



Recipient: Vrìl-Ya Envoys

Author: SPIDERWEB

Concerning: Dossier on the Vau

This document has been prepared to brief you on everything known about the Vau. As you can see, it is astonishingly thin. The verified facts concerning the Vau and the Hegemony are all too few, and much of the data is incomplete. To this end, the opinions and speculations of many experts — some from as long ago as the Diaspora and Second Republic — have been compiled, in an attempt to complete the portrait. Only the most useful of such musings have been included, since any wrong assumptions here could prove deadly to agents who actually manage to infiltrate the Hegemony.

Good luck.

History

In 2845, the Vau first appeared to humanity and delivered a crushing defeat to the colonists of New Monaco (now Apshai). Three years of useless and vain attempts at retribution by various Diasporan governments eventually led to the Vau's acceptance of an official envoy, Benjamin Verden of House Justinian. While the raids into Hegemony space always resulted in the terrible deaths of the raiders, their frequency had become an annoyance to the Vau. They accepted Verden's visit in an attempt to quit the raids for good, with the veiled threat that, should this diplomacy fail, the Hegemony would act to disable humanity's ability to conduct the raids.

This threat caused panic and fear on many worlds, as word of it spread through the jumpweb. Many local governments were toppled by uprisings, their governors blamed for the aggression against the Vau, although it was often popular opinion that pressed these governments for victory in the first place. Noble families used the upheavals to move in and stabilize regions, safeguarding them until democratic governments could again be elected, while mercantile conglomerates seized power in other areas. Here and there, acolytes of the new and growing Church spoke out against such seizures of proper power, and urged calm in the face of the Hegemony's threat.

The Prophet himself broke a long fast and meditation to deliver a sermon concerning humanity's problem with the alien empire. Although the actual script of this sermon is lost, most theologians agree that the version handed down to us by Palamedes is correct. The Prophet warned humanity to "guard its own fields," and to worry not about the "wilderness encroaching from without," but to instead beware the "untamed wild within." This was one year prior to his own diplomatic mission in 2849, which resulted in his death during jumpgate travel.

Benjamin Verden was ferried by a Vau cruiser to the planet called "Vau" by most humans. (The name Verden gave for it in the Vau tongue — Shaduveen'Lan Tuomani — was hard to pronounce by those un-

trained in the language, and was only used by diplomats.) There he witnessed marvels of technology never yet seen by humans, and — judging from the details given in his reports — unachieved even by the later Second Republic.

Most observers today know about the repulsor plates (*bafuvupan dahum*), Life Cocoons (*eevsu'ud rumuld'hansth*), Smart Robes (*numunanth ofleed'hansth*) and lightsplinters (*halsh'rumu tla'a*). Everyone also knows that our own energy shields and blaster tech was developed by reverse engineering Vautech. It comes as no surprise to state that the Vau's own shields and blasters are more advanced than ours. Largely forgotten are Verden's accounts of collapsible buildings — somewhat like Smart Robes but on a massive scale — and flitters with remarkable maneuverability.

What few people realize today is that not all of Verden's report was widely published. Much of it was kept secret, shared only with certain officials. Most of these survived to become core members of the Second Republic's First Council, whereupon the information was sealed and stored with the Republic's nascent intelligence service. It was considered highly classified, and was only seen by certain military personnel and diplomats working the Vau frontier.

During the data purges of the Fall, the files were lost. The consistent failures of the noble houses, patriarch and Merchant League to gain any new advances in Vau diplomacy stem from this lack of key information. Indeed, it must have seemed to the Vau that humans had lost all the secrets of successful diplomacy, as inadvertent *faux pas* based on ignorance insulted countless Mandarins. Eventually, the Vau withdrew attempts at communication and remained removed from all but scant human contact for centuries, only coming forth once more after Vladimir's ascendancy.

Nonetheless, they were distant and their borders closed even more tightly than before. Previously, uninited forays into Vau space resulted in the invading ships being towed back to the Known Worlds. Now ships were often fired upon. If they did not immediately heed the warnings, they were destroyed.

During the Emperor Wars, Imperial Eye agents on both Cadiz and Manitou uncovered copies of Verden's original reports, along with successive data on Second Republic intelligence operations against the Vau. The Decados were unaware of the data on Cadiz, hidden in forgotten think machines buried deep under old diplomatic offices. The files on Manitou were obtained in Vau territory at the cost of two agents' lives. Strangely, no retribution or comment from the Vau followed this incident.

While these files have since been kept in the greatest secrecy, for the Emperor and his agents' eyes only, we suspect that some of the other intelligence services have portions of this information, gained through means best not discussed here.

This is information any agent would surely kill to obtain. You are privileged to read it now, by order of the Emperor himself. It is vital that you are as prepared as possible for this first full envoyship to the Hegemony since the Fall of the Second Republic.

The Vau

As you are surely well aware, the Vau have a caste society consisting of at least three castes: Mandarins (leaders), Soldiers and Workers. Hints suggest that there may be sub-classes within these castes, but no evidence of other castes is known.

Before discussing the castes, some general notes on physiology may prove helpful, since it differs somewhat between castes — genetic heritage seems to be the key decider in a Vau's caste role.

We believe the Vau are related to amphibians or reptiles. Their leathery skin resembles that of the Hironem, although their bone structure is quite different. Their legs suggest descent from a fleet-footed animal, although whether this was a predator, herd beast or scavenger is unknown. Too much time exists between the present Vau and their distant ancestors to draw any conclusions as to their evolution of consciousness and current culture.

Average height varies with caste. Mandarins are the tallest (average 10'), followed by Soldiers (8') and then Workers (6'). Girth or width also seems to vary by caste, with Soldiers the broadest, Workers average and Mandarins slender.

A Vau's eyes consist of large pupils with no whites, similar to the Ur-Obun and Ur-Ukar. However, unlike those cousin races, the coloring of Vau pupils varies. Visitors have witnessed black, blue and red. The shading seems to vary with mood, growing darker or lighter at times, although neither Verden nor other agents knew enough Vau psychology to determine which is more favorable.

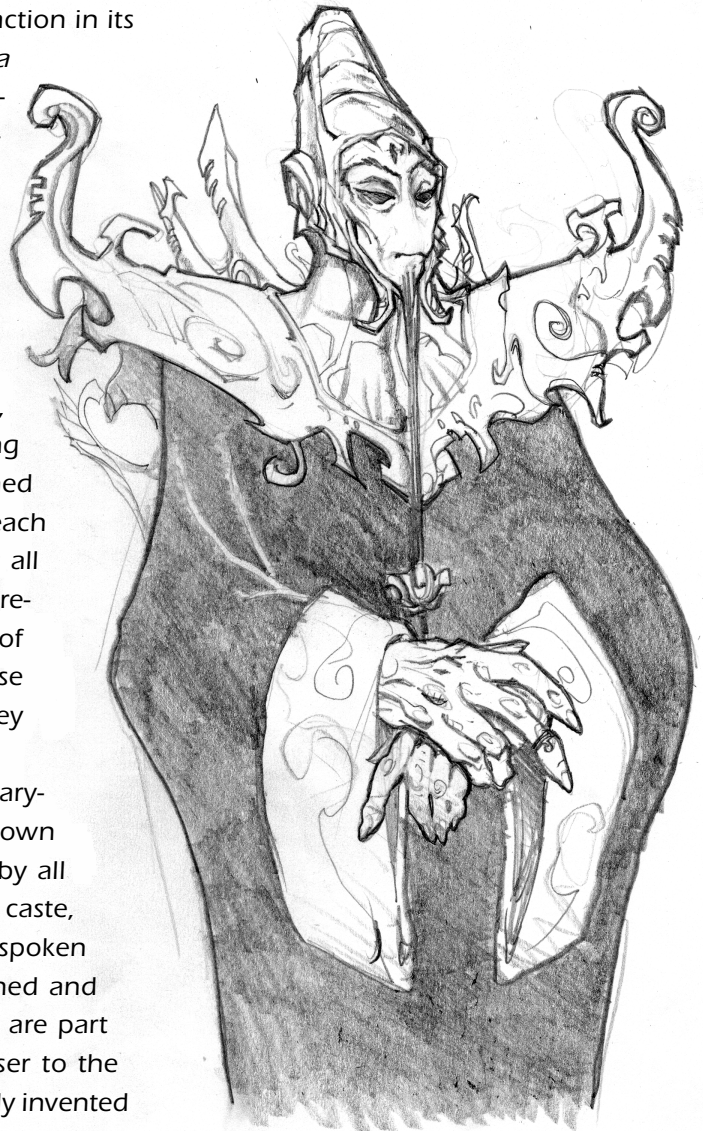
Vau hands are surprisingly humanlike, but with longer, more slender fingers, which appear to be double-jointed in at least the Worker caste.

Dress is surprisingly standard among castes — at least, among those living near humans on Vrili-Ya, Manitou and Apschai. There is variance in minor details, but on the whole, Mandarins tend to look very much alike in their green robes and aesthetically sculpted harnesses, while Soldiers wear the same armored uniforms, differing in badges and glyph symbols. Workers have the widest variety, from leggings to tunics and robes, depending on their labors.

We believe that caste behavior is not simply determined by societal expectations, but may involve actual genetic behavior patterns that control a Vau's reactions to certain circumstances and align his or her goals with the overall purposes of his caste. In other words, a Worker feels a real need to perform constructive labor and gains satisfaction in its performance and completion, while a Soldier has a *priori* martial assumptions, governed strongly by Mandarin "alphas." Indeed, it may be possible that Mandarins are much more intelligent than Soldiers and Workers.

Gender roles are unclear. Physical differences between sexes are not readily apparent, and few unclothed Vau have been witnessed; no examination of sexual organs exists. However, Verden claimed that both males and females fulfill roles within all castes, although he never explained his reasons for believing so. He did reveal an interesting fact: Vau are not birthed live, but hatch from eggs. They are born in clutches, each of which contains a variety of castes, although not all clutches host a Mandarin. A Vau's closest and most precious social ties are to his clutchmates, even mates of other castes. The luckiest Workers and Soldiers are those born in the same clutch as a Mandarin, whom they serve for the rest of their lives as favored advisors.

The Vau language contains many dialects, some varying radically from one another. The High Speech is known only to Mandarins, while Middle Speech is spoken by all castes. Three forms of Low Speech are known: Worker caste, Soldier caste, and the Foreign Tongue, that dialect spoken to non-Vau. It is also the diplomatic language learned and studied by Verden; the phonetic terms he recorded are part of this dialect. Ironically, the Foreign Tongue is closer to the High Speech than other dialects, since it was seemingly invented



Vau Mandarin

by Mandarins in recent history (i.e., just before or soon after human contact).

As for writing, there are three forms: prophecy glyphs (those used in the Valukesh Ha'eni oracle), *Val'eni* (High Speech glyphs), and *Ban'eni* (common glyphs). All of these scripts use pictographic characters, each with voluminous amounts of glyphs readers must memorize.

Verden's phonetic alphabet and vocabulary was based solely on oral transmissions; he did not understand enough glyphs to translate Vau writings. Second Republic diplomats realized that many of Verden's supposed "stems" were wrong — the Foreign Tongue apparently has little consistency in its adaptation of High Speech terms (this is perhaps intentional, to prevent foreigners from easily understanding High Speech).

Learning to speak Vau is a continual process of learning individual vocabulary terms and their numerous exceptions. Some concepts for which the Vau have words are untranslatable to us due to their alien nature. For instance, Verden recorded many words for smells he could not sense through his Smart Robe filter. After drinking what he believed to be a Vau wine, Verden swears to have seen a color that does not exist — at least, within the spectrum of normal human vision. As he stammeringly tried to describe it, a Mandarin, after realizing that it was color the human diplomat was attempting to comprehend, helpfully suggested some words (Verden chose a shortened version, *sho'in*) and even pointed out the color's location on the electromagnetic spectrum using a crystal prism and chart (it is below red, but above infrared).

The next morning, when the drink's effects wore off, Verden could not find the color again, leading him to believe the whole event may have been a practical joke. However, Jovan Ost, a famed Second Republic diplomat, claimed to have also seen *sho'in* revealed to him after a bout of unintentional food poisoning on Vril-Ya. (This event helped reveal just how much the Vau know about human anatomy, as his hosts apologetically purged him and returned him to health with only three draughts of a liquid.)

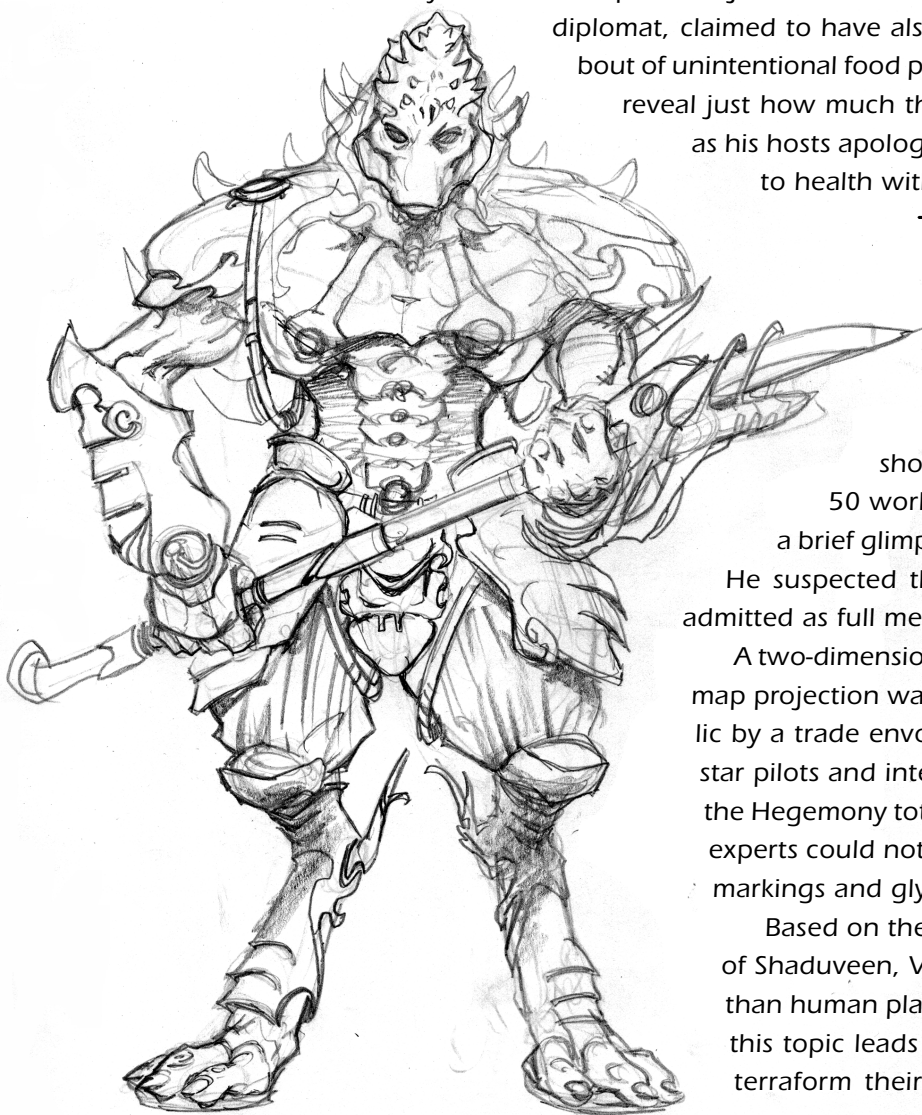
The Hegemony

At the time of Verden's visit to Shaduveen'Lan Tuomani ("Resplendent Fortress of Auspicious Entry," often called simply Shaduveen for short), the Hegemony consisted of at least 50 worlds — or so Verden judged, based off a brief glimpse he had of a holographic star chart.

He suspected that there were more worlds not yet admitted as full members of the Hegemony.

A two-dimensional image of such a three-dimensional map projection was captured during the Second Republic by a trade envoy. After study of this faulty image by star pilots and intelligence agents, it was assumed that the Hegemony totaled at least 61 planets. However, the experts could not agree on the interpretation of all the markings and glyphs.

Based on the strange descriptions Verden gave us of Shaduveen, Vau worlds are terraformed differently than human planets. Second Republic intelligence on this topic leads some to believe that the Vau do not terraform their worlds, but instead adapt to them



Vau Soldier

Soldier (note horns - unique to this caste)



using their advanced Smart Robe and Life Cocoon technology. Verden claims that he was forced to wear a Smart Robe that filtered out atmospheric poisons deadly to humans but pleasant to the Vau. Unable to smell the air himself, he could not translate the word his guides used to describe its unique scent, which the Vau seemed to treat as a treasure.

Aliens

This leads to the obvious topic of sentient alien races: Are there any living within the Hegemony that are as yet unknown to humans?

Verden's descriptions of never-before-seen-by-human eyes alien races was among the information kept secret from the general populace. During his time, troubles with the Ukari and Vau were already bad enough, and officials feared informing their constituents about more potentially hostile races. Later, intelligence agencies and Church officials helped to

hide this information from the commonwealth of humanity.

I present some of his descriptions below:

Velek (incomplete name): Verden was filled with a sense of dread upon meeting one of these creatures, apparently a large, sentient crustacean. Its width and overall size — in addition to massive pincer claws — caused him to assume it was a warrior, although successive intelligence reports point to more of a Worker role.

"Naga" (actual name unknown): Verden witnessed large, sentient snakelike aliens that could rise on their sinuous torsos to stand as high as most humans. Their tails ended in a radial array of highly dextrous tentacles by which they manipulated objects and weaponry. He did not learn this race's name, and so dubbed them "Naga" (*Nagas* plural), after a mythological beast from ancient Urth.

"Edgewalker" (actual name unknown): These tall, broad humanoids could be mistaken for severely Changed humans, so greatly does their basic physiology resemble ours. They are, however, mishapen: broad shoulders, thick necks and slim waists. What's more, the members in the group Verden saw had different, shockingly bright skin colorings and patterns: dark black with thick white stripes, red with blue stripes, and blue with orange stripes. They walked with a regal discipline Verden had before seen only among martial arts experts, leading him to believe that those he saw were warriors. The name comes from the only words Verden's guides used to describe them: "They walk the edges of frontiers."

There may, of course, be many other races as yet unknown. We believe that only some of those listed above have free sovereignty; others may exist confined to their homeworlds (such as the G'nesh of Apshai?).

Technology

The most formidable threat the Vau pose is their very mystery. We cannot control what we don't understand. Even once understood, however, the Vau have a vast superiority in technology and resources.

Starships

The Vau use an advanced alloy for their ship hulls which we have never been able to analyze. Certain Second Republic corporations supposedly made some leeway in studying samples, but the results were considered corporate secrets. From an era where corporate security rivaled that of the central government, none of this research has survived in the intelligence records we inherited, and the guilds have not come forth with such information. Whatever the metal is, it is recognizable for its greenish-coppery tint.

Vau ships have no gun emplacements, but instead harness a massive plasma ball kept suspended be-

tween two, three or four generator struts (the larger the hull, the more struts). The kind of field necessary to contain this roiling ball of energy is immensely strong, far beyond known tech standards. Even more impressive is the ability to selectively open and direct the field, funneling energy outward like a blaster. It is this plasma ball which powers all ship systems, include the prodigious energy shields.

Obviously, it would seem the prime target for any attack. However, the field is so strong that ship hulls have crumbled under fire before the field disintegrated. Of course, this was only tried successfully once, in an engagement with a Li Halan dreadnought against what we assume was a destroyer class vessel. The hull was shattered enough to harm the struts, whereupon the field collapsed. The remains of the ship still retained a stored charge, enough for the ship to flee the region with slight shields intact, preventing study of the remains by the Engineers Guild.

It is unclear just how many hull types the Vau possess, but their variety seems limited, at least based on what ships patrol the Hegemony border. It is entirely possible that we have viewed only warships, and that various civilian ships roam within the Hegemony itself.

As for the patrol ships, a few have been classified: a shuttle (well shielded), a small explorer class vessel, a frigate class, a destroyer and a cruiser. Rumors of a dreadnought are hard to verify. Such a thing surely exists, but has not been seen since the first retribution for trespass against Apshai millennia ago.

Instead of assault landers, Vau seem to rely on smaller, well-armed and shielded shuttles that cluster around a carrier. Again, this was only witnessed at Apshai, and only hearsay tells of it.

Personal Weaponry

Mandarins seem to carry no weapons, but their Valukesh Ha'eni (see below) warn them of dangerous situations or environments. Rarely is a Mandarin without his Soldier escort, usually six per Mandarin. Besides their excellent energy shields and crystalline armor, Soldiers most often bear energy staves, short staffs capable of emitting beams of blaster fire, either single shot, wide-area spread, or bursts of multiple fire. In addition, a retractable blade allows the weapon to be used in melee to good effect.

Perhaps due to the effectiveness of these Soldiers and their weapons, Verden witnessed no weapons worn by other castes or aliens within the Hegemony. Tools like knives and hatchets were seen, but no other devices designed for martial use. Do not be fooled, however; surely other weapons exist.

Religion and Occult Powers

As yet, we have no idea whether or not the Vau — or any race within the Hegemony — has exhibited psychic or theurgic abilities. We have no idea what sort of religion the Vau follow — if indeed, it they have a religion and not simply a highly ritualized form of Anunnaki-inspired science or culture.

We do know that they have greater knowledge of the Anunnaki than any race yet encountered. Verden translated their word for the Ur races as "Progenitors," for they spoke of them as "great architects of the universe," and "mentors to younger races."

They revere a device called the "Valukesh Ha'eni," a sort of prophecy think machine allegedly capable of foretelling not only the outcome of individual fates but of whole societies. Every major undertaking witnessed with a Mandarin involved consultation of the Valukesh Ha'eni. Only if the glyphs it revealed were considered auspicious would the Vau take action; otherwise, he would end diplomacy sessions and close off borders.

These glyphs are most curious. Verden viewed a "prophecy invocation" and saw moving images, resembling animated pictograms merging from one into another.

However, these glyphs seem highly interpretive, for Mandarins have often left meet-



Worker (note single crest)

ings early to meditate upon the outcome of an invocation, and some have claimed to “seek dreams” to gain greater clarity. Thus, we assume that much of a Mandarin’s role involves training in philosophy, art, science and every major cultural endeavor, all to better “read” the prophecy glyphs. Mandarins show deference to others based on such wisdom.

Beyond the Valukesh Ha’eni’s prophecy function, it also seems to serve as an all-purpose think machine advisor, warning Mandarins of unexpected conditions and sometimes translating unknown words for them. It perhaps also acts as a sensor device.

There are two metaphysical topics of extreme importance to the Vau, to an almost theological degree: Time and Holism.

Time

The Vau are obsessed with time. To them, the universe is an ongoing process of increasing order amidst chaos. Presumably, the chief task of a Mandarin is to help Order to triumph over Chaos. Metaphors for time as a river or stream are ubiquitous.

However, they feel no urgency in their task. Mandarins often take days to decide a course of action, and do not like to be rushed. Once action is decided upon, Soldiers and Workers accomplish tasks with efficiency and timeliness.

Holism

The Vau seem very concerned with the conceptual wholes that encompass parts. In other words, they are concerned with groups over individuals. Every part must have a place within a greater context (a “whole”). Mandarins seem unnerved by pieces they cannot place, and often endeavor to discover what roles people and things serve.

This is one of the most obscure topics on which we can provide little advice. Consultation with expert Oubliette Mind Physicks, Reeves negotiators, Church missionaries and noble diplomats provides little agreement on means by which to exploit this trait.

Customs

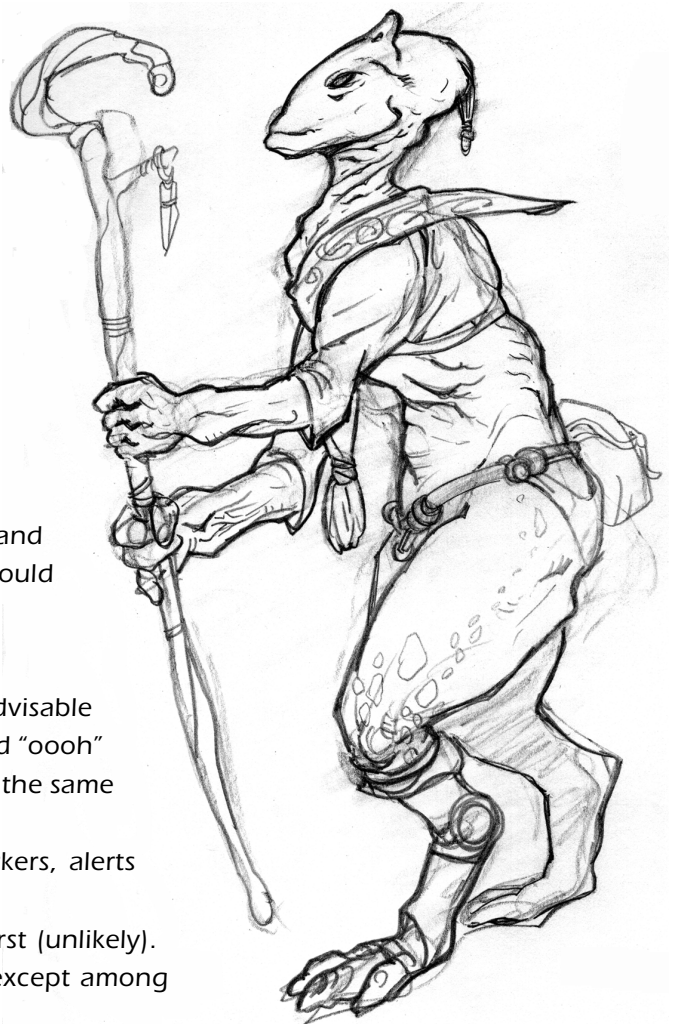
Years of diplomatic encounters — both successful and not — have taught us some behaviors every diplomat should learn and heed when meeting the Vau.

Greetings

Upon meeting a Vau (especially a Mandarin), it is advisable to form an “o” with the mouth and make a deep-throated “oooh” sound. This seems to connote respect and well-being at the same time.

Do not show teeth when smiling. It unnerves Workers, alerts Soldiers and displeases Mandarins.

Do not offer your hand unless the Vau offers his first (unlikely). Vau seem to have a rigid concept of personal space, except among clutchmates.



Vau Worker

Always begin a conversation with pleasantries; coming straight to the point is insulting. If possible, talk around a problem in metaphors. This greatly pleases Mandarins. For this reason, al-Malik and Li Halan nobles have had good success where more plain spoken Hazat and Hawkwood nobles have failed. (This is no condemnation of those fine houses, simply a statement about Vau relations.)

Presenting Gifts

Vau Mandarins often appreciate gifts, especially magic lantern and holovid entertainments. If they are pleased enough, they sometimes give valuable gifts in return: artificially intelligent artforms or miniature golem servitors are among the most prized.

Farewells

As with a greeting, a farewell is best accomplished with the “oooh” sound. A bow is customary when leaving a Mandarin, but not necessary among Soldiers and Workers.

Is is helpful, but not required, to summarize a discussion with some simple, appreciatory comment, such as “My time has seen great benefit,” or “How auspicious the hours have been.” Ambassador Sing Chou Li Halan had amazing success with haiku poetry.

Politely Saying “No”

Never say “no.” It is extremely rude. Instead, state some circumstantial reason why you cannot respond positively to a request. Try to foist the blame on an object or the weather, instead of upon oneself. (The Vau seem to deny free will, instead attributing actions to fate, which can manifest through objects or people.)

Example: When requested to provide jumpkeys to a Mandarin, instead of denying the request outright, try “I am most apologetic for these keys’ inability to leave my ship; they are inclusive of its whole.” (See “Holism,” above.)

Summation

There is nothing more we can provide. All else is unsubstantiated hearsay, which could get you into great trouble if acted upon falsely. Needless to say, any confirmation of this information which you can provide or add to will not only greatly aid future diplomats, but initiate rich rewards.

Travel in the Light!

