him. He ran away with a Scraver excavation team when he was 13 and never looked back.

The next 30 years were spent on salvage operations throughout the Known Worlds. He quickly gained a reputation for being able to sniff out hidden artifacts anywhere, but the find which made him consul, as well as League ambassador to Alexius, was completely an accident.

While researching a site on Holy Terra rumored to have abandoned oil drilling equipment (there being no more oil to drill for on the planet), he dug up an ancient bunker. In the bunker, he found an entrance to a cave complex, buried millennia ago during an earthquake. In the cave he found enough military equipment to outfit several legions, all top-of-the-line First Republic armaments. Lords proved his genius, however, by managing to get these tons of munitions off planet without the



Consul Oliver Lords

Church confiscating them for its own use. He auctioned them off in space, eventually striking a bargain for the whole thing with Alexius. Many feel that this deal was crucial in ensuring Alexius's place as Emperor.

The League certainly feels it must have been critical, for it made Lords ambassador to Byzantium Secundus and the Emperor. Lords, however, is not especially happy with the situation. He joined the Scravers to get away from city life, not get embroiled in interstellar politics. As a result, he has come to rely more and more on his staff, some of the best minds in the League. He has found his Reeve advocate, Maya Minamoto, especially helpful and often turns to her for advice.



Consul Antonio Suvatski

People have always liked talking to Antonio, and he can't imagine life any other way. Born into a family of bureaucrats on Byzantium Secundus, Antonio seems to have made up for all the dullness that ever lived in his family. His parents say the first sound out of his mouth was a laugh, not a yell, and he's been enjoying himself ever since. Even those people who know that he might sell their secrets to someone else can't help but spill their hearts out to him. Needless to say, this has made his march up the guild ranks somewhat easier.

The only time his pleasant life grew somber was when the Scravers sent him on a mission to Sutek. House Hawkwood had just launched an assault on this Hazat world, and Antonio arrived to a scene of burned farms, decimated towns and hordes of refugees. It was here that he met Consul Percival Lystrom of the Reeves. Percival stressed the risk in which the Known Worlds had placed themselves. Another generation of conflict could send humanity spiraling into a decline from which it might never recover. All the while the heavens would turn blacker and blacker.

Antonio and Percival have been constant compan-

ions ever since. They have dedicated themselves to seeing that humanity make the most of the opportunity which Emperor Alexius affords it. They seek out trustworthy allies who will help them assure humanity's place in the stars, and have become more and more aware of the forces fighting this goal.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Scraver Consul

Quote: "Ha ha ha. So, come on lad, out with it. What happened after the Duke found you and the Duchess upside down in the laundry chute?"

Description: Antonio has always had that twinkle in his eyes, and it has always been the first thing people commented on when they met him. He doesn't recognize it, however, and spends as much time as an al-Malik making sure that his beard is properly oiled, that he has just the right amount of makeup on his dark skin, and that his stomach is not getting too big.

Roleplaying: Always jolly, Antonio has found that the best way to deal with difficult situations is with humor and grace. He laughs off all but the most egregious insults and is willing to forgive almost any transgression.

Entourage: Antonio does not believe that anyone could ever want to hurt him, and only grudgingly agreed to take on the bodyguard Percival Lystrom insisted he hire. Still, he is usually surrounded by friends and associates and spends his time talking and laughing.

Body: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Endurance 6

Mind: Wits 7, Perception 8, Tech 6

Spirit: Extrovert 8, Introvert 2, Passion 7, Calm 3, Faith 2, Ego 5, Human 7, Alien 1

Natural skills: Charm 10, Dodge 4, Fight 3, Impress 8, Melee 4, Observe 8, Shoot 3, Sneak 5, Vigor 5

Learned skills: Academia 2, Bureaucracy 8, Empathy 10, Etiquette 7, Gambling 4, Inquiry 8, Knavery 6, Read Urthish 5, Science (Psychology) 4, Search 5, Social (Acting) 4, Streetwise 9, Xeno-Empathy (Ur-Obun) 2



Consul Antonio Suvatski

Blessing: Exceptionally Well Liked (+2 Charm dealing with people he already knows)

Wyrd: 7

Equipment: Holo recorder

Weapons: None

Armor: Dueling shield, synthsilk

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



Fellow Tuti Leamone



Fellow Tuti Leamone

Tuti grew up on Sutek, surrounded by the remains of cultures long past. She played in ruins of the First Republic, worked in the remains of a Second Republic warehouse and lived in a house from the Diaspora. Her parents, minor members of the Scraver Guild, spent their days combing the countryside for any sort of artifacts. Tuti remembers the first one she ever found, a plastic figure of a wildly dressed Ur-Ukar, badly damaged and missing one leg. Despite its flaws, it made her leap in the air with excitement when she pressed a button on the back of its neck and it said, "Hi boys and girls. I'm Testy the Clown." From that moment on her career as an artifact hunter was assured.

There is nothing she likes better than spending weeks digging through ancient garbage dumps, rooting around for anything of value. Much of what she finds has no readily apparent value, but Tuti finds a way to give it some worth, often combining two (or more) barely recognizable artifacts into a single new design. She recently arrived on Byzantium Secundus after uncovering the location of an ancient landfill. She believes she has hit its first layer, and is understandably excited.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Scraver Fellow

Quote: "Ohmygosh! It's a genuine, authentic, never-found-before ... hey, what's that over there?"

Description: Tuti is a very attractive woman, but one would never know it from the dirt and oil-covered visage

which first greets people. Her fair skin and blonde hair are often multicolored from the layers of refuse she digs through. All her clothes are work clothes, and they bear the marks of her occupation.

Roleplaying: Keeping Tuti's attention on one subject for more than a minute is an adventure of epic proportions. Her mind seems to leap from topic to topic with wild abandon, and even while on a salvage operation she will run around the site, digging up whatever interests her at the moment.

Entourage: A team of high-quality scavengers. While they do not have much combat ability, they do have the most diverse array of high-tech tools and weapons to be found in the Known Worlds. Fusion torches can do a lot of damage when turned on high.

Body: Strength 6, Dexterity 9, Endurance 7

Mind: Wits 6, Perception 7, Tech 9

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

Natural skills: Charm 5, Dodge 5, Fight 3, Impress 5, Melee 4, Observe 9, Shoot 6, Sneak 4, Vigor 7

Learned skills: Academia 2, Bureaucracy 2, Drive Aircraft 3, Drive Beastcraft 4, Drive Landcraft 6, Drive Spacecraft 2, Inquiry 6, Lockpick 3, Lore (Lost Tech Sites) 8, Physick 1, Read Urthish 3, Read Urthtech 8, Redemption (Craft) 5, Redemption (High Tech) 6, Redemption (Mech) 9, Redemption (Volt) 8, Remedy 3, Ride 3, Search 8, Science (Archaeology) 4, Spacesuit 2, Speak Scraver Cant 1, Stoic Body 2, Streetwise 2, Think Machine 3

Blessing: Curious (+2 Extrovert when seeing something new)

Wyrd: 6

Equipment: All kinds of whacky high-tech doodads, many of which do nothing more than light up and make noise. She also has an abundance of useful tools, including blow torches, environmental suits, MedPacs, patched-together vehicles, unused cybernetic implants, think machines, communication devices and more. She probably has access to anything a character can think of, though it will not be in the condition he expects.

Weapons: Hand-held Taffy gun (Range 4/8, Shots: 3, Rate: 1, Size: M. Target must make a contested Strength + Vigor roll against the foam's potency of 8 to move, but every turn he does move the foam's potency increases by 1. The foam dissolves after 30 turns, but every turn he does not move the foam loses 3 potency until it slides off).

Armor: Assault shield, environmental suit (2 pts armor and life support)

Cybernetics: Concealable Engineer's Eye, Spy Eye

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

(For another local Scraver, see Draqua jo Lash, an Ur-Ukar in the Aliens section, later in this chapter.)



Sabot "Black Gut" Karlson

The Muster



Sabot "Black Gut" Karlson

It is the lot of Byzantium's serfs to hate a lot of people — landlords, thieves, those scum who live down the hill. But few people are hated by the serfs so much as is Sabot "Black Gut" Karlson. Sabot is responsible for the disappearance of many serfs, snatched from the fields or their own homes and shipped off to Cumulus, the League spacestation, for sale to nobles on distant worlds. Complaints have been filed and the Church has decried his slaver operation, but nothing has yet been done to stop his reign of terror.

Sabot is an orphan from Severus. At the tender age of seven, he was snatched by a Chainer gang and shipped off to the Shaprutan mines. He toiled for five years in this hell before being sold to a lumber gang on Grail. When the Muster ship transporting him to his new workplace was boarded by Decados soldiery attempting to destroy House Keddah's new purchase, the young Sabot slipped from his chains and aided in the defense. He took a submachinegun from the dead hands of a Muster merc and mowed down Sir Draven Decados, whose energy shield had unfortunately malfunctioned before he could deliver a deathblow to the Muster captain. The rest of the Decados retreated and left the Muster ship to limp its way to Grail. The Muster captain whose life the boy had saved was so impressed by the young lad's pluck and combat skills that he freed him and granted him a commission in the Muster. When the ship landed and the slaves were dragged out, Sabot was one of the armored thugs prodding and beating them with sticks.

After such a life, many might use their newfound freedom to fight for the emancipation of all slaves. Not Sabot. His history as a slave has only made him despise slaves more. He prides himself on his lack of pity, but it actually

hides a deathly fear of a return to the situation of his youth.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Muster Manager

Quote: "You calling me callous? You some sort of slave lover? Why don'tcha join 'em, if you love 'em so much! Go on, get in that hold!" (kick of booted heel)

Description: Sabot's large gut is legendary, as is the tattoo he had put upon it: A black sun. He won't explain what it means, but it disturbs many people, especially since he wears short shirts which display his decorated flab for all to see. He is approaching 40 but is still a formidably sized, although balding, man.

Roleplaying: Sabot is an okay guy who'll buy most people a beer and laugh at their bad jokes, as long as they're not serfs or whining Church priests — or that sissy Jake Wilkenson — come to plead mercy for the cattle. These he curses at and threatens to burn with his expensive Leagueheim cigars.

Entourage: Sabot rarely leaves the safety of Cumulus, but when he does, he is always accompanied by an armored contingent of Muster mercenaries.

Body: Strength 8, Dexterity 5, Endurance 7

Mind: Wits 5, Perception 5, Tech 5

Spirit: Extrovert 7, Introvert 1, Passion 6, Calm 1, Faith 1, Ego 4, Human 3, Alien 0

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

Learned skills: Drive Landcraft 5, Gambling 5, Inquiry 3, Knavery 5, Lore (Byzantium serfs) 6, Remedy 3, Mech Redemption 4, Social (Leadership) 5, Spacesuit 6, Streetwise 6

Curses: Homely (-1 Charm), Tyrant (-2 Charm among peasants)

Benefices/Afflictions: Orphan, Gossip Network (2 pts)

Wyrd: 6

Equipment: Muster Chains

Weapons: Large autofeed pistol, frap stick, dirk

Martial Arts: Martial Fist, Martial Kick, Martial Hold, Block, Tornado Kick, Trip Kick

Fencing: Parry, Thrust, Slash, Draw & Strike, Feint

Armor: Partial plate

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



Sergeant Jake Wilkenson

Wilkenson takes his duty as a combat officer for hire very seriously. He believes in the nobility and honor of his job, providing a security service to those who need it. He prefers duties which involve training and arming locals to fight for themselves, but excels equally well in heated infantry engagements. While he is relatively new at his job, he has impressed many Muster veterans. This has gained him some allies from on high, in the old guard mercenary faction of the Muster, those who feel as Wilkenson does and despise the Muster's role as slavers. They believe the Muster would be more profitable and viable were it not

for the Chainers. As proof, they cite the many Church priests who claim they would engage the Muster's services more if it were not for their black mark as slavers.

Jake Wilkenson comes from a wealthy weaponsmith family on Tethys. His father is a widely respected quality control expert at the Mitchau smithy. Jake had notions of honor, honesty and discipline drilled into him at an early age, not only by his father but also from the nobles who came to purchase arms. Wilkenson has yet to fully realize how little these great men heed their own words.

Wilkenson uses Byzantium Secundus as his base of operations, choosing from various jobs offered him by the wide array of customers found here. He has recently turned down two high-paying jobs to instead ensure that Sabot Karlson's recent slave-run into the Gasperah lowlands was not excessively cruel. He hates Karlson with a passion and fears that this anger may lead him to murder someday. He secretly hopes that a combat situation will arise which would allow him to "accidentally" shoot Karlson in the back.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Muster Chief

Quote: "We're not just hired guns; we're trained, honorable soldiers who aid those with no soldiery of their own. Who else will protect them?"

Description: Wilkenson is a man of average height with a ramrod straight posture and disciplined fastidiousness. His dress is always sharp, whether it be a military uniform or a more formal affair.

Roleplaying: Politeness is the key to success with a client; there is no reason to display the crude casualness of most Muster mercs. What clients want is discipline, and he gives it to them.

Entourage: Wilkenson works alone, although he may call on aid from fellow mercs.

Body: Strength 7, Dexterity 7, Endurance 7

Mind: Wits 6, Perception 6, Tech 5



Sgt. Jake Wilkenson

Spirit: Extrovert 5, Introvert 4, Passion 3, Calm 7, Faith 3, Ego 2, Human 3, Alien 0

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

Learned skills: Drive Aircraft 4, Drive Landcraft 6, Empathy 3, Focus 3, Physick 4, Remedy 7, Mech Redemption 4, Social (Leadership) 5, Spacesuit 3, Stoic Body 4, Stoic Mind 2, Survival 4, Warfare (Tactics) 5

Blessings: Handsome (+1 Charm), Disciplined (+2 Calm in combat situations), Just (+2 Passion when righting a wrong)

Benefices: Ally (3 pts)

Wyrd: 3

Equipment: MedPac, survival gear

Weapons: Assault rifle, medium revolver, dirk

Martial Arts: Martial Fist, Martial Kick, Martial Hold, Block, Martial Throw, Tornado Kick, Leaping Kick

Fencing: Parry, Thrust, Slash, Flat of Blade, Disarm

Armor: Leather, standard shield

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

Reeves



Consul Percival Lystrom

Percival's parents apprenticed him to the Reeves when he became old enough to count to 10. He has handled almost every duty a Reeve could, doing bookkeeping, making loans, couriering money and information, collecting money from nobles delinquent on their loans and acting as an advocate in both religious and secular courts. During the Emperor Wars he spent a number of years on Delphi, helping arrange loans for House Hawkwood. When Alexius first became regent, Percival went to Byzantium Secundus to help keep an eye on the Reeves' money. Few people know just how big a loan the Reeves gave Alexius before he declared himself Emperor, and even fewer know of



Consul Percival Lystrom

Percival's involvement in pushing the loan through.

Now he holds a place of honor on Byzantium Secundus, and may well be the most prominent League member on the planet aside from the League Ambassador himself. He has arranged loans for many of the politically prominent people on the planet, and does not always collect in firebirds. Information, favors or gratitude can all be more valuable than money. This is especially true when one is involved in as much intrigue as Percival is.

Many Reeves know of Percival's enthusiastic support for the Emperor, but only a few know how closely he has tied his own fortunes to Alexius. He and his lover, the Scraver Consul Antonio Suvatski, saw first hand the devastation the Emperor Wars wrought. Both committed themselves to finding a way to prevent that from ever happening again. To that end they have thrown their full backing behind Alexius, and enlist others to both fight the Emperor's enemies and create a stable government.

People do know that Percival has the ear of the Emperor, and they also know that he shares a mansion with Suvatski, one of the leading Scravers on the planet. They correctly suspect that little happens on Byzantium Secundus that Percival does not know about. What they don't know is just how much of what happens he is responsible for.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Reeve Consul

Quote: "No, you don't have to pay me back now. Say, weren't you on that ship they just let out of quarantine?"

Description: Thin, with blond hair slowly turning gray, Percival looks a good bit older than his 42 years. In fact, some people suspect that he is taking antiaging serums, though he has yet to feel the need. While working, Percival prefers dark suits with a severe cut. At home he tends toward flowing robes of the most comfortable sort.

Roleplaying: Percival may give the appearance of a man more comfortable with a ledger than a laser, but he has also spent time helping covert Reeve loan collections (also known as piracy against those who owe the guild money). He no longer considers himself a man of action, but remains just as decisive, and once he has made a decision almost nothing can make him change his mind.

Entourage: Percival only has two official bodyguards, but he is usually surrounded by a plethora of accountants, advocates, scribes, assistants and others. At home he prefers the company of Antonio, but has a first rate staff to help around the mansion.

Body: Strength 4, Dexterity 6, Endurance 6

Mind: Wits 9, Perception 6, Tech 5

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

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

Learned skills: Academia 6, Bureaucracy 8, Empathy 6, Etiquette 9, Inquiry 7, Read Urthish 8, Read Urthtech 6, Read Latin 6, Social (Debate) 7, Social (Leadership) 5, Social

(Oratory) 6, Spacesuit 2, Speak Ur-Obun 5, Think Machine 5

Wyrd: 6

Equipment: Personal think machine

Weapons: Palm laser

Armor: Dueling shield

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



Manager Maya Minamoto



Manager Maya Minamoto

The Minamoto's have been a powerful faction in the Reeves for centuries. Maya's lineage includes innumerable consuls, three deans and one Leaguemeister. Maya has her sights set on adding to this distinguished history, no matter what it takes. To this end she had aligned herself with some of the most eminent and respected leaders of her guild. They have in turn groomed her to become one of them.

Maya fervently agrees with those who believe technology must be kept from those who cannot handle it. Innumerable guild members, especially leading Gray Faces, feel this way, and strive to keep anything but the most basic tools out of the hands of commoners. If this means centering such knowledge with the guilds, and allowing them to profit from it, then so be it. Recently Maya even began meeting certain people outside of the guild who felt this way as well, mainly Church leaders and nobles recommended to her by her Reeve patrons.

When one of these patrons, Consul Derrick Luden, called her to his mansion on Leagueheim, she knew he had a special mission in mind for her. She just had no idea of its scope. Over a two-day period, Consul Luden briefed her on conditions on Byzantium Secundus — and a nefarious plot within the League to turn its resources over to the Empire. Certain guild members had conspired to give Alexius covert and overt support during the Emperor Wars, and have continued this after he became Emperor. Now they are looking to establish their own place by mak-

ing him undefeatable.

The Reeves have assigned Maya to their embassy on Byzantium Secundus as an advocate-at-large, with a great deal of leeway in deciding what her duties are. They have given her a list of contacts sympathetic to her cause, and a list of suspects to watch out for. Consul Percival Lystrom heads that list.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Reeve Manager

Quote: "Hmm, yes. I could help you... but that would not be prudent."

Description: Maya is a young Oriental woman with long black hair (usually tied back in a bun) and dark eyes. She wears stylish yet unassuming clothing, preferring to stay in the background as much as possible.

Roleplaying: Maya always looks out for any advantage. She considers all people outside of the League her inferiors, as well as many people inside the League, but hides this contempt under a cloak of good manners.

Entourage: While still working primarily on her own, Maya is trying to build a network of allies and associates who believe as she does. She has been amazed at how closely tied these people already are.

Body: Strength 5, Dexterity 8, Endurance 6

Mind: Wits 9, Perception 7, Tech 7

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

Natural skills: Charm 8, Dodge 6, Fight 4, Impress 9, Melee 4, Observe 7, Shoot 7, Sneak 6, Vigor 5

Learned skills: Academia 6, Arts (Rhetoric) 7, Bureaucracy 8, Cybernetics (Ether Ear) 5, Etiquette 8, Drive Landcraft 3, Inquiry 7, Knavery 4, Lore (Traditions) 8, Read Latin 3, Read Ur-Obun 1, Read Ur-Ukar 1, Read Urthish 6, Read Urthtech 4, Social (Debate) 9, Social (Leadership) 2, Social (Oratory) 7, Speak Latin 2, Speak Scraver Cant 1, Speak Ur-Obun 2, Speak Ur-Ukar 2, Stoic Mind 4, Streetwise 1, Think Machine 4

Blessing: Respected (+1 Charm dealing with people who know her)

Wyrd: 5

Equipment: Noise suppresser (ensures privacy of her conversations), tracking devices, unlimited line of credit

Weapons: Laser pistol

Armor: Dueling shield

Cybernetics: Ether Ear, Internal Think Machine

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

The Authority



Dean Tungsten Acco

As head of the Authority on Byzantium Secundus, Acco is one of the planet's most powerful people. The trouble is, he used to be more powerful. Acco remembers the days when the regents had almost no power on the planet. Back then the Authority could do as it pleased. Now the Emperor is trying to exert his influence over the planet, and the Authority is find-



Dean Tungsten Acco

ing it more and more difficult to overcharge for the slum property it owns, dump its refuse wherever it pleases and run its ancient black markets.

While the Authority's legitimate businesses have prospered with the influx of people brought to Byzantium Secundus by the Emperor, these have never been the guild's mainstays. Acco knows that the Authority must either shift its focus or find a way to get the Emperor to stop interfering with its activities, and Acco prefers the second solution.



Consul Wilima Affoh

Consul Wilima Affoh's family grew up on the borders of the slums, working as best they could to keep from becoming part of the abject poverty all around them. Wilima herself began working in Authority factories when she was five. While most children do not thrive in this environment (or even survive), Wilima prospered. She became an associate member of the guild when she was 12 and immediately began organizing other workers to help them join it.

A major reason for the Authority's success on Byzantium Secundus has been its eagerness to sign up anyone other guilds had overlooked. Wilima has continued this stratagem, managing to add a number of independent street cleaning groups, low-level bureaucrats and animal handlers to the Authority's ranks. As a result she has moved rapidly up through the guild's ranks, and the determination she has shown in backing up even the guild's poorest members against other guilds, the League or even noble houses has made her a likely candidate to become the guild's dean.

It has also made her a large number of enemies, not the least of which are the Scravers who have long wanted to control the planet's bazaar. It has also brought her into conflict with House Cameton and the Church on more than one occasion. Wilima would like nothing more than

to organize all Byzantium Secundus's serfs and working people, but moves carefully, knowing that anything she starts could cause an immediate backlash.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Authority Consul

Quote: "What you suggest could get a lot of people killed. Of course, if it works..."

Description: Wilima usually wears her long black hair up in colorful scarves, but most of her clothes are severe and professional. She has recently added even more formal clothing to her wardrobe, hoping that joining in Byzantium Secundus's social whirl will give her an edge in League politics.

Behavior: Driven and energetic, Wilima lives her life with the certainty that she is fulfilling some great purpose. Thus she seems gruff and abrupt, and has an extremely fiery temper, but her friendships and loyalties will last a lifetime.

Entourage: Wilima has two bodyguards who are extremely dedicated to her. This has not stopped the Scravers from trying to get them to turn against her, however.

Body: Strength 6, Dexterity 5, Endurance 6

Mind: Wits 8, Perception 7, Tech 8

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

Natural skills: Charm 7, Dodge 4, Fight 4, Impress 9, Melee 4, Observe 6, Shoot 3, Sneak 4, Vigor 5

Learned skills: Artisan 5, Bureaucracy 7, Drive Landcraft 2, Empathy 6, Etiquette 4, Inquiry 5, Knavery 2, Read Urthish 4, Read Urthtech 3, Redemption (Mech) 6, Social (Debate) 4, Social (Leadership) 5, Social (Oratory) 3, Speak Scaver Cant 1, Streetwise 6, Think Machine 3

Wyr: 7

Equipment: Private think machine

Armor: Standard shield

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



Consul Wilima Affoh



Bran Botan vo Karm

Aliens

Ur-Obun



Bran Botan vo Karm

Certainly the most famous Ur-Obun in the Empire, Bran Botan vo Karm was an old friend of Alexius before the Emperor appointed him as his Left-Hand Counsel. It is an august post, one requiring a sharp political sense but also a more down-to-earth view of the common folk, Alexius's subjects. It is Botan's job to advise Alexius on the possible ethical outcomes of his actions (the Right-Hand Counsel advises on more logistical matters). The Church was at first furious that Alexius spurned tradition by not choosing one of their own for the post, but Botan, a priest of the Ur-Obun Church founded by the disciple Ven Lohji, won over even the Patriarch with his wise tongue. The Church is still wary, watching Botan carefully from afar, but it has turned its anti-Alexius energies elsewhere for now.

What few know is that Alexius uses Botan to arrange covert deeds he would never dare decree under the close scrutiny of his court. These deeds are strange, involving quests on secret night roads to dangerous worlds as yet unknown to most of the powers-that-be. Alexius and Botan are searching for information on the Annunaki and the Vau, for they suspect a connection between the two. Botan has made a number of contacts in all levels of society and has been very successful in keeping his ties to these people incognito. Most of his contacts are aliens or inconspicuous freemen with few ties. He feels the weight of these missions heavily, for most adventurers he has sent off have never returned. But he knows the importance of uncovering alien secrets before the opposition does.

Vinthius Rudanda

Vinthius is a successful art merchant in the Imperial City. The al-Malik pay him to watch Lady Salandra. The duchess has a passion for high art and the merchant has built a certain rapport with her. Since Rudanda knows Salandra would kill him if she discovered his secret, he is very cautious in his choice of confidants. He is an amiable sort in most regards, though he overcharges for his art. Rudanda has one of the greatest art collections in the Empire. He uses his influence to help less fortunate aliens (and humans) throughout the planet. Vinthius has allies among the al-Malik and the Engineers; he even has cordial ties with some Ur-Ukar.

Race: Ur-Obun

Rank/Class: Free alien merchant

Quote: "Perhaps I can interest you in some Etyri wind chimes? Come back later and we'll talk."

Description: Vinthius Rudanda is a wizened old Ur-Obun with odd overgrown, bushy eyebrows — which is unusual for his race. He dresses in rich Ur-Obun styles, though he has made some concessions to native Byzantine fashion. His Vorox bodyguard, Verasix, accompanies him everywhere. Rudanda carries a vast array of technical devices and is a journeyman psychic.

Roleplaying: Smile a lot and be helpful, but not oily. You know you've got the best, and they know they'll have to pay highly for it.

Body: Strength 4, Dexterity 6, Endurance 6

Mind: Wits 9, Perception 8, Tech 7

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

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

Learned skills: Academia 8, Alchemy 2, Artisan 7, Arts 9, Bureaucracy (Guilds) 5, Empathy 3, Etiquette 7, Inquiry 6, Art Lore 8, Read Urthish 6, Read Ur-Obun 8, Volt Redemp-



Vinthius Rudanda

tion 4, Search 3, Slight of Hand 2, Social (Debate) 7, Speak Urthish 6, Speak Ur-Obun 9, Speak Ur-Ukar 2, Speak Vorox 3

Blessings: Gracious (+2 Extrovert to guests)

Benefices: Gossip Network (Imperial City), Riches (5 pts), Secrets (Lady Salandra)

Occult: Psi 2

Powers: Psyche (Intuit), Sixth Sense (Sensitivity)

Stigma: Overgrown eyebrows

Wyrd: 5

Equipment: Whisper Pin, volt tools, VS Perimeter Guard. His house and studio are Gen-locked.

Weapons: Light revolver

Armor: Synthsilk robe, standard shield

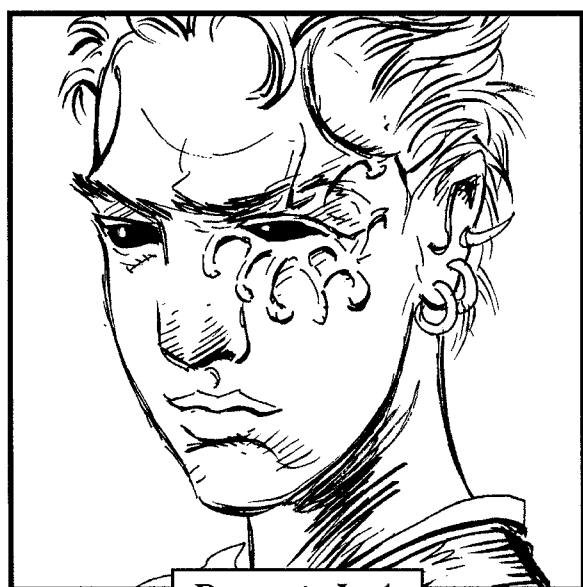
Vitality: -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0

Ur-Ukar



Draqua jo Lash

Born in the lowest Ur-Ukar slums of Harmony, Draqua jo Lash clawed her way to the top of the Scraver underworld. Through a cunning mixture of cleverness, brutality and terror, she is now one of the most powerful figures in the Byzantine Scravens guild. She also holds a good deal of sway in Ur-Ukar society. Many Ur-Ukar consider her a philanthropist and few would (openly) accuse her of forgetting her roots. Draqua shuttles between the Harmony and Gasperah Slums, cultivating her criminal empire. She also has extensive criminal and legitimate concerns on Criticorum, Tethys and Shaprut. She is quick, almost impulsive, when pursuing opportunities to expand her power still further. Draqua maintains a veneer of polite respectability in human society and has even attended lesser functions in the Imperial City. She is both contemptuous of and fascinated by humans.



Draqua jo Lash

Race: Ur-Ukar

Rank/Class: Scraver Director of Gasperah and Harmony

Quote: "You better talk fast — that maxicrete's getting hard!"

Description: Draqua jo Lash is a young Ur-Ukar woman. She has an elaborate tattoo carved on her face, an ornate, spiderweb around one eye, but few scars otherwise. Some Ur-Ukar consider her a coward because of her lack of scars, but few are brave enough to say this to her face. Draqua tends more toward upscale, nouveau riche Scraver fashions, but also wears an impressive array of Ur-Ukar silver works. The overall impression is both frightening and evocative to humans and Ur-Ukar alike (the upper class call this style Slum-chic). She has an extensive private stock of longevity serums.

Roleplaying: She sneers at those who fail to impress her (almost everyone). She loses face to no one.

Entourage: Draqua travels with an accountant, bodyguards (both Ur-Ukar and human) and a retinue of debauched sybarites. Golem Protectors (see the **Fading Suns** rulebook) guard her opulent highrise offices in Harmony and Gasperah.

Body: Strength 6, Dexterity 6, Endurance 6

Mind: Wits 7, Perception 7, Tech 5

Spirit: Extrovert 6, Introvert 2, Passion 4, Calm 3, Faith 2, Ego 6, Human 3, Alien 4

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

Learned skills: Bureaucracy 5, Disguise 3, Drive Watercraft 5, Empathy 6, Etiquette 2, Gambling 6, Inquiry 5, Knavery 9, Lockpicking 6, Lore (Slums) 8, Read Urthish 3, Read Ur-Ukar 2, Ride 5, Search 5, Slight of Hand 4, Social (Leadership) 6, Speak Urthish 4, Speak Ur-Ukar 5, Streetwise 9, Survival 5, Torture 5, Tracking 3

Blessings/Curses: Handsome (+1 Charm)/ Greedy (-2 Calm when money involved), Known Criminal (-2 Knavery), Unnerving (+2 Alien when dealing with serfs)

Benefices/Afflictions: Gossip Network (2 pts), Passage Contracts (8 pts), Riches (9 pts)/ Vendetta (Temple Avesti)

Occult: Psi 3, Urge 1

Powers: Psyche (Intuit), Soma (Toughening, Strengthening, Quickening), Urge (Speak in Tongues)

Stigma: Draqua has no nipples on her breasts

Wyrd: 6

Equipment: Drugs, poisons, squawker, scrambler pad, Muster Chains

Weapons: Dagger, laser pistol, stunner

Martial Arts: Martial Fist, Martial Hold, Block

Fencing: Parry, Thrust

Armor: Trendy synthsilk clothes, standard shield

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



Garganador

Vorox

Garganador

When Baronet Ferix Masseri was gunned down in the Slums, Garganador fled. She was, after all, his bodyguard who had failed to prevent a gang of bandits from killing the minor and near poverty stricken noble. House Masseri would surely sell her into slavery — if they could find her. Masseri has little resources, so Garganador is sure that she can evade them as long as she lays low. For this purpose, she has taken work in the swampy lowlands of Byzantium Secundus hunting sharpshirts. It's ridiculous how hard a time the humans have catching the vermin; it's second nature to a Vorox born and bred.

Garganador was a feral animal until the baronet saw fit to purchase her from the Li Halan and pay for her civilizing — a brutal, grueling but ultimately rewarding year of conditioning by civilized Vorox, beginning with her declawing. She is angry with herself now for returning such a boon with failure. If she could only hook up with another noble to prove herself again.

Race: Vorox

Rank/Class: Ex-Masseri householder

Quote: "I will not fail you."

Description: Garganador is nearly eight feet tall and very broad. She's large even for a Vorox. Her fur is reddish brown, and she has braided some of her hair in an attempt to look more civilized. She wears harnesses and belts to carry her equipment but otherwise goes unclad.

Roleplaying: Garganador is insecure about her role in Known Worlds society and is always trying to fit in. But her natural habits are often unappreciated by most.

Entourage: She travels alone but seeks an entourage to attach herself to.

Body: Strength 8, Dexterity 6, Endurance 7

Mind: Wits 3, Perception 4, Tech 1

Spirit: Extrovert 4, Introvert 1, Passion 4, Calm 1, Faith 1,

Ego 0, Human 1, Alien 3

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

Learned skills: Read Urthish 2, Remedy 2, Speak Urthish 3, Speak Vorox 4, Survival 6, Tracking 7

Blessings/Curses: Predatory (-2 Calm when hungry), Giant (+2 Vitality, base run: 14 meters), Bite (Init: -1, DMG 3), Extra Limbs (6 arms/legs), Sensitive Smell (+2 Per, smell only)

Afflictions: Vendetta (House Masseri)

Wyrd: 4

Equipment: Hunting gear (traps, hooks, etc.)

Weapons: Glankesh blades

Martial Arts: Drox (allows 2 actions), Martial Fist, Martial Kick, Martial Hold, Block, Martial Throw, Claw Fist, Sure Fist, Choke Hold,

Fencing: Drox (allows 2 actions), Parry, Thrust, Slash, Draw & Strike, Feint, Off-hand

Armor: Studded leather

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

Gannok



Stukeneneer

Stuky, as his many friends call him, lives about as good a life as any Gannok, despite the demeaning nature of his work.

As jester to the imperial court, he entertains the leading figures in the Known Worlds, eats the best food and goes to the best parties. He also has to meet constant demands for entertainment, gets knocked over a lot, and must humiliate himself for the amusement of the lowliest courtier.

Since his comedic demeanor and constant pratfalls ensure that no one takes him seriously, Alexius enlisted his aid as an agent many years ago. Stuky has developed a knack for tumbling right on over to key conversations and picking up as much as he can for the Emperor. The



Stukeneneer

Emperor also uses the jester as his main contact to alien races and to enlist the aid of "less desirable elements."

The only problem is, Stuky's family on Bannockburn has disappeared. Stuky found this out when a handwritten note appeared in his private quarters warning him not to tell anyone his family was missing. Stuky feels sure the note was written with Gannok blood. He has no idea who took them or what they want, but feels certain it can only be the Emperor's enemies.

Race: Gannok

Rank/Class: Serf

Quote: "How many Avestites does it take to change a torch? One... and one Decados to serve as the wick. Did ya hear the one about the deaf courtesan? That's okay. Neither did he." (Falls over.)

Description: A short, particularly slender Gannok with black and white fur, Stuky often dyes his hair and puts on makeup to help make his appearance funnier. He dresses in the traditional multicolored clothes and belled hat of the jester. When off duty, he prefers a traditional Gannok dress, though he will often have a cigar of finest Shaprut tobacco between his lips.

Roleplaying: Stuky uses humor to convince everyone of his harmlessness. With his recent troubles, however, his humor has begun to have a serious edge to it.

Entourage: Stuky is friendly with most of the Emperor's servants, but has no real close friends. In true Gannok fashion, his closest friends were in his own family.

Body: Strength 5, Dexterity 9, Endurance 7

Mind: Wits 7, Perception 7, Tech 6

Spirit: Extrovert 8, Introvert 2, Passion 7, Calm 2, Faith 2, Ego 4, Human 2, Alien 4

Natural skills: Charm 9, Dodge 7, Fight 5, Impress 8, Melee 5, Observe 8, Shoot 4, Sneak 8, Vigor 7

Learned skills: Acrobatics 8, Bureaucracy 1, Disguise 5, Empathy 6, Etiquette 4, Gambling 3, Inquiry 4, Knavery 8, Lockpick 2, Performance (Comedy) 8, Read Urthish 4, Remedy 2, Search 5, Sleight of Hand 9, Social (Acting) 7, Speak Gannok 8, Stoic Mind 4, Streetwise 5

Blessings/Curses: Prehensile tail (usable to grasp objects or to hang from), Regeneration (heal 1 Vitality per span), Agile (+2 Dex with acrobatic feats)/ Stench (-2 Extrovert for those who smell him — Stuky hides this with thick perfume)

Wyrd: 7

Equipment: Jester equipment — pies, fake clubs, juggling equipment, etc.

Weapons: Splinter daggers

Armor: Dueling shield, synthsilk

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

Barbarians

There is no permanent embassy on Byzantium Secundus for representatives of any of the barbarian nations, although Alexius has occasionally invited ambassadors to the planet for peace talks. These ambassadors

invariably bring a retinue, which usually leaves with less people than they came with. It seems that defections are inevitable once the barbarians see the splendor in which imperial citizens live. Some of these officially ask for asylum from the Emperor (almost never granted) or the Church (almost always granted), but others simply slip away from their embassy cages to live a new life in the lowlands.

A group of ex-barbarians living in the Slums has set up an aid group for others like them. In the environment of hatred many of them experience from their serf neighbors, Kurgan and Vuldrok become fast allies, if not friends. Some of these barbarian immigrants are actually spies, while others are escaped slaves. These people are targets for Chainer capture since no one recognizes that they exist, making it extremely easy to collect free slaves. The barbarian resistance group has recently seriously injured one of Sabot Karlson's Chainer gangs, and Sabot has sworn to capture all the barbarians responsible and sell them to the war effort on Stigmata.

Others

Tahira

Life on Cadavus was never easy, but for a serf in the planet's hinterlands it could be unbearable. Food itself was scarce, and any luxuries were out of the question. At the age of 12 Tahira was betrothed to the town carpenter, a prospect she found appalling. Just days before her marriage al-Malik ships landed on the planet, disgorging troops into its hinterlands to raid Decados fiefs, and a few merchant ships followed. The Decados drove the al-Malik off the planet a few weeks later, but by then Tahira had stowed away on a merchant ship and found herself flying to a new world.

The ship flew from the most archaic parts of Cadavus to the space port on Criticorum, show place of the al-



Tahira

Malik. Tahira sneaked off the ship as dawn broke over the city and found herself in the midst of a city she could never have conceived of in her wildest dreams. Gleaming spires towered high over her. Cars crowded the streets and fliers tore through the sky. Tahira knew then that she could never return to the life of a serf.

Still, there wasn't much a 12-year-old could do on Criticorum, so she rapidly fell into a life of crime. In no time at all she had broken almost every single one of the few laws Criticorum has, learned a great deal about how the underworld works and was forced to flee the planet. She went straight to Byzantium Secundus, where she began her own gang, one which could protect her if things got out of hand.

She and her gang started small, handling crimes too petty for more established groups to deal with. As the years went by, and her Criticorum experience paid off, it became more aggressive, and she began taking on bigger gangs and winning. Now she is eyeing the biggest of the gangs — the Scravers — and figuring out how to take over its many profitable rackets.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Escaped serf

Quote: "If you want to operate here, you pay me. The Scravers got no power here."

Description: She looks a bit older than her 19 years, with a lean, hard look earned first through working in Decados fields and then living on some of the toughest streets in the Known Worlds. Her dark eyes watch everything that happens, and her thin lips never crack a smile.

Roleplaying: Tahira's ambition is the center of her life, and the more success she and her gang has, the more she wants. To her, all people are either pawns or obstacles, and everyone is treated accordingly.

Entourage: Her gang of criminals includes 20 core members who have sworn blood oaths to her, as well as another 50 associate members she can call on at any time. These people range from giant enforcers to skilled assassins to cat burglars to tech whizzes.

Body: Strength 7, Dexterity 8, Endurance 9

Mind: Wits 8, Perception 9, Tech 6

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

Natural skills: Charm 6, Dodge 8, Fight 8, Impress 9, Melee 9, Observe 9, Shoot 6, Sneak 9, Vigor 7

Learned skills: Disguise 5, Drive Landcraft 2, Inquiry 5, Knavery 8, Lockpick 8, Remedy 4, Search 7, Sleight of Hand 8, Social (Leadership) 7, Speak Scaver Cant 4, Stoic Body 3, Streetwise 9, Survival 6

Wyrd: 5

Equipment: Lockpicks, synthsilk rope, grappling gun, other burglary tools, police radio

Weapons: Dagger with poison jets (Tahira can press a button to release poisons when she hits her foe; her favorite poison is that secreted by Vorox claws)

Armor: Dueling shield

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



Freeman Jones

Freeman Jones

Very few people manage to survive in the Known Worlds without pledging fealty to some stronger group. Those who do often find it necessary to at least form alliances with the great powers, working closely with them while maintaining their independence. Freeman Jones is one of these free agents, able to choose who he will and won't work with. A talented private investigator and occasional mercenary, Jones has worked for a number of noble houses and guilds, but his main employer is the Universal Church.

Jones grew up on Holy Terra, the only child of one of the few families neither owned by the Church nor beholden to it. He still managed to make friends with a number of people who have become prominent in the Church, and they often turn to him to covertly investigate situations where their own agents would be too recognizable. Most recently, two bishops asked him to investigate rumors of corruption within the Church's hierarchy on Byzantium Secundus. The bishops fear that a number of the leading clergy have greater allegiance to the royal houses than the Church, and want to Jones to find out if this is true.

Masquerading as a dealer in relics and religious texts, Jones has managed to meet most of the Church's leaders on Byzantium Secundus. The more he gets to know about them, however, the more he begins to suspect that some greater conspiracy might be at work. What it is he does not know, but he feels certain that it is something hidden from the Church on Holy Terra.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Freeman

Quote: "Of course, we're all faithful followers of the Prophet. Of that there can be no doubt."

Description: Jones tries to look nondescript, but it's not easy for him. He is rugged and muscular and walks with too much self-confidence. He finds it difficult to act with

the sort of feigned friendliness most guild merchants specialize in.

Roleplaying: Jones is becoming desperate to figure out what is going on. He feels certain that a number of priests are aligned to some end which they are hiding from him, but he has no idea just what that end may be. He is becoming more inquiring and is looking to line up other people who can help him.

Entourage: Jones has an assistant, the ever-capable Veronica Gales. She primarily handles his records and finances, but she is also handy with a gun.

Body: Strength 6, Dexterity 7, Endurance 7

Mind: Wits 7, Perception 8, Tech 7

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

Natural skills: Charm 6, Dodge 7, Fight 7, Impress 8, Melee 6, Observe 9, Shoot 8, Sneak 9, Vigor 7

Learned skills: Academia 2, Bureaucracy 5, Disguise 4, Drive Landcraft 5, Empathy 4, Etiquette 3, Gambling 6, Inquiry 7, Knavery 5, Lockpick 6, Lore (Church Figures) 5, Read Latin 3, Read Urthish 4, Read Urthtech 2, Redemption (Mech) 4, Ride 3, Search 8, Sleight of Hand 4, Social (Acting) 6, Speak Latin 4, Speak Scraver Cant 2, Speak Ur-Ukar 1, Streetwise 6, Think Machine 2

Blessing: Nose for Trouble (+2 Perception when someone is hiding the truth from him)

Wyrd: 5

Equipment: Concealed voice recorder, trench coat, pseudoreligious relics and texts

Weapons: Medium autofeed pistol

Armor: Standard shield

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

Makron

Makron (real name: Joseph Hauges) leads a secret demonic cult of powerful nobles. Well, he occasionally has some knights, dames and guild members over to play at being demonists, but he certainly sees it as something greater. His interest in the occult dates back to his childhood. His mother was an Orthodox priest and his father taught at a Church school on Tethys. Makron heard their cautionary tales of evil heretics, and the idea of causing people that much consternation appealed to him no end.

His parents used their influence to get him a post at a Church school on Byzantium Secundus, hoping that he would eventually join the prestigious faculty at the University of Veridian, but Makron had other ideas. Byzantium Secundus offered him a chance to seek out the practitioners of the dark arts his parents had warned him about.

His initial inquiries uncovered no demonists but did lead to encounters with a few other people with similar interests as his. Makron found that retelling the stories his parents told him, albeit with some extra flourishes, made him appear to be an expert on the subject. His new friends began bringing their own friends to meet him and soon

Parting the Primordial Curtain

(Extrovert + Impress, LG, sight, prolonged, 1W)

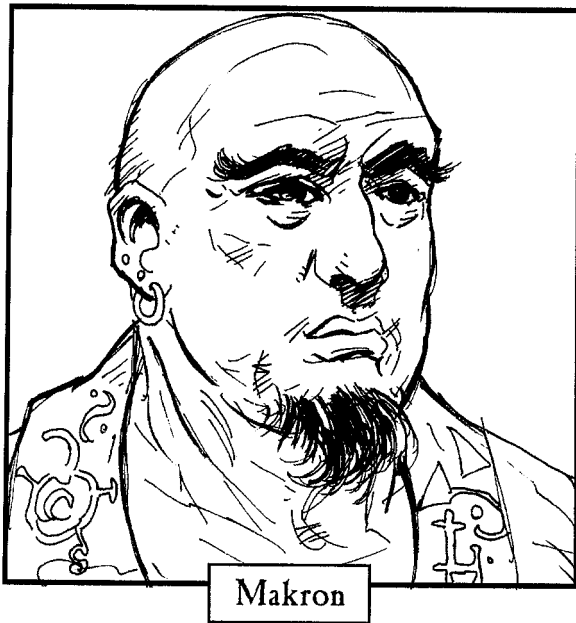
This rite causes its target (who must be human; aliens are immune to this particular rite) to suffer bizarre hallucinations which initiate feelings of fear and paranoia. There are two versions: In the first, the target must be present at the casting of the rite, which takes 10 minutes to complete. In the second, the rite preparations are performed beforehand (requiring 10 minutes to complete); then, at any point within one week of preparation, incense of the chanu chotl leaf of Sutek is burned in the presence of the target, causing the rite to take effect once the incense is smelled. The latter rite costs the caster 3 Wyrd (spent during preparation). For either version of the rite, an additional target may be added at the cost of 1 Wyrd each.

Once the spell is in effect, the target suffers a -2 penalty to his Calm, but receives a +2 Passion bonus. In addition, he suffers strange visions of otherworldly entities floating in the air, weaving in and out of the walls, or squirming underfoot. These things can take many forms, usually that of whatever animal or alien beast the target is most afraid of (fish, snakes, puppy dogs). They will cluster around other people — who obviously cannot see them — whispering in their ears. The amazing thing is that their victims will then heed their commands, usually aping whatever words were spoken to them — they are obviously in the thrall of these creatures and must be stopped!

Whether or not the spell actually allows the target to see real, extradimensional demons or not, it does allow the target a subtle form of telepathy which allows him to hear another's thoughts before they are actually spoken — an effect which is perceived as described above, when the imaginary creatures whisper to the speaker. Church priests or devout faithful under the effect of this rite usually wind up attacking innocent bystanders whom they believe to be threatened by demons.

While this is an Antimony spell, the caster does not have to know Antimony — she simply must be able to understand (read or speak) whatever language the rite's instructions are presented in. Antinomists believe that certain combinations of gesture and word are like keys which can unlock certain precoded behaviors in the human lizard brain.

This spell is usually performed as a party trick by Makron, who feeds his guests certain drugs which reverse the spell's effects, turning fear into humor. However, he is not above using it on his enemies, sans happy drugs. He is unaware that this is but a minor version of a far more dangerous spell.



Makron assumed his new name and appointed himself leader of a coven.

Things would have stayed this way, with Makron leading his new friends in stylish but ineffectual demonic rites, had he not encountered a wizened old man in the basement of the Veridian library. Makron easily fell into conversation with the old man, who directed him to one book in particular in the stacks. Makron sneaked the musty tome out of the library and hurried home to read it. Titled *De Natura Daemonum*, it almost caused Makron to give up his practices. Then two more books, including *La Tres Sainte Trinosophie*, appeared on his doorstep. Now Makron feels ready to try some serious magic.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Freeman

Quote: "When the star (looks at book) Aldebaran moves in the sky, then (looks at book) the archlord of the abyss, Wahiuk, will walk between the worlds."

Description: A short, overweight and balding man who may once have been debonair but now looks tacky in his robes and tights. He has a deep voice and can make a strong first impression, but repeated encounters will reveal his lack of depth.

Roleplaying: Rather timid when dealing with other people one on one, Makron changes whenever a group gathers. Then he must be the center of attention, and will force himself on other people's conversations to ensure that he is always involved.

Entourage: Makron has managed to accumulate a few followers who firmly believe in his power. While these people, primarily low-level nobles and guild members, are not especially talented, they are very loyal to him.

Body: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Endurance 4

Mind: Wits 6, Perception 4, Tech 4

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

Natural skills: Charm 7, Dodge 4, Fight 4, Impress 6,

Melee 3, Observe 4, Shoot 3, Sneak 5, Vigor 4

Learned skills: Academia 6, Alchemy 1, Arts (Rhetoric) 3, Bureaucracy 2, Etiquette 2, Inquiry 4, Knavery 5, Lore (Occult) 5, Physick 1, Read Latin 5, Read Urthish 5, Science (Pharmacology) 3, Social (Debate) 1, Social (Oratory) 3, Sleight of Hand 2

Wyrd: 7

Equipment: Tomes of magic and the occult. One of them contains an Antinomy spell: Parting the Primordial Curtain (see sidebar).

Weapons: Ritual dagger

Armor: Synthsilk

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

Misfits (Changed)

Misfits, as many call them, are Changed humans and anima who live in the Slum and the sewers of Drown Town. Most misfits have extreme stigmas that preclude their living in mainstream society. The majority of misfits live in the Slum regions of Gasperah and Harmony. The Sewer Shaman below is an example of a relatively powerful misfit. Most misfits avoid contact with the rest of society. Many are harmless, but occasionally one goes on a deranged killing spree. When this happens the authorities must bring it down like any other dangerous animal.

Sewer Shaman

A former member of the Eskatonic Order, a mystical accident on Manitou maimed him both physically and spiritually. The shaman has severed all his former ties and now lives under the streets of Byzantium Secundus with the Raech-ul (see later in this chapter). He radiates a suppressed aura of power, despite his decrepit state.

Race: Changed Human

Rank/Class: Defrocked priest

Quote: "Away! Away! You are not welcome here!"

Description: Some see the crazed sewer shaman in Harmony's undercity, herding stooped and mysterious sewer creatures. The sewer shaman is a true misfit, badly malformed. He wears long stinking rags that was once a white robe and carries a staff made of bristlereed. He has long grimy white hair and a snarled beard. His most disturbing feature is his right eye, which has two eyeballs in one grossly malformed socket. He wears an eye patch on the rare occasions he goes above ground.

Entourage: Anywhere from one to 50 Raech-ul.

Body: Strength 6, Dexterity 9, Endurance 7

Mind: Wits 6, Perception 9, Tech 4

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

Natural skills: Charm 2, Dodge 6, Fight 5, Impress 6, Melee 4, Observe 10, Shoot 2, Sneak 9, Vigor 6

Learned skills: Academia 7, Alchemy 3, Beast Lore 4, Disguise 4, Drive Watercraft 7, Empathy 8, Lore (Drown Town) 6, Physick 5, Read Latin 6, Read Urthish 6, Speak Latin 5, Stoic Body 4, Streetwise 4, Survival 4, Tracking 5



Blessings/Curses: Keen Ears (+2 Perception with hearing), Keen Eyes (+2 Perception with sight) / Monstrous (-3 Charm unless seeking pity)

Benefices/Afflictions: Protection (Raech-ul), Secrets (Geomantic)/ Fallen from Grace

Occult: Theurgy 7

Rites: Church (Prophet's Holy Blessing, Laying on of Hands, Prophet's Censure, Tongues of Babel), Eskatonic (Celestial Alignment, Divine Revelation, Rend the Veil of Unreason, Second Sight, Osseous Transmutation, All-Seeing Eye, Refinement of Essence)

Stigma: Deformed eye (see above)

Wyrd: 8

Equipment: Fusion lantern, Wyrd tabernacle (bristlereed staff: 10 Wyrd points)

Weapons: Staff

Armor: Prayer beads (allows him to cast a Shield of the Pancreator theurgy rite), torn stiffsynth robe

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

Gillmen

Dr. Finman (see Engineers, above) has committed a major atrocity: He has kidnapped human beings and surgically altered them against their will. The results of these sick experiments are the Gillmen, humans with gills on their throats and increased resistance to undersea pressures. These victims are not the grand trophies of forced evolution Finman believes them to be; they can breathe underwater only in fast moving current (which means they must continually move) and can only survive two hours at a time out of water. More Gillmen have died than have survived. Those who have lived longer than a month wish for death, and plot revenge against their captor.

Race: Changed Human

Rank/Class: Serf

Quote: "Glub."

Description: Gillmen look human in every way except for the large, breathing slits on either side of their necks (gills) and the bluish tinge to their skin.

Roleplaying: If they do not serve their master, they are punished. Thus, they serve their master — for now.

Body: Strength 8 (max 11), Dexterity 7, Endurance 8

Mind: Wits 3, Perception 4, Tech 2

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

Natural skills: Charm 1, Dodge 6, Fight 5, Impress 4, Observe 7, Sneak 7, Vigor 9

Learned skills: Beast Lore (fish) 5, Lore (Drown Town) 3, Survival 3

Curses: Ugly (-2 Charm)

Occult: Changed

Powers: Enhanced Body characteristics, able to breathe underwater, can breath air for only two hours per day

Wyrd: 3

Weapons: Spear

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



Gillman

Creatures

Byzantium Secundus hosts many creatures, some indigenous, some imported from other worlds (many unintentionally). The lowlands are experiencing a troublesome invasion of formerly domesticated — now feral — pets of all kinds: Thrinn Cats, Vrig Bats, Huffa (rabbitlike creatures), Yipyip Birds (annoying parrotlike birds who seem to remember and mimic only the worst gossip they hear from their noble owners), and Queem Sh'an (poisonous snakes from Cadiz). These are most often escapees from a noble or merchant home, abandoned to the floods. Little can be done to curb the population explosions of these creatures. Thankfully, the more dangerous, exotic creatures are rare, usually single pets rather than breeding pairs.

The most famous native animal is the brute, domesticated and spread throughout the Known Worlds in many breeds (see the **Fading Suns** rulebook for details). Brutes are common in the lowlands, as they are the cheapest form of labor available to serfs. An occasional herd of nondomesticated — and thus musk equipped — brutes will wander into a lowland village, causing the evacuation of the populace until they (and the stench) can be driven away.

Many brute dealers and serfs who rely on brute labor worry about the growing population of alien sharprats, vicious swampland predators accidentally imported from Vorox. These pack animals have caused significant damage to brute populations. If their predations go unchecked, brutes will rise in price, making them unavailable to the underclass which needs them the most. Some Vorox from Dregs Town have hired themselves out to help hunt down sharprats, claiming experience in hunting the beasts on their homeworld. It remains to be seen how effective these agents will be.

Sharprats

These predators are mainly scavengers, relying on the kills of larger beasts on their homeworld. Turned loose in the wilds of Byzantium Secundus, where few larger predators exist, they have found easy hunting against the more docile native prey. They are pack hunters, roving in bands through wilderness swamps. They are rarely without good prey supplies, but if they are hungry enough, they will attack humans.

Description: A sharprat is about the size of a greyhound. It is lithe and skinny, with sharp teeth and claws on its front paws. It has a long, slinky tail it uses for balance when leaping on the backs of large prey. Its fur is silky and quick drying, but when wet exudes a telling scent to those animals with strong olfactory senses. For this reason, sharprats are wary of approaching prey downwind until their packbrothers can completely surround the target.

Body: Strength 5, Dexterity 9, Endurance 7

Mind: Wits 3, Perception 8

Natural skills: Dodge 8, Fight 6, Observe 7, Sneak 8

Weapons: Bite (4 DMG), Claws (3 DMG)

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

Sewer Dwellers

Byzantium's Drown Town is full of strange inhabitants, forming an exotic ecosystem both wondrous and dangerous.

Raech-ul

Some believe that the Raech-ul are native to Byzantium Secundus, while others think they are examples of Second Republic genetics gone awry. Still others consider them trolls or demons. Almost every lowland citizen knows that something nasty lives beneath their feet in the sewers of Drown Town. Stories of child snatching trolls are wide spread among the serfs, though few educated people give these stories much credence. The Raech-ul, as the Ur-Ukar call them, are a primitive humanoid race who live in scattered tribal enclaves throughout the planet's underworld. Dreaded by the serfs, the idle rich sometimes hunt them for sport. No one has objected to these hunts because most people consider the Raech-ul to be animals. The hunting nobles have not told anyone about the elaborate cave drawings or evidence of tool use found in Raech-ul caves. Misfits (see above) usually avoid the Raech-ul, but there have been reports of some misfits who try to protect them. Few know what contacts the Ur-Ukar have with them.

Quote: "Chit-chit-chit-chit."

Description: A strange mixture of human and amphibian, the Raech-ul are stooped, sewer dwelling humanoids. They have pale, green-white skin with elaborate darker markings on their backs and faces. They have large, saucer plate eyes ideal for night vision, but they also seem to adapt quickly to the light. Seemingly shy and fright-

ened by humans, they can turn unpredictably vicious. They are stronger and faster than humans and seem completely immune to Psyche Psi powers.

Body: Strength 7, Dexterity 9, Endurance 7

Mind: Wits 2, Perception 7, Tech 1

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

Natural skills: Dodge 8, Fight 6, Observe 7, Sneak 8

Learned skills: Speak Raech-ul 3, Survival 4

Powers: Immune to Psyche Psi powers, camouflage (+3 on hide rolls), night vision (+4 Observe in the dark)

Wyrd: 3

Weapons: Club, sharpened piece of scrap metal

Armor: 1 + 2d natural armor. Some may wield crude but effective 3 + 3d shields made from bristlereed and stretched tranquier hide.

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

Tranquier

The tranquier are ravening predators that inhabit certain regions of the Drown Town sewers. They are lightning fast, strong and stealthy killers. They prey on Raech-ul, most medium sized animals (brutes) and unwary humans. While not sentient, tranquier display a high degree of predatory cunning. Tranquier tend to avoid the well-guarded underground plazas of the highlands and midlands, due to their dryness and because of past debacles against the Imperial Guard. Lowlands and the Slums are

not so lucky, however. Fortunately tranquier are few in number due to their slow gestation period. The Engineers have recently captured some for study.

Description: Tranquier are generally reptilian in outline, closely resembling crocodiles in overall body shape. They have heavily armored scales, but move quickly despite that. They have six long legs which end in long clawed fingers. These fingers are incredibly strong and dexterous; they use these to walk catlike up the sheerest surfaces. Their tails are ridged with razor sharp bony plates, which they use to deadly effect against opponents. Tranquier eyes are yellow or light green with reptilian slits for pupils. Their teeth are clear, but tipped with red. Because of the danger involved in capturing them, their teeth and hides are currently the rage as jewelry among the nobility (tranquier may bring in as much as 250 firebirds each).

Body: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Endurance 7

Mind: Wits 2, Perception 7

Natural skills: Fight 9, Observe 8, Sneak 10

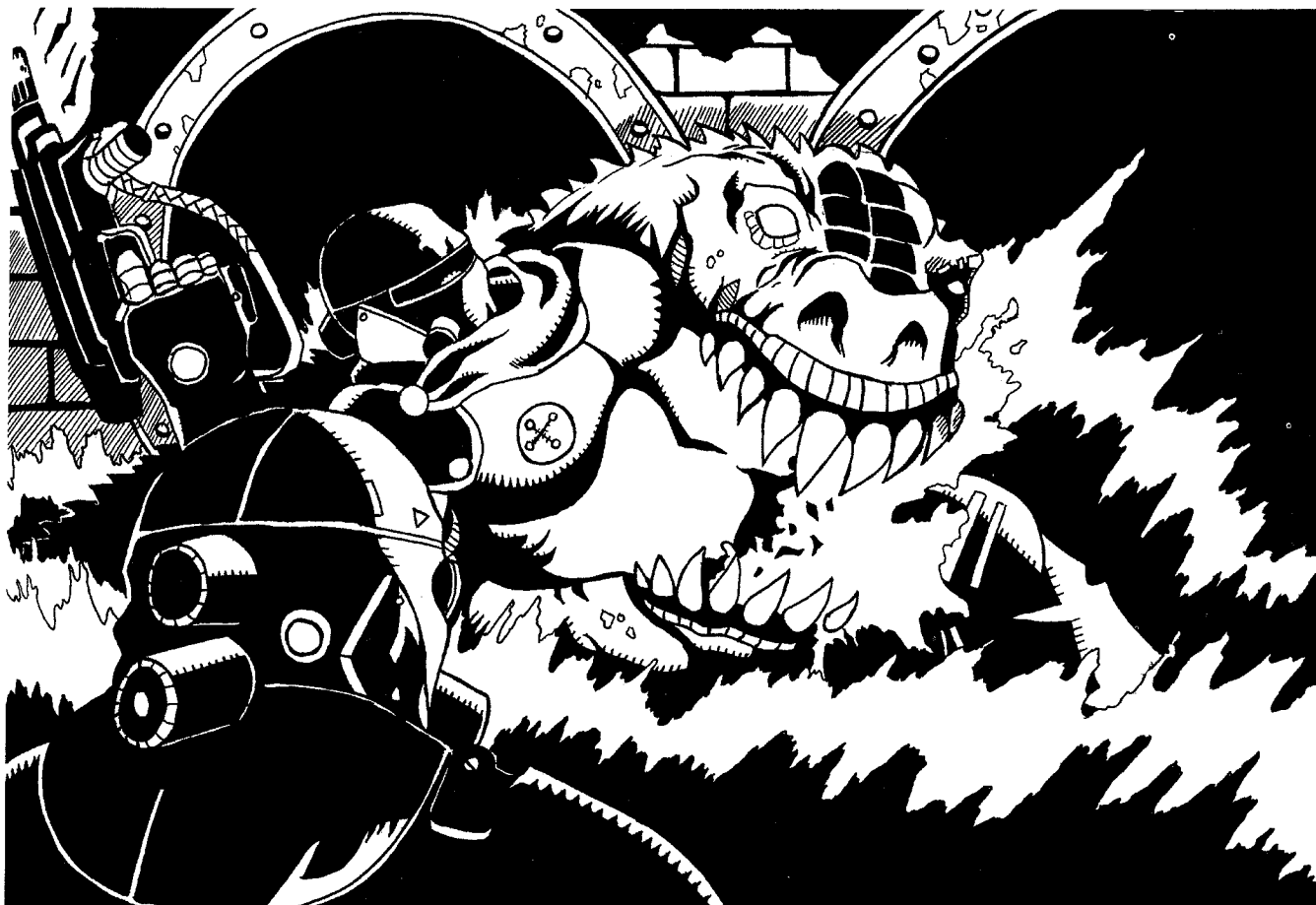
Powers: Natural weaponry, Poison Saliva (Roll Dex + Fight. Spray toxin from snout glands 10 meters in one direction. Victims must roll Calm + Stoic Mind or lapse into an ecstatic coma for one turn per victory point the tranquier scored)

Weapons: Claw (5 DMG), Bite (6 DMG), Tail (5 DMG)

Armor: 4 + 4d natural armor

Vitality: -10/-8/-6/-5/-3/-1/0/0/0/0/0/0





Scrion

Scrions are large batlike creatures with glistening, semi-transparent skin. Their skeletal structures and many of their internal organs are discernible on their head, chest and wings. They are fast, but erratic fliers who live in Drown Town and many natural caves. They feed exclusively on cylofungus and only live in areas where it is plentiful. Their excrement is the only known medium in which cylofungus grows, leaving some biologists with an interesting "chicken or the egg" dilemma. Scrion are highly territorial about their food supply and breeding pods (softly glowing gelatinous sacks). They are a prehistoric species native to the caves of Shaprut. Some migrated to Byzantium Secundus on Shaprutan ore ships during the Diaspora and have inhabited Byzantium Secundus ever since.

Their primary means of defense is their high pitched shrieking, which affects the human nervous system and causes temporary blindness. Most aliens (and tranquier) are immune. The Scrion's shriek has a range of 15 meters. Victims of the shriek may make a Calm + Vigor roll or be blinded for one turn per victory point the scrion scored.

Body: Strength 3, Dexterity 9, Endurance 5

Mind: Wits 1, Perception 8

Natural skills: Dodge 8, Fight 3, Observe 4, Sneak 3

Weapons: Bite (2 DMG)

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



Scrion



Chapter Four: Conspiracies

Conspiracies in the Known Worlds swirl and twist with insane regularity. Like dancers at some grand ball, conspirators come together and separate as their steps move them. Today a Li Halan noble may help you as no one else can; tomorrow she may have you killed. The plots and schemes of Byzantium Secundus are the plots and schemes of active people, not soulless institutions or long-held habits. Most of the people whose actions effect the Known Worlds have a reason for why they act the way they do, and their actions reflect this rationale.

This leads to an amazing array of theories as to just what the many conspiracies are. Some see most of the intrigues as revolving around the Emperor, with his supporters on one side and his enemies on the other. Others see them as a split within the Universal Church, with the various sects fighting for power. Still others see them as the machinations of powerful individuals (psychics, theurgists, princes and the like) using everyone else as pawns. All of these are valid theories, but none of them sums up the whole.

For instance, while Maya Minamoto of the Reeves appears to have aligned herself against the Emperor, she really cares little for him one way or the other. Her primary fear is that the guilds will lose their monopoly over technology, and that her rise to power will thus come to an end. On the other hand, Bishop Yetari, while a major conspirator on the planet, has not aligned herself for or against Alexius, the League or any sect. It all depends on what her Decados masters (and her dark studies) command her to do.

The following chapter lists some of the major groups and their motivations. Some of them have obvious alliances while others' agendas are more hidden. Whatever the case, gamemasters should feel free to change them at the drop of a hat. Nothing is stable in the **Fading Suns**.

Overview

Below is a brief outline of the major conspiracies and forces vying for power on Byzantium Secundus — and thus vying for control over the Known Worlds. Plots hatched by these forces can involve schemes on worlds as far away as Pandemonium or even Vrìl-Ya.

Anti-Alexius Forces

Certain individuals and groups do not approve of the new Emperor and are attempting to bring him down before he can fully ensconce himself on the throne. They rarely operate openly, of course, for to be caught in such an affair is high treason.

Such conspirators include: Perturbed Hawkwoods (angry at Alexius's distancing himself from his family), House Decados, anti-change Reeves (who do not like many of Alexius's proposed reforms), Muster slavers, extremist elements of the Orthodox Church (who would prefer Alexius to be more beholden to the Patriarch), and certain Ur-Ukar (who fear that Alexius risks uniting humanity too well).

Surprisingly Neutral

Some parties are actually more neutral toward the new Emperor than their detractors might assume: Avestites (who don't care who is Emperor as long as he does nothing heretical), the Hazat (who want Imperial aid in their border war against the barbarians, though this will change if they see weakness in Alexius), Scravers (who don't care, for they will make money anyway), Vorox (who think all humans are crazy), Engineers (who just wish to be left alone), and the Patriarch (who hopes to influence Alexius's successor).

Alexius's Best Allies

The Emperor has many on his side as well, some of whom are firmly behind him and ready to fight for his place should it be questioned. These include: the Quest-

ing Knights (many of whom were knighted by Alexius and in whose name they will gain much honor), Brother Battle (thankful for his timely aid on Stigmata), Sanctuary Aeon (who see him as more compassionate than most regents before him), most Hawkwoods (loyal to their own), Eskatonic priests (thankful for the opening of the jumproads), and the Ur-Obun (who see Alexius's friendship with Bran Botan vo Karm as the best chance they have of gaining long-sought freedoms).

Third Republic Architects

There are those who yearn for the grandeur of the Second Republic and seek to create it anew. Most of these see Alexius as the stepping stone for a united humanity, a requirement for a new Republic. They are, for now, throwing their lot in with the Emperor, although always attentive to new opportunities, including pro-change Reeves (who see a new Republic as the best method of carrying forth their ideals of justice and administration), Charitoers (who seek the freedom and unlimited frontiers of old), and House al-Malik (who see much profit as the charismatic leaders of a new Republic).

Secret Enemies

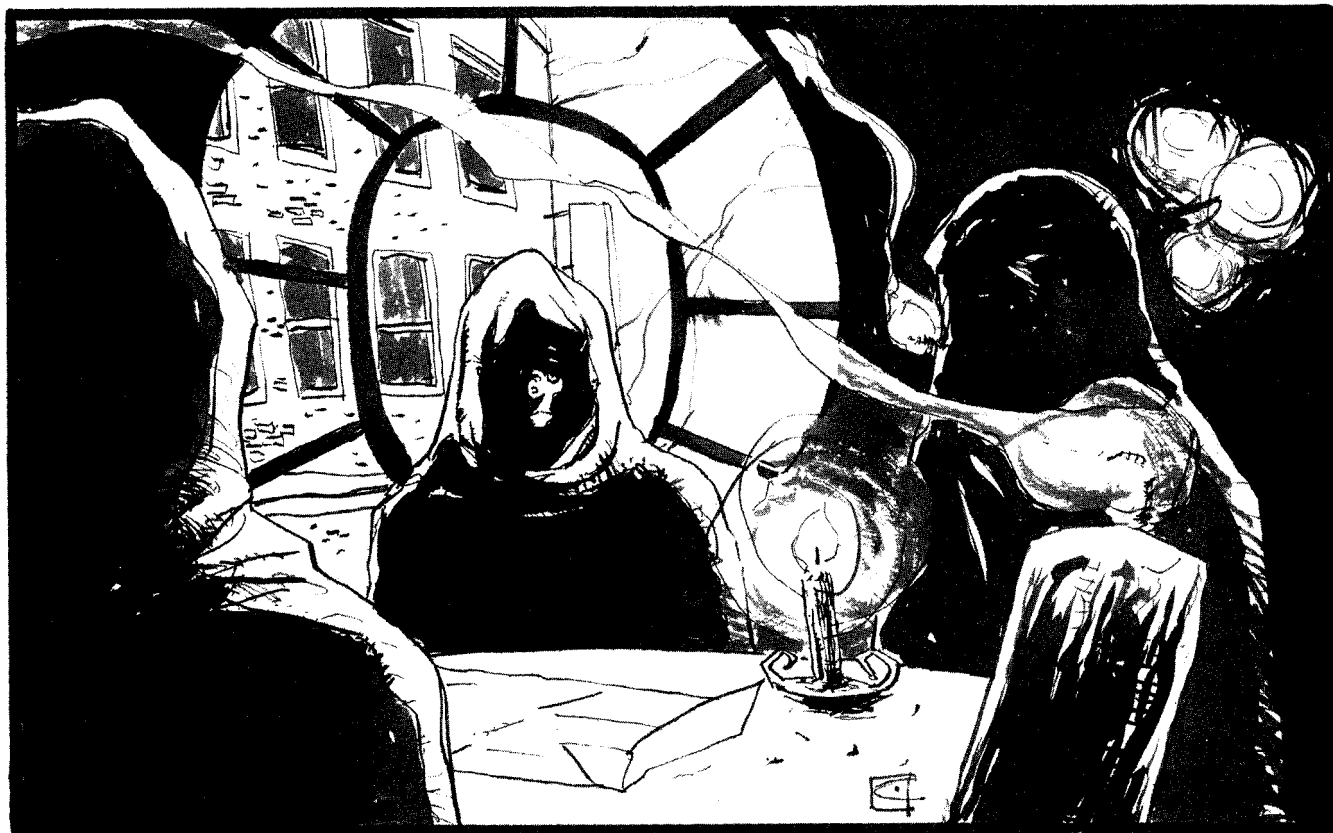
The new Empire of the Known Worlds has its enemies, however, some of whom are unknown and unsuspected by the powers-that-be. These secret enemies include servants of the Ur (mysterious individuals who know more than they should about the Ur and harbor plots inimicable to Human Space), the Invisible Path (psychics who

believe they are superior by right of their powers), FAR (the Frontier for Alien Rights, many of whom are tired of their lower-class status), anti-alien groups (who feel that humans are already too kind to aliens), and Antinomists (who found it easy to operate while the regents were weak, but who fear the increased power of a strong Emperor).

Politics

The political situation on Byzantium Secundus is one of transition. Byzantium has, through most of its history, been a cosmopolitan, interplanetary center of trade and culture. Even during its most isolationist periods during the depths of the Dark Ages, the planet remained involved in interplanetary affairs, having been the seat of regency for centuries. Nevertheless, Byzantium is used to running its own show. While other houses, sects and guilds historically maintained a presence here, the Cametons and the Authority always managed the overall affairs of the planet. Now, with the advent of Byzantium Secundus as the Imperial center, all this has changed. Outside political forces have converged here with lightning speed, diminishing the local power of the Cametons and Authority.

While these outsiders are bringing a level of prosperity to the planet not seen since the Fall, they are also churning the planet's political waters to a dangerous degree. Even those Byzantine natives who have profited the most from this influx may occasionally lament the loss of the planet's sovereign status. Many natives are completely against the changes of the last three years. The



Cametons, the Authority, and other, darker forces feed these fears in the hopes of bringing down the Emperor before he can cement his power.

A shrinking middle class and the rising waters also make Byzantium a prime target for political demagogues. Occasionally, street orators may whip the local populace into a rioting frenzy. These rabblers may start rumors of alien invasions, or turn a local parish against a beloved priest by claiming he is an Antinomist. As the carnage of these riots spreads, the orators who start them often disappear without a trace.

The political situation as described below is not necessarily true of the Empire at large. Local factors, as well as the various power groups' larger political agendas, often forge odd political alliances on Byzantium Secundus.

The Four Estates

There is a great — and often heated — debate as to whether there are three estates of power, or four. The traditional three estates after the Fall were the familiar ones of Church, nobility and Merchant League. The role of regent, while ostensibly that of an Emperor-in-waiting, has historically proven to be little more than a puppet position for one of the three estates. With the appearance of a confirmed Emperor, however, this carefully maintained status quo has fallen into a state of disarray. While technically of the noble class, Emperor Alexius Hawkwood is a major power unto himself. The Emperor has his own agenda which often diverges widely from that of the nobility as a whole.

The Emperor

For now, so soon after the ravages of the Emperor Wars, Alexius holds a level of approval higher than that of any individual house, sect or guild. Many people see him as humanity's savior, and there is an almost religious zeal among many of his supporters. His popularity cuts across lines of class and group affiliation, though obviously some parties support him more than others. On Byzantium Secundus the Emperor enjoys widespread support from House Hawkwood, Brother Battle, House al-Malik, many guildsmen and a large majority of serfs. The Emperor's greatest detractors on the planet are in House Cameton and among traditionalists of all organizations. Many groups are maintaining a studied neutrality between the Emperor and his enemies, and even the Emperor's worst foes are taking advantage of the new and unprecedented economic prosperity to enlarge their coffers.

The Emperor's detractors scream that the Emperor is conducting the biggest land grab in the planet's history. They are right. The Emperor has annexed vast stretches of territory and placed them under Imperial authority. Most guilds and serfs have generally benefited from these acquisitions, and the Emperor has been very careful not to seize any Church territory. The biggest loser has been

House Cameton. The Cametons resisted Alexius's rise to power, and now suffer the ignominy of defeat. The Emperor has parceled out Cameton land to his supporters at the house's expense. The Cametons are ill equipped to deal with the sudden onslaught. They have watched much of their influence on Byzantium Secundus fade almost overnight. Most Byzantine citizens are not particularly fond of the Cametons; many serfs view the Emperor as a much better landlord. Still, the tides of the Empire's political seas are fickle; the tide that lifted Alexius to power may just as easily sink his ship of state.

The Phoenix Court

The Emperor's court is a hotbed of political scandal and intrigue. Here representatives of every power group from throughout the Empire vie for the Emperor's attention. Some of these forces support the Emperor, while others plot his downfall. All this occurs in an air of grandeur not seen since the Second Republic. The Imperial City is pageantry personified, and the political sorties waged here are truly Byzantine in complexity. Every power here has a hidden agenda, and the Emperor's enemies wait for every opportunity to weaken his rule. Here petty counts and bold visionaries battle to decide the fate of an Empire.

The Imperial Guard

Many, but not all, members of the Imperial Guard are knights. The Emperor has rewarded his fighters well for their loyalty, through gifts of land and vassalage. Many areas on Byzantium Secundus (and on other worlds) are direct fiefdoms of Imperial Guard knights. Many soldiers in the Imperial Guard were once mere yeomen, and there is some friction between commoner knights and knights of quality (those from noble families). The Cametons complain that the Emperor hands out knighthoods to commoners too easily, but the truth is that the Emperor's egalitarian actions have led to an unprecedented mixing of the classes. This experiment has met with mixed success.

The Electors

The Electors make up an oligarchic assembly founded by Vladimir in his Great Charter. It is a large and heterogeneous group with widely divergent interests. The Electors are representatives of the main power groups (Church, houses and League), and have little in the way of accountability to the people.

Vladimir created the Scepters, or vote rods, and distributed them to the houses, Church and League. These Second Republic-level artifacts allowed their holders to cast a vote for Vladimir's successor — the next Emperor. Alexius needed 15 Scepters to cement his claim to the throne; he collected 23 of them through alliance or force. Those Electors who willingly allied with Alexius, giving him their Scepters, are called the Advocates, the informal name for those Electors who supported Alexius's rise to power.

The Emperor has rewarded his supporters well, but not always as lavishly as they often believe they deserve. The Emperor has paid most of his allies off with money, keeping himself mostly free of illicit connections. Some allies who proved embarrassing have been cut loose, so the Emperor could govern unhindered by inappropriate alliances. While the Advocates have little official power over the Emperor, he has wisely stayed on their good side. Most of the Advocates are still loyal and well satisfied with their lot.

While the Electors and Advocates are not all positioned on Byzantium Secundus, they occasionally visit to oversee some matter of state or to cement a bargain with Alexius (or his enemies). While some people fear that the Duchess Salandra is somehow manipulating the Emperor, others believe that it is Alexius who is using his relationship with her to influence her Elector allies.

Parry and Riposte: The Nobility

The rank and file nobility are, arguably, the planet's most powerful group. Many see the Emperor's coronation as the culmination of noble influence. They consider the fact that there is a noble sitting on the throne of worlds, not a patriarch or a League Dean, as the ultimate validation of noble power. This triumph has galvanized nobles throughout the Empire, though unfortunately they are still as balkanized along house lines as ever.

Many nobles on Byzantium Secundus seem more haughty and power hungry than anywhere else in the Empire. Some, however, have also developed strong altruistic motives, and a few are even patrician utopians and, it is whispered, secret Republicans.

House Hawkwood

Due to their family connections with the Emperor, the Hawkwoods are riding high. Some complain that they could be riding higher still if the Emperor was not maintaining such a measured distance from them (Alexius officially renounced most of his family duties after his coronation). Still, the Hawkwoods have done extremely well under his rule, and are busy supplanting the Cametons as the planet's premier power. This is especially true of the lower nobility. Hawkwood Knights now make up over twenty percent of the knights on the planet. There are also many Hawkwoods who renounced their titles to serve Alexius in the Imperial Guard (many of these are secretly members of the Reborn Sun sect).

The Hawkwoods have skillfully ingratiated themselves with most of the other groups on the planet, though there are obvious exceptions — most notably the Cametons and many hardliners in the Orthodox Church. The Hawkwoods are also one of the more respected houses among the serfs.



House Decados

The Decados have behaved almost frighteningly well on Byzantium. Most believe they are planning something, but no one knows what. Most of the rumors in this matter swirl and eddy around the Emperor's rumored par amour, Duchess Salandra Decados. Many in House Hawkwood fear that Salandra will attempt to either subvert or assassinate the Emperor if she marries him.

House Decados has gained a territorial toehold on the planet with lands on Harmony. They have nominally allied themselves with the Cametons, but are unfriendly with the local Reeves, Charioteers, and al-Malik. The Ur-Ukar and most other aliens in Harmony despise them (though they do employ alien agents).

The Hazat

The Hazat are the planet's wildcard. They have alliances with nearly everyone, but also seem to stay neutral when the sparks start flying. They always seem to end any incident in a better tactical position than they were in before it began. The Hazat would be a decisive factor in any military conflict, and most groups try to maintain their favor. The newly resurgent Kurga Caliphate has pressed the Hazat increasingly hard in recent years, however. This has made them less of an influence in Byzantine politics than they might be otherwise.

House Li Halan

The Li Halan are observing a strict strategy of neutrality throughout most of Byzantium Secundus. They are careful to offend none. Many people consider the Li Halan, along with the Amaltheans, to be the planet's only honest brokers. As such they are privy to a vast store of privileged information. They are strict about enforcing their guests' rights to confidentiality, but recently a scandal broke out when an unscrupulous Li Halan broke this credo. The renegade has been imprisoned for life on Kish, and the house is rapidly regaining most people's trust.

The house's main point of contention on Byzantium Secundus is on Aldaia. Their old power struggle with House Cameton heated up seriously in recent months when a construction crew found a long-lost Li Halan countess walled up in a Cameton-owned winery. Despite the Li Halans almost inviolate public image, there are some who hint that they are not as benign as they seem.

The al-Malik

Many al-Malik strongly support the Emperor, because they see his destiny as aligned with that of Sister Theafana al-Malik. Although the Lady has studiously distanced herself from her title as part of her Brother Battle vows, the family is still on friendly terms with her. Lady Theafana has been an ambassador between the Hawkwoods, the al-Malik and Brother Battle. The three forces constitute a cohesive triumvirate of political and military power.

The al-Malik have also strongly (though covertly) involved themselves with the administration of Port Authority, keeping strong but secret ties to the Authority guild. The al-Malik have also aligned themselves with some of the more progressive elements in the Church. They are especially wary of House Decados and have agents watching the Duchess Salandra. Some accuse the al-Malik of using their connection to Sister Theafana to shed their reputation as "a house of shopkeepers."

House Cameton

Most Cametons are furious with the Emperor. Once almost sole rulers of the planet, this minor house is now watching its iron grip diminish finger by finger. The Emperor has annexed some Cameton lands. While he has reimbursed the Cametons financially, this has done little to assuage their loss of power and family pride. Many Cametons claim the Emperor deals with them unfairly, and while he has made various overtures to them and afforded them certain rights in perpetuity, the house doubts his word. The Cametons' greatest losses do not come directly from the Emperor, however. Vast legions of ambitious newcomers are arriving to make their fortunes in the Imperial center. Many of these houses, sects and guilds are unwelcome by the planet's original inhabitants, and the Cametons are trying to play on the natives' fears and to inflame tensions against these newcomers. The house especially hates the Hawkwoods and is courting Houses Decados and the Hazat.

The Cametons also have allies among the Authority and more regressive forces in many Church sects. While House Cameton is a traditional minor house that has many legitimate grievances against the heavy hand of the state, some of its members are deeply ashamed of the recent pacts that some house elders are rumored to have made in their quest for re-ascendancy and revenge.

Noble Territories

Virtually the entire planet consists of royal properties. On some planets, a lowly baron may rule over vast tracts or even an entire continent. On Byzantium Secundus, however, things are far more condensed. Here an influential count may rule over only a few small islands. Five or more major dukes may divide an entire continent. Church and guild territories are held by whomever runs the local cathedral or agora. Church and guild lands may be larger or smaller than some noble lands, but their total acreage on the planet is less.

Nobles have actual title to most lands. The Church owns the Holy City, their cathedrals and small independent plots, but the guilds must lease land from nobles, though this can cause conflicts when the nobles want to repossess the land for other purposes. Because of the tumultuous political scene, land is changing hands faster than at any time in Byzantium's past. Serfs may go to bed in a Cameton barony, wake up in a Hazat county and then go back to sleep in a Hawkwood duchy.

There are two types of fiefdoms on Byzantium Secundus: individual house fiefs and Imperial territories. These territories are not overlapping, except in a few rare cases. Instead, the territories abut each other in jigsaw puzzle fashion. There is strong competition for land.

Tenders of the Flock: The Church

The Church views Byzantium Secundus as a key interest; it has expended much of its resources here. While the Church has always been strong on Byzantium, the planet's persistent secular streak remains a constant annoyance. Now that the planet is the seat of a revitalized Empire, the Church has spared no expense in trying to more thoroughly re-evangelize the populace. To this end Archbishop Palamon enforces a strict interpretation of Church dogma, while at the same time creating outreach ministries to "bring more sheep back to the fold." Byzantium Secundus is home to many such proselytizing groups, and a strong fundamentalist backlash is growing. The planet is far too secular for the tastes of many in the Church, though many clergy also defend the choices of the populace. The Emperor is the primary target of the Church's most regressive members. These opponents advocate the Church's complete dominion over the state. Byzantium Secundus is a political pressure-cooker wherein the Church finds itself sharply divided on many issues.

Urth Orthodox

The vast majority of people on the planet belong to the Urth Orthodox sect. The Urth Orthodox priesthood on Byzantium Secundus consists evenly of traditionalist and more reform-minded members. Most see the archbishop as a theological conservative, but many of the bishops at the Veridian University are of a more progressive bent. The sect generally supports the idea of Empire, though some question even this proposition. Support of an Emperor does not mean uniform loyalty to Alexius, however.

The Orthodox sect holds the Holy See on the planet, and a majority position on most lesser councils. The Orthodox Church, while tradition bound, is not a strong proponent of the Inquisition (there are notable exceptions), and Archbishop Palamon has cast strict edicts to curb the power of the Inquisitors while in his see.

Brother Battle

Except for House Hawkwood, the Brother Battle order is the Emperor's closest ally on Byzantium Secundus. Connected to him through Sister Theafana, the sect often acts as the Emperor's strong right arm. Their aid has been invaluable during the Emperor's transition to power, and they have quelled more than one attempt at insurrection during the Emperor Wars against the regent Alexius. Not all Brother Battle knights support the Em-

peror, however. The leader of the Vladimir Monastery sees conspiracies everywhere and Alexius is the focus of more than a few of these.

Eskatonic Order

There are few Eskatonics on Byzantium Secundus. Although the archbishop has some advisors from this order, he has made it clear that these wizards are not particularly welcome on Galatea. This means that most Eskatonic priests are outsiders throughout the planet. Some think the archbishop protests too much, however; he publicly states his distaste for the order, but then treats with them in secret. The order is neutral toward most groups on the planet. Most Eskatonic priests merely wish for solitude to pursue their studies. Only a few of them are politically active; most of these are on Aldaia, where they are co-guardians of the planet's oldest library, the Great Library of Horace. There are also Eskatonic magi investigating the worsening conditions on Tamerlain, and on Ghash studying the recently uncovered gargoyles.

Temple Avesti

Despite their bad reputation, most Byzantine Avestites are fairly restrained when compared with their brethren on other planets. Almost all of them were serfs before taking orders and many have a good deal of sympathy for the peasantry. Some accord the Emperor a certain grudging respect for his efforts to aid the poor. Despite this, it is little secret that most Avestites distrust the Emperor. Archbishop Paloman sees the Avestites as a potentially destabilizing power (as they are on many planets), and keeps them on a short leash. Occasionally they have overstepped their bounds, as when they recently incinerated a well-loved professor at the University of Veridian. Otherwise, however, they are surprisingly neutral toward the Emperor, taking advantage of the new peace afforded by the Emperor to travel freely and proselytize for their sect.

Most Avestites live lives of spartan simplicity, away from the general population. Visiting Avestites from Pyre often bring their own food and sleeping mats with them, so that foreign luxuries will not corrupt them. The Avestites try to gain lay converts from many of the local guard or constabulary to ensure that citizens live up to the appropriate moral standards.

Sanctuary Aeon

Sanctuary Aeon's popularity is as great on Byzantium Secundus as it is on most planets throughout the Empire. Much of its idealistic vision of peace and fellowship has found deep and nourishing root among the planet's populace. Even during the worst of the Dark Age's inquisitorial paroxysms, the Amaltheans helped to keep the accusatory insanity in check. Their star has risen still further under the Emperor, though they do not completely trust him. Despite their influence on Byzantium Secundus, they are few in number. They have been unable to gain



any foothold in the political circles of the throneworld, and so they are mostly apolitical, preferring to teach by example as they minister to the planet's poor. The general population sees the Amaltheans as blessed; they may walk safely through the worst Slum streets. Because of this, the Church often uses them as messengers. The rich also prize Amaltheans as healers, though the priests and priestesses serve them as they do any other, often using the riches of the wealthy to provide funding for poor hospitals.

Besides their ministrations to the poor, many Amaltheans are often strong proponents of alien rights, backing certain alien rights group such as FAR (Frontier for Alien Rights). The Cametons and the Authority have often seen the priests as interfering busybodies, but have sometimes used them as intermediaries to the serfs in near-riot situations.

Other Sects

There are many lesser sects on the planet, some only marginally affiliated with the Church. Hesychasts (mendicant monks) from a thousand ancillary sects throughout the Empire have representatives here. Some are merely pilgrims, while others are mad visionaries following their own vision of the Pancreator. No few of these are heretics. Many come to the planet because of its battered but still standing tradition of religious tolerance. People openly debate matters of great and controversial theological significance in trendy highland cafes, over farm fences or in the lowest Slum bars. Street preachers walk unhindered in many areas, openly questioning the planet's rulers. The Byzantine Church and Empire usually allow these gadflies some degree of freedom, as long as they do not go "too far." Pilgrims and other tourists travel from distant planets to attend the great street oration festivals in Tamerlain.

The Color of Money: The Merchant League and Other Trade Guilds

The League is the most fluid of the three major power groups. It is primarily on Byzantium Secundus to conduct business, and can do this under one regime as well as another. Nevertheless, guilds throughout the Empire have profited as never before during Alexius's reign. Most guildsmen will continue to support Alexius as long as this continues. Some guildsmen, however, chafe under the Emperor's regulations, and worry about some of his reforms, especially those distributing technology to yeomen and serfs.

Some guildsmen on Byzantium are not moved by profits alone; some are proponents of a Third Republic. Many of these believe that the Empire is a step in the right direction and are thus, for now at least, seemingly loyal Imperialists. Most believe that Empire is merely a chain in a ladder to the next great pinnacle in human progress.

Secret Republican guildsmen look to the Second Republic (the last great pinnacle) for inspiration. These guilds are redoubling their efforts to uncover the planet's still vast array of archaeological secrets.

Most of the other power groups distrust these Republicans, forcing them to meet in secret. They have secret languages and passwords. Code words and handsigns are increasingly common, and any Third Republic guildsman recognizes such phrases as "a friend of the family," or "brother or sister traveler." The majority of guildsmen, however, have little interest in such speculative long term investments as a Third Republic. They are satisfied with the status quo and rarely look beyond the next quarter's profit.

Charioteers

Byzantium Secundus has the busiest spaceports in the Empire and the Charioteers have a great deal of influence here. Charioteers, as a group, have not allied themselves strongly with any of the other power factions. They are interested in running a business and will take work from almost any quarter. As a result, they enjoy more autonomy than any other group. However, there are a surprising number of secret Sathraists among their ranks on Byzantium Secundus. The planet was an old haven for members of this persecuted religion, and has remained so for centuries. Many people admire the Charioteers, and see them as dashing. But not all Charioteers live up to this reputation.

Engineers

Members of the Supreme Order of Engineers are not often seen by the populace, but they are as powerful here as on most worlds. They have lucrative contracts in the space and sailing industries, and are vital to the starship repair facilities on Cumulus and Diadem, the two spacestations in the Byzantine system. However, their legitimate contracts can rarely protect them from the Inquisitors when a rogue Engineer is revealed to be inventing forbidden technologies, such as golems or prohibited substances. Byzantine Engineers are generally courteous, if remote. Many work with the Charioteers in the planet's spaceports, though this working coalition rarely translates into anything beyond a pragmatic working relationship. The Supreme Order of Engineers' physickers provide many nobles, wealthy guilders and, to a lesser extent, clergy with longevity drugs. These apothecaries have a good deal of behind-the-scenes political clout.

Scravers

The Scravers have a much seedier reputation on Byzantium Secundus than they do throughout the Empire at large. While they maintain a fashionable facade in the planet's agoras, most have firmly entrenched themselves in the planet's criminal underworld. The Scravers are most powerful in the lowlands and the Slum; even the Decados must pay them their due in Harmony. Crime is

steadily rising on Byzantium Secundus, and the Scravers get their cut. The Scravers run chop-shops for stolen cars, black-markets and drug rings. They are slowly bleeding many people dry. The Scravers also run much of the planet's "poverty industry" (see Serf's Rights, later in this chapter). The authorities have made occasional — usually half-hearted — attempts to curtail these criminal activities, and the Avestites are currently leading the public charge against "Scraver criminality." The Scravers present their most respectable facade on Aldaia, where they recently formed an alliance of convenience with the Charioteers to take over the Aldaian agora. This alliance is fast unraveling, however.

The Muster

The Muster is making money on Byzantium Secundus like never before. Like the Charioteers, the Muster has remained neutral and autonomous. The Chainers oversee the vast bureaucratic and construction needs of the nascent Imperial homeworld. This affords the Muster a considerable degree of political leverage, but it rarely uses it except to protect its interests. Muster deans are strong pragmatists. Slavery is not a popular institution on Byzantium Secundus, and thus most local contracts utilize trained professionals, not slaves. Nonetheless, certain Chainers raid the planet's Slums for slaves, grabbing people who will never be missed by the authorities. This has greatly angered the Authority guild, some of whose lesser members have disappeared, rumored to have been shanghaied by the Chainers. A guild war is brewing and may erupt into violence unless an accord can be forged.

Reeves

Many local Reeves have unabashedly allied themselves with the Hawkwoods, but retain the status of junior partners. They have long been ensconced in the judicial and legislative halls, performing most of the menial tasks necessary to the governance of a throneworld. Indeed, without their diligence, important records such as deeds, titles and contracts would not be properly kept, causing an anarchy of claims between disputing parties, whether it be noble, guild or clergy. In addition, their loans have kept many a decadent noble afloat when their debts got the better of them. While these nobles despise being beholden to a guild for their affluence, they would hate even worse the destitution and the shame it brings. So, they party on, cursing the Reeves and their League ilk publicly, but paying the interest in a timely manner nonetheless.

During the Emperor Wars, the Reeves smartly ingratiated themselves with Alexius with huge, although secret loans, and their position as Byzantium's civil legislators has been assured. In addition, the Reeves control much of Byzantium's entertainment and news media. Most town criers are Reeves. Most people consider them one of the more respectable guilds on Byzantium Secundus, regardless of their unwholesome connections

with the magic lantern industry. The Reeves also own most of the planet's best banking houses.

Town Criers

Freedom of the press is virtually nonexistent on most Imperial worlds, but Byzantium Secundus has a lively tradition of intellectual debate. Most subjects on Byzantium are at least somewhat politically astute. Byzantium's press takes several forms. These include anything from town criers in the street, to newspaper, radio and even magic lantern reports. Only the very rich have magic lantern projectors with which to receive these elite news reports, but a sizable minority in the middle class have radios.

The most common form of information dissemination, however, is from town criers. Even the most destitute Slum towns have a crier, considered to be an honorable position. Unfortunately, such a large system has some corruption. A bureaucratic system of hundreds of "newsrooms" throughout the planet disseminates the information to local, individual criers. However, a word changed here or there can inflame revolts, and for this reason, the loyalty of a crier is carefully monitored by his employers.

The Cametons administered the system until shortly after the Emperor's coronation, at which point the "business" was taken over by the Reeves. While most criers are happy with the recent change of administrations (they all got raises), some are still loyal to the Cametons.

The crier also has the duty to alert the populace in

the event of any civil emergencies (flash floods, brigands or beast attacks). They also have the duty of defending against larger scale problems such as major revolutions and possible alien attacks. Most citizens view the criers in an almost mythological way; many serfs see becoming a crier as a way out of poverty. A town crier is a powerful individual among yeoman. Serfs who are lucky enough to become criers gain their freedom with the position (which is why such promotion is rarely awarded). There is rich folklore surrounding the tradition of the crier stretching back to the institution's beginnings after the Fall.

The criers are also in charge of squelching "false" rumors. Criers are in an ideal situation to hear local and planetary news before almost anyone else, but such a position can be dangerous. Despite their special status, some people may take out their frustrations on "the bearer of bad tidings."

The Authority

Like the Cametons, the Authority's leaders were once almost sole masters of the planet's destiny. Unquestioned rulers of Port Authority, they are still a powerful force throughout most of the planet. The Authority has suffered less at the new Empire's hands than the Cametons. Indeed, it is making more money than ever. But the Authority is used to being the big fish in the pond; while it has not grown smaller, the pond has grown considerably larger, and thus harder to control. The Authority is gen-



erally more cautious than the Cametons; while many Cametons scream for revenge against the forces of Empire, the Authority is taking a much longer view of things.

The Authority is made up of many local guilds, and is really more like a central agency for its member guilds than it is a guild unto itself. The local guilds needed such a central entity to guide their interests through the succession of regents during the Dark Ages, but their position is less clear now that an Emperor has attained the throne — an Emperor more beholden to the interplanetary guilds of the Merchant League than to a conglomerate of local small-time guilds. Thus, the Authority is worried about its future. There is argument among its deans as to their best method of survival. Some want to attach themselves to Alexius, noting his land-grabbing as proof of his willingness to take local issues seriously — after all, if he plans to build power on Byzantium lands, he'll need the skill of the Sailors' Guild and the Water Crafters' Guild, both Authority controlled. But others see the example of the Cametons and seek instead to work against Alexius, hoping that when he is dethroned, his successors will offer the Authority a better deal. Toward this end, many are attempting alliances with House Decados and the Hazat.

There are many subguilds within the Authority, some of which are listed below:

The Water Crafters' Guild

Of the many guilds under the Authority umbrella, the Water Crafters are one of the most important. They administer the nearly endless system of dikes, dams and flood walls on Byzantium Secundus. The power to control who gets flooded and who doesn't makes the Authority lots of friends — and enemies, too. Unfortunately, since it regards it as a business, it does not always properly attend the less-profitable systems in the Slum and other low-land areas. Almost everyone angrily denounced the Authority when one of its dams burst recently, wiping out a children's hospital.

Sometimes called Sewer Rats, Water Crafter guildsmen rarely go anywhere without their protective black and orange rubber suits. They also have underwater breathing apparatuses and water skimmers custom-made to traverse the tight sewer confines of Drown Town. Many sewer rats are prospectors, searching for lost treasures in the planet's Drown Town regions. Earlier prospectors long ago stripped away the more accessible treasures, but the guildsmen keep searching. Some people believe that the Water Crafters deliberately allow some regions to flood so that they can loot the area while battling the deluge.

The Sailors' Guild

The Sailors' Guild is among the wealthiest and most influential on the planet. While the Charioteers facilitate the planet's off-world attractions, most on-world commerce is done by sea. Byzantine ship technology covers a vast array of periods, from the Second Republic through

Colors of the Seven Fleets

Moliach (First Fleet): Moliach sailors wear heavy navy blue uniforms. Their ships are a medium gray with sparse black and white markings.

Gabler (Second Fleet): Gabler uniforms are a light blue with purple insignias. The ships are either light blue or gray with no trim. Gabler ships have tracteries of luminite to repel insects.

Obsidian (Third Fleet): Obsidian crews wear black uniforms with red and silver trim. The ships are also a flat black with shiny black geometrical patterns.

Vistaka (Fourth Fleet): Vistakan sailors wear slate-gray uniforms. The ships are slate-gray with wavy olive-green patterns.

Borachio (Fifth Fleet): Borachio sailors have light gray uniforms with dark gray and gold trim. Their ships are a dark silver with a scuffed pattern.

Naiad (Sixth Fleet): Naiad crews wear white and light gray uniforms with dark gray trim. Sailors from this ocean have a spooky and depleted nature about them. Their ships are a ghostly white trimmed with gold, almost undetectable in the Naiad's eternal mists.

Caspian (Seventh Fleet): Caspian uniforms are black, scarlet and crimson with gold braid trim. Their ships are a dark burnished bronze color. Caspian ships also have luminite tracteries to repel insects.

the present, although Second Republic ships are rare. Byzantium's sailors are among the most skillful in the Empire (sailors from Madoc may be more skilled, but often have lower tech ships). Nearly every native of Byzantium knows his way around a boat.

Surprisingly, even in an era of starships, ocean-going vessels still serve a purpose in the planet's defense. The Seven Fleets (one for each ocean) consist of the Empire's most advanced naval vessels. These ships are bristling with the latest in surface-to-space ordinance. Byzantine ships also carry Tethys-manufactured scramblers to confuse orbiting spaceship's targeting devices, thus forcing them into the planet's atmosphere if they wish to engage the ocean-going vessels. Each of the Seven Fleets has a distinctive appearance, which dictates everything from their uniforms to the military patterns on their ships.

Civilian sailors observe a strict code of honor and decorum, though there are many obvious exceptions to this rule. Sailors of every kind observe a strict protocol of fellowship amongst each other; they are suspicious of most outside forces, especially those unused to the sea. In general, the only politics pursued by the Sailors' Guild involve protecting its business interests.

Courtesans' Guild

Technically illegal in most regions, the Courtesans' Guild nevertheless enjoys a good deal of covert prestige on Byzantium Secundus. While many public figures pi-



ously denounce them as sinners, they also covertly use the guild's services. Courtesans may be either male or female, human, alien or Changed. They serve a wide variety of clients from the Slums to the Imperial Palace. The Courtesans are thus privy to some very useful and potentially embarrassing information, and they are not above using blackmail to protect their position. While the guild as a whole rarely trades in information, individual courtesans may provide a font of useful knowledge if properly approached. The Authority Courtesans are competitors with the Scravers and the Muster in their profession, but they usually take better care of their employees than the Scravers. Courtesans are generally a tight knit community, and are less stratified along lines of class than most other groups (even the high-class courtesans in this guild strive to aid the low-class members, and vice versa).

Other Guilds

- **The Pilgrimage Guides:** These faux clergy guide pilgrims from all over the Known Worlds through Byzantium's holy sites, including the arduous walk through the Holy City to the Maya Cathedral. They charge for this service, of course, but pilgrims gain protection from Byzantium's seedier elements (although no guarantee of protection from the Authority's relic merchants). Most members of this guild are ex-priests or mendicant monks not adverse to earning a few firebirds.

- **Tour Guides:** In addition to serving pilgrims, the

Authority has always rushed to show off its fine planet to the wealthy visitors from the other worlds in the Empire. It offers a variety of tours, from high-class to low-class thrills. It also offers bodyguards to protect its visitors, although this service costs extra.

- **Magic Lantern Palaces:** The Authority owns many of the planet's magic lantern palaces, or moviehouses, although it does not own the production guilds which make these entertainments. Nonetheless, it makes a pretty firebird by offering opulent comfort to those wealthy merchants and knights who visit these mid- and high-land palaces.

Strangers Among Us: Aliens

Despite their third-class status, aliens are often better off on Byzantium Secundus than they are on most planets. The planet's traditional place as the seat of the regency has meant that more aliens come to Byzantium than almost any other planet. Some alien rights organizations, such as FAR, have offices on Byzantium Secundus, although unknown parties have firebombed most of these buildings. There is a growing anti-alien backlash in certain sectors. Phrases like "Byzantium for Byzantines" are increasingly common. A skirmish between human and alien serfs recently broke into a full-scale revolt in Har-

mony. The Cametons placed the area under martial law and are restoring order, but the area is still dangerous for human and alien alike. Even the most enlightened Byzantine citizens often consider aliens rabble.

Ur-Obun

The Ur-Obun have risen the highest in human society and enjoy a special, protected status. Highly skilled as artists and diplomats, their talents are much in demand. Some have grown immensely wealthy and one of their number, Bran Botan vo Karm, is Alexius's Left Hand Counsel. Still, they are only a minor player in the planet's power structure. Most of the aliens on Tamerlain are Ur-Obun and some hold positions of real power there. The Ur-Obun answer to a local council of elders, in turn beholden to the high council on Obun.

Ur-Ukar

The Ur-Ukar are less numerous than their Ur-Obun cousins, but both the general population and the authorities view them with trepidation. Most Ur-Ukar live in the Slum and other lowlands. Economically marginalized, most people consider the Ur-Ukar the lowest of the low. Despite this disdain, most people also fear them. In recent years the Ur-Ukar have begun to make their presence better known. Some are wealthy merchants and have connections in all guilds, especially the Scravers. More respectable institutions rarely trust these merchants, however. The Ur-Ukar are especially strong in Harmony and Gasperah. Much of the human public views them as bogeymen. Occasionally the authorities round them up and incarcerate them with little cause. Human criminals and political opportunists alike often find a convenient scapegoat among the Ur-Ukar.

Some Ur-Ukar are, not surprisingly, open rebels; many of them live in Stygriat. Few in number, these bands strike terror into the hearts of Byzantine subjects everywhere. The rebels have focused on midland targets in an attempt to destabilize the middle class. The Imperial Guard has had only limited success in stopping these attacks.

Vorox

There are very few Vorox on Byzantium Secundus. The few who do live here have an exotic reputation among most humans. Even the most rabid anti-alien ideologues give them a wide berth. They are just as likely to be in the highlands as the lowlands. There are a few Vorox in the Imperial Guard, and some nobles and criminal organizations hire them as bodyguards.

The Middle Class

The Byzantine middle class makes up about 25% percent of the planet's population (higher than in the Empire at large). The middle class are mostly professional craftspeople and traders; many belong to one of the minor, local unaligned guilds. A generally tolerant lot, the ever rising flood waters test their generosity of spirit.

Middle class farmers may work a midlands farm for generations, only to see fertile valleys turned into salty marsh lands overnight. The rains press the middle class as never before, despite recent aid by the Emperor. Unscrupulous politicians, who wish to further destabilize society, exploit these middle class fears. Many among the middle class now greatly resent the working poor. Many people frantically scramble to keep their heads above water, often standing on the backs of their less fortunate fellow citizens.

The middle class covers a wide spectrum of wealth and professions. The largest single employers of middle class subjects are the Reeves and the Muster. These may be bureaucrats, advocates, construction workers or household servants. Most yeomen belong to smaller local guilds, however. There are guilds for farmers, street cleaners and mechanics. There are local guards, teachers, doctors, entertainers, morticians, skimmer salespeople and scribes. The middle class wields a considerable amount of political power due to its size and relative prosperity.

Below the Salt (Serfs)

Although serfs enjoy more legal protections on Byzantium Secundus than on most planets, the planet's authorities only sporadically enforced these laws before Alexius took the throne. Sometimes called "the poor's Emperor," Alexius's aid has still been mostly cosmetic so far. Some bigger projects are underway, but years from completion. Most in the upper classes still see serfs as expendable chattel.

Serfs make up about 70% of the Byzantine population (as opposed to 80% in the Empire at large). Some serfs enjoy a wide array of freedoms and protection, while others are used like the meanest of brutes. Most freemen in Veridian, Old Istanbul and Aldaia generally treat their serfs sternly but fairly. Serfs in Tamerlain have the most freedoms, and are generally free in all things but name. Most serfs in Gasperah and Harmony toil their entire lives with little reward but a barren shack and a desolate, early death. Tarsans are almost exclusively free people; some Tarsan nobles may grant citizenship to escaped serfs who make their way there. Treatment of serfs varies widely in Ghast.

Many of the serfs' social betters underestimate them, and consider them inherently inferior in every way. This sanguine attitude can occasionally prove disastrous when someone in the upper classes pushes the serfs too far. Serfs often have a superior knowledge of their community; many are accustomed to defending their homes against dangerous creatures and marauding bandits. A noble who thinks he can rape a local farm girl or burn down a town hall with impunity may find himself on the business end of a pitchfork. The upper classes fear peasant rebellions for the devastation they cause, though these revolts are usually poorly organized and short lived. While most serfs throughout the Empire live in rural regions, many Byzantine serfs live in urban or semiurban areas. Byzantine

Culture

Byzantium Secundus has long been on the forefront of culture throughout the Known Worlds. What is popular on Byzantium Secundus usually becomes the fashion on surrounding planets in as little as a year. Outlying planets may take a generation or more to pick up on the "latest" in Byzantine fads and fashions. While Byzantium is a major cultural center, it has strong competition from Criticorum, Leagueheim, and several other planets. Byzantine culture from any class tends toward flash and style. Even most serfs attempt to dress as well as their circumstances allow. Despite this emphasis on fashion, prestigious parties are often more about words than packaging. It takes the right clothes to get into a prestigious party, but a keen wit or the right rumor is needed to cement one's place ("Salandra Decados and Alexius? Pshaw!").

Byzantium Secundus is an unusually neat and orderly world, but with a strong casual streak. Most on the planet are pleasure loving and generally open and friendly to strangers (this is less common in Slum areas). Byzantium also accepts more foreign customs, fashions and fads than almost any other planet. Aspects of almost every Imperial world are emulated throughout the planet.

Byzantium's artistic community is one of the largest and most respected in the Empire. The booming planet needs artisans of every kind; the most talented of these command stratospheric fees from their customers. Artisans usually work through either the Muster or one of the local artisans' guilds (sometimes Authority controlled, sometimes independent). Veridian, Old Istanbul and Tamerlain contain the highest numbers of artists. Besides the visual arts, there are also strong theater, dance and musical communities. Many traditionalists consider these artistic communities scandalous, and there are often clashes between these two forces. These encounters may even end in murder, just because someone wore the "wrong" clothes

serfs often possess a degree of political and social sophistication undreamed of by serfs on less developed planets.

Serfs' Rights

Most of the free classes give lip service to the idea that people must accord even the lowest serfs a modicum of human dignity. The Prophet taught that the Pancreator blesses all his children equally. Unfortunately, few in the upper strata really believe this. While the Church does play a major part in ministering to the poor, it also preaches the dogma of the "undeserving poor." Many see poverty as a moral failing: "If they were virtuous, they would not



be poor.” Most in the upper classes view serfs as truly inferior.

Byzantium Secundus is more virtuous toward its serfs than most other planets in some ways, less so in others. Since its colonization during the Diaspora, Byzantium Secundus has always had a strong egalitarian streak. This impulse has survived the tyranny of numerous despots. The fading suns and the eternal floods are testing these impulses to the limit, however. Byzantine serfs, traditionally accorded a good measure of legal rights, are now watching the water rise above their ears.

It is only since the coronation of Emperor Alexius that some of these downward trends have reversed. Many see Alexius as a strong patron of the poor, though his actual actions have earned him mixed reviews from many of the serfs’ advocates. He has reinforced both flood walls and many of the serf’s protections, but has also abandoned them when politically expedient. Nonetheless, Lady Theafana prompts Alexius to aid the poor, and many serfs see her as an almost saintlike figure. The Emperor’s enemies whisper to the middle class that the Emperor wastes precious firebirds on the undeserving. Reactionary forces are rearing their ugly heads and it would seem that the Emperor’s initial popularity is fast coming to an end.

Ultimately, most on the planet still consider serfs de facto chattel. Most regard the idea of fundamental human rights as a dangerous heresy (the idea of alien rights is enough to send more reactionary subjects into howls of rage). Those from higher classes often use the serfs very poorly indeed. Nobles especially may rape, rob or murder peasants with little fear of legal repercussions. While the Emperor is paying legal scholars and sympathetic clergy (many from the Reeves and Sanctuary Aeon) to help revive the traditional system of Byzantine law with protections for all, what small recourse serfs have through the courts is eroding more rapidly than reforms can be decreed.

The Poverty Industry

Despite recent prosperity, a full 35% of the population lives in abject poverty (about one half of all serfs). Over the past few centuries various forces have driven more and more people into serfdom. While much of this is because of the rising waters, human predators also bear a portion of blame for pauperizing the lower class. Scraver and Cameton forces in particular have fed off the poor like parasites. Small, loan-sharking concerns spread like bristlereed throughout the lowlands. These offer easy terms and credit for desperately needed farm items or token luxury items. The Scravens, in particular, charge exorbitant rates and often repossess valuable real estate from free farmers unable to pay back their loans. While most nobles ignore the problem and many in the Church urge the poor to “accept their burdens,” some of the poor are fighting back. Recently, organized bands of serfs have attacked several of the above mentioned interests and then disappeared back into the depths of the Slum. The Scravens

especially wish to stop these insurrections; they have offered large bounties to those who will help “bring these terrorists to justice.”

Islanders

About 15% of the planet’s population lives on small islands. Islanders vary widely in appearance and behavior, depending upon which ocean they live. Islanders who live on the shallow inland seas have closer ties with mainstream society, while those on the seven oceans are more isolated. Most islanders are more primitive and independent than their mainland counterparts. (The Tech Level on many islands does not exceed 4; most are around 2, and a few have reverted to complete barbarism.)

Land-hungry mainlanders often buy islands and relocate low technology islanders so they can put the islands to better use. Pagan religions thrive on many small islands, though most are staunchly Universal Church supporters, although usually from bizarre variant sects. There are even rumors of cannibal tribes on poorly charted Gabler and Caspian islands. Most islands are self-sufficient, drawing bounty from the seas, but almost every island depends to some degree on outside supplies from the mainland.

Dissident Groups

Despite — or because of — its place as seat of the Empire, Byzantium Secundus has a strong counterculture community. Underground artists, Sathraists, Third Republic advocates and Ur-Ukar rebels mix in every level of society. Open dissension is more tolerated here than on most planets, but dissenters must keep a low profile. While these groups are collectively fairly large, they pursue a wide array of goals and, thus, do not constitute an immanent threat to the powers-that-be — or so most believe.

Most of the planet’s gadflies are in Tamerlain, though they are relatively common on all continents except Old Istanbul. There is an extensive list of prohibited books and songs that remain popular nevertheless. Counterculture also extends to the fashion market; many Byzantine styles could get someone arrested on most worlds. The very recent trend in youth clothing is of special concern to many traditionalists. Young people now wear far more flamboyant clothes since the Emperor’s coronation, and many see this as a sign of deteriorating morals.

Revolutionaries

There are a number of hard-core revolutionaries on Byzantium Secundus. Most are armchair revolutionaries, but a few employ more direct methods. Revolutionary tactics range from scholarly polemics to terrorist attacks. Revolutionaries may be Ur-Ukar rebels, Cameton loyalists, or anyone from the numerous other dissatisfied groups. There is currently little danger that these groups could overthrow the Byzantine government, but they may constitute a hard revolutionary inner core if the planet’s political situation worsens. There are revolution-

aries living everywhere on the planet. The greatest numbers of “intellectual revolutionaries” are in Tamerlain, while the rebels in Harmony and Gasperah are the real thing.

Liberation Theologists

Some priests believe they have a duty to free the population from the shackles of tyranny in whatever form it takes. These clergy are just as likely to target Church interests as those of the nobles and the guilds. Most of these Theologists use peaceful means, but a few become revolutionaries. Priests of this bent may be of any sect, but are most common among the Amaltheans and Hesychasts. Liberation Theologists are most common in the poorer areas, and often attempt to recruit members from the poor. Many local authorities disapprove of them and these priests find their Church connections to be little protection against aggrieved local despots. The Holy See also generally frowns on Liberationists and maintains a list of “troublesome clerics.” The Holy City does not always move to protect these priests from their “self-imposed dilemmas” when they cross a local tyrant.

Sathraists

Sathraists are mostly Charioteers, but may be from any background. There are ancient, draconian laws against Sathraism, and those who pursue this philosophy must do so secretly. This religion is little understood by outsid-

ers, most of whom grew up with stories equating Sathraists with devil worshippers. These people inherit an ancient bigotry whose origins have long since been forgotten.

Many Sathraists band together in mutual aid groups, some of which have refuges on Byzantium Secundus, an old home to the religion. Most Byzantine Sathraists are on Veridian or Tamerlain. They are often evangelical in outlook and attempt to share their experiences with others whom they feel they can trust. However, they are aware of both the legal and moral consequences of these actions, and are careful when feeling out potential converts. Few Sathraists will expose an unwilling or unknowing person to the Sathra experience (there are exceptions).

The Imperial Eye recently organized a sting operation in the Veridian spaceport and arrested three Sathraists. Their companions are secretly planning a daring jail break.

Pagans

Pagans are those who have turned their eyes from the holy light of the Pancreator to find their truth in trees and stones. So the Church claims. People have been taught to fear and despise pagans on Byzantium Secundus, just as on most other Imperial worlds. Still, there are more of them than most would expect. Some live secret lives in the cities, pretending obedience to the Universal Church. Others live in the wildest places on the planet, living out their neoprimitive lifestyles. Pagans are especially numer-





The Sathra Effect

For unknown reasons, usually only starship pilots experience the Sathra Effect — the ecstasy which Sathraists call communion. On certain occasions, navigators and other essential ship personnel have received visions, but such instances are extremely rare.

Those characters who are lucky (cursed?) enough to actually pilot a ship with a disabled Sathra damper (an extremely rare ship — and illegal), may suffer one or more of the following effects:

- **Mystical visions:** Those who experience the Effect remember few specifics. They speak of communing with infinity and communication with ancient intelligences, but can say little more. Their experience is no mere drug high, but a profound religious revelation. As with many mystical experiences, the content of the experiences quickly fades, but the pilot is left with a deep feeling of communion with... something. Many try to recreate the experienced by relating it to forms important to them — the sayings of the Prophet, the writings of Emperor Vladimir — in a desperate attempt to grasp the ephemeral mystery they have touched. But most Sathra mystics feel that the deep, wordless questions raised by their experience can only be answered by repeated communion. With each journey, the Sathraist feels he is getting closer to the answers to the unspoken questions his soul asks. It is said that the most experienced Sathra pilots can enlighten masses with but a word, so great is their connection to the infinite. But such people are legendary, and unknown to modern Known Worlders, schooled by the Church to fear Sathraists.

The Sathra Effect is one of the greatest mysteries in the universe; no one knows what it is really about. It ignites fear in the hearts and minds of many, especially the Inquisitors, but to others it is a siren call from beyond.

- **Addiction:** Pilots become addicted to the momentary/infinite ecstasy that accompanies the journey through a jumpgate. A character who has experienced the ecstasy will find it hard to resist a second chance. This then leads to the reckless seeking out of new chances for communion. If a successive chance at the experience is offered, the character will have to make a Calm + Stoic Mind roll to resist taking the offer. Each successive jump inflicts a cumulative -2 modifier onto the roll, until resisting further ecstasy becomes a Herculean task.

- **Awakened psychic powers:** Those who have experienced successive communions may find themselves with new powers. Details should be worked out between the player and gamemaster; more information on this mystery will be revealed in future **Fading Suns** supplements.

ous in Tamerlain, Aldaia and Ghast. Some of these groups are relatively benign, while others are said to practice horrific blood sacrifices.

Antinomists

Warlocks of considerable power have settled on Byzantium Secundus, attracted by both its social aspects and its rumored profusion of ley lines. Antinomists are a solitary and secretive breed. Although people rarely have evidence of their presence, they are the bogeymen of countless folk tales. Indeed, if every peasant story were true, Antinomists would run the planet (some conspiracy theorists, undaunted, claim that they *do*). While most reports of Antinomy turn out to be only unsubstantiated rumors, the Church has little doubt that real demonists are hard at work trying to undermine Church, state and the very fabric of reality.

The most infamous Antinomist in Byzantine history is undoubtedly Amadeus Li Halan, a ruthless duke who lived in Ghast's Vespa region during the early Dark Ages (well before the house's conversion). Stories of his wickedness are still the stuff of popular fiction, and some blame him for Ghast's current desolation. Bishop Odel, a legendary Brother Battle monk, finally destroyed the Antinomist in a fiery cataclysm, but many believe that his dark servitors still haunt the Vespan wastelands.

The Aurorae (The Reborn Sun)

The Reborn Sun sect is either loved or reviled everywhere on Byzantium Secundus. The Aurorae, as they call themselves, are fanatic followers of the Emperor. Most are young and many are in the Imperial Guard. Detractors often paint them as a sinister cult. Aurorae may come from any background, but are mostly young knights and guildsmen born after the beginning of the Emperor Wars. They see Alexius has the first chance for peace in their lifetimes. Some Aurorae believe the Emperor surpasses even the Prophet in importance.

The Church watches this sect very carefully. They are a very new organization, though some claim guiding principles from the first Emperor. Unfortunately, although Alexius is a charismatic leader, he must also pay heed to the political realities of ruling an Empire. This means that many Aurorae must periodically adjust their almost religious beliefs to match the Empire's changing political realities. Many of the sect's critics hope the Aurorae will turn against the Emperor when he inevitably disappoints them.

The Matharites

The Matharites are an ancient psychic coven of murderous fiends. Indigenous to the jungles of Aldaia, the Matharites have since spread to every continent. They have inflicted a wide array of unspeakable atrocities over the centuries. These range from human sacrifices to cruel and elaborate psychic assassinations. The Imperial Eye is having no more luck destroying them than it did with the Cametons or the Authority before them. Fortunately

few in number, the Matharites are nevertheless a potent and fearsome power on Byzantium Secundus. The Imperial Eye believes that the Matharites have secret connections with Antinomists and the Invisible Path, though there is little conclusive evidence of this.

Serf rumors often describe the Matharites as an omnipresent conspiracy with blood-mad cultists hiding behind every bush. The Matharites named themselves after Cylus Mathar, an extremely potent Orthodox Penitent who some believe was one of the conspirators behind Vladimir's assassination. Despite the seeming randomness of their atrocities, the Imperial Eye and other groups fear that the Matharites are working in accordance with a long standing secret plan.

Or so they claim. It is odd that the none of the ring-leaders of this cult have yet been caught, or even seen in public. Some whisper that the cult is a fiction created by the Imperial Eye as an excuse to pry into local affairs. Just mention demon worship and everyone is willing to let a spy into their home to sniff out the perpetrator. Of course, detractors rarely say this out loud, for fear that the Imperial Eye will hear them.

Sybarites

As the waters rise worldwide and the sun fades away, many subjects have adopted an "eat, drink and be merry" philosophy. While hedonists must publicly retain a respectable facade, voluptuary sins of every description occur behind the locked doors of palace, peasant hovel and cathedral alike. The Church often turns a blind eye to such excesses, realizing that people need a way to blow off steam. Others in the Church, however, believe such hedonism angers the Pancreator and is, thus, a prime cause for the fading of the suns. The range of sins practiced by Sybarites behind closed doors is truly impressive. These may include sexual sins with almost every conceivable kind of partner (human/alien dalliances are the most taboo), experimentation with a wide array of narcotic or technical devices, Sathraism and the possession of banned books or films.

Lowlives

Ruffians, criminals and bottom-feeders of every description populate Slum and lowland regions throughout the planet. Most of these are parasites who live off the planet's most vulnerable subjects. They traffic in graft, prostitution, narcotics, extortion, smuggling and freelance assassination. Many belong to the Scravers guild, but many more are freelancers or belong to smaller local guilds. These often find work with ambitious nobles or greedy merchants who require covert services; a thug from the Slum will often gladly perform illegal services quickly and quietly. Some corrupt nobles also find that Slum dwelling lowlives are expendable and rarely missed if they become inconvenient.



Chapter Five: Dramas

Byzantium Secundus is home to some of the most famous epics in human history, from the Sathra exodus during the time of persecution to Vladimir's coronation and assassination. Now a whole new series of dramas are about to take place, with the characters right in the thick of the action. This chapter details some of the possible directions gamemasters can take their dramas, and offers ways to tie together many of the disparate elements of Byzantium Secundus.

Some of the following ideas could provide the basis for entire dramas or even epics. Others are merely events which gamemasters can weave into other dramas. Many of them can be combined to create even more intriguing dramas.

Story Seeds

The following are plots and incidents with which the characters can interact to create dramas. Some appear minor while others can impact the entire Empire, but these provide only a beginning. Gamemasters will need to put some work into these to make them full-scale dramas, but the basics are here.

In Quest of a Drink

The noise level in the tavern is less than that of a dreadnought during take off, but just barely. Most of the bedlam seems centered around a table of young nobles, carousing as though there were no tomorrow. Since the characters rouse the nobles' curiosity (how could they not?), they will have no way to avoid a confrontation. If the characters have the gall to leave, the nobles will follow them out, harassing them all the way.

The nobles are a group of Questing Knights, led by Baron Eviathan Hawkwood. They will initially be friendly, but anything which can be interpreted as an insult will be, and the knights will react. If the offending character is a noble, then one of the Knights (probably Eviathan) challenges her to a duel. If the character is anything else, the Knights will try to beat or humiliate her (pouring

drinks on her head, hanging her from a flagpole, dumping her in a barrel of bad wine, rolling her in flour, etc.), though they will stop short of killing anyone. Should the characters prove themselves by giving almost as good as they get, the knights will be impressed, giving the characters an in with the Questing Knights. If the characters act badly, or (worse) outdo the Knights, then they may have made serious enemies.

Not Kidding

Stukeneneer, the imperial jester, has never had a problem staying in the know. Now, however, his family back on Bannockburn has disappeared, and Stuky has no idea who is responsible. Recently messages have begun appearing in his chambers instructing him to await further orders. His own spying abilities have led him to believe that one of the imperial maids put it there, but he is afraid that if he, or any imperial official, looks into the matter, the kidnappers will kill his family. Nothing is more important in Gannok society than the family.

So Stuky has sought the help of talented outsiders. He needs the characters to follow that maid and find out who she reports to. Only after a good bit of skullduggery, working their way up the chain of connections (most of whom appear to be black marketers), will the characters finally follow someone who has ties to the Vau. Apparently, the Vau Hegemony is behind the abduction of Stuky's family.

Below Water

A Li Halan child has disappeared, and his distraught parents have offered a substantial reward for his return. The characters catch sight of the boy in Drown Town, where he dives into an isolated pool to avoid them. No matter how long the characters wait, the boy does not resurface. Underwater investigations reveal a passage to a nearby river, but it would take almost 20 minutes of submerged swimming. Managing to follow the boy will lead the characters to a small community of gilled people, all escapees from the lab of Dr. Finman.

Accusations

In an abandoned church (which makes a good refuge for travelers), the characters come across an old manuscript titled "The Emperor and the Patriarch", which purports to detail the Universal Church's role in the assassination of Emperor Vladimir. Filled with hearsay and innuendo, the pamphlet really does nothing of the sort, but characters need to be careful who they show it to. Such accusations rocked the Church following Vladimir's death, and a small group of priests is still devoted to quashing such rumors. This group also has strong ties to the Inquisition. Freeman Jones left the pamphlet, hoping to see what sort of reaction it would cause.

Lover's Jumpgate

While walking through one of Byzantium Secundus' regent's parks, built by some long-forgotten regent as a monument to her imagined glory, the characters overhear two lovers making plans to leave the planet. One of them is a Li Halan, heir to a duchy. The other is an Ur-Obun diplomat. While the two are devoted to each other, their parents would never approve. They have no allies — without the characters' help, they will never have a chance to get off planet. On the other hand, the characters could turn them over to their parents and expect some reward.

Ur Plots

In the public markets, the characters find a number

of ancient Ur-Ukar religious items for sale, cheap. After they purchase the items, a striking Ur-Ukar lady runs up to the stall. She offers the characters some money for the items, but not nearly as much as they could make auctioning them off to collectors. The woman, however, is Hasaline akir Vetenant (from the **Fading Suns** rulebook), and she will not be denied. The items were stolen from an Ur-Ukar temple centuries ago, and have only just reappeared. Hasaline will appeal to the characters' sympathy, greed, vanities or whatever. If need be, she may well contact some of the Ur-Ukar terrorists she knows. On the other hand, if the characters sell them to her cheap, she will strike up a conversation with them and begin trying to use them in her plans to split humanity.

Lost in the Dark

A lady of the court has become infatuated with one of the characters. She sends small trinkets as tokens of her love and finally invites all the characters to a party, "where only the best people will be." In fact, most of the party's guests are low-level nobles and merchants, sipping the most trendy wines and doing small amounts of the most trendy drugs. When the host appears, they will applaud him and praise his party before he starts to mingle. When the host reaches the characters, he will gaze as deeply as he can into their eyes and then ask, "Do you think you can handle the Dark?" This is Makron, hoping to recruit more followers to fund his lifestyle.



Room Service

The characters come home to find their rooms vandalized and every last object overturned. Neighbors will deny having seen or heard anything, but finally someone will say, “Pancreator damn it, when you have problems with the Scravers, don’t bring them here.” In fact, Tahira has leaked to the Scravers that the characters work for her — regardless of whether or not they actually do — and that they have a list of secret Scraver agents in their possession.

Unwarranted Search and Seizure

Cameton police stop and detain one of the characters, searching him and interrogating him about various crimes committed around Galatea. When the character is finally released (or escapes), a stunted man in a black cloak will approach him from an alley. This is Sir Chamon Mazarin, and he will try to recruit the characters to help him in operations against House Cameton. Of course, he won’t tell the characters that it was he who put them in hot water with the house to begin with.

The Background Epic

Many players like to see what kind of impact their characters can have on the game universe in which they play. This is especially true when the game takes place somewhere like Byzantium Secundus, and every character has a chance to affect the rest of humanity. One way the gamemaster can facilitate this is with a background epic, where the characters’ actions take part against a bigger backdrop.

Two different examples follow. In one, the background story (Imperial Affairs) creates situations for the characters to take part. The characters’ actions will not change the background story that much, though it could cause them to repeatedly risk their lives. Over the course of their investigation, the characters will learn their way around the various intrigues of the place. In the second (A New Sect), the characters’ actions may well decide the future of Byzantium Secundus.

While the following descriptions include a number of important events, gamemasters can ignore them or make up their own. Additionally, gamemasters can even weave in unrelated dramas to add more diversity to the epic. At the same time characters are involved in trying to stop riots in the slums, they might have to deal with a noble who is harassing them and looking for a duel.

Imperial Affairs

Most people with any access to the gossip making its way through the noble courts of the Known Worlds recognize that Emperor Alexius and Sister Theafana al-Malik are more than just friends. The two first met several decades ago when they were teenagers, battling Symbiots on Stigmata. According to the bards, romance blossomed immediately, and the two planned an elaborate marriage.



When word got out that the head of House Hawkwood and an heir to Prince al-Malik were thinking of uniting, the other houses went mad. Faced with unified opposition from Decados, Li Halan, Hazat and minor house nobles, Alexius and Theafana found it politically expedient to break off their engagement.

After Alexius became Emperor, a number of prominent al-Malik and Hawkwoods expected the two to renew their betrothal, because the romance certainly had not disappeared. Alexius has spent the last several years solidifying his position, however, and Theafana has been busy with her own activities, not least of which are constant battles against the Symbiots.

Now a new threat to their relationship appears on the horizon. The infamous Salandra Decados has presented herself at the Emperor's court, ostensibly for the purpose of smoothing over Decados-Imperial relations. She and the Emperor have held a number of high-level meetings, and no one knows just what they have discussed in private. Now the following events occur:

- Alexius and Salandra seek out someone to relay highly confidential messages between them. They have agreed that whoever it is needs to be someone from outside of their own entourages, trustworthy, and able to overcome anyone who might try to interfere. Do the characters fit the bill?

- Master Panard of the Temple of Vladimir sees the Emperor's apparent rejection of Theafana as a direct attack

on him. He will recruit agents to try to find out what is going on and possibly sabotage the budding romance.

- A number of Decados on the planet find the relationship between Salandra and Alexius extremely promising. They will hire people to spread praise of Salandra and perhaps undermine Theafana's influence.

- The Imperial Eye desperately wants to know what is going on, but is afraid that between Salandra and the Emperor, it has no unknown agents. Thus it will seek out qualified people to spy on them and perhaps try to intercept their messages.

- A number of al-Malik fear that this new relationship will lessen their house's influence. They hire people to disrupt it any way possible.

- Consul Percival Lystrom is nervous. Duchess Salandra represents everything he opposes, and he wants to ensure that she will not change Alexius's more progressive policies. Percival will bring in people to make sure his policies (including better treatment of serfs and aliens) are not threatened.

- Some of the less combat-inclined men and women of the court have begun seeking out Questing Knights as their personal champions. Salandra has decided to find one to protect her interests whenever she is away. She will seek out the most fearsome warrior she can find, and then arm him to the teeth.

- If the character's are continuing the "Precious Cargo" adventure from the **Fading Suns** rulebook, then this ro-



mance is the reason Alexius does not intervene. At this point he wishes to avoid upsetting the Decados.

The Letter and the Disk

Two communiqués of import suddenly surface (at least one of which is probably found by the characters). One is a computer disk which allegedly shows Theafana in a passionate embrace with Sir Oscar Trusnikron, a Questing Knight who joined her on her crusade against the Symbiots. The other is a letter from Emperor Alexius to Salandra Decados, which seems to both confirm and deny any romantic involvement. It reads:

"You ask how I knew of your deception in trying to seduce me. All I can say is that some things cannot be duplicated. Some things, for good or evil, are unique. Yours in passion, Alexius."

The Relationship

Several months ago, on a night when Alexius thought Theafana was battling a Symbiot infestation on Shaprut, she came to him in his bed chambers. The passion of the night was undeniable, but when it was over, Alexius whispered, "Good night Salandra." The statement made her sit straight up in the Imperial bed, because after the months of carefully studying Theafana and working with the Known World's best cosmetic surgeons, Salandra believed herself the exact duplicate of her rival.

The fact that she could not hide her deception from Alexius has neither stopped their romance or dimmed their ardor. Many nights since have been spent together, though Salandra has taken care to look quite different each time. Part of Salandra's original scheme was to become pregnant by the Emperor, thus becoming the mother of his heir. Despite their regular trysts (and Salandra's ingestion of hyperfertility drugs), however, no child has been conceived.

What has developed instead is an odd confidence between Salandra and Alexius. The two have found a great deal of common ground, and actually appear to enjoy each other's company. No matter what the result of the letter and the disk, their relationship will continue, each willing to forgive the other — much to the consternation of all court watchers.

The Disk

The disk begins its trip around Byzantium Secundus at Cumulus station and makes its way to the palace. Decados agents and Salandra's new champion at court should be involved in bringing it there. Master Panard, the Emperor worshippers and the al-Malik each have a definite interest in keeping it from getting to the palace. Consul Lystrom and the Imperial Eye both want to take a look at it before anyone else does.

If the gamemaster so desires, then at least one Inquisitor, agents of House Hawkwood, Scraver information brokers, House Cameton police, the Authority, Questing Knight allies of Sir Oscar, Symbiot infiltrators and even

Ur-Ukar terrorists might go after the disk. It will take a roundabout route from Cumulus station as it changes hands again and again.

By the time it finally reaches the court and Alexius turns it over for verification, the Engineers who look at it say that the disk has been too flagrantly altered for them to confirm or deny its authenticity. While this would seem to confirm claims by Sir Oscar's supporters that he would not have an affair with Theafana, many questions still remain.

The Letter

The letter begins in the hands of whomever Alexius and Salandra have recruited to carry their correspondence. How it leaves their hands is up to the gamemaster and the characters (especially if the characters are the envoys in question), but leave their hands it will. Many of the same forces going after the disk will seek out the letter, but with one major difference. While those going after the disk are usually hardened agents, the ones tracking the letters will be courtiers and high-level officials. While the disk travels from Cumulus to the Emperor, the letter will stay within the palace.

While battles for the disk should involve treachery, blasters and armored troops, fights over the letter will involve influence, sweet words and (maybe) a duel or two. Everyone at the court is trying to curry favor with someone who really wants the letter, so every courtier the characters might encounter will want it. Characters may well become involved in tracking down both items, but should be careful not to use the wrong tactics at the wrong time.

The Ball

Barring unforeseen difficulties, the gamemaster can have the disk and the letter both reach the Emperor at a grand ball he is throwing in honor of Duchess Salandra. Every noble on the planet will have fought for invitations to this ball, as will many of the planet's leading Church and League members. The characters should be able to wheedle invitations one way or another, especially if they have been actively involved in seeking out either the disk or the letter.

The ball itself will be packed from eight p.m. on, with no one wanting to miss a moment's action. It takes place primarily in the palace's immense grand ball room. Courtiers, all dressed in their most colorful finery, line the marble stairways.

Rumors at the ball will fly at light speed, because nobody knows who has what. Numerous letters and disks have popped up, only to be exposed as fraudulent. When the real ones finally make their appearance at court, probably in the hands of Decados allies (like House Van Gelder) in the case of the disk or al-Malik allies (like a Brother Battle) in the case of the letter, Emperor Alexius will dismiss them contemptuously.

Apparently the Emperor could care less about either. Rumors that Salandra has him under psychic control not-



withstanding, he has been responsible for most of this. He purposely had the letter made public (aided by Sir Chamom Mazarin) and closely followed the hysteria surrounding the disk in order to determine who was on who's side. Part of the reason he has stayed close to Salandra is so that he can keep an eye on her, feeling that he would prefer to know what devilry she is up to than have her scheming far from his sight.

Two problems accompany this strategy. First of all, Alexius risks becoming overconfident in taking this viper to his bosom. As she stays close to him, there is no way to keep her from learning certain secrets. The second problem comes in the form of their relationship itself. When it began, Alexius felt sure that he would stay detached from it. Instead, he has found himself truly enjoying Salandra's company, and becoming closer and closer to her. He has no idea that Salandra is going through much the same turmoil.

Gamemasters who want to be especially melodramatic can have Sister Theafana make an unexpected appearance at the ball at midnight, but this background epic is really designed to give characters a feel for the court. Little will be resolved here. Instead, more questions will be raised and few concerns alleviated.

A New Sect

The most popular religious figure on Byzantium Secundus isn't a bishop or even the archbishop. Instead it is a lowly priest, Padre Jorge Medardo, whose work in the slums has made him a saint to thousands of the planet's poor, though no nobles even know he exists. Recently he has lost interest in his ministry, however, and spends much of his time in quiet contemplation. One of his constant companions, a novitiate named Saduj Seliman, has noticed his popularity and begun to envy it. He has also noticed Padre Jorge's growing indifference to his followers and looks to take advantage of it.

This background story begins with Saduj getting permission from Padre Jorge to try to raise additional money from the flock. Saduj does this by spreading the word that Padre Jorge has had visions of demons infesting Byzantium Secundus. His followers must rally together to protect themselves. The trouble is, Saduj lays it on pretty thick. Within hours, hordes of frightened slum dwellers are rampaging through the streets, going after anyone who looks the least bit strange. This is an easy way for the characters to get involved; there are probably very few people stranger looking than them.

The riots cause a substantial amount of damage to the slums and in the neighboring Dregs Towns. No one of any influence would have cared about this, except that the rioters also spread out to some of the more affluent sections of town before Cameton security could disperse them. The Authority expressed grave indignation, especially since the rioters torched a number of its warehouses.

Saduj now fully comprehends just how much power

Jorge wields and decides to secure it for himself. What follow are a number of the events which occur as he makes his move to greater powers. Characters should get involved early to try to stop Saduj's rise to power before it is too late. Just remember that, should he get too powerful, everyone will suffer.

- The Scravers make a deal with Saduj. They have been trying to supplant the Authority as the main guild on the planet and will take any advantage. Saduj adds anti-Authority diatribes to his harangues and directs rioters to more of its businesses. In exchange, the Scravers give him money to spread his message. They also send guards to keep an eye on Padre Jorge, ostensibly for his protection but really to ensure that he does not get out among the faithful. If Padre Jorge saw what was going on, it might force him to act.

- The Authority sends its agents and hires others to infiltrate the slums, trying to find out who was responsible for the riots.

- Several inquisitors, lead by Sister Scarleta, make their way into the slums to determine the truth of the many rumors about demons. As part of the investigation, Sister Scarleta seeks out Padre Jorge, but cannot find him. She will enlist other people to help find him while she looks for demons.

- Pranksters, going by the name the Mercurians, start faking demon attacks and sightings. This helps raise tension in the slums to all new heights.

- Since property belonging to both House Cameton and the Empire have suffered damage, each blames the other for the troubles. Members of both groups will look for any opportunity for revenge, and clashes between Imperial soldiers and Cameton police become more common.

- A new sect begins to form as concerned worshippers stop attending Orthodox churches and seek out Saduj. If he stays in power, this sect will grow more and more militant, seeing demons in every shadow and evil in every heart. It will grow more and more anti-Imperial, anti-noble, anti-guild and anti-alien until it is too big to stamp out. Imperial bureaucrats will begin joining and quitting their old posts en masse. No Imperial officials will realize what is going on before all Byzantium Secundus faces catastrophe. At that point, who knows how the Emperor, the Church and the League will react.

- Saduj himself will become more powerful, drawing to him some of the worst elements of the slums. His bodyguards get bigger and meaner as he becomes more powerful, he branches out into numerous criminal activities, and begins researching the demons he has been haranguing about. Even if Padre Jorge publicly rejects him, he will keep a core group with him, and can become a threat again in the future, perhaps on another planet.

More Precious Cargo

Gamemasters who took their players through the "Precious Cargo" drama from the **Fading Suns** rulebook can easily continue their epic on Byzantium Secundus. The capital of the empire is the natural destination for the heir to House Chauki, and Andros Chauki will press the characters to take him there if they do not think of it themselves. His main goal is to have his house recognized as sole owner of Iver, and then negotiate deals with the other houses and the guilds. To this end he needs talented people who can guide him through the intricacies of imperial politics, protect him from attack and champion his cause. Lacking them, he will settle for the characters.

Andros' Enemies

Of course, the Hazat fear that his very existence may invalidate their claims to nobility. After all, if a single one of the original Chaukis still exists, then that noble would have a legitimate claim to all of the Hazats' holdings. This possibility intrigues Duke Andros, but he knows his house has no way to seize Hazat property — it does not even have a jump-capable spaceship or the ability to make one. Andros might be willing to trade any claim to Hazat possession in exchange for their support of Chauki control of Iver. Of course, scholars from a number of different factions are currently researching the Chauki ancestry both on Iver and in the Great Library of Horace. Others may well be creating new documents. Of course, should the Hazat disprove the Chauki claim, then they would be in line to seize Iver. After all, they have everything else the authentic Chaukis used to.

A more intractable enemy, however, is House Decados. The Decados want Iver, and have already begun sending their agents down to the planet. They had initially planned to "convince" Andros to swear fealty to them, and release him after they finished poisoning his father. In freeing Andros, the characters have destroyed these plans and created a schism within House Decados. Some, lead by Count Sharn of Pandemonium, want to use force to make their claim on Iver, while others want to cut a deal with the Chaukis, requiring only a minor levy of money and soldiers. This would allow Decados agents to slowly expand the house's influence on the planet, a scheme which has worked well on Cadavus but has taken decades to bring to fruition.

The Church may become either a friend or a foe, depending on how the situation is handled. Iver's main sect is called the Church Incarnate (Incarnates), similar in many ways to a small sect which also exists in the Empire. It is not an especially strong sect, however, and others might want to set up shop. The main problem is that religious leaders on Iver have not pledged fealty to the Patriarch, and this has caused no end of consternation. Andros will be friendly to Church officials, but he does not understand their complaints. Someone will have to shepherd

him through this minefield before Inquisitors get involved.

Another possible problem is the role of aliens on Iver. While they make up less than 10 % of the people who live there, they have been almost fully integrated into society. Many humans in the Known Worlds find this concept extremely discomforting and a violation of the natural order. This is an issue which might well make otherwise neutral parties favor a Decados takeover.

Andros' Allies

He doesn't have any. When he first arrives on Byzantium Secundus, the characters are the only people he knows he can count on. His best bet is to try to ally with the Emperor, who might be the only person able to counter his many enemies. Alexius may be sympathetic to the Chauki's plight and approve of their treatment of non-human races, but he will not risk upsetting so many other powerful factions without some serious gain. His main inclination may well be to have the Hazat and the Chauki ally so House Decados does not get another planet under its control.

The Imperial Eye might just give him other reason to get involved. The Eye's main agent on Pandemonium, Graaf, has a stranglehold on the planet's criminal economy. Part of the reason he has such a strong grasp on the underworld is his membership in the Sons of Iver, a secret society composed of the descendants of Iver natives left on Pandemonium when Iver sealed itself off from the rest of humanity. Once charged with maintaining Iver's isolation, the Sons have been re-evaluating their ties to a planet they once believed to be something out of myth and legend, a place of spiritual power. Graaf could help the Chaukis, or he may find it in his best interests to help Iver's anti-royalists.

House Chauki has one further bargaining chip whose value it does not fully realize. While Iver has lost much of the technology necessary for the operation of its ancient artifacts, its people have preserved these items with loving care. In addition, a number of Second Republic military sites have remained undisturbed on the planet due to their inaccessibility and ancient defenses. Whoever salvaged these locations could uncover a treasure trove.

What the Characters Can Do

The most obvious dramas that characters can become involved with revolve around protecting the Chaukis from danger as they travel around Byzantium Secundus. The Hazat will no doubt continue to assail Chauki and his entourage, the Decados have their spies coming after him, the Church is watching him, the Imperial Eye has its surveillance experts following him, and if he doesn't stop buying everything with diamonds and emeralds, every thief on the planet will be in his quarters.

Their most important duties, however, may well turn out to be assisting Andros in gaining recognition. Chauki

has little idea who is who, and while he is fine at high-level negotiations, needs the information and advice the characters can provide. The characters will have to throw themselves into Imperial intrigue, however, watching for whatever threats and opportunities come their way. Their lives may well fill with duels, clandestine meetings, ominous figures and secret agendas. Each faction has people who would be willing to work with the characters and even more who will work against them.

Other questions may also come to the fore. An anti-royalist faction has been gaining strength on Iver. Who is behind them, and will their radical philosophy spread off-planet? Now that the jump route to the Iver sun has reopened, what other planets might lie beyond it? Questing Knights may well flock to Iver for adventure, and what kinds of disruption will their presence cause? And just why did the Vau provide coordinates to Pandemonium in the first place?

Fool's Errand

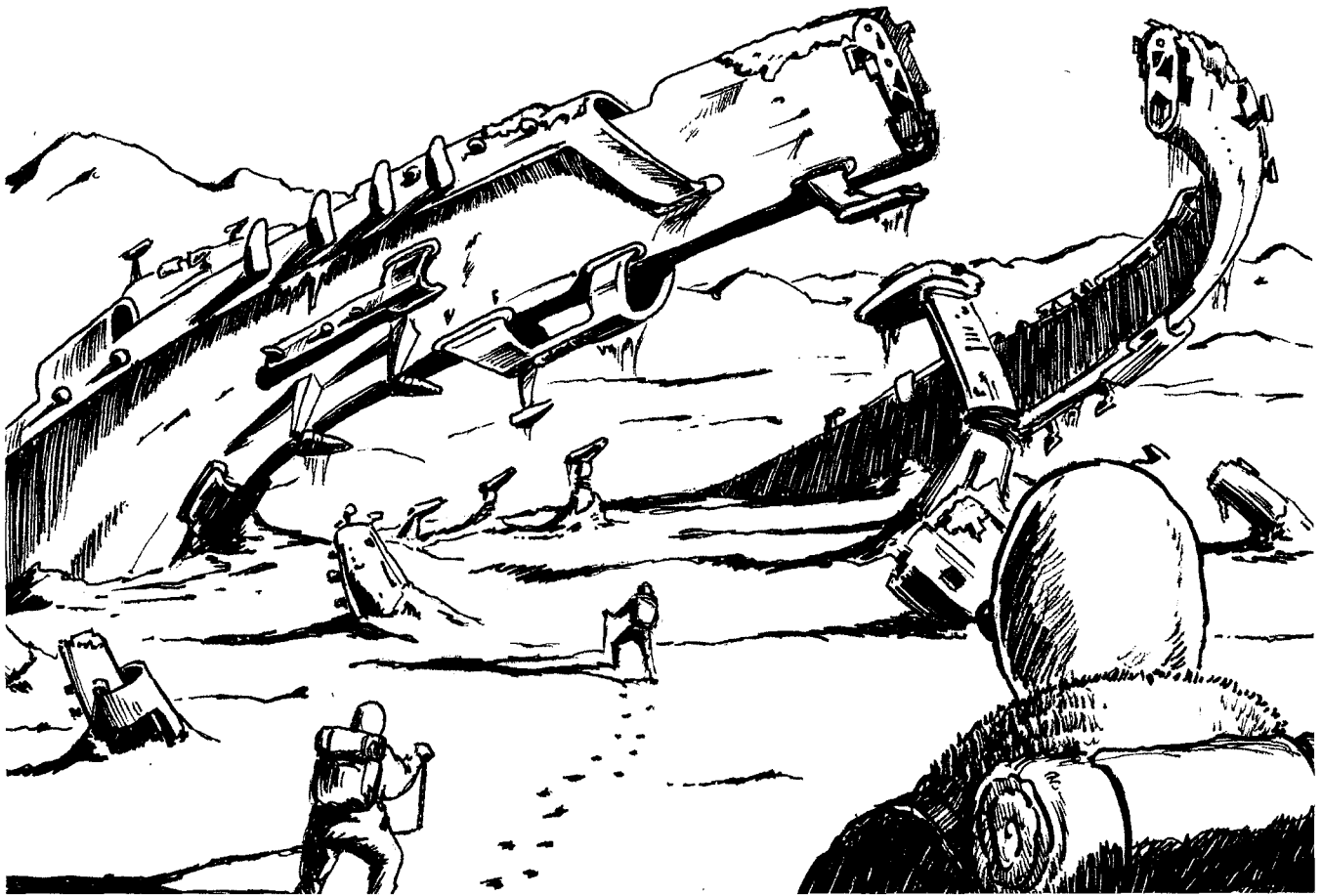
One of the great mysteries always good for a round of gossip at the Imperial Court is the nature of the Vau Embassy on Tarsus. Only Alexius and an elite unit of the Imperial Guard have ever visited the isolated structure, and they do not speak of it. Whether this is out of nervous fear or mere diplomatic discretion is a matter of much conjecture among the petty nobility. Certain nobles have bribed the surveillance crew on Diadem, the Imperial spacestation orbiting the planet, with the aim of getting a look at the compound, but all that is revealed is a single tower surrounded by a blue grass lawn dotted with sculpted hedges.

Many have complained to the Emperor, demanding that the Vau's secrecy is dangerous to the safety of the newfound state. Who knows what's going on in that embassy? But Alexius refuses to invade the privacy of Vau property.

Such privacy, however, births the most outrageous conspiracy theories, bandied about among the lower-echelon householders and the highest-placed nobility alike. Even the clergy are not above engaging in whispered worries about the Vau's supposed plans for humanity.

The heat of such paranoia finally became too much for a certain Eskatonic Order priest. Sister Georgina Yalick, swayed by too much speculation and not enough evidence, broke into the Imperial Palace to examine the Vau el'ash sculptures gifted to Alexius by the Vau ambassador. Whatever she saw — or thinks she saw — caused her to smash one of them. She was apprehended and removed to a Church-run insane asylum in Old Istanbul. The court had something to talk about for a week, but the incident was soon forgotten, replaced by a Li Halan daughter's fashion scandal.

What the court has not gotten wind of yet is Sister



Georgina's escape. The Imperial authorities have been notified and are on the lookout for her, but she has yet to be found. They are covering up the incident, afraid that the wayward priest may be headed for the embassy itself.

Characters can become involved in a number of ways:

- Sister Georgina approaches the characters seeking their help in breaking into the Vau embassy. She promises great rewards (firebirds, Vautech, etc.) and claims that she is representing a powerful Church official in this affair. If pressed, she will produce a bishop's ambassadorial ring, an item worn by all priests on official Church business. These items are not easy to come by, and possession of one is proof enough for most people that the bearer has legitimate connections. However, Georgina stole the ring from a priest who was visiting a sick relative in the asylum she was interred in. The priest, embarrassed about the ring's loss (he thinks he merely misplaced it) will not fess up to losing it if questioned, claiming he chooses not to wear it all the time, and no, you cannot see where he keeps it.

Sister Georgina is very convincing. She displays no outward insane behavior and simply seems to be one of the many conspiratorial Eskatonics who wander the Known Worlds seeking occult secrets. She will play on any paranoid feelings the characters may have, trying to convince them that the Vau are hatching a deadly plot against the Emperor. She claims to have cast a theurgic rite to divine the plot from the el'ash sculptures — spy devices, she

says — and now she must break into the embassy and disable their weaponry. She knows a theurgic rite which will allow her entry past the Vau energy field protecting the grounds.

Are the characters with her? If not, she will do her best to elude them and find some other suckers to get her to Tarsus.

- Imperial Guardsmen are searching for her. They will take any reports concerning her seriously. If the characters approach them with information about Sister Georgina, such as her offer to them, they will try to engage the characters in tracking her down. The priest has displayed an uncanny ability to sniff out representatives of the law, and the characters are in a good position to get close to her. The authorities do not want her to breach the embassy but will not send units in to stop her — such a military confrontation might be taken the wrong way by the Vau. They would rather risk her breaking in and suffering the Vau's punishment than start a diplomatic incident.

- Bran Botan vo Karm, Alexius' Ur-Obun councilor, has other plans. Unknown to the Imperial Guard, it is actually his wish that Sister Georgina succeed in her attempt. His own intelligence efforts against the Vau have been unsuccessful so far, so he is placing his hopes on this wild card. He actually engineered her escape and acquisition of the bishop's ring, and is watching her movements from

afar. She does not know this; she is sincere in her paranoid conviction and believes the Pancreator aided her escape.

Once the characters get involved, Botan will send his own agents to try to recruit them to his side. However, these agents will never claim to represent him; he must remain incognito. The agents will be chosen to represent the characters' best interests (if one of them is an artifact hunter, then a noble patron will appear to beg his assistance in obtaining Vautech; if one of them is a Charioteer, a high-ranking Charioteer will appear and ask the character to retrieve some Vau jumpgate keys for the guild).

Regardless of who the characters are working for, one of the various parties will do their best to send the characters off with Sister Georgina.

The Journey South

Hopefully, the characters will have access to transportation. Otherwise, Sister Georgina will steal a flitter. She seems to have uncanny luck in this (the flitter actually belongs to one of Bran Botan vo Karm's agents). After a refueling stop in southern Tamerlain, the group continues on to Tarsus.

The embassy is located on a lone ice and snow covered peninsula jutting into the Naiad sea, hundreds of miles from the nearest human settlement. The place is incongruous with its surroundings, for a blue grass lawn abuts the ice in a circle (one mile in radius). Purple hedges dot the lawn, sculpted into strange shapes, some of them recognizable creatures, others seemingly abstract. In the center sits a tower made from an unknown material dotted with open windows but revealing no light or movement within. It appears to be three stories tall. A spaceship landing strip lies near the tower.

The lawn is protected by an invisible energy field which maintains a warm weather ecosystem inside its perimeter. Sister Georgina claims she can breach this field.

Break In

The priest casts a rite and a hole is torn in the force field. Winds and snow blow in, sweeping onto the lawn. Sister Georgina is the first through the breach.

She will let the characters take the lead from here, making it clear that their goal is the top level of the tower. There are no guards or defenses on the lawn, although the weird shapes might be enough to drive the superstitious away. The myths about human-shaped hedges here appear to be mere myths, for no such shapes can be seen.

The tower has a single door, made of the same substance. There is a Vautech version of a Gen-lock, virtually impregnable by humans. However, the lock is not engaged and the door opens at a touch.

Inside is a small hall leading to a set of winding stairs rising up into the tower. A tiny closet is nearby, with its door cracked open, revealing Vau robes, dusty and unused. These are made of fine silk-like material, the product of some alien beast. The fashion is fascinating, threaded with Vau glyphs of beautiful design. These robes are worth a

total of about 2000 firebirds if sold to the right party (Vinthius Rudanda, the Ur-Obun art dealer, is such a party).

The place is deathly quiet.

Receiving Room

The second floor is a large sitting room, with comfortable chairs designed for humans. Side tables obviously meant to hold refreshments sit near the chairs, and Vau hangings adorn the walls, depicting similar scenes to those in the Imperial Palace (the various castes: worker, soldier, mandarin). A small kitchen is hidden behind a concealed door. It shows signs of recent use, although the only food obvious is a refrigeration device stacked with sealed packets of some jelly-like substance.

The Caretaker

The top floor is the bedchamber of the only resident of the Vau embassy: Ch'lek Ph'thorn, of the G'nesh from Apshai.

The G'nesh are an insectoid race under the authority of the Vau Hegemony. They are indigenous to Apshai but are rarely encountered by the human colonists on the planet, deliberately kept apart by the Vau. G'nesh have different breeds with different insect traits. Ch'lek Ph'thorn is a large, humanoid creature with certain spiderlike traits. He has opposable digits at the end of each of his four arms.

He lies in a large hammock, staring weakly at the characters as they enter his bedroom. He is too weak to greet them, for he is dying, and no human physician can help him.

Ch'lek Ph'thorn is the caretaker of the embassy. The Vau placed him here to watch the grounds, although they care little for them. The position is a punishment for some obscure social crime Ch'lek committed on Apshai long ago. He has lived here alone since the Vau mandarin left after Alexius' coronation.

He speaks a little Urthish, but it sounds strange coming from his alien throat. He will try to apologize for not greeting the characters and explain that he is dying of homesickness. He tells them to help themselves to the *chaklalla* packets in the kitchen below.

Sister Georgina is immediately suspicious of the alien and focuses on a nondescript, greenish metal box in the corner. She claims that it is the weapon, and that the alien is faking its weakness. Ch'lek does seem to gain some energy at this and will try to prevent her from touching it, but he is ultimately too weak to rise; the effort will be his last, and he expires.

When the box is opened, it will reveal only an ornate pair of hedgeclippers.

The Mad Priestess

Sister Georgina will begin banging the walls, searching for secret rooms which could hide the weapon she seeks. There is no sign of such rooms. She will run madly through the tower banging on all the walls. She tears open



all the food packets in the kitchen. She runs outside and tears at the hedges. She finds nothing.

Either because of the rite used to breach the energy field, or due to the passing of the caretaker, the entire field has dispersed, and snow and ice blow across the lawn. The warm temperature drops and the lawn becomes a part of the Tarsan landscape.

Sister Georgina is now convinced that the weapon is hidden in the other el'ash sculptures and will rush to the flitter to storm the Imperial Palace. If possible, she will take the flitter without the characters. If the characters try to stop her, she will consider them tainted by the Vau's agent and believe that they are now working to protect the Vau's secrets. She will escape from them at her earliest chance. Her rite will open any locked door or passage, so keeping her locked up will be difficult.

If she escapes, she will head for the palace, leaving the characters with the task of stopping her or informing the palace of her intentions. The latter option, of course, will bring the characters under scrutiny.

Depending on the extent of the damages to the "embassy", the characters may find that any future dealings with Vau representatives to be more dangerous than usual.

Once Bran Botan vo Karm's agents discover (from the characters) that the Vau embassy holds no secrets, Bran will have his agents engage the characters in capturing Georgina, for they have spent more time with her than anyone else and have an advantage in dealing with her. Nonetheless, the statues will receive a 24-hour guard.

The best the characters will come out with in this situation are some strong contacts, who they may or may not eventually discover are really working for Bran Botan vo Karm.

If Georgina is foiled in her attempt to reach the sculptures, she will flee off-planet, holding a vendetta against the characters forever. In this case, her traits and powers should be detailed by the gamemaster.

Magic Smugglers

Cumulus is a key spot for black market activity. Somehow, black marketers have managed to get their forbidden goods through the random Imperial and Church searches conducted on many ships exiting the jumpgate. In addition, black market goods made on Byzantium Secundus have appeared with increasing frequency on other worlds. The problem has vexed the Church enough to call in Inquisitorial aid, but the Inquisitors have had little luck finding contraband goods. Yet these goods still show up on Cumulus. The Church does not yet dare to bring its full censure against the spacestation, for their own fleets are berthed there for occasional repairs. But they have sent many undercover agents in to find out just what is going on.

The increased heat revealed a corrupt stevedore in the



customs division, and since his departure more and more black market goods have been apprehended when the ships arrive. But many goods still slip through, especially on other worlds. It is odd that so many ship captains protest innocence when the goods are discovered in their holds, seemingly as surprised about the illegal material as are the authorities. Inquisitorial theurgic review has revealed that many (but not all) of these captains were indeed truly unaware of their cargo.

The Inquisition has dispatched agents throughout the Known Worlds to uncover this smuggling ring at its source, but as yet have been unsuccessful. Indeed, some thoroughly searched ships have entered a jumpgate to Byzantium Secundus, been searched again upon exiting the gate and found to be clean, only to be caught with illegal goods upon arrival at Cumulus. It is as if the cargo simply appeared in the holds of these ships.

Which is exactly what happened.

A smugglers ring is ensconced on Tuszla, one of the three moons of Magog, hiding in the abandoned mining city. Three renegade League guildsmen have repaired enough of the facility to provide an atmosphere and living conditions. They have stockpiled a load of illegal goods here (everything from drugs and weapons to forbidden literature) and are slowly leaking it to their sources.

They have yet to be caught because no one suspects the ingenious Second Republic artifact they have discovered: a long-range teleportation device. Buried deep in the mines of Tuszla, this experimental device was forgotten until the bandits came across it. After testing it, they quickly figured out how the machine could be used to make them richer.

It works so: Part of the device, a bulky, platform mounted gun, is aimed at a pile of black market goods. The other part, a satellite-mounted telescope, is aimed at a passing starship. With a complicated series of button presses, the black market goods are then teleported into the ship's hold, all unknown to the ship's pilot.

Characters can become involved in this plot in any number of ways:

- The Church hires them as third-party investigators to uncover the smuggling ring.
- The Imperial authorities hire the characters to uncover the ring.
- The Scravers, insulted at being cut out of the action, hire the characters to uncover the ring and shut it down.

Detective Work

Discovering the truth is going to require some detective work:

- Sabot Karlson (a high-ranking Muster operating on Cumulus) is working with the three smugglers, ensuring that the goods are unloaded from the ships under the noses of the ships' owners. Toward this end, he won the contract to provide the spacestation with stevedores. Although one of his men was caught by the Inquisition, the others have yet to be discovered. He is looking for some-

one to replace his lost loader, preferably another Muster member.

In addition, Karlson has cut Muster members on other worlds in on the action. Similarly corrupt stevedores can be found on surrounding worlds, unloading goods teleported onto ships before they left the Byzantium system (and after they were searched by customs).

- Whenever the teleportation device is used, an energy signal is released. It can only be detected by ships nearby Magog or its moons that are looking for unusual readings. A ship targeted to hold the teleported goods could easily detect it if it were looking. The signal can be traced to Tuszla.

- Eventually, one of the smugglers has to leave Tuszla for Byzantium Secundus to load up on more black market goods. Characters with seedy connections may be able to follow the trail to this smuggler, and from there follow him to Tuszla.

The Teleporter

This massive device cannot be easily removed, for it is hooked up to the power core built long ago to fuel the mining operation. It would take a team of crack Engineers

a while to figure out how to move it, and they may never figure out how to replicate the technology. The device is delicate, and any bullets, blaster bolts or physical blows it suffers may destroy it beyond repair.

The teleporter cannot reach ships which have passed Magog, entering deeper into the system, or those are which near the jumpgate.

Breaking Up the Ring

Once characters realize what's going on, they are various things they can do:

- Reveal the smugglers and their location to the Church. The Inquisition will make swift work of them and capture the teleporter for the Church.

- Call in the Imperial authorities. The smugglers will be jailed on Byzantium and the Imperial Fleet will gain the teleporter.

- Join the smugglers. The bandits won't like this option, and will try to kill the characters.

- Kill the smugglers and take over their operation. Sabot Karlson will be suspicious and will probably try to turn the tables on the new bandits, taking over the operation himself.



Appendix: The Imperial Eye

Many people know the story of how Emperor Vladimir set up the Imperial Eye to find lost artifacts and help keep track of aliens and barbarians. Most also know how each succeeding head of the Eye has used it for his own gain, stocked it with his own followers, and finally left it in disarray. What they don't know is that some lower level members of the Eye, primarily operatives and career administrators, believe the Eye predates Vladimir by many years.

Indeed, they trace its lineage back to the earliest days of humanity's colonization of space. When Earth's powers-that-be heard that the pilots were experiencing strange mystical epiphanies, they immediately assigned agents of the Internal Investigation department to infiltrate the growing Sathra cult. These I. I. agents began bringing back tales to fit their bosses' worst fears, warning them that the pilots planned to rebel, taking all the existing spacecraft to another planet with them and using the ships to shut down Earth's connection to the stars. They also told stories of religious ceremonies where the pilots invoked alien gods, promising them all the Earth's souls in exchange for power.

Earth's leaders moved immediately to eliminate this threat, assassinating key leaders of the pilots' union and grounding hundreds of other pilots. Many of these ended up in special camps from which they never returned. Still, Earth never succeeded in capturing all the pilots. A number simply disappeared, never to be seen again. Most people assumed they had either died or taken their ships to deepest space.

Near the end of the great purge, known to Sathraists as the Great Betrayal, 100 of the leading pilots managed to meet in a small outpost on Neptune's satellite Triton. There, the majority decided to take their ships deep into space, to live their lives in religious freedom and attempt to create new congregations with whatever followers they could scrounge from the new colonies.

A few of the pilots, however, adamantly refused to run. They called those who did cowards. They agreed to

help keep Earth's forces from chasing down the escaping pilots and promised to help pave the way for a reconciliation between Earth and the pilots. Secretly, however, they swore vengeance against the agent who betrayed them with lies and the Sathraists who ran. Using what remained of their influence, they managed to seek out the I. I. agents who had destroyed their movement and trapped them in an abandoned Sathraist temple. Following a night of ritual and prayer, only the agents reemerged, carrying the bodies of the Sathraist devotees.

The agents quickly moved to have all Sathraist hunting brought under their control. They pursued the renegade cultists with great energy, but little effect. They had more success bringing other aspects of the Republic's security apparatus under their control, accusing other organizations of suffering from Sathraist infiltration so that they could take over. Within a decade I. I. had taken over all the intelligence operations of note and began quietly recruiting new members. These new members went through a period of initiation rites remarkably similar to those of the Sathraists.

The purge of the pilots had some other unintended consequences, however. With no experienced pilots, the First Republic had difficulty enforcing its will on distant colonies. The most distant began repudiating their ties to the Republic, a result that the I. I. immediately blamed on Sathraist spies. As the Diaspora spread, First Republic leaders began casting a nervous eye on the security apparatus they had set in place, and they eliminated almost all I. I. funding. As the First Republic collapsed, the I. I. barely managed to continue, funding its activities through a mix of legal and illegal operations.

It lasted all the way up to the Second Republic in this manner, though most other intelligence agencies only survived by combining forces with the growing House Decados. During the Second Republic the I. I. rose to prominence once again, providing an important counterbalance to the activities of the Decados and other noble houses. When the Second Republic finally collapsed, the

noble houses almost completely dismantled the I.I. A few noble houses, including House Alecto, managed to keep it alive again as a tool to counter the other houses. Before Vladimir became Emperor, he renamed its remnants the Imperial Eye, and made it an intrinsic part of the Empire. Thus it has remained, sometimes a pawn in the games nobles play, and sometimes a key player.

The Eye Today

During the Emperor Wars, control of the Eye bounced from house to house. Almost every regent gave leadership of the Eye away in exchange for votes. This meant that each major house, and some of the minor ones, had a chance to put its own people into important positions. While they rarely assigned their own people to handling operations or day-to-day affairs, they could decide what operations would take place and which divisions got the money they needed.

Alexius has said he will change this, and first appointed Duchess Oelestre Xanthippes of House Xanthippes to head the agency when he became regent. Duchess Oelestre was the most competent director of the Eye since the Decados ran it, and she made a great show of ordering it to track down lost artifacts, the charge Emperor Vladimir first gave it centuries ago. The associated masquerade ball was the talk of that season.

The Duchess has stayed on since Alexius named himself Emperor, and other nobles like to cluck their tongues in dismay at what kind of blackmail files she must have built up. Members of the Eye, however, tend to cluck their tongues in dismay at how little she seems to know about the very organization she purports to run. Of course, some people doubt that anyone knows the full scope of Eye activities.

The organization is extremely fragmented, with operations put into effect generations ago continuing to run with no one at Eye headquarters being aware of them. Operatives use the considerable autonomy that comes with the job to set up smuggling routes, blackmarket operations, protection rackets and worse. Still, most Eye members do their duty for Pancreator and Empire, with personal aggrandizement a secondary goal.

Operations

While most of the Imperial Eye's activities remain shrouded in a veil of secrecy, some have become public knowledge. For instance, everyone knows of its role in hunting down lost artifacts for the Empire. They also have little doubt that its agents follow all Kurgan and Vuldrok officials in the Known Worlds. The Eye has made public its involvement in capturing a number of prominent criminals, including space pirates, counterfeiters and peasant rebels. Finally, aliens regularly complain of Imperial Eye harassment.

Less well known are stories regarding the tailing of nobles, infiltration of religious groups, raids on secret labs,

blackmarket weapon sales, secret chemical experiments, piracy and worse. Vladimir charged the Eye with the task of uncovering and neutralizing enemies of the Empire. He did not define who these enemies were, and the Eye has taken it on itself to find them.

Most operatives act alone or in a small group. Most travel freely between planets, relying on their own resources to take them to wherever trouble might be, while others establish intelligence networks on individual cities, continents or planets. Each operative knows at least two different contacts who can relay messages and supply money or other materials. The Eye does not pay especially well (usually one firebird a month), but it does provide its agents with innumerable opportunities to make money on their own, as well as making only cursory investigations of expense accounts.

The Old Guard

While those in charge of the Eye are primarily political appointees and the remnants of past regents, the operatives and administrators who handle most of the day-to-day work get hired by other low-level members of the Eye. They naturally seek out those with similar interests and goals, bringing in those they trust and promoting those who seem competent. Additionally, several (non-noble) families have played a significant role in the Eye throughout its history, and these ancient cliques consider themselves the old guard. They are also the ones who most fervently believe that their predecessors were Sathraists who took the place of the agents who betrayed them.

These members of the old guard keep an eye on likely candidates for initiation. They convince them that the old guard makes up the most loyal branch of the Eye, that which has served the Empire for 500 years. As the recruit makes her way through the ranks, however, they begin to reveal the group's deeper secrets. By the time the initiate realizes that the old guard's primary allegiance is not to the Eye, it is too late. By that time she should be committed to a Sathraist revival anyway.

Playing the Eye

If gamemasters want their players to be able to play members of the Imperial Eye, they should feel free to photocopy the pages in this Appendix for those players. Characters can serve a variety of different roles, from covert operations specialists to spies to internal security operatives. The Eye gives its agents a great deal of freedom in their actions and expects them to use their own initiative, though failure to follow orders can bring immediate censure.

Most members of the Eye either come from the lower levels of the nobility or were born free on one planet or another. Its membership also includes more than a few ex-guild members. The Eye has also recruited current members of the clergy and the League, but these are the exception, not the norm. In fact, the Eye is not especially large,



employing approximately 1000 agents around the Empire and an equal number of support staff (mostly on Byzantium Secundus).

The following section includes some of the roles characters can fill, as well as what their duties and obligations might be. Since most members of the Imperial Eye have cover stories constantly in use, gamemasters should also encourage players to give their characters ties to non-Eye groups.

New Benefices

Counterfeit Riches (1): The character has access to counterfeiting equipment and can make as much money as he thinks he can get away with. Note that this is a capital offense, even for members of the Eye.

Rank (1-11): This works much like Commission does for members of the League, but the ranks are not as hard and fast. Certain field agents command more respect and power than do their supervisors, but no one will ever buck the will of a spy master. As characters rise in the ranks, they become more fully aware of code words and other similar features of the Eye. Recruits are not full members and are usually only used for simple information gathering or beatings. Spy Masters, on the other hand, generally control the Eye's operations on an entire planet. Levels five and higher come with an expense account.

1 = Recruit

3 = Agent

5 = Field Agent

8 = Supervisor

11 = Spy master

Secret Identity (1): The character has a cover story and the documents to prove it. This identity is good enough to stand up to any but the most rigorous tests.

New Blessing

Codemaster (2 pts: +2 Wits when breaking or creating codes)

New Skill

Cryptography

Roll: Wits + Cryptography

This skill allows the character to create and break codes involving whatever languages he can read. Codebreaking is usually a sustained action task; Gamemasters assign codes a victory point total (generally 9 to 18) which a character must accumulate before he breaks it.

Complementary skill

• **Think Machine:** Think Machines can prove invaluable in code breaking, but only if characters have or can create the right software and know how to use it.

Those Who Watch: The Eye

The Eye does not really have different agencies as much as agents who focus on certain areas. Most agents have the freedom to conduct any sort of investigations they like. They can rely on support from their superiors and immunity from Imperial laws. They had just better make sure that they provide useful information and support to their superiors, and that they follow all orders. Failure to do these things are the only real crimes the Eye worries about.

Suggested natural skills: Observe, Sneak

Suggested learned skills: Inquiry, Read Urthish, Speak Urthish (usually learned equal to Wits)

Suggested Benefices: Rank

Reclaimers

The best known aspect of the Eye's work is tracking down and recovering valuable artifacts. The Eye makes a big deal of presenting valuable artifacts to the Empire, but everyone wonders about those objects that are not turned over. While all Eye personnel are supposed to watch out for ancient objects, two kinds of Reclaimer agents travel the spaceways. The first of these are artifact hunters, whose duty is to pass on word of possible artifacts or artifact sites. The second are the actual Reclaimers, those who can either dig artifacts out of ancient buildings or seize them from their current owners.

Characteristic: Wits, Perception, Tech

Natural skills: Dodge, Vigor

Learned skills: Artifact Lore, Redemption, Read Urthtech

Blessing: Grease Monkey (4 pts: +2 with all Tech Redemption skills)/ Nosy (+2 pts: -2 Calm when seeing something new)

Benefices: Standard shield (5 pts)

Surveillance (Shadows)

The Eye makes little secret of the fact that it watches barbarians and aliens. It does keep quiet about how much it observes nobles, League members and religious leaders. All information has value. The Eye only uses its own agents to tail people when those people are especially dangerous. Otherwise it recruits other folks, and one spy master may coordinate hundreds of recruits.

Characteristics: Dexterity, Perception, Calm

Natural skills: Dodge

Learned skills: Knavery, Sleight of Hand, Streetwise, Tracking

Blessing: Suspicious (2 pts: +2 Perception when rivals are about)/ Paranoid (+2 pts: -2 Calm when under suspicion)

Research and Design

Originally formed to help increase security of Eye headquarters, R & D has grown a great deal, developing



new tools for surveillance, security and assassination. Most of the agents who do R & D do little else, but they may sometimes work with the Reclaimers or Operations. R & D is still centered on Byzantium Secundus, but some of its agents travel the stars, bringing the latest technology to field agents and analyzing the items they find.

Characteristics: Wits, Tech, Calm

Natural skills: Shoot

Learned skills: Artisan, Lockpicking, Read Urthtech, Redemption, Science, Think Machine

Blessing: Innovative (2 pts: +2 Tech when trying to invent something new)/ Possessive (+2 pts: -2 Calm when cut out of the action)

Operatives

These are the stars of the Imperial Eye, those agents who travel from planet to planet chasing criminals, foiling dastardly traitors and protecting the Empire from all dangers. They have a great deal of freedom as to what they do, and some have established their own fiefs. Their official duties are to watch potential enemies and safeguard Imperial interests, but their unofficial duties go much farther.

Characteristics: Endurance, Wits, Passion

Natural skills: Charm, Impress

Learned skills: Etiquette, Inquiry, various Lore, Stoic Body, Streetwise

Blessings: Bold (2 pts: +2 Passion while acting when others hesitate)/ Pridful (+2 pts: -2 Calm when insulted)

Field Troops

The Imperial Eye denies that it actually has soldiers under its command, but does insist that it needs trustworthy forces to protect its headquarters, the Imperial Mint and other critical locations. Of course, the secret that these same guards sometimes find their way into combat situations away from their post is a risk that the Eye will just have to take.

Characteristics: Strength, Endurance, Perception

Natural skills: Fight, Shoot

Learned skills: Martial Arts, Search, Survival, Torture

Benefices: Standard shield (5 pts), big gun

Infiltrator

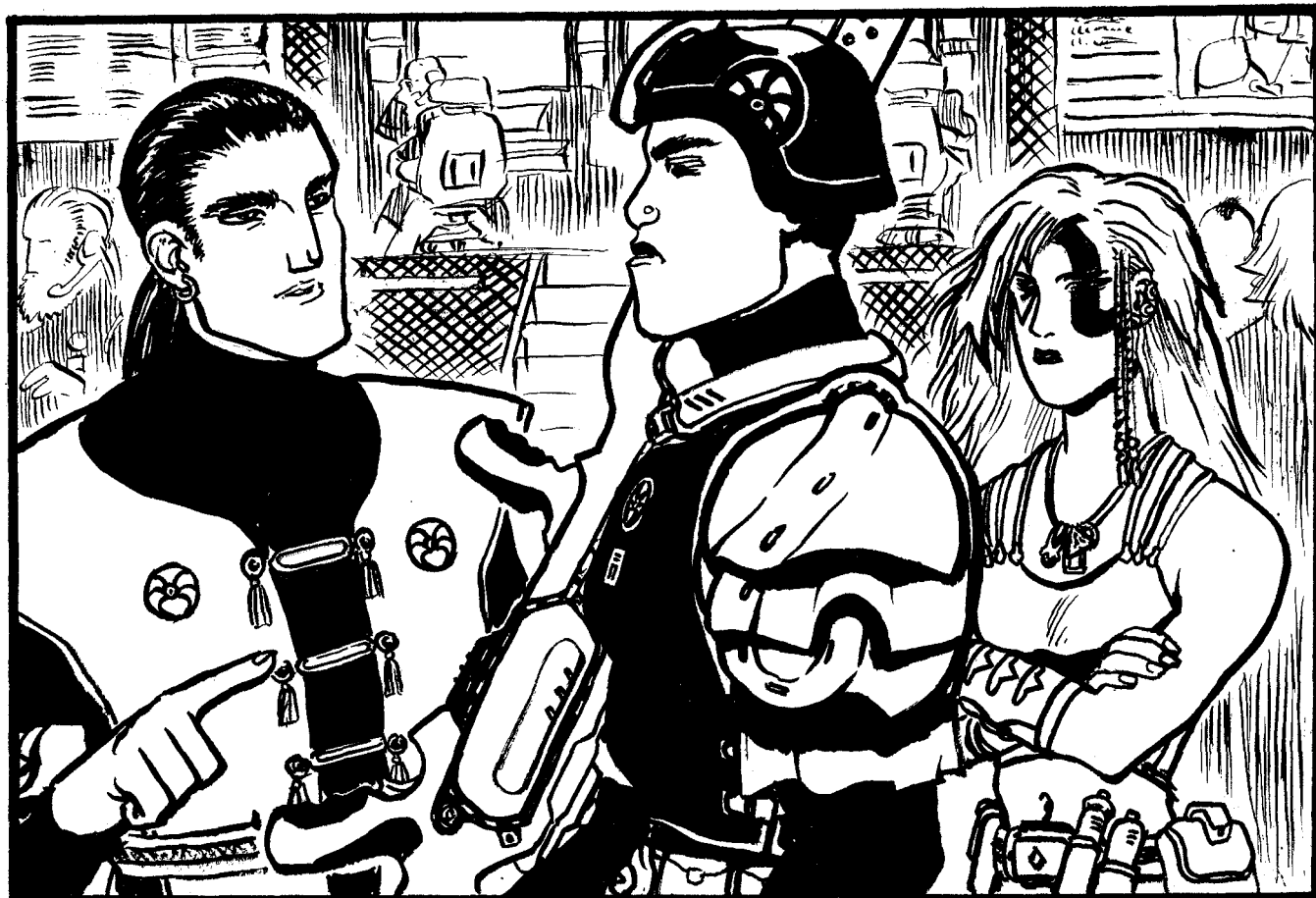
This category includes agents who also work for the League, the Decados or even the Inquisition. You live the life of a double agent, and this may well be the most dangerous life of all. The player should decide what, if any allegiance, is the character's real one.

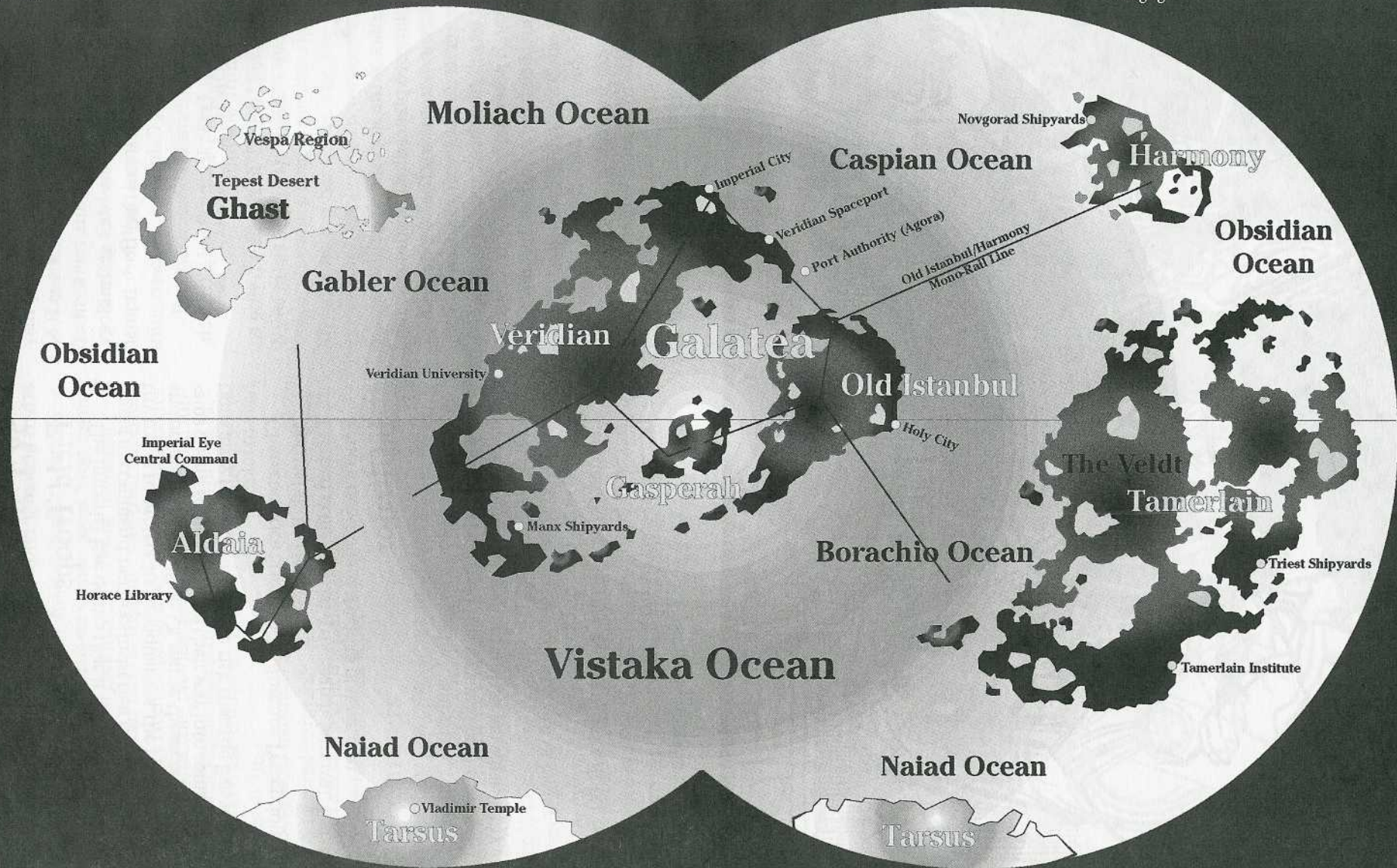
Characteristics: Dexterity, Wits, Faith or Ego

Natural skills: Charm, Dodge

Learned skills: Disguise, Knavery, Lore (folk), Social (Acting), Stoic Mind

Benefices: Secret Identity





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