

F A C T I O N B O O K



FADING SUNS



Factions Book

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Pilgrims:

In previous eras of our history, we have fallen into tribalism. For some, the tribe was family or city-state, or later, the planet or ruling faction. Thankfully, due to the Pancreator's grace and Patriarch Palamedes's unification of the race, such divisions are behind us. Our future promises common cause, equality, and universalism. Only a grave fall from grace will send us back to our former barbarism. Pray for this not to occur.

— *Epistles of Patriarch Wiold I, Volume XXVII*

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INTRODUCTION: MINORITY REPORT

“I spoke the other day with a guildler — a ‘Wrangler.’ Can you believe that? A whole guild devoted to ‘wrangling.’ Oh, I don’t know what it means either. I think it has something to do with arranging social events. Pardon me? Training animals? Oh, is that what they do? Good lord, I almost shook her hand. Imagine how filthy it must have been! Now I am forewarned.”

— Ophilia Zansaba al-Malik, as recorded in Marduk Harston Torenson’s Tour of the Crown-Jewel Worlds

The **Fading Suns** core books presented the major power players in the Known Worlds: the five Royal Houses, the five main sects of the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun, and the five largest guilds of the Merchant League. But these aren’t the only factions vying for a place amidst the dimming stars. There are numerous minor houses, lesser sects, and small guilds. While members of these groups have sometimes risen to prominence, their groups as a whole have rarely maintained a starring role on the universe’s main stage for long. They quickly get eclipsed by the major powers, whose size and reach makes it hard for these lesser players to gain any real traction outside of their immediate territories and purviews.

Still, they keep trying. A number of the houses represented here were once major players among the Ten who overthrew the Second Republic, but time and misfortune have rendered them beholden to one Royal House or another or have cut down their holdings to a scattered few territories spread across the worlds. Some factions, such as the “pagans,” have never had a strong foothold, even during the egalitarian Second Republic era, and now, they’ve got it worse in the New Dark

Ages under the constant gaze of a jealous Universal Church. Even worse, the Changed — the genetically modified inheritors of experiments both ancient and all-too-recent — can rarely walk abroad without risking approbation (at best) from a suspicious and superstitious populace.

The various Known Worlds alien species don’t have it much better, but at least they have a degree of protection from the Emperor’s reforms and the safety of their reservations — except for those who leave them to travel among the bigoted lumpen of humanity.

It’s not easy being among the minority in the Known Worlds. For this reason, some of their members seek outwards, hoping for greater freedoms among the barbarian worlds or desperately trying to be admitted into the Vau Hegemony, where a host of alien species are said to have equality. (Almost no one is ever admitted.) Most must find a way to achieve their ambitions against the tide of history and culture. Those who do become legends.

These legends-in-the-making are presented here to supplement your roleplaying needs, available as player characters, NPCs, and food-for-thought for the power dynamics of the 51st century.

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THE MINOR NOBLE HOUSES

Not everyone can be top dog. The so-called “minor” houses have learned this lesson many times over in the centuries since the Fall of the Second Republic, often in punishing ways. Some houses — Alecto and Chauki, for instance — no longer exist, having been destroyed or subsumed by other houses. Others continue to exist through the patronage of certain Royal Houses, used as pawns in their political chess games, while some houses still stand independently, clinging to a few lands with little hope for expansion.

Everyone knows there are more noble houses out there among the Lost Worlds. Some hold the threat of disenfranchisement for existing houses, should they ever reappear. On Iver, for example, an offshoot of House Chauki has survived; if the Emperor were to recognize them as the house proper, the Hazat holdings — seized long ago from the Chauki in an uprising — would be forfeit. Others represent new players brought onto the board of the Known Worlds’ grand strategy games, such as House Eldrid, the Vuldrok barbarian house of the Empress Freya, and House Ramakrishna, allies to House Eldrid. The Ramakrishna still have distant claims to land on Shaprut that are now owned by the al-Malik. Everyone is watching to see how this will test the Royal House’s ability to maneuver for peaceful solutions while keeping the heavy hand of the Emperor at bay.

Although the minor houses lack interstellar political power, this empowers their scions to break the mold of tradition and to seek for new avenues to power. Many join the Questing Knights or other knightly orders, becoming the notable boots-on-the-ground in the places where history is being made. In this way, individuals from the minor houses might just turn out to be more influential on the Known Worlds’ destiny than their larger rivals.

Eldrid

This Vuldrok house is not quite blood-related and is extremely new. It is named after its founder, Eldrid the Wise, a Vuldrok thane who avenged her father’s death by burning his murderer’s feast hall down as he and his men drank themselves into a stupor. Upon taking a fourth of the continent of Jyandhom on Hargard, Eldrid reluctantly sent people to reach out to the Empire, just as the Ramakrishna from the south were doing. With help from Sura Ramakrishna, she was able to arrange a meeting with members of the Company of the Phoenix. A series of meetings and communiques led to Eldrid arranging for her daughter, Freya (named for Freya of the Red Mountains), to marry Alexius, cementing his hold on Hargard in return for the grant of noble status for Houses Eldrid and Ramakrishna.

Since then, thanes from across the continent have pledged themselves to Eldrid’s cause with only a few holdouts. Members of House Eldrid are Vuldrok to the core — warriors with a deep love of feasting, raiding, and spirituality. Some of them have converted to the Universal Church. Some cling to their old gods. All are eager for the power that following Eldrid brings them.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Duchess Eldrid the Wise* is the head of the house. She’s in her early 40s now and was in her late teens when she avenged her father. The prince is a shieldmaiden — a *Fheykrig* — of formidable skill and intelligence. Before accepting Known Worlds noble status, she held a thanedom in her own right — no easy task on a Vuldrok world. She is brusque and never uses more words than she needs, and she can kindly be called “plain.” Nonetheless, heads of various noble houses have begun to court her favor, the better to win over the legions at her command. Though she is married to thane Vidar Vigirson, Freya’s father, she occasionally takes lovers.



- *Countess Freya of the Red Mountains* is a legendary (former) thane and namesake to Freya of House Eldrid (now Empress Freya). She is Duchess Eldrid’s current field commander and confidante. Many say she is more than that, but there has been no

public declaration and no damning evidence. Freya is a member of the Fheykrigs, the same all-female raider legion Eldrid once swore alliance to, and she commands a great number of them. Unlike Eldrid, Freya is lithe and pretty and flirtatious, and most of the Known Worlds nobility who visit (mistakenly) think she is a safer bet than Eldrid.

PRIMARY HOLDINGS

- *Jyandhom*, a continent on Hargard, is mainly controlled by House Eldrid. There are some exceptions to this rule, as some thanes are holding out against the warrior maiden's bid for nobility. Jyandhom is a continent of pine forests, craggy mountains, and swift rivers — all excellent places for the rebels to stage guerilla warfare. In the south, a breakoff faction of the Ramakrishna is still fighting against the Eldrid dominion, though the bulk of House Ramakrishna is allied with House Eldrid. The capital of Elfhome to the north is a city made mostly of wood, stone, and glass in the style of the Vikings of Holy Terra.

ALLIES

House Ramakrishna, Imperial Throne

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

The Eldrid are very new to Imperial politics, and most don't have the background for it. Your life of fighting and raiding is lauded, but you're also expected to be polite to people who have never fought a day in their lives. How will you adapt to this new turn of events? How do you celebrate your old traditions?

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Named for their founder and not for any shared blood, House Eldrid is a loose confederation of pro-Imperial thanes and their families from Hargard. While many of them are older or more physically powerful than Eldrid the Wise herself, they are all unfailingly loyal to their "Grand Thane" — or, as she now calls herself among Known Worlders, "Duchess." House Eldrid commands some of the finest berserkers on Hargard, but they're starting to train diplomats as well.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Vuldrok); Melee Weapons (Military) *or* Transport (Beastback); Speak Vuldrok

Characteristics: Faith +1 *or* Will +1; Perception +1; Presence +1; Strength +2

Perk: Noble Title (Knight)

Skills: Animalia 1 *or* Survival 1; Fight 2 *or* Melee 2 *or* Shoot 2; Charm 1 *or* Impress 1; Vigor 1

HOUSE QUIRKS

Blessing: Gregarious (+2 Presence when dealing with guests or hosts)

Curse: Tunnel Vision (-2 Perception when angry)

Favored Calling: Pirate

Material Award: Masterwork (+1 goal) axe, sword, *or* spear.

Juandaastas

One of the most famous of the minor houses, Juandaastas might have been wiped out long ago were it not for the protection of House Hawkwood. Strictly speaking, they aren't even properly human. Juandaastas lobbied for alien rights precisely because that advocacy could protect them. Many members of the house are *tuupa*: half-obun/half-humans. Those who are either one or the other still carry the recessive gene that marks one as a tuupa and may manifest psychic or theurgical powers.



LEADING MEMBERS

- *Marquessa Sabine bint Raschid al-Malik*/Juandaastas is the current leader of the house, having taken over

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from her late husband as regent after his untimely death. Her young son, Kaspar, is the heir apparent. Sabine is a psychic, and while she's gregarious, she is a bit paranoid where the health of her son is concerned. Rumor has it she's training him as a psychic as well.

- *Count Philippe Juandaastas* rules Rangor, a fief on Gwynneth. The harsh, unforgiving mountains of this demesne suit his misanthropic temperament. He rarely ventures outside of his keep, but he is very protective of his fief full of misfits: psychics, aliens, heretics, and tuupa.

PRIMARY HOLDINGS

- *North Perleria* on Criticorum is home to a collection of Juandaastas fiefs, all under Sabine. The area has been named a preserve for endangered animals due to the pleasant climate. One of the most infamous specimens is the knife weasel, a rodent with opposable thumbs that raids human villages in large packs.
- *Rangor* is hidden deep within the mountains and crags of Gwynneth. It's extremely dangerous to get in or out, but Rangor itself is a paradise of free folk and misfits with its own agora and university. Count Phillippe grants refugees full citizenship after they agree to serve one year in his personal military.

ALLIES

Hawkwood, al-Malik

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Be curious! The Juandaastas know there is more in the heavens and on their fief's worlds than they could dream of, and they enjoy expanding their minds and boundaries. What do you want to learn? Who can teach you what you want to know, and for what price?

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

A strange house with a strong psychic line, House Juandaastas has the dubious honor of being the only house that isn't fully human. Obun and half-obun make up around a quarter of this house's bloodline, and the house welcomes outcasts and rebels from other worlds. Their fiefs tend to be secluded and pastoral, but members of this house serve in various houses' dervish corps and generally explore the Known Worlds to appease their rampant curiosity.

Special: You can choose to allocate 1 or more characteristic ranks to the Psi characteristic, and you can increase it by using the characteristic ranks awarded at each level.

Capabilities: Choose any two Lores; add Juandaastas Lore

Characteristics: Intuition +2; Will +3

Perk: Noble Title (Knight)

Skills: Academia 1; Charm 1; Drive 1 *or* Pilot 1; Empathy 1; Focus 1

HOUSE QUIRKS

Blessing: Connected (+2 Intuition when other house members are nearby)

Curse: Distractible (-2 goal on Will-based rolls when distracted)

Favored Calling: Lord

Material Award: Crystals for focusing psychic powers (+1 goal), set prettily in a noble coronet. (Can be worn even if psychic powers do not manifest.)

Justinian

House Justinian's story is a parable about hubris. They allied themselves with House Alecto and were to be a great house upon Vladimir Alecto's coronation, but they fell hard after his assassination. They used to own the planet Paradise, but its jumpgate was corrupted (likely by the Decados), and they can no longer reach it. Now they cling to their fiefs on Ravenna, Midian, and Delphi and to their allies in House Hawkwood. While the house itself is deeply conservative and pro-Imperial, it also keeps strong ties with the Scravers and the Muster. The younger members of the house have formed a "Young Turks" faction to change the direction the house is going, but it's an uphill battle.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Marquessa Carolandra Justinian* is the lady of Courai, a member of House Hawkwood's military, and a knight of rare talent. She was, until her father's recent death, also the leader of the "Young Turks" faction that sought to change the direction the house was taking to something more practical. Her pet projects include pushing for the development of new Deepcore cities on Ravenna and expanding holdings on Delphi. Carolandra does not believe in clinging to past glories, only seeking new ones, and she is almost as obsessive about her goal as her father was about his.



PRIMARY HOLDINGS

- *Courai*, one of the larger continents on Delphi, is entirely under direct Justinian control. There is a large presence of Amaltheans here, as well as a new spaceport.
- *Redwood* and *Voro* on Midian are both underdeveloped but not barbaric. The serfs and free folk here all live a rustic country existence and want for little — except tech.
- *Two Deepcore cities* on Ravenna are administered by the Justinians. Mostly, their subjects mine and keep the terraforming engines in working order. Eskatonics are welcome in Justinian Deepcore cities with or without Church permission.
- *Paradise* is currently totally inaccessible due to a damaged jumpgate. It is unclear what caused this issue, though most suspect the Decados. A branch of the family might still be trapped on this lush and beautiful planet, and they might hold a vote scepter.

ALLIES

House Hawkwood, Urth Orthodox

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

The Justinians are a house divided. Do you want to recapture your Paradise lost, or do you want to forge

ahead and win new things? What do power and spirituality mean to you? What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail?

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Once a major house, House Justinian suffered major setbacks when they lost their home planet of Paradise. Much of this house is dead set on reclaiming their homeworld, but some of them have turned their eyes to newer, more achievable goals.

Capabilities: Customs (Commons); Knowledge (Jumpweb *or* Shipboard Operations); Knowledge (Justinian)

Characteristics: Endurance +2; Presence +2; Wits +1

Perk: Noble Title (Knight)

Skills: Academia 1; Fight 1 *or* Melee 1 *or* Shoot 1; Focus 1 *or* Vigor 1; Impress 2 *or* Knavery 2

HOUSE QUIRKS

Blessing: Driven (+2 goal on Will-based rolls when working towards a specific stated goal)

Curse: Arrogant (-2 Presence when talking to new people)

Favored Calling: Knightly Order *and* Questing Knight

Material Award: You have a plot of land on Paradise, should it be recovered, plus a masterwork knife (+1 goal).

Keddah

An anomaly among minor houses, the Keddah are the only family to autonomously own their own planet. The sweeping deserts and striking mesas of Grail are well-suited to this family, who fondly trace their lineage back to the nomadic tribes of northern Africa and western Asia back on Holy Terra. Their duke is referred to as a sheikh, their knights are khans and khanums, and most of their keeps on Grail are little more than elaborate and beautiful pavilions that can be torn down and moved with little more than a day's notice. The capital palace, Pelleas, is a combination of marble, sandstone, and cedar, all worked together into a gorgeous (but deceptively sturdy) structure of spires and arches and lattices. The family celebrates all weddings and holds all important meetings here. Recently, they've also hosted refugees from House Masseri's war against the Decados here.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Sheik Haroun Keddah* is the leader of the house and the ruler of Grail. He is a clever administrator, a

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passable general, and a great lover of all things involving intrigue. The sheik has several low-level contacts within the Hawkwood Rooks and the Decados Jakovian Agency, collecting bits of intelligence like another man collects gems. He also directly controls the Eyes of Isis, the dervish legion of the Keddah. His paramour, Khan Balthazar Masseri, is a powerful psychic knight in the Eyes of Isis and an invaluable asset to the house.



- *Khanum Parizade Keddah* is the knight in charge of training the Eyes of Isis. Known for her ability to confuse her opponents and disappear at will, her nickname is “the shadow daeva,” and it’s unlikely that an enemy of the house will ever see her in the same place twice. Apart from being a powerful fighter, she is also a decent spy. She has a brash sense of humor and is chatty and extroverted until threatened. Luckily, she doesn’t consider many things a threat.

PRIMARY HOLDINGS

- *Grail* is the single largest territory owned by House Keddah, and by extension, any minor house in the Known Worlds. A temperate world crisscrossed by winding rivers and impressive mountain ranges, Grail is host to House Keddah, their subjects, and the birdlike etyri, a species of sentient aliens who are capable of limited personal flight.

Although extremely rare, some of the children of lesser family lines are Synrinxes, half-etyri who are among *the Changed*, the products of Second-Republic-era genetic manipulation. As a result, they may have feathers mixed with their hair or display certain theurgic talents, although they do not possess the wings and flying ability of full etyri. While humans are free to leave the planet, the Synrinxes are considered freaks anywhere offworld (and even on some parts of the world, though they are protected by their noble status), so they mostly stay on Grail.

The people of Grail are semi-nomadic and can vanish into the desert at a moment’s notice, when necessary.

ALLIES

House Masseri, the Etyri, House Decados

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Members of House Keddah are all a bit wistful, having been brought up on stories of a romantic past. You love new information, old ballads, and the histories of all peoples — or perhaps you don’t care for them, but you need that knowledge for something. What are you ready for? Where will you go?

CHARACTER CREATION

Nomadic and proud of it, House Keddah has the rare distinction of being the only minor house to own its own planet. Members of the house range across the great mountains and forests, feasting in silk pavilions or training in the hidden valleys of Grail. Their wanderlust rarely stays contained to their home planet, so members of this house are regularly encountered offworld.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Etyri *or* Speak Etyri); Knowledge (Keddah); Knowledge (Shipboard Operations) *or* Transport (Beastcraft)

Characteristics: Dexterity +1 *or* Strength +1; Endurance +1; Perception +1; Presence +2

Perk: Noble Title (Knight)

Skills: Academia 1 *or* Perform 1; Charm 1 *or* Impress 1; Drive 1 *or* Observe 1; Fight 1 *or* Melee 1 *or* Shoot 1; Survival 1

HOUSE QUIRKS

Blessing: Nomad (+2 goal on Endurance-based rolls when on the move)

Curse: Softhearted (-2 goal on Will-based rolls when making tough decisions)

Favored Calling: Explorer and Lord

Material Award: *Pocket pavilion* (TL5 palm-sized device; pops up into a four-person yurt when set on the ground and activated)

Masseri

Once rulers of the planet Daishan and a major Sath-raist threat, House Masseri is a wreck of its former glory. They lost most of their holdings during the Symbiot Wars, when they were forced to retreat by the guns and flamethrowers of the Stigmata Garrison. The head of the house and their heir apparent were put to the torch after deliberately infecting themselves with the symbiot taint to protect their homeworld. Since then, the house has been sworn to the Decados and forced to bend their dwindling might towards that house's cold war with the al-Malik. The older faction of the Masseri cling like roaches to their island fiefs and ruined cities, but the younger Masseri are joining the Church and guilds in droves. If this keeps up, it's likely that the house will be gone in a generation.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Marquis Claudio Masseri* is the house ruler in name only. While he does give orders to the other nobles in the house, he holds no seat himself and is in fact an "honored guest" (read: refugee) at the Keddah palace of Pelleas on Grail. Ancient and blind in one eye, he plays the fool, the better to gain an advantage. There are rumors that he is hooked into the symbiots' "lifeweb," but Church investigations have turned up nothing. The Decados want him dead, but the al-Malik have been courting his favor to spite their ancient enemy. Claudio knows this and hopes to coax the few members of his family who are still loyal to him into an alliance (hopefully a conjugal one, producing more children) with the al-Malik.
- *Duchess Honoria Masseri* is the lady of a windswept island of 10,000 people on Leminkainen. Bitter and hot-tempered, much like her ill-liked father, she is prone to psychic outbursts, a possible hold-over from symbiot infection in her line. She holds a special grudge against her uncle, Balthazar (formerly Baldassare) Masseri, and the marquis for "abandoning" the house. She sees herself as the true leader of the house and intends to prove it by any means necessary.
- *Baron Ignatius Masseri* administers the Decados fiefs on Severus and is a complete and utter snake. He thinks he is a much better diplomat

than he is, and while he is a competent administrator, the Jakovian Agency keeps him under an information lock on a need-to-know basis. While he is looked on with contempt by much of the Decados for his wheedling nature and fits of temper, he is deeply devoted to his children and to the memory of his dead partner. He is fiercely protective of his position in order to protect them.



PRIMARY HOLDINGS

- *Kriel* on the Hawkwood world of Leminkainen is essentially a prison colony for the local Masseri. Any trace of symbiot taint has been thoroughly scorched out, and the land reflects this. Most food is imported, and serfs work in fishing and seining. Those who address Duchess Honora, the ruler of this tiny, storm-battered fief, do so with more than a touch of irony.

ALLIES

House Decados, House Keddah

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Masseri is a house in freefall. You know you're quickly losing your position. Will you flee from the sinking

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ship with the other rats, or will you cling to the last remaining vestiges of your house's glory?

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

House Masseri was broken and scattered during the early Symbiot Wars, largely due to members of their house becoming infected by symbiots. Masseri generally avoid mentioning their bloodline unless absolutely necessary. They can be found among the guilds, the Church, the military, and in service to other noble houses.

Capabilities: Customs (Commons); Knowledge (Masseri); an equipment capability *or* Knowledge (Symbiot)

Characteristics: Perception +2; Presence +1; Wits +2
Perk: Noble Title (Knight)

Skills: Charm 1 *or* Impress 1 *or* Knavery 1; Disguise 1 *or* Sneak 1; Empathy 1 *or* Focus 1; Shoot 1; Survival 1 *or* Vigor 1

HOUSE QUIRKS

Blessing: Chameleon (+2 Presence when in a new situation)

Curse: Scattered House (-2 Presence in another noble's fief)

Favored Calling: Ronin

Material Award: *Bloodstone* (TL6 blood-monitoring device from the Stigmata Garrison; turns red when exposed to symbiot-tainted blood)

Ramakrishna

Once a powerful house during the Second Republic, the Ramakrishna were smashed during the Fall. They fled to their homeworld, Rauhina, but they couldn't hold it themselves against the Vuldrok. As a result, the planet was renamed Hargard, and the Ramakrishna were relegated to the southern continent. The family has since rebuilt itself as a power on the planet, but tensions with the rest of the Vuldrok have risen to a point that they can no longer count on their brethren to ensure their survival. House Ramakrishna reached out to the Phoenix Empire, and in exchange for negotiating the treaty between Eldrid and Alexius, they have regained their Known Worlds noble status.

Members of House Ramakrishna disdain open intolerance, regarding it as classless and ignoble. They are curious and well-read, as well as multilingual, and they consider themselves a bridge between the Lost and Known Worlds.

LEADING MEMBERS



- *Sir Savan Ramakrishna* is the Lord-Mayor of Givirvraja by virtue of being Duchess Sura's trusted confidant; thus, he was the diplomat present at the meeting binding House Eldrid to the Phoenix Throne. He has a big laugh and an even bigger ability to get into trouble that he can easily extract himself from. Although he plays the buffoon, Savan is well-educated and deeply empathic — he has passed several city laws easing the tax burden on the freefolk families and merchants below a certain wealth level, as well as making it easier for those without noble rank to attend a university.
- *Duchess Sura Ramakrishna* is the head of the house and ruler of the Vijayangar continent on Hargard. She is aware of the position she has put her house into by reaching out to the empire, but she feels it is for the best. Sura is fiercely devoted to her husband, Duke Jahan, and her paramour, Lady Roshanara, as well as her children. Thanks to the treaty between Hargard and the Phoenix Throne, her children are now recognized as lords in the Known Worlds, and she hopes to see that reach expanded before she dies. At the very least, she hopes Alexius will make good on his promise to allow the Ramakrishna to represent themselves at his councils.



PRIMARY HOLDINGS

- *Vijayangar*, on Hargard, is the house's current home. An island of sophisticated culture on the Vuldrok world, Vijayangar boasts a spaceport, several cities, and a series of strategically useful mountain ranges. The Ramakrishna have an undisputed hold over this continent, though there is an ongoing threat to their people from the rebels on Ostmark.

ALLIES

House al-Malik, House Eldrid

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

The nobles of House Ramakrishna are not newcomers to Known Worlds politics, no matter what anyone else might think — they're just slightly out of date. You're still getting your bearings, but you're ready to throw yourself back into the fray that your family left eons ago. What will you do with your newfound status? How does being considered a barbarian shape your decisions?

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

A newly restored house from Hargard, the Ramakrishnas are similar to their former al-Malik rivals on Shaprut in their elegance and learning. To the Church's dismay, they are pagans, followers of a religious philosophy called Tertha. While most nobles of the house prefer to remain on their homeworld, some are investigating their new neighbors in the Known Worlds or visiting old relatives on Shaprut while plotting to reclaim lands there, now that they have the Emperor's favor.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Ramakrishna, Tertha); Speak Vuldrok

Characteristics: Faith +1; Intuition +1; Presence +1; Wits +2

Perk: Noble Title (Knight)

Skills: Academia 1; Arts 1 *or* Perform 1; Charm 1; Empathy 1 *or* Focus 1; Interface 1 *or* Tech Redemption 1

HOUSE QUIRKS

Blessing: Learned (+2 Wits when discussing intellectual matters)

Curse: Selfish (-2 Perception when not the center of attention)

Favored Calling: Courtier

Material Award: *Hand of Hamut* (TL7 finger-ring device; one-use — single activation — standard energy shield; can be recharged after use over a 6-hour period)

Shelit

Once a house of some power in the Kurgan Caliphate, the Shelit were crushed by the Caliph, and their forces were decimated. To this day, they refuse to speak of the details, only noting that they fled to the outskirts once their doom was at hand. The Hazat took them in on the condition that they would protect the borders of Hira against their former lords. House Shelit has taken to this duty with the solemnity for which their house is known, and the Hazat do not ask them any questions. In recent years, since their introduction to the Church and the Phoenix Throne, House Shelit has been under a great deal of scrutiny. While they are excellent doctors and surgeons, rivaling the Decados in their knowledge of human (and some alien) bodies, they came to this proficiency through an advanced understanding of cybernetics. Almost every member of the house has a cybernetic enhancement somewhere, and the Church, especially the Avestites, do not trust them. House Shelit knows this, and they know they cannot change this, so they do their duty and keep their feelings to themselves.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Viscountess Dana Anahira de Shelit de Hira* is the current head of house. Directly descended from the original house founder on the matrilineal line, she seems an unlikely matriarch, given her distaste for combat and her refusal to be educated within the ranks of the Hazat — an offer made to all the children of House Shelit. She is, however, a devout follower of the Universal Church and has invited the Sanctuary Aeon into Shelit fiefs on Hira. That makes all the difference. Dana is in her mid-30s, is as serious as the rest of her house, and has no unnervingly obvious cybernetic limbs. Her eyes, however, are enhanced to detect sudden movement and body heat — a good choice for a ruler uneasy on her throne.

PRIMARY HOLDINGS

- *Ta'if*, named after an important walled city on Holy Terra, is a combination fortress and palace on the continent of Halalaj on Hira. While it is perhaps not as grand as some other house's holdings, it has stood for thousands of years and has not been destroyed by siege or bombing or the simple passage of time. Ta'if is a blocky construct of red and white sandstone with massive gates and few exterior windows. Inside, however, there are pleasant courtyards, mosaic-inlaid floors, and soaring ceilings with oil lamps that are faintly, but pleasantly, scented. The viscountess rules the family from the inner solar.



ALLIES

House Hazat

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

House Shelit is a stranger in a strange land. You know you are surrounded by people who hate and mistrust you. Present your best face to the world, and they can't hurt you. Also, it helps that you have a cybernetic implant, making you slightly better than normal humans. What do you want to be accepted for? What do you avoid doing at all costs?

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

A frontier house from Hira, the Shelit are former members of the Kurga Caliphate who allied with the Empire after a massive betrayal from within. They are a grim but determined family, and they keep the borders on Hira as part of their fealty to the Phoenix Throne. Culturally, they are closer to the Known Worlds than to the Hiran Kurgans. They have a deep interest in cybernetics, a fetish the Church and many (but not all) noble houses find distasteful.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Kurgan) *or* Tech Lore *or* Think Machine; Knowledge (Shelit); Medical (Cybernetics) *or* Read Urthtech*

* House Shelit nobles can learn this language, which is normally restricted to the guilds.

Characteristics: Endurance +1; Intuition +1; Will +2; Wits +1

Perk: Noble Title (Knight)

Skills: Academics 1; Crafts 1 *or* Tech Redemption 1; Fight 1 *or* Melee 1 *or* Shoot 1; Focus 1 *or* Interface 1; Remedy 1

HOUSE QUIRKS

Blessing: Determined (+2 goal on Will-based rolls when fighting)

Curse: Dispassionate (-1 goal for persuasion influence vs other nobles)

Favored Calling: Cyborg

Material Award: Cybersympathy surgery (+1 Techgnosis; your nervous system has been surgically modified to better handle cyber-implants)

Thana

Some say the Thana aren't human, that they are aliens or demons or something else altogether. That's not entirely incorrect. The Thana are products of centuries of breeding projects, carefully controlled eugenic culling, and extreme bio- and genetic engineering. These experiments began several generations before the Second Republic, though the exact date is unknown. They were intended to breed gods from mere humans, so that the surrounding systems would tremble in fear of the house. Any given member of House Thana is painfully gorgeous and expected to live to around 120 years old. They also have a strong tendency towards psi powers, especially the path of Sixth Sense. While extremely puissant in their own right, House Thana was scattered to the winds when their homeworld of Eridol was shut off from the Known Worlds after its jumpgate was disrupted. They hold no fiefs larger than a manor in their own right. Those who are not constantly on the run from the Church are already members of the Inquisition. The house still technically holds their nobility, due to Vladimir's decision to uphold their rights, but like the Masseri, they might be extinct within a (long) generation.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Alarun Silal Thana* is the eldest living known Thana psychic at something like 100 years. They do not present as either male or female, and they do not use binary pronouns, like much of their house. Alarun holds no titles and is referred to as "Their Grace" merely out of respect for their noble blood. They are welcome without question in the courts

of the Decados and the Li Halan, and they often find hospitality in the courts of the lesser houses. Alarun is extremely polite and very knowledgeable. In exchange for hospitality, Alarun will happily spend an evening discussing politics, sharing stories, or simply giving advice. Their body structure and face are perfectly symmetrical, except for the eyes — one a deep blue, almost black, and one a pale silver. The shock of this sudden disruption makes it easier to appreciate the rest of Alarun.



- *Morik Danae Thana* is the Chief Penitent of the Hounds of Light (psychic hunters) for the Avestites. While they also prefer to use non-binary pronouns, they have grudgingly adjusted to being addressed as “she” or “the priestess.” Morik is a “natural-born” (i.e. bastard) child of the house, taken in by the Avestites after their Thana parent was killed. They are a fanatic Inquisitor, and their psi powers are invaluable to the Church. They also suffer from a deep self-loathing, which they inflict on themselves and others.

PRIMARY HOLDINGS

Alarun owns a small manor on Grail.

ALLIES

House Decados, House Li Halan, the Inquisition

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

House Thana is what happens when you have only yourself to cling to. You are like star-seeds scattered across the universe looking for somewhere to root yourself. There is no castle to come home to, no fief to administer, no place to be grounded and safe. You are your own best asset. How will you survive? How will you thrive in a world that treats you as nonhuman?

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

While they may look the least human of all the houses, the Thana are just as human as any other noble. They may live far too long and have a tendency towards psychic powers, but they are still a noble house, and thus, they can request hospitality in any fief that will have them. They have few lands of their own and are constantly moving. Some have joined the Church for more stability.

Special: You can choose to allocate 1 or more characteristic ranks to the Psi characteristic, and you can increase it by using the characteristic ranks awarded at each level.

Some Thana are Changed mutants whose ancestors were given longevity (see the Longevity perk in *The Changed* chapter).

Capabilities: Customs (Cathedral, Commons); Knowledge (Thana)

Characteristics: Dexterity +1; Intuition +1; Presence +1; Will +2

Perk: Noble Title (Knight)

Skills: Academics 1; Charm 1 *or* Empathy 1; Fight 1 *or* Melee 1 *or* Shoot 1; Focus 1; Impress 1 *or* Knavery 1

HOUSE QUIRKS

Blessing: Unearthly (+2 Presence around other nobles)

Curse: Dynastic Stain (-2 Presence around Church officials)

Favored Calling: Psychic

Material Award: *Eridolian shard* (TL7 device that provides +2 Spirit Resistance, one use per scene; it’s a shattered piece of the house founder’s energy lance; these are passed down through generations and often set into necklaces or bracelets)

Torenson

Like many other minor houses, Torenson was once a house powerful enough to be considered a candidate for the Phoenix Throne. Their pride and their military both matched that of the Hawkwoods, but

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they overreached. The house's enmity towards Vladimir Aleto was well known, and in some sectors, they took the fall for his death. In others, their complicated web of alliances destroyed them in a torrent of violence and confusion. All but wiped out, the part of the house that did manage to survive learned better. Torenson today is not known for its strength but for its sophistication. Scions of the house are trained in wit, mediation, and etiquette, and Torensons are actively sought out as arbiters in noble disputes (as lawyers and Reeves are for the merchant class). They also make excellent matchmakers, seneschals, and diplomats. More than a few have entered into morganatic marriages with greater houses to secure more permanent positions. Torenson owns very few fiefs in their own name, but their blood is so old and their skills are so honed that they don't have to.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Marquessa Agneta Torenson* is the current matriarch of the house. A dark-skinned woman in her middle years, Agneta is noted for her quick smile and her ability to smooth out any social situation, no matter how tense. She sends out her house members with the clever eye of a general, assigning each Torenson to a situation that will further both their own goals and those of the house. Assisting her in this is one Sofia of Padua, formerly the court poet

at the Torenson estates on the continent of Avaneir on Rampart and now her lover. Originally a spy for the Reeves, Sofia is now utterly devoted to the marquessa. Agneta is well aware that Sofia is putting them both in danger, but she values her par amour both for her own feelings and as a weapon against the Reeves.

PRIMARY HOLDINGS

- *South Perleria* on Criticorum is ruled by Sir Zachary Torenson. Sequestered within a smaller collection of fiefs than the Juandaastas fiefs directly on the north border, the population is heavily controlled by the Torenson traditions. Marriages are arranged from birth here, and citizens and peasantry alike are assigned occupations based on their perceived talents. Life would be orderly, but for the fact that the Juandaastas "pets" from the north keep leaking across the mountainous border.
- *The Torenson estates on Avaneir* are the closest approximation the house has to a powerbase. A relatively small population lives in this fief, and though it is pastoral and pleasant, it requires a lot of upkeep. The marquessa is extremely concerned with appearances, so the house's resources are bent towards keeping this base on Rampart looking welcoming and lovely.

ALLIES

House Li Halan, House al-Malik, any other house that retains their services

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Any person can be a noble if they say the right words and dress the right way. You know this all too well, and you can play the part with the best of the great houses. Be witty, be charming, and always keep your ears open. What does Agneta want from you? What do you want for yourself?

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Once a house of warriors, Torenson was soundly defeated during the first Emperor War. They are now brilliant arbiters, matchmakers, and lawyers for those who feel the Reeves are too far beneath them.

Capabilities: Customs (choose Cathedral Customs or Commons Customs); Knowledge (Torenson); Lore (any)

Characteristics: Intuition +2; Perception +2; Presence +1

Perk: Noble Title (Knight)

Skills: Academia 1; Arts 1; Charm 1; Empathy 1 *or* Focus 1; Perform 1

HOUSE QUIRKS

Blessing: Matchmaker (+2 Wits when arranging deals, contracts, or marriages)

Curse: Traditionalist (-2 Wits in unfamiliar environments)

Favored Calling: Courtier

Material Award: You have a *roster* of all current nobles, both landholding and otherwise, that was either printed in book form or preserved as a portable data archive. (It can be traded in annually for an updated version.)

Trusnikron

Little more than a herding and breeding guild, House Trusnikron is a rare case of a noble house that did not earn its title through the husbandry of its children. Their home is Ravenna, but they also hold fiefs on Cadavus and Shaprut. All of their estates are devoted to raising steeds, no matter where they are. From horses to griffins to urrocs, Trusnikron raises the best. They also serve Hazat and Hawkwood with no small amount of distinction, both in their air force and as cavalry. While they have the potential to grow into a larger house than they are now, Trusnikron is comfortable with where they are. They are something of a link in the void between guilds, the Church, and the nobility, and they are happy to take that role. Somewhat surprisingly, the house has very few enemies. While they are brusque, and sometimes even rude, they tend to make friends fairly easily. No one really sees the Trusnikron as a secret threat — they're just not the sort of people who present themselves as schemers and spiders.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Duchess Morgana Solara Trusnikron* is the duchess-dowager of Folari North on Ravenna and one of the two heads of the house. Though her husband died when her twins were in the cradle, she has not taken a lover or a spouse since — and she seems fairly happy not to do so. Some say she's in love with the Phoenix Throne itself. The truth is, she's deeply content with her position, and she enjoys teaching the house's craft to new breeders and members of the house alike. In an unprecedented move, she took the orphans of a fire in a merchant's house on as her wards — and



it's possible she might adopt them as well. Morgana is an accomplished horsewoman and pilot, as well as a clever theologian.

- *Vismarquis Kovann Trusnikron* is the ruler of Sudania on Cadavus. While at first glance he does not appear to be an ideal member of this house — he has a club foot and is blind in one eye — Kovann is a wizard on a urroc. He has competed in many tournaments held by the guilds and the Decados and won most of them. Kovann is extremely gentle with his steeds and can soothe a nervous griffin with a single touch and a soft word. This proves to be useful in battle, where he is a deadly commander. Kovann is still bitter about the death of his father, which he blames on the Decados.

PRIMARY HOLDINGS

- *Folari North* on Ravenna is a highly mountainous and forested region ruled entirely by this house. Paths cut through the rock and woods make riding easier, and wild urrocs breed here, making it easier for the nobility to catch and tame. The Trusnikron here are close to their Hawkwood overlords, so it is not uncommon for members of the two houses to party or rendezvous in the woodlands of Folari North.
- *Sudania* on Cadavus is a harsh, wind-battered region full of wastelands and monasteries. The Decados gave this continent to the house as a sort

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of white elephant, and the vismarquis knows it. Vesta, the planet's second largest city, is here, full of anti-Decados sentiment that runs unchecked.

ALLIES

The Hazat, House Hawkwood

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

The Trusnikron are one step above shepherds, and they're fine with that. You have a great deal of social fluidity, and no one will question your presence in a guildhall or a ballroom. How will you use this freedom? How will it restrict you?

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Raised to nobility for their truly astonishing way with animals, the Trusnikron are still looked down on by those of older blood — especially the Torensens, with whom they share at least one border.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Beast); Knowledge (Trusnikron); Transport (Beastback *or* Beastcraft)

Characteristics: Dexterity +2 or Strength +2; Endurance +2; Perception +1

Perk: Noble Title (Knight)

Skills: Animalia 2; Charm 1 *or* Impress 1; Drive 1 *or* Survival 1 *or* Vigor 1; Fight 1 or Melee 1

HOUSE QUIRKS

Blessing: Breeder (+2 Presence when dealing with animals)

Curse: Uncouth (-2 Presence when dealing with other nobles)

Favored Calling: Amateur

Material Award: A trained small pet (such as a dog-, monkey-, or bird-like creature) that can fetch items and warn against intruders.

Van Gelder

Once a Royal House, Van Gelder is now barely more than wealthy free folk, a family in service to the Decados. They get along well with the Chariteers and the Reeves, and they have plenty of money, but after their near destruction by House Alecto, they are content to remain in the shadow of a far more dangerous power. Many other houses do not seek out the Van Gelder — they're considered not just common, but dull and stodgy. They have old Republican manners with Imperial sensibilities, and while they will trade with anyone, most

don't want to go through the boredom of talking to them to go through with it. This reputation for dullness is one of their greatest assets, however. A full eighth of the Jakovian Agency consists of scions from House Van Gelder, and they make excellent spies, assassins, and simple eavesdroppers. Many have forgotten that Van Gelder had a reputation as master poisoners before the Emperor Wars — a skill they've retained in service to the Decados.



LEADING MEMBERS

- *Marquis Zarachia Van Gelder* is the head of the family. While he identifies as male, it's impossible to tell from looking at him. Zarachia has a dark complexion, startlingly bright hazel eyes, and no hair on his body anywhere, thanks to his friends in the Genetech cartel. He is the oldest member of the family, clocking in at an impressive 102 years. He is also the regent of Alashak on Malignatus, as the Decados duke has gone missing. Zarachia is extremely competent at his administrative duties. He is generally quiet in both private and public life and plays his cards extremely close to the chest. The Decados are deeply suspicious of him, but so long as he continues to turn out money from his fief and faithfully serves the house, they have no reason to topple him from his throne.

- *Dame Agatha Van Gelder* is the head of the Vanguard, a knightly order created to protect humans from alien aggression. She is a veteran of the Emperor Wars and has both the physical and emotional scars to prove it. One of her eyes is missing; the other is stained a dark purple-red. She is stern and cold but occasionally shows a softer side at odd moments.

PRIMARY HOLDINGS

- *Alashak* is a continent of Malignatus, a place of steppes, cities, and ice floes. Marquis Zarachia rules from Aola, an ugly, tumbledown city of mixed construction and catacombs. The Van Gelders control the planet's largest airport.

ALLIES

House Decados, the Charioteers, the Reeves

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Another house that's one step above merchants, the Van Gelders use their spotless if dull reputation to get away with all sorts of things. Who do you want out of your way? How will you achieve it? How harmless are you, really?

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Another old house that fell from grace, the Van Gelder are currently a steward house for the Decados. While they occasionally plot against their masters, they more often plot for them, taking out inconvenient political and clerical figures for the Jakovian Agency.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Van Gelder); Medical (Poison); Ranged Weapons (choose Energy Guns *or* Slug Guns)

Characteristics: Dexterity +1; Perception +2; Presence +1; Wits +1 *or* Will +1

Perk: Noble Title (Knight)

Skills: Charm 1 *or* Impress 1; Disguise 1; Fight 1 *or* Melee 1 *or* Shoot 1; Intrusion 1 *or* Sneak 1 *or* Sleight of Hand 1; Knavery 1

HOUSE QUIRKS

Blessing: Careful (+2 Perception in social situations)

Curse: Shadowy (-2 Presence when not spying)

Favored Calling: Spy

Material Award: *Sunset serpent* blade poison (so called due to its ability to temporarily blind opponents for 1 scene; must inflict at least 1 dmg with coated blade; one vial is good for five uses)

Xanthippe

Perhaps the most matriarchal of all the houses in the Known Worlds, House Xanthippe is aware of the irony of their strongholds all being on moons. In fact, their most important fief is on Luna, the moon of Holy Terra. Xanthippe maintains a great number of space stations as well, most with hydroponic greenhouses dedicated to producing the unique wines the house is famous for. Mostly content to stay on their moons and out of the greater scheme of politics, the house is quietly shoring up its own power. Occasionally, they will allow the more combat-ready members of the house to lead mercenary corps into a war or two — but never on just one side. Xanthippe is deeply dedicated to balance. All of the house laws are codified in a document called *The Measure*, which is locked in a bulletproof vitrine in their stronghold on Luna. Each moonhaven, space station, and member of the house also has a copy.



LEADING MEMBERS

- *The Morigana* are three matriarchs chosen to lead the house. When they take this position, they bear one of three titles: the Maiden, the Mother, or the Crone. When the Crone dies, the Mother becomes the Crone, and the Maiden becomes the Mother. The new Crone and Mother then choose

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a new Maiden. The Maiden is in charge of wine production, the Mother handles administration and diplomacy, and the Crone resolves less savory matters, usually warfare and spycraft. They often work together, though each has full power over their domains. The current Maiden and Crone are working together to create a wine that really makes use of the saying “in vino veritas.” The Mother is hard at work maintaining cordial relations with all of the houses, as well as eyeing a potential stake in a space station orbiting Byzantium Secundus.

PRIMARY HOLDINGS

- *Luna* is the house’s most prized fief. It is here that they keep *The Measure*, as well as an estate carved primarily out of regolith, basalt, and volcanic iron. Members of the Sanctuary Aeon are welcome here, as are pilgrims to Holy Terra. It is guarded by the Hippolytes, an all-female knightly order formed for the personal protection of members of the house. Luna also hosts the only known lunar vineyard, an experimental greenhouse full of hardy Terran varieties, such as riesling and vidal.

ALLIES

The house has no allies, remaining deliberately neutral in all matters. However, this also means they have no real enemies.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

As a noble of House Xanthippe, you’re known for being level-headed, always weighing your options

in every situation. Sometimes, you’re scoffed at as a mere wine merchant, but most people know better. Consider your choices and think through everything. You can never be perfect, but patience is key in all endeavors to get the best possible outcome. How will you make sure cooler heads prevail? What are you willing to give up to get what you want?

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

The most matriarchal house of any in the Known Worlds, Xanthippe has its fiefs mostly on moons and space stations. They grow hydroponic grapes, it’s true, but they also sell their formidable military services to the highest bidder while striving to appear completely neutral.

Capabilities: Customs (Commons) *or* Science (Life); Knowledge (Xanthippe); Melee Weapons (Military)

Characteristics: Dexterity +2 *or* Strength +2; Endurance +2; Perception +1 *or* Presence +1

Perk: Noble Title (Knight)

Skills: Alchemy 1; Fight 1; Impress 1; Melee 1 *or* Shoot 1; Survival 1 *or* Vigor 1

HOUSE QUIRKS

Blessing: Hardened (+2 goal on Faith-based rolls during tense or difficult situations)

Curse: Indifferent (-2 Presence when making a hard decision)

Favored Calling: Commander

Material Award: You have a book or data copy of *The Measure* guidebook. (Once per act, you can consult it as a primary action for one reroll on a failed non-combat roll.)



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While the five major sects/orders are by far the most important and influential ones within the Church, they are not the only ones. Within reason, the Universal Church allows for a wide diversity of ways to live out the teachings of the Prophet. Here are a few of the most significant ones.

Chorali

The Chorali follow a holy avocation to venerate the Pancreator through song. Many members of this order were originally part of another sect or order but found their true calling among this elect choir. Chorali who originally came from different sects may not necessarily get along, owing to their particular beliefs, but they still cooperate in their shared mission within this order and the Church.

The Chorali also provide an avenue for talented musicians who have no interest in joining the Merchant League. The League's various entertainment guilds have a near-monopoly on the performance and recording of music; the Chorali offers a Church-supported alternative. Of course, this sometimes means that some Chorali are not particularly faithful, using the order as a convenient way to advance their own careers rather than serving the Church out of genuine devotion.

Most Chorali are musically talented but little more. Truly gifted Chorali are reputed to be able to work miracles with their voices alone. The hymns of such miraculous Chorali reflect the power and grace of the Pancreator, much like the theurgy of other orders. The unique nature of these hymns is of great interest to many within the Church, particularly the Eskatonics, who wish to learn more about this blessing of the Pancreator.

LEADING MEMBERS

- Already a famous singer before he entered the Orthodoxy in his teens, *Canon Antonio Steed* is a celebrity across the Known Worlds, thanks to magic lantern shows and the patronage of nobles. His music has served as an effective tool of evangelism in high society, despite the fact that he's now a heretic. Years ago, when his faith began to wane, he sought out new avenues to relieve his ennui. After he encountered the Incarnate sect of Iver, he began to pepper his work with references to their heretical theology. His popularity has kept the Church from defrocking him, but after one more infraction, he might be tried and burned as a heretic to serve as a very public example.



- *Deacon Beth Solaria* miraculously received Irama Li Halan's vast memory of hymns when she attended her deathbed. A simple Sanctuary Aeon nurse at the time, she was the only one present when the dying "Matriarch of Music" gestured for her to come near. Bending an ear to the old woman's feeble voice, she was suddenly engulfed in light and the sound of a choir, whereupon she fainted. When she was revived by the head nurse, Lady Irama was dead, and Beth remembered a vast number of hymns she'd never heard before. The Miracle of the Whispered Song vaulted Beth to public acclaim, something she is most definitely uncomfortable with. The Chorali promised her a place where she could safely and privately spend her days recording all the hymns Lady Irama left her.

ALLIES

The Chorali can count on support among all the major orders of the Church, including the Avestites and Brother Battle. They also find support among religious nobles and anyone else who seeks to spread the Church's influence by means other than preaching.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Like a missionary among heathens, you move among the faithful, spreading the words of the Prophet and

inspiring devotion. Since you exist outside the formal hierarchy, you are welcomed everywhere. This social mobility gives you a unique advantage compared to many other priests within the Church.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Musically talented members of other Church sects often join this order to dedicate themselves to the Choir Absolute, the eternal Empyrean song. Exceptional Choralis are said to be able to work miracles with their voices alone. A Choralis character might be a pursuer of lost hymns, an inspired composer, or a member of a noble or merchant's entourage.

Characters who have their apprenticeships among this order, instead of first training under a different sect, gain the following traits:

Capabilities: Knowledge (Choralis); Lore (any); Speak Latin

Characteristics: Dexterity +1 *or* Faith +1; Intuition +2; Presence +2

Perk: Church Ordination (Novitiate)

Skills: Arts 1 *or* Remedy 1; Charm 1 *or* Impress 1; Empathy 1 *or* Focus 1; Perform 2

SECT QUIRKS

Blessing: Beloved (+2 Charm among the faithful)

Curse: Innocent (-2 Mind Resistance against persuasion influence from the faithful)

Favored Calling: Chorister

Material Award: You have a hymnal book containing the most common songs of praise to the Pancreator (+1 goal to Perform-skill *awe* maneuver rolls when reading from the book).

Hesychasts

Some believers chose to forgo the hierarchy of the Church entirely, retreating to the wilderness to commune with the Pancreator. These monks, known as hesychasts, do not answer to any authority, and as such, they do not enjoy the many social benefits of other clergy. In exchange, though, they have relative freedom to seek out the Holy Flame as they wish — so long as they do not fall into heresy.

As relative outsiders to the politics of the Church, mendicants have little influence on theological or doctrinal issues. Occasionally, a hesychast will come from the wilderness, wielding some insight that causes a stir or even a revival within the Church. However, this rarely happens, and (as noted above) it can lead to worries about heresy. On the other hand, the history of the Church is filled with monks whose mystical

experiences earned them recognition as saints. Such saints are the subject of many folk tales and passion plays, making them popular figures in the imaginations of the common people of the Known Worlds.

Hesychasts are generally of three sorts. The first consists of lone hermits who stake out a dwelling place in the wilderness, far from the distractions of civilization. The second are monks who dwell in monasteries organized for a similar purpose. The third are wandering mendicants who travel from world to world, bringing the word of the Prophet to the ignorant and unconverted. All mendicants depend on the kindness of others to survive, as they often live under vows of extreme poverty, rarely possessing more than they need to survive to the next day.

LEADING MEMBERS



- *Sir Volstag Rupi Decados the Silent* forsook his title and house to live an ascetic life in the harsh forests of Malignatius. He has taken a vow of silence, allegedly because the horrors of the Emperor Wars so traumatized him that the sound of his own voice brings back intolerable memories. Seekers come to sit beside him or follow along as he scavenges for food, claiming to gain deep, mystical insights in his presence.
- *Hedrick the Bear* is a huge man with strange proclivities. His birthplace and life before he showed up on the Kurgan frontier on Hira are unknown.

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Now he appears on this world and that, sharing his spiritual wisdom with anyone who will listen. Some believe his teachings are tinged with the Kurga Caliphate's religious heresies, but inquisitorial investigators concluded that he only uses Kurgan fables as a metaphors for his quirky but scripturally acceptable (if odd) lessons about "slaying the two-faced face in the mirror that the One might appear."

ALLIES

All the established orders of the Church view hesychasts with varying degrees of suspicion. The Eskatonics and the Amaltheans are the most sympathetic to their insights, while the Orthodoxy and Avestites are on the lookout for heresy amongst them.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

You wish to remain aloof from the day-to-day squabbles of the Church. For you, nothing is more important than the direct experience of Pancreator and his creation, which can be found equally in the wilderness or among the common folk. These experiences, you hope, will reveal the purpose of creation and lead you to a great degree of reflectivity of the Holy Flame.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

As a diverse group of priests who want nothing to do with Church politics or other worldly pursuits, Hesychasts seek contemplation of the Holy Flame above all else. Some Hesychasts pursue this vocation in monasteries, while others do so alone in the wilderness. A Hesychast character might be an otherworldly mystic, a rebellious iconoclast, or even an insightful investigator of hidden truths.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Hesychasm); choose any 2 Lores

Characteristics: Dexterity +1 *or* Strength +1; Endurance +1; Faith +1; Perception +1; Wits +1

Perk: Church Ordination (Novitiate)

Skills: Crafts 1; Empathy 1 *or* Observe 1; Focus 2; Remedy 1 *or* Survival *or* Vigor 1

SECT QUIRKS

Blessing: Pious (+2 Impress among the sinful)

Curse: Uncouth (-2 Charm at society functions)

Favored Calling: Mendicant

Material Award: You have blessed rosary beads or a minor relic of a saint; this grants you +1 goal to Focus-skill rolls.

Incarnates

The Incarnates are an offshoot of the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun, albeit one deemed heretical in its interpretation of the Omega Gospels. According to the Incarnates, the true Church is an invisible one, known only to the Pancreator. It is a harmony of souls, not a political organization. The Incarnates believe that the Patriarchs, starting with Palamedes Alecto himself, hid the true teachings of the Prophet to suit their own political ends. They believe that the leaders of the Church should live simply and without ostentation among their flock rather than giving in to the soul-destroying corruption of riches and temporal power.

The sect gets its name from the belief that every sentient being holds within it "the Incarnate Spirit given by the Pancreator" and thus has direct communion with the godhead. Priests trained in doctrine are useful but not necessary to help reflect the Holy Flame, which (the Incarnates attest) is each individual's responsibility to foster through hard work and prayer. That said, the Incarnates do have their own bishops (and councils thereof) to which they turn for guidance. Unfortunately, this sometimes leads to difficulties as one bishop claims primacy over another, leaving this sect a chaotic mess.

Needless to say, the Universal Church considers the Incarnates a threat, working hard to suppress them and their beliefs. This is particularly true in Li Halan space, where many secret Incarnate cells can be found. There is debate within the Church as to whether this is the best approach to dealing with these heretics. Some within the Orthodoxy feel that a less aggressive approach, one based on theological dispute and debate, might yield better results.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Bishop Soko Kanli* is the current head of the Incarnate faith on Midian, following the death of the beloved Bishop Lucan. Like his predecessor, he is hunted by the Li Halan authorities. Unlike his predecessor, Soko lives a double life: He is also Canon Yukio Ernaldo Li Halan, the Orthodox inquisitor who hunts the heretical Soko Kanli. It is anyone's guess how long he can maintain this ruse.
- *Bishop Miis'kar Skyspeaker* is a popular Etyri Incarnate priest who travels the planet Iver and preaches to any who will listen. Some believe that he is secretly a spy for an intelligence agency of one sort or another, a claim that has never been substantiated.



CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Branded heretics by the Universal Church, members of this sect believe that all sentient beings possess the ability to commune directly with the Pancreator without the need for priests or religious hierarchies. The sect is persecuted on many worlds, but such persecution has only made it stronger. An Incarnate character might be a fiery preacher, a hidden believer, or a wanderer looking for other adherents of their sect.

Capability: Knowledge (Incarnates); choose any 2 Lore

Characteristics: Endurance +1; Faith +1 or Wits +1; Intuition +2; Presence +1

Perk: Wise One

Skills: Academia 1 or Empathy 1; Charm 1 or Impress 1; Focus 1 or Remedy 1 or Survival 1; Perform 2

SECT QUIRKS

Blessing: Stubborn (+1 goal on End-, Will-, Faith-based rolls when persecuted)

Curse: Bitter (-2 Charm when dealing with the Orthodoxy)

Favored Calling: Friar

Material Award: You have a *collection of notes* in a secret code that supposedly lists the names and locations of Incarnate-friendly individuals across the Known Worlds.

ALLIES

The Incarnates have no allies among the other sects. Indeed, they are disliked even by other heretics, such as the Children of Zuran, with whom they have doctrinal differences every bit as strong as those with the Church. They are therefore very much on their own.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

In the Known Worlds, you are wary of the Church's power and secretive in your activities, even as you are filled with zeal in the rightness of your interpretation of the Prophet's words. You believe that time will prove your interpretation correct; when this happens, the corrupt Church will be unable to stop the new flowering of faith that will spread across space.

Preceptors

Prior to the Church's adoption of suspicion toward technology, there were those within its ranks who saw it as a potential bulwark against the coming dark age. Coming from the upper classes of the now-defunct Second Republic, these priests took it upon themselves to learn and share the lore of science, literacy, and mathematics among the common folk. Seeing themselves as "teaching missionaries," they fanned out across the Known Worlds, acting as part of a religious duty to preserve the fruits of Republican knowledge.

As universities and other sources of learning crumbled, the Preceptors were often the only source of reliable information about the days before the New Dark Ages. While this made them popular in many quarters, it also incited jealousy in the nobility, who considered it their divinely ordained role to be the users of high technology. The Preceptors were thus a threat to their position, and certain noble houses worked hard to sour the Orthodoxy on the teaching

missionaries. The fact that the Preceptors were also developing closer ties with the Merchant League probably did not help matters.

Soon thereafter, the Church responded to the growing tide of support for the Preceptors with threats of Inquisitorial investigation, excommunication, and worse. They might have succeeded in suppressing the sect had it not been for the Sanctuary Aeon, who unexpectedly stepped forward to support them. Not willing to risk tearing the Church apart, the Patriarch backed off, leading to the present stalemate. The Preceptors continue to operate without censure, but they remain wary that events may turn against them.

LEADING MEMBERS



- *Priest Hedvika Hawkwood* is from a minor branch of the house, but one still influential enough that it had access to the corridors of power on several worlds. Hedvika uses this influence to work as a tutor to younger members of her house, inculcating in them in the knowledge of the past in the hope of forging a brighter future. Rumors within the Imperial court suggest that she has been interviewed by Imperial Left-Hand Councilor Bran Botan vo Karm concerning the eventual tutoring needs of Aurora Hawkwood.
- Born on Byzantium Secundus, *Deacon Seneca Leroy* was initiated into the Preceptors by his parish priest, who was secretly a member of this sect. Under his

tutelage, he traveled the Known Worlds, seeking out lost works from before the New Dark Ages and ensuring that copies were made of them. It is said that he now has many caches of books and data archives hidden throughout the empire, available for use by fellow Preceptors who perform duties for him.

ALLIES

The Preceptors have two potent allies. The first is the Merchant League, which sees this sect as useful in helping to combat the anti-technological prejudices within the Church. The second is Sanctuary Aeon, which rallied to the Preceptors' defense, claiming that they offered the Known Worlds another "path to the Pancreator's grace."

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

You believe that a priest's primary virtue is in knowing many fields of study and mastering as many as possible. The more people you can teach, the better. Indeed, you see teaching as your sect's primary vocation, so you may return common lore to the people and educate them to rise above barbarity. Nevertheless, you are pragmatic and understand that your goals may upset the established social order. Therefore, you prefer to move slowly, lest you elicit the ire of either the nobility or those within the Church who oppose disseminating the knowledge of the past.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Once operating in secret, the Preceptors stepped into the light during the Emperor Wars as advocates of learning open to all, regardless of social status. Although they are now supported by the Merchant League and Sanctuary Aeon, the Orthodoxy looks with suspicion on this sect. A Preceptor character might be a dedicated teacher, a religious doubter, or a seeker of ancient knowledge.

Capability: Knowledge (Preceptors); Lore (any); Tech Lore *or* Think Machines

Characteristics: Dexterity +1 *or* Faith +1; Intuition +1; Presence +1; Wits +2

Perk: Church Ordination (Novitiate)

Skills: Academia 2; Arts 1 *or* Crafts 1 *or* Tech Redemption 1; Charm 1 *or* Impress 1; Focus 1 *or* Interface 1

SECT QUIRKS

Blessing: Mentor (+2 Presence when teaching)

Curse: Disrespectful (-2 Charm around authority figures)

Favored Calling: Scholar

Material Award: *Library* (TL7 handheld simple think machine; designed to interface with and download the information contained in practically any repository of data)

Voavenlohjun

*“The Pancreator is within
and without;
and without the Pancreator
is emptiness.”*

— Ven Lohji, *The Gleanings*

After the Prophet’s death in 2849, the obun Disciple Ven Lohji returned to her homeworld of Velisamil and began teaching to others her revelations about the Prophet and the Pancreator. Many obun converted and became the Voavenlohjun, the “Followers of the Speakings of Ven Lohji.” Voavenlohjun priests can be identified by their green robes adorned with a stylized jumpgate cross.

Although Ven Lohji was careful to defer all authority to the words of the Prophet, her own teachings and beliefs were still collected by her earliest followers. Her epistles, sermons, and written reflections were gathered together after her death and published in the *The Gleanings of Ven Lohji (Omilvenlohjoille)*. Although they do not supplant the Omega Gospels among the followers of Ven Lohji, they are the lens through which the obun read and interpret the Gospels.

The obun call the Pancreator Lyovaa’ken “s/he who creates all things”. To the obun, grace and harmony are synonymous. To live the proper life — in accordance with the sacred pattern — was to inculcate harmony. This, for Ven Lohji, was no different than the Prophet’s sermons on grace and Luminous Return. Although some obun theologians use the metaphorical notion of the soul as a “reflective mirror,” thus reflecting the Light of heaven back to the Pancreator and to other humans, many obun prefer to see the soul as a *conduit*. An obun who does not live in Harmony with the Way will not fully receive the Light of heaven, while the Enlightened are “open”; thus, the Light of heaven flows through them into others and ultimately back to the divine.

The sect has a strong emphasis on scholarly theological debate and meditation, including many practices dating back to the obun’s native Bintaru religion. Priests are expected to come to personal, individual conclusions about metaphysical matters, rather than blindly adopting doctrine. This, among many of their other beliefs, makes the Orthodoxy uncomfortable.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Archbishop Ramaseel HanSaal* is the head of the Voavenlohjun sect, and so they spend much of their time wrestling with bureaucratic matters involving the Urth Orthodox or other Church sects. They (Ramaseel is a Child of Dhiyana, a gender considered sacred by the obun) leave much of the local (Velisamil) administration of the sect to their underlings. Their true passion is archaeomythology, the study of the obun ancient past and contacts with the Anunnaki. Before their ascent to the leadership of the sect, they were a professor at the Academy of Sacred History in the capitol city of Loaaj. Ramaseel contemplates retiring and returning to their studies, seeing it as a higher calling.



- *Novitiate Shaala vo Neer* is a young mendicant for the sect (a rather rare calling for the Voavenlohjun) who’s traveling into Vuldrok space, seeking signs of lost obun and ukar colonies. She brought herself a bit of fame and attention when she brokered an accidental peace between Vuldrok of House Eldrid and rebels supporting Thane Firestorm. She had run onto the battlefield begging the clashing warriors to spare the ancient tree that grew there, which to her eyes uncannily resembled depictions of the tree the Prophet sat beneath when he first encountered Ven Lohji. So shocked were the combatants at her bold request, they thought her “god-touched”

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and mutually agreed to take their fighting elsewhere. Her example is beginning to inspire other young Voavenlohjun who seek to see worlds beyond Velimisil.

ALLIES

Sanctuary Aeon, Eskatonic Order

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

You are a conduit in the great network of the universe. More than most, your knowledge of metaphysics and your mental training give you the ability — and attendant responsibility — to harmonize perturbations in the great web of being. You do so chiefly through contemplation and study, but instructing others is also paramount, hopefully to prevent them from creating discord and to bring order to already chaotic situations. Look to nature for example: when allowed to simply be, it balances itself.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Although rarely seen off the ur-obun homeworld of Velimisil, the green-robed priests who follow the teachings of Ven Lohji, the Prophet's disciple, are often greeted with curious wonder by most Known Worlders, who know little of the sect besides its

reputation for rigorous meditation and mystical sayings. Voavenlohjuns seek to live up to the virtue of Discipline associated with their founder. This can sometimes make them seem cold and distant to others, who worry that they're being judged and found wanting by the "green mystes."

The majority of Voavenlohjun are obun, although the sect is open to members of all species. It is rare, however, to find human members, let alone other aliens.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Beast) *or* Science (Life) *or* choose any Lore; Knowledge (Voavenlohjun); Lore (any)

Characteristics: Dexterity +1 *or* Perception +1; Faith +1; Intuition +2; Wits +1

Perk: Church Ordination (Novitiate)

Skills: Academia 1 *or* Survival 1; Arts 1 *or* Perform 1 *or* Remedy 1; Charm 1 *or* Empathy 1; Focus 2

SECT QUIRKS

Blessing: Metaphysical (+2 Intuition when unraveling enigmas)

Curse: Condescending (-2 Presence among the unenlightened)

Favored Calling: Dreamtender

Material Award: You own a physical or data copy of *The Gleanings of Ven Lohji*. (After spending 30 minutes consulting the book, your next Focus-skill rally roll is favorable, so long as it occurs within the next 24 hours.)

Pagans

Though the Church claims universal jurisdiction over the sentient souls of the Known World, its reach exceeds its grasp. On many worlds, beings exist who do not adhere to the Prophet's faith or bend their knees to the Orthodoxy. The Church dubs such benighted souls pagans, though there are many different types of such believers. Two of the most significant ones are briefly described below. (The Vuldrok also practice their own religion, called Erdgheist, although most Known Worlders don't know anything about it besides superstitious folktales spread by survivors of their raids.)

Children of Zuran

The Children of Zuran (or Zuranity, as it is sometimes called) takes its name from a Diaspora era thinker called Manuel Porfirio Zuran, whose *Libro Esperanza* codified his teachings. He taught that everything in

existence depended on the love of the Creator, whom he called Usen Dheu, "the Vast Spirit." He further taught that Usen Dheu had created other spirits in the hope that they would freely unite with their source, and in so doing, become creators themselves. As such, everyone is important in the eyes of the Creator, and no hierarchies exist before him. All spirits are attempting to return to him, and Usen Dheu honors the hard work — and suffering — this takes.

Zuran taught that earlier religious figures from human history, such as Buddha, Christ, and Muhammad, were all messengers from Usen Dheu, who had tried, in their own ways, to teach the same truth that he was sharing. As Zuranity evolved, it incorporated many other religious leaders into its message, including those of alien species. Opposed to these messengers was the Sombrio Diablo Dando, the Spirit of the Mistaken Way, a dark trickster who lures spirits from the proper path to Usen Dheu. The Universal Church is deemed to have been tricked down the wrong path,

chaining souls and hiding the keys of knowledge from those whom it should be aiding.

The Children of Zuran are divided into seven “tribes,” each of which has its own perspective on the teachings of Zuran. They all work together toward endeavors of mutual benefit and, since no hierarchy is acknowledged among them, diversity of opinion is not only tolerated but celebrated. Despite certain similarities between their belief systems, the Church considers the Children of Zuran to be pagans rather than heretics and makes every effort to convert them from their erroneous ways. The Zuranists show no signs of abandoning their freewheeling, democratic faith.

LEADING MEMBERS



- *Captain Dando Morrigan* is a Charioteer pilot and Zuranist whose charm has allowed him to elude Church censure... so far. He is also protected by serving in the retinue of his good friend, Marquesa Miranda Deladio Hazat de Vera Cruz, a pious Sword of Lextius, sworn to defend the Church with her sword. Although she tries now and then to convert Dando, she doesn't try too hard, having become fascinated with his Sons of Fire tribe's culture.
- *Matre Sutra*, leader of the Brethren of the Star Tribe, is a 120-year-old woman who has outlived almost every Decados and Li Halan noble who has bargained with her. She is revered as a savior of her people in the face of persecution on Malignatius. Although she keeps

muttering that she will take her people to her homeworld of Ravenna, it never seems to happen. She is protected by her now-fully grown “cubs,” which include her shrewd grandchildren and two Vorox.

ALLIES

Despite their pagan status, the Zuranists frequently acquire allies on the worlds they inhabit. They do this in a variety of ways, most often by making themselves useful to someone of importance. On some occasions, no less than House Decados and the Li Halan have protected the Zuranists in their domains for this very reason, and this is not an unusual occurrence.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Your beliefs often offend outsiders. Some of your fellows like to profess them loudly while others keep them quiet. Which kind are you? Even if you hold your tongue, you're proud of your beliefs and traditions, preferring them over the beliefs of the Universal Church or other faiths (such as the Incarnates). This pride helps to keep your spirits buoyed and has enabled the Children of Zuran to survive centuries of opposition from the Church and nobility of the Known Worlds. This pride sometimes manifests in sly mockery of your enemies; Zuranist wit is renowned on many worlds.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Considered a pre-reflective religion by the Universal Church, the Children of Zuran have defiantly endured despite numerous attempts to suppress them. Zuranists believe in a single god and a vast multitude of spirits, whom they invoke in their rites. A Zuranist character might be a pious interstellar vagabond, a runaway serf, or a smuggler with a heart of gold.

Capability: Customs (Commons); Knowledge (Jumpweb) *or* Transport (choose one); Knowledge (Zuranity)

Characteristics: Dexterity +1; Endurance +1; Faith +1 *or* Will +1; Intuition +1; Presence +1

Perk: Wise One (you are a Santa Elda or a Blanca Matre)

Skills: Art (choose a medium) 2 *or* Craft (choose a type) 2; Charm 2; Drive 1; Knavery 2; Observe 1; Sleight of Hand 1; Sneak 1

SECT QUIRKS

Blessing: Bold (+2 Intuition while acting when others hesitate)

Curse: Pridelful (-2 Presence when insulted)

Favored Calling: Trader

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Material Award: Your copy of Manuel Porfirio Zuran's *Libro Esperanza* contains a coded guide to locations in the Known Worlds where the Children can find hospitality.

Gjarti

Gjarti has ancient roots, having begun as a “back to the earth” movement during the early days of humankind’s exploration of other worlds. Over the centuries, this movement evolved into the worship and experience of nature through the Universal Mother, who lends her name to this religion. This worship, however, is far from standardized, and despite the common name applied to them, many different variations exist. Broadly speaking, these variations can be grouped into one of three categories: folk Gjarti, contemplative Gjarti, and compassionate Gjarti.

Folk Gjarti’s purpose is to contact spirits and to gain favors or powers from them. All spirits are believed to exist in a hierarchy governed by the Universal Mother. Gjarti herself is a spirit of life and governs only the living and spirit realms, but there are also evil spirits who come from a realm where life and light do not exist. Contemplative Gjarti, meanwhile, is about personal enlightenment through wisdom and contemplation. In this, contemplative Gjarti is very similar to hesychasm, though the specifics differ greatly. Contemplative practitioners recognize Gjarti as the Universal Mother, but unlike folk believers, they see her as an abstract principle or idea rather than an entity with a form and personality. Compassionate Gjarti seeks union with the Universal Mother as a means to bring either power or a surcease to the pain of living in the material world.

All Gjartins believe in reincarnation, as well as spells and conjuring. These spells are their means of practicing theurgy. Both these aspects of the religion are a cause for concern by the Church, which takes a dim view of Gjarti, regardless of their type. Even so, many otherwise faithful peasants recognize and respect Gjartin shamans and monks, seeing that they genuinely have power over the spirits (both good and bad) that sometimes haunt the wilderness. This had made efforts to stamp out this pagan religion extremely difficult.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *The Ghost of Nowhere* is a local legend on that desolate planet, but peasants who have encountered the Ghost claim “it” is actually a simple man, a Gjartin shaman and deserter from the Stigmata Garrison. His true name is unknown, and no military squads have come searching for him. It is said that he

“found” Gjarti, was healed of symbiot taint by the Universal Mother, and now works mostly unseen to restore greenery to Nowhere.



- *Shadro Wisdom Kin* is an outlaw shaman living in the wilds of Leminkainen who knows the world’s flora and fauna better than anyone. He recently arose from obscurity when Empress Freya, traveling on her first tour through the Known Worlds, was overheard to ask about him. She was apparently unaware that the Hawkwoods had placed a decade-old bounty on his head, presumably for his role in cursing a count’s son, as well as aiding Vuldrok “visitors” (i.e., raiders). This has caused Town Criers to enter the forests in search of a prize interview with the elusive figure.

ALLIES

Officially, no one aids Gjartins, as they are an outlawed pagan religion. Unofficially, many look the other way when they appear, both because of the difficulty in uprooting them and because they prove useful from time to time.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

You have a deep connection to your world of origin or chosen planet, viewing it as alive and providing a connection to the Universal Mother. This gives you

an otherworldly perspective on the universe that goes beyond what can be seen with the eyes. All Gjartins know that the Church would gladly eliminate them if the opportunity arose. Consequently, you keep your beliefs to yourself unless you can be sure of your safety.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Taking its name from the Source of Life, the Universal Mother, Gjarti is an earthy religion practiced by peasants on several worlds (and among the barbarian Vuldrok). Some members of the faith are renowned – and feared – for their command of unique forms of theurgy. A Gjartin character might be an experienced explorer, a canny shaman, or a noble who is a secret devotee.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Beast) *or* Science (Life); Knowledge (Gjarti); Lore (any)

Characteristics: Endurance +1; Intuition +2; Faith +2

Perk: Wise One

Skills: Animalia 1; Charm 1 *or* Impress 1; Craft (choose a type) 1 *or* Empathy 1; Remedy 1; Survival 1 *or* Vigor 1

SECT QUIRKS

Blessing: Earth Lore (+2 Intuition when dealing with animals and plants)

Curse: Persecuted (-2 Presence when confronted by the Orthodoxy)

Favored Calling: Theurgist

Material Award: You have a pendant of knotted wood identifying your priestly rank (+1 Survival when lost in the wilderness).

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THEURGY: NON-CHURCH, PAGAN, AND OTHER RITUALS

Despite Orthodox rhetoric, the major sects of the Church do not have a monopoly on theurgy. It can also be practiced by minor sects like the Choralí, heretics like Incarnates, and even pagans (although their theurgy has a rather different flavor). Space restrictions prevent a full list of rites for these factions. Instead, here are some suggestions for adapting the rites listed in this chapter for independent and pagan uses.

The Choralí, Hesychasts, Preceptors, and Voavenlohjun all have access to the Ecumenical Rituals, like other sects of the Church.

CHORALI

The Choralí may also use the rituals of the sect from which they originally came.

HESYCHAST

There are several traditions of Hesychast rituals: the Via Anima (focusing on meditation), the Via Epistemic (focusing on mental clarity and rumored to verge on psychic powers), and the Via Corporeus (focusing on enduring pain and hardship).

PRECEPTORS

The Preceptors are not renowned practitioners of theurgy, but they do possess rituals of their own, most of which deal with acquiring and sharing knowledge.

INCARNATES

The Incarnates, despite being deemed heretics, likewise have access to theurgy similar in effect to the Ecumenical Rituals, as well as the rituals practiced by the Amaltheans and Eskatonic Order. Incarnates use theurgy to foster a personal connection with the Pancreator, as well as to promote the sect's interpretation of the Omega Gospels. Thus, rituals that bless, defend, and reveal the truth are most common.

VOAVENLOHJUN

"There is no magic; only the working of God's will."

— Ven Lohji, *The Gleanings*

Obun theurgy is ancient, dating back to the primeval war in heaven. It was one of the many

weapons used against the ukari as they fought the will of the Lightbearers. The theurgy introduced by Ven Lohji is a grafting of the Prophet's teachings onto the indigenous Bintaru theurgic rites.

The central theme of obun theurgy is harmony: physical (health), psychological, spiritual, environmental, and social. Ven Lohji's theurgy is comprehensive, and all her priests study a variety of theurgies; they wonder at the compartmentalization of the human Church's theurgy into disparate concerns. One subject does not study healing magics while another studies warrior rites — individual priests may each have their forté, but the entire priesthood is a holistic theurgic body.

Ven Lohji taught the Prophet much about theurgy, and these teachings have in fact affected the entire Church. The various hand gestures of human priests are a pale shadow of the ancient Bintaru belief that various intricate hand gestures each have an association to a divine principle, aiding in the theurgic process.

Voavenlohjun characters can choose from the Ecumenical Rites, as well as the rites of the Eskatonic Order and Sanctuary Aeon. The GM might allow them to draw from other lists, based on their studies.

(Note: It is possible for an obun to practice theurgy *and* have psychic powers, but it is rare; usually, only one such ability is awakened.)

CHILDREN OF ZURAN

Zuranist theurgy focuses on dealing with spirits, whether benevolent or malign, and protecting the Children of Zuran from persecution.

GJARTI

Gjartin theurgy (also called "magic," "spells," or "conjurations") is the most divergent system from that practiced by the Church. It is also the most highly developed, divided into three different traditions: folk, contemplative, and compassionate. The compassionate tradition is quite similar in effect to the theurgy of the Amaltheans, while contemplative rituals are not unlike those of the Eskatonic Order (though more focused on dreams). Folk rituals have some similarities with the Ecumenical Rituals but with an emphasis on mastery over or communion with nature rather than the Pancreator. Gjartin theurgy also has its own unique vestments.



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The Minor Guilds

Minor guilds are not limited to League members under 18; instead, they include the overwhelming majority of adult freemen and women whose associations have limited influence — financially, politically, and geographically. Nobody knows just how many guilds exist throughout the Known Worlds. At least 200 are part of the League, and many more have no official sanction. Some, like the Authority on Byzantium Secundus, wield a great deal of power in a limited jurisdiction. Many of these only exist on one planet, and often only in one city on that planet. Still, any activity a freeman might want to engage in probably has a guild to support him. While nobles hold many of these guilds in disdain, more than a few fledgling guilds gained support from nobles looking to invest money or to keep the leading guilds from gaining too much power in their fiefs.

Some of the better known of these lesser guilds cater to artists and entertainers. Musicians and troubadours have two extremely influential alliances — the Masque and the Carnivalers — allegations of psychic training notwithstanding. They, and several other guilds, have forced the renowned League Academy to provide facilities for its members. Even court jesters have a small but venerable guild, and one of its finest members is on the Academy faculty.

Lesser guilds have made their mark on the League in a number of ways. For instance, one of the printers' guilds has done much to preserve non-religious books, though it has been careful not to disseminate anything of which the Church might disapprove (such as Church criticism, information on technological developments, or accurate histories). Not all of the printers' work is in print, however. Some printers' guilds also transcribe old documents kept in an electronic format; they've redoubled their transcription efforts since the end of the Emperor Wars.

Some of these guilds provide a wide variety of functions but limit their activities to a small area. For instance, the Morticus Guild of Tethys originally began as a family bakery several hundred years ago. Its members became wealthy enough (and their liege impoverished enough) that they were able to buy their freedom. Now they control a number of different trades on Tethys, including labor on new buildings, hauling goods between its two main cities, providing workers for artifact recovery, and overseeing all transactions between the planet's human and native alien populations.

A few guilds limit their activities to Leagueheim itself. Since Leagueheim's population is made up primarily of freemen, most of its people have joined guilds. Thus, the Courtesan Guild, Ancient Society

of Sacred Alchemists, and the Purloiners Guild may have branches elsewhere, but they usually deny it. They can easily be found on Leagueheim, however, displaying their goods and services proudly.

Apothecaries

Most people in need of healing turn to Sanctuary Aeon for help. When that's not enough, they may turn to a local wise woman or barber. However, all of those likely turn to the Apothecaries for the chemicals, concoctions, and compounds that allow them to do their jobs. The Apothecaries Guild collects and hordes all the lore it can find on any claims, real or delusional, for healing medicines. Guild masters pass down ancient lore to apprentices, who test it, use it, and change it as needed.

Quality control and product efficacy vary from one Apothecary to another, but for the most part, their products are superior to those made elsewhere. While they may not cure you, they probably won't kill you. Some of their products have gained a deserved reputation. While they don't hold a monopoly on Elixir, the quality of their guild's version is generally considered second only to the limited quantities made by Sanctuary Aeon.

In addition, Apothecaries specialize in "healing" techniques avoided by Sanctuary Aeon. Need help with that cybernetic leg? It might cost you your other arm and leg. Thankfully, most Apothecaries no longer demand payment in human organs.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Consul Silva Burgess* was long considered next in line to head the guild, but old age has caught up with her. It is rumored that she once discovered the art of turning base materials into gold, but then forgot it after she developed a mild but progressive dementia. The guild's leaders now try to coax from her as many secrets as they can before she is unable to recall them.
- *Algol Hipparch* comes from a multigenerational family of Apothecaries. Competing against his brothers and sisters for recognition within the guild, the short but brave chemist traveled into Vuldrok Space before Alexius extended his rule to Hargard. Algol's invention of a new Elixir variant using a rare herb found only on the planet of Wolf's Lament brought him recognition — for those few doses he could actually make with his limited materials. Now, he searches for more of the herb so he can synthesize it and put his Elixir formula into production.



MONOPOLIES

The guild does have patents on many other drugs. Some do what the guild claims; others are worse than placebos. The guild's leaders, like bloated Dean Read (a.k.a., "Big Apothecary"), constantly seek more medicines to take under their control. They like to research them in labs and ancient libraries, but more than a few have been obtained from non-guild herbalists... who often disappear after their research.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

While Apothecaries have a reputation as dour bookworms more at home with chemicals than people, tales of Apothecaries whose bizarre behavior accompanies their chemical dabblings are almost as common. Most Apothecaries dream of discoveries that would benefit all humanity. These dreamers know that humans once had a much broader command of the elements of health, so Apothecaries now seek knowledge in ancient ruins and even older books. They are willing to travel the breadth of the Known Worlds to gain the knowledge they seek, often offering their healing skills to companions who can help them on their journey.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

The Apothecaries Guild collects and hordes all the lore it can find on any claims, real or delusional, for healing medicines and practices. From patent medicines to cybernetic implants, Apothecaries believe they can handle it.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Apothecaries); Medical (Disease, Poison)

Characteristics: Dexterity +1; Intuition +2; Wits +2

Perk: Guild Commission (Associate)

Skills: Academics 1; Alchemy 1; Crafts 1 *or* Tech Redemption 1; Remedy 2

GUILD QUIRKS

Blessing: Innovative (+2 Intuition when trying to invent something new)

Curse: Callous (-2 Presence when asked for aid)

Favored Calling: Healer (as the priest calling)

Material Award: *Secret formula* (coded formula for producing standard-quality Elixir™ regenerative serum at Hard Resistance rather than the usual Tough; see the Concoct Elixir perk)

Brewers

On most worlds, pure water can be a rare commodity. Tainted water can result in cholera, dysentery, and worse, especially in those lands scarred by chemical attacks during the Emperor Wars. Thus, the Brewers Guild has grown, making drinks far healthier (and far more fun) than most water; on many worlds, it is one of the most respected guilds.

The Brewers Guild has a hierarchy on Leagueheim and full membership in the League, but its average member will never have any use for this structure. The common image of a Brewer — located in a small town, working their apprentices like mad in an endless quest for profit — is an accurate one, similar to the portrayal of many small guilds.

Despite this, Brewers consider themselves superior to the serfs who make up the bulk of their customers. In fact, some were originally serfs, sold by their family and their owning noble to an established Brewer who needed an apprentice. They interact regularly with their bonded neighbors and often hold a place of honor and prestige in the community. They remain free from noble dominance, thanks mainly to the support of the League, which even the most short-sighted noble is unwilling to oppose.

Of course, not all Brewers remain in some backwater village. Large cities often have competing Brewers selling different brands of beer, ale, and liquor.

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The Charioteers like to deal with the best of these, and Criticorum's Brewers ship their wares to all surrounding worlds. Some of these individual Brewers have giant operations under their control, involving hundreds of apprentices and dozens of chiefs.

The major function of this guild, other than to keep its members free from noble control, is to limit this sort of competition. Most communities only have one Brewer, and she can call on League resources if someone – be it a freeman, noble, or priest – tries to set up an operation in her territory. The major exception to this comes in wine making, which is dominated by nobles and the Church due to the amount of land required to grow the grapes.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Consul Garth Jon* is renowned for somehow having tended bar at infamous hot spots during the Emperor Wars. Some accuse him of having been a spy, listening in to bar-talk gossip from behind every faction's lines, but he claims it was just his persistent foul luck to wind up in places where combat always broke out, and he's all too willing to show off the scars.



- *Ruth "Blitzzy" Belachek* was a Li Halan serf who won her yeomanry during the Emperor Wars after nursing a wounded soldier who turned out to be the son of a duchess. With her freedom to travel,

she followed her passion for tea-making and joined the Brewers, where she discovered that she preferred alcoholic drinks and quickly mastered their concoction. She is becoming known as the go-to Brewer for contracts in dangerous territories.

MONOPOLIES

While alcohol is not legal everywhere, where it is, the Brewers make what people want to drink. In some fiefs, their monopoly is so powerful that no serf can distill any spirits without paying the guild. In most, home brewing is allowed, so long as the serf does not use more than a copper still. Anything worth drinking probably comes from a Brewer. Individual Brewers often have monopolies on specific brews, and certain regions fight to ensure no one else makes their creations. Big Mouth Mickey on Sutek is a perfect example of this, making a powerful (if questionable) ale said to loosen the lips of all who drink it. He ships it throughout Hazat space but is willing to battle anyone who claims to make the same drink.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

The gregarious Brewer, as proud of her own firebirds as the drinks she creates, is a popular stereotype, and often an accurate one. Most have a limited focus, caring only for their operations and their coin, but others are the center of local communities and gossip networks. Some act on behalf of the entire guild, traveling from Leagueheim to settle disputes, to fund new operations, and to try the best drinks from one thousand fiefs (a regular guild challenge).

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

The Brewers Guild makes drinks far healthier (and more fun) than most water. On many worlds, it is one of the most respected guilds. Those who travel the worlds seeking lost concoctions earn everyone's respect... until they drink too much.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Brewers); Lore (any); Science (Life)

Characteristics: Dexterity +2 *or* Endurance +2 *or* Strength +2; Intuition +1; Presence +2

Perk: Guild Commission (Associate)

Skills: Alchemy 1 *or* Tech Redemption 1; Charm 1 *or* Impress 1; Crafts 2; Fight 1

GUILD QUIRKS

Blessing: Well-Liked (+2 Presence with customers)

Curse: Haughty (-2 Presence around serfs)

Favored Calling: Artist

Material Award: *Savior sauce* (recipe for a unique liquid that requires the Alchemy skill, Life Science capability, and 10 fb in materials to produce: 1 drop greatly improves the flavor of a single mug of any drink; you begin with 10 doses)

Bureaucrats

The Bureaucrats Guild has found new opportunities and challenges since Alexius' coronation. While the need for their services is increasing with the growth of Imperial power, other guilds and groups are trying to get a piece of the action. Still, the Bureaucrats persevere. Their greatest strength is their guild unity. For example, if a Li Halan baron on Kish tries to undercut the guild, Reeve loans might suddenly come due, his troops could start complaining about going unpaid, and his relatives on Rampart might suddenly find their efforts to build a new castle put on hold — indefinitely.

In addition to being amazingly well connected, the Bureaucrats are both efficient and discreet. If there is a paper to be pushed or filed, this guild is the one to call. It amazes some of the nobles just how much one or two of these stiff, arrogant, and often sullen souls can accomplish in only a few days, and the Church certainly considers them a blessing. Even the other guilds come to these paper pushers, half-jokingly referring to them as a “guild’s guild.” It’s a simple fact of life: records must be kept, paperwork has to be done for anything to run smoothly, and no one else in their right mind actually enjoys doing it.

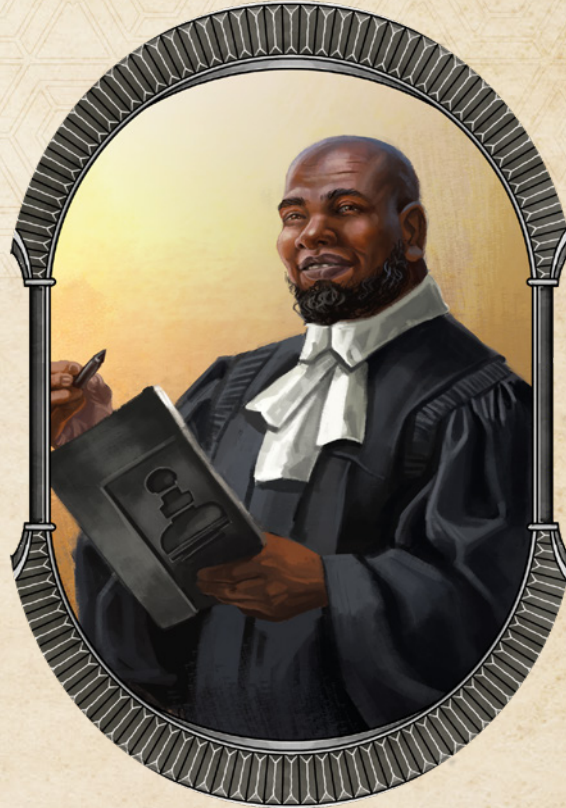
Nobody likes the Bureaucrats, but everyone seems to need them. In some cases — when nobles decide it is time for the people to pay their taxes — many even fear them. It is the Bureaucrats who determine how much each person pays, and the empire has hired a large number of these boors to ensure that every firebird owed gets where it needs to be in a timely manner. Most importantly, they know when to keep their mouths shut. Where there’s paperwork, secrets are all too often revealed. The guild charges well for its services, but it knows how to keep quiet — or rather, it knows how to make it seem like it can be trusted.

In actuality, the Bureaucrats have one of the most efficient gossip networks running. Most of the Leaguers know this, and the Scravers, Reeves, and Muster are perfectly willing to pay extra to either get information or keep certain data secret. Nonetheless, Bureaucrats have a reputation for honesty that is second-to-none; as such, they are trusted with legitimate government seals and signatures.

Unofficially, and for a small fee, they will validate or disprove the signatures of authorities from almost anywhere. They will also deliver signed, sealed documents

from one location to another. The Known Worlds’ intelligence agencies have a love-hate relationship with them, needing their services constantly, desperate to uncover Bureaucrat secrets, and even more desperate for the guild to protect their own secrets.

LEADING MEMBERS



- *Director Sordis Haskell* brokered the end of a fierce feud between two Hazat families that had flared up during the Emperor Wars and kept going for years after the Emperor was crowned. Sordis’ tireless optimism and good humor kept the two sides returning for talks even after multiple duels nearly ended both dynasties.
- *Associate Alma Lewis* gained inadvertent fame when she accidentally mixed up her manager’s documents and wound up legally cementing arranged noble marriages between the wrong parties. When the mix-matched couples discovered they both had found their soul mates, they feted Alma as the “Pancreator’s go-between”, thus saving her from guild expulsion and vaulting her error into a series of holovid soap operas.

MONOPOLIES

This guild’s monopolies are primarily departmental. In some fiefs, they have little power, while in others, they control everything from taxes to road building to

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every level of commerce, down to the decision whether a serf can build a shed. In many Church dioceses, they keep track of births, deaths, weddings, and even the tawdrier side of relationships.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

The stern, dedicated Bureaucrat is almost a caricature, and their ability to stonewall inquiries is unparalleled. By the same token, a helpful bureaucrat is Pancreator-sent, able to recover documents and smooth over troubles no one would have thought possible. It is not unheard of for nobles, guild leaders, and Church officials to travel with their own Bureaucrats to ensure help when needed. These traveling Bureaucrats need to be both skilled and discrete, capable of both uncovering and concealing secrets as needed.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

In addition to being amazingly well connected, Bureaucrats are efficient and discreet. If there is a paper to be pushed or filed, this guild is the one to call. These stiff, arrogant, and often sullen souls can accomplish an amazing amount of work in only a few days.

Capabilities: Lore (any); Read (Latin or Urthish); Think Machines

Characteristics: Intuition +1; Presence +1; Wits +2; Will +1

Perk: Guild Commission (Associate)

Skills: Academia 2; Charm 1 *or* Knavery 1; Focus 1; Interface 1

GUILD QUIRKS

Blessing: Jaded (+1 goal on Will- and Faith-based rolls in stressful situations)

Curse: Scary (+2 Impress — everyone fears the tax man)

Favored Calling: Spy

Material Award: *FiefLink* (access codes to a guild database that allows the Bureaucrat to track down anyone in a fief in a formal position of authority; a network terminal must be available and accessible)

Carnivalers ("The Menagerie")

The Carnivalers Guild (a.k.a. "the Carnies" or "the Menagerie") is a relatively recent addition to the League, reaching full guild status shortly before the Emperor Wars. Originally focusing on musicians, it

opened its ranks to entertainers of all sorts, including those who make priests and nobles debate the definition of "entertainment."

Its success stems in part from its willingness to accept alien performers, giving it an edge against its competition, the overwhelmingly human Masque. Dubbed "the Menagerie" during the Emperor Wars, their antics brought relief and amusement to a weary populace. Since the Emperor Wars, its distribution outlets and arena contacts have greatly increased, placing it into some of the same venues as the Masque. Where there are no stages or arenas, the Carnivalers Guild provides its own.

After announcing a coming event, the guild arranges an area, lands one of its haulers, and works night and day to make its miracles happen. It is not uncommon for the locals in any given area to discover that last night's empty field has sprouted a full-blown tent and arena by the next morning. The best-kept secret of the Carnivalers is that the guild is run by a group of humans and aliens working together. This has proven instrumental in one of the Carnivalers' most popular (and least sanctioned) types of shows: gladiator battles. These traveling shows present classic good guy/bad guy battles. Humans are often in the roles of heroes and aliens in the roles of heels. Fighting another human is not exceptionally lucrative, but a human going into unarmed combat with a well-trained vorox can become rich for a lifetime — provided he wins, of course.

A great deal of gambling takes place at these events, but those who manage to make the most profit are the same people who run the bouts. Many people have wondered why the Church doesn't more actively condemn the brutality of the games, unaware of the hefty tithe the Church receives from the bouts. Why ruin a good thing?

The Harlequins Guild (technically a sub-guild) is another example of how a variety of talents can serve a guild well. These garishly clothed pranksters are paid well to get the attention of the locals. It's the job of these street clowns to generate interest in the upcoming sporting events and to spread rumors about the contestants involved. It's also their duty to get the lay of the land... politically speaking.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Dean Bartholomew Brackett* is the public head of the guild, although he works in close conjunction with his life partner, *Virim Suros*, an obun. Both are former performers retired from the stage to run the business of the guild. Brackett's main activity is to surreptitiously facilitate gambling at guild events, something which has made him and Suros quite rich — to the growing anger of lesser guild members, who think they're taking too large a cut of the action.

- *Whiss-taah Stargiver* is a shantor dancer of astonishing grace. She gained interstellar fame when Empress Freya audibly gasped in surprise and delight at her acrobatics. While Whiss-taah resents dancing on command for money, the money is very good and allows her to support her family back on Shaprut.

MONOPOLIES

The guild engages in many forms of entertainment that others can't — or won't. The gladiator battles are just one type. Comedians who cater to serfs (often by injuring themselves and others), athletes competing on bizarre, nonsensical obstacle courses, magic lantern shows about people bickering while trying to survive on deserted planets and eating alien food — all of these are the type of classless entertainment on which the Carnivalers thrive.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Almost all Carnivalers have at least two personalities — one when on stage and another as soon as the lights go off. For every depressed clown, there's one who's constantly laughing with insane energy. The gladiators adopt roles for their bouts, but amongst themselves, they have strong ties of camaraderie. The Harlequins seem the most insane in public but also tend to be the most perceptive, watching everything around them.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Carnies, clowns, tumblers, gladiators, and more, Carnivaler troupes travel the Known Worlds with their outlandish vehicles and more outlandish members. Performers and pranksters, entertainers and executioners, they amuse and unnerve the Known Worlds.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Entertainers); choose a Lore (any) *or* Customs (Cathedral *or* Court)

Characteristics: Dexterity +2; Intuition +1; Presence +2

Perk: Guild Commission (Associate)

Skills: Animalia 1 *or* Sleight of Hand 1; Arts 1 *or* Crafts 1 *or* Vigor 1; Charm 1 *or* Impress 1 *or* Knavery 1; Perform 2

GUILD QUIRKS

Blessing: Bold (initiative edge)

Curse: Shifty (-2 Presence when asking for something)

Favored Calling: Amateur

Material Award: *Promoter* (TL6 book-size curio: prints up to 100 transparent posters that stick to nearly any surface and display a crude hologram of your act; the animated image is pre-set, but you can alter the text to show the time and location of your next show; a new batch of sheets costs 5 fb at a TL6 agora)

Courtesans

Courtesans don't just deal in the pleasures of the flesh, though they certainly excel at that. They also know the art of making their employers look good by working as professional hangers-on in an entourage. These specialists work as advisors — though few nobles would admit to taking their advice — and as symbols of social status. Their job is to deftly move conversations in directions that will please their employers and reveal information about numerous topics while simultaneously keeping the attention of as many important people as possible. However, Courtesans are paid as much for their silence as for the quality of their conversation.

Some Courtesans also work as go-betweens for their employers. If a special, discreet purchase is needed by a noble, the odds are excellent that a Courtesan can and will procure what is needed. Courtesans maintain a gossip network on many worlds and are especially good at finding things. For those nobles who seek questionable entertainment and diversions, Courtesans provide one of the few safe methods of gaining their desires.

The Church frowns on this guild for a number of reasons, so the Courtesans Guild only acts openly on Leagueheim. The sanctity of marriage is certainly one reason for the Church's condemnation. Another is its acceptance of alien members. Courtesans come in all shapes and sizes, and some of the most popular Courtesans are not human. When away from Leagueheim, they often hide their guild affiliation, only revealing it when necessary.



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- *Consul Darius Century* is the acting head of the guild while its dean, Lady Venice, slowly dies from wounds she suffered from an Avestite zealot's assault. While the zealot has been arrested, until the guild sees justice, Century has ordered that all Courtesans deny business to any Avestite. This is a surprisingly large, if clandestine, clientele for the guild. Century believes the Temple Avesti leaders will quietly throw their own to the wolves lest the embargo last too long.



- The non-binary Courtesan known only as *Cibola* is a legend among Sybarites. Their skills are sought after by elite hosts on every world, but they are bored with the round of what passes for decadent and risqué parties these days. They are preparing to depart into Vuldrok Space, to see what sorts of fresh distractions they can discover.

MONOPOLIES

The Courtesans do not have a monopoly on humanity's oldest profession, as the Muster supplies most prostitutes. However, the Courtesans Guild does seek a monopoly on high-class escorts for hire, going to great lengths to recruit independent operators into their ranks. The guild's classes at the Academy Interatta are some of the most

popular — and demanding. Those who make it through the curriculum, ranging from wine tasting to dueling, graduate with a great loyalty to the guild, even if they are members of other guilds.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Everyone, even the most fanatical Inquisitor, can become a Courtesan's friend, given the right setting and enough time. Courtesans can quickly and effortlessly ingratiate themselves to anyone. They are masters of getting others to speak without having to say anything themselves. At a party, a skilled Courtesan will leave even the greatest boor feeling witty and attractive. Of course, they can also be deadly serious about their job, dealing promptly and efficiently with any threats.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Courtesans know the art of making their employers look good by acting as professional hangers-on in an entourage. These specialists work as symbols of social status and as advisors, though few nobles would admit to taking their advice.

Capabilities: Customs (Cathedral or Court or Streetwise); Knowledge (Courtesans); Lore (any)

Characteristics: Dexterity +2 *or* Endurance +2; Presence +2; Wits +1

Perk: Guild Commission (Associate)

Skills: Charm 2; Empathy 1; Fight 1 *or* Shoot 1; Knavery 1 *or* Remedy 1 *or* Vigor 1

GUILD QUIRKS

Blessing: Popular (+2 Presence around customers)

Curse: Vain (-2 Perception when flattered)

Favored Calling: Courtier (mimics the noble calling)

Material Award: *Dancing Queen* (TL6 curio: symbol tattooed on you somewhere; when activated, it forms into 1 of 3 different, pre-programmed animated-loop holo-images)

Gourmands

Gourmands are not, contrary to the lesser terms thrown their way from time to time, mere “cooks” or “chefs.” Anyone calling them that is likely to receive a chilling glare and a cold chicken dinner in response. Gourmands are responsible for making certain that everything coming close to the palette of their employers is of the very finest quality. When nobles have parties, when visiting dignitaries come around, and even when the lords and ladies want a

late-night snack, the Gourmands work to ensure that everything is perfect. More than caterers or decorators, the Gourmands oversee the kitchens and dining rooms of the nobles, the very wealthy, and in some cases, Church leaders.

Cooks and chefs tend to design meals to please their own taste buds. Gourmands make certain the desires and needs of their employers come first, regardless of taste. Some masters require the healthiest food, some the most exotic, and some the most culturally appropriate. The Gourmand must find the finest ingredients for the kitchen staff, plan meals for visiting associates (an especially challenging task if the visitors are not human) and — most importantly — guarantee that the food is safe to eat. Even ascetics have been known to hire Gourmands to ensure that their food is as flavorless as possible.

The most skilled Gourmands can detect the rarest poisons, sampling the meals of their more paranoid masters. Assassination is an old game, and poison has always been a preferred method. Gourmands are adept at detecting poisons with their tongues and (in some cases) with think machines that can indicate when rare toxins are employed. More than one noble owes a life debt to the Gourmands. However, more than one Gourmand's career was cut short by serving a particularly hated noble.

Properly trained Gourmands don't come cheaply. Too often, a less expensive apprentice who doesn't bring the appropriate skills to the job ends up either ruining a party with the wrong selections or rotting in his grave because he didn't notice the bug or toxin that meant his downfall and the death of his employer. The best Gourmands have an inordinate understanding of security — and how to circumvent it when necessary.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Manager Liza Stark* is the head of the guild's new initiative to "vet" the strange foods coming out of Vuldrok Space following the popularity of all things Vuldrok when the Emperor took a barbarian bride. As such, she oversees a team of Gourmands who seek out Vuldrok cuisine to put it to the test and judge which ones are right for which patron's tastes.
- *Piotr Sigismund Decados* is the unacknowledged bastard son of a Decados noble. Officially, he can't claim the name, but he uses it defiantly anyway. He is known for going anywhere and eating and drinking anything, even Vuldrok "dare food", such as fermented Nizdharim tentacles. His opinions on a new dish can either make it the hottest thing on the menu or yesterday's trash.

MONOPOLIES

The Gourmands' monopolies lie in the recipes they greedily hoard and the ingredients only they can source. Many Gourmands would rather die than give up ancient family secrets, though they may trade them within the guild.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Many Gourmands are certain that only they have taste, even looking down on their own employers as uncultured louts. No one can truly understand subtleties of taste and flavor like they can, and the rest of humanity must be pitied for its ignorance. Still, more than a few Gourmands develop a fanatical loyalty to their employers, doing anything to keep them alive.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Gourmands are responsible for making certain that everything that comes close to the palette of their employers is of the very finest quality — and free of poison. The greatest Gourmands travel the Known Worlds, looking for new recipes and ingredients that will confirm their reputations.



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Capabilities: Customs (Cathedral or Court) *or* Science (Life); Knowledge (Gourmands); Lore (any)

Characteristics: Intuition +2; Perception +2; Presence +1

Perk: Guild Commission (Associate)

Skills: Academia 1; Alchemy 1; Charm 1; Crafts 2

GUILD QUIRKS

Blessing: Keen Taste (+2 Perception with taste only)

Curse: Fastidious (-2 Presence in chaotic situations)

Favored Calling: Artist

Material Award: *Savior sauce* (recipe for a unique liquid that requires the Alchemy skill, Life Science capability, and 10 fb in materials to produce: 1 dose greatly improves the flavor of a full-course meal; you begin with 10 doses)

The Masque

The Masque remains the most prestigious of the entertainment guilds, though not always the best paid. Since it was a remnant of Second Republic entertainment conglomerates, many have pointed to this guild as the primary reason for the post-Emperor-Wars renaissance of live entertainment in the Known Worlds. Almost as many people, however, have pointed an accusatory finger at the Masques, claiming that their plays — “distortions of the truth” — lead to an increase in sin. Whether loved or hated, the Masques have always managed to make a solid profit.

While traditionally an actor’s guild, the Masque also represents musicians and authors, especially playwrights and realitywrights. The most prestigious talents can be found within the Masque, and the guild’s customers include Royal Houses, the Church, and even Emperor Alexius. Indeed, the guild’s current dean is from a Hawkwood family and is called Minister of Propaganda both inside and outside of the guild. Critics sometimes complain of the veiled support performances give both Alexius and his policies, but Masque realitysmiths will create magic lantern shows for anyone if the price is right.

The guild is run by a congress of former stars: Actors past their prime, performers who’ve surrendered their place in the limelight to fresher faces, and agents capable of creating stars with but a few words in the right ears have all joined forces to make sure that the Masque is the premier entertainment guild. The powers-that-be in the guild are directly responsible for the rating system that now protects their members from Church interference, and they’re notoriously friendly with the higher echelons of the houses.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Consul Dame Judith* is a lead talent agent for the guild. She is not a noble, although she is famous for portraying them in magic lantern shows and stage productions, such that her moniker of “dame” is used by nobles as well as guild members when addressing her. A growing number of young turks in the guild criticize her hold on power, claiming that she favors older members well past their prime at the expense of helping younger members find work.



- *Stavos Killsmith* is a magic-lantern show director known for his crime sagas set during the Emperor Wars, many of them based on real people and events. It is said that he has angered certain underworld figures, although his holovids are immensely popular among many crime bosses. He has friends in low places who have made it known that he is protected.

MONOPOLIES

The Masque considers innumerable classic performances as its exclusive territory. Some of these date back to before humanity achieved spaceflight and represent cultures now long-forgotten. The same is true for certain instruments, vocal styles, types of dance, and more.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Members of the Masque know that they represent the height of human culture and art, and they act accordingly. Dukes and duchesses should be honored that a member of the Masque might grace their courts, and all lesser creatures should recognize the artist's greatness. Still, when on stage, nothing matters beyond creating another great performance.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

While traditionally an actor's guild, the Masque also represents musicians and authors, especially playwrights and realitywrights. Classic performances and innovative magic lantern shows are their stock in trade.

Capabilities: Customs (Cathedral or Court); Knowledge (Entertainers); Lore (any)

Characteristics: Dexterity +2; Intuition +1; Presence +2

Perk: Guild Commission (Associate)

Skills: Animalia 1 *or* Arts 1 *or* Crafts 1 *or* Sleight of Hand 1; Charm 1 *or* Impress 1 *or* Knavery 1; Fight 1 *or* Melee 1 *or* Vigor 1; Perform 2

GUILD QUIRKS

Blessing: Shrewd (+2 Mind Resistance against fast-talk attempts)

Curse: Possessive (-2 Presence when cut out of the action)

Favored Calling: Artist

Material Award: *Prop-bot* (TL6 device: This anti-grav drone provides lighting, music, and sound effects for up to 3 different pre-programmed performances. Tech Compulsion: Inerrant.)

The Oubliette

The Emperor Wars often seemed a descent into madness on incalculable terms. When death rained down at random from the skies, an entire planet could descend into violence. All the houses created war monstrosities designed to both destroy and terrify. The end of the wars left behind a humanity for whom madness often seems inescapable. On many worlds, madness means death. Too many look upon the ravings of the insane as a sign of demonic possession – and in some cases, they're right to do so. Those whose minds couldn't hold up to the pressures of their lives have found themselves burned alive or hanging from the business end of a noose.

But in the larger cities, where civilization is more than just a word, the Oubliette is prepared to tend to the needs of the mind-crazed. Though it was a small

guild before the Emperor Wars, hostilities brought a desperate need for the Oubliette's services, and the end of hostilities revealed soldiers who needed their help as much as did the civilians they traumatized.

Many of the mind-physicks working for the Oubliette are trying to rediscover the lost art of healing fragmented minds, but a few already understand the workings of that most complex organ. A sanehouse run by the Oubliette is one-part a facility for healing and four-parts experimental labs for the study of insanity and its root causes. Frankly, most of their methods are on par with those used by the Inquisition.

The Oubliette has two types of clients: those who pay and receive treatment and those who are used as guinea pigs. The wealthier the client, the more carefully the patient is handled. More than a few patients who've come to the Oubliette were fully functional members of society when they were brought to the doctors. Some are purchased through the Muster, and some are left with the Oubliette as a way of removing a potential threat to somebody in power. But the madness that is infecting the Known Worlds since the suns began to lose their glow is accepted by most, and even those who question it often don't wish to peer into the darkness of the Oubliette for fear of what they might see.

The Oubliette does dangerous work. Several mind-physicks have succumbed to the very ailments they try to treat. There are patients who speak of the things dwelling in the darkness between the stars, and the words they speak are both compelling and terrifying. These "dark minds" are a problem the Oubliette is trying hard to understand, but there is some evidence that what they speak of is beyond mortal comprehension.

Some Oubliettes now theorize that the darkness between the stars parallels the darkness within humans; thus, the interstellar void is much like the void between people. These Oubliettes believe humanity has a collective neurosis, almost like an entity of sorts that has developed its own defenses over the course of millennia. The neurosis feeds on dissension, separation, and disunion, striking out against those who would reunite humanity physically, emotionally, or spiritually. They expect an even greater backlash now that Alexius has taken the throne.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Director Hester Mundy* is slowly going mad, although nobody knows it yet. He has tended to a number of patients who suffer from nightmares about the rising Dark, and it has begun to infect his own sleep. He is too good a psychologist not to know what is happening to him, but he is afraid

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to seek help within his guild lest it threaten his position. The only thing he fears more than his growing madness is the possibility that it's not psychological but supernatural.



- *Doctor Sheila Susurrus* is rumored to have a number of noble families under her thumb following her successful therapy of their troubled members. She is an excellent hypnotist, and even her fellow guild members have accused her of being a psychic. She scoffs at such rumors. Her accusers often find themselves challenged to duels by her noble clients.

MONOPOLIES

While Sanctuary Aeon also tries to treat the insane, the Oubliettes have a monopoly on most of its techniques — at least, those techniques it does not share with the Inquisition. The Oubliettes also work closely with the Muster to aid in the mental conditioning of its workers.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Peering into the insanity within humans leaves many on the brim of madness. While Oubliettes do their best to maintain a strict professional facade, many of them have their own quirks, neuroses, and obsessions. While they might appear the most scholarly and self-controlled of individuals, deep down they are often writhing with fear and insecurities.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Many of the mind-physicks working for the Oubliette are trying to rediscover the lost art of healing fragmented minds; a few already understand the workings of that most complex organ. The sanes-houses run by the Oubliette are both facilities for healing and experimental labs for the study of insanity and its root causes.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Oubliette); Lore (any); choose an additional Lore (any) *or* Medical (Torture)

Characteristics: Intuition +2; Presence +1; Wits +2

Perk: Guild Commission (Associate)

Skills: Academia 1; Charm 1 *or* Impress 1 *or* Knavery 1; Empathy 1; Observe 1; Remedy 1

GUILD QUIRKS

Blessing: Analyst (+2 Intuition when interviewing someone)

Curse: Righteous (-2 Presence when judgment questioned)

Favored Calling: Dreamtender (mimics as the priest calling)

Material Award: *Shock-therapist* (TL6 frap stick device with 3 preset states, one of which is inflicted with a successful attack: Angered, Castigated, or Stunned. Tech Compulsion: Cruel.)

Pedagogues

The Pedagogues make up not one but innumerable guilds of teachers, each with their own specialties. They are not divided up by subject, as in an alien languages guild or life sciences guild. Instead they organize based on their students. For instance, members of the Governess Guild, which instructs and cares for the young children of nobles, have to teach basic math, literacy, and manners, as well as knowing first aid. The Nannies Guild, which rears the children of rich merchants, has to ensure that its members know the same skills, but the two argue bitterly over which is better.

While not all Pedagogues teach children, that's the role where they have the most visibility and undergo the most scrutiny. Right before the Emperor Wars, the Church began insisting that it needed to sanction all Pedagogues. War turned Church attention elsewhere, but with the outbreak of peace, the Church has renewed its interest. The Pedagogues have banded together to oversee their own practices, ensuring proper education and stamping out any rumors of misconduct.

The Tutors have both the largest pedagogue guild and the most watched. Its members roam the Known Worlds, seeking positions with noble families or rich merchants to train their children. Some tutors have used their posts to great advantage, as in the case of Conlokasis, who went from teaching Li Halan youth to becoming a key advisor to Duke Kamatari Li Halan, Prince Flavius's granduncle. Others have used their authority to less noble aims, robbing and even kidnapping their charges or teaching forbidden doctrines. As a result, both the League and the Church keep an eye on the guild, responding to reports of troubles as quickly as possible.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Consul Sakura Knowles* is the head of the Tutors Guild. She carries on a personal crusade to ensure that the lessons of the Emperor Wars are not lost on the new generation, hoping beyond hope that all future wars can be stopped by recitation of the recent past's horrors. Her passion has gained her the attention of Bran Botan vo Karm, the Emperor's counselor.



- *Ichabod Turing* is infamous for once having plugged his cybernetic implant into an ancient data archive that turned out to be corrupt, leaving his mind with a virus. He cannot purposefully recall any of

this data, but he sometimes blurts out portions of it at random times. Many clients now seek him out, hoping to glean knowledge of the past from his utterances.

MONOPOLIES

The Church ferociously rejects the notions that any of the pedagogue guilds have a monopoly over education, insisting that religious instruction is far superior. However, there are numerous topics on which Church teachers seem either ill-informed or unable to teach at all. As a result, the Pedagogues seem to have a monopoly on certain types of instruction, even if it is carried out by a number of their guilds. In addition, the Pedagogues have patents on certain types of instruction, like the Reggio model used by some of the more popular Nannies. All the pedagogue guilds are competing to instruct Princess Aurora when she gets old enough.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Pedagogues are used to being considered experts on all topics. Most revel in that perception, whether they have the requisite expertise or not. Many people seem to believe anything a Pedagogue tells them, no matter how wild or unsupportable. Their air of certainty alone wins many a debate. If that is not enough, then the reputation for stern discipline can carry the day.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Pedagogues teach anyone who can pay, and in the Known Worlds, this requires a diverse collection of skills.

Capabilities: Customs (Cathedral or Court); Knowledge (Pedagogues); Lore (any)

Characteristics: Intuition +1; Presence +2; Wits +2

Perk: Guild Commission (Associate)

Skills: Academics 2; Charm 1; Empathy 1 *or* Interface 1; Focus 1

GUILD QUIRKS

Blessing: Authoritative (+2 Presence when placed in command of others)

Curse: Disrespectful (-2 Presence around authority figures)

Favored Calling: Scholar

Material Award: *Great Mind* (TL6 simple think machine encyclopedia: Bestows +2 Academics after 10 minutes of research. Tech Compulsion: Inerrant.)

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Promoters (Shills)

One of the worst intra-League feuds came between the Promoters and the Masque. While the Shills claim a monopoly on influencing public opinion, no one else recognizes that, but they do recognize the guild's patents on certain techniques. When Emperor Alexius hired the Masque to promote his accomplishments and victories, the Promoters threatened the careers of entertainers who did so.

The lure of Imperial firebirds, plus the excitement of the most prominent entertainment campaign in centuries, led many of the most prominent Masque members to ignore the Shill threats, and thus, a trade war started. Promoters slandered actors (often with the truth), while Masque performers terminated long-standing contracts and began their own promotions. The two guilds were at the brink of open warfare when guild leaders stepped in to quiet the drama. Now Alexius also has a contract with the Promoters to shill for his Masque actors. Calm has returned, though animosities linger.

Promoters exist on every major planet, and they shill for everything from trade goods to causes (alien rights, free trade) to individuals (merchants running for League office, nobles proposing matrimony). It is not uncommon for members of this guild to be on opposite sides of an issue, spending as much time bad mouthing each other as supporting their own side. Indeed, they view such situations as chances to improve their status within the guild, and they will trumpet their successes for months on end.

Promoters tend to focus on what passes for mass media in the Known Worlds, but they also use rumor campaigns and bribes to accomplish much of their agenda. For instance, a Promoter hired to improve Count Vlad Decados's reputation before a visit by a prospective bride might pay Town Criers to spread news of some glowing accomplishment (true or not), hire a team to threaten his worst detractors, bribe a priest to use the count as a positive example in a sermon, donate money in the count's name to some major cause, convince a higher ranking noble to stand next to the count at a party, and even ask the count to stop feeding serfs to his pet water dragons — though the last example is the least likely to succeed.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Director Gregor Wellspring* gained the guild some notoriety when a low-tech guerilla marketing campaign triggered a bomb scare. Local authorities mistook the low-tech devices for unexploded Emperor Wars bombs, creating panic. Although many

feathers were ruffled when the truth was revealed, the campaign did vault the client's holovid satire series to fame.



- *Chief Cyrus Parameter* is an up-and-coming Promoter who uses holovid mask technology to impersonate famous people and endorse products. While this bold tactic has delivered results, it remains to be seen how long he can get away with it before one of the celebrities he impersonates retaliates.

MONOPOLIES

As much as the Shills like to think they have a monopoly on public relations, anyone can act in that capacity. However, they do have patents on specific techniques, such as subliminal messaging. They've tried to patent disseminating false stories via the Town Criers, but that practice became too popular with too many powerful factions for them to enforce.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Everything is exciting! Your clients are the best! Stories to the contrary are fake news! Promoters can take the worst news and find the best spin for it, except when they are paid to do the exact opposite. Promoters can convince themselves of the truth of their most outlandish statements, but they always know better than to believe a client.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Promoters (Shills) exist on every major planet, where they shill for everything from trade goods to causes to individuals. They know a dozen different ways to move public opinion and a thousand different ways to change an individual's mind.

Capabilities: Customs (Cathedral or Court or Streetwise); Knowledge (Promoters); Lore (any) or Think Machines

Characteristics: Faith +1 or Will +1; Intuition +1; Perception +1; Presence +2

Perk: Guild Commission (Associate)

Skills: Academia 1 or Interface 1; Charm 1 or Knavery 1; Fight 1 or Melee 1 or Shoot 1; Perform 2

GUILD QUIRKS

Blessing: Born Huckster (+2 Presence when promoting something)

Curse: Sleazy (-2 Presence when getting someone to trust you)

Favored Calling: Tycoon

Material Award: *Acclaimer* (TL 5 curio, handheld or headset; voice amplifier also allows user to change her voice as well as making a variety of preprogrammed sounds)

Prospectors

Prospectors live a life that few would want, spending their days blasting apart asteroids and refining the raw ore they find into metals used to manufacture a variety of goods. Where many of the terraformed planets inhabited by humans have long since given up their mineral wealth, rocks floating in the void, barren moons, and planets far from the sun still have treasures to offer for those daring enough to seek them out.

Although nominally members of the League, Prospectors historically disdain politics and power plays. They just want their wages and a good place to spend them. However, this has changed with the opening of Vuldrok space and the race to reconnect with Lost Worlds. Families are the core unit of the Prospectors, and they're hearing rumors of family branches in these new lands that have been cut off from each other for centuries. Guild leaders are pushing the League to support more and more ventures into unknown space, and some Prospector families are trying to mount their own.

The Prospectors Guild has no central leadership. Instead, each of its massive mining ships has a Council of Elders, which represents each family within its floating city. Each Council elects one senior

representative to discuss business and rates with fellow Prospector ships. Politics are kept to a minimum by the guild, and personal grudges are not permitted to get in the way of an honest profit.

Most Prospector ships are contracted to a house, guild, or Church operation, laboring to uncover metals vital to those factions' manufacturing concerns. Operations that cannot afford a full ship will contract lone Prospectors to act as foremen, supervising serflaborers.

Many whisper that the miners have been apart from humanity for so long that they are no longer fully human. They often seem as mentally different from the average human as the ascorbites are physically. Most of their lives are spent on their refining ships with little or no outside contact with Known Worlds culture. Many of the sites where they work are hidden from the faint light of the fading suns. For all their eccentricities, the Prospectors seem happy with their lot in life. Perhaps for this reason alone, few Known Worlders really trust them.

LEADING MEMBERS



- Pipa "Blueface" Bronto is renowned for dying of oxygen deprivation three different times, only to be revived each time. Although she has some scrambled memories from the events, she is now considered something of a good luck charm among Prospectors, and there is competition among teams to contract her.

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- *Consul Rudis Harmony* sits on the Council of Elders in the Muster mining complex on Triangulus, Ravenna's moon. His miners uncovered some sort of artifact and Rudis coordinated the cover-up so that Muster officials could move it offworld before Hawkwood authorities could hear of it. When this was later discovered, the Hawkwoods were furious and have threatened to pull the Muster's contracts unless Rudis steps down. However, some whisper that this is also a ruse, to hide the Hawkwood's current possession of the artifact.

MONOPOLIES

While anyone can try to mine asteroids and space debris, doing it with degree of success requires a certain skill set. Their technology is nothing special, but the Prospectors jealously guard their techniques. Often, they refuse to share them outside of their own families.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Outside of their element, Prospectors may be nervous and ill at ease. In their element — surrounded by the infinite vastness of space — they can be as serene as a sleeping baby. Of course, their isolation often reinforces odd quirks and tendencies, and many planet dwellers find Prospectors discomfiting at best.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Prospectors live a life that few would want, spending their days blasting apart asteroids and refining the raw ore they find into metals used to manufacture a variety of goods. Many whisper that the miners have been apart from humanity for so long that they're no longer fully human.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Prospectors); Tech Lore and a second Tech Lore *or* Science (Applied)

Characteristics: Endurance +2; Perception +1; Strength +2

Perk: Guild Commission (Associate)

Skills: Crafts 1; Fight 1 *or* Impress 1; Pilot 1; Survival 1 *or* Vigor 1; Tech Redemption 1

GUILD QUIRKS

Blessing: Grease Monkey (+2 Wits when using tech)

Curse: Otherworldly (-2 Presence around non-space-farers)

Favored Calling: Reclaimer

Material Award: *Plasma mattock* (TL6 device: blunt medium-sized metal spatula superheats to ignore materials Resistance when deployed to slowly carve minerals and metals; against living creatures in

combat: 2 damage and delivers the Blaster attack property and tech compulsion)

Purgers

The stereotypical image of a Purger is of a broken-down, foul individual leading around an even more broken-down and foul brute cart, calling for people to bring out their trash. This portrayal only refers to one of the guild's duties, however. Waste disposal systems must stay operational, radioactive and chemical wastes need to disappear, and someone has to run the recycling plants on those rare planets that actually still have them.

Most of these efforts get paid from a city's tax coffers, though others (especially toxic waste disposal) are funded by specific guilds or nobles. The Purgers Guild on each planet handles specific contracts for that planet and its inhabitants, but there is little in the way of interaction between Purgers on different planets. While the guild has an official dean on Leagueheim, she has little influence over the rest of the Purgers.

This is partly because of the low status Purgers have both on their homeworlds and within the League. The Charioteers prefer not to take them from world to world, fearing that they would drive off other customers. Purgers generally have little interaction with the rest of a planet's population, which views them with a mix of distrust and disgust. After all, the Purgers do not just dispose of the trash. They remove anything of value or interest, and many secrets end up there.

On certain worlds, especially within Li Halan space, the Purgers are not allowed to mix with other people, except while carrying out their official duties. The Purgers probably suffer the worst from the Li Halan caste system. While they make a substantial amount of money in removing trash and selling anything of value they may find, they can only deal with other people through official Church intermediaries. Purgers on Kish and Icon are especially well known as being inbred and odd. They sometimes use their wealth to ferry in new blood from offworld, but as a general rule, they can only deal with one another.

This is not the case on every world, however. On Byzantium Secundus, for instance, the Purgers are respected associates of the Authority, the planet's leading guild. The Istakhr Purgers recently opened a branch on Stigmata, removing wastes generated by the Stigmata Garrison and studying all trash for any signs of symbiot infestation. Symbiot spores have already claimed the lives of a few Purgers, but the Emperor pays them well to remove this most noxious of refuse.

In space, the Purgers are far more welcome. In colonies and on space stations, waste is a dangerous thing. Purger efforts to reclaim every last molecule of oxygen,

water, hydrogen, and so on find huge demand here. In addition, the Purgers have added an important new sideline in the years since the Emperor Wars — battling hull rats. As hostilities ceased and interstellar travel bloomed, hull rats became a much more dangerous problem. Ships that contract with the Purgers have significantly fewer infestations than do those who don't. Poisons, weapons, unholy rites — whatever strange techniques the Purger employ, they certainly work.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Consul Zelda Frizz* is the official Purger for the watchstation orbiting the Manitou jumpgate, meant to alert interested parties whenever vau ships enter the system. She is rumored to know more about the Hegemony and its inhabitants than most xenologists and diplomats, although she denies this. Still, ambassadors are known to stop off at the watchstation to consult Zelda before meeting with vau emissaries.



- *Orphan Zed* is a Purger working in the sewers of Byzantium Secundus. She has become a figure of gossip at court recently, due to a disgruntled Orthodox priest's accusation that she is the bastard child of Patriarch Palamon. Church officials are searching for her, but she has yet to be found, said to be working so deep under the surface that even her guild can't track her whereabouts.

MONOPOLIES

While the Purgers do not control every type of waste management, they have exclusive contracts with a surprising number of fiefs. They also have patents on numerous disposal techniques, including those for hazardous materials. Anyone but a Purger will just try to find a poor part of town to dump these substances, but the Purgers might actually do that relatively safely.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Many Purgers delight in the perception of them as unkempt, uncouth, and often disgusting. In fact, since much of their equipment is found and salvaged, everything about them is often a mismatch of styles and quality. However, the guild is one of the wealthiest of the minor guilds, and some individual members have access both to lots of firebirds and teams of loyal muscle. These guild leaders can evidence a surprising amount of style and sophistication, and they are used to always getting their own way.

CHARACTER CREATION:

APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Purgers remove the waste from public view, be it garbage, sewage, or even dead bodies. The Purgers literally know where the bodies are buried.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Purgers); Knowledge (Beast or Streetwise) *or* Medical (Disease or Poison) *or* Science (Applied or Life); Tech Lore

Characteristics: Endurance +2; Strength +1; Perception +1; Will +1

Perk: Guild Commission (Associate)

Skills: Alchemy 1 *or* Animalia 1; Fight 1 *or* Melee 1; Impress 1; Intrusion 1 *or* Vigor 1; Tech Redemption 1

GUILD QUIRKS

Blessing: Hardy (+2 Endurance against toxins, noxious odors, harsh chemicals)

Curse: Quasimodo (-2 Presence when seducing others)

Favored Calling: Reclaimer

Material Award: Portable Incinerator (TL5 curio; this miniature furnace allows the user to quickly reduce anything one cubic inch or smaller into vapor)

Slayers

This guild has seen a decline since the end of the Emperor Wars, and its leaders desperately hope that new offices in Vuldrok space will spur growth. To that end, this small guild of assassins is looking for investors

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to fund its expansion. For an organization that still “doesn’t exist,” the Slayers Guild has more influence than most would like to admit.

Nobles still seek a Slayer when rivals and nuisances must be disposed of. Members of the Church who lean more towards political ascension than spiritual rewards call upon the Slayers to handle obstacles that can’t otherwise be removed. The guilds often handle their own problems, but they call upon the Slayers when their own members or even priests or nobles begin treading too close to their secrets. The Slayers are discreet and successful. They have no interest in blackmail or bribery. They consider their duties an art form, and in some cases, a sacred calling.

A surprising number of the Changed are Slayers; the guild makes a good place for these genetic monstrosities to hide. The most impenetrable fortresses often seem open to the Slayers, which isn’t surprising: the finest technological wonders are available to them, provided they can justify to their mediators the need for proscribed technology. In many cases, individual Slayers own a collection of weapons and high-tech wonders that would be the envy of most in the Known Worlds: think machines, golems, nanotech devices and more. These items would surely be enough to guarantee their punishment by the Church, but only if the Church were to acknowledge their existence.

Each individual Slayer is trained in secrecy by her one contact within the organization. In all cases, only one person ever acts as go-between, either for a single Slayer or a team. This person, known as a mediator, also serves as the Slayer’s instructor and is usually a retired master assassin. Secrecy is everything, so only the very highest echelons of the guild know the names of more than a few members.

Slayers are chosen for their physical prowess, their wits, and their undying loyalty. Rumors persist that each member of the Slayers undergoes extreme mental conditioning to guarantee their ability to remain silent about their deeds. Some even claim to have captured members of the guild, only to have the captives die without ever uttering a word.

Almost all the major powers in the Known Worlds have access to a contact who can reach the order. These contacts are often little more than well-placed servants, the sort who are normally ignored until their employers should need to call on the Slayers. The actual network of contacts who work as “acquisitioners” is fairly small. There is little need to have a lot of people in the know, because the list of clients who can even consider affording the Slayers’ rates is a short one.

LEADING MEMBERS



- *The Sixth Spacehawk* is the latest in a lineage of Slayers. When he dies, a Seventh will appear. Nobody knows who they are or how they are chosen. The First Spacehawk appeared during the Emperor Wars and was responsible for the assassinations of many key military personnel. The Fourth was the last to serve in the Wars, and his successors have since plied their trade in the uneasy peace of the Pax Alexius. Even most Slayers know little of the Spacehawks, although some believe it is a role adopted by Slayers as needed and is not a single individual at all.
- *Fanum LeGrace* is a legend among Slayers. She was (is?) a Changed metonym capable of perfectly mimicking a chosen target. While she used her powers to assassinate a number of military leaders during the Emperor Wars, it was her mimicry of a vau Mandarin ambassador on Byzantium Secundus that allowed her to get close to Alexius and slay him. Unfortunately, she killed his decoy double, who was also a metonym. She was then shot by the Imperial Guard, although rumors persist that she escaped in the guise of a scullery maid.

MONOPOLIES

This guild claims no monopoly, patent, or exclusive. Instead, it relies on being the very best at what it does.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Most Slayers have other “day” jobs, which are fairly lucrative and allow them to choose their own hours. It is rumored that some even belong to the Church, though scant evidence ever comes to light to prove these claims. Whatever their day job, each Slayer knows the value of secrecy and takes it to extremes. Never expect them to discuss their real job. If they do, do not expect to survive the experience.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

When someone needs to die, the Slayers are the guild to hire. Expert assassins are well connected and willing to carry out a job no matter the foe. The Slayers reputation inspires fear... and envy.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Slayers); Lore (any); Melee Weapons (Military) *or* Ranged Weapons (choose Energy Guns or Slug Guns)

Characteristics: Dexterity +2; Perception +2; Strength +1

Perk: Guild Commission (Associate)

Skills: Disguise 1 *or* Intrusion 1; Knavery 1; Fight 1 *or* Melee 1 *or* Shoot 1; Observe 1; Sneak 1

GUILD QUIRKS

Blessing: Obstinate (+2 Mind Resistance against attempts to divulge secrets)

Curse: Paranoid (-2 Presence when scrutinized)

Favored Calling: Spy

Material Award: *Shimmercloak* (TL6 device: +2 Sneak for *hide* maneuvers; Tech Compulsion: Afraid) *or* *Stonefoot* (blade poison: 10 one-use doses; on successful attack, inflicts Hindered state)

Stewards

For centuries, only elite freemen and women could earn an invitation to noble galas. Many fumbled at such affairs due to poor speech, posture, dress, or opinions. What to do? Hire the Stewards to teach you how to be upper class! Since the Emperor Wars, the growth of Imperial functions — and the many non-nobles

who attend them — has given the Stewards more work than they can handle.

These men and women keep up to date on the latest styles, trends, and gossip, passing that knowledge along to their clients. Plan on selling Shaprut wine to nobles? Have a Steward teach you the ins and outs of noble parties and celebrations. Of course, one of the biggest faux pas you can make is to let the nobles know that your style came from a Steward.

The Stewards’ newest clients, the Vuldrok nobles of House Eldrid — former thanes — don’t know about this prejudice, and the Stewards are in no rush to tell them. Still, the uncouth thanes need *somebody* to teach them proper etiquette, now that they’re part of Known Worlds society. No proper noble deigns to do so; it might as well be a job for the Stewards.

Nobles look down on Stewards and their students as pretenders, aping the manners of their betters. Nobles might send some of their minor householders to the Stewards, hoping to improve a lackey’s deportment, but only because they would never expect that servant to be nearly as refined as they are. These nobles are especially infuriated when a Steward’s pupil ends up invited to an Imperial affair for which they were snubbed.

Of course, Stewards have to justify this monopoly, and they do so by staying aware of every trend in noble manners. While House Torenson might preach about the eternal nature of good conduct, the Stewards make their money by teaching not only the basics but by providing regular updates on what has changed. Are pigtails the current rage among men? Should women wear mink or Cadizian mirhem? Ask a Steward.

The lengths to which Stewards go to become the first to learn these tidbits are legendary. Since they are not invited to the noble events where such matters get determined, they must find alternative sources of information. Bribing servants and planting bugs at parties are just the beginning. Stories of Stewards found hidden under tables at dinner parties or caught taking photos from trees seem to crop up every year. Still, Stewards who know what is hot (and what is not) are always in demand.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Director Selma Garulus* is a keen watcher of courtly trends at the Imperial Court on Byzantium Secundus.



She sells her reports and opinions on fashions, gossip, and courtly doings to other Stewards through an expensive subscription service. Many lords on distant worlds want to display the latest Imperial fashions before their rivals one-up them, and Selma's reports give those lords' Stewards an edge in providing them.

- *Kotek* is a hironem. He recently blew the whistle on a F.A.R. terrorism plot that threatened his Li Halan client. He received the grateful thanks of the lord and a medal but was then let go from his service contract. He now seeks a new employer and is considering expanding his search to Hargard.

MONOPOLIES

Most of their earliest clients were merchants (generally Charioteers), so becoming a guild was the only way the Stewards could ensure that their lucrative positions would not be usurped by guild-owned tutors. As part of the League, they insist that other guilds avoid teaching etiquette to their members. Some of these teaching guilds gripe that Stewards often create fake fads as a way to justify their positions rather than teaching true culture and etiquette.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Stewards are their own advertising, endeavoring to always show dignity and style. However, they are careful never to show up their clients, so they know when to tone it down. The urge to correct their charges is never far away, and quick criticisms have a way of just slipping out.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Stewards teach manners and elegance to anyone who will hire them. They insist that they know the very hottest trends, even if they make them up themselves.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Stewards); Lore (any); Transport (Beastcart *or* Landcraft)

Characteristics: Dexterity +2 or Strength +2; Endurance +2; Perception +1

Perk: Guild Commission (Associate)

Skills: Academia 1; Charm 2; Drive 1; Empathy 1 *or* Observe 1

GUILD QUIRKS

Blessing: Gracious (+2 Presence with guests)

Curse: Insecure (-2 Mind Resistance around social betters)

Favored Calling: Scholar

Material Award: *Featherduster* (TL6 curio: a synthetic feather that disintegrates dust and grime when gently slid across clothing)

Town Criers

Shortly before the Emperor Wars, the Reeves created a network of town criers to gather and disseminate news from and for people who could not read or afford radios. While the wars spread the growth of this network, it also definitely accelerated the demand. People grew desperate for news of relatives deployed to distant systems, reliable insights into the course of the war, and rumors of when their own planets were at risk of attack.

Nobles objected to any news source that they did not control, and the Reeves did little to support the Criers during the Wars. After the Wars, however, official censorship waned. Town Criers who had seen their ambitions stifled during the Emperor Wars now found themselves perfectly placed for growth. Interstellar and interplanetary connections thrived once more, and the demand for news proved insatiable. While most Criers came to the guild either out of a desire to tell stories or to help people learn truth, others saw the massive funds that could be made.

The other guilds were their main clients, but even nobles and the Church spent money promoting opportunities and news stories. The Reeves certainly appreciated the revenue but never felt comfortable with the public scrutiny under which the Criers operated. When ambitious Criers moved to increase their sub-guild's independence, the Reeves did little to resist.

However, the guild's ambition quickly proved to be its undoing. Trapped between nobles, spy agencies, and others, the Criers found themselves the scapegoats for everyone else's failures, blamed whenever they reported anything like bad news. The Criers' own inability to sometimes differentiate between true news and disinformation planted by suspect interests added to the guild's woes. After a decade of rocket-like growth, it all came crashing down. The remaining Criers found themselves forced back into the Reeves for survival.

Still, the more idealistic of the Criers remembered what they almost accomplished. The ability to share real news with their audiences, untainted by spin from the Church, nobles, and other guilds, was a heady experience. The chance to do so again, and perhaps change the nature of the Known Worlds, lingers with them.

LEADING MEMBERS



- *Lady Dahahalima* is the queen of gossip. Her columns recounting courtly doings and fetes are required reading for all socialites. She is a bit of a mystery herself, appearing at events without ever being seen arriving, and disappearing without ever being sighted leaving. Although she is a noble, nobody seems to know from what family she hails. She is considered one of the crown jewels of the Town Criers Guild.
- *Chief Beany Brooks* is an actual “crier”: he stands on street corners on Byzantium Secundus and yells out exciting tidbits of news and gossip to get the attention of customers, who he then hard-sells on the latest news sheets or holovids. He leads a gang of young criers who also act as sleuths and crime solvers. He gained some fame recently for revealing that a haunting at a noble manse was actually a disgruntled servant posing as a ghost.

MONOPOLIES

In many fiefs, the Town Criers still have a monopoly on the public dissemination of news, but what they really care about is the monopoly on sharing the advertising that supports their news efforts. That is the monopoly they will enforce at any cost.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Most Town Criers are adept at both gathering and spreading news. As a result, they tend to be social and determined, as capable in quiet one-on-one conversations as in shouting to a crowd. The best Criers have small teams that can work with them, and some of the most famous travel from place to place, gathering news along the way and sharing it with appreciative audiences on arrival.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

The status of the Town Criers has fluctuated, but the need for news remains. Town Criers uncover the news and share it as far and wide as they can.

Capabilities: Customs (Cathedral or Court or Streetwise); Knowledge (Town Criers); Lore (any or Transport (Landcraft))

Characteristics: Intuition +1; Perception +1; Presence +2; Wits +1

Perk: Guild Commission (Associate)

Skills: Academics 1; Charm 1 or Knavery 1; Drive 1 or Intrusion 1; Fight 1 or Melee 1; Observe 1 or Sleight of Hand 1 or Sneak 1

GUILD QUIRKS

Blessing: Born Huckster (+2 Presence when promoting something)

Curse: Sleazy (-2 Presence when getting someone to trust you)

Favored Calling: Amateur

Material Award: *Mojo* (TL5 simple think machine: This device records audio and transcribes speech to text, which it uploads to any planetary Town Crier’s datanet cache or saves it until it auto-uploads upon connection. Tech Compulsion: Indiscreet.)

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A CRYING SHAME

In the heady days after the end of the Emperor Wars, many guilds anticipated renewed prosperity and power. Several minor guilds began angling for major guild prominence. One, the Town Criers, saw an opportunity in the reconnected Known Worlds. Its members moved quickly to take advantage of this, selling news, ads, rumors, and lies to all-new audiences.

For the Criers, information was both power and wealth. They bought it, sold it, bartered it, and often made it up. While the Criers' initial role focused on making community members aware of opportunities near them, their role shifted after the Reeves subsumed them during the early Regency period.

As connections between planets fell apart, the Criers' quickly became the main way to keep track of news from distant worlds, even if that news was months old. The Reeves, who worked with every faction no matter how the winds shifted, did their best to ensure the Criers also stayed above the fray.

After the Emperor Wars ended, however, the lead Criers saw their opportunity. With the Known Worlds connected as they had not been for centuries, the demand for news reached whole new peaks. The demand for fast news also skyrocketed.

To meet the demand, and to maintain their growing prestige, the Criers took news from any source they could. The revenue could come from anyone — Church leaders spreading morality tales, merchants trumpeting unbelievable (and unproven) wonders for their products, and noble houses carrying on ancient feuds in a new forum.

The latter proved an amazingly profitable stream of lies and money. All the spy agencies within the Known Worlds participated, but the Royal Houses dominated this new form of war. In solar systems now seemingly insatiable for news, and with new information channels appearing in the aftermath of war, the spy agencies continued as if peace had never appeared.

These took many forms, but anti-Imperial and anti-Alexius stories grew into the preeminent form. The Imperial Eye was uncharacteristically slow to react, as it was used to the Town Criers being an ineffectual if sometimes annoying part of the Reeves. However, their growing wealth and

prominence allowed the Criers to begin asserting more independence.

The Imperial Eye began investigating, but only after it too had used the Criers to plant its own fake news. It expected the anti-Alexius news to have come from traditional enemies, like the Decados Jakovians. However, it quickly became apparent that this went well beyond the usual disinformation campaigns, known to the Decados as “maskirovka.”

Numerous factions, and factions within factions, appeared within the web of conspirators. Li Halan fundamentalists, Muster slavers, apocalyptic Eskatonics, and many more had their own reasons for funding such stories. However, the conspiracy had a surprising heart: Jakovians allied with numerous disaffected Hawkwood nobles. The fact that House Hawkwood would attack one of their own so viciously was surprising enough. The revelation that they did it in concert with their ancestral enemies was even more shocking.

The Eye took its findings to the Emperor, expecting orders for an immediate reprisal, but he would allow no such thing. Disgusted that they could not act against the traitors within Alexius' house, they moved instead against the messenger. The Criers' rise within the League had upset the old order. The major guilds looked askance at this upstart, especially the Reeves. It took the Eye little to convince the Criers' enemies that they had Imperial authority to move against the guild.

Lawsuits in religious and secular courts dropped like pants at a Decados ball. Lines of credit, whether from Reeves, the Brother Battle, or other sources, dried up like grapes before Inquisition flamethrowers. Other lines of income, especially from guild merchants, disappeared like lyrical metaphors before a tyrannical editor.

Besieged on all sides, the Criers found themselves forced to turn to the Reeves for salvation, relying on their advocates and bankers to bail them out of trouble across the Known Worlds. Of course, the price was more than firebirds. The Criers found themselves bound more tightly to the Reeves than ever before. Those who remember the heady days of the guild's rise chafe at these new controls and constantly seek freedom from the press of Reeve rules and restraints.

Weaponsmiths

Many thought the end of the Emperor Wars would cripple this guild, but that has not proven so. While the Weaponsmiths no longer turn out the massive quantity of weapons they once did, they can instead return to what made them successful in the first place — handcrafting beautiful tools of death. In addition, where the Royal Houses once relentlessly encroached on their monopolies, the Weaponsmiths have again cornered the market for top-notch weapons.

Many small guilds (most of them independent of the League) and families are known for their skill in this area: the Mitchau family (patroned by House Hazat), Martech Guild (connected to the Engineers), the Varsten family (House Decados), the Sumpter family (patroned by House al-Malik), the Radir family (patroned by House Decados), the Combo family (gannoks associated with the Charioteers), and famed individuals such as Ariman Dreskel (under contract with the Scravers) and Boltan Arbogast. Competition is fierce between them but is nonetheless civilized.

A patron provides the family with a good stipend, and in return, the family produces fine weapons. All such families and guilds are constantly trying to recreate Second Republic technologies, and to this end, they usually send their journeymen sons and daughters out to search for such tech.

Martech, a sub-guild of the Engineers, is owned by its members — a radical concept that makes many houses and guilds uncomfortable. Every member of Martech shares in the profits. For this reason, membership in the guild is only open to the best, and more than a few rising stars have been lured from their family business to join Martech.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Consul Emile Grosvenor* is a grizzled veteran of the Emperor Wars and one of the premier starship weaponry experts in the Known Worlds. He recently retired from a management position at the shipyards of Tethys and hopes his free time will allow him to perfect the design of a new type of deck-mounted laser. The Royal Houses are inundating him with offers for exclusive use of this currently incomplete tech.
- *Durago Darkstar* is an ukar known for inventing a frap net to ensnare and stun a large crowd. The Muster quickly bought the exclusive use of the patent, making Durago rich and sought out by clients who seek new methods of riot control. He



is rumored to now be working on a contract for Sigfaddir Firestorm on Hargard, which could get him into trouble with imperial authorities for aiding an enemy.

MONOPOLIES

The Royal Houses refuse to let anyone have a monopoly on creating weapons, so the Weaponsmiths instead create their own styles and specialties. These exclusives are respected, as even the most powerful Royal House keeps its options open when it comes to buying weapons.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Weaponsmiths are consummate crafters, dedicated to the greatness of their creations and the refinement of their skills. While many Weaponsmiths reluctantly engaged in mass production to keep up with orders during the Emperor Wars, but they have now returned to handcrafting each weapon and ensuring it meets their highest standards.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Weaponsmiths specialize in handcrafted weapons of elegance and might — tools of death that a family may prize for generations.

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Capabilities: Knowledge (Weaponsmiths); Melee Weapons (Military) *or* Ranged Weapons (Energy Guns or Slug Guns) *or* a Science Lore; Tech Lore

Characteristics: Dexterity +2 *or* Strength +2; Intuition +2; Wits +1

Perk: Guild Commission (Associate)

Skills: Alchemy 1; Crafts 1; Melee 1 *or* Shoot 1 *or* Vigor 1; Tech Redemption 2

GUILD QUIRKS

Blessing: Curious (+2 Intuition when encountering something new)

Curse: Competitive (-2 Presence around business rivals)

Favored Calling: Tech Redeemer

Material Award: Masterwork weapon (+1 goal) you made yourself

Wordwrights

The idea that books have power is undeniable. There are those who believe the popularity of “Armstrong: My Sojourn on Barbarian Worlds” (now on its 10th volume) helped pave the way for the reunification with the Vuldrok. This series, like most of those concocted by the Wordwrights, pretends to be merely autobiographical, yet these scandalous books are also filled with sexual deviation, murder, and mayhem, as well as enough adventures to satisfy a dozen people. The best Wordwright creations pretend to be written by a noble, a thinly disguised work involving that noble’s past. Without the changes to names and places, each would likely result in an unpleasant investigation by the Church.

Of course, it is the Wordwright who makes the books worth reading. Few who read the adventures of Armstrong realize that these tales are written from notes about the life of Lord Andreas Hawkwood, now retired from the harsher political games and mostly satisfied to sit in his den writing about his past, a time before the empire was finally rebuilt. All they know for certain is that whomever Armstrong really is, his life has been incredibly interesting. And the secrets revealed about other nobles — their identities also hidden under pseudonyms — are delightfully dangerous.

What also remains unknown is how amazingly boring the man’s life actually is. Without the Wordwrights, the adventures of Armstrong would best be used to light a fire on a chilly night. Scandals of every sort are laid bare for all to see, but they’re done so safely. More direct autobiographies are also revealed in this manner: factual details of battles won and lost and explorations to forgotten worlds are treasured among the privileged. Despite this, the details of whose names have been changed always catch the most attention.

For that reason alone, the Wordwrights are very discreet. Discretion is more than a promise for the Wordwrights. It’s a solemn vow, one the guild intends to keep if only to ensure that the Inquisition is kept a safe distance away. It is not only nobles who come to the Wordwrights; shortly before Lady Theafana al-Malik’s disappearance, a book that was immediately marked for destruction wherever found — “Blood on My Sword: Confessions of a Brother Battle” — rapidly reached the equivalent of bestseller status.

LEADING MEMBERS

- *Consul Margo Peters* was once a best-selling writer of mysteries but now manages a number of younger ghost-writing Wordwrights. She gets them wealthy clients who want their autobiographies or torrid romances turned into books, and she protects her writers’ identities from public ire when those books enflame the wrong parties.



- *Wolf Wildmann* is an author famed for his novels about nobles and guilders who give up their lives of endless duty to live free on rural estates or in the wilderness. He is himself a rabid outdoorsman and attracts many celebrities who join him on epic hunting expeditions and fishing trips on his home-world of Bannockburn.

MONOPOLIES

Many people can write, but only the Wordsmiths crank out these sensationalist pot boilers. Wordsmiths do not enforce their monopoly at the point of a sword, preferring the point of a pen. They are also the Known Worlds' leading literary critics.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

To drag a Wordwright from his or her literary den is a feat unheard of. Great skulkers in the dark, they prefer writing by candlelight to going out on a sunlit day. Social functions are beyond them, but their imaginations take them to great (if tawdry) places.

CHARACTER CREATION: APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

For those few people who are literate, the Wordwrights create works of pleasure and scandal. Their craft helps influence the way everyone sees their universe.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Wordwrights); choose 2 Lores (any)

Characteristics: Intuition +3; Will +1 *or* Faith +1; Wits +1

Perk: Guild Commission (Associate)

Skills: Academics 1; Arts 2; Charm 1 *or* Impress 1 *or* Knavery 1; Focus 1 *or* Interface 1 *or* Observe 1

GUILD QUIRKS

Blessing: Shrewd (+2 Mind Resistance against fast-talk attempts)

Curse: Introverted (-2 Presence at social gatherings)

Favored Calling: Artist

Material Award: *Mojo paper* (TL5 simple think machine: This single sheet of synthpaper can be written on repeatedly; it saves all its pages and can upload them to most datanets. Tech Compulsion: Indiscreet.)

Wranglers

Wranglers are as close to old-fashioned Urth cowboys as you're likely to see. Many of these folks spend months on end tending to herds of brutes or nurturing the delicate sea creatures some nobles find preferable as pets or food.

Wranglers watch over the herds of riding beasts and food stocks. They also train them and are adept at minor medical surgeries, such as musk sac removal for brutes and shoeing for riding beasts. Wranglers work long hard hours on the range, often living off the land for months at a time, and they're usually good at predicting the weather and determining which forms of local fauna are edible for themselves and for their herds. Plants or animals that look like their harmless cousins while hiding nasty surprises fool few Wranglers.

Being a Wrangler requires few skills taught in books, but don't make the mistake of thinking they're ignorant just because most are illiterate. Wranglers are skilled crafters in their own right, trained in animal husbandry, hunting, herding, and even the manufacture of saddles and harnesses.

The heads of families are normally the de facto leaders of the local Wranglers. While each worker is paid enough to live on, the head of the family in these cases normally receives the lion's share of the money, which is used not only to tend to their own needs, but those of the entire family.

Most people view Wranglers as little more than serfs, and polite society is almost never open to a Wrangler. Many people would rather their descendants married a Purger or Carny than a member of this guild; thus, mothers strive to keep their children from growing up to be Wranglers.



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- *Director Jaxson Ready* is an old brute handler who can herd any beast. He is said to have even herded an Ungavoroxian grackle fox into a pen — a feat that so impressed the feral vorox witnesses that he was given honorary membership in many anger-aks. He now helps to steer the guild's interstellar fortunes from his ranch on Gwynneth.



- *Elsbeth Seersighted* is alleged to be a natural theurgist, trained by a hesychast anchorite. While some have accused her of being a Gjartin pagan, her knowledge of scripture always stymies attempts to stain her with that slur. She has an unusual affinity with small animals and is able to soothe even the most rabid with uncanny songs.

MONOPOLIES

The Wranglers do not have specific monopolies, but they definitely have their herds. Trying to rustle a Wrangler's animals is a sure way to start a fight — one that will likely end in death. Their stock is their livelihood.

ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Rugged and taciturn, Wranglers work hard and play harder. Fights are the order of the day, whether they're with brutes or with people. Still, a Wrangler can also make the most loyal of friends, and they have a reputation for never forgetting a favor.

CHARACTER CREATION:

APPRENTICESHIP TRAITS

Many of these folks spend months on end tending to herds of brutes or nurturing the delicate sea creatures some nobles find preferable as pets or food. Wranglers watch over the herds of riding beasts and food stocks. They also train them and are adept at minor medical surgeries.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Beast, Wranglers); Transport (Beastback or Beastcraft)

Characteristics: Dexterity +1 *or* Strength +1; Endurance +2; Presence +2

Perk: Guild Commission (Associate)

Skills: Animalia 2; Drive 1; Fight 1 *or* Remedy 1 *or* Vigor 1; Survival 1

GUILD QUIRKS

Blessing: Beastmaster (+2 Presence for non-combat interaction with animals)

Curse: Uncouth (-2 Presence at society functions)

Favored Calling: Scout

Material Award: *HALT*er (TL5 curio: a synth-rope that can be looped around an animal's muzzle or neck to place it in the Docile state through a lulling electromagnetic frequency; see the *Animalia command animal* maneuver; does not work on sentients)



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Humanity isn't alone out there among the myriad worlds. A number of sentient alien species share the stars with them — something which humanity has historically been very jealous about. The dominant human society's behavior toward people who are not like them has been shameful and beyond unjust, but calling this out does little to change things. Non-human alien species must eke out their lives as second-class citizens in a humanocentric universe...

... for now, at least. It's possible that certain events might reverse this. The superior Vau Hegemony could decide to annex the Known Worlds, putting humans under their thumb. In such a state, the other species might not be on top, but they might also find a place above humans in the new pecking order. Or the symbiots could flood into the Known Worlds, upending human rule and replacing it with... well, nobody really knows what would happen next. Finally, jumpgates could open onto whole new empires as yet unknown, ruled by aliens who are powerful enough to say no to humans. The aliens can dream, can't they?

The contemporary situation in the Known Worlds is looking up a bit, however. Alexius has shown favor to alien rights since his ascension. While he does not move fast enough in many aliens' opinions, he has steadily been ensuring alien rights whenever conflicts arise. He recently upheld ascorbite sovereignty treaties on Severus that date back to the Second Republic, agreements the Decados rulers of that world ignored for a long time. This has, of course, angered the noble houses, who don't want to be told what they can do to aliens they consider their own citizens, but Alexius has been consistently firm on these issues. It is said that Empress Freya is even more sympathetic to alien rights, so there appears to be no chance in the near future that the Emperor will change course on slowly but surely returning to the alien species their former freedoms.

The new Patriarch has yet to weigh in, either for or against, this trend. The Church has traditionally been a terrible instigator of the worst types of anti-alien bigotry, but it has also defended their rights against the worst forms of noble house abuse. If the new Patriarch were to follow Alexius' lead, a new era of alien liberty would surely dawn.

Until that time, the ascorbites, etyri, gannok, hironem, ishkin, oro'ym, shantor, ur-obun and ukar, and the vorox do what they can to thrive under the yoke.

A NOTE ON NATIVE LANGUAGES

The birthrights below assume that you were raised among others of your own species, living in the rather insular territories and reservations left to you by the dominant human cultures. Hence, you've learned your "native" tongue: the most common language

spoken by your culture's majority. If your alien character was not raised this way, you probably don't know this language. Consult your GM for exceptions.

Ascorbites

Carapaced, bipedal insectoids share a tribal hive mentality.

Initial contact with the ascorbites of Severus was ominous yet friendly, when the first human settlers were warned about the ferocity of the native fauna. They deemed themselves safe in their metal lodgings, at least until ravenous hull-rats devoured them. Subsequent contact established the hematophagous insectoids as distant yet non-hostile. For a long time, the ascorbites remained shrouded in mystery, residing in their tree-top villages called *tunos*, even as human settlement of their homeworld progressed.

This enigmatic exterior began to crack as soon as humans first happened to get their hands on ascorbite young in a devastated tunos. As it turned out, ascorbites in their adolescent development stage are highly impressionable and vehemently stick to their indoctrination throughout their entire life. The Decados put this single-minded dedication to use in the Emperor Wars, where they tasked ascorbite units with suicidal missions.

As returning survivors were shunned by their native counterparts, it became apparent that ascorbites shared a pseudo-psychic hive mentality that propagated itself through infrasonic sound, which they referred to as the Song. The malleable young quickly pick up new skills, which they then contribute to the Song of their people, providing far more flexibility than the stolid mindset of adult ascorbites would otherwise allow. Ascorbites who follow different Songs have to communicate verbally and always consider each other inferior, which has led to frequent tribal warfare.

The emergence of human-raised ascorbites in recent years seems to have galvanized the native ascorbites on Severus. They have since broken off contact and retreated into the jungles. The Jakovian Agency keeps a tight lid on any news from Severus, but word is that the local holdings are suffering from increasingly frequent attacks.

In the meantime, other factions managed to acquire ascorbite offspring of their own, mostly through illegal slaving raids by the Muster. While offworld breeding proved unsuccessful at first, sheltering the offspring from the adults has led to multiple ascorbite collectives among the factions of the Known Worlds. Most of them are rather small but fully dedicated to their patrons.

The biggest of these — the *mi'llazh* — remain in the services of the Decados. Working with them, they often serve as bodyguards or couriers in sensitive situations, since their unquestionable loyalty provides a rare

modicum of safety in an environment of otherwise frequent betrayal. Just like the Decados, these ascorbites are very secretive towards outsiders — and sometimes even towards their noble masters themselves.

The Avestites have cultivated an ascorbite collective of their own — the *Locustae Rubri* (or “Red Locusts”). This comes as especially surprising, considering the stories about the native worship of dark gods on Severus — the *Somta Vosht’i* — which fuel persistent rumors about a possible demonic origin of the species. Yet the Temple considers their immaculate ignorance, combined with their susceptibility to indoctrination, as laudable, giving them a chance to redeem their sinful ancestry through dedicated Church service. The Decados are afraid the Avestites are only raising this collective to prepare for an Inquisitorial raid on Severus. All they need is hard evidence of the native ascorbites’ antinomy to circumvent the restrictions of the Pax Alexius. Meanwhile, the unscrupulous *Locustae Rubri* are deployed on missions that might even give hardened veterans of the Temple pause. The irony of releasing “a locust scourge” onto their worst enemies doesn’t seem to be lost on the otherwise humorless Avestites.

Apart from the minor collectives, there is also the rare individual ascorbite, usually a victim of a procedure referred to as “clipping.” The Muster used to employ this technique of removing the antennae and abdominal cords to pacify the insectoids for transport, robbing them of the means to participate in their people’s Song. These ascorbites are tragic loners, feeling truly alien in a world where nothing resonates with them. The Muster have since mostly given up on this procedure, instead preferring to raise some ascorbite young of their own.

Physique: Ascorbites are generally humanoid and grow slightly taller than the average human, although their body mass tends to be lower. Their strong legs are capable of huge leaps, while their vestigial wings are incapable of flight. They live about 60 years and

reproduce sexually, laying eggs into carcasses to sustain their offspring in its larval state (*arme’lova*). After a few months, they move on to their six-legged adolescent stage (*tan’zhom*), which usually lasts about a decade, during which they are highly capable of absorbing new information. This adaptability is lost in transition to adulthood, when the second set of arms atrophies. Each stage is divided by a period of cocooning, and while growing, they periodically shed their exoskeletons. Myths about ascorbites on Severus mention a fourth stage of development that will reveal itself upon the return of the *Somta Vosht’i* — even they do not know what it will bring to their species.

Leading Ascorbites: Captain Zhu’brief (head of Prince Hiram Vladislav Decados’ personal ascorbite guard), Klom’i (senior ascorbite agent in the Jakovian Agency; voluntarily submitted herself to clipping to mute her Song), Canon Gerasimus of Pyre (first ascorbite to be entrusted with an Inquisitorial Seal)

Homeworld: Most ascorbites still live on Severus, but they can be encountered all along the jumpweb. While larger local populations are still rare due to the lengthy indoctrination period, there are resident collectives on Pyre and Leagueheim. The Hazat’s attempts at establishing a collective on Hira have met with little success so far.

Roleplaying Notes: Adult ascorbites strongly stick to the indoctrination they received in their youth. Questioning the benevolence of their patrons is completely foreign to them. While individual ascorbites are slower to learn later on, the Song of their collective

allows them access to knowledge they themselves don’t possess. They are highly committed to other ascorbites that share the same Song and constantly stay in touch with their community, even if it might seem like they never actually communicate with each other. A group of ascorbites working in concert is a fright to behold. Towards outsiders — anyone except their collective and its patrons — they come off as extremely secretive.



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Character Stereotypes: Emperor Wars veteran (serving in their noble patron's forces or among their own collective among the Dispossessed yeomen), Inquisitor (Locustae Rubri), Chainer (ruthless ex-slave turned slaver)

ASCORBITE BIRTHRIGHT

Adaptability: You gain immunity to any toxin or disease you survive. You also pass these immunities on to your offspring.

Bloodsucker: You gain nourishment exclusively from consuming blood, commonly freshly obtained from a living organism. (One hull rat is sufficient for one day's sustenance.) The means to preserve blood rations are expensive and rarely reserved for ascorbite foodstock.

Carapace: You have natural carapace armor that provides 3 Body Resistance. Any clothes or armor you wear must be custom tailored (+10% cost).

Far Leap: Your strong legs allow you to double your jumping distances.

Fixed Development: You are set in the ways you learned in adolescence. Thus, you are unable to change your class, and you are likely to stick with a single calling (although this can be negotiated with the GM).

The Song: Each ascorbite can communicate with others within the same collective via subvocal sound. This allows them to share capabilities, as per the Complementary Capabilities rules. One ascorbite must be the primary actor, using a primary action for the task, but the helping ascorbite can aid as a secondary (rather than the usual primary) action, so long as they are both within audible range of their Song.

Speak Ascorbite: You learn your native tongue of clicks and whirrs as a Speak capability.

CLASSES

Ascorbites have no nobility of their own. Some collectives with a high-ranking noble patron are sometimes treated like informal knightly orders, but no ascorbite has been ennobled in his own right so far.

The only ascorbites in the Church are the Locustae Rubri of the Avestites. Their blind fanaticism scares the other sects even more than the Avestites do.

The mainstay of the ascorbites among the Merchant League are the Muster, but they are not beyond renting out their services to other guilds on a semi-permanent basis.

CALLINGS

Each collective has its own calling; members gain access to that calling's perks, even if they don't follow that calling. For noble and League collectives, this is usually the Mercenary calling, while for the Locustae Rubri, it is Inquisitor.

ASCORBITE PERKS

Whenever you gain a calling perk, you can choose from your calling's list or select the Enameled Chitin perk below.

ENAMELED CHITIN

Ability • Precondition: Ascorbite

Your natural chitin has been engraved and supplemented with metal and strengthening compounds.

Benefice: Your gain +2 Body Resistance for your natural armor. However, without a source of common materials and victorious Tech Redemption or Crafts repair maneuvers (Resistance 2), your wounds take twice as long to heal.

Etyri

These winged, flying avian humanoids have a culture valuing omens and the afterlife.

Of all the sentient alien species, the etyri are the one most likely to inspire awe and wonder, rather than fear and revulsion, in those who first see them. These large, articulate, soulful birds with prehensile forelimbs are seldom encountered away from their home planet of Grail, yet their place in fable and scripture has been well known since the Diaspora. People from all walks of life have attended morality plays in which these winged creatures swoop down from the sky, bestowing forebodings of things to come in rich and haunting intonations. In fact, the etyri culture orients itself toward the future in many ways, preserving a history full of omens and divinations and a mythology founded upon prophecy and belief in an afterlife said to exist in the spaces beyond the sky.

It was the etyri themselves who initiated contact with the early human settlers on Grail, carefully observing and learning Urthish so as to greet them in their own language. The avians were on the verge of extinction, subject to predation by Grail's other sentient species, egg-stealing subterranean reptiles. They were able to negotiate and trade for technology and weapons that granted them advantages in their struggle for survival. Later, the etyri kept watch over the healer Amalthea when she tended to the soul-sickness of the Prophet Zebulon, assuring them an honored place in the lore of the Universal Church. Generally speaking, relations between humans and etyri have been good, although on rare occasions — such as when logging businesses threatened the forests where the majority of etyri breed and raise their young — many willingly gave their lives in combat and proved themselves to be unyieldingly staunch and fierce defenders of their ancestral lands.

Few etyri ever travel from their homeworld, and one can only find them in significant numbers on the most heavily populated planets, like Byzantium Secundus or Criticorum. Reasons for this include their closely knit families and communal structures, combined with their rather long lifespans. Large numbers of elders are dependent on their young, so few members can be spared. Another reason is their mythic identification of the afterlife with outer space, such as the idea that those who leave the planet are considered dead. Those who return may be regarded as angels incarnate or unhallowed ghosts, depending on the circumstances under which they departed. (The etyri obsession with death is thought to date back to a stage in their evolution when they were carrion-eaters, which they are loath to acknowledge or elaborate upon.) Yet another reason may be a matter of physical frailty. Although they're quicker and more agile than many sentients, their slender bones are hollow, making them lighter and more fragile in comparison with most species.

This is not to say that any etyri is weak and defenseless. Though they may be crushed when grappled, the grappler is likely to lose an eye or some other soft body part in the process. Etyri individuals

who leave their home planet tend to be the toughest of their breed: They are members of the noble tribes called Huar'raughq, who resemble birds of prey. During times of prolonged peace, however, members of other breeds show a willingness to venture forth into the Known Worlds. Over the centuries, denizens of the equatorial rainforests — the Chirikiti — have attained prominence in interplanetary society, using their large, bulbous, exotically-shaped beaks and related talents for mimicry, as well as their richly colorful and elegantly coiffured plumage, to gain fame and fortune in the performing arts.

Physique: Physically, the etyri resemble the feathered fliers common to nearly all settled planets, but with an extra pair of limbs that function the way hands do for most sentients. They may stand up to 2 meters or taller when stretched fully upright, but they're more comfortable in a forward-slanting posture that keeps them closer to eye level with most folk. Their wingspan is generally just over twice their fullest height. Their other limbs, usually bare or partially feathered, terminate in four digits that can swivel slightly to oppose each other in either a 2-versus-2 perching grasp or a 3-versus-1 manipulative grip.



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The beaks of the etyri vary widely in size and shape, denoting ancestry and lineage. The ruling clans have hooked beaks, which resemble the beaks of hawks or eagles; these beaks are most frequently seen on individuals who travel off their home planet. The feathered covering of the etyri is even more widely varied, ranging from a smooth sleek monochrome of muted earth tones to wildly hued or even iridescent stripes, speckles, streaks, and bands covering elaborate crests, tufts, and plumes.

All etyri keep themselves impeccably groomed at all times, partially out of pride in their personal appearance, but mostly to keep their airflow control surfaces functioning with peak efficiency in flight.

Leading Etyri: Sir Thoktikaa (Questing Knight), Eulia Liu (singer and tribal elder), Chozik Dorch (duelist)

Homeworld: Grail is their homeworld, but small populations exist on the most populous worlds, notably Criticorum, Byzantium Secundus, and Leagueheim.

Roleplaying Notes: Clear and precise in speech, etyri maintain honor and dignity with an ever-watchful eye to the future. Their complex language and richly detailed culture make them especially sensitive to social nuances. They generally excel at the performing arts and expression of the courtly graces. As the only sentient with the natural ability to fly under their own power, they find it easier to think in three dimensions than their land-bound companions, acting on an instinctive and experienced understanding of aerodynamics, ballistics, and weather. For the etyri, the future awaits above rather than forward, while the past falls downward rather than behind.

Character Stereotypes: Courtier (charming and striking socialite), Chorister (soul-stirring healer of hearts), Star Pilot (fearless explorer of the unknown), Artist (natural-born performer)

ETYRI BIRTHRIGHT

Beak: Thanks to your sophisticated vocal apparatus, rolls involving your voice — speaking, singing, or mimicry — are favorable. You can perform Fight-skill attacks with your beak: 2 base damage.

Claustrophobia: You simply can't stand confined spaces, such as prison cells or small starship cabins. When you must be within such a place (except for your nest or a cockpit from which you're piloting) for more than an hour, you suffer the Anxious state.

Flight: You can fly with a speed of 12 meters per movement action. To take flight from the ground, a clear area of at least 5 m diameter is required; to fall into an unpowered glide, you must drop from a perch at least 10 m above the ground. You can carry up to 15 kg per Strength rating in powered flight or take-off; you can carry twice as much when gliding.

To really gain the full use of your wings, you need to train in a special Fly skill, which begins with a base of 3 ranks and allows you to perform the following maneuvers:

- **Speedup** — To add speed to your flight, roll Fly + Strength as a primary action vs. Hard Resistance; success = add 1 m of speed per 2 VP spent. (You might also need to make this roll to counter strong winds.)

- **Stunt flying** — Includes precise flips, rolls, and maneuvers to intercept flying or falling objects. Roll Fly + Dexterity roll as a primary action vs. a Resistance determined by GM based on the situation.

- **Stoop** — Diving to attack. Roll Fight + Dexterity, but your Fight ranks are limited by your Fly ranks. If you've got Fight 6 and Fly 4, you can only bring 4 of your Fight ranks to bear on a *stoop*. This maneuver adds to the attack's base damage, increasing it by an amount equal to damage from a fall of the same height. (For example, a stoop of 14 m adds 6 to the damage.)

Hollow Bones: Your ability to fly comes at a cost: your bones aren't very sturdy. You cannot raise your Strength higher than 9, and you subtract 1 from your Vitality.

Keen Eyes: You must choose the Perception characteristic as either primary or secondary (it cannot be tertiary), and its maximum natural rating can rise as high as 12 (although not until after 10th level).

Size: Members of the Huar'raughq are taller than most etyri. They're Size 6, while other ethnicities tend to be Size 5.

Speak Etyrian: You learn your native tongue as a Speak capability.

Talons: Your "hands" and "feet" are adapted to perch and grasp all sorts of irregular shapes and surfaces. You can perform Fight-skill attacks with your talons: 3 base damage.

CLASSES

Nobility among the etyri is not merely inherited. It's a matter of breed: Huar'raughq have the features and bearing of birds of prey. They're the type most frequently encountered away from their home planet. Those who travel offworld usually do so in the service of a human house, such as House Keddah.

With their deeply religious culture, talent for communication, and prominent roles in early Church lore, etyri seem to be natural-born priests. Etyri priests tend to be concerned with death and omens, which can be considered spooky by other sentients.

Cha'arkut etyri, who somewhat resemble Urthish game and songbirds, are considered natural economists and often become merchants. Those who travel offworld usually join a guild of the Merchant League, most often as pilots.

CALLINGS

Etyri have access to the Explorer calling's perks, even when they don't follow that calling.



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ETYRI PERKS

Whenever you gain a calling perk, you can choose from your calling's list or select the Flying Ace perk below.

FLYING ACE

Ability • Precondition: Etyri

Most Etyri can fly, but you have spent your life mastering winds and wing.

Benefice: Your rolls related to flying with your wings are considered favorable.

Gannok

These greasy primates have a knack for technology.

Considered barely sentient primates at first, the gannok surprised xenologists when they suddenly exhibited human speech after only a short period of contact. Gannok were named after the sound humans heard them make most often (the word “hungry” in their native language, *tok tok*). Quickly becoming a curiosity all over the Second Republic, the gannok were proven to possess a fascinating degree of adaptability to technology that far surpassed their previous primitive tools. By the time of the Fall, mere generations after first contact, it was widely accepted that gannok were intellectually comparable to humans — a fact the Church struggled to accept for a long time. Their mechanical aptitude combined with their slender frames and flexible bones made them ideal ship engineers, so they found their calling between the stars of the Known Worlds.

The Merchant League was quick to welcome any willing gannok into its ranks. Their inclination towards technological careers led many to believe that any gannok they encounter is actually a member of a guild. While this preconception is more often correct than not, the ease with which they adapt to new occupations has made them highly regarded specialists among other factions as well. Their systematic way of thinking lends itself perfectly to menial bookkeeping and formalized writing — skills valued by nobles and clergy alike.



But it was their unique resistance to symbiot corruption that recently brought them to the attention of militaries all over the Known Worlds. While most of them are pacifists by heart, any gannok willing to be drafted finds a ready home among any fighting force stationed anywhere near the symbiot threat. Their impetuous and prankful nature has gained them a reputation as daredevils often clashing with military authority — a quirk that has prevented them from rising to higher ranks so far. Nonetheless, their rate of success with missions regular troops would consider suicidal speaks for itself.

Although gannok are generally hesitant to pick up arms, they show far less qualms about manufacturing them. Their homeworld Bannockburn just so happened to be the most fertile ground for this kind of enterprise. Over the past decade, Zebo Chombo, head of a family of weaponsmiths on Leagueheim, managed to amass a lot of wealth and consolidate multiple other gannok families into his Chombo Conglomerate. This allowed him to branch out all over the Known Worlds, making him one of the most influential members of the Merchant League. He is often criticized for his policy of selling weapons to anyone who can afford them, a necessary evil he tries to make up for by investing in humanitarian efforts.

One notable recent endeavor is an archaeological program aimed at uncovering the history of the gannok.

While early scholars assumed the gannok had only just risen out of their humble ignorance when they first encountered advanced human civilization, there have been reports of Anunnaki carvings showing gannok in ceremonial garb and even a spacesuit. The high presence of Ur artifacts on their homeworld lends credence to any theory linking the two species.

Even though this hints at a longer history than previously assumed, gannok curiously possess no noteworthy culture of their own. The Universal Church was hopeful to fill this spiritual void, but they soon realized the species as a whole lacked any proclivity for religion. The few gannok that

have managed to achieve priesthood now try their best to convert rural settlements on Bannockburn. Many only play along to get rid of the missionaries.

Despite their excellent mental adaptability, gannok struggle with rapidly shifting social environments. Although this isn't often a problem in the rigid feudal society, many still tire of the "human ways" and yearn to return to the deep forests of their homeworld, leaving any trace of civilization far behind. Many "primitive" gannok communities on Bannockburn today choose to live in blissful isolation. Unbeknownst to them, Zebo Chombo is using all the leverage available to him to protect them from the grasp of the local Muster. Emperor Alexius' current efforts to strengthen alien rights have certainly gained him much favor with the arms tycoon.

Physique: Gannok are mammals, sharing the average lifespan of humans and growing between a meter and a meter and a half tall. A gannok's flexible bones and joints grant them a huge degree of freedom of movement, while their prehensile tail allows them to use both hands freely while holding onto something. Gannok are ill-liked for their natural stench, which they tend to cover up with perfumes. This results from an enzyme-rich, oily residue they secrete constantly but that seems to be linked to their heightened immune system and regenerative capacity. Research into medical applications in other species has so far yielded little results, but the Chombo Conglomerate has expressed interest in providing further funding in this field.

Leading Gannok: Master Zebo Chombo (head of the Chombo Conglomerate), Sergeant Hopok Chatta (veteran of the Stigmata Garrison), Deacon Shipa Ol-lot (head missionary among the gannok community on Bannockburn)

Homeworld: The gannok have come a long way since their humble beginnings on Bannockburn. The populace on Leagueheim has grown significantly, and the expanding Chombo Conglomerate provides an economic pillar for many gannok communities to spring up all over the Known Worlds. Since the war front on Stigmata has shifted favorably, they also maintain a notable (if minor) presence here, which allows them to coordinate weapon shipments to Ab-solution and Chernobog.

Roleplaying Notes: Their strong regenerative capabilities have led the gannok to develop a propensity for playing rather intense physical pranks. Their sense of humor colors most of their social interactions, giving rise to the phrase "crazy as a gannok." Nonetheless, they care about the well-being of any living thing with no notable biases in regard to species. They are highly pragmatic and always eager to move on to the next challenge. While many view this trait as potential carelessness, a gannok will not deliver work until he's convinced it will actually fulfill its purpose.

Character Stereotypes: Reclaimer (ruin delver), Scribe (researcher of ancient scripts), Star Pilot (breakneck pilot)

GANNOK BIRTHRIGHT

Grease Monkey: You gain the Tech Lore (TL5) capability as an innate knack.

Hungry Healer: The drawback to your regeneration (see below) is that it draws upon your bodily reserves, making you voraciously hungry afterward. On the scene after you have regenerated at least 1 Vitality, you need to eat double your normal amount of food. You can't regenerate again until you've done so.

Small: Your Size is 4. Your Vitality is less than humans and your movement speed is lower. You need to wear children sizes (-10% cost) or get custom tailoring (+10% cost) when you're not buying clothes from other gannok.

Symbiot Immunity: You cannot be corrupted by or converted into symbiotism.

Monkey Physique: Your feet can operate as well as hands for manipulation but not combat tasks. You also have a prehensile tail that allows you to grab things, although cannot perform fine manipulation tasks with it.

Omnidigestion: Luckily, you can eat a vast amount of organic matter that others won't touch, including rotten meat and vegetables. This doesn't make you immune to deadly toxins, and you probably don't enjoy eating trash, but it can help feed your regeneration's insatiable hunger.

Regeneration: You heal 1 Vitality per scene. This does not require a Revival or Respite; it just happens naturally for you.

Speak Tok Tok: You learn your native tongue as a Speak capability.

Stench: You stink. Gannok don't think so, but most everybody else does. Unless you cover your stench with heavy perfumes and colognes, your persuasion influence rolls against non-gannok are unfavorable (unless they're breathing through filters or oxygen tanks).

CLASSES

Gannok have no noble class in their own communities. This does not preclude a gannok being knighted or ennobled, but it's certainly rare.

Gannok are rather irreligious, so it's almost unheard of for one to become a priest. Those rare few who do are usually Mendicants or Scribes, since they have a hard time finding a congregation that would take them seriously.

Most offworlder gannok (and even many homeworlders) are Merchant League guilders.

CALLINGS

Gannok have access to the Tech Redeemer calling's perks, even when they don't follow that calling.

Hironem

These bipedal reptiloids live in an isolated caste society.

Recently surfaced intelligence reports indicate that humanity's first contact with sentient alien life might actually have been with the reptilian species of the hironem, not the shantor, as previously assumed. The existence of the hironem on Cadiz was long kept a secret by the intelligence agents of House Gloucester in order to maintain control of the colony. These agents would later go on to be the founders of House Decados, which still rules this world to this day.

The hironem proved civil and willing to trade with the newcomers, exchanging their land for advanced human technology. This human expansion only ground to a halt once the so-called God-King entered the picture, declaring a moratorium on any trade of land not sanctioned by him. The local nobles eventually managed to appease him by taking out any rebellious hironem settlements and shipping their citizens off to the God-King's city-state of Turaz, where they were stripped of any status. Soon enough, Turaz was the only remaining hironem enclave on Cadiz.

One unique quality of this species is their ability to perceive *s'su*, the cosmic life force. The gods taught the hironem all about the underlying fabric of the universe and named their most apt student *Shamash*, the first God-King. Thus, the God-King of the hironem is not worshiped himself, but he is the only one entrusted with the secrets of the gods, which are passed along from one Shamash to the next.

Hironem society is divided into four castes. From highest to lowest, these are the servants of the God-King (*sibanzi*), warriors (*kigazi*), makers (*kimmu*), and "non-people" (*illu*). The caste of the *illu* includes merchants and bankers, since they don't practice a productive craft, as well as members of any craft that is considered unclean. Any hironem who leave Cadiz are tainted by the dark between the stars and thus automatically proclaimed *illu*. Each caste is subordinate to any higher one and may suffer severe punishment (including death) if they interact inappropriately with a superior (such as touching the weapons of a warrior). Inter-caste relations aren't forbidden, though,

and ascension into a higher caste is possible via apprenticeship, which is often part of a marriage.

The return of Iver to the jumpweb also revealed a significant hironem populace on that world with a lesser God-King of their own. While the castes present on Cadiz are also found

here, the separations between them have grown less distinct, granting more freedom to lower castes. Since hironem were exiled there during the time of the Second Republic, their historical records have not yet been subject to Jakovian tampering — an oversight that House Decados is keen to remedy as soon as possible, now that the world has been interdicted.

As many scholars have noted, the caste system of the hironem bears strong resemblances to that of the *vau*.

Recent exchanges of information with the Hegemony suggest this may be due to the influence of a renegade Mandarin who retreated with his wayward followers to Cadiz, where they were worshiped as gods by the indigenous lifeforms. The *vau* have declined an invitation to visit Cadiz, which would allow them to further shed light on this matter; as usual, they cite no reasons for their reluctance.

The God-King of Cadiz fervently denied any credibility to these claims. He has since retreated into isolation, interacting with the outside world only through his most trusted *sibanzi*. As unrest in the wake of the God-King's prolonged absence started to spread, many looked towards the God-King of Iver as a new spiritual leader. Not wishing to be the cause of a divide among his people, he instead chose to abdicate and put a representative council in charge of ruling the local hironem population. This may have put a burgeoning civil war on hold for now, but the situation in Turaz is still tense. Malcontents among the *illu* are prone to riots, and House Decados is hesitant to interfere in hironem territory.

For a long time, given the lasting stigma of leaving their homeworld, only a few hironem chose to explore the Known Worlds. Among the first to do so were the



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members of the elite Dragon unit in the service of House Decados. After the Emperor Wars ended, they preferred Muster employ to the outcast existence awaiting them back home. The recent upheaval of long-held beliefs has made even members of higher castes reconsider their place in the order of things, prompting them to search for their fortune along the jumpweb.

Physique: The reptilian hironem share the common humanoid stature of other aliens, standing up to two meters tall. Some possess a vestigial tail. They shape the crests on their head to display their status, as well as for aesthetical reasons. As ectothermic beings, they tend to avoid colder climates and rely on heated clothing, if necessary. They give live birth and generally share a human lifespan, although wealthy hironem have lived to be well over a century old.

Leading Hironem: Shamash the God-King (exclusive ruler of Turaz on Cadiz), Shamash Dozo (retired monarch on Iver), Captain Hessat (commander of the Dragons)

Homeworld: For a long time, most Known Worlders assumed the city-state of Taruz on Cadiz housed the entire existing hironem population, but the return of the enclave on Iver to the jumpweb and the resulting cultural schism prompted many hironem to take to the stars. The members of the Dragon unit have made their home on Bannockburn, attracting many more discontented outcasts. The Eskatonic Order has recently established a settlement of exiled hironem mystics on Pentateuch, collaborating with the s'su masters to unravel some of the mysteries of the planet.

Roleplaying Notes: Pretty much all hironem who have left their homeworld feel betrayed by their own kind. They are aware they have chosen their own damnation by exposing themselves to the dark between the stars, but they revel in the new experiences this expanded horizon has to offer. Torn between curiosity and deeply ingrained courtesy, their perception of s'su makes them come off as rather weird to other species. The new arrivals have yet to develop a sense of kinship among their own, but groups who have lived along the jumpweb for a while — like the Dragons — have proven they are easily able to integrate into this foreign world.

Character Stereotypes: Bounty Hunter (former warrior looking for new challenges), Theurgist (s'su mystic selling out his services), Explorer (down-on-his-luck refugee)

HIRONEM BIRTHRIGHT

S'su Vision: You are able to sense emotions in people and places. Stronger emotions leave longer-lasting impressions. You can perform a *s'su sense* maneuver on a

target within sight by making an Empathy + Intuition roll as a primary action vs. the target's Spirit Resistance. Victory yields WP, and success informs you about the target's surface emotional state. If they are currently suffering a mental or social state or tech compulsion, you'll know it. If they are not under the influence of a state, you'll need to spend 2 VP to read their emotional status: happy, angry, anxious, paranoid, etc. To also read deeper emotions that might be motivating the target, such as revenge or love, spend an additional 2 VP. For 2 VP, you can gain information about the general health of the subject, such as if they are diseased or poisoned (but this does not diagnose the illness).

Ectothermic: You rely on external methods to regulate your body temperature. If you have no adequate equipment to compensate for unfavorable environments, you become Dazed at temperatures below 60°F/16°C or above 110°F/43°C, Stunned at temperatures below 50°F/10°C or above 120°F/49°C, or Unconscious at temperatures below 40°F/4°C or above 130°F/54°C.

Speak Salsu: You learn your native tongue as a Speak capability.

Warded: You cannot naturally acquire psychic powers. This means you cannot follow the Psychic calling.

CLASSES

Hironem have no nobility of their own beyond the God-King. In rare cases, members of the Dragon unit have been knighted by their noble employers for exceptional services rendered, but this is never a hereditary privilege.

Those hironem who have become outcasts by leaving their homeworld rarely hold religion in high regard. The more mystically inclined do find a welcome home in the Eskatonic Order, however.

Many star-wandering hironem end up joining a Merchant League guild; the Muster is the most prominent choice.

CALLINGS

Members of the sibanzi caste gain access to the Scribe calling's perks, even when they don't follow that specific calling. Members of the kigazi caste gain access to the Duelist calling's perks, and members of the kimmu caste gain access to the Artist calling's perks. Members of the illu caste can choose their calling and gain access to its perks, so long as it fits with their upbringing, subject to GM approval.

HIRONEM PERKS

Whenever you gain a calling perk, you can choose from your calling's list or you can select the Exothermic Adaption perk below.

ECTOTHERMIC ADAPTION

Ability • Precondition: Hironem or Oro'ym

You have mastered your body, turning your cold-blooded nature into an advantage instead of a drawback.

Benefit: You may control your body temperature through meditation and breathing exercises. If you can spend a few minutes in such a state, then for the rest of that act, you ignore penalties normally associated with cold weather and gain +2 Body Resistance to environmental cold or heat.

Ishkin

These marsupial weasels are stealthy and curious.

Ishkin are sentient marsupials from Wolf's Lament, a world deep in Vuldrok space. In the last few years, they've spread farther throughout the Runeworlds, and there is now a small population on Hargard in the forests of Dagnir.

They call themselves the *mic'pochi*, "the invisible people." Vuldrok sometimes call them "chameleon weasels" and "backstabbing rats." Their namesake comes from their fur's amazing camouflage ability and their sly, cunning stealth, allowing them to avoid and hide from others. Their myths tell of how Sleeva the Moon breathed "cunning" (sentience) into their ears and how her shadow, Kluuto, taught them the moon's "going away" power (their camouflage).

The ishkin initially hid from their world's Diaspora colonists, only showing themselves after the Fall. Some Vuldrok believe that the ishkin aren't the product of natural evolution but were instead allegedly created by a powerful vitki runecaster or an Anunnaki artifact. Ishkin are, of course, insulted by this claim.

Ishkin have their own representative in the Great Althing that loosely governs the Vuldrok Star-Nation and are considered their own nation. Many ishkin have forsaken their wilderness homes and live among or near humans in cities or just outside of towns. The young are enamored of human tools and technology, and some become inventors and engineers.

Physique: Ishkin can stand upright but are equally comfortable on all fours. Their slender fingers are capable of fine manipulation, but their palms and fingertips have thick padding for when they run on all fours.

The ishkin's amazing ability to camouflage themselves operates on a fairly simple principle known to high-tech stealth science: fiber-optic cables. Ishkin hair is composed of thin, hollow reeds capped with a translucent jelly. Their fur wraps in multiple layers about their bodies. Light and images from one side of an ishkin's body are captured and funneled through the fur to the other side; when looked at straight on, the hair stems



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project an image identical to that on the other side of the ishkin. (Ishkin fur is odd in that it branches in two directions away from its root; both directions share the same hollow tube, although the root does not.)

When an ishkin is relaxed, its fur lies smoothly in layers. When agitated or attempting to purposefully camouflage, the hair rises, so that the stems' ends are presented to a viewer. Their hair is abundant enough to cover multiple angles of viewing.

Their camouflage capability works better when they remain still and unmoving, but even when in motion, an ishkin's background travels with them, although a blur or shimmer in the air may clue observers in.

Ishkin are sometimes hunted and skinned for their fur, since two or three pelts can be sewn together to produce a human-sized "stealth coat," conferring their camouflage abilities to any who wears one. (The hair must be made artificially erect, usually through a careful application of lacquer.) For such a suit to work, the fur must retain its roots; shaved fur cannot be collected and sewn into a suit.

Leading Ishkin: Tlankor (leader of the Dagnir Ishkin Nation on Hargard, trying to remain neutral in the war between Thane Firestorm and the Hawkwyrd), Myrsha Su (scarred "thief queen" of Valholm Spaceport), Sabuk Klaa (wandering runecaster recruiting Known Worlders for mysterious missions)

Homeworld: Wolf's Lament (in Vuldrok space)

Roleplaying Notes: Many ishkin don't recognize rights of property and gleefully steal items that intrigue them. While they sometimes return these once the novelty has worn off, this does little to mollify the original owners — or the authorities.

Ishkin suffer the same penalties for theft as others: mutilation (hands cut off), death, exile, or imprisonment. The latter is rarely chosen, since the lengths jailors must go to trap an ishkin are considered inefficient and costly. More than one jailor has overlooked a camouflaged ishkin in an "empty" cell, inadvertently releasing the captive once they opened the cell to investigate how the prisoner escaped.

These punishments are considered harsh by most ishkin, who fail to understand the seriousness humans place on uninvited "borrowing." Ishkin fail to draw the distinction between pirating — glorified by many Vuldrok — and cunning stealing; both activities are just as daring in their eyes. For this reason, ishkin are fixtures in the thieves guilds of many Vuldrok cities.

Wild (non-civilized) ishkin use blowguns, bows and arrows, spears, and knives (made from flint). Civilised ishkin prefer steel dirks, frap sticks, and sniper carbines.

Wild ishkin wear leather harnesses but no armor, as their camouflaged fur is a necessary defense. Civilized ishkin yearn for energy shields, but those who can't afford such extravagance adopt light leather cloaks

that can be removed and folded into a bundle with a primary action (Resistance 2).

Character Stereotypes: Vuldrok Pirate, Scraver Thief, F.A.R. Spy, Vagabond Explorer.

ISHKIN BIRTHRIGHT

Bite: You have sharp teeth, allowing you to make a Fight-skill *bite* maneuver (2 dmg) against anyone grappling you. On the first turn that someone has grappled you, you can *bite* them as a bonus primary action.

Camouflage: So long as you're not wearing too much clothing and equipment, your fur can help you to blend into your immediate environment. Your Sneak-skill *camouflage* rolls are favorable, and you may perform the maneuver as a primary action with no preparation against an Easy Resistance. Your *skulk* rolls are also favorable.

An ishkin who loses their fur can no longer camouflage. However, even a week's worth of regrowth may be enough to provide it with partial abilities: they lose favorability on *skulk* and *camouflage* but can still perform the latter maneuver as a primary action vs. Demanding Resistance.

Keen Senses: You must choose the Perception characteristic as either primary or secondary (it cannot be tertiary), and its maximum natural rating can rise as high as 12 (although not until after 10th level).

Scamper: You can drop and run on four legs (both hands must be free), giving you a running speed of 14m.

Short-Lived: Average lifespan is 35 years. However, ishkin mature quickly, attaining adulthood at about age 5.

Small: Your Size is 4. Your movement speed (on two legs) is 8 m (see *Scamper*, above). You need to wear children sizes (-10% cost) or get custom tailoring (+10% cost) when you're not buying clothes from other ishkin.

Speak Kitlosh: You learn your native tongue as a Speak capability.

CLASSES

Ishkin have no nobles. Their only priests are shamans (among the wild ishkin) and a handful of runecasters. Most ishkin are merchants or yeomen.

CALLINGS

Ishkin often become Thieves, since they find it easy and rewarding. They also make good Spies, often using Thief, Trader, or Reclaimer as a cover identity. Of course, as Vuldrok, not a few of them become Pirates.

It's not impossible for them to develop Psi or practice theurgy, but it is rare and unusual, and it can make them distrusted among their own kind.

Oro'ym

These amphibious humanoids are known for their ancient pedigree.

According to their legends, the amphibious oro'ym emerged as tool-bearing sentients 10 million years ago on the watery world of Madoc. Leaving their isle lagoons for deeper waters due to an oncoming ice age, they fell into battle with the sentient, 12-legged mollusk nizdharim. Led by their early culture-hero kings Dhanalla and Zynigrion, the oro'ym achieved victory.

Oro'ym mytho-history tells of how spacefaring gods (perhaps a technically more advanced amphibious race) named the Dionak made contact and raised oro'ym culture from the seas to the stars. Originating from a water world near the star Ataka (which some Republican astronomers believed to be Sirius), the Dionak took the oro'ym with them as emissaries to less technically advanced worlds, including (allegedly) Urth. Apparently visiting circa 12,000-6,000 BCE, they aided "Babon's children" (humanity), dispensing tools and knowledge. Xenologists believe the oro'ym appropriated these tales from other star-faring civilizations.

The oro'ym were hurled down from their high culture when a meteor struck Madoc, burying their great city of Anan Annalk. According to their holy work, *The Mvorniad*, the War in the Heavens followed. Abandoned by their Dionak allies and left at the mercy of the savage Sons of Krillos (who resemble the Sons of Rillos from ukari mythology), the remnants of their high civilization were destroyed, and the survivors fled into deep waters.

Some oro'ym, using the higher technology abandoned in the ruins, set themselves up as priest-kings. Escaped slaves later formed the Ded'ym warrior nation and broke the control of the priest-kings by using rediscovered ancient artifacts, eventually slaughtering the tyrants in a series of uprisings. With their high culture gone, many turned to the teachings of Saznakear the Lost, who gave them the *Lukabankor* or Code of Peace (circa 400 CE). Henceforth, it was forbidden for the oro'ym to war with each other. Custom and law put an end to ruinous genocide.

When humans landed on Madoc, they brought viruses that nearly drove the oro'ym to extinction. They vanished from human contact for centuries but were reencountered in 4872 by

a human fisherman. Having developed immunity to the diseases, they began to parley with the Merchant League and established trade. The oro'ym were then reintroduced to the Known Worlds.

The seven oro'ym nations are loosely allied in a confederacy. Their language is called at'ym.

Physique: Adult oro'ym are bipedal, standing between 1.5 and 2 meters in height. They're omnivores with gills and lungs; adults can dwell indefinitely under salt or fresh water. Great finned tails propel them through the deeps and are used as powerful weapons capable of stunning predators. Scales mark their heads, backs, and tails. Different colorations mark their nations: the Zia'din possess emerald skin, while the Zustar are purple-hued; the orange and red Ri'nadan are the largest nation. The remaining federations — Tapol'ym, Semed'ym, R'len, and Sargon'ym — are dark brackish-green.

Oro'ym either give live birth or lay eggs. Most oro'ym females give live birth to offspring referred to as "newts" by humans. Those who lay eggs prefer the guarded pools on Madoc's small islands. Females carry the young (groups of 2-4) in pouches.

An oro'ym possesses flat nostrils, either high on their face or atop their head, similar to blowholes in whales. Their eyes are protected with great eyelids, and their eardrum lies concealed behind a thin membrane of skin. The Oro'ym hearing range is far greater than humans. Cold blooded, they regulate their bodily warmth through double columns of sail fins on their backs. When unfolded, the fins bend straight back or sideways and are about a foot long. The colorful frills, larger on males, expand about their necks. If an oro'ym loses a tail or limb, they can regenerate it within four months.

Oro'ym who enter human society usually cut off the webbing between their first and second digits, so that they can easily fit their fingers through the triggers of guns. The Scravers Guild developed "starsuits" for oro'ym Reclaimers, an advancement over the W.E.T. suits that allowed the oro'ym to go offworld while retaining constant moisture. The starsuits allow them to swim through the cold reaches of space to collect artifacts from abandoned space stations and asteroids.



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Leading Oro'ym: Loremaster Kada-Jhad (former priestess and offworld traveler; erroneously believed by many to be the leader of the Oro'ym Confederation; she is said to possess the gift of prophecy), Wersha Valinfas (*wersha* war leader of the Zia'din), Ka Tadoon (famed Reclaimer, now a wealthy merchant prince).

Homeworld: Madoc is the only world where the oro'ym dwell in any numbers, although a consular contingent exists in the seas of Byzantium Secundus. The location of their religious centers and city, Dahun Derion, remain guarded from outsiders. Oro'ym lore masters hold that some oro'ym still exist on the Dionak world (in the Sirius system). No jump routes to Akata exist, so this remains conjuncture.

Roleplaying Notes: A traditional people who can recite their ancestry back 900 generations, the oro'ym do not believe in a hierarchy of sentients; instead, they hold that all things are living and conscious. They are prideful and become angered when insulted. Slow to make friends, they are extremely loyal once they do.

Character Stereotypes: Friar (wise priestess/priest), Reclaimer (scavenger of undersea or outer-space ruins), Artist (exotic performer)

ORO'YM BIRTHRIGHT

Ectothermic: You rely on external methods to regulate your body temperature. If you have no adequate equipment to compensate for unfavorable environments, you become Dazed at temperatures below 60°F/16°C or above 110°F/43°C, Stunned at temperatures below 50°F/10°C or above 120°F/49°C, or Unconscious at temperatures below 40°F/4°C or above 130°F/54°C.

Hardy: You can raise your Strength and Endurance characteristics as high as 11 (although only after 10th level).

Native Language: You have the capabilities Speak At'ym and Read At'ym.

Regeneration: You can regrow a severed limb or tail. It takes about four months for it to become fully usable again. Each time you do so, you lose 1 rank of Endurance (although you can regain this using the characteristic ranks you gain when leveling up).

Requires Moisture: Your body requires semi-regular immersion in moisture. You can go for three days before suffering ill effects. On the fourth day, you become Fatigued. In the following scene, you become Stunned and Hindered. After that, you begin to suffer 1 Vitality wound per hour. Immersion in water at any point will reverse the effects step by step each minute until you're back to normal.

Swim: Your swimming speed is 10 m.

Tail: Your long tail helps provide balance. Your rolls to prevent being knocked down are favorable. You can also attack with it using the Fight *strike* maneuver: 3 base damage + Slam attack property.

Water Breather: You have gills and lungs. You can breathe underwater in both salt and fresh water and breathe above water.

CLASSES

Oro'ym have no nobles as such, although warriors and war leaders effectively act as that class. Their ranks are not recognized outside of oro'ym society.

Oro'ym have shaman priests of their native animistic religion. Oro'ym rarely preach the scriptures of the Universal Church; instead, those oro'ym priests who travel offworld feel more akin to worshippers of Gjarti.

The Merchant League is most welcoming to the oro'ym, especially the Scravers Guild, which highly values the oro'ym's aquatic capabilities.

CALLINGS

Native oro'ym become hunters, fish farmers, artisans, shamans, loremasters, interpreters, warrior guardians, and teachers. Those who travel offworld tend toward becoming Reclaimers, Traders, Explorers, and Scouts. The Church even overlooks their animistic "heresies" to lure them into becoming Choristers, since oro'ym singers are valued for the otherworldly quality of their voices.

ORO'YM PERKS

Whenever you gain a calling perk, you can choose from your calling's list or select from the perks below.

AMPHIBIOUS

Ability • Precondition: Oro'ym

You are perfectly at home in water or on land, losing none of your species' grace.

Benefice: You have capability in water and on land. In addition, you are well experienced in leaving water for a long time and can go a full week with stored water before needing immersion in water to survive.

This modifies your Requires Moisture birthright: Once Fatigued, you don't become Stunned or Hindered until one day has passed. After that, you suffer 1 Vitality wound every three hours.

ECTOTHERMIC ADAPTION

As the Hironem perk.

GOD LORE

Ability • Precondition: Oro'ym priest

You have a special affinity with the ancient artifacts of the Anunnaki.

Benefice: Certain priestly oro'ym can learn ancient Anunnaki "passwords," phrases handed down in their native at'ym language from long ago. Amazingly, these words seem to activate some Ur tech. While some words can be imitated by human speech or computer

synthesizers, it seems that they are only efficacious when spoken by a living oro'ym.

The effect of these words is not always known by the oro'ym speaker. It is up to the GM to devise their specific effects in a drama. For example, some phrases can waken Gargoyles but provide no command over them. Other phrases can locate or activate soul shards and philosophers stones. These phrases are wild cards; they should offer sudden, unpredictable surprises.

Shantor

These horselike quadrupeds strive for freedom.

When Diaspora xenologists were first studying the ungulate quadrupeds of Shaprut, little did they know they were about to introduce the first sentient alien species to the Known Worlds. Initially perceived as little more than clever animals, this assessment soon had to be reevaluated. The extensive tool use of the shantor became evident when they were witnessed fighting with spears gripped in their teeth. Using the dewclaws on their forelimbs, as well as their articulate lips and prehensile tongues, they actually possessed an amazing degree of fine motor control that in some cases even surpassed human capabilities.

Communication proved difficult at first. The shantor's windspeech consisted of whines and whistles that transcended human hearing, carrying levels of meaning that were impossible to distill down into any human tongue. After prolonged development, the *dolo-mei* (man/spirit/box) was able to provide automated translation, so long as the shantor restricted themselves to extremely basic windspeech.

Further research showed the shantor possessed a simple nomadic culture with family units led by a so-called "Runner" and a religion based around sun worship. Upon learning that humanity hailed from beyond the sun, the natives worshiped them as gods for a time — but it didn't take long for the

shantor to grow disillusioned with this belief. As encroaching mining operations disrupted many families' traditional migratory patterns, tensions began to rise. Things came to a head during the Ukar War, when ur-ukar psychics manipulated the shantor into revolt. Many lives were lost before Church missionaries were able to uncover the real cause behind the bloodshed.

Despite these findings, shantor were relegated to an existence of virtual slavery under House Ramakrishna, the rulers on Shaprut of the time. The custom was only temporarily abolished during the Second Republic and subsequently reinstated by House al-Malik. Soon legends of a "Great Runner" destined to lead his people out of oppression began to emerge. Little did the shantor suspect that their salvation would come at the hand of a human: Emperor Alexius.

When one shantor slave on Byzantium Secundus gave his life to bring his people's plight to attention, the Emperor became determined not only to free them from slavery but also to improve conditions for the entirety of his alien subjects. Upon his engagement to Freya of Hargard, he insisted that a sizable territory on that world be part of his dowry. Then he turned it over to the shantor, providing them with a new homeland of their own.

This development caused shantor society to split. More traditional-minded families equated abandoning their sun to heresy and chose to stay on Shaprut. Many more, labeled "Darkwalkers" by their kin, chose to go. This sudden drain on their workforce upset the local al-Malik. Not wanting to provoke another mass revolt, they had little choice but to let the newly freed people go. Attempts to seek recompense from the Emperor continue to this day, further souring his relations with his noble subjects.

A young Darkwalker named Ashmane Shoomaala has recently risen to the position of Runner of the new territory, after gaining a certain amount of fame for saving a transport ship full of shantor bound for Hargard from Sathraist sabotage. He has since pledged support to House Eldrid in their fight against the Vuldrok rebels of Ostmark, hoping to cement his people's standing on their new home.



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Previous expatriates of Shaprut often ended up with the Muster, serving as cavalry units and mobile weapon platforms. More recent newcomers to the jumpweb decided to repay the kindness of Emperor Alexius by seeking out more humanitarian employ instead. The Amaltheans in particular experienced an influx of new novitiates due to the fact the sect previously ministered to the natives on Shaprut; they now benefit from the shantor's renowned skills as surgeons.

Physique: The massive shantor most resemble Urthish horses, standing a meter and a half tall at the withers. They're able to walk on their muscular hind legs for short amounts of time, using the dewclaws on their forelimbs like thumbs. Usually they rely on their teeth, tongue, and lips for tool use instead, using custom pack harnesses for storage and specialized manipulator muzzles for improved fine-motor control. Shantor heads are shorter and stouter than those of horses; their eyes are able to shift around in their sockets, allowing for a greater field of view and more accurate spatial focus. Their hearing range encompasses high frequencies inaudible to humans. Most shantor don't grow older than 60, though medical therapies for common maladies can greatly extend their life expectancy.

Leading Shantor: Alahad Star-Running (activist and poet, in permanent zero-g therapy on the starcity Cumulus in the Byzantium Secundus system), Runner Ashmane Shoomaala (chief of the Darkwalkers on Hargard), Major Loadbearer Hulaaloo (al-Malik war veteran turned Muster drill instructor)

Homeworld: With the majority of the population abandoning their native world of Shaprut, Hargard has become the new port of call for the shantor. Settling on the southern coast of Jyandhom, a territory only recently liberated from Ramakrishna control by House Eldrid, they named their capital New Sa'razz. Reservations still exist on Criticorum and Istakhr but have noticeably declined in population.

Roleplaying Notes: Regardless of the recent divide in their society, all shantor still uphold unity as a driving principle within their species. Due to their long-lasting oppression at the hands of humans, distrust towards this species is a common trait. Darkwalkers tend to be more cynical about this attitude than their relatives on Shaprut, likely a result of their previous exposure to the society of the Known Worlds. Nonetheless, they value their history just as much, celebrating it in song and storytelling. The *dolomei* that allow them to speak Urthish — albeit only in a highly stylized and poetic manner — are usually worn as necklaces. Darkwalkers tend to put their human-given name first, followed by their transcribed windspeech name, while traditional shantor put the transcription first, followed by its translation. Being ridden is an intimate act akin to mating, so shantor

generally don't allow it. Keep in mind that their massive size is often a detriment in urban or otherwise cramped environments.

Character Stereotypes: Mercenary (demolitions expert), Scout (wilderness guide), Healer (Amalthean convert)

SHANTOR BIRTHRIGHT

Can't Speak Urthish: Your vocal cords cannot imitate the Urthish language. You require a *dolomei* device to translate your vocal sounds into Urthish.

Four-Legged: You walk on four legs, which gives you a maximum speed of 28 meters with a movement action.

Hardy Physique: Your maximum Strength and Endurance ratings are 14. You still cannot raise either trait to 10 until 10th level, but after that, your limit is higher than most.

Huge: Your Size rating is 7. While this increases your Vitality and movement speed, it also means you need custom tailoring when you're not buying clothes from other shantor (+10% cost).

No Fine Manipulation: Unfortunately, since you're a hooved animal, you lack the digits with which to easily manipulate tools. You can approximate some uses with your dewclaws and extremely flexible mouth muscles, but you need a *muzzle manipulator* device for truly fine manipulation.

Receptive Hearing: You can hear in higher ranges, allowing you to make *spot* and *search* rolls to detect sounds that others can't hear.

Speak Windspeech: You learn your native tongue of high-pitched whistles as a Speak capability.

Warded: You cannot naturally acquire psychic powers, theurgy, or antinomy. This means you cannot follow the Psychic or Theurgist callings. (Exposure to Anunnaki relics has been known to erode this drawback.)

CLASSES

Nobles are very rare among shantor. They have no noble class among their own kind, although they do have chieftains and leaders. Occasionally a shantor will be ennobled by a Royal House for exceptional deeds, but this is almost never a hereditary privilege.

Shantor who become priests mostly tend to shantor congregations, but it's not beyond the realm of reason for a shantor priest to preach to a human flock.

Most shantor who leave their homeworld join the Merchant League or a yeoman society.

CALLINGS

Shantor have access to the Scout calling's perks, even when they don't follow that calling.

As noted above, they cannot naturally acquire psychic power or theurgy rite perks.



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The father bundled the boy as a prophet, telling him he was not of this world and sending him down the river in a basket of reeds at night, the river a quicksilver scribble under the moon. The world is a place I'll never see, the story not mine. But imagine it thus. Found in a sewer, me, nary a basket nor burning bush in sight. A gutter world far from the core. These are old stories we tell ourselves, narratives that bind lives into packages we can understand.

Beyond the curtain, I watch Olius stand proudly, wooden sword thrust to heaven — this particular firmament stained with smoke and grime and smelling of humanity in the closely packed tavern/theater. Groundlings all, taking some part of the *extasis* of the Pancreator, caught up in the retelling of a tale of a king, and of his son, whom the creator commands must die at the father's hand. It is a very old mystery play.

The words are on my lips but are given voice by Olius. They are my words. I wrote them, but the troupe cannot ascribe such work to the dwarven jester who scampers about on stage for comic relief. I take inspiration from ancient gospels delivered by a creator who takes nothing but shame in me. The irony is, perhaps, too on-the-nose, even for a playwright.

"I cannot kill my son, Oh Lord. I have brought him into this world and shall not usher him from it!" Olius plays the line too hard, the liquor flushing his cheeks. Still, even besotted, he is a fine actor.

Then the voice, Burrow speaking into the cone, the voice of the Pancreator Himself. "You dare? It is I that brought him into this world, as I have brought you and all things beneath the heavens. I say what becomes of you all!"

I've written a vengeful, tempestuous god. My sources are pariahs as well. Both of us were made not by the Pancreator but by men, or something less than a man in my case. A fool, a little flint of real man, a mutant, my heritage long ago encoded by "scientists" now millennia dead. Certainly, they did not imagine nor want this tiny body when they ran their experiments. Surely this form is a failure even to them. There is a shabby nobility in being a perfect disappointment.

The bells on my hat jingle in pace with my uneven gait as I exaggeratedly lurch forward onto the stage. The crowd wants the mutant as feeble as possible; they want him to look foolish, even when he speaks the truth.

"Master King, the lady calls and sayeth that the night is full of witches. Do not listen to their false prophesying!" Then I stumble, buffoonish, cartwheeling end over end to raucous laughter and familiar indignations slung wantonly.

"Be away, little imp. You are lucky I keep you for amusement as I do!"

Then a clap of thunder, Burrow pounding together two shells which reverberate just so. He shrieks, the voice of the Pancreator now unmasked as a demon who is Gwenda, nigh seven-feet tall and a former Grimson. The wicked horns are real. We are tolerated. The fringes are forgiving. So far away from the dying light of the cosmopolitan worlds, we walk in shadow.

The demon rages; the Pancreator possesses the king; the play runs as you remember it.

Olius already nipping from his flask: "Not half bad a performance, and some of these onions they threw at us in the end are edible yet."

Gwenda sifts through the bucket of mostly wings and crests — nary a full firebird — tossed at us after the performance. "The one tried to grab me. I could have beaten him to death with his own arm."

"Now, now," Olius pronounces, "you are lucky they tolerate you. You're lucky I do, for that matter."

She snarls, one lip exposing sharpened teeth. "Your days of fame are long behind you. Aren't you banned from several of the fiefdoms?"

He takes it in stride, flushed with liquor, feeling comfortable behind a warm buffer. Nigh impenetrable, our king. "We must do as the Pancreator lays out for us."

The sound Gwenda makes might be a laugh, as she takes off the scaly costume to reveal a physique far more intimidating than any pretend demon. Our kingdom of a stage is now host to dancing drunks and folk tunes penetrating the worn wood of the floor.

"We'll soon have enough for passage to Kish. There's real money and fame to be had there. Masque recruiters go to those shows, you know?" A hiccup follows.

He's right, our king, they do, and so do slumming nobility — nobles whose names loom large among my people. Supporters of the Inquisition. I have offered them my hand, and with pity, they take it, for I am too sad to kill and have remit from certain lords.

And when their hand meets my sweaty palm, the pact is done: the disease which I carry, the poison, is transferred by my will unto them. They die days later. My reports are made to the Circle. The troupe knows nothing of this. I am Cassus, the little man. Cassus the Fool. Cassus, who could not possibly bring a real man to his mortal end. I merely write. My pen is a poor weapon indeed.

Olius calls for help with his boots. Scuttling to help, I remember my place... for now.

Every society, human or alien, has pariahs. You might just be one....

There were days, long past now, when humankind decided it should better itself, improving the gifts the Pancreator gave it. Humanity's hubris produced some few fortunate results, at least for a time, but mostly it created horrors and mutants: the Changed.

Their roots go back to the *zaibatsu* that once ran the world and eventually expanded to the space around it. In the Second Republic, humanity was foolish enough to tamper with the alchemies of life, birthing homunculi of various sorts under the watchful eyes of demons. Or anyway, so the stories go.

The Changed are nothing more than genetic holdovers from the days of transhumanism, a word now as unknown to the peasant's tongue as it is forbidden. Each of the Changed is a genetically engineered creature, a mutant made via lab experiments. Some few gene lines escaped the purges of the Inquisition, who have no room for creatures sprung from so-called science. Today, some of the stalks of that old tree bear fruit: children who are born to seemingly normal parents but will never themselves be mistaken as normal. Thus, mutants in the 51st century may have inherited their traits from recessive genes. Still, there are those more recently created during the Emperor Wars, and the Church fears that many more are being created by heathens outside moral and natural laws.

They are literally the "Out-Caste," having no place in the Known Worlds. Many are hunted by the Church; nearly all are reviled by true humans. Yet they have pockets where they cling together in teeming slums, secret redoubts, and for a few of the Tweaked, even in the open. They serve a simple purpose in the natural order, serving as scapegoats and boogeymen. Rulers and priests and demagogues have always found it useful to stoke the fears of some minor population and conjure conspiracies in the minds of those who hate them. It's a political convenience as often as it is a religious one. The human empire is thousands of years old now, but it's not so very different from the world that gave birth to it.

The Out-Caste

As part of the Out-Caste, you have no place, no station, and no actual rights. While some fiefs claim to give you citizenship, it is in name only. Nothing can stop those who feel like it's time for a good Changed-bashing.

Yet such oppressed groups naturally congregate for support. Ironically, the boogeyman foisted on the public was perhaps at some point made real by making the Changed pariahs. Of course, if they do have a secret network, they could just as easily be working

for one of the great houses, couldn't they? The machinations of the Known Worlds grind ever finer plots and paranoias.

From circus freaks to genetically enhanced veterans of wars the public wants to forget, the Changed huddle in the growing shadows of the dimming light of dying stars. Maybe, in the end, they'll be the only ones ready for the final Dark.

STEREOTYPES

Pariahs by definition don't belong, but that common thread has a way of manifesting in common character types. While a Changed can be any kind of Out-Caste, below are some stereotypes to get you started.

Rural Outlander: You're a bumpkin, at least to anyone not from the backwater planet you come from. The ways of the Known World are foreign to you. Even if you don't look obviously Changed, people pick up that you're "not from around here." Of course, your "simpler" ways of seeing things often have far more clarity than so-called sophisticates.

Socialite Curiosity: The elite of society embraced you, at least as a curious companion. You went to the best parties, and although prejudice was rampant, your circle of friends kept you from danger. You know you aren't one of them, but you certainly don't feel like one of the Out-Castes. Really, you don't. Not at all.

Fringe Thespian: Certain customs and interpretations of religious and political texts afford your kind a place in the theater — at least on some worlds. You make your way as an actor, part of a troupe bringing passion and mystery plays to miners on remote asteroids and fringe colonies few have heard of. The light you bear may one day fill you with illumination, revealing your place in the universe.

Circus Runaway: Some mutants are so obviously *other* that they can only mingle with their own kind. You joined a freak show, a circus, or some other roaming band of entertainers. It had a reputation for raucous entertainment and fleeing the crowd. Now some places begrudgingly welcome you. Others run you out of town.

Clone: Someone refused to accept the limits the Pancreator places on the mortal coil, and you were the result. To society, you are now a cheat, a false copy, an aberration of the natural order, and an easy way to avoid the great mystery of the afterlife. You had no say on the matter. You may be hunted by the Church, sought by your originator, or wholly unaware of your status. What happens when you find out? What happens when your originator dies and her attendants come looking for you to replace her?

Changed Revolutionary: You have no station. You are not considered human. You are the persecuted minority, a cast-off of Pancreation. At least, humans tell

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you this, but you know they are wrong. You dedicated your life to proving them wrong. Perhaps you are a lone activist. Perhaps you are in a cell of the vast Changed Underground that people fear exists. Perhaps you are a spy for your kind among the “pure born” humans.

Expendable Secret Asset: The great houses have many clandestine needs, and you fulfill some of them. You do so without acknowledgement and with total deniability. Your powers are useful but not permitted. You work in the shadows, trading your ability for coin, exchanging your lack of social position for invisibility. You may spy, kill, or otherwise do the dirty work of nobles who do not want to be associated with you or the deeds you perform on their behalf. You might know where the bodies are buried, but surely the nobles have people watching you. It's a thin line you walk, and it's a dangerous one.

Changed Birthrights

Even the wild genetics and whirling loops of DNA that make mutants can be broken down into some (vague) discernible categories. A treatise written by a monk some four centuries ago lays out an even more complex physiognomy and system of classification for these so-called mutants.

The truth is that the science used to warp the human form is long forgotten. No one in the Church, despite their claims, can say with any veracity that these categories are the limits of the Changed or the extent of their powers. The very inability to categorize and label them makes them dangerous to the Church, or at least makes priests mad enough to paint them so. With that in mind, here are the most recognized types of the inherently unrecognizable Changed.

When you choose to play a Changed character, you choose Changed as your species. (That's Step Three in the character creation process described in *Chapter 5: Characters* of the **Character Book**.) You begin play at 1st level as a Changed.

INHUMANS

Horrors and parodies of the human form made by demons, Inhumans are the reason peasants keep pitchforks and torches. They haunt the nightmares of superstitious folk and keep wayward children in place. “Finish your meal,” parents say, “or the Inhumans will come to claim it from you.”

Truly, most people of the Known World find these mutants hideous to look upon. While some vestige of the humanoid form pushes through their unnatural bodies, it's not enough to put anyone at ease. Largely, the poorly educated underclass think they are actual demons. The Church plays to this reputation when it



works to their favor, though some sects preach tolerance and forgiveness for such Changed.

Amorphous forms, double heads, odd numbers of appendages, third eyes, strange or sentient tumors — these are all catalogued instances of inhuman mutations. None of these creatures can pass for human or make their way in human society. As a result, they are normally only found in small conclaves of their own kind, often small towns on backwater worlds or the worst slums of criminal cities. Some of them are possessed of abilities which are useful to merchants, such as raw strength or pheromone secretions that elicit wanton spending. People claim some of them are available in underground slave markets. The Church, of course, would never abide such a thing, were it known.

BIRTHRIGHT

Changed Perk: Choose a Changed perk that represents your inhuman mutation. You can choose one additional power by trading in a class or calling perk or taking an affliction (only one allowed).

THE ANIMALIZED

Splicing, vivisection, alchemical weddings — the current age has many names for the fusion of seeming opposites, but most peasantry and nobility alike just call them “animalized.”

A common mistake holds that these creatures are animals made sentient. That is not the case, but it does



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make them among the most hated of the Changed. Ages past, these creatures were humans with animal DNA. While they might look like cat people or snake men, they are, at the end of the day, still *people* – not that the Church believes that, or anyone else who doesn't dabble in forbidden sciences.

Some have fur and tails, while others have gills, elongated ape-like arms, or regenerative lizard-like limbs. On the whole, almost none of these folks can pass for human. You can hide a tail, sure, but the fur on the face gives one away. A few might pass for human at a glance, but these Changed display their animal DNA. Certain debased nobles are rumored to... favor... such creatures and keep them for unnatural purposes. Of course, these rumors are allegedly heresy spread by the mutant filth themselves.

BIRTHRIGHT

Changed Perks: Choose two Changed perks that represent your animalized mutation. You can choose one additional power by trading in a class or calling perk or taking an affliction (only one allowed).

MUTANTS

Somewhere between human and inhuman, mutants are thought to be the result of original experiments passed down through ancient bloodlines. If so, time diluted the purity of their difference, leaving most mutants with human-looking forms and the normal number of appendages. Some are diminutive

in stature, while others are overly tall. They all have some malformation which, upon close examination, reveals their true nature. However, if they keep wrapped up and stick to poorly lit streets, they might make it through the night in a human city.

Having probably descended from genetic variants designed to surpass humans, mutants have the highest rate of useful powers. This certainly doesn't make up for their poor lot in life, though certain powers occasionally save them from a ravaging mob.

BIRTHRIGHT

Changed Perks: For your initial class or calling perks, you can choose from the Changed perks list.

THE TWEAKED

Perhaps the most insidious threat in the eyes of the clergy, Tweaked pass for human. In fact, there isn't anything externally that would cause one to think them otherwise. Certain arcane rituals are said to read their auras as otherwise unnatural, but this is not proven fact. The Church, if it had such mystics, would not reveal them to the Tweaked, for these Changed are their greatest threat — or so they hold publicly.

In reality, Tweaked most likely count their blessings and try to live in human society without drawing attention. In reality, when a Tweaked is "found," no



one can say for certain whether it's simply a human who angered the wrong noble.

Yet the Changed Underground, which the Church proclaims its enemy, could exist, but only if the Tweaked had infiltrated human society in an organized way. If they have, what would be their purpose, and what ends would they seek? Some fear the Tweaked are secretly superior to human stock, surviving as the heirs to ancient humanity. No one speaks of such things in polite company. Histrionics such as these are only used to stoke the anger of the peasantry... right?

BIRTHRIGHT

Changed Perks: For your initial class or calling perks, you can choose from the Changed perks list.

GRIMSONS

An old proverb says that necessity was the mother of invention. An even older one claims the mother of invention is war. The Grimsons are the product of the latter. Perhaps, some rogue scholars say, all our advancements as a species come from our inherent desire to destroy each other.

Whatever the philosophical case, great noble houses spent huge sums of money and resources during the Emperor Wars perfecting all manner of weaponry. One such weapon was humanity itself, altered into the perfect war machine.

This human arms race didn't begin with genetics but with chemicals. Drugged soldiers raged across the battlefield, but soon enough, the next noble house would discover a better combat drug, and ever on. Finally, one of the houses —no one is sure which— resurrected the ancient secrets of modifying human genes. Grimsons were the result. Whatever house made the first, others followed, but that initial breach of faith could bring down the originator... should anyone still know the truth.

The science used was a far cry from that of the Second Republic. The troops produced often had as many disadvantages as they did edges. Yet the military of the great houses purposed them into effective squads. Being veterans of that war, Grimsons are the only class of Changed to possess anything like official citizenship. By and large, they are tolerated, if not feared. They make their way as bodyguards, mercenaries, and killers-for-hire. The houses use them against each other, but only if they can keep plausible deniability. Officially, their altered genes are designed so as not to pass down to their offspring... "officially."

BIRTHRIGHT

Grimson Perks: Choose two Changed perks that represent your Grimson mutation. (Enhanced Physique is the most common one.)

Grimson Affliction: Choose an affliction from the list in *Chapter 3: Traits* of the **Character Book** or Berserk (see sidebar). Common afflictions for Grimsons

include Addiction, Oath of Fealty, Obligation, Outlaw, and Vendetta.

Changed Perks: For your initial class or calling perks, you can choose from the Changed perks list.

AFFLICTION: BERSERKER

Precondition: Changed (Animalized, Grimson)

You are prone to fits of utter, destructive rage.

Affliction: Whenever your Vitality rating is half its maximum rating (or lower), you fly off the handle and suffer the Berserk state for 10 turns. You can spend 3 VP to avoid this state for the scene. If you begin the next scene with half (or lower) Vitality, so you'll need to spend 3 VP again to avoid berserking. If you choose not to spend these VP (or can't), you go Berserk.

After sufficient time (i.e., attaining 10th level), if you've sought therapy and spent some effort dealing with your anger issues, you can resolve this affliction.

METONYMS

Where there is war, there is espionage. The ultimate spy is one that can change shape. This is likely the origin of the Metonym: a mutant with enough fine muscular control to change their appearance. A Metonym can pass for human; after all, they are designed to do so. Like clones, Metonyms are currently engineered, though the science is unclear and the results uncertain.

Every city or town has a legend of a changeling, shapeshifter, or Metonym. The Church officially recognizes them as a threat. Privately, the Inquisition wonders if perhaps Metonyms are designed by the so-called Underground of the Changed. If so, can they alter more than their muscles? What if they could assume any humanoid form they desired?

BIRTHRIGHT

Metonym: You may change your features completely by spending 5 VP, even appearing as another sex or mimicking a specific person. You can hold this form for up to 12 hours. The physical disguise is perfect in appearance, but you'll still need to perform a Disguise-skill *impersonate* maneuver to convincingly act as that person. For you, this roll is favorable, and you can add your class level to the Resistance used against attempts to pierce your disguise.

This power does not normally allow you to mimic a person's genetic profile; you'll need high-tech devices to pull that off. However, rumor holds that a Metonym



with access to someone's blood can ingest it to match that person's profile. (This would require them to spend an additional 5 VP when they transform.)

Some members of the Inquisition believe that some Metonyms can shift body sizes and the like — powers far beyond the muscular control attributed to these shapeshifters. Deep inside the Church, clergy fear that noble houses, and even their own ranks, have been infiltrated by Metonyms who can permanently hold different forms. Surely, that cannot be the case... can it?

Changed Perks: Your maker might have added some additional adjustments to your genetic code. For your initial class or calling perks, you can choose from the Changed perks list.

CLONES

Clones are a currently produced group of genetic anomalies, though they remain highly illegal. Despite this, noble houses have their secrets, and sometimes even the Church cannot ferret them out. Some nobles have dreams of scions exactly like themselves. A few have even been accused of somehow transferring their consciousness to clones, though no proof of this has ever surfaced.

The Church considers clones a complete blasphemy, executing any clone and its original upon discovery. In theory, even the Emperor himself would not be able to avoid such a fate. Of course, the Emperor has no clone. The very idea is ridiculous.

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Clone: You can pass for your original iteration without needing disguises (although you might need to study them to capture their carriage and diction). Also, you'll register as your original on high-tech scans, such as retinal, fingerprint, genetic, etc. You won't share any obvious scars or injuries gained, since you were cloned from them, but otherwise, according to science, you're an exact match. Still, this condition is more affliction than benefit, since the Church hates you, and your original might hunt you for your organs.

Changed Perks: Your maker might have added some additional adjustments to your genetic code. For your initial class or calling perks, you can choose from the Changed perks list.

Perks of the Changed

Changed perks must be chosen at character creation. They cannot be acquired after a character begins play, unless the GM allows it. (This might be due to some unforeseen mutation that occurs when the character reaches sufficient age, or it may be from exposure to some weird energy field that rearranges the Changed character's already unstable genetic structure.)

ALTERNATIVE RESPIRATION

Power • Precondition: Changed

You can breathe in toxic environments.

Benefice: You can convert noxious substances, such as methane or other gases, into whatever you need to keep living, as if it were air. You can also breathe underwater, and nearly any toxic or inhospitable gas or environ that affects normal people does not affect you. You cannot breathe in outer space, though, since there is nothing to convert for your needs.

CHAMELEON

Power • Precondition: Changed

Your skin mimics the environment around it, whether it's natural or manmade.

Benefice: Your rolls are favorable for *Sneak blend in*, *camouflage*, and *skulk* maneuvers, as well as for any hiding-related action. You cannot control this ability; thus, your skin constantly pulls visual cues from the world for camouflage. While this feature is quite handy for a stealth mission, it's unsettling in subtle negotiations when one party keeps reflecting the fine china or a waiter's white gloves. The GM might decide that you suffer unfavorable rolls in these sorts of situations.

CLAWS

Power • Precondition: Changed (Animalized)

You have claws or talons on your hands and/or feet (or some other Changed limb).

Benefice: These claws or talons provide natural defense in hand-to-hand (or hand-to-tentacle) combat. When using them, you gain +2 base damage for Fight-skill *strike* attacks. Your claws cannot be used when you wield a weapon. At the GM's discretion, you may also gain a favorable roll in situations where your claws might aid coercion.

Claws are obviously an inhuman trait, though some neo-primitive fashion statements run toward fake claws, and a few mutants might pass as such.

ELONGATED FINGERS

Power • Precondition: Changed

Your long fingers give you extraordinary manual dexterity.

Benefice: You rolls for any hand-based manipulations or ministrations are favorable. These might include hacking a computer via a keyboard with the clock ticking down, opening a safe, or picking the pocket of a well-heeled merchant.



ENHANCED INTELLECT

Power • Precondition: Changed

Your mind has been made smarter and faster.

Benefice: Your Mind characteristics can be raised to a maximum of 12, even before you reach 10th level. Also, you can spend 3 VP to push yourself when using one of those characteristics (such as when bolstering a skill roll): Your roll becomes fortunate. You can only do this a number of times per act equal to your class level.

This power is rare. During the early New Dark Ages, when distrust of think machines was widespread, some noble houses and guilds resorted to using people whose intelligence and reasoning capacity had been improved through genetic engineering. Unfortunately, the affectations and personal warmth of these “Calculors” tended to be deficient — they creeped people out. The drawback to this power is that your persuasion influence rolls using any of the Spirit characteristics are unfavorable.

ENHANCED PHYSIQUE

Power • Precondition: Changed

Your body has been made bigger, stronger, faster, and tougher.

Benefice: You gain +1 Size (which also adds 1 to your Vitality and 2 meters to your movement speed). Your Body characteristics can be raised to a maximum of 12, even before you reach 10th level. Also, you can spend 3 VP to push yourself when using one of those characteristics (either to bolster a skill roll or to lift something, etc.): Your roll becomes fortunate. You can only do this a number of times per act equal to your class level.

This power is common among Grimsons. It is obvious to onlookers. Not only are you taller, you’re wider and your muscles bulge. You might need specially tailored clothing (+10% cost).

ENHANCED SENSES

Power • Precondition: Changed

One or more of your five senses is heightened. You can push (through strange genetics) hearing, sight, or any other sense beyond normal human bounds. One Changed might be able to see in the dark, while another could have the hearing spectrum of a canine.

Benefice: Each time you take this perk, declare which sense it applies to. Depending on the sense that’s heightened, you do not suffer the effects of states that would impose penalties or poor conditions upon you, such as Visually Impaired or Hearing Impaired. Additionally, a state like Blinded or Deafened might be downgraded to merely Visually Impaired or Hearing Impaired.

Along with this benefit, you have an inevitable tell. An animalized character with dog-like olfactory perks, for example, might have a dog-like nose. The GM should weigh the usefulness of the perk and balance the downside. In social encounters or combat, these Changed suffer penalties at least equal to anything their ability affords, and their influence attempts are unfavorable among strangers. Once someone gets to know them, however, their rolls with that person are normal. (At the GM’s discretion, some incognito enhanced senses have no penalties.)

EXOSKELETON

Power • Precondition: Changed (Animalized, Inhuman)

An exoskeleton provides natural armor, but at the cost of a human appearance.

Benefice: You gain +4 Body Resistance. This natural armor does not interfere with an energy shield, so long as you wear no armor. Any armor you do wear must be specially tailored to fit (add +20% to the cost).

Whether your exoskeleton is made of bone or chitinous material, this change is obvious to anyone looking. You would need to be fully robed and some distance away to avoid detection.

EXTRA LIMBS

Power • Precondition: Changed

You possess an extra pair of arms or legs.

Benefice: When you gain this perk, declare whether it applies to arms or legs. You can take this perk a second time to gain the other version: legs if you took arms the first time, or arms if you already have extra legs. Extra arms and legs can be useful for a variety of reasons, as listed below.

Extra Arms: You have trained yourself to use one of your extra limbs to perform one bonus primary action per turn, although this bonus action is unfavorable (even if you have the Ambidextrous perk). Also, your climbing speed is doubled. You can learn the Graa martial art even if you’re not a vorox.

Extra Legs: You double your movement speed and can’t normally be knocked prone by grapples and the like.

Extra legs are nearly impossible to hide, but extra arms might hug the body in a loose garment and escape cursory inspection. The torso might be extended to accommodate extra arms or legs below the normal ones. Some might sprout from the character’s body in a spider-like manner. Some might even function as both legs and arms, at the GM’s discretion.

FANGS

Power • Precondition: Changed

Fangs are both menacing and effective for biting.

Benefice: You must decide whether your fangs are incognito or noticeable. The rules for each appear below. Of course, the latter exposes the Changed for what they are and can easily backfire.

Incognito Fangs: Grants +1 base damage but only after a successful *grapple* (at which point, they're no longer incognito to witnesses).

Noticeable Fangs: Bestows +2 damage with *Fight strike* maneuvers.

With either version, you can enhance a coercion-influence attempt by threatening someone with your fangs. This makes your roll favorable, but only the first time you bare your fangs against the same target within the same act.

FOOT PADS

Power • Precondition: Changed

Subcutaneous fat pockets on the bottom of your feet allow for natural stealthy movement.

Benefice: Your rolls are favorable for actions involving sneaking and silent movement but only when you're barefoot. Since this mutation is only on the bottom of your feet, it is easy to hide by wearing shoes. However, ancient engineers typically paired this with memetic abilities or combat mutations, both of which are harder to hide from prying eyes.

FROG TONGUE

Power • Precondition: Changed (Animalized, Inhuman)

You can shoot a 2-meter tongue covered in microscopic suction cups from your mouth and use it to grab objects.

Benefice: If the objects are light enough (size XS, S, or M), you may pull them toward you. Roll Vigor + Dexterity as a primary action. Resistance equals the Strength of the person holding the object or depends on the object's size: Demanding for M, Hard for S, or Easy for XS. If the person holding the object isn't surprised by the frog tongue, they can spend VP to boost Resistance.

GILLS

Power • Precondition: Changed (Animalistic)

Gills, typically grown on the neck, allow you to breathe underwater for unlimited periods of time.

Benefice: Your gills are concealable under a heavy scarf.

GLIDER WINGS

Power • Precondition: Changed (Animalistic, Inhuman)

Humankind's yearning for flight entered the genetic stage during the First Republic era. While they never produced actual wings as such, they did create membranes that allowed people to glide for significant distances.

Benefice: You can launch yourself from any high point and glide at least 100 meters at your normal movement speed, give or take an occasional boost or hindrance for strong winds.

The membranes between your arms and torso are hard to hide from authorities. Clothing and armor must be specially tailored to allow you to unfurl them (add +10% to the cost).

HAZARDOUS BREATH

Power • Precondition: Changed

Your very breath can be toxic to most life.

Benefice: To cough up a cloud at a target within 3 meters, you spend 2 VP (to activate the organ) and roll Vigor + Endurance as a primary action versus the target's Body Resistance (ignoring armor) or their Dexterity (whichever is higher). Impact makes the target Stunned (unless they are breathing through a device, like a spacesuit). The cloud can linger in place for 1 additional turn per VP you spend. Anyone who passes through that space must make a reflexive Vigor + Endurance roll versus a Demanding Resistance or be Stunned as they breathe in the noxious fumes. The extra organ that produces the toxin shows up during advanced medical exams.

HIDDEN BODY

Power • Precondition: Changed (Inhuman)

You are actually two people: two separate entities. The other is small and lives in a womb inside of you.

Benefice: The miniature version of you is Size 2; it can enter and exit its womb at will as a primary action. It is half your level and has half your trait ratings (round down). (We suggest you write out a separate character sheet for it.) Despite these lower stats, it could very well be the "brains behind the operation." In fact, some possibly apocryphal accounts in ancient annals claim that Changed with this ability acquired human bodies as hosts. Such fears often fuel mass hysteria and executions. If these stories were true, one of these Changed might be able to inhabit and "pilot" another person, but of course, such ideas are as ridiculous as they would be haunting.



You can hide your other you when it is concealed in its womb, but that womb can be detected by even cursory medical exams. Your double only gains sustenance when it's in its womb, so it cannot be separated from you for long before it begins to starve.

HORNS

Power • Precondition: Changed (Animalistic, Grimson)

Believe it or not, horns were once fashionable during the Second Republic. Now they are forbidden signs used to mark the Changed by the Church. Posters warning against harboring mutants often feature horned heads, though instances of horns are quite rare.

Benefice: You can perform a *ram* maneuver: Roll Fight + Strength as a primary action vs. the target's Body Resistance. Base damage is 4 (includes +2 for your horn).

You cannot easily hide your horns, and humans tend to have an atavistic fear of horned humanoids. By revealing your horns to someone, you might gain favorability on a coercion influence attempt.

IMMUNITY

Power • Precondition: Changed

One specific condition, toxin, environment, or the like does not affect you as it does normal humans.

Benefice: When you gain this perk, declare a class of substances to which you are immune: poison gases, diseases, drugs, poisons, or venom. You can gain

this perk multiple times; each additional perk represents a new immunity.

INTERNAL RESPIRATION

Power • Precondition: Changed

Through advanced engineering, or inheritance thereof, you do not require air.

Benefice: Extra organs in your body allow all respiration to occur inside the body, so long as there is calorific energy (i.e., food) to do so. This shows up on a medical exam but is otherwise concealable from most scrutiny.

LONGEVITY

Power • Precondition: Changed (Mutant, Tweaked)

You can live longer than most of your kind, barring calamity or illness.

Benefice: You are gifted with an average lifespan twice that of your species (150 years for humans). Longevity serums can extend it even more.

PEROMONES

Power • Precondition: Changed

You secrete pheromones that have a profound effect on people. The classic example is a pheromone that promotes amorous feelings toward you, but other secretions can induce feelings of trust, fear, or even familial devotion.

Benefice: Your persuasion influence rolls are favorable, so long as your targets are in your presence and can breathe in your pheromones (vid- and holo-chats won't provide this benefit). Alternatively, when you gain this perk, you can choose fear pheromones, making your coercion rolls favorable.

PHOTOSYNTHESIS

Power • Preconditions: Changed

Like plants, your body converts sunlight into energy.

Benefice: Built as a response to famines millennia ago, this perk ensures that as long as you have sunlight, you do not have to eat. Your skin is likely tinted with chlorophyll or another, possibly alien, analog thereof.

POISONOUS ATTACK

Power • Preconditions: Changed

You secrete poison from your body.

Benefice: Your poison might come from your tears, mucous, spit, or even sweat. Some Changed have control over this poison's release. Others do not. You are one of the lucky ones who can control your power.

The efficacy and timeframe of the poison's effects vary as noted below. Some poisons kill on contact, while others take days to take effect and are nearly untraceable. Rumors persist of assassins in the

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Changed Underground who use this ability stoke fear in the peasantry. Rumors that noble houses engineer such people for private vendettas certainly are laughable, aren't they?

Choose one from following delivery options to describe how your poison is dealt:

- **Natural Weaponry:** This perk can be combined with Fangs, Claws, or Tentacle (via a stinger) to deliver the poison on a successful Fight attack. Spend 2 VP to add the poison, which takes effect immediately. Otherwise, you'll need to smear the poison on a blade or collect it in a needle to deliver it.
- **Skin Secretion:** Your poison can be delivered by touch. After a successful Fight + Dexterity primary-action roll against the target's Body Resistance (ignoring armor) or Dexterity (whichever is highest), you can spend 2 VP to secrete the poison into their system. This only works on skin contact; if the target is completely covered, such as by full-body armor or a spacesuit, you can't deliver the poison. The poison either takes effect immediately or after a delay (up to 1 day per additional 2 VP you spend). It can't be traced back to you except with sophisticated DNA reading devices, assuming they've got a record of your DNA for comparison.
- Choose one from the following effect options to describe the nature of the poison:
- **Cytotoxin:** Causes 3 damage, plus 2 dmg on each successive turn per 2 VP you spend when it's injected. (If you spend 6 VP, for example, it causes damage for three successive turns.) The target can attempt to *shake it off*, which cancels its ongoing effect. It can be neutralized with proper medicines, including Elixir™. You have unlimited uses of this poison.
- **Neurotoxin:** The victim makes a reflexive Vigor + Endurance roll vs. a Resistance equal to the VP you spend when administering the poison. Failure makes the victim Stunned for 1 day. He rolls again the next day; Failure makes him Immobilized; he rolls again the next day or falls Unconscious; failing again the next day means he's Dying. The victim can't *shake it off*, but a medic with proper supplies and the Poison Lore capability might be able to neutralize it (as can the Sanctuary Aeon theurgic rite of Cleansing). You can produce only one dose of this poison once per day.

ROUGHSKIN

Power • Preconditions: Changed

Your skin is hard, rough, and otherwise hard to penetrate.

Benefice: You gain +2 Body Resistance. This natural armor is compatible with energy shields, and the skin is easily concealable under clothing.

SKUNK SPRAY

Power • Preconditions: Changed (Animalized)

Noxious, odorous gas shoots forth from glands in your body.

Benefice: You may choose where such glands appear and can conceal them under clothes until used. The cloud is truly noxious. You spend 2 VP to eject it from your glands as a secondary action. You can target an area up to 3 meters away. Anyone without breathing protection who is caught in the 1-meter radius cloud is Nauseated for 3 rounds. Even with breathing protection, anyone caught by the cloud stinks for the next 3 hours, during which time their influence rolls are unfavorable against anyone who isn't wearing breathing protection.

TENTACLES/PREHENSILE TAIL

Power • Preconditions: Changed (Animalized, Inhuman)

Tails and tentacles are extremely uncommon, even among the Changed. They function in a manner similar to extra arms but with less manual dexterity. Some are possible to hide, but once revealed, they cause immediate fear and revulsion in most people.

Benefice: The tail or tentacles can grasp objects but cannot perform complex tasks. Each affords a *disarm* attack (as the Melee maneuver but using Fight skill instead). You can snatch an opponent's legs out from under them by performing a *strike* with your tail/tentacle, rendering them Prone. You gain initiative edge for these attacks (because most opponents just aren't expecting a tail/tentacle).

If you choose the tentacle option, you can have two, which function in a method similar to the Extra Arms power (above). If you choose the tail, you have only one, but it aids your balance, preventing you from being knocked down or rendered Prone.

WEBBED HANDS

Power • Preconditions: Changed (Animalistic)

Webbed hands are one of the more common mutations. You can swim like a creature born of water.

Benefice: You can swim at your full movement speed, so long as your hands are free. This mutation is often coupled with Gills (see above). Hiding the webbed hands is rather easy, but other telltale signs, such as scales, often go with the webbed fingers. The origin of this engineering is believed to date from the Emperor Wars, when some houses created elite, sea-borne shock troops.

CYBORG AND CYBERNETICS

Cybertech

Before the dawn of the Second Republic, zaibatus and kindred corporations colonized the stars. Engineered for profit, they devised laws suited to their own interests, expanding the ranks of the disenfranchised as they redefined criminality. Black market rivals learned to circumvent those corporate laws with concealed personal technology. Even at the height of civilization, ambitious technophiles sought an edge over their enemies by augmenting their minds and bodies.

Millennia later, their distant descendants resurrect scavenged technology, kit-bashing ancient tech to meet the needs of a new dark age. Old cybertech isn't at the bleeding edge of pre-Fall tech, but it's better than what most commoners have. Criminals who fought the old zaibatus didn't have long lifespans, but they did have concealable, profitable, and often ruthless cyberdevices. A new generation has learned to reboot and rebuild that tech.

Many priests find this trend particularly troublesome. If humans were made in the Creator's image, redefining that form is an insult, perhaps even blasphemy. Cyborgs inexorably tarnish their souls with each modification until they're only dim reflections of the Pancreator's light. The more these heretics deviate, the more they stray from humanity... and human restraint. Fortunately, there's a hidden network of specialists ready to help would-be cyborgs adjust: a shadowy underworld of cyborgs struggling to retain their sanity and humanity as they circumvent the law.

The Perks of Augmentation

In past millennia, cyber freaks could insert and remove highly customizable cyberware as casually as changing clothes. In the new millennium, grafting cybertech to your body isn't simply "plug and play." Characters acquire cybertech through perks. Unless you've got the proper perk to go with the new cyberdevice you've purchased, it won't integrate into your body; it is unusable. Adaptation also takes time, resources, and delicate cyber-surgery.

With time and experience, a cyborg can adapt to an increasing amount of tech in their body. In game terms, cyberdevices count against a character's Technosis rating, just as all high-tech does. (See *Technosis* in **Chapter 3: Traits**.) If you've implanted more devices than your Technosis allows, you're in overload,

and since these devices are surgically attached, you can't simply offload them to ease your compulsions. This is called *cyberpsychosis*, since it's effectively permanent until enough tech is removed from the body or your Technosis is raised to adapt to it.

When you've got adequate Technosis to handle another cyberdevice, you're free to shop for the next tech you need, hunt down a surgeon who can implant it, and deal with the consequences of recovery and adaptation.

Unfortunately, there's no universal "Interweb" for finding these gizmos. Underworld contacts on your current world may provide a list of devices from which you can choose, as provided by your GM. Cyborgs can conceivably customize a device's materials, power source, and features, but the rules for that can get complicated. This rulebook instead provides a list of off-the-shelf devices you can acquire. You gain your perk, pay the money, and take your chances.

Being caught with cybertech has its own share of risks. Local authorities don't like dealing with criminals who have augmentations they've never seen before, so mere possession of cyber can lead to arrest, exile, or even immolation. Keep in mind, though: If they don't know you have it, they can't guard against it. Cyborgs shouldn't be overt or indiscriminate in their use of cyber, but when it's applied at the right time in the right way, it can provide a winning (possibly chrome-polished) edge over your competition.

Common Devices

For your shopping convenience, we've included a few sample devices repeatedly confiscated from back-alley surgeons. The exact size and color may vary from one world to the next.

Each device is acquired as a perk (most often by taking the Cyborg calling, which gives you access to all of these devices). Once you begin play, however, you must *also* pay the firebird cost for new devices you acquire, *in addition* to the perk. So, to gain a shiv sleeve during play, you have to find the device somewhere, pay for it (unless you've stolen it or dug it out of a ruin), pay for the surgery, and also choose its perk as a calling perk. (Most callings don't provide access, though, so you'll probably need to follow the Cyborg calling for one or two levels, depending on how much cybertech you want to acquire.)

You can't install more than one cyberdevice for the same organ. If you've replaced your right eye

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with an Etyri Eye, you can't install a Shadow Eye in the same socket.

You may also find manufacturers' variants of a device: Each one includes a manufacturer's name, which can tip you off to its materials, power supply, tech level, and other considerations. Two manufacturers may make the same device, but with different bonuses and costs.

Caveat Emptor: Before you pay your firebirds, one more word of caution. Taking the maximum amount of cybertech is risky. As with all forms of high tech, cyberdevices cause tech compulsions in those who carry too much tech.

Armor

OZYMANDIAS TEFLON MESH

Calling • Cyberdevice TL6 • Precondition: Cyborg
Across most of your torso, back, and upper legs, you've got subcutaneous layers of highly resistant alloys, increasing your resistance to electricity, radiation, and acid. You're also comfortable in a wider range of temperatures.

Benefice: You gain concealed armor rated at +2 Body Resistance. It's also Flameproof and Shockproof, it's compatible with most energy shields, and it has ABC protection (atomic, biological, and chemical).

Cost: 200 firebirds to purchase; 200 for implantation

Tech compulsion: Protective

OZYMANDIAS TORSO MESH

Calling • Cyberdevice TL6 • Precondition: Cyborg

Across most of your torso, back, and upper legs, your skin has a second, hidden layer of metallic mesh underneath it. Externally, your appearance doesn't change. Internally, you have extra protection against crude forms of weapon damage.

Benefice: You gain concealed armor rated at +2 Body Resistance. It's also Hardproof and Slamproof, and it's compatible with most energy shields.

Cost: 200 firebirds to purchase; 200 firebirds for implantation

TECH COMPULSION: PROTECTIVE

Enhancements

CIRCE LITHE WIRE

Calling • Cyberdevice TL6 • Precondition: Cyborg
Synthetic muscle grafts boost your reaction time in your arm and leg muscles. This gives you swift reactions to danger, increasing your ability to deflect and dodge.

Benefice: You gain +2 goal when performing the *dodge* and *evade* maneuvers. You can spend 1 VP to boost your Body Resistance by 2. After that, the cost is normal (+1 Resistance per 1 VP).

Cost: 200 firebirds to purchase; 200 for implantation.

Tech Compulsion: Heedless

CIRCE SPRY-STIM

Calling • Cyberdevice TL5 • Precondition: Cyborg
Synthetic muscle and nerve implants provide hair-trigger reflexes when danger is near.

Benefice: You gain *superior* initiative edge. You always act first, unless someone else has a superior edge, in which case you roll to determine which of you acts first. Your superior edge cannot be overruled or interrupted, except by another superior edge.

Cost: 300 firebirds to purchase; 200 for implantation

Tech Compulsion: Heedless

JORGENSON'S SUBCUTANEOUS CAVITY

Calling • Cyberdevice TL5 • Precondition: Cyborg
You've replaced some of your internal organs with smaller synthetic substitutes, freeing up a chamber where your left lung used to be.

Benefice: Removable flesh flaps and osseous hinges allow you to open or close the chamber. You can hide an object up to one square foot inside your chest cavity. Alternatively, you can hide one Medium-sized item, two Small items, or three Extra-Small items. Drawing an object out or placing an object inside takes a primary action.

Cost: 300 firebirds to purchase; 200 for implantation.

Tech Compulsion: Acquisitive

OZYMANDIAS DEEP LUNG

Calling • Cyberdevice TL5 • Precondition: Cyborg
You can store an internal supply of oxygen, allowing you to breath for an extended time, even while floating in a vacuum or submerged in liquid.

Benefice: You can breathe in an area without external oxygen for a number of hours equal to your Endurance.

Cost: 500 firebirds to purchase; 200 for implantation.

Tech Compulsion: Industrious

PROMETHEAN LUMBAR LIFTS

Calling • Cyberdevice TL5 • Precondition: Cyborg
Reinforced metallic implants in your arms, lower back, and legs increase the amount of weight you can lift. As an added benefit, you are strong enough to bend metal or crush organic creatures in a steel-vise bear hug.

Benefice: You gain +2 Strength when lifting things, grappling others, or bending/breaking items.

Cost: 300 firebirds to purchase; 200 for implantation.

Tech Compulsion: Destructive

Perception

TARSTON ETYRI EYE

Calling • Cyberdevice TL5 • Precondition: Cyborg
You've replaced one of your eyes with a simulacrum that not only allows you to focus on a specific distant or fast-moving target, but also coordinates with implants in both hands to coordinate your aim. As a result, you're a crack shot with a ranged weapon in either or both hands.

Benefice: You gain +1 goal on attacks with ranged weapons. You do not need to take the Shoot *aim* action to get this bonus, but you can still *aim* for greater accuracy. You also ignore penalties for long and extreme ranges.

Cost: 300 firebirds to purchase; 200 for implantation.

Tech Compulsion: Inerrant

SMITH & SMITH SHADOW EYE

Calling • Cyberdevice TL5 • Precondition: Cyborg
Surgeons have replaced one of your eyes with an artificial simulacrum; you can still see with it. When activated, it also allows you to see with infrared and ultraviolet night vision.

Benefice: You can see in the dark. You ignore the Blind and Visually Impaired states when they're caused by darkness. In addition, you can see thermal radiation — heat signatures — given off by people and tech.

Cost: 500 firebirds to purchase; 200 for implantation.

Tech Compulsion: Inerrant

Think Machines

PANDORAN DATA INTERFACE

Calling • Cyberdevice TL5+ • Precondition: Cyborg; Interface 1+

You've got a think machine implanted near the base of your brain.

Benefice: Your think machine provides three lore capabilities and has space to add up to two more. You can access these capabilities in your think machine's database for use with a skilled action.

You have some cables and adaptors for interfacing with another think machine; you can read its data and copy it into your own archives. In addition, you gain +2 goal when using the Interface skill with think machines to which you are connected.

Cost: 500 firebirds to purchase; 200 for implantation.

Tech Compulsion: Inerrant

Weaponry

SMITH & SMITH SHIV SLEEVE

Calling • Cyberdevice TL5 • Precondition: Cyborg
A surgeon has replaced muscle tissue inside one of your fingers, arms, or toes with thinner synthetic substitutes. That provides enough room for implanting a concealed melee weapon: usually, it's a dagger or sword. You're very precise with that weapon.

Benefice: Deploying or retracting a shiv sleeve's weapon is a secondary action. You gain +1 goal when attacking with it.

You can hold a dagger in a finger, toe, or the palm of your hand, or your arm can conceal a sword.

Cost: 300 firebirds to purchase; 200 firebird base cost for implantation

Tech Compulsion: Bloodthirsty

Cyber-Surgery

Engineers, Scravers, and similar cyber-freaks have skills for identifying and resurrecting cybertech, such as the High Tech Lore capability used with Tech Redemption skill. That knowledge is useful, but neither of those traits makes you a cybersurgeon. Implanting cyberdevices requires the Remedy skill as well as the Cybernetics Lore medical capability.

If you have this skill and capability combo, you can make some money as a cybersurgeon, whether legally through a guild or Amalthean clinic or illegally in numerous underworld chop-shops. Eccentric nobles (especially Decados and al-Malik) hire their own personal cybersurgeons.

If you have the Social Arena (Streetwise) capability, you can ask around for a black-market cybersurgeon without needing a roll, assuming you're on a fairly cosmopolitan world or city. Otherwise, you might need to risk a persuasion influence roll, where failure might mean the wrong people find out what you're looking for and the Inquisition might come looking for you.

You cannot implant a device on yourself. If you have access to a high-tech automated surgery clinic (TL7), you might be able to perform surgery on yourself, using its suite of pain-killers to keep you fully functional while you cut out your own flesh and install chrome and plasteel materials. These technological wonders are extremely rare, and their owners — usually wealthy nobles or Sanctuary Aeon cathedrals on Artemis — aren't necessarily keen on letting outsiders use priceless artifacts to experiment on themselves.

Cyborg

Cyborgs bear cybernetic device implants. You may have gained your implants as a requirement for your employment or to replace a missing limb or organ. Or you might be a cyberfetishist who is obsessed with altering and improving your body.

Cyborgs can be found throughout the Known Worlds in a wide variety of occupations, although they are often distrusted by Inquisitors and treated as pariahs by the common folk. Some of their more common professions include: soldiers, guards, spies, couriers, hackers, and even musicians and entertainers.

Cybernetic implants tend to impact your personality (due to techgnostic overload), and many cyborgs are often more focused on (and more concerned about) technology than people. You might prefer interacting with a think machine to actually engaging in social interaction. Much of your time is also devoted to improving and tinkering with your cybernetic enhancements.

This calling is rarely practiced for more than one or two levels — just long enough to gain access to one or more cybernetic device perks.

PATRON SAINTS

Blessed Anomalie — A rare disease struck the northernmost mining settlement of Cadavus, and the remote town had few resources to deal with widespread illness. Sheer providence brought an itinerant healer. Sister Anomalie of Tethys (c. 3850) tended to the disease's victims until she too became infected. The disease progressively devastated her body. Anomalie's patients saved her by replacing her dying limbs and organs with cybernetics. Once the disease was halted, she continued to minister and heal — an anathema to the Church but beloved by her people.

Saint Galatrix — Galatrix (3700-?) was a Second Republic Fleet Captain (Julie Harrow?) damaged in a shipping collision. Saved by angelic intercession, her damaged legs, left arm, and left eye were replaced by blessed sentient-tech. Pledging herself to the Pancreator to keep all sentients safe, she became a folk-saint among the tech-implanted. Historians later discovered this “saint” was named after the Galatrix corporation that implanted her; she was a walking advertisement for their “body-enhancement” technology. Some believe she lives still.

EARLY CAREER TRAITS

Capabilities: Tech Lore; Think Machines *or* an appropriate Lore *or* Science

Characteristics: Dexterity +2; Endurance +2; Will +1

Perk: Choose 1 from the Cyborg Perks list below or from the open perks list.

Skills: Academia 1; Focus 2; Interface 2; Tech Redemption 3; Vigor 2

Equipment: Cybernetic repair kit

CYBORG PERKS

You may choose any cyberdevice perk.

MEDICAL LORES

CYBERNETICS LORE

RESTRICTED: *Merchant League, Cyborg, Enthusiast, Healer, Occultist, Reclaimer, Spy, Sybarite, Tech Redeemer*

You know how to implant and remove cybernetic devices. (Repairing these devices uses the Tech Redemption skill.)

PERSONALITIES

This chapter presents NPCs from the various factions, alien species, and Changed types presented earlier in this book. Use them as allies, enemies, rivals, or colorful encounters for your PC troupe.

Minor Houses

COUNT PHILIPPE JUANDAASTAS

Headliner • Noble 3 • Juandaastas • Lord

“I wouldn’t be rude to guests in your home. I’ll thank you to remember that all of you and all of them are guests in mine.”

Description: As a child, Philippe’s best friend was a young obun girl who taught him how to play the harp. She later disappeared during one of the many battles of the Emperor Wars, her fate unknown. Philippe has never been quite the same since then, growing up to become a cold, callous man to outsiders. He doesn’t speak to anyone outside his mountain fief of Rangor unless it’s absolutely necessary. He keeps his manor house half-lit at all times, traditionally displaying a single light in the topmost window. Refugees and misfits of all kind are accepted as full citizens in his fief, so long as they serve one year in his personal military. Philippe is extremely protective of his people, and he will fight tooth and nail to keep them safe and comfortable.

PCs might encounter Philippe while escorting outcasts to his domain or possibly after following them there (much to his annoyance).

Characteristics:

Str	5	Wits	4	Pre	6
Dex	3	Per	6	Int	4
End	4	Will	6	Faith	4

Skills:

Animalia	3
Drive	2
Empathy	6
Fight	6
Observe	4
Perform	5

Actions:

Goal	Impact
<i>Daunt</i>	11
<i>Shake it off</i>	7 9 7
	Removes a state.

Capabilities: Customs (Commons, Court, Street-wise), Knowledge (Gwynneth, Obun, Theatre), Musical Instrument (Strings), Read/Speak Obunish, Read/Speak Urthish, Transport (Beastcraft)

Perks: Conscript, Imperious, Landed, Noble Title (Count), Riches (Well-Off), Untouchable

Resistance: Body 3 | Mind 10 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 22

Revivals: rating: 8 | number: 1

Equipment: Harp

Bank: 10

Surges: rating: 9 | number: 1

BARONET KHANUM PARIZADE KEDDAH

Headliner • Noble 6 • Keddah • Spy/Psychic

(*quiet whooshing sounds behind you*)

Description: Not much is known about the knight in charge of the Keddah’s psychic corps, the Eyes of Isis. She might be the daughter or sister of the head of house, or she might have married into it. Either way, each time she appears, her appearance is different. She’s always happy to share stories, some of which may even be true. Her dervishes all refer to her as the “shadow daeva,” and most fear and love her in equal measure. Those who fail her rigorous training standards return to their homes with their memories totally wiped and their pockets empty. House al-Malik has quietly put out feelers for someone strong enough to take her out.

Parizade can either be a dangerous enemy or an untrustworthy friend for the PCs. She might also be a good Psi trainer, if they’re up to the challenge.

Characteristics:

Str	4	Wits	5	Pre	7
Dex	8	Per	4	Int	4
End	6	Will	6	Faith	3

Occult: Psi 6

Skills:

Disguise	8
Empathy	5
Fight	6
Focus	9
Impress	7
Intrusion	9
Shoot	7
Sneak	8
Vigor	6

Actions:

Goal	Impact
<i>Emote</i>	8
	Instill emotions in target.
<i>Head Shackle</i>	14
	Controls target’s actions.
<i>Shake it off</i>	15 15 12
	Removes a state.
<i>Shoot</i> laser pistol	16
	4 dmg
<i>Skulk</i>	16
	Spend VP to boost Resistance vs. detection.
<i>Fist strike</i>	10
	2 dmg

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Capabilities: Customs (Court, Streetwise), Knowledge (Grail, Jumpweb), Medical (Poison, Torture), Read/Speak Urthish, Transport (Warcraft)

Perks: Imperious, Noble Title (Baronet)

Psyche: Mind Speech, Inuit, Emote, Mind Sight, Mind Search, Head Shackle

Resistance: Body 3 | Mind 4 | Spirit 2

Vitality: 26

Revivals: rating: 11 | number: 2

Equipment: Synthsilk jumpsuit, laser pistol, dagger
Soul shard: Appears as a small crystal fragment embedded in a wristband; boosts Parizade's Head Shackle power, allowing her to make a target suppress memories of everything that has occurred within a span. By spending VP, she can increase this back to one day (3 VP), one week (5 VP), one month (7 VP), or three months (9 VP). (Therapy using Psyche powers might be able to bring the memories forth again.)

Bank: 20

Surges: rating: 13 | number: 2

DUKE ALARUN SILAL THANA

Headliner • Changed (Mutant) • Noble 8 • Thana • Courtier

"Thank you for your gracious hospitality. Please, let me repay you."

Description: Alarun is the oldest known of the living Thana at almost 200 years. They are gender-neutral, politely correcting anyone who doesn't use the singular "they." While they are technically in charge of their house, they do not claim to have any sort of authority over the rest of the Thana, and it saddens them to see their younger siblings and cousins scattered throughout the Known Worlds. Alarun is as pale as moonlight and perfectly symmetrical, except for their one midnight blue eye and one silver-grey eye. They can hold forth on a wealth of topics and are happy to do so in exchange for a place to sleep.

Alarun might be encountered in any court of the Known Worlds, and they will most likely have some useful information for the PCs — even if they don't realize it at first.

Characteristics:

Str	5	Wits	6	Pre	8
Dex	6	Per	4	Int	8
End	6	Will	4	Faith	3

Skills:

Academia	8
Alchemy	6
Charm	8
Empathy	5
Impress	6
Observe	4
Perform	6

Actions:	Goal	Impact
<i>Convince</i>	14	Target is Convinced.
<i>Mesmerize</i>	14	Target is Mesmerized.
<i>Shake it off</i>	9 7 6	Removes a state.

Capabilities: Customs (Commons, Court), Knowledge (Jumpweb, Oratory, Shipboard Operations), Musical Instrument (Strings), Read/Speak Obunish, Read/Speak Urthish

Perks: Exemplar (Charm), Gossip Network, Imperious, Longevity (rare Thana genetic endowment), Noble Title (Duke), Proxy, Respectable, Riches (Rich), Schmooze, Well-Traveled

Resistance: Body 1 | Mind 12 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 26

Revivals: rating: 13 | number: 3

Equipment: Traveling clothes.

Bank: 25

Surges: rating: 16 | number: 3

Minor Sects

DEACON INACIO LUNA DELGADO

Headliner • Priest 9 • Choral • Chorister/Mendicant

"I sing of the Pancreator's beloved ones. I sing of the People."

Description: Inacio came of age during the Emperor Wars, where he was drafted into a Merchant League infantry unit and sent to various hot spots across the Known Worlds. He developed a deep loathing for war and what it did to people, especially civilians and traumatized soldiers. On a battlefield on Criticorum, he found his voice — literally. While he'd always had a good singing voice, and he had learned how to strum a guitar in the barracks, his songs were not particularly remarkable. An injury to his throat left him bleeding to death. He swore to the Pancreator that, should he live, he would devote himself to helping all people. An unknown Amalthean medic healed him using what he believes — he's not sure, being only half-aware at the time — to have been theurgy. The evening after he awoke, he tried to raise the spirits of his fellow wounded through a song. Instead of the gravelly voice he was used to hearing, the sound of an angel came forth from his throat. His audience was enthralled. So was he. He knew that he had to keep the promise he had made.

That was 25 years ago. Since then, he has traveled throughout the Known Worlds singing folk songs that praise the kind and just while condemning the cruel and petty. He is a folk hero to many, a living saint to some, and a menace to the public

order to those rulers and officials whom he mocks and derides with his music. If he sings praises to you in one of his songs, you can bet that your legend will spread, and commoners will look well upon you. If he derides you in song, it won't be long until your fief is roiling with unrest.

He spent his early years as a hesychast, refusing to join any sect or order. The kindness extended to him repeatedly by the Choristers eventually swayed his opinion on joining organizations. He officially took vows with the order and very quickly rose in the ranks. He now has the protection of the order. Any local potentate who tries to harass him will find voices raised in unison against them across the entirety of the Known Worlds.

Characteristics:

Str	4	Wits	5	Pre	9
Dex	7	Per	5	Int	9
End	6	Will	5	Faith	9

Skills:

Charm	9
Empathy	8
Fight	5
Focus	7
Observe	8
Remedy	7
Perform	8
Perform	9
Sneak	5
Vigor	7

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Befriend</i> 18	Target is Befriended.	
<i>Mesmerize</i>	17/18* Targets are Mesmerized.	
<i>Rouse</i> 18	Targets are Roused.	
<i>Shake it off</i>	13 12 16	Removes a state.

* Guitar/song

Capabilities: Customs (Cathedral), Knowledge (Known Worlds Jumpweb, Madoc, Religion, Song), Musical Instrument (String), Read/Speak Latin, Read/Speak Urthish, Transport (Beastback, Beastcraft)

Perks: Anthropologist, Breath Mark, Church Ordination (Deacon), Gospel, Harmonize, Inspiring, Living Legend, Key Signature, Perfect Pitch, Petition, Vow of Poverty

Resistance: Body 2* | Mind 6 | Spirit 2

* Shock-, Slamproof

Vitality: 34

Revivals: rating: 14 | number: 3

Equipment: Leather jerkin, sturdy guitar, audio recorder (TL5)

Bank: 25

Surges: rating: 18 | number: 3

SISTER ELIZABETH INUKSHUK

Headliner • Priest 7 • Hesychast • Monk/Theurgist/Spy

“Hark! The tufted tarbuck spills ale on the curmudgeous gimlet! All must bow!”

Description: Elizabeth was left as a baby on the doorstep of the Inukshuk Monastery in the wilds of Pandemonium. Wary monks took her in and put the infant to seemingly random tests. They divined by her reactions — whether she cried or stayed silent — that she was worth raising. These tests continued throughout her childhood and early adulthood, though they were always confusing and unpredictable. She could never prepare or know how it was she was supposed to pass them. She had seen other children like her — children taken in and raised — who were turned away when they failed a test, rejected by no discernible criteria. But somehow, through luck or pluck, she passed all her tests and was admitted into the Order of St. Yllo the Thrice-Damned, where the truth was finally revealed.

The Order followed the teachings of an obscure saint called Yllo the “thrice-damned,” so-called not because he was cursed by the Pancreator but because he vexed the early Church Patriarchs, who sought repeatedly to excommunicate him. Every time they tried, their voices would go hoarse as they tried to inveigh against him or their paperwork would miraculously disappear or burst into flames. Eventually, after three tries to “damn” him, they exiled him instead to a mountaintop monastery on Grange, the planet that would become Pandemonium.

So the story went. In truth, he was a master spy for the Church. His “exile” was merely his retirement when he became too old to effectively act in the field. Instead, he trained an elite order to follow in his footsteps, serving as a secret spy force for the Patriarchs that even the Syneculla could not control. Unfortunately, it was so secret that following his death, nobody knew about his elite order except for the order itself. Successive Patriarchs laughed at the suggestion pressed by this strange order of hesychasts that they were sanctioned as holy spies. Eventually, they were written off by the Church as harmless cranks.

And still they trained generation after generation in their spycraft, which masqueraded as a form of sacred madness, a trickster art of paradox and tomfoolery. To outsiders, these monks are known to deliberately cause confusion in the hopes that others will see the Pancreator’s creation anew, through eyes unclouded by convention. They are tolerated... for a while. Eventually, their tactics try everyone’s patience, and they are asked to leave or spend time in the local lockup.

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Sister Elizabeth is one of the few traveling representatives the order has left. They lend their spycraft to a select group of patrons — bishops, deacons, and even Reeves guilders — who remember the order's secret purpose. Elizabeth performs these duties not merely for their spiritual value but to raise money to move the monastery from its perilous mountaintop on the unstable planet of Pandemonium.

Characteristics:

Str	6	Wits	5	Pre	5
Dex	4	Per	5	Int	5
End	8	Will	8	Faith	7
Theurgy 5 / Hubris 2					

Skills:

Disguise	6
Empathy	5
Fight	7
Focus	8
Impress	5
Knavery	7
Perform	7
Sneak	8
Vigor	7

Actions:

Goal

Devotional Liturgy12

Impact

Allies' *shake it off* and *stonewall* are favorable; Afraid or Terrified attempts are unfavorable.

Fist <i>strike</i>	13
<i>Deceive</i>	12
<i>Distract</i>	12

2 dmg
Target is Deceived.
Reduces attacker's goal -1 per 2 VP spent.

Laying On Hands 13

Heals 2 Vitality per 1 VP on others; 1 Vitality per 1 VP on self

Lesser Banishment12

Suppresses occult power: 5 turns + 1 per VP (5 VP for scene)

Prophet's Holy Blessing

15 Grants favorable rolls for a single declared task.

Shake it off 16 | 16 | 15

Removes a state.

Capabilities: Armor (Combat), Customs (Cathedral), Knowledge (Hesychasm, Oratory, Religion), Medical (Surgery), Read/Speak Urthish

Perks: Armor of Purity, Church Ordination (Canon), Inspiring, Martial Arts (Koto Adept), Mimic, Second Skin

Theurgy: Devotional Liturgy, Laying On Hands, Lesser Banishment, Prophet's Holy Blessing

Resistance: Body 3 | Mind 4* | Spirit 2

*+2 vs non-order Church members

Vitality: 35

Revivals: rating: 11 | number: 3

Equipment: Studded-leather jerkin (Slamproof)

Bank: 25

Surges: rating: 13 | number: 2

MAMA ZENITH

Headliner • Priest 8 • Children of Zuran • Dreamtender/Theurgist

"Ah... your card is Lextius the Knight. You are in the right but are not recognized for it; you suffer ostracism. And the card that crosses you is... the Anunnaki! Your exile will lead you to uncover secrets that will change the universe!"

Description: Mama Zenith is the matriarch of a large family of traveling Zuranist traders. She has been all over the place, including some of the worlds in Vuldrok space. While her family handles the trading that keeps them fed and their small fleet of starships in working order, she tells fortunes. Her accuracy is legendary.

Most famously now, many years ago when she was a guest at the hold of Thane Eldrid, she read the cards for young Freya Eldridsdottir and predicted the child would "rule more worlds than Froljir." That girl never forgot, and now Mama Zenith is a favored guest at the Imperial court on Byzantium Secundus, advising the Empress and reading her fortune regularly.

If she has read the cards for the newborn Princess Aurora, she has not revealed it. Nor has she revealed what is in store for the Emperor, who has so far refused to sit through a reading (at least publicly). Patriarch Palamon has inveighed against Mama Zenith's presence at court, but Freya refuses to turn aside the woman who predicted her rise.

Mama is very protective of the Empress, but she also uses her position to advocate for freedom from Church condemnation for the Children of Zuran.

Characteristics:

Str	3	Wits	7	Pre	7
Dex	4	Per	5	Int	9
End	6	Will	7	Faith	8
Theurgy 5 / Hubris 1					

Skills:

Academia	6
Charm	8
Empathy	9
Fight	6
Focus	8
Impress	6
Knavery	7
Remedy	6
Shoot	5
Vigor	5



Actions:	Goal	Impact
Laying On Hands	16	Heals 2 Vitality per 1 VP on others; 1 Vitality per 1 VP on self
<i>Minister</i>	18	Downgrades persistence of target's mental or social state; she uses a divinity card reading to do this.
<i>Shoot</i> stunner	10	6 dmg; Shock
<i>Shake it off</i>	14 15 16	Removes a state.

Capabilities: Customs (Cathedral, Commons, Court, Stree-wise), Knowledge (Known Worlds and Barbarian Jumpweb, Religion, Shipboard Operations, Zuranity), Ranged Weapons (Energy Guns), Read/Speak Urthish, Speak Vuldrok, Transport (Beastcart)

Perks: Ally (Empress Freya), Contacts (Zuranists), Incubation, Inspiring, Micro-Confessions, Well-Traveled, Wise One

Theurgy (Zuranist rites similar to Church rites): Divine Revelation, Knowing Heart, Laying On Hands, Oath to the Saints, Second Sight

Resistance: Body 3* | Mind 2 | Spirit 0
* Shockproof

Dueling Energy Shield: 5/10

Vitality: 33

Revivals: rating: 13 | number: 3

Equipment: Synthsilk robes, whisper pin, SOE Tesla stunner (2 fusion cells)

Bank: 25

Surges: rating: 15 | number: 3

Minor Guilds

DOCTOR SOBOK CHAAR

Headliner • Merchant 3 • Oubliette • Detective/Dreamtender

“Do you often have feelings of persecution? Perhaps I can help....”

Description: Doctor Chaar developed a high-tech method of electroshock therapy to use against patients whose particular malady was the practice of antinomy — black magic. Practicing on Leagueheim, she convinced local Church authorities to remand captured antinomists into her care, since her methods had cured at least one patient of his dark inclinations (although a near lobotomy could also do that). They figured better her than the Inquisition, whose arrival would only annoy their Merchant League neighbors.

What she hasn't revealed was that her technology is based around an Ur artifact she bought from a hobo

on Sutek. This odd device generates an electrical field unlike any Chaar has read about in the vast Academy Interrata archives. After a patient has been exposed to the fields while they sleep, they report strange dreams that are eerily consistent. They wander in a strange realm pregnant with an unseen presence whose name they somehow know to be the Pollen King. It never speaks or reveals itself, but all the dreamers know that it wants to grant them prosperity.

Chaar finally tried the machine on herself and had the same dream, but this time the presence showed itself as a giant eye floating in the night sky. A voice spoke in her mind, promising ultimate knowledge of Anunnaki secrets if she could collect and assemble a special device made from Ur tech. It showed her the pieces needed but not their locations. Obsessed with manufacturing the device, she has spent a fortune hiring various reclaimers to find the pieces and bring them to her. So far, she has only two of the five needed. She grows more and more desperate and impatient.

Characteristics:

Str	3	Wits	8	Pre	6
Dex	3	Per	3	Int	5
End	4	Will	5	Faith	4

Skills:

Charm	5
Empathy	8
Focus	7
Impress	9
Shoot	5

Actions:

Goal	Impact
<i>Castigate</i>	17
<i>Shake it off</i>	11 12 11

Capabilities: Customs (Court, Commons), Knowledge (Leagueheim, Obliette, Religion), Ranged Weapons (Slug Guns), Read/Speak Urthish, Science (Life)

Perks: Analyze Personality, Deduce, Guild Commission (Manager), Ingenious, Micro-Confessions

Resistance: Body 0 | Mind 6 | Spirit 0

Energy Shield: 5/10

Vitality: 21

Revivals: rating: 8 | number: 1

Equipment: Lank derringier, quantum radio, doctor's bag, Elixir (5 doses), handcuffs (TL7), Library think machine (TL5)

Bank: 10

Surges: rating: 11 | number: 1

SCAB HARBLOUGH

Headliner • Merchant 4 • Slayer • Thief

“A drunk walks into bar.... There's no punchline. Drunks do that all the time. What? Are you offended?”

Description: Scab is an insult comic popular among the elite of Criticorum. Whether it's nobles, merchants, or stuffy priests, he skewers them all to their

faces — and they love it. That's because, no matter how hard he hits them, he hits the little guy even harder. His comedy is mostly about punching down, bemoaning just how rotten the common folk are. Although the commoners hate him for it, they don't really get invited to the kind of soirees where he works.

But that's his day job... or evening job, considering that most of his customers pay to have him at their post-dinner parties. His real job is making a killing — literally. His comic persona is a fake identity to cover his actual identity as a member of the Slayers Guild. The character of "Scab Harblough" gets him into elite places across the Known Worlds. The fact that someone sometimes ends up dead in those places is just a coincidence, of course.

Characteristics:

Str	6	Wits	6	Pre	7
Dex	6	Per	7	Int	6
End	5	Will	5	Faith	4

Skills:

Charm	5
Disguise	7
Fight	7
Intrusion	7
Melee	6
Perform	7
Shoot	6
Sneak	8
Vigor	5

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
Dagger	12	4 dmg
<i>Shake it off</i>	8 8 7	Removes a state.
<i>Shoot laser pistol</i>	13	5 dmg; Laser
<i>Wow</i>	13	Targets are Wowed.

Capabilities: Customs (Court, Commons, Street-wise), Knowledge (Criticorum, Oratory, Slayers), Melee Weapons (Military), Ranged Weapons (Energy Guns, Slug Guns), Read/Speak Urthish

Perks: Guild Commission (Chief), Ingenious, Intruder, Keen Awareness, Legerdemain, Passage Contract, Riches (Good)

Resistance: Body 4* | Mind 4 | Spirit 0

* Hard-, Shock-, Slamproof

Vitality: 23

Revivals: rating: 9 | number: 2

Equipment: Shimmercloak (+2 *hide*), Smartsynth, Martech Gold laser pistol (3 fusion cells)

Bank: 15

Surges: rating: 11 | number: 2

GIDEON PATALIPUTRA

Headliner • Merchant 3 • Brewers • Artist/Explorer

"Try this — sip it, don't chug. Now, do you taste the hint of Aylon fire-palm lotus? Yes, I know: It's worth

a fortune, only blooming once per year. What if I told you I can replicate its taste much cheaper? How many casks would you buy?"

Description: Gideon is an avant-garde brewer of ecstatic concoctions: unique drinks that appeal to the adventurous tastes of the elite. He will go anywhere — into forbidden wastes, tepid jungles, or barbarian villages — in search of rare ingredients for new drinks.

He's a fifth-generation Brewer, the heir to his family's secrets for a number of renowned spirits. He has left the management of the breweries to his sister, Lati, so that he could pursue his passion for invention. His elderly mother tuts that this will be the ruin of the family's business, but his cousins are eager to ride his coattails into elite noble courts, guildhalls, and cathedral feast-day celebrations as his unique beverages become all the rage.

His current sponsor, Count Mohinder Rama Ghanjid, has sent him into Vuldrok space in search of a rumored concoction called "shadow milk," allegedly drunk by a rare brotherhood of runecasters in order to see into the future. Gideon is in search of an entourage to help him track it down.

Characteristics:

Str	5	Wits	4	Pre	6
Dex	6	Per	5	Int	7
End	6	Will	4	Faith	6

Skills:

Alchemy	7
Charm	6
Crafts	7
Drive	5
Fight	5
Empathy	4
Observe	5
Remedy	5
Shoot	6
Sleight of Hand	4
Vigor	6

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Befriend</i>	12	Target is Befriended.
<i>Entreat</i>	12	Target is Entreated.
<i>Invent</i> concoction	14	Narrated; create new drink from ready ingredients
<i>Shake it off</i>	9 7 9	Removes a state.
<i>Shoot pistol</i>	12	5 dmg

Capabilities: Armor (Combat), Customs (Court, Commons), Knowledge (Brewers, Cooking, Known Worlds and Barbarian Jumpweb, Shaprut, Ship-board Operations), Ranged Weapons (Slug Guns), Read/Speak Urthish, Science (Applied, Life), Transports (Landcraft)

Perks: Anthropologist, Guild Commission (Associate), Guts, Ingenious, Riches (Well-off), Royalties

Resistance: Body 3* | Mind 2 | Spirit 0
* Hard-, Shock-, Slamproof

Vitality: 24

Revivals: rating: 8 | number: 1

Equipment: Explorer's expedition medallion (TL5 think machine: compass, weather forecast, motion detector), Imman Vorton medium autofeed (3 clips), plasteel-studded leather jerkin, MedPack, Elixir (3 doses)

Bank: 10

Surges: rating: 9 | number: 1

Aliens

HU'ULURAH ("THE ANGEL CALANDRA")

Headliner • Etyri • Yeoman 5 • F.A.R. • Tycoon

"I am humbly flattered that you recognized me. That role was many years ago. Still, I do remember it well...." (*unfurls wings majestically; cue intake of breath by the crowd*)

Description: Hu'ulurah is a famous magic lantern star, known for her role as the angel Calandra in the epic series "Our Fallen Heaven." Although she retired from acting nearly 10 years ago, she is still recognized almost everywhere she goes in the Known Worlds. She has put her fame to work in the service of the Frontier for Alien Rights, mixing at high-class affairs with wealthy philanthropists and soliciting donations for the cause. Some whisper that she must be a spy, but she's really what she seems to be: a "face," a charismatic socializer.

The famous character she once played gives her an aura of holiness even among the most secular guilders, although she herself is practically an atheist — something she of course hides behind a veil of sanctity by adopting the mien and dialogue of the Angel Calandra whenever her piety is in question. It works every time, even on suspicious Orthodox doctrinal scholars (many of whom grew up watching "Our Fallen Heaven").

Characteristics:

Str	4	Wits	4	Pre	9
Dex	8	Per	8	Int	5
End	5	Will	7	Faith	5

Skills:

Charm	9
Focus	6
Impress	6
Shoot	6
Perform	8
Vigor	5

Actions:	Goal	Impact
Beak strike	7	2 dmg
*Befriend	18	Target is Befriended.
*Mesmerize	17	Target is Mesmerized.

Shake it off	11 13 11	Removes a state.
Talon strike	7	3 dmg

Capabilities: Knowledge (Etyri, Grail, Jumpweb, Theatre), Ranged Weapons (Energy Guns, Slug Guns), Read/Speak Urthish, Speak Etyrian

Perks: Ally (influential fans), Danger Sense, Friends in High Places, Independent, Professional Reputation (Expert), Riches (Well-Off), Trendsetter

Birthright: Claustrophobia, Flight (12m speed), Hollow Bones (-1 Vitality), Keen Eyes, Size (6)

Resistance: Body 0 | Mind 6 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 27

Revivals: rating: 11 | number: 2

Equipment: Fine-fashion robes, palm laser

Bank: 15

Surges: rating: 14 | number: 2

S'CAA'LA ("BUGHEAD JONES")

Headliner • Ascorbite • Merchant 1 • Purger • Reclaimer

(*unnerving silence*)

Description: S'caal'a is one of the tragic loners of his species whose antennae have been "clipped" — removed to prevent him from accessing the Song of his tribe. He was taken as a young child by Chainers and sold to the Purgers Guild on Bannockburn. A Sanctuary Aeon priest intervened and returned him to his homeworld of Severus, thinking she was doing some good. It only served as a terrible reminder of how cut off from his own kind he now was.

He retreated to the local Purgers guildhall and found work cleaning the sewers beneath the cities of Severus. He proved quite adept at finding all sorts of valuable things that should never have wound up down there, and he is now forging business relations with fences who can help him profit from his finds. These new friends have offered to send him off-world to places ripe with riches buried in the trash.

Characteristics:

Str	6	Wits	3	Pre	3
Dex	3	Per	6	Int	3
End	5	Will	3	Faith	4

Skills:

Alchemy	3
Animalia	5
Impress	5
Intrusion	6
Melee	5
Sneak	6
Tech Redemption	6

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Actions:

	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Impact</i>
<i>Daunt</i>	10	Target is Daunted.
<i>Shake it off</i>	8 6 7	Removes a state.
<i>Spear strike</i>	11	5 dmg; Hard (2-handed)

Capabilities: Customs (Streetwise), Knowledge (Beast, Purgers, Severus), Medical (Disease, Poison), Read/Speak Urthish, Speak Ascorbite, Tech Lore (TL5), Transport (Landcraft)

Perks: Contacts (junk sellers), Guild Commission (Associate), Hard Boiled (+2 coercion influence, +2 Mind Resistance vs Afraid/Terrified), Ingenious, Intruder, Keen Awareness

Affliction: Clipped (severed from the Song)

Birthright: Adaptability, Bloodsucker, Carapace, Far Leap (x2 distance), Fixed Development

Resistance: Body 3 | Mind 2 | Spirit 0

Vitality: 18

Revivals: rating: 6 | number: 1

Equipment: Portable incinerator (TL5), hovernet (TL7 anti-grav bag), spear

Bank: 5

Surges: rating: 7 | number: 1

TITO "SMITTY" SMYTHE

Headliner • Gannok • Merchant 2 • Town Crier • Detective

"Deacon Shao! Witnesses say you were seen at Marquis Louis Decados' lurid 'naked clowns' party. Care to comment? Is that clown makeup on your collar?"

Description: Smitty is an investigative journalist for the Town Criers Guild. While he is mainly stationed on Byzantium Secundus, he has gone to other worlds tracking down leads on stories. For the last few years, he was consigned by his editors to churning up gossip instead of following his true calling – hunting down stories of corruption. Lately, the guild, under influence from the Reeves and the Imperial apparatus, has been given more leeway to perform the role of actual journalism as a way to reform the pay-for-play practices that threatened to throw off the balance of power. Smitty is finally allowed to take off the ol' gloves and do the kind of hard-hitting stories he was born to write.

His friends wonder how long he can survive it. There are no freedom-of-the-press privileges in the Empire — such Republican ideals are long dead. Still, many groups support the practice of having a relatively neutral third party dig up dirt, presumably to keep everyone honest (or at least forcing them to hone their skills at hiding their schemes better). Smitty has a way of getting under people's

skin and getting them to blurt out exactly what they meant to keep secret.

When he's not trying to look nondescript, he wears a beat-up old leather trenchcoat and a tilted cap and grips a smoldering cigar in his teeth.

Characteristics:

Str	3	Wits	6	Pre	5
Dex	7	Per	7	Int	3
End	3	Will	4	Faith	3

Skills:

Academics	5
Disguise	6
Drive	4
Fight	5
Focus	5
Empathy	5
Intrusion	6
Knavery	7
Observe	7
Shoot	5
Sleight of Hand	5
Sneak	6

	<i>Goal</i>	<i>Impact</i>
<i>Detect lie</i>	8	Know if target is lying.
<i>Fifth-degree</i>	13	Tricks target into revealing information.
<i>Shake it off</i>	8 9 8	Removes a state.
<i>Shoot pistol</i>	12	4 dmg

Capabilities: Customs (Cathedral, Commons, Court, Streetwise), Knowledge (Byzantium Secundus, Town Criers), Ranged Weapons (Slug Guns), Read/Speak Urthish, Speak Tok Tok, Tech Lore (TL5), Transport (Landcraft)

Perks: All-Access Pass, Contacts (Reeve lawyer), Deduce, Guild Commission (Associate), Ingenious

Birthright: Dwarf (Size 4), Grease Monkey, Hungry Healer, Symbiot Immunity, Monkey Physique, Omnidigestion, Regeneration (heal 1 Vitality per span), Stench (unfavorable persuasion vs. non-gannok)

Resistance: Body 2* | Mind 2 | Spirit 0

* Shock-, Slamproof

Vitality: 16

Revivals: rating: 6 | number: 1

Equipment: Leather trenchcoat, Phoenix handgun autofeed (2 clips), telltale eye (TL5 monocle: magnify, IR, UV), mojo (TL5 think machine recorder connected to guild datanet), diffuser (TL5 belt buckle; emits perfumes to cover gannock stench; tech compulsion: Pretentious)

Bank: 10

Surges: rating: 8 | number: 1

The Changed

PIERRE DESHON

Headliner • Changed (mutant) • Merchant 3 • Prospectors • Scout

“Over on the ridge, 3 o’clock. They look like miners. They’re not. Decados marines. Get ready...”

Description: Pierre is a 10th-generation Prospector. He was not only born to the job, he was made for it — or rather, his ancestors were. They were genetically modified to need no oxygen source; they can convert the food they eat into oxygen. This allowed them to spend longer hours on asteroids and barren moons, as well as surviving when their spaceship’s hull or moonbase’s walls were breached — as could happen during the Emperor Wars.

The Prospectors Guild is well aware of the DeShon family’s special physical dispensation, but they keep it a secret. It actually makes the DeShons a sort of royalty among space miners. Every miner wants a DeShon nearby in case of trouble; they can get your unconscious body to safety when the oxygen suddenly departs.

Pierre isn’t a miner; he’s a scout. He performs advance recon on mining sites to make sure they’re safe and that no competition might object with weaponry. He also guards existing Prospector’s sites from spies, thieves, and enemy forces.

He doesn’t actually *need* his spacesuit’s oxygen supply, but he wears it to hide his Changed power, even in situations where his meal gives him well enough breathing time.

Characteristics:

Str	5	Wits	3	Pre	3
Dex	8	Per	7	Int	3
End	6	Will	3	Faith	4

Skills:

Crafts	4
Fight	5
Impress	6
Observe	6
Pilot	4
Remedy	4
Shoot	7
Survival	7
Tech Redemption	7
Vigor	5

Actions:

	Goal	Impact
<i>Shake it off</i>	9 6 7	Removes a state.
<i>Shoot laser rifle</i>	+1	8 dmg; Laser
<i>Spot</i>	13	Notices hidden people/things.

Capabilities: Knowledge (Madoc, Prospectors, Shipboard Operations), Ranged Weapons (Energy Guns), Read/Speak Urthish, Tech Lore (TL5, TL6, TL7), Transport (Spacecraft)

Perks: Gearhead, Guild Commission (Associate), Guts, Ingenious, Oriented, Passage Contract, Spotter
Changed power: Internal Respiration

Resistance: Body 6* | Mind 2 | Spirit 0

* ABC; Blaster-, Flame-, Hard-, Laser-, Shock-, Slamproof

Vitality: 20

Revivals: rating: 8 | number: 1

Equipment: Armored spacesuit (hindering, 24 h life-support), Martech Red assault laser rifle (5 fusion cells), plasma mattock (TL6; 2 dmg + Blaster), MedPak

Bank: 10

Surges: rating: 8 | number: 1

DAME ZSÓFIA POGANY XANTHIPPE

Headliner • Changed (mutant) • Noble 2 • Xanthippe • Questing Knight

“I don’t recommend that course of action. Your odds are 33.245%.”

Description: During the Emperor Wars, noble houses took many risks to gain an advantage. Even minor houses with no hope of attaining the throne maneuvered to become indispensable — or unsailable — to their royal-house allies and enemies. Zsófia’s mother was the product of her family’s attempt to eke such advantage.

Their holdings were on a spacestation near the Manitou jumpgate — the edge of vau territory. A vau ambassador out of the blue invited her family’s youngest scion, Eszter Pogany, to join an embassy trip into Vau Space, although she would not be allowed to bring any tech, including recording devices. The family, wanting to ensure that Eszter remembered everything she heard and saw, decided to activate an ancient technology they had recently found on a derelict spaceship: a Phavian Institute experimental “synaptic intensifier.” It had never been tested. Eszter lay in the humming glow of the hyperbaric-like chamber for 24 hours and emerged with enhanced mental potential. Before she had been a gregarious young woman, quick to joke, but after, she became cold and calculating. The vau didn’t seem to notice the difference. The family later suspected that the enigmatic aliens had chosen Eszter because they knew what the family was hiding and wanted them to use it upon her. Soon after she left for the trip, the spacestation became a casualty of the latest sortie in the wars, and the artifact was destroyed.

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No matter. Eszter knew that her time in the chamber had altered her genetic structure and that her progeny would inherit these changes. After she returned from her short and unfruitful embassy, she began vetting multiple suitors who would provide the best genetic matches for her planned number of children (six). She chose Baron Paavo Ehrlich Xanthippe for the father of her first child, whom she named Zsófia. Unfortunately, Zsófia's planned siblings never arrived: Her mother was killed in yet another senseless Emperor Wars conflict before she could conceive again. It remained for her father to raise Zsófia, although he could never really understand her.

Zsófia was shuttled from spacestation to moonbase to spacestation throughout her upbringing. Her father was landless due to the wars, so they relied on the hospitality of relatives, whose curiosity about Zsófia was enough to ensure many invitations. She hated her role as a toy to be queried at every new home. As soon as she reached majority, she pledged herself to the Company of the Phoenix and took the first mission that came her way: a trip to barbarian space, where no one knew about her special "gifts," so she could be judged by her merit alone.

Characteristics:

Str	5	Wits	8	Pre	3
Dex	6	Per	7	Int	3
End	4	Will	6	Faith	3

Skills:

Academics	8
Alchemy	5
Focus	9
Impress	5
Melee	5

Observe	6
Remedy	5
Shoot	7
Survival	6
Tech Redemption	5

Actions:

<i>Concentrate</i>	15
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Impact

Makes your next roll for a specific declared task favorable; any other roll is unfavorable.

<i>Shake it off</i>	13 15 12
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Shoot rifle	13
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Sword <i>strike</i>	10
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Removes a state.

9 dmg; Blaster

6 dmg

Capabilities: Customs (Court, Commons), Knowledge (Manitou, Shipboard Operations, Xanthippe), Military Weapons, Ranged Weapons (Energy Weapons), Read/Speak Urthish, Science (Life)

Perks: Noble Title (Dame), Imperial Charter, Imperial, Riches (Wealthy), Rise from the Ashes, Stoic Mind

Changed Power: Enhanced Intellect (spend 3 VP to make a single Mind characteristic-related roll favorable; uses per act = 2; Spirit-related persuasion rolls unfavorable)

Resistance: Body 3* | Mind 4 | Spirit 0

* Shockproof

Energy Shield: 5/10

Vitality: 20

Revivals: rating: 7 | number: 1

Equipment: Synthsilk jumpsuit, standard e-shield, longsword, SOE Crucible blaster rifle, 4 spare fusion cells, data copy of *The Measure*

Bank: 10

Surges: rating: 10 | number: 1