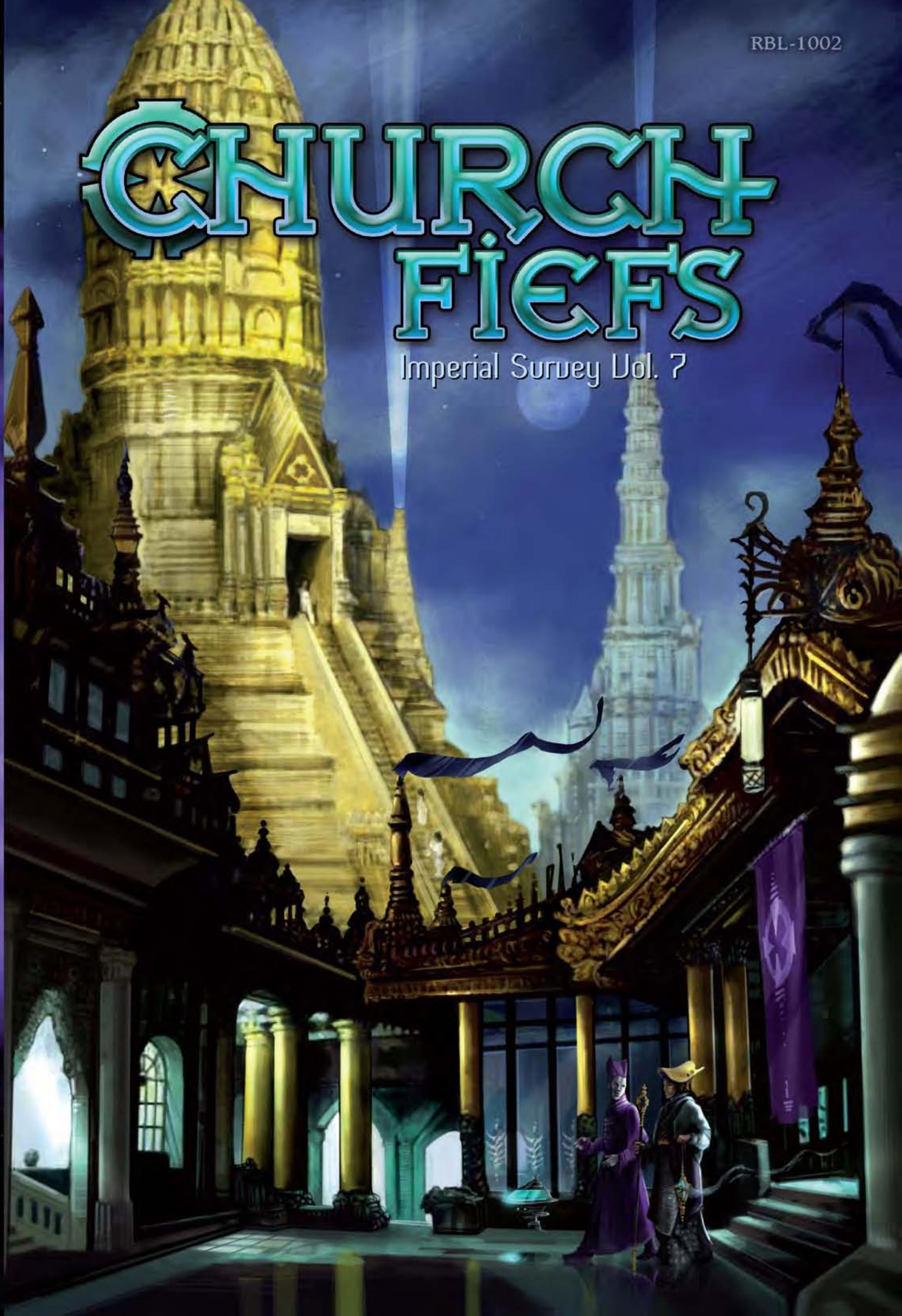


CHURCH FIEFS

Imperial Survey Vol. 7

FADING SUNS™



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Imperial Survey Vol. 7



A Fading Suns Sourcebook

Church Fiefs Credits

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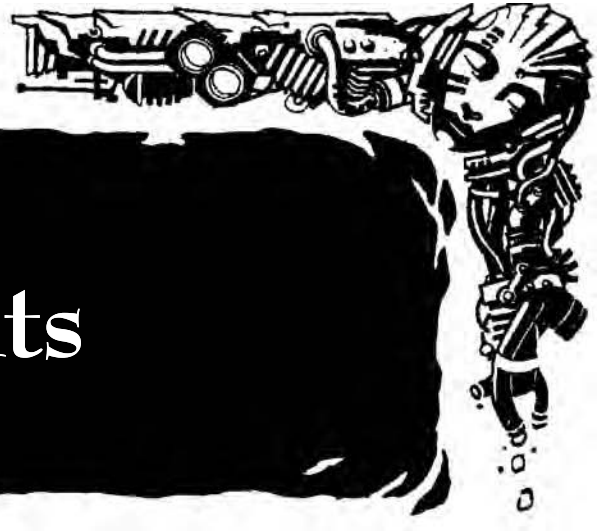
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SIR TORENSON'S ROUTE



Articles of Faith

"No one can stand between the Light and the Dark. To live is to choose—a Quest for the Light or to be embraced by the Dark"

Illuminations 2:7, Omega Gospels

Your Imperial Majesty,

I write herein with the split quill of my fore-fathers, one meaning per sentence is guildsman's fare. My task is done, my Emperor. This missive, and indeed this entire tome, is not only destined for you who know my travails and my, shall we say, quirks, but also to those as yet unnamed who will make use of this work. That is unless I miss my guess and this is indeed for your personal use alone. If that is the case, then I apologize in advance for my unashamed sermonizing. In my pride, hubris and defense, I will assume this was one of the qualities that suggested myself for this task.

Three years hence you commissioned me to tour the worlds held by the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun and to produce a survey.

I hope I have learnt from the less than satisfactory Imperial surveys. I mean no disrespect to the authors, noble knights of your own banner, one and all, but—and I pray to have avoided the same pitfalls—their penmanship was enjoyable, but not apt to conceal their prejudices, embroiled as they were in the ambitions of their houses. No man, as the ancients say, can serve two masters.

The peculiarities of my own situation should inure me from similar accusations.

Ten years ago I began my second tenure in the Pancreator's service in that most excellent company, the

Swords of Lextius. Shortly afterwards, I had the pleasure of meeting you. My aunt, the Marquessa Agneta, was overseeing your coronation; it was my honor to assist her and, in extenso, you. As this one tenure expires, another begins. It seems no coincidence that my first task as a Knight of the Phoenix is the writing of this report. The hand that feeds me is, ultimately, my own. In that, I am honored to say that I have reported throughout cleanly and concisely, sine ira et studio, to you and whomever else it may concern. Such was my task at its inception and now at its completion.

Above all else this missive is one of faith. My companions have oft chided me and encouraged a belief in explanation and a reliance on the rhetoric of science, that most untrustworthy of panacea. It has been my humble pleasure—and truth be told, one of my unspoken aims—to bear witness as they have learnt some measure of wisdom, and faith throughout our travails. I trust that the need for such education amongst my current audience is absent.

I have traveled the stars for you, my Lord Emperor, and walked the paths of the Holy. I have seen great darkness, great despair, and yet great hope. I pray to the Pancreator, not for the forgiveness of those I may offend (may my House find it in their hearts to forgive me) but that these words may prove useful.

*By the Grace of the Pancreator; his servant, and yours,
Sir Peregrine Obadiah Torenson*





Chapter One: Artemis

The properties of the Church fall throughout the Known Worlds, as befits the Celestial light shining to all reaches of the darkness. I began my journey, my quest, nigh on three years and so many jumps ago.

History

History almost passed Artemis by. Indeed, the planet would have remained nothing more than a footnote on the pages of time had not Saint Amalthea been touched by Grace there. Its jump co-ordinates were the last discovered leading from Holy Terra. The true thrust of adventurous exploration and discovery happened at the edges of civilization, the zaibatsu pushed further and further, seeking to extend their knowledge and wealth. The only explorers plying their trade in the Holy Terra system were the old, the infirm, or the untrustworthy. But every now and again they struck gold.

Achilles Panagiotidis was one of these washed out prospectors, he had been put out to pasture by his zaibatsu, whose name is lost to us. They did not object when he bought out his contract and set up in business as a mineral surveyor on Saturn's moons. He had a ship, a crew and very little hope of anything better but he was his own master.

No one knows how Achilles found the new jump route, some claim he stumbled across Ur ruins on Titan in a drunken stupor, others say he was ever a Sathraist, gifted a dark vision as a reward for who knows what deeds. All that is certain is he discovered a new jumproute, the last emanating from old Urth. In February 2741, Achilles Panagiotidis discovered Artemis.

Four months later the planet had killed him.

The planet Achilles found was no paradise, indeed, it was only borderline inhabitable. Its atmosphere possessed just enough oxygen to sustain life long enough for Achilles to set up base camp. Long enough for Urth to become aware of the newly found world, and long enough for Achilles and his crew to succumb to a virulent strain of virus that lurked within the planet's ecosystem. Later, medical researchers named the condition induced by the virus "skeletalosis", the few survivors called it "Achilles' Doom".



Artemis Traits

Ruler: Sanctuary Aeon

Cathedral: Cathedral Noun (Sanctuary Aeon)

Agora: Engineers/Charioteers

Garrison: 5

Capital: Demiopolis

Jumps: Three

Adjacent Worlds: Holy Terra (dayside)

Solar System: Thyone (Sun), Arge (0.42 AU), Mileta (0.8 AU), Artemis (Hyale, Phylinone) (1.1 AU), Aura (7 AU), Maera (18 AU), Jumpgate (49 AU)

Tech: 5 (some medical tech approaches level 6–7)

Human Population: 70,000,000

Alien Population: 35,000 (mostly Obun)

Resources: Luminite, rainstone

Export: Luminite, rainstone, medical supplies and skills.

Landscape: Its two major continents, Notichora and Boreichora, are separated by an equatorial ocean. The planet's tilted axis places the north and south poles respectively in permanent light and darkness

The newly arrived colonists had no cure for the virus. Indeed, at that time, there was none. They were exposed within moments of stepping into their new Garden of Eden. The readings they took from orbit before touching down showed much life, both plant and animal. They did not show the delicately balanced ecosystem. They could not have known that Artemis was a death-trap.

Over the course of their evolution, the native flora and fauna had built up a natural resistance to the virus; indeed, a good proportion of the ecosystem was reliant on it. Achilles

and his crew knew nothing of this, and were unaware of what struck them down. The library of Demiopolis holds the medical detail, which I will spare you, suffice is to say the first colonists wasted away to lifeless husks within four months.

But their sacrifice was not in vain. Impending death gave their efforts to find a cure desperate energy; the groundwork they laid down proved invaluable to the second wave of colonists. Achilles' former employers sent a medical research team in the hopes of finding a cure and, more profitably, a new source of biotechnological resources. Standing on the shoulders of the dead Achilles and his companions, these scientists fashioned an alpha version of the eventual cure. Their discovery was fascinating. The skeletosis virus was endemic to Artemis, symbiotically suffusing the local flora and fauna, increasing their bone mass. Unfortunately, human bodies were not equipped to deal with the virus and fell prey to it. Human life could not survive on Artemis without either weekly inoculation against the oppressive virus or, at best estimate, seven generations of exposure and adaptation. Artemis was, to all intents, a dead world.

The planet would have stayed an uninvolved backwater were it not for the intervention of Dr. Santiago Valdez. Dr. Valdez was the foremost, indeed the only, practitioner of a radical offshoot of the science of terraforming. Not for him the painstaking ministrations of Doramos, he desired a faster, easier and above all else, cheaper way of sculpting a world's face. He based his researches on the biological rather than the geological, claiming that, with the correct tools, one could subvert a planet's biosphere via viral implants on a planetary scale. Unfortunately for him, he was born two generations too late. The Diaspora was coming to an end, the golden age of terraforming died with Doramos, his disciples scattered to the winds, more importantly, there were no planets left. At least none the zaibatsu would turn over to an unknown scientist for the purposes of experiment. Until Achilles' sacrifice. For all his faults, Valdez recognized an opportunity when he saw one. The newly discovered Artemis promised scientific immortality. He wasted no time. Even before the second wave of settlers collapsed under the weight of their grotesque skeletons, he presented his five-year plan for Artemis to the board of shareholders of the Eco Green Organisation (EGO), the foremost terraforming company in the Known Worlds. His evangelical enthusiasm and technical expertise (not to mention his low overheads) convinced them to give him Artemis. Such was their generosity they demanded sole rights to the basic patents derived from the first fifteen years of research performed on the planet—unheard of.

Not that Valdez cared. All he saw was the world that was to be his own. Interestingly, Second Republic files recently discovered in the Amalthean archives at Mataria Magarten show that terraformers were five times more





likely to succumb to delusional psychoses than the next highest risk profession. (The professional political class, followed closely by holo-vid actors and political science academics.)

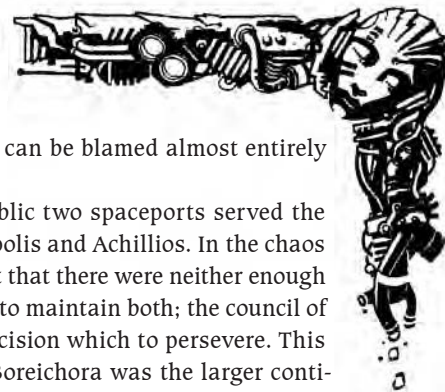
Valdez survived longer than Achilles. Indeed, he outlived approximately 37% of the indigenous biomass of Artemis. The bioforming was an ecological disaster, although Valdez recorded he was "exultant to have at last been proved right". Valdez had not fully considered (or, given his nature, did not care about) the implications of altering the viral symbiosis. The virus existed in true symbiosis with the biosphere, as opposed to a parasitic arrangement. Neither could exist alone. Valdez successfully eradicated the virus from large sections of the world, and in doing so, condemned much of the local fauna and flora to extinction. The second phase, transplanting Urthish stock, destroyed not only the existing virus-dependent life, but also the life-cycles they propagated. Valdez had wiped out the biological memory of the planet.

By the time his disastrous activities came to light, it was too late to undo the damage. The sentiment of the Republic had turned against the terraformers; eco-concerns were growing and gaining popular support. Removing Dr. Valdez from prominence lest he attract even more bad publicity during a difficult time, made economic sense. The EGO pensioned him off to a Leagueheim research facility, where he wrote articles on bioforming in general and the Artemis experiment in particular.

So was Artemis colonized with death and destruction, an ironic start for the home of the healers.

I should take this opportunity to name and thereby thank my companions. Loyal Shiro, most mercurial of guildsmen, Charioteer of high renown and part owner of our steed on this crucial errand, the good ship *Volshebnik*. Krieger, who, were he less experienced and more innocent could be mistaken for my squire. Father Trefillion von Gottwuerfel of the Eskatonic Order, a seeker after the mysteries. Less a member of my entourage, more a fellow pilgrim. And lastly, but never least, Taudwon Shavasti ap Gwent. A faithful retainer of my father, and his father before him, bound to our bloodline by her unswerving devotion to duty and the flippant curse of a vagrant al-Malik scoundrel. My father promised she would see Holy Terra before her end; I count myself fortunate for the opportunity to discharge both his promise and some small measure of my bloodline's gratitude for her service.

I now write about the salient points of Artemis' geography, for these are integral to the politics of the planet. Artemis orbits Thyone, its sun, in the standard elliptical, Shiro informed me, but the planet itself revolves at a certain angle from the perpendicular. This sounded like so much guildsman's rhetoric until he underlined the practical implications. The angled rotation places the north and south polar-regions into permanent light and darkness, respectively. The shadow, no pun intended, of this anomaly falls across both the history and current political climate of Artemis, of which more later.



Artemis was a crippled world bereft of a fully functioning biosphere. Life there was hard and expensive, for no obvious reward. Such was the assessment of its corporate owners. They cut back supplies and support for the few hardy colonists ministering to Artemis. We do not know how long this continued before the colonists had enough, nor do we know the leaders of the revolution that eventually seized the planet from zaibatsu control. Corporate records of the time tend not to detail setbacks (they were public domain). They mention “terrorist actions” and “anti-social agitation”, euphemisms for workers taking the law into their own hands. Artemis’ own records are surprisingly blank; local historians either trace their culture back to the semi-mythic Achilles or the semi-divine Amalthea and her *comes in spiritu*, Sata Binte Abram. What had been once a totalitarian capitalist state under the zaibatsu had devolved into canton rule by the time Sata Binte Abram first set foot upon Artemis. She is generally revered as the herald of Amalthea, but that does her a disservice, on Artemis she is held in even higher regard than that honor alone would allow.

Since the times of Achilles and Valdez, the Artemisians’ greatest fear was viral infection. Valdez had not completely eradicated the virus. From time to time, someone, usually an off-world explorer or artefact hunter, would bring back more than they bargained for from the hinterlands. One such treasure hunter, a paleo-ethnologist by the name of Cassidy had exhumed fossilized remains of an Artemisian dinosaur in the southern dark zone. Unfortunately for him, and the city of Demiopolis from where he attempted to ship his cargo off-world, the bones were laced with fossilized virus. Once again in proximity to warm flesh, the virus awoke.

Fortunately Sata Binte Abram was present. A follower of Saint Amalthea, and highly skilled healer in her own right, she had studied the colonization of Artemis and Dr. Valdez’s bioforming. Finishing her studies on planet, she quickly put her skills and knowledge to work, stopping the outbreak of skeletosis, but not before a tenth of the population of Demiopolis were infected. The Council leader thankfully made her a grant of land (taken from the skeletonized excitzens). It was on this land that the first Temple of Eternal Sanctuary was built. And here that the Mataria Medgarten stands to this day.

Thus the Sanctuary Aeon gained its first foothold on Artemis. This became a current stranglehold after the Fall, amid a tale of jealousy and competition.

Kingston and Chapaev were two native noble houses, both alike in dignity. Both grew out of geographical and mineral wealth and ruled Artemis in tandem. House Chapaev grew rich on the profits of the northern continent’s (Boreichora) rainstone mines, House Kingston in the southern continent (Notichora) controlled luminite production. Chapaev was the more powerful, but by never enough to destroy Kingston, in truth their leaders preferred easy profits together to the risk of war against each other.

House Chapaev’s fortunes waxed in parallel with the growing popularity of the Sanctuary Aeon, as Kingston’s

waned. This state of affairs can be blamed almost entirely on a quirk of geography.

During the Second Republic two spaceports served the continental capitals, Demiopolis and Achillios. In the chaos of the Fall, it became evident that there were neither enough spare parts nor skilled labor to maintain both; the council of cantons had to make the decision which to persevere. This was not a difficult choice. Boreichora was the larger continent, both in land mass and population, hence it had more representatives on the council, and the Temple of Eternal Sanctuary was situated in Demiopolis, the northern capital. Despite the many and varied arguments of the Notichorans, the decision was made to preserve Demiopolis spaceport. Or as the Notichorans phrased it: “cut us loose to starve”. Their prediction was not far from the truth. Their link to the stars severed, all commerce in Achillios, and therefore Notichora, had to be routed via Demiopolis. Demiopolis leeches the life from Achillios. Notichorans historically felt marginalized, this was now exacerbated. Political influence followed the shift in economic power. Chapaev rose. Kingston fell.

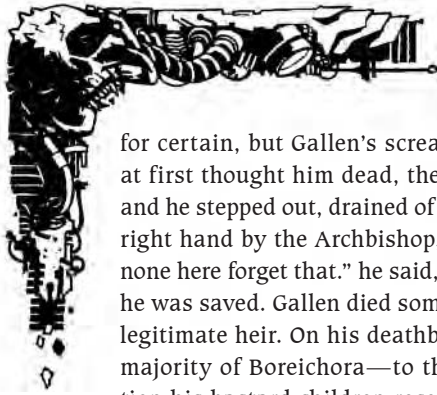
This worked in favor of the Sanctuary Aeon during the reign of Archbishop Yamuna Istaga (4366–4450). During his tenure, the last Duke of House Chapaev, Gallen called “The Wise”, fell sick with the ancient virus, now called “Achilles’ Heel” by some wags, while exploring the zone of northern lights. By the time Gallen returned to Demiopolis, skeletosis had taken hold. The virus imbedded itself most deeply in his skull, causing bone shards to begin growing inwards. The screams of Gallen were reportedly “enough to send a man to an early grave”. No healer could help him. Sata Binte Abram’s knowledge of the virus was lost in the Fall. After seven days and seven nights of uninterrupted anguished screaming, Archbishop Istaga presented himself at the gates of the Manse Chapaev. He told the guards he had “business with the master of the house”. He went up to Gallen’s bedchamber alone. What happened therein no one knows

Skeletosis

Skeletosis affects the victim’s bones. Once contracted, the bones begin to grow heavier and bigger, causing extreme lethargy, then pain, then ultimately death. (The skull grows thicker, both inwards and outwards—eventually crushing the brain. Long before this happens, hip, shoulder and spine fuse.)

In game terms, every three weeks after contracting the disease, the character takes one permanent vital damage level (incurring the penalties for that as normal)—after 15 weeks the character will have taken 5 vital damage levels (–10 penalty on everything), after 18 weeks they are dead. One partially beneficial side-effect of skeletosis is the increased bone thickness and density, which grants extra defence against damage. Each 3 weeks after contracting the disease the character gains one point of effectively sub-dermal armor.





for certain, but Gallen's screaming stopped. His retainers at first thought him dead, then his chamber doors opened and he stepped out, drained of all color and supported at his right hand by the Archbishop, "I owe this man my life, let none here forget that," he said, then promptly collapsed. But he was saved. Gallen died some twenty years later, without legitimate heir. On his deathbed, he willed his lands—the majority of Boreichora—to the Sanctuary Aeon on condition his bastard children receive landed titles. Archbishop Istaqa did this; consequently making his sect the biggest landholder on the planet.

The only dissenting voices came from Notichora; House Kingston was not amused. Their bid for pre-eminence shattered with the ceding of Chapaev lands to the Sanctuary Aeon. They faced then the truth that becomes apparent to every opponent of the Amaltheans. To wit: there is no more popular faction within the Known Worlds, not the Orthodoxy, not the Charioteers, not even, and it pains me to write this, the Emperor. No one can act against them without massive popular backlash. Though few act upon this knowledge, it guided the steps of the greatest Amalthean leaders, Istaqa, Madost, even back to their sainted founder herself. That none of these leaders abused this exalted position speaks not only for their goodness but also their political acumen.

Recent History

At first glance, the Emperor Wars seem to have passed Artemis by. But here appearances are deceptive. True, Artemis was not scarred like Stigmata or Byzantium Secundus, but to say it remained untouched would be a gross simplification. Nothing escaped the last fifty years unchanged.

The vulgar transports of war, battle and death, did not alight on Artemis for several reasons. Firstly, Artemis is a backwater. The residents of the planet know this from the moment of their birth, it is drummed into them with every beat of their heart. Strategically speaking, Artemis is a backwater. It is connected to the Jumpweb only once. It has decent mineral resources but nothing irreplaceable; the only resource of large-scale invasion-worthy significance is the Sanctuary Aeon. But the repercussions, physical and spiritual, to anyone daring to strike at the healers of Amalthea hardly bear contemplation.

Assuming anyone would be so crass as to consider invasion—and one hopes any leader capable of mounting such an expedition would also have accumulated wisdom enough to rule it out—they would shortly encounter the second reason for Artemis', relatively, pain free Emperor Wars. There was only one route for invasion: via Holy Terra. Even were Artemis not ruled by a sect of the Universal Church, the chances of any invasion fleet forcing passage through, arguably, the third best guarded system in the Known Worlds are negligible. *Ita vero* I would rank the defenses of Stigmata and, marginally, Byzantium Secundus as more impregnable than those of Holy Terra, that analysis considers only standing defenses, not incipient reinforcements.

But that is not to say Artemis had an uneventful war.

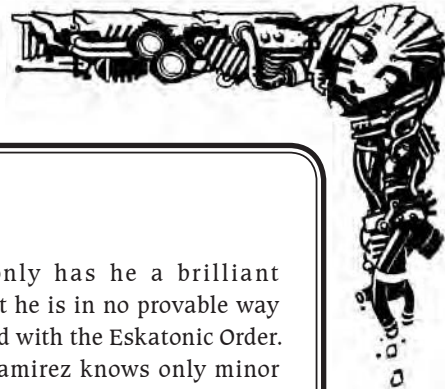
The Sanctuary Aeon has never seen a demand on its services like that of the last five decades. At the onset of hostilities, many Prthivi Maters and Paters traveled off-world to tend the needy. As the scope of the conflict expanded from what at first seemed an isolated border dispute between the Li Halan and the Decados into a full blown interstellar conflict, the resources of the Sanctuary Aeon were stretched beyond breaking point. The demand for healers outstripped the supply. Severely wounded cases were brought to Artemis for treatment.

Mataria Medgarten houses the most advanced healing technologies in the Known Worlds—the doctrine of Merciful Technals allows the Sanctuary Aeon to use otherwise heretical means for healing purposes. The unwritten corollary of this is the technologies stay on Artemis. As blitzkrieg advances gave way to battles of attrition across a dozen or more systems, the number of wounded brought to Artemis increased exponentially.

Soon those requiring treatment exceeded the Amaltheans' capacity to heal. The Amaltheans had no foreknowledge of the outbreak of hostilities; it took them just as long as the militaries, if not longer, to ramp up their operations to wartime levels; requiring the training of new staff and building of new facilities. These endeavors were fraught with difficulty. It takes longer to train one Amalthean healer than a company of soldiers. Not only were there insufficient training facilities but qualified trainers were often, if not always, elsewhere on matters of life and death.

This is not to say Artemis became a charnel house. Far from it, while conditions in any number of field hospitals were extreme, only the crème de la crème of war-wounded went to Artemis. The reason being simple economics. A voyage to Artemis was expensive at the best of times (given its location and lack of profitable trade to compensate), adding the Charioteer's war tariffs and the increased duties demanded of traffic moving via Holy Terra, it made sense for combatants to ship only the irreplaceable (specialists or command staff) for treatment. Instead of the strained situation one might have expected to result, a genteel court culture sprang up—which is still evident in the architecture of Demiopolis and, to a lesser extent, Achillios. Every House tried to make a little home away from home for their convalescents.

Not entirely unpredictably many of the patients, particularly those of less reputable lineage, found the planet's temperate environs and non-combatant status more enticing than their duties. There were more desertions from House armies on Artemis than on any other world. This worsened as the war progressed. Artemis obtained a reputation as a deserter's paradise. The Sanctuary Aeon's traditions both allowed the desertions and nullified any attempts to capture or punish the culprits. Since Artemis had been willed to the Amaltheans they had sole control of the Planetary Defence Force, or Guardians. No other factions on the planet could muster troops beyond a noble's entourage. This policy secured the Amalthean's neutrality and had the Orthodoxy's



People of Note

Boss Chiquita

"Smiley" Melendez

Boss Chiquita "Smiley" Melendez is the Scraver boss of Artemis and the woman to see if you want to know about spies. Her assistant Berezhkov is a Malignatian veteran of the Emperor Wars. He is also an undercover Jakovian agent—his mother and sister still toil in the Malignatian labor camps. Smiley is fully aware of this and feeds Berezhkov enough information to keep his masters satisfied (she has, on occasion, passed on misinformation to further some other plot—although she is loathe to grab the Jakovian tiger by its tail in this manner).

What neither of them is aware of is Berezhkov is also a Mutasih "deep-sleeper" agent. Grabbed from the battlefield and implanted with numerous simple (and extremely well hidden) listening devices, he automatically uploads transmissions to a hidden al-Malik listening post once per month. He also complains of migraines and nightmares every full-moon.

Father Pablo Ramirez

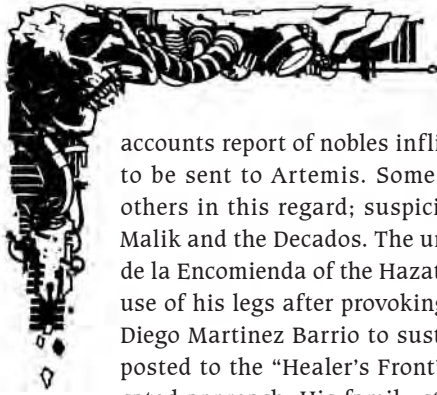
Father Pablo Ramirez is a hesychast preacher of an ancient order, come to Artemis to learn more of the healing arts. Of Hazat stock—although he set aside the majority of his names and entitlements when he took up the cloth—Father Ramirez is a fixture in the libraries (and coffee houses) of the Mataria Medgarten and likes nothing more than a rambling theological discourse. His black habit and tonsure are well known around the capital.

Above all else, Father Ramirez is a man of compassion. He is also one of the few non-Eskatonic clergy to carry the seal of a Sanhedrin Inquisitor. His true mission is to scour Artemis for signs of Amalthean technosophic heresy. Father Ramirez is aware of the reasons behind his selection for this most delicate of tasks.

Not only has he a brilliant mind, but he is in no provable way connected with the Eskatonic Order. Father Ramirez knows only minor Church theurgic rituals but has been known to wield his staff with vigor.



support. During the Emperor Wars, the strain of holding a neutral position increased but the Amaltheans did not abandon their principles even under mounting pressure from the noble Houses as the scale of desertions increased. The only planet in the Known Worlds with a greater concentration of disparate, and dissolute, nobility during the Emperor Wars was Byzantium Secundus; Artemis quickly became a spy's paradise (indeed the Scravens to this day control the major docklands on Boreichora and Notichora). The possible intelligence gains, and losses, on Artemis were obvious and massive. Numerous



accounts report of nobles inflicting wounds on themselves to be sent to Artemis. Some were more successful than others in this regard; suspicion naturally falls on the al-Malik and the Decados. The unfortunate case of Don Llano de la Encomienda of the Hazat who lost his left eye and the use of his legs after provoking a duel with his cousin Don Diego Martinez Barrio to sustain "sufficient injury" to be posted to the "Healer's Front" bears out the less sophisticated approach. His family still maintains a small estate on the outskirts of Demiopolis.

People & Places

In my experience, the heritage of a planet's population is not written on their skin. By population I do not refer to the ruling elite—these more or less conform to the norm, Hispanic Hazat, pale Decados etc—but to the ruled. On any globe the skin color and ethnicity of serfs varies according to environment and local migration patterns. The best place to study this is Byzantium Secundus, followed closely by Holy Terra. In some cases, the arctic chill of Malignatius or the furnaces of Pyre for example, environment is the major factor but generally, and due to the efforts of the terraformers, most worlds display the full range of serf types. The real difference manifests in personality, in disposition. It is here that the reality of Artemis diverges from my assumptions.

Demiopolis

Artemis is a polarized world. Geographically, socially and politically. My survey of "Amalthea's Legacy", as the planet is sometimes known, began in Demiopolis. The Valdez Memorial Starport sits twenty kilometres to the north of the city proper upon the granite foundations of the surrounding Hessian mountain range. In the short northern night, the luminite walls of Mataria Medgarten glowed in the distance like a jewel set in the middle of a crown.

At this point I should mention the days and nights of Artemis. Due to the orbital peculiarities the length of day and night varies depending on location, specifically longitude. The days in Demiopolis are longer than the nights, fifteen hours to nine, and stay that way throughout the year (my Charioteer, Shiro, explained this time and again, I accept his word and the evidence of my own eyes but do not profess to understand). As one moves further north—Demiopolis sits on Boreichora's southern coast—the days lengthen, to the south the nights do likewise. Travel enough and you find eternal light, or dark. The locals refer to that as "falling off the edge of the world".

So, in the clear darkness of a warm spring night—it is always spring in Demiopolis, a most satisfactory result of "celestial mechanics"—we journeyed via mag-tube from the spaceport to the centre of the city. The criss-crossing mag-tubes remind one of the Imperial City but the city itself is more reminiscent of Llanfyrth on Gwynneth, or even Velisimil. Cherry blossom trees, always in bloom, line the wide boulevards, their scent hanging in the air.

The city struck me immediately as relaxed. Even at our late hour of arrival there were numerous people out and about as we neared the civic centre. Nobles and Guilders of every rank and file provide the animus of a thriving café culture centered on the magnificent edifice of the Mataria Medgarten, but nothing as hectic as one might find on Criticorum for example (after an hour on the planet I was yet to be accosted by beggars).

As my appointment within was not until the following morning, my companions and I whiled away a pleasant evening bathed in the soft glow of blue luminite ensconced at what became our regular oasis, The Sultan's Gift. The *maitre d'*, a well-upholstered individual calling himself Benari ibn Doula, claimed to have been liberated from slavery in the Kurgan Caliphate by the Hazat; given the cosmopolitan feel of Artemis and the excellence of his coffee, I saw no reason to doubt him.

Before our audience the next morning, I spent an informative few hours with Benari accustomize myself with local gossip. He proved himself a veritable font of information. I suggest any visitor (to any world, I consider this a universal truth) spends time to get to know the rumors on the ground, as it were. They invariably contain much spice that never travels far from the source. In this case I learnt much about the succession of the current Ketcharch.

I already knew, what righteous man could not, the office of Ketcharch (the spiritual leader of the Amaltheans, second only to their Archbishop) had recently changed hands. I was not aware, however, of the disruption this caused on Artemis, put bluntly; it was the biggest event since your Imperial Majesty's coronation.

The outgoing Ketcharch, Archbishop Calvar Equinus, resigned, as is the Amalthean tradition; they deem it ill manners for a leader (temporal or spiritual) to endure beyond their usefulness or welcome. The venerable Equinus, worn by his exertions during the last twenty years of war and reconstruction, retired to a life of contemplation in the northern border zones leaving his office in good order and his blessing for his successor. This is where the problems began.

Disregarding the more salacious of Benari's rumors, I took up the subject with the new Ketcharch when she granted me an audience later that day in the inner sanctum of the Mataria Medgarten.

Ketcharch Tzu Tzan is a descendant of noble blood; her great-grandfather, the Marquis Yep Fan Tzan Li Halan, relinquished his title, devoting himself body and soul to the Sanctuary Aeon. His peers saw this act as undoubtedly pious but perhaps somewhat feckless. His descendants' devotion to the Church nullified any possible doubts and Tzu Tzan enjoys warm relations with the Li Halan, both in their Jasmine estates to the east of Demiopolis and their off-world territories.

Ketcharch Tzu acts in person with the wisdom and grace one would expect of her lineage. She patiently explained the "scandal". Before her succession as Ketcharch, she served as spiritual head of the council of Demiopolis. At this point I should explain Artemis' political structure. Artemis





is comprised of two major continents (Boreichora and Notichora) and a sparsely populated equatorial archipelago. Boreichora is divided into seventeen semi-autonomous cantons—a throwback to the end of the Second Republic. Councils drawn from their most prominent citizens, landowners, churchmen etc administer these cantons. The council of Demiopolis is the de facto global ruling council and is comprised of members drawn from all lesser canton councils, as well as citizens of Demiopolis. Ketcharch Tzu was head of the council, partly an honorary position but mostly as befits her status. When her ascension to Ketcharch was first mooted, a point of order was raised. It was traditional that no Ketcharch or Archbishop had ever sat on the Council of Demiopolis. Despite protests from her supporters, she acquiesced to the implied course of action and resigned her post on the council to, in her words, “better focus my energies in the service of the Pancreator and my honored brethren”.

Demiopolis and its surrounds are pleasant and agrarian; healthy rainfall gifts the landscape a lush verdancy. Artemis in general and its cantons in specific are self-sufficient. The planet has grown richer from its exports of luminite, rainstone and medical supplies. Due to the Amaltheans’ wise reinvestment of profits, the general standard of living is well above average.

The canton way of life has not yet completely subsumed the norm, nobles from many houses dwell here, and indeed one notes there are more gentry in and around Demiopolis than strictly necessary to administer the small number of

noble estates. Most of this excess is made up of nobility posted to Artemis during the wars that have “gone native”. Without casting aspersions, it is my duty to note the largest populace of foreign nobility are of the Hazat. Don Giovanni de la Encomienda (grandson of the unfortunate Llano), had the good grace to house my entourage and myself at his manse on the outskirts of Demiopolis. The Don is one of the leading lights of the compassionate refugee social circle (as he likes to refer to himself). While obviously not a veteran of Byzantium Secundus or Criticorum, his parties make up in exuberance whatever they may lack in élan.

Demiopolis is one of the most cosmopolitan worlds I have visited. The city is split into the typical quarters—noble, guild and church. The Amaltheans have the strongest presence here of all the factions, theirs are the twin centerpieces of the city, the Mataria Medgarten and the Cathedral Noun. Their elegant luminite walls reflect the flame of the Pancreator and the wisdom of their owners. The Orthodox presence is next strong but all the major sects are well represented. The Brother Battle maintain a teaching hospice attached to the Medgarten commanded by Adept Rasczak, a ruddy and cheerful Stigmata veteran, who, if his current vim and vigor are a reliable guide, must have been a wonder to behold when still in possession of all his limbs.

The Hazat have the strongest noble presence although it is far from overwhelming, true to its reputation as a backwater, the cutthroat politics that characterize more sophisticated world are absent here, or at least they walk quieter amongst the healers.



The Guilds too are well represented. The Amaltheans have the strongest links of all the sects to the merchants and the Demiopolis Agora reflects that. The technology on display, especially medical technology, rivals the workshops of Leagueheim in sophistication, if not price. The Supreme Order of Engineers and the Scravers boast the largest visible presence, although Reeves are notoriously difficult to detect. The Engineers have extensive workshops, many of which are jointly run under supervision of the Amaltheans. The Scravers control most of the southern third of the city, all the docklands and both airports. Scraver flagged super-freighters steaming into the docks weighed low with exported Notichoran luminite are an everyday sight.

It was my misfortune to require the aid of the Scravers to arrange my passage to Notichora. To this end I was forced to seek out their leader. Boss Chiquita "Smiley" Melendez was not what I had expected. Her femininity was only one of her pleasant surprises: wit, elegance and unstinting personal hygiene. I was delighted to discover them all. Her attitude toward the Phoenix Seal, however, ("That's a pretty thing, how do I go about getting one?") was less than admirable. She eventually proved amenable to the Emperor's gold, if not his warrant. Her lieutenant, a Malignatian émigré calling himself Berezhkov made our final arrangements. He told my assistant Krieger that his information was ours, for a price. Thus, it pains me to report, is the loyalty of the *ordo tertius* bought.

Minograd

The main Boreichoran rainstone mining facility is far to the north, nestling in the arms of the Karnobat mountain range. A pall lies over the city, ground rock dust, from the Engineers' machines hangs heavy in the air. The city's given name is Minograd, the population has renamed it Smogograd. I hesitate to consider how terrible the pollution would be without the restraining influence of the Amaltheans. Minograd is different in character to Demiopolis, it has no pretensions, it is a mining town and knows it. The décor and architecture is functional, blocky and uninspired. And everything is covered in a fine layer of grey grit. I would advise anyone planning on visiting Minograd not to. Then I would advise them to invest in a breathing mask.

I was kept waiting two full days before seeing Minograd's *de facto* ruler (the city is a joint Amalthean—Engineer protectorate, it is autonomous, answering only to the council of Demiopolis). When he, Crafter Darrow, finally deigned to see me he was as crass, rude and unbending as any caricature of the automaton Engineer could be. He claimed he could not grant me more than ten minutes as there were "vital works" that required his attention forthwith. When I questioned him on the conditions of his workers within the mines he deemed he could tell me nothing. His first duty was, in his words "to protect trade secrets". I despair that creatures such as this functionary and his ilk can gain so much power, my Emperor, and silently I mourn the

Avestite's light presence on this world. Up until now they found precious little here to detain them. I fear that may be changing.

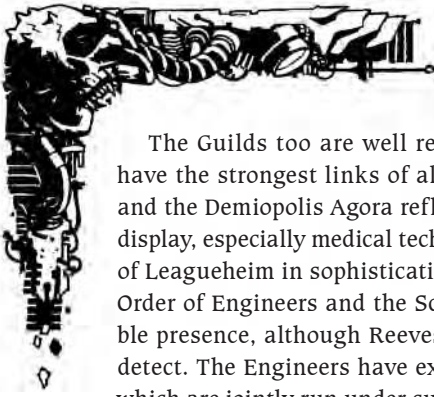
Yara's Rest

More calming to my eyes than the slag heaps and choke-dust of Minograd was the quiet contemplation of Yara's Rest, the northernmost town in Boreichora. The home to not only the Shrine of Saint Yara and the Knightly Order that bears her name but also the headquarters, northern barracks and administrative centre of the Planetary Defense Force. This was by no means a typical garrison town, but then the PDF is no typical armed force.

I met General Paulus, the head of the Planetary Defense Force in what should, but for Artemis' orbital eccentricities, have been the early evening. In the north, the people change. Paulus, the son of a Demiopolis baker and native of the capital before promotion sent him north, did not have the look of the locals (hooded eyes and rich tans that the temperate climate does not suggest are the norm here); truth be told he did not look a soldier at all. He struck me more as a diplomat, or even a bureaucrat. Perhaps fitting for the Amalthean world that their chief of defense inspires compassion rather than awe. We talked, cordially, for over an hour. In three years at his post, Paulus' forces had seen minimal action, civil unrest was unheard of. Their main responsibility consisted of border patrols around the light zone. Despite dire warnings, scavengers and souvenir hunters still try to enter the restricted zone. (The Amaltheans' second act in office restricted access to both the light and dark zones to prevent outbreaks of skeletosis. A carefully monitored scientific station, Santata, manned jointly by Amaltheans and Engineers continues to research "Achilles' Doom" two-hundred miles into the light borderlands). After the interview came a quick inspection of his troops. They were well-turned out, but did not convince as a fighting force; if limited to police actions, maybe they would be adequate, but no more.

The Shrine of Saint Yara proved an ideal place to replenish our energies. It stood quiet and serene ten miles beyond the centre of Yara's Rest flanked on either side by the cloister and monastery of the Knights of Saint Yara. I prayed at the shrine, a large red-stained luminite boulder (anomalous for the region, luminite is mined predominantly in Notichora). At the eventual dying of the day it shines like fresh blood. The second in command of the order, Sir Benjamin Justinian gave me the following account.

"As you know, the Sanctuary Aeon is avowedly pacifist. But spiritual purity did not stop the jealous landowners during the dark times of the Fall. They hounded the followers of Amalthea, who would not resist. The populace watched and did nothing. Yara was one of the few who did not stand idly by. The daughter of the local smith, she protested when the corrupt mob came to harm the disciple of Amalthea living here. She would not suffer the mob to go about



its perverse business unhindered. She was brutally beaten, then shackled to the rock and left for the buzzards. She never once called out in pain. The Pancreator eased her suffering as he eases that of all those who walk the righteous path. After six days spread on the rock without a murmur of protest she spoke. "I forgive you", she said then she died, her face peaceful. Her blood stained the rock from that day to this. We follow her holy example, defending those who chose the ways of peace."

Saint Yara's order has grown into one of the most popular, if not the most populous Knightly Orders in the Known Worlds. Tales abound of gallant Yarans defending their Amalthean wards unto death, resplendent in their livery of silver and their coat-of arms, a white unicorn, rampant.

I had hoped to meet with Baronet Alexandra d'Havilland, the head of the order, but she was visiting Holy Terra in the company of Archbishop Sakhya. I would encounter them both later.

Then we left Boreichora, for the most part a green and pleasant land, and journeyed via Scraver transport (courtesy of Boss Melendez) to Notichora. We moved into shadow as our flight crossed the equator, entering the southern, dark hemisphere. I paid the coincidence little mind but Brother Trefillion, my Eskatonic companion was convinced of the moment's portent.

Achillios

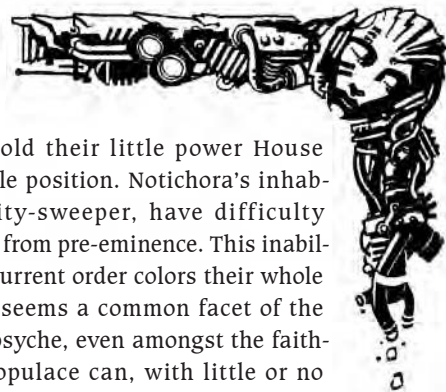
Achillios, capital and major port of Notichora, is in some ways very similar to Demiopolis, in others its complete opposite. It has the same wide boulevards and sprawling docklands, the same industrial, merchant and noble quarters, but where in the planetary capital stands the Mataria Medgarten, in Achillios is a noble manse verging on the dilapidated. Styled after the great Byzantine gothic tradition, it is the home and seat of power of Viceroy Montoya Kingston, the de facto ruler of Achillios and by association the whole of Notichora. Once rulers of half the planet, his House's fortunes have been in decline for centuries but they have endured with determination enough to almost make up for their lack of grace.

However tightly they hold their little power House Kingston is in an unenviable position. Notichora's inhabitants, from Viceroy to city-sweeper, have difficulty assimilating their fall from pre-eminence. This inability to accept the current order colors their whole outlook—this seems a common facet of the Artemisian psyche, even amongst the faithful. The populace can, with little or no encouragement, recite chapter and verse on the woes that have befallen them even unto the discoverer their city is named after. The blame is always placed not, as would be correct, with time and tide and circumstance, but with their economic and political superiors in the north.

Viceroy Montoya has the typical Notichoran appearance. Slighter than their northern counterparts, skin paler, bordering on callow, and wide eyes. I may be deluded but I would say Notichorans blink less often. There is also a propensity for black moods and bleak introspection to match the dark, churning landscape.

In the Viceroy's case I sympathize. To be consistently reminded of one's antecedents' failures must be wearing. I saw similar signs in Bishop Clementio, primate of the diocese of Achillios. We spoke, at length. He is a small man and an engaging speaker, yet unsettling. Showing more than I suspect he realizes. It was he, for example, who raised the point of law that forced Ketcharch Tzu's resignation from the Council of Demiopolis. They had been political opponents for some time and are the leaders of the nearest thing the Sanctuary Aeon has to a schism.

Paraphrasing the Bishop's long-winded oratory style, the Amalthean sect is split between two camps. The first, dubbed the Heterodoxy by Bishop Clementio, believes in strong Amalthean ties with the Orthodoxy. This tributary of the schism traditionally holds political sway, its power firmly entrenched in the north. The second camp—dubbed "Extremists" by some, although Clementio prefers "Progressives"—posits that Amalthea wished to set her sect apart from the Orthodoxy. It holds that, true to her ideals, they should withdraw from all political contact with any "outsiders", to better further their healing aims. This struck me as reactionary nonsense, but given its source I feel obliged to report it faithfully.





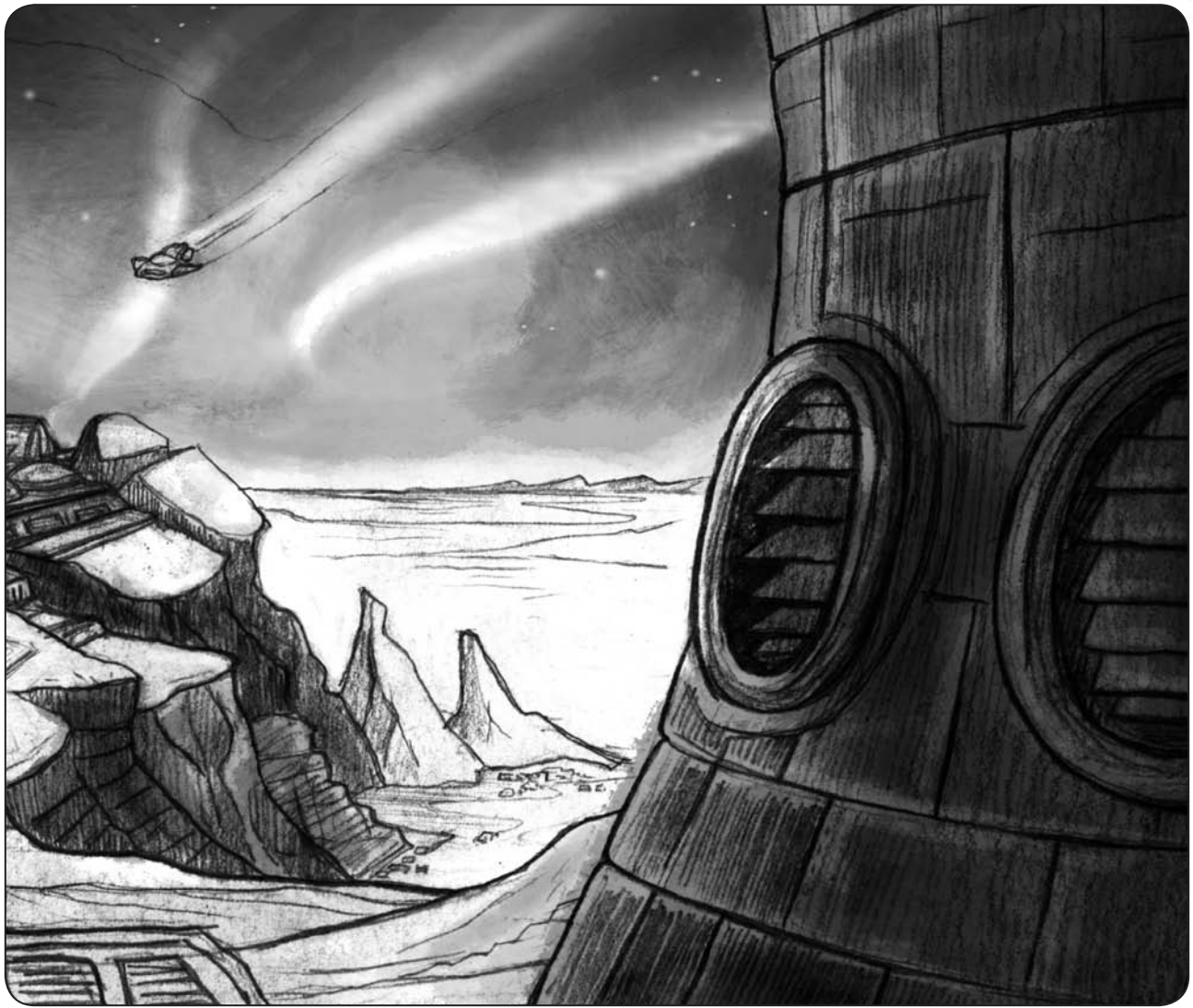
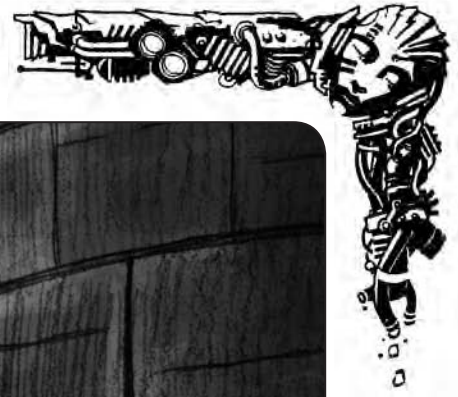
Noble and guild buildings cluster around the centre of Achillios, less in number and extravagance than their counterparts in Demiopolis. The mix here favors more the Decados and the Scravers. There is a strain to the city, to its demeanor, décor and conversation that is tangible. I stood under the slate-grey statue of Achilles before the bramble's playground that once was the Achillios' Municipal Spaceport and not only felt the passage of years and the decay they bring. I felt something else. I felt resentment.

The landscape beyond Achillios rolls to the horizon without urgency, carpeted by the local variant of heather—a bloody purple in hue. During the long hours of half-light, the land takes on alien aspect. Father Trefillion was moved to quote the ancients as he meditated on the sight: "But look, where the morn, in russet mantle clad, walks o'er the dew of yon high eastward hill."

The wealth of Notichora comes from the mining and export of luminite. The necessities of this trade scar the land continent-wide from the choking docklands to the reinforced maxicrete transcontinental roadways radiating from Achillios to its satellite mining townships. The roads fascinated me. A whole subculture has sprung up around

them. The lowest of the low and the weakest of the weak are here, those without liege, family or hope. Following them, Charioteers and Scravers dance in unison the steps of commerce, beating what little is left of worth from the road scum, leaving the chaff to the wind. Transport is strictly controlled by the guilds; Amalthean influence does not extend to the roadways. Guildsmen drive the "road-trains", thirty-six wheel monstrosities that rumble and grind hither and yon. Guildsmen guard the checkpoints and the toll-booths, and guilders man the way-stations. The roads are raised, one could jump down to avoid the checkpoints, getting back up is more difficult, even without considering the armed patrols. Throughout the network, every day's travel there is a seemingly identical travelers' rest. These amenities are syndicated by the guilds to "give the traveler a welcome break at the end of a hard day". They are cheap and reliable and indescribably awful.

The economy and geography of Notichora mirror in certain respects those of Boreichora, albeit on a grubbier scale. The mining industry encircling the road-web bears out this observation. Mining conurbations bore into lode-bearing hills, processing luminite as opposed to rainstone.



The gentle glow of the stone is a marked contrast to the ever lengthening twilight—the heather strewn plains surrounding Achillios give way to more and more rugged terrain toward the south, culminating in the encircling Cherson mountain range which marks the border of the dark zone.

I found these mining shanties even more depressing than their northern counterparts. Their extreme longitude grants only a few hours of watery sunlight per day, during which all the inhabitants are typically down the pits. The townships resemble nothing more than abandoned ghost towns. Such sights I had not expected to see on a Holy World. They unsettled me more than their equivalents on, for example, Leagueheim.

Yet there is efficiency here, if nothing else. The township cartels, the largest of which is Rhondda, are run skillfully by a joint Scravers-Engineers concern, once again with Amalthean oversight, although their presence here is perfunctory. However, Crafter Julius Newton and his associate Boss Isaiah Ridley received me with notably more respect than the Engineers' representative in Minograd. They were invited to Artemis by the offices of Bishop Clementio and Viceroy Kingston to administer the mines. That this went un-

remarked, one hesitates to presume un-taxed, in Demiopolis speaks of the gulf dividing Artemis.

The Cherson Mountains

The mining townships sit in the foothills of the Cherson mountain range that forms the natural border of the dark zone. The Planetary Defense Force patrols this border. Their southern headquarters are outside the mining township of Talbot. In my interview with Major William X. Sanderson, the commander of the southern contingent, it became apparent that the entire command structure had been split; he was leader of over half of the Planetary Defense Force (despite the smaller physical area under its control).

This did not unduly disturb me, Major Sanderson at least has the demeanor of a seasoned soldier. He gave every impression of being a capable man, and thorough. He explained the dangers of patrolling the dark side and how they necessitated the high levels of military hardware in his barracks. There are many attempted crossings into the dark, rumors persist of disreputable locals leading hunting parties into the forbidden zones. Even so, the military



Solar System

Thyone (Sun): Once a bright yellow star, the light of Thyone has dimmed, turned toward the blue by the Fading Suns phenomenon.

Arge: A small desolate rock known primarily for its mercury lakes. These were siphoned almost dry in the past but replenished, as the liquid metal seeps up through the planet's porous crust.

Mileta: Artemis' twin in size and density is a dustbowl world, covered by red sand. Without an atmosphere, Mileta would have been a prime target for terraforming. There are occasional Scraver expeditions here to search for Annunaki ruins, to no noticeable effect.

Artemis: A green and pleasant world, its early problems aside. The two major continents are separated by a broadly equatorial ocean. Artemis' axial tilt gives its polar-regions permanent light and dark (respectively).

Hyale: Smaller and closer moon of Artemis. Little more than a captured asteroid.

Phylinone: Larger and more distant moon. The Xanthippe keep a small Moonhaven here.

Aura: A craggy, rocky world, without atmosphere or water, Aura rotates twice as fast as Artemis generating colossal winds through its canyons.

Maera: The largest planet in the Artemis system, Maera is a semi-solidified gas-giant, more a liquid-giant. From space it appears a rich aquamarine, with dark shapes moving slowly beneath its mysterious waves.

build-up seems excessive to my mind (interestingly, the new hardware is hastily retouched war surplus of varied provenance, my Muster associate Krieger noted items ranging from Decados flame-throwers to a prototype al-Malik hover-tank).

For all their firepower and discipline, the Planetary Defense Force does not patrol the entire dark side perimeter. The easternmost pass through the mountains is guarded by a religious order (despite operating under the Amalthean aegis the PDF is determinedly secular). The Citadel of the Coming Night is home to the most pious Order of the Eternal Dawn, a splinter sect of the Temple Avesti with strong ties to the Eskatonic Order. The monks here contemplate the

evils of the physical world and the darkness that hovers all around, held at bay only by the light of the Pancreator. Their monastery was founded in the ruins of hubris: the citadel was once the holiday home of a discredited branch of House Kingston, which dabbled in forbidden knowledge and perished some four hundred years hence from self-inflicted skeletonization.

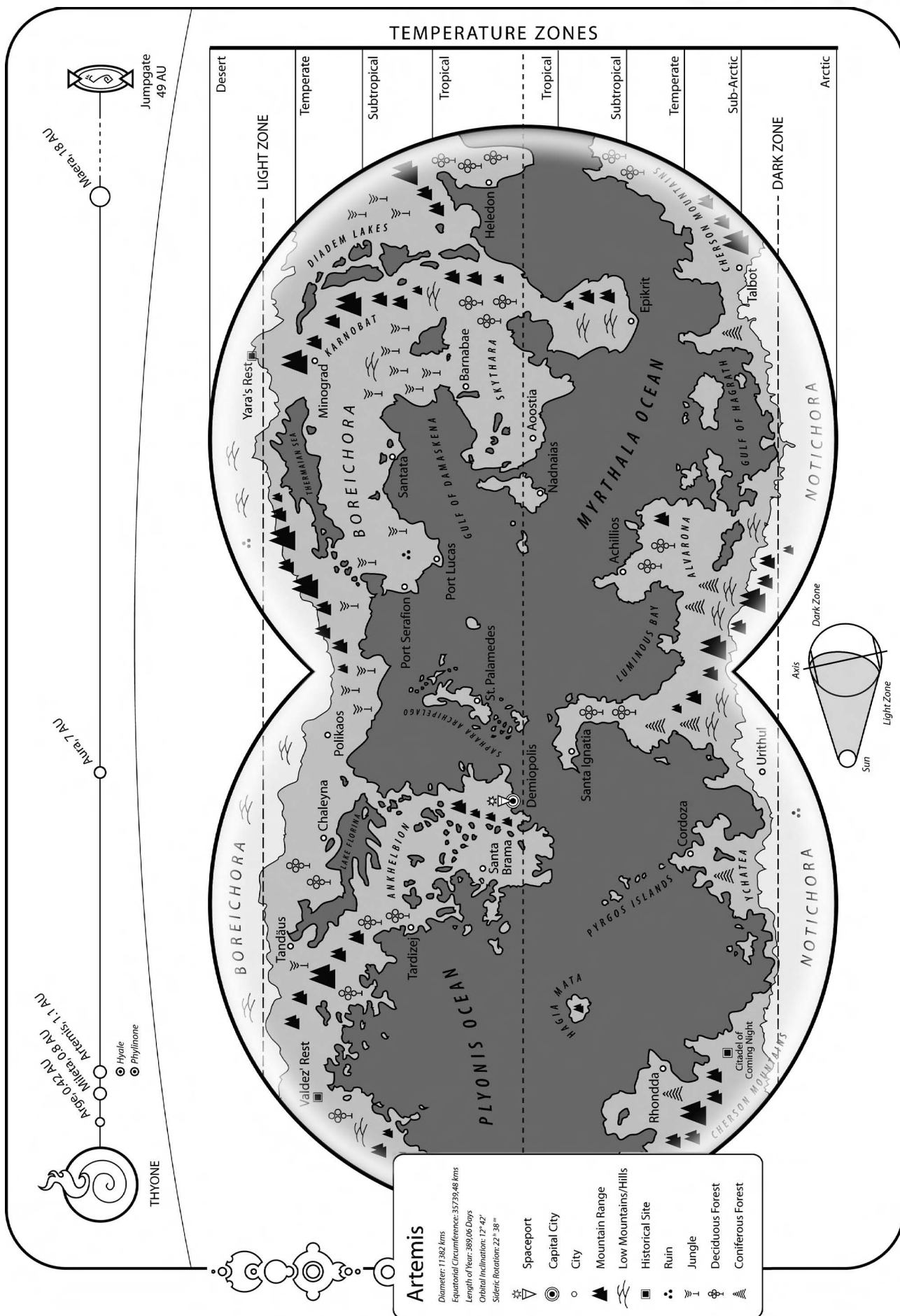
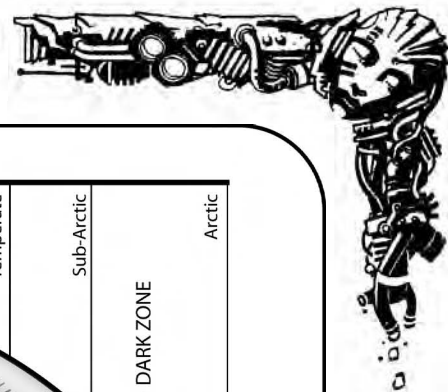
Seventy years passed and still the citadel stood empty, it was then that the founder of the Order, Illuminatus Nathaniel Dracos, on midwinter eve petitioned the Ketcharch for permission to found an order in the ruins. He was refused. He accepted the decision and left to walk paths unknown. He returned one year later on midwinter eve to once more petition. He was once more refused. Then again the next year. And the next. Only at the seventh time of asking was he granted the permission he sought. It is recorded that neither did he query the Ketcharch's annual deflection of his request, nor did she explain it. They remained on good terms from then on.

The current head of the Order is the Avesti Deacon Maurice Singer, a man of simple words and unadorned piety. Deacon Singer is also the highest-ranking Avestite on Artemis although he bears no ambassadorial obligation. The two extended twilights—I hesitate to call them days—we spent at the monastery were full of simple devotion, a credit to the Temple Avesti who make up the majority of the clergy. I had the good fortune to spend some hours with the order's chartophylax, Provost Veda Daniels who gave me a tour of her library. She prided herself, indeed this is one function of the monastery, of preserving the darker history of Artemis. Some might go so far as to call the contents of his library apocryphal. The tale that stayed in mind was the alternate history of St. Yara. She was, the provost avowed, a devoted follower of Amalthea, a local (Notichoran that is) girl who was hacked to death in the barbarous north not for her protestations against the healer's treatment, but her accent when she spoke them. The northerners, he said, could not bear to hear their fallacies enumerated by a lowly southerner.

This fed my thoughts as I prepared to leave Artemis for the next stage of my quest.

I reflected on Artemis. On one hand there was Demiopolis: a modern, clean, thoughtful city. Demiopolis is the centre of Artemis, it remembers the past, echoes of democracy whisper along its boulevards. I think sometimes it yearns for those times once more. Then there is its shadow, Achillios. A city that might have been. A city that history passed by.

Artemis is not what is appears to outsiders, your Imperial Majesty. Or rather, that is not all it is. It is riven. History scars this place as any other. The Amalthean presence has soothed the passage through strife but it has not righted the perceived wrongs of the past nor set a path of appeasement for the future. Artemis seems calm on the surface, but rest assured, still waters run deep.





Chapter Two: Holy Terra

A paradise known by many names, Holy Terra is commonly referred to as Terra Sancta by off-worlders, and Urth by its population. Any attempt to catalogue this planet is a monumental task doomed to fail. The heady scent of history can be overwhelming, nonetheless I shall attempt it.


History

In 2305 humanity discovered the jumpgate, although, given the circumstances, found is more accurate. It opened our path to the stars, to the worlds we know to this day and many beyond our ken, lost in the darkness of the Fall. After that time, although our recollection is murky, we know about the Diaspora, the coming of the Prophet, the Second Republic and then the Fall. All that is left from the times before is myth, ancient legends and fireside tales.

In many ways the history of Holy Terra is a microcosm of our own shared history: marked by blood and death, by faith and redemption.

In 2305 humanity discovered the jumpgate, but they had already made the leap into space. Urth was, in the past, always over-crowded. Humanity in its matchless ingenuity found many ways to alleviate the problem; some, such as hydroponics farming, were beneficial, others, such as state imposed sterilizations were not. The problem was never solved; there was never enough faith to hold mankind's ambition in check. Maybe back then this was no bad thing, but seeds sown in rotten soil always grow bad.

Humanity expanded, filling the space available, but still did not stop. It is hard for us to understand the conditions in those squalid, cramped days, when every city was a slum to rival the worst favela of Aragon. Everywhere. I daily count my blessings we have now seen the error of our ways. But then, still the population grew and with it civil unrest. There was not enough food for all, even when there was, the rich neglected their duty to the poor. Urth teetered on the brink of revolution. In desperation, the political powers of the time, quasi-imperialist corporations that would later grow into the zaibatsu reached for the moon. In 2075, the first colony on Luna (as Urth's single moon is sometimes



Holy Terra Traits

Ruler: Urth Orthodox

Cathedral: Urth Orthodox

Agora: Charioteers

Garrison: 8

Capital: Rio Brasilia

Jumps: Two

Adjacent Worlds: Artemis (nightside), Sutek, and Pentateuch (both dayside)

Solar System: Sol (Sun), Mercury (0.4 AU), Venus (0.7 AU), Urth (1 AU), Mars (1.5 AU), Asteroid Belt (2.8 AU), Jupiter (5.2 AU), Saturn (9.5 AU), Uranus (19.2 AU), Neptune (30.1 AU), Pluto (39.5 AU), Jumpgate (62.5 AU)

Tech: 3 (Church has access to 6 or 7)

Human Population: 4,000,000,000

Alien Population: 2,000 (mostly Obun in Rio Brasilia)

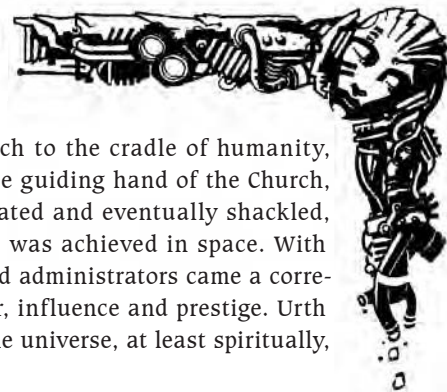
Resources: crops, some fossilized fuels, and tourism

Export: Art works, religious relics, crops, minerals, and metals (from the outer colonies)

Landscape: Urth is seventy percent ocean, its continents range from arctic wastes, to deserts, to teeming jungle, to rolling steppes.

known) was opened. The masses had an escape route at last. No immediate change in their situation, mind you, but the promise of a better world. Hope is the enemy of freedom.

With awe the masses watched colonies grow on Luna, then Mars (2175), then in the asteroid belt and outer satellites. What first was a trickle of brave and desperate



volunteers starting anew became a raging torrent. Colonies proliferated but still the flood could not be dammed. The situation on Urth deteriorated; the sight of others reaching their dream emboldened the masses. Leaders at the time sought the ancient solution.

Spatial geometry had divided this mini-Diaspora already, the Luna, Martian and asteroid belt colonies on one hand, and the gas-giant's satellites—the largest of which were Saturn's Callisto, Jupiter's Titan and Neptune's Triton—on the other. These rivalries were mainly economic in nature; the outer satellites were rich in minerals that the barren inner colonies lacked. They had greater prestige, a fact exacerbated by their colonists who saw themselves as true frontiersmen, mocking those who stayed behind, hiding in the shadow of Urth.

It was simple for the unscrupulous corporate and political leaders of Urth to fan the flames of resent into anger, then hatred, then finally, war. This war was ultimately fruitless. Although it certainly allowed the enforcing of far stricter discipline upon Urth—and alleviated much complaint—the world suffered. The outer satellites were important sources of mineral resources (at that time Urth was massively industrialized) but they were far from self-sufficient. In short, it was a war no one wanted, from which no one benefited, and which no one could stop.

Discovery of the jumpgate galvanized humanity like nothing before. Quarrels were forgotten, the rulers of Urth had a different, more profitable and more sustainable distraction for their disgruntled population. Soon the key was turned, the jumpgate unlocked and humanity poured out amongst the stars. The main thread of history moves on with it at that juncture, leaving Urth behind, as so many colonists. But Urth remained.

The wars against the Sathraist pilots that followed on the heels of expansion were an attempt by the pre-eminent politicians at safeguarding Urth's centrality in the newly forming universe of human endeavor. It was doomed to failure. Already the corporate masters, the zaibatsu relocated, moving their centers of operation to more convenient sites, closer to the center of the jumpweb—also to evade punitive taxes at home; a major benefit of controlling a world is the setting of its tax-rates, something the zaibatsu did not overlook.

Urth complained as loudly as it could, but no one was listening, history had moved on. While still retaining some vital functions—the interstellar vehicle registry resided on Urth until the height of the Second Republic—Urth drifted slowly from prominence, becoming more introspective, reminiscing fondly of the times of its undisputed power.

Though a major part of its psychology, maudlin recollections did not swamp Urth. Its leaders dug in and decided to increase its power economically (Urth at this point still had the largest population in the Known Worlds). To this end, industrialization continued—at surface level and in space.

In 2854, the 2nd Holy Synod, headed by Patriarch Palamedes, resurrected Urth's fortunes. He returned the

seat of the Universal Church to the cradle of humanity, its rightful home. Under the guiding hand of the Church, industry was cowed, regulated and eventually shackled, on the planet at least; less was achieved in space. With the influx of churchmen and administrators came a corresponding increase in power, influence and prestige. Urth was back at the center of the universe, at least spiritually, if not politically.

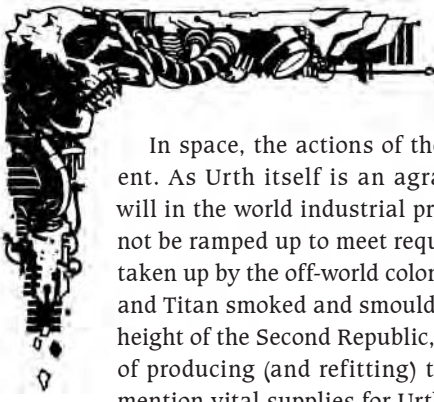
Thanks to the large Orthodox presence on Urth, the populace was already well on the way to an agrarian existence. The terrors of the Fall made relatively little mark, merely accelerating a process begun centuries before—at least on the planet proper, in space things were harder. Only the major colonies (Luna, Mars and Triton) were self-sufficient, the others had to band together as contact with Urth slowly atrophied. Once again loose leagues amongst the outer colonies formed, but even then, and even for the larger colonies, life was hard. In time all but the most hardy and most ingenious perished. Thus life on Urth settled into a predictable, well-ordered pattern.

Recent History

Holy Terra spent the majority of the war years without suffering major military intervention. Despite that, large changes were noticeable for the population, both groundside and in space (or highside as some colonists would have it). For the groundsiders life continued much as before. Indeed it would be hard to deduce from the lot of an Urthish peasant that war raged throughout the Known Worlds. Urth was, of course, neutral. This did not stop the Patriarch's court at Rio Brasilia from becoming a hotbed of diplomatic intrigue.

Patriarch Hezekiah the Elder's succession in 4972 drastically changed the Orthodox attitude to the war. His predecessor, Patriarch Theodora II the Steadfast was avowedly non-interventionist. Patriarch Hezekiah realized the Universal Church could not afford to remain excluded from the decision-making process—if one may call wartime that. He knew not taking a side was worse than choosing the wrong one. Thus he pronounced Orthodox support for the Li Halan cause. Thankfully both he and they were not ideologically blind to good military sense. By the war's final years, both parties had divined which way the wind was blowing and suitably tailored their policies; Patriarch Hezekiah declared Orthodox support of Alexius Hawkwood's claim to the Phoenix throne in 4982. A measure of this declaration's political worth is the high regard the Orthodoxy, and its leadership, is still held by all parties concerned. Before then, the Patriarch not only made sound political decisions but made every effort to put Holy Terra on a war footing. He introduced rationing (which was only repealed Urth-wide as late as 4997) and raised numerous Home Guard units. These local militia were drilled as defenders against invasion and, more importantly, infiltration by saboteurs. They were never tested in the first respect, in the second they proved wonderfully successful. Internal security on Urth during the war years was second to none.





In space, the actions of the Patriarch were more apparent. As Urth itself is an agrarian paradise, with all the will in the world industrial production on the planet could not be ramped up to meet requirements. This shortfall was taken up by the off-world colonies. The spaceyards of Triton and Titan smoked and smouldered like at no time since the height of the Second Republic, straining under the pressure of producing (and refitting) the Patriarchal Fleet—not to mention vital supplies for Urth itself.

Civil disorder during these times was, in the main, unheard of. There were minor outbreaks of violence on both Luna and Mars where terrorist groups tried to claim independence. The Luna uprising was put down within hours by the local watch supplemented with Xanthippe mercenaries (an action for which House Xanthippe won the personal regard of the Patriarch).

The situation on Mars was different. There has long been a muted, but well-defined, Free Mars movement. Seeing their chance and using increased workloads as an excuse, a group of terrorists under the leadership of the now infamous escaped serf Douglas Quaid barricaded themselves into the sewage recycling center and declared independence. The siege of the facility was only broken when a force of penitent psychics led by Sanhedrin Philosophus Magsman stormed the walls. The ringleaders were executed shortly after although Quaid's body was never recovered. To this day graffiti can be found on Mars proclaiming "Quaid Lives!" Needless to say, such graffiti is prohibited; anyone caught daubing such seditious slogans can expect extreme penance.

People & Places

Once past the thorough customs inspection at the jumpgate—every ship, even those in transit, is checked by Orthodox overseen experts, although the Inquisition only scours those it deems suspicious. Our papers were, of course, in order—my pilot, Shiro, guided us towards Urth (as I will refer to Holy Terra here, for clarity and brevity) in a tightening gyre allowing us to visit many of the extant colonies before arriving at Urth itself.

Charon

The dark side of Pluto's lone companion; Charon is as far from the light of Sol, Holy Terra's star, as is possible without drifting into the Dark. The station here, once a refuge of science and hopelessness, is now manned by a skeleton staff of Eskatonic friars and Hesychast mystics. There are never more than twelve souls present on Charon Station at any time. Their current leader (meaning the longest serving) is Provost Wingate Johannsen, a haunted man whose bloodshot eyes told me little; in the most coherent explanation I could procure he told me he was: "Watching the gate, just in case..." I had neither the time nor the inclination to question him further.

Triton and Titan

Eurydice on Triton and Orpheus on Titan are twins in form and function, though not in feel or thought. Respectively situated on the largest moons of Neptune and Saturn, the stations were identical pre-fabricated shipyard domes. They still serve this function, but their fortunes have diverged since their inception.

Before the jumpgate was discovered, Eurydice served as the nominal capital of the loose outer satellites alliance. The idea of superiority took root and was never dislodged. Tritonians, as they call themselves, see themselves as the "kings of spacers", the most frontier-minded and most daring colonists in the system, nay, the Known Worlds. This attitude appears to quickly infect residents,—along with their idiosyncratic accent: "about" pronounced "aboot" and the like. Even Bishop Arago, recently appointed to the diocese of Neptune shows signs of this dementia (there are smaller scientific and mining outposts on the planet's surface and its smaller moons). Eurydice is a mining outpost and refuelling depot for the Patriarchal fleet, shipping minerals and machined parts back to Urth.

It does not sit well with the Tritonians that Orpheus is now the major shipyard in the Holy Terra system. Needless to say, the Titans (as the inhabitants predictably, and not unamusingly call themselves) find it hilarious. The greater wealth, influence and prestige are not lost upon them, or their spiritual guide, Bishop Ariel Dominguez. Orpheus also differs from Eurydice in being able to afford to hire an Engineer to oversee the activities of their shipyard; Crafter Vaux recently arrived from Leagueheim on recommendation of the Leaguemeister Tyrus Spear himself, and has started modernizing procedures.

I must confess to some concern over the well being of those souls confined to live in cramped colony domes, never to walk free under the sun. In my experience, dome-dwellers are an exceedingly strange bunch. They seem to become fiercely territorial, nationalistic even. And this phenomenon affects all strata of society; if anything, the lower orders seem more deeply stirred. This can be disconcerting to the uninitiated. Less worrying yet still strange to a newcomer is the ethnically jumbled population, a product of the original economic mini-Diaspora. The inhabitants were drawn without prejudice from the global underclass so many years ago and the mixture has never been distilled. Given enough pressure, man can live with man, it seems. The damage such a mingling has done to our language I cannot even attempt to mimic in writing. Suffice to say when dialects from all corners of the world fuse together, then mutate, it can leave a classical educated scholar such as myself understanding barely one word in four.

The Asteroids

During the Second Republic the asteroid belt was a valuable source of minerals. Now it is practically the last hive of lawlessness in the Holy Terra system; pirates thrive



here, only the best pilots, i.e. Charioteers, risk chasing them into the depths of the asteroid fields. There are colonial work shacks in various states of repair throughout the belt, the largest of which form a loose coalition known as The Seven Sisters. The asteroids in question are: Ceres, Pallas, Vesta, Hygeia, Davida, Interamnia, and Europa. The largest of the colonies is Fourmyle on Ceres, a brutal place, reminiscent of the worst of frontier towns, with spacesuits substituting for horses. The asteroid authorities, the mayor of Fourmyle, Geoffrey Reed a shifty, scurvy cove, assured me he did everything within his power to protect the shipping lanes. Frankly, I would not trust the man as far as I could throw him. While he and his ilk sit on their more than ample behinds, the pirates, reveling in names such as Cutthroat Bill, Deadly Jesse, and most famous of all Scarlett D'eath go about their heinous work with impunity.

Mars

Mars deserves more than it receives. The first human settlement on another planet, the first successful use of terra-forming technology, the first research into psychic phenomena all took place here. To say nothing of being the birthplace of the Prophet.

Yet it is not so. Those on other worlds hardly mention Mars, but in relation to the Prophet. The Martians know better, it is to their credit that this continual affront to their pride has not bred a culture of resentment. The Martians bypassed this phase, I can only praise the ministrations of the Universal Church in this matter, and live at peace with themselves. No man could ask for more.

Mars was partially terraformed and possesses a thin atmosphere akin to that of De Moley. It is possible to walk outside the numerous atmosphere domes that dot the landscape, but not advisable unless accompanied by a local guide. More than one unfortunate tourist has been lost amongst the hills and valleys, never to be seen again.

Mars' only spaceport is adjacent to its largest town, Marsport, both sitting in the shadow of Olympus Mons, its largest mountain. Marsport is, as befits the



People of Note

Adept Frederik van Gelder

Adept Frederik van Gelder is far from the typical Brother Battle, he has inherited a subtlety and political appetite from his family most would not expect from a warrior monk. Amongst the Brother Battle, however, the choice and use of weapons is a matter of not just doctrine but dogma; as such,

Frederik has been deployed where he can do the most damage—to the court of the Patriarch.

Frederik's current main project is the prospective noble marriage between House Decados and the Hazat (or perhaps House Hawkwood and the Hazat). From his base in Arnhem (in North Europe) he seeks to influence this to the best benefit of the Brother Battle.

Drawing from past experience, Frederik believes the best way to do this is to gain influence over the parties involved. To this end he has been unsuccessfully trying to addict Boyar Vasily Tukhachevsky to a drug of his choosing. Unfortunately for Frederik, the only suppliers of Selchakah are the Decados—and were one of their heirs to succumb, the drug could easily be traced back to him.

Frederik would pay generously for any who could bring him an alternate form of control, or whom he could use as disposable cat's paws in his endeavours.

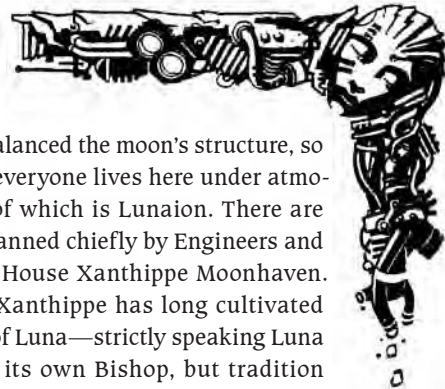
Associate Leoric d'Ascoigne

Associate Leoric D'ascoigne is a minor Reeve factotum and one of most well-informed men in Rio Brasilia. Leoric is officially Third Assistant Deputy (3rd Class) to Consul Magenta de Winter—herself official advisor to Archbishop Sigmund Dual and unofficially known as God's Banker. Leoric was parachuted into his current lofty position at the behest of his sister, an influential Leagueheim advocate diabolus.

Although not completely out of his depth, Leoric does not have a true taste for high politics. His lack of killer instinct mildly disappointed Consul de Winter so she set him to minor intelligence gathering and analysis—tasks for which he is better suited. Leoric pays well for any “useful” information—he won't track down and/or maim time-wasters but repeat payments will not be forthcoming.

Leoric also manages to find time to run the “Lost Souls Detective Agency” in the lower spaceport district. Leoric has, despite his family's reputation, a huge weakness for an up and coming Reeve: a soft heart.





birthplace of the Prophet, a serene, humble place, in marked difference to the boisterous outer colonies. The people are respectful and helpful, they have grown accustomed to the influx of tourists and pilgrims, indeed it is these visitors that give Marsport the majority of its wealth—there are other, smaller mining outposts dotted throughout the Martian landscape, as well as rudimentary farms. Despite much pressure over the years from civilian administrators, and unscrupulous Charioteers, the Prophet's birthplace was never pinpointed. I, personally, am thankful for this. Hordes of goggle-eyed nincompoops shuffling dutifully to pay their respects at the shrine of his birth would, I consider, be missing the wood for the trees. Every Church across the universe is a shrine to his message. Let that be enough.

Aside from tourism (or pilgrimage), Marsport is a major administrative center for the Orthodoxy. The largest freestanding building on the planet, not beneath the atmosphere domes, is the magnificent gothic cathedral Mars St. Michel. The headquarters and chief monastery of the Penitent psychics, those unfortunates trying to turn their dark gifts to the light. Less well-known is the fact that the cathedral stands upon the ruined headquarters of the Phavian Institute's forerunner, the University of Human Advancement. The Bishopric of Mars includes oversight of the Penitent psychics and is, as such, one of the most prestigious appointments below Archbishop level. The current incumbent, Bishop Jacobus is a staunch Hinayana conservative who served with the Manifest Light legion on Stigmata. Traditionally, the head of the Penitent psychics is assisted by a priest of the Eskatonic order, Bishop Jacobus' assistant is Philosophus Magsman, a member of the Sanhedrin and local hero for his part in breaking the sewage work siege during the Emperor Wars, although in his seventies his wit has not dulled.

A word of warning, although the denizens of Marsport are welcoming and content, resentment grows further from the capital. The so-called Martian Freedom Movement, a terrorist organization, has more popular support amongst the industrialized mining outposts. The Orthodoxy is always interested in hearing any rumors concerning them.

Venus

Although physically more suitable for terraforming than Mars, Venus' poisonous atmosphere defeated even the greatest scientific minds of the Second Republic. The Supreme Order of Engineers periodically attempts to set up research stations but with no tangible results, as of yet. I am unfortunately unable to confirm or deny the rumor that the Temple Avesti has asked permission to found a monastery there.

Luna

Luna's colony, Lunaion, is the oldest human settlement beyond the boundaries of Urth, our first step into the stars. Age and tradition are ingrained here, into the people, into the buildings, even into the air.

Luna was too small to be terraformed. The excavations

would have dangerously unbalanced the moon's structure, so there is no atmosphere and everyone lives here under atmosphere domes. The largest of which is Lunaion. There are smaller research stations, manned chiefly by Engineers and there is Arcadia, the oldest House Xanthippe Moonhaven. The Luna branch of House Xanthippe has long cultivated relations with the Bishopric of Luna—strictly speaking Luna is too small to be awarded its own Bishop, but tradition overrules, rightly, on this occasion. Indeed, current Bishop Hereward is Lady Averil Xanthippe's son and her sister, Lady Aloysia Xanthippe, heads the Xanthippes here and personally led the wartime peace-keeping forces. Xanthippe House guards keep order in the streets, not only of Arcadia, but also Lunaion. The Xanthippe are greatly respected on Luna. It is not difficult to see why for the streets of Lunaion are clean, and the people seem happy and well treated.

Urth

My thoughts as I finally set foot upon humanity's home-world are difficult to articulate. All my life I have heard the legends of our common past and now I am here to see it for myself. I find this the most difficult portion of my task, to see the truth behind the received wisdom. At least I bypass the need to describe Urth's geographical oddities; there cannot be an educated soul amongst the stars without the names and numbers etched into their consciousness. So, if any of what I have to relate repeats what the reader already knows I apologize in advance.

We landed, after a considerable delay while our visas were checked, at the Serene Perturbation Garden, starport of Samarkand. Half of the Patriarchal fleet, including the flagship Phlogiston under the command of Priest Gwylan Davies and Adept Roscoe Smith of the Brother Battle is stationed above Urth. The remainder is stationed at Triton under the singular command of Deacon Drake, responsible for customs searches of ships in transit, and guarding the jumpgate.

Urth is a strictly ordered world, the vast majority of land given over to wild reserves, showing how life used to be, from the Asiatic steppes to the North American Plains. The population is confined to cities and their surrounding agrarian areas. As befits a world with such a high population—even considering those living in the off-world colonies—there are more cities on Urth than could possibly be mentioned. Residency is tightly controlled; one needs papers to prove one's identity and visas to access any city. The Orthodoxy police these restrictions and their administration to better protect the welfare of the populace. Migration between cities is rare, and difficult for locals, and not without difficulties for visitors. This is not to say movement across Urth is impossible, there are five starports (corresponding with five of the continental capitals); Samarkand, Rio Brasilia, Cairo, Petersburg and Quebec. Every major city boasts an airport, access to which is tightly controlled. Indeed, why would one wish to move on from one idyllic existence to another?





Politically Urth is divided into roughly continental archbishoprics: Europe, Asia, Africa, and North and South America. Each of these is divided further along city lines, each city of size watched over by bishop. The seat of each continental Archbishopric is the continental capital. Similarly, the Archbishop of South America is traditionally also the Patriarch (the latter position taking precedence, of course).

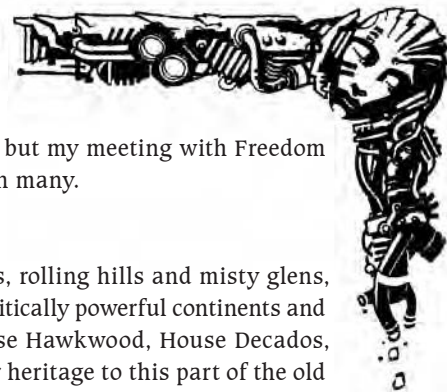
Asia

Samarkand sits proudly at the heart of the Asian continent, one of the oldest settlements on Urth, yet the most recent to become continental capital. The lands under its dominion are varied and wild, scorching deserts, lofty peaks and rich red earth. Truly, all human life is here.

This is the ancestral homeland of the Li Halan and the cities conform to the precision and order that House is rightly renowned for. The Archbishop of Asia is traditionally allied with House Li Halan; the current incumbent is Archbishop Peng De-Huai, a Hinayana hardliner. Transgressors against public order are displayed in public stocks in Cardano Square every Friday morning. Public executions are scheduled for Sundays. Samarkand also serves as the Li Halan embassy on Urth; their Jade Palace sits to the north of the city beside Lake Baikal, and has done since the conversion. The previous ambassadorial residence, in Shanghai, was burnt to the ground, which was then salted. The current ambassador, Count Temujin Tai Li Halan, an accomplished huntsman, often enjoys the fruits of the countryside wearing his famous panda-skin cloak accompanied by Bishop Peng.

Asia is too vast to be totally homogenous; to the south the Hinayana Orthodoxy's influence gives way to a more relaxed form of Mahayana worship. These two factions are political and dogmatic rivals. The Mahayana champion, if such a term is fitting, is the Bishop of Hong Kong, Bishop Nicholas Chen, a sprightly eighty year old whose family has held the diocese for seven generations. The political agitation between Samarkand and Hong Kong reached a head in 4998 when Patriarch Hezekiah bestowed the Bishopric of Asia (and along with it the status of continental capital) to Bishop Peng of Samarkand. This was a grave insult to both Hong Kong and the Mahayana hierarchy—not to mention a thank-you to Bishop Peng who supported the Patriarch in his own succession.

Hong Kong is a very different city to Samarkand. While no less devout, the inhabitants are much more vociferous, more urgent. Hong Kong bustles, Samarkand kow-tows. The



docklands of Hong Kong are a veritable hive of activity at all hours of the day and night. Not surprising, given it is the busiest port on the continent. What did surprise was the preponderance of gambling houses. One could hardly move for the sound of gaming pieces played and money lost. I spoke to Detective John Ho, head of the harbor patrol whose sentiments nicely sum up the morals of Hong Kong: "As long as no-one gets killed, and they confess on Sundays, I don't care what they get up to in their spare time."

Australasia

Australasia is a strange place. A place of dry air and endless desert, and a burning faith. And a burning resentment. This resentment comes chiefly from a lack of recognition, as was explained to me at length, again and again and again during my visit. I spoke with the Bishop Howard Klein of Sydney, a short man with a lazy eye and a temper to match his stature. Australasia is not treated as a full continent; politically speaking, it is not given its due. In truth I can see why. It is not blessed with a starport, its population is too small and its terrain is too harsh. Bishop Klein preferred to see it as a conspiracy. The upper echelons of Australian city dwellers are staunchly Hinayana Orthodox, conservative in outlook and fashion (Australian cities dot the coast, the interior is scorched wasteland). In an attempt to expand his influence (and that of his Bishopric) Bishop Klein has been negotiating with Archbishop Peng of Samarkand over a realignment of borders, specifically, he wants to redraw them with the Indonesian part of Australasia. This would significantly expand his population base and his personal importance. Quite what he has to offer in return for this impressive boon is beyond me.

Fortunately, Bishop Klein is not the only spiritual leader in Australia. Following up rumors first heard in Hong Kong, we commandeered a flitter (the Bishop seemed eager to impress an Imperial servant) and began to traverse the continent. Endless sandy wastes stretched out beneath us. After what seemed like an eternity, we reached our destination. A bleached red basalt monolith sitting serene and magnificent in the middle of the deserts: Uluru, the Cathedral of the Rock, the unofficial home of Freedom Jones, the hesychast preacher and his flock. Periodically, out of the desert, comes a wandering mystic, in this part of the Known Worlds a Koori tribesman. A cult has built up around these wandering preachers; fashionable dilettantes come from across the globe to learn at the feet of the wise ones. Something of this phenomena percolates throughout Urth. Since the coming of the Prophet and, particularly, the relocation of the Patriarchal Seat to Urth, the natives have seen themselves as blessed above and beyond those born elsewhere. Taken to extremes it follows that those families that have been on Urth longer are more blessed, more in tune with the Prophet's teachings. Some groups, generally those sedentary in nature—such as the tribes of the Asiatic steppe, or the Koori in Australia—claim their ancestors never left Urth. Surely, so the reasoning goes, those whose feet never left the holy world must be the most holy.

On that, I cannot comment, but my meeting with Freedom Jones was more fruitful than many.

Europe

A land of majestic forests, rolling hills and misty glens, Europe is one of the most politically powerful continents and also the most divided. House Hawkwood, House Decados, and the Hazat all trace their heritage to this part of the old world (although the Justus prefer to claim South American heritage). They all have their embassies here and they all compete for influence. That the current continental capital lies in Decados-claimed territory at Petersburg (named after a pre-reflective Saint) and Archbishop John Calecas of Europe is one of their scions gives no end of pleasure to the House of the Mantis.

Despite the heavy noble presence, especially in the capital and the ambassadorial seats (Madrid and Edinburgh respectively for the Hazat and House Hawkwood) the continent is Orthodox through and through. The usual theological splits apply, the south and east of the continent, including the ambassadorial seats and cities such as Rome and Moscow are predominantly Hinayana, and the most outspoken of this faction is Bishop Ximénez de Cisneros of Guernica. Guernica's Cathedral of the Oak is the traditional seat of the Inquisitorial Synod, of which Bishop de Cisneros is an active member (the Orthodoxy dominates the Inquisition on Urth); its library of precedent is second only to that of the Cathedra Avesti on Pyre.

The north and west of the continent, traditionally Hawkwood lands, veer more toward a Mahayana interpretation of the scriptures. Indeed, on certain of the remoter islands (Eire and Iceland for example) the peasants have lapsed into pagan worship. Bishop de Cisneros is trying to rally support behind his calls for an Inquisitorial purge of the area. Bishop Absalom Moore of Sheffield is the most vocal opponent of the potential purge and he has won much support in Count Alasdair Tamlan Hawkwood's ambassadorial court with his impassioned arguments against, "The Bishop of Spain's unashamed lust for blood". Unsurprisingly this has won him few friends in the Hazat court at Madrid. The latest move of their ambassador, Count Tuco Benedicto Pacifico Juan Maria Ramirez, an Emperor War veteran sticking closely to his old alliances with the Decados, was to ban Hawkwood delegations from his court, and Bishop Moore from the entirety of Spain—the fact he has neither the legal right to do this nor the temporal ability to enforce it has not slowed Count Ramirez down in the least. It has, however, disrupted Count Alasdair's plans to ferment a friendship between his son, Sir Rory Archibald Hawkwood and Lady Isabella Carmen Delores Ramirez, the eldest of Count Ramirez's daughters. Not to be outdone, the Decados ambassador, Count Mikhail Tukhachevsky Decados, has made an official request for a marriage between Lady Isabella and his own, reputedly sickly, son, Boyar Vasily Tukhachevsky Decados. The upcoming ambassadorial ball, to be held in Rio Brasilia at the Patriarch's invitation, promises to be most intriguing.



Africa

The Dark Continent. If the true glory of the Pancreator can be seen anywhere it is here. A safari through Africa is a must if even one day can be spared. The chance to see the elephant and lion, the wildebeest and hippopotamus is surely a dream come true. Safari visas can be obtained from the offices of the Church in Cairo, and are definitely worth the effort.

Africa is relatively free of the politicking of Europe but it is more active on the international scene, under its vigorous and expansionist Mahayana Archbishop Mirza Abu Talib of Cairo it has expanded its borders to India in the east and Istanbul in the north and the Arabian wastelands to the south-east. Whispers abound over just how much support House al-Malik and its ebullient ambassador Count Ubaydallah al-Mustansir are lending, and what the repayments will be. Bishop Talib, of course, is having none of this. He claims coming into Africa, and *in extenso* his sphere of influence is the best thing that could happen to a city.

Cairo is truly a wondrous place, its Cathedral of Saint Salah, built on the ruins of a pre-reflective altar dominates the center of the city. Adjoining the Cathedral is the University of Enlightenment, the foremost house of learning beyond the Academy Interatta, unusually for Urth it specializes not just in theology but linguistics, classics, and science. Bishop Talib has deflected criticism of the teaching program by pointing out the achievements of its alumni, the Great Chartophylax, Nyana vo Dret, was himself a student.

More wondrous even than these is the Sphinx, said by some the most ancient of Gargoyles. The Gargoyle is off-limits to the public, guarded by Bishop Talib's personal guard (wielding, it has to be said, al-Malik equipment). This has not stopped Gargoyle cults springing up, left right and center. The guard does nothing to hinder these cults as long as they confine themselves to respectful vigilance from afar. It is rumored that much of Cairo's (and Bishop Talib's) good fortune is thanks to the Sphinx's wisdom. I cannot speculate on this except to say I was refused access to the Gargoyle in no uncertain terms, no one sees it without the Bishop's expressed permission. When I sought to ask it of him, he was unavoidably detained and unable to see me.

Bishop Aleksei Georgious of Istanbul has refuted all African advances as yet; more Hinayana than Mahayana in outlook although declared for neither, he appears to be playing Africa against Europe in efforts to better his own, and his city's, position. Sub-continental India has long been denied the political weight its population deserves. In the past, this was often self-inflicted by vicious infighting. For the moment, however, Bishop Lal Dravin of Delhi has united the Universal Church of India (if this is not an oxymoron) behind him and seems intent of joining forces with Cairo. Should this succeed, the political map of Urth would significantly change. If Europe does not pay these developments the attention they deserve they may get an unpleasant surprise soon enough.

It was while in Delhi that I experienced the, for want of a better word, darker side of Holy Terra. I had decided it

would not be fitting to complete this survey without stepping beyond the boundaries of what should be seen. As such I donned a disguise and stepped beyond the city walls into the teeming masses of humanity that throng beyond. It should be pointed out that construction on Holy Terra is tightly controlled and, in general, proscribed—cities are not allowed to encroach further into the natural wilderness. Unfortunately mankind has never been able to adequately control its population despite several barbaric pre-reflective attempts, and well they have not, as every soul reflects glory on the Pancreator. But still the masses throng, kept out of the wilderness and kept out of the cities; slums abound on Holy Terra. Those surrounding Dehli seemed endless, or maybe their scale was merely beyond my comprehension, I must admit I am more accustomed to moving in more rarified atmospheres. The sight of such a mass of humanity reinforced to me the nature, and the scale, of the obligation thrust upon those who would rule, and those who would guide.

North America

I did not travel direct to the continental capital in Quebec, instead detouring to visit the monastery headquarters of my companion Father Trefillion's Order. The Order of The Divine Chance is, as he explained, an Eskatonic splinter sect devoted to deciphering the Pancreator's truth by observing the ineffable exercise of his will. They are based on the east coast of the continent, to the north of its largest city, New York.

New York finds itself at the center of a political storm, the feeling there has long been that the largest center of population should hold the continental Archishopric, an argument rigorously refuted by the diocese of Quebec. This animosity goes back for generations and has reached its head in recent years. The two principles, Bishop Francesca Condolenzzi of New York and Archbishop Raymond de Chartres of Quebec made no secret of their hatred for each other, their arguments often descending to the gutter. Things became more serious a year ago, when New York ceased trading with Quebec. A small, agrarian city, Quebec relied upon trade from teeming New York. In response, Archbishop de Chartres censured New York, declaring it was growing beyond the boundaries set down for it (the expansion of all Urthish cities beyond strict guidelines is expressly forbidden under Church Law).

No one is sure quite how this spat would have turned out and the question is rapidly becoming moot, for six months ago Archbishop de Chartres was struck down with a wasting illness. The best medics, theurgic and medicinal, have not been able to raise him from his feverish slumber. Bishop Condolenzzi has called for a continental synod meeting to choose a successor, this has been decreed as "shameless opportunism" by the Quebec faction and defended as "good practical sense" by the New Yorkers. Officially, the Patriarchal Seat has no influence in internal continental appointments, but Bishop de Chartres was a close confidant and ally of the Patriarch.



We encountered another somewhat singular brotherhood on our journey south—the continent seems particularly susceptible to them; something for the Eskatonics to look into, a confluence of leylines, perhaps? The Brothers of the Ancient Order are nothing if not an eclectic mix. Their monastery, such as it is, reinforces the feeling of eccentricity. It sits at the foot of an ancient pre-reflective mountain altar, the faces of some four ancient potentates carved into the very rock itself. The scale of these graven idols astonished me, they stand tens of meters tall each. I must admit to finding their unflinching flinty observation somewhat unsettling. Provost Mortimer Rivers, ecumenical leader of the order, explained that the idols were not Gargoyles in the truest sense, yet it was his belief they held some power, or some secret from out of the past. What other reason could there be for their existence? The order's motley collection of souls—I marked Engineers, Heychasts and Scravers amongst their number—devotes itself to solving that mystery.

South America

South America is a continent of contrasts. In the north, the disputed Mexican borderlands. In the center vast

uncharted jungles, their depths known only to lost tribes of pygmies still worshipping pre-reflective gods. In the south, sweeping pampas grazed by herd upon herd of shaggy haired cows.

Rio Brasilia is the jewel in the crown of South America. There sits the Patriarchal Seat, reflecting the Holy Flame into all our hearts. It is the continent's largest city (only Mexico City rivals it), its capital, its starport and its largest sea-port. Cathedrals dominate many cities but few cities were designed and built around their cathedrals as Rio Brasilia was. Wide boulevards radiate out from the center like rays of light; each faction assigned a section between two rays, with the center reserved for the Orthodoxy. All the sects and guilds keep healthy stations here—only the nobility chose to house their ambassadors elsewhere. I was fortunate to meet a familiar face amongst the sublime chaos surrounding the court: Adept Frederik van Gelder, the Brother Battle ambassador (who recently replaced Adept Aaron). I first served with Frederik during my first tenure as a Sword of Lextius. His political powers have matured considerably since then and with his help I was able to secure a twenty minute interview with the Syneculla, His Excellency Archbishop Sigmund Dual. He offered me every



Solar System

Sol (Star): A mid-range yellow star, of all observed stars Sol has been least affected by the Fading Suns phenomenon. The Engineers are at a loss to explain this (the Church, of course, is not).

Mercury: Small and hot. Never terraformed, Mercury's axis is tilted to the perpendicular; half of the planet is permanently boiling, the other permanently frozen.

Venus: But for its corrosive greenhouse atmosphere, Venus is Urth's twin. Some manned scientific stations were developed during the Second Republic but they have long since been abandoned.

Holy Terra: A blue-green world, a paradise. Almost lost to pollution and industrial predation during the Second Republic, now its idyllic climate is restored.

Luna: Urth's oldest colony.

Mars: The birthplace of the Prophet, and also the scene of humanity's first attempts at terraforming. Its thin atmosphere is breathable, but non-natives struggle to adapt.

Asteroid Belt: Countless asteroids lie between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. Many are large enough to house colonies and mining shacks. Others hide pirates.

Jupiter: Jupiter was once the center of a loose confederation of outer colonies. Its moons are still dotted with these outposts.

Saturn: Further removed from Sol's light than Jupiter. Saturn's history mirrors that of the larger planet on a lesser scale.

Uranus: A frozen world, covered in methane ice, much of Uranus was mined during the Second Republic. Science stations dot its moons.

Neptune: The last major outpost before the jump-gate, several of Neptune's moons hold colonies.

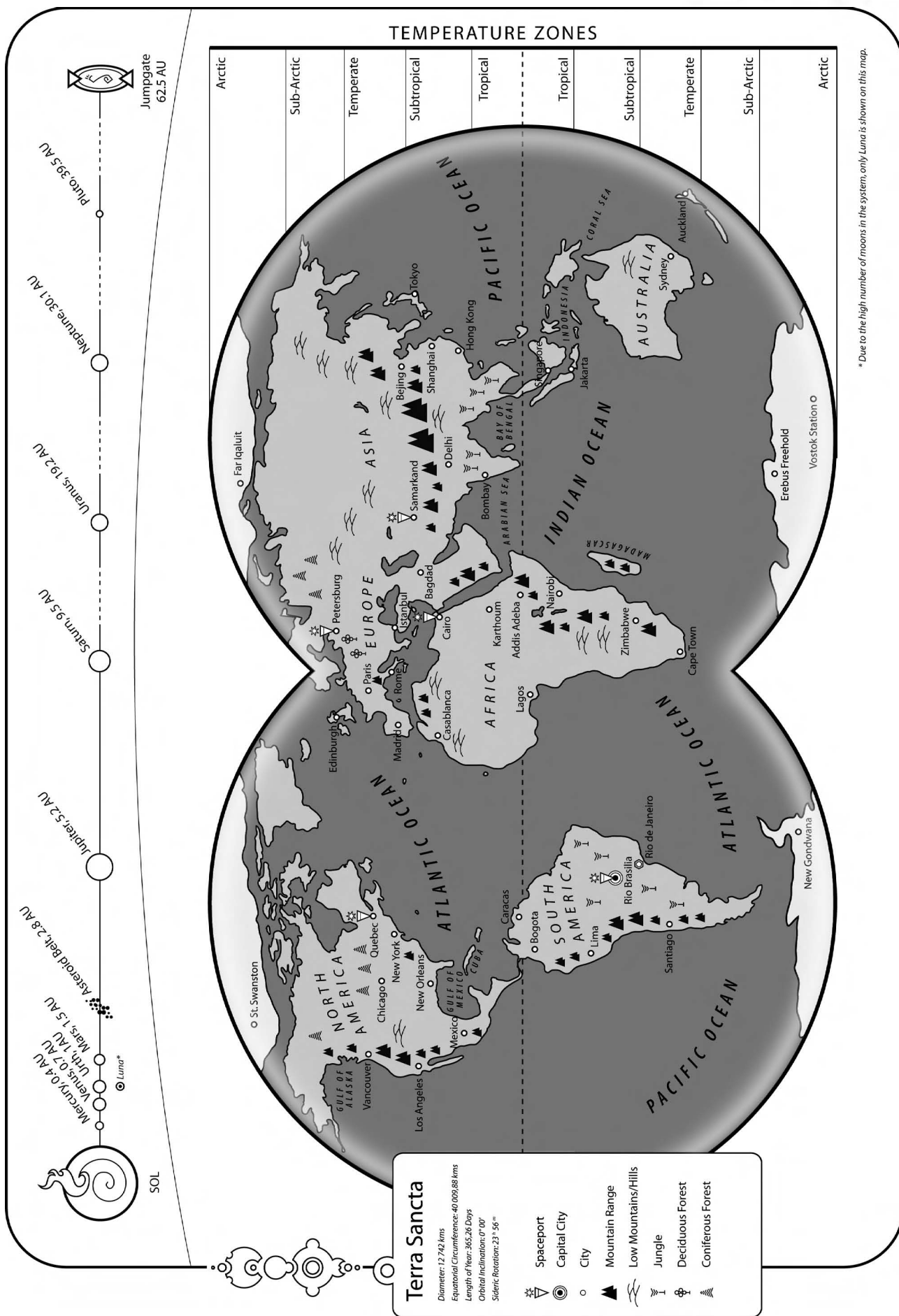
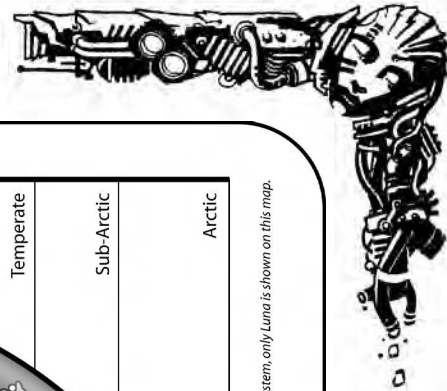
Pluto: A lost wanderer on the edge of darkness. Very little has ever happened on Pluto, most likely very little ever will.

assistance in furthering my endeavor and seemed genuinely interested to learn more about the Questing Knights and their achievements. He was no more forthcoming than I when asked for his thoughts on the impending succession of Patriarch Hezekiah.

The major political frisson in Rio Brasilia at the moment is a recurrence of the age-old Hinayana-Mahayana schism, brought to a head in this case by the Syneculla himself. Archbishop Dual has recently, and under protest, allowed a limited alien presence in Rio Brasilia. Before now the city was considered off-limits for Urth's miniscule alien population. He requisitioned a sub-section of the al-Malik quarter for this purpose, imposing strict border controls. While aliens, specifically Obun, are allowed in the designated areas, they are allowed nowhere else. Mahayana activists call this a direct affront to their philosophy and, moreover, to their de facto champion, the Great Chartophylax Nyana vo Dret, an Obun. He has diplomatically refused to engage in argument, but it is not secret that the Mahayana powers see this as a challenge to them all. Archbishop Sakhya (with her escort Baronet Alexandra d'Havilland of the Knights of St. Yara) arrived for urgent discussion with the Great Chartophylax, Archbishop Talib of Cairo and Adept van Gelder. It would have been remiss of me to ask Frederik what occurred within these talks, but dishonest to deny my curiosity.

I should mention here, in passing, the City of Refuge, Rio de Janeiro. This lawless cesspit lies more than a thousand kilometers into the jungle, a stinking anachronism, a hold-over of pre-Imperial protectionism. If I may, for a moment, be so bold—the sooner the Patriarchal court has its way and burns the lesser Rio from the jungle, the better. I only mention the cursed place at all as a warning to ill-informed pilgrims who have been known to mistake the two Rios, much to their predictably short-lived chagrin.

It is with mixed feelings I leave Urth. I have learnt so much in my time here, but cruelly I have learnt of yet greater wonders that I have not the time to experience. I would wish one day to return here, but I feel in my bones, as I embark my ship, that I will never set foot on these hallowed lands again.






Chapter Three: Pentateuch

Pentateuch was previously surveyed in detail in the Fading Suns sourcebook Weird Places (pp. 11–21). The information in this chapter is in addition to that presented in the Weird Places book.

Pentateuch, a world apart. The final gift of Doramos to an undeserving universe. A magical world. Home of the fabled Ghostwind and the mysterious Eskatonic Order. Would that I had more time to catalogue it, my Lord Emperor. Fortunately greater scholars than I have already approached the task so I recommend their works to you and confine myself to the immediate political structure.

Pentateuch is finally at peace—as much as any world can be in the time of the fading suns. Or so it would seem. While the surface seems calm, there is turbulence in the depths. More forces are at work than are first apparent. Always a hotbed for unexplained behavior—psychic covens, ghost towns, strange disappearances and the like—the stewardship of Pentateuch was gifted to the Eskatonic Order in 4956. The terms of the Pentateuch Concordat are public record. It was hoped to end the cycle of repressive violence that had gripped Pentateuch for centuries. It seemed to work, but other factors may have been responsible. The Emperor Wars had many effects across many planets. Here they dampened the underlying tensions, covering old hatreds with a veneer of necessity. Also, any new political administration experiences a honeymoon period. Change must be good, no matter what the change. The Eskatonics, and the planet, benefited from both these effects. But after crises old troubles raise their heads. Things hidden become seen.

The Eskatonic Order runs Pentateuch. This truism is perhaps not accurate. The Eskatonics have ever been a small order, dedicated to the pursuit of truth in all its forms. Administering to a flock, much less a planet, was never their strength. There is, in essence, a power vacuum. The Eskatonics are too wise to be unaware of this, indeed Magus Moore hinted at his understanding during our meeting. His order's organization is not geared to the needs of Pentateuch; seniority is gained via wisdom and revelation, not efficiency. Indeed, it is hard to pinpoint for outsiders to perceive their hierarchy—Eskatonics find this confusion amusing or dense, depending on their mood. The Hierophant



Pentateuch Traits

Ruler: Eskatonic Order

Cathedral: Basilica of Saints Paulus and Horace (Eskatonic Order)

Agora: A (sometimes) collaborative effort between the Charioteers and the Rajahs (a collection of local arts traders)

Garrison: 2

Capital: Heliopolis

Jumps: 1

Adjacent Worlds: Byzantium Secundus (dayside), Delphi and Holy Terra (nightside)

Solar System: Daleth (Sun), Moroni (0.125 AU), Bani (0.25 AU), Bubastis (0.5 AU), Pentateuch (Nuz) (1 AU), Tanis (4 AU), Jumpgate (64 AU)

Tech: 5

Human Population: 300,000

Alien Population: 150+ (primarily in Aztlan)

Resources: Various grains and crops

Export: Spices and herbs. Arts and crafts. Joloba bean, a cousin to Urth's coffee bean, and used in similar beverages. Cantha-weed, a form of tobacco. Mellior, a rich, dark timber used in fine furnishings.

Landscape: Terraforming turned Pentateuch into a planet with the biological and geological diversity of Urth. There is less water on Pentateuch, however seas make up perhaps half of the planet's surface.

of Heliopolis, Magister Taraza (marked by her black hooded robe as a member of the Sanhedrin, the Eskatonic “secret police”) is, I assume, to be the next highest ranking. She administers Heliopolis with a steady hand and a cool

intelligence. Looking back, I see much of my insight was pre-empted by her gentle hints. Nothing an Eskatonic does is without a reason, my Lord Emperor. I bear this in mind as I continue.

Activity of all kinds has increased of late, old school and new. The Orthodoxy, in the presence of Bishop Queipo de Llano has expanded its presence. Recently, the Cathedral of Saint Palamedes was consecrated on the western outskirts of Heliopolis, a focal point for the Orthodoxy. He preaches a strong Hinayana doctrine, mostly to the urbanities of Heliopolis—the outlands of Pentateuch are traditionally anti-Orthodox, if that is not too pejorative a term. Bishop de Llano could not hide his resentment of the Eskatonics when we spoke. Reading between the lines, he sees them as not up to the task given to them under the terms of the Concordat: the running of Pentateuch. There is some evidence to support this view. During the Emperor Wars, the Hazat made several sorties against Pentateuch, citing their usual excuses but their intent was clear enough: expansion. Strategically Pentateuch would have met their goals, a forward position and staging post for raids against both Byzantium Secundus and the Hawkwood worlds through and beyond Delphi (not to mention Holy Terra itself). Their assaults were strictly limited in scope, gauging reaction. And it was the Orthodoxy that responded, sending squadrons of the Patriarchal Fleet to underline their point; ultimately the Universal Church guards Pentateuch. The Hazat understood and withdrew, but their ambition remains. Factions of the Orthodoxy believe they have not been fully repaid for their efforts aiding Pentateuch. Squadrons of the Patriarchal fleet under the command of Priest Alejandro Lerroux still patrol the skies of Pentateuch. They are more a symbolic presence than a military one, but the symbol is unmistakable.

The Hazat have seemingly shelved any military invasion plans, instead turning to diplomacy. With predictable results. The Hazat ambassador, Marquessa Danielle Eliza Castenda de Sutek, is obviously a stranger to the diplomatic field. Personal beauty and a fiery temper are doubtless worthwhile traits, in certain situations. Delicate diplomacy requires a sharp mind and a tactful tongue. I regret to report the Marquessa lacks either of these qualities. Her heavy-handed approach has alienated her obvious ally, Bishop de Llano. Her retainers recently rounded up a cell of so-called Orthoclast terrorists that had been nosily active of late (the Orthoclasts demand an end to Orthodox rule). Magister Taraza pointed out they were all recently arrived Aragonian immigrants. The incident has hardly been mentioned since. During our meeting, a candlelit dinner in her manse, the Marquessa requested I report favorably on her endeavors, if I “knew what was good for me”. I dutifully discharge my service to her and her House by reporting her words *verbatim*. One as eloquent as her requires little translation from one as lowly as myself, a mere servant of Hermes. Not all members of the Hazat on Pentateuch were as bellicose as the Marquessa, I was fortunate enough to be invited by Don Heraklio Menendez Casa Grande de Cadiz, on a unicorn hunt. The unfortunate, and extremely hospitable, Don had

Solar System

Daleth (Star): An orange-red star, dim to start with, Daleth has not dimmed as much some other stars.

Moroni: A scorched barren world, the size of Urth's Luna. It was never explored, being too close to the sun for even atmosphere domes to survive.

Bani: Much the same as Moroni, Bani was barren and uninteresting before Doramos and it remains so to this day.

Bubastis: Slightly larger than Pentateuch, Bubastis is without atmosphere. Large polar carbon dioxide icepacks cover much of its soot scorched surface.

Pentateuch: Transformed by Doramos into a green and pleasant world, rivaled only by Holy Terra for its idyllic agrarian landscapes.

Nuz: A large moon with a thin, breathable atmosphere. Legend has it Doramos intended to terraform Nuz next.

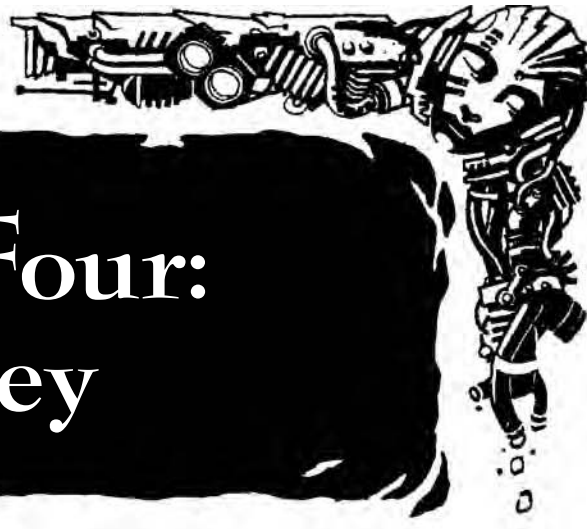
Tanis: Ordered by Doramos to be untouched. Quite why anyone would want to touch this inhospitable chunk of rock and ice is unknown.

recently arrived on Pentateuch from the Kurgan front where he suffered a dolorous blow. It was his plan to capture the semi-mythic Pentateuch unicorn and thus restore himself. Time, unfortunately did not permit me to accompany him, but I most certainly wish him well in his quest.

Terrorist acts however, both real and imagined, are undeniably on the increase, Bishop de Llano's accusations of incompetence have not been assuaged by Magus Moore's answers of “a world needs time to find its own equilibrium”.

The situation here is tense and will only become more so. The Eskatonic leadership find themselves in a difficult position, under outside pressure like no sect since the penitent Avesti. Some whisper they are on trial, if not for their survival, then for their stewardship. The fact Bishop de Llano was a favored student of Archbishop Dual of Holy Terra only feeds the paranoia. In the center of the slowly growing maelstrom sits Magus Moore, wise beyond my experience and till now, predominantly silent. I will not attempt to guess the plans of the Eskatonics, I will only say this. Pentateuch was always schismatically divided and now the memory resurfaces.





Chapter Four: De Moley

Hooba's apocryphal astrological tarot paints De Moley as the planet of war. And that is fitting: born into its current form in war and home to the foremost warriors between the stars, De Moley is a craggy, tough world. Only the hardy survive it. It suits its guardians well. But it was not always like this.

History

De Moley's history is an eon-long allegory of warfare. Long periods of inactivity interspersed with sudden violent bloodshed. Agents of the Pan Arabian Mercantile Alliance (PAMA) zaibatsu colonized it early in the Diaspora. PAMA was at the forefront of exploration and colonization, if not exploitation and resource management. Many of the best pilots were theirs, wooed by unparalleled freedom and excellent health benefits. As is the case with any blade worthy of the name, this cuts both ways. Unbeknownst to PAMA, the disease of Sathraism flourished amongst their pilots. Entrusted with too much freedom by their employers, the pilots plotted and schemed. Sathraism bedded down in the soil of De Moley (then known by its original name of Mazdak) like hardy, parasitic ivy. It was not removed for over a thousand years.

The end of the first Republic and the first war against Sathraism did not touch too heavily on De Moley. The heretics on this world were less brave than their companions elsewhere; they chose to skulk and to cower. To carve out hiding places amongst the crags and the howling winds. That choice served them well at the time, but truth and justice visit all eventually.

De Moley fades from our histories after the first defeats of the Sathraists; a quiet world, too inhospitable for the fashionable and too difficult for the miners, it marked the border between the spheres of influence of House al-Malik and House Decados and little more. Until the fall of the Second Republic.

When civilization fell from its lofty peaks of technosophy and hubris, the minions of Sathra were in the chaotic vanguard. What happened next is common knowledge to us all, I ask the reader to indulge my repetition.

De Moley Traits

Ruler: Brother Battle

Cathedral: Brother Battle (Monastery at Ruad)

Agora: Charioteers (not enough trade for the Scravers to contest)

Garrison: 5

Capital: Castrensis

Jumps: Three

Adjacent Worlds: Aylon (dayside), Severus (adjacent)

Solar System: Areia (Sun), Salat (0.95 AU), De Moley (Primus, Secundus, Tertius) (1.2 AU), Deione (3.1 AU), Chione (35 AU), Ishtar (49 AU), Jumpgate (65 AU)

Tech: 3

Human Population: 8,000,000

Alien Population: 400,000 (mostly Ukari)

Resources: minerals, metals, gems

Export: minerals, metals, gems, weapons, Brother Battle memorabilia

Landscape: Harsh and rugged, De Moley's only continent, Radixon, is mountainous in the extreme. Harsh winds funnel down the numerous valleys. Animal life here tends to the squat and hardy, as do the people.

The Fall of Mazdak

Brother Battle scholars date their order's foundation to 4053 when Saint Malcolm Xavier Justinian and Saint Godfrey de Moley swore to keep open the jumproute from Aylon to Yathrib. In 4073, after their exploits had caught the imagination of the masses, the nascent brotherhood was the spearhead thrust at the heart of the resurgent Sathraist movement, on the planet known as Mazdak.



The Battle of Mazdak marked the birth of the Brother Battle but the end of its founders. Persecution and trial had bred into Sathra's followers a low animal cunning and viciousness unmatched throughout the Known Worlds. They had lain quiet, but not idle. Industrious hands had turned their mountainous stronghold into a honeycomb of tunnels. The Brothers of Battle struck against this termite mound of sin as hammer unto anvil.

Eventually the Brothers, led by compassionate Saint Malcolm, pious Saint Godfrey, and Saint Godfrey's cousin Count Jackson Fiata de Moley, encircled the planet, forcing back the Sathraist's unclean ships. The price was terrible, but it was not the end. Their enemy would not surrender and made to their boltholes, selling every inch of land dearly. Mazdak's major starport at that time was Nineveh, the Sathraists knew it was a vital strategic choke-point before the mountains and fortified it accordingly. Saint Malcolm and Saint Godfrey realized they did not have the numbers to besiege Nineveh. They relied instead on the ingenuity of Count Jackson. He offered favorable terms of surrender to the Sathraist government. These were rejected. He hardened his heart and commenced the bombardment of Nineveh. For forty days and forty nights the Brother Battle rained down destruction on the heretics. When Saint Godfrey first set foot on the planet that was to bear his name, in Nineveh, not one stone stood upon another.

This opened the ways to the mountains and the siege of the Sathraist's last great stronghold, a citadel of concrete and iron, which they called Alamut. The Siege of Alamut was hellish and almost broke the order. The defenders were desperate, they had nowhere left to run yet neither could the besiegers turn back for there was no life for them beyond Mazdak. Attrition on both sides was immense. A stone cast from above killed Saint Malcolm. He died in his cousin Sir Jackson's arms, his final words an exultation to his kinsman, not to fail, not to suffer the evil to last a day longer than he. Inspired by the example of his friend, Saint Godfrey himself led the final assault. A pious man of even temper and ready wit, he was a friend to all who knew him and a hero to his men, it was he who broke the fortifications of the bastion of sin, he who stepped first through the breach in the fabled walls of Alamut and he who fought hand to hand with the Sathraist chieftain atop the battlements. He was triumphant despite obtaining dreadful wounds—wounds that would confine him to a wheelchair for the remainder of his days. In his sainted cousin's name, Count Jackson claimed the planet of Mazdak for the Order. There were none that could deny him.

Thus did the Brother Battle come to De Moley.

The rebuilding of Mazdak, or De Moley as it became increasingly known, occupied the Brother Battle now. Atop the ruins of Nineveh they built their capital of Castrensis and they took the fortress of Alamut, rebuilt it, sanctified it, and then called it home, the monastery at Ruad. In their efforts they had help from what one might consider unlikely sources. Envoys from both House Decados and House al-Malik made their way to the Monastery at Ruad to offer aid



and succor in the Brother's time of need. Count Jackson, who by this time had been named the first Grand Master of the Order, gratefully accepted their offers, realizing his young Order needed all the help it could get to survive in those tumultuous times.

In time the Decados and al-Malik presence on De Moley grew and an uneasy peace between the two developed, as uneasy peaces are wont to do in border areas. Always the presence of the Brothers kept the general peace and other





than occasional localized flare-ups, life on De Moley continued as ever it had, hard but rewarding.

Until the time of Darius, that is.

Recent History

Philosophers argue war reveals true human nature. I hope this is wrong. I hope there is more to human nature than I have seen in war. More than greed, envy and hate. With courage, discipline, loyalty and sacrifice war shows the best of the best, but also the worst of the worst.

A philosophy without example is coffee house rambling, nothing more. I give the example of De Moley. The Emperor Wars raged across the world of the Brother Battle and for once it was not at the hands of the warrior monks.

Disputes between the sizable presences of Decados and al-Malik never amounted to much more than petty border squabbles until the Emperor Wars. Fear of the Brother Battle or, more kindly, unwillingness to abuse their host's hospitality was the reason. While the cat is away, as the saying goes, the mice will play.

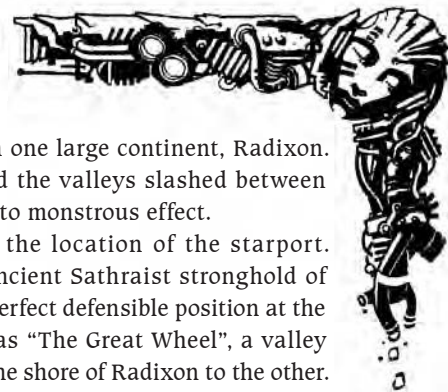
De Moley's major landmass, Radixion, is split into three unequal political regions. The Brother Battle, obviously, claim the largest of these, the majority of land is theirs, as is the only starport and Castrensis, their new capital. House Decados and House al-Malik each control smaller areas, during the early years of the Emperor Wars the borderlands

between what locals came to call "Little Aylon" and "Little Severus" quickly became disputed territory. The Mambij borderlands, mostly the broken lowland, and the nearest atmosphere dome, Herat, soon became embroiled in running warfare between Decados and al-Malik bravos.

This activity was relatively low key and the Brother Battle allowed the squabbling to continue, not wanting to be seen taking sides in what was at that time still a territorial dispute between noble houses. The al-Malik nominally controlled the disputed dome, Herat at the start of hostilities and there was little threat to this until a Decados escalation in 4466. These efforts culminated in the sabotage of the vital atmosphere reprocessing plants; De Moley has a thin atmosphere, comparable to Mars. The responsibility for the attack was disputed; the Decados claimed they had nothing to do with it, insinuating another hand planted the bombs. Although never formally accused, the Brother Battle re-stated their position as neutral.

From there things went downhill. The Brother Battle reinforced their chapter-house in Herat, this helped to contain the conflict, which although it never escalated into fully fledged war certainly intensified. Nearly fifty years of partisan guerrilla conflict has certainly left its mark. To borrow a phrase from my Muster associate Krieger, "they are still digging up the bodies on De Moley".

Without outside impetus the impasse continued until the later years of the war—De Moley was of little strategic



use to either House Decados or House al-Malik, the Brother Battle presence was too strong to overcome and neither party wished to provoke the monks from their stance of neutrality by mustering interstellar strikes from their world. It is here, toward the end of the Emperor Wars, that controversy first raises its head.

We know of two events for certain. First, the Countess Carmetha of House Decados withdrew her Stigmata legion to attack Criticorum. Second, an al-Malik offensive finally pushed the Decados out of Mambij. The advance, under General Mehmed, gained ground which was not lost even until the armistice. At first glance these events seem unrelated, but that is not what House Decados, and in particular the De Moley branch of House Decados believes. It is their supposition that shortly after Countess Carmetha ruinously left her post—which, lest we forget, endangered the Brother Battle troops guarding the Stigmata front—the Brother Battle on De Moley actively started supporting the al-Malik. This has the signs of all the best propaganda, on the surface it is believable enough and it certainly fits the facts, but this is not to say it is true. The allegation has been vehemently denied by both General Mehmed and the Brother Battle. However, given the implications, one imagines the last has not been heard of this matter.

The Brother's own territory had a relatively quiet war for many of the same reasons as the other Church-controlled planets were bypassed; simply put, a lack of strategic importance coupled with horrendous costs for any invader. De Moley has been a bolthole and a sanctuary from the turmoil of the universe for a thousand years and more before its current occupants took possession.

The major activity seen on the globe during those benighted years was economic, not military. Production and mining facilities multiplied during those years to meet the increased war demand. With war threatening all the shipping lanes throughout the Known Worlds, it made sense to become self-sufficient. Most of the Brotherhood was deployed elsewhere (particularly on Stigmata), indeed, only the border patrols around the contested area of Mambij and above and around the spaceport at Castrensis increased in number—despite their best efforts the disparate parties managed to spill some of each other's blood.

People & Places

Atmospheric disturbances delayed our planetfall by thirty-six hours. My pilot Shiro claimed he could have managed the landing but ground-control at Castrensis denied him the opportunity to flex his piloting muscles. This illustrated to me one of De Moley's most memorable features. The wind, or—more precisely—the raging, howling wind. An overview is necessary, at this point. De Moley is a large world, with slightly higher gravity than Urth standard, but with a thin atmosphere. To my mind this should not favor high winds and indeed would not, were it not for the planet's geography. Mountainous is the best word to describe De Moley's major landmass—sixty per cent of the globe is water; most

of the land is aggregated in one large continent, Radixon. The rugged mountains, and the valleys slashed between them funnel the wind there to monstrous effect.

This is exacerbated by the location of the starport. Built on the ruins of the ancient Sathraist stronghold of Nineveh, Castrensis is in a perfect defensible position at the fulcrum of what is known as “The Great Wheel”, a valley network that reaches from one shore of Radixon to the other. Logistically and militarily good; practically, a problem. The approach to the Castrensis spaceport is a nightmare, for seven days out of every twenty it is unmanageable by all but the most foolhardy, or desperate. Reeve insurance is prohibitive enough that the Charioteers refuse to run the air traffic control system—this function has passed to the Brother Battle. It is from here that the Brother Battle fleet, including Master Claudius' flagship *Incitatus*, is coordinated. The pilots and captains rotate their commands. My Charioteer, Shiro, confirmed the presence of a healthy Charioteer staff, including his old companion Lieutenant Barry Hercules, aboard the fleet at all times.

When one finally makes the approach, it is breathtaking. White snow-capped jagged mountainsides rear up at all angles and down far below the twinkling green lights await. A daytime approach is certainly not for those with a weak disposition.

The first thing that struck me as I stepped down from the *Volshchnik* was the atmosphere, or lack of it. The spaceport is situated on a half-mile square block of ceramsteel-reinforced concrete outside the atmosphere dome that covers the majority of Castrensis (the foundations are made of the same concrete poured over the ruin of Nineveh). The atmosphere is thin, one becomes breathless quickly. The locals and the Brothers I met have adapted well to the conditions, but I would not recommend an off-worlder attempting strenuous activity outside the atmosphere domes. The stature of the locals struck me moments later, as we moved inside. They tend to the squat, a few inches shorter than average, but this shortcoming appears to be added to their width. A solid, hardy people. And they need to be.

Names on De Moley may be confusing to the un-initiated. As ever with conquering peoples, the new replace the old. On De Moley, places, and people, are likely to be named after the fashion of the area they are in. In the Decados controlled north, names follow the neo-Slavic tradition of that house, in the Brother Battle controlled central areas, their own traditions predominate while in the al-Malik controlled east, names retain their pre-Brother Battle flavor.

Castrensis

The city of the warrior-monks confounds some expectations and confirms others. It is not, as one would initially expect, a pious shrine to the Order that controls the world. It is a fully functioning city in its own right, held in stewardship by the Brother Battle with the administrative functions of the city handled by Brother Battle auxiliaries. Organizational skills are organizational skills whether on



the battle field or in the council chamber. I have found in my associations with Brother Battle monks and also Muster soldiers that both these groups hold logistical knowledge in high regard. Much higher than the typical noble knight would. Perhaps this is the difference between the dream of heroism and the knowledge of the realities of war.

Castrensis is, in all outward appearances, a bustling capital city of a relatively poor planet. Its secondary character is clearly that of a mining town, indeed the vast majority of industry on De Moley is dedicated to mining, extraction, processing and shipment of the mineral wealth found inside its ever present mountains. The second largest industry, growing quickly in the last few years, is weaponsmithing. Hadrian Lank recently set up a workshop in Castrensis' merchant quarter, only a stone's throw—or a mortar's flight—from the Brother Battle main supply depot.

A common feature of the four major cities is the atmosphere dome. It is not advisable and definitely not healthy to attempt hard physical labor in the thin air. Given that getting anywhere on this planet without motorization, retrieving any of its mineral wealth, or employment by its major faction all require copious physical endeavor the atmosphere domes are a necessary evil. Of the four cities, Neo Zaporozhe, Ctesiphon, and Herat are covered by their original Second Republic domes. Fully enclosed, entry is via airlock—some large enough to allow flutter access. In Castrensis the situation is different as the original dome was destroyed along with the city it sheltered during the Siege of Nineveh. Its replacement was built during the reconstruction. As would be expected its style meshes perfectly with the overall aesthetic. Functionality is the keyword. Had I to describe Castrensis with a single word, that word would be grey.

Once one makes their way, on foot, under cover from the exposed spaceport the other overriding sensation of Castrensis makes its assault. Noise. The dome is not complete, or rather, it is not airtight. I can best describe it as a full covering suspended twenty meters above the city. One gets the distinct impression of what life would be like inside a paperweight. The noise that assails is the constant drone of the fans supplementing the meager atmosphere. My Charioteer tells me fully sealed domes do not need to blow in as much air as none can escape. Here, the constant drone is the price to pay. After a day or two under the glass, as the locals call city living, one acclimatizes, the drone reduced to the level of an aural toothache.

The city is arranged in a most orderly grid. On other planets the limitations of space (the dome and the surrounding mountains being the limiting factors) would cause an explosion of ingenuity and squalor but here that is not the case. There are simply not enough people on the planet.

The dome similarly limits upward expansion, the tallest building, the Starr Center, belongs to De Moley's small enclave of Reeves and is only eight stories tall. The Reeves head a small but compact Merchant's quarter. Director Jennifer Starr, Reeve leader and most influential Guildier in Castrensis, spoke to me at length about potential market

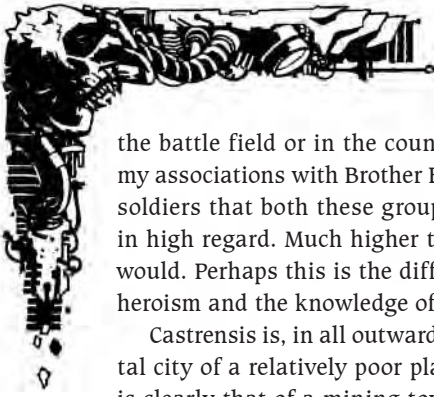
shares, demographics, profit margins and all manner of other economic concerns. She was, despite her typically merchant outlook and worryingly focused conversation, a gracious host and after several hours became somewhat more expansive, and subsequently interesting. She explained about, as she called it, the explosion of mercantile interest in De Moley since the end of the Emperor Wars and how the Reeves have bankrolled several new merchant endeavors; notable amongst these, the Lank weaponsmiths. According to her, the planet's stock has "never been higher". I could not possibly speculate whether this large grey presence ought to do with the Brother Battle's money-lending operations.

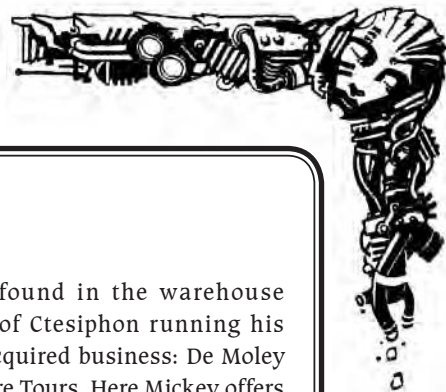
Clearing my head of Reeves monetary doublespeak, I made my way to the administrative center of Castrensis, the Solum building, a rectangular grey box distinguishable from the surrounding rectangular grey boxes only by the symbol of the Brother Battle adorning its faces. Truthfully, the jumpgate and sword is not as prevalent as one expected, the majority of functionaries—guards, porters, street-sweepers etc—are organized by the Brother Battle, but are not actual members of the order. Indeed, the idea of divinely inspired holy weapons maintaining law and order in a ramshackle (relatively) outpost is patently ridiculous.

Adept Gilbert Erail, the Brother Battle chief administrator, agreed to see me at extremely brief notice; a short, graying and extremely organized man, he managed to allot me twenty-seven minutes before chairing a meeting of the city council. This is a true council in name only, all decisions regarding the administration of Castrensis ultimately belong to the Brother Battle. This is not to say they have not found the newly instituted council, it is only three years old, useful. Director Starr sits on it, as do Boyar Valentin Ivanovich Decados and Baronet Jasmine Sima al-Malik, respectively the Mantis and al-Malik ambassadors. Adept Erail confided to having a better working relationship with Director Starr than the noble ambassadors, who were hard-pressed to contain themselves to civil behavior and spent most of their time in infantile gainsaying of the other. Sadly, it would seem there are still those who would not learn the lessons of our very recent past.

I met then with the respective ambassadors, separately I might add. It pains me to confirm Adept Erail's sad indictment; Boyar Valentin, a scion of the ruling family of Neo Zaporozhe seemed so short-sighted as to be unable to see past his hatred of his opposite number. They have already fought three duels, inconclusively. The Boyar would not elaborate the cause of enmity, I assume it runs deep. I would have hoped Baronet Jasmine to be more magnanimous, however I fear the loss of her left eye in their last duel seems to have somewhat skewed her outlook. A proud daughter of the Sunwheel, she couched her words in metaphor and simile but could not disguise her intent. I suggest the feud between al-Malik and Decados will not be ended whilst she remains ambassador.

It pleases me now to make a return to spiritual matters. Strangely, there is no cathedral in Castrensis, only a small Orthodox chapel. Pilgrims wishing to pay their respects at





People of Note

Adam Nevar

Adam Nevar is much more than just a disgruntled serf with ideas above his station. Originally a Muster Sergeant (he still wears his Muster half-plate armour, although the symbols are mostly covered with battle-grime) he is the son of an Emperor Wars hero. His father, Kelton Nevar, was one of Alexius' champions and later one of his weaponmasters. Despite this, Adam soon fell from grace.

While bounty-hunting for the Muster, Adam traveled once too often with disreputable pilots and was exposed to the Sathra effect. Strong of body, but relatively weak of spirit, Adam quickly became a devoted follower of Sathra. After several run-ins with Sanhedrin mystics which left Adam unfortunately (in his eyes) unable to harm members of the clergy he made his way to De

Moley in search of ancient Sathraist lore. Already Adam has found a store of small soul shards with which he has replaced the fingernails of his left hand.

Armed with his trusty shotgun, his Muster martial arts, and his newly acquired psychic powers, Adam is a formidable opponent. Adam stumbled into an already chaotic Freetown and quite quickly managed to take over. He originally hadn't intended to stay on for long, only to use it as a base of operations, but has started to enjoy the power and the opportunities for cheap violence it offers.

Associate Mickey "The Mechanic" Scarlett

Scraver Associate Mickey "The Mechanic" Scarlett is a fairly recent newcomer to De Moley. He

can be found in the warehouse district of Ctesiphon running his newly acquired business: De Moley Adventure Tours. Here Mickey offers guided tours to interplanetary visitors for extremely reasonable fees. He hires, he claims, only the best local guides. De Moley Adventure Tours do only minor legitimate business of late, although its sideline of scouting and salvaging ancient Sathraist ruins and lost Brother Battle stockpiles is doing much better.

The Adventure Tours are all Mickey's own idea although his sojourn on De Moley wasn't. Don Simeone Di Canio suggested a trip out into the wilds would be better for Mickey's health after Mickey had done "a job" on a Charioteer Killroy team investigating the Don's frozen fish transportation racket a little too closely.

the sepulcher of Saint Godfrey need to visit the monastery at Ruad. No flitters fly there, no roads lead there. The only route is fifteen days on foot through backbreaking terrain. A journey to test the truly faithful.

Ruad

I passed the test, forgive me my hubris, it was not easy but my companions and I prevailed. The monastery at Ruad, seat of the Brother Battle is a sight beyond imagining. My words do it a signal disservice, I can only hope for forgiveness of those who have seen the truth. It stands immense and undaunted at the head of Saint Godfrey's Trail, one of the five major valley systems radiating out from Castrensis, its myriad spires reaching for the stars, for four hours we walked our final paces in the shadow of the walls. Our breath was short and the air grew cold, but the flame of our faith burned bright in our hearts. Truly it deserved its ancient title, the Eagle's Nest.

Nowhere except Stigmata houses more Brother Battle monks than this monastery, their detractors would call this place a shrine to war, but I disagree, a shrine rather to strength and protection, the noblest of causes. The monastery's dual natures, military and religious, are plainly evident. Everywhere there is hush, and I would say peace; yet there is order here as well. Access is strictly controlled; the

Brothers are gracious hosts, if a little brusque at times, but as in any military organization there are rules to be followed. Relatively little of the monastery is open to the public. We were shown the courtyard and one of the numerous dormitories (despite their name, the Order is unisex, although, I note, their dormitories are not) and one of the many chapels. Of my companions, Krieger, Shiro and Shavasti were allowed no further. Father Trefillion and I were shown to the Shrine of the Sainted Progenitors. Although my presence was obviously on sufferance, despite my rank and years of service with the Knights of Lextius I am not a man of the cloth, as was pointed out to me by a succession of monks of slowly increasing rank—they seemed almost like Decados dolls, one within the other ad infinitum, but I digress...

The Shrine is the spiritual center of the monastery, indeed the whole Order. Therein lie the sacraments and sanctified remains of the Sainted Progenitors, Saint Godfrey and Saint Malcolm. Their unadorned white marble tombs flank a raised altar set beneath a beautiful stained glass window, depicting the holy Prophet and his disciples, facing the rising sun. If one kneels in the shrine at the appropriate time, the room is filled with a light like the blood of martyrs. I cannot recall how long I knelt in that hallowed place, only that it was not long enough. It was with an aching heart I left, and only a mildly curious mind as to the owner of the third tomb, set away to the side of the two Saints.





Further than that we were not allowed, under any circumstance. I would estimate we were shown at most a tenth of the monastery's interior, taking into account only that which could be seen above ground and there are known to be labyrinthine tunnels below. Our interview with his Excellency, Master Claudius of De Moley expunged my misgivings.

Of all those of power and influence I came across during my travels, Master Claudius impressed me the most with his warmth toward the Imperial Phoenix and his vision for the future. He is a man of great energy and physical prowess despite his advancing years and he showed commendable attitudes toward the Phoenix Throne and everything you are working to achieve, my Emperor. Nonetheless he was forthright in restating his sect's neutral political position, "the Brother Battle are the Sword and Shield of the Pancreator," he said, "not of politicians, great nor small."

After our meeting, certain doors were opened that before were closed as Master Claudius arranged a tour of the Brother's facilities, but unfortunately we were not shown deeper into the monastery. The instrument of his wishes was Adept Reynald de Vichiers, one of Master Claudius' staff, who took us down to the Brother's private flutter pad. Several of the craft are kept at the monastery for, as they put it, emergency procedures. I can only assume our tour was one of these.

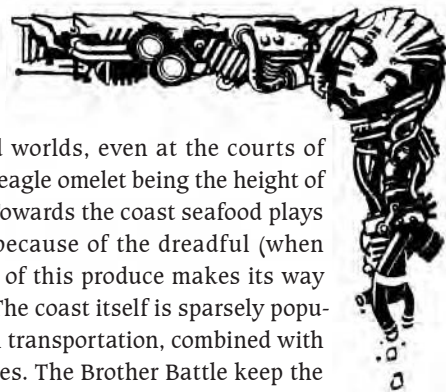
There are recent additions to Ruad that deserve—if not demand—attention, the newly created ambassadorial chambers. Although they barely deserve the title, they are little more than jury-rigged temporary accommodation housing delegations from, at present, the Supreme Order of Engineers and the Hazat. Upon further investigation I discovered these

missions house what the Brothers describe as "advisors". I would rather describe them as lobbyists. It makes sense that the most puissant military force in the Known Worlds should be the object of political desire. The relationship between gun-barrels and power, political and otherwise, was known even to the ancients. However, it troubles me that I should not have been aware of these missions beforehand. Unfortunately I could find out little more, certainly not who ran the Hazat mission. It was only due to a happy stroke of fortune that I recognized the Engineer spokeswoman, Lady Mox Shelit, from a previous unrelated errand on my aunt's behalf. Lady Mox would not, however, speak with me, and neither would the Brothers.

Radixion

Seen from the air, Ruad is almost more impressive than from the ground, I felt like an eagle hanging there far above the monastery. Adept de Vichiers then showed us some of the Order's outland territories. Beyond the city domes there is precious little worthy on note on De Moley, Brother Battle estimates suggest some eighty per cent of the planet's population dwell within—or work within—the dome-covered mines and processing plants, the remainder are small-holders eking out a living as best they can amongst the high plateaus. Little grows, certainly not enough to sustain herd animals. A naturalized form of goat is the predominant land herbivore, its natural predator being the De Moley rockcat; similar to the Urthish lynx but twice as deadly. For the planet of the Brother Battle, this seemed entirely appropriate.





As mentioned, the majority of the landmass is under nominal Brother Battle control, nominal only in the respect that outside of the atmosphere domes the Brothers care little what the populace does or where they go, apart from certain restricted zones. The area between the second and third spokes—the valleys radiating from Castrensis counting clockwise, Saint Godfrey's Trail is number one—is restricted. The borders are fenced and mined; any trespassers are treated as would be a trespasser on any holy ground, which is to say severely. Adept de Vichiers was less than forthcoming about this area but judging by local rumor—I hesitate to do so, but hearsay is often times more useful than silence—it is the Brother Battle proving grounds. An area set aside for war games, survival training and weapons testing.

There are several other rumor-shrouded restricted areas south of Castrensis. Too small for proving grounds, speculation runs wild about them. Weapons tests gone wrong, hubris blasted sites of theurgic rites, Symbiot-infected ruins, crashed spaceships, mass graves. Inflammatory all. But when the Brothers say nothing, loose tongues will wag.

As I mentioned earlier, the Brothers claim eighty percent of the population lives within the domed cities. This seems far too high to my mind. The geography of De Moley is an important factor here, it is inhospitable beyond the experience of most, and it influences all existence on the planet. There are more people that live beyond the cities, although almost none of these are émigrés. It takes the toughness of a native to survive here. Truth be told, no one really knows how many live on De Moley, the majority of the planet is inaccessible except by flitter or mountaineer—indeed my companion, Shavasti, remarked how De Moley reminded her of her native Kordeth. Rumors persist of strange beings and occurrences out in the roadless wilderness, a particular favorite being the tale of True Nineveh, the lost last bastion of the Sathraists—I suspect these rumors have drawn more than a few ne'er do wells to De Moley to seek fortune and infamy.

Natives here tend to slightly shorter and broader than standard (a side effect of the somewhat higher gravity), heavy framed and durable, in personality them seem at first dour although this is not entirely fair, better to say they take their time before warming to one. Interestingly, De Moley natives amongst the Brother Battle tend to rise further than their numbers would suggest, Master Claudius himself is a native of this rocky land.

The land flavors the food, also. There is little pasture on De Moley, agriculture is perforce small scale and hardy. The crofters—the profession of practically all those beyond the domes—tend small hardy potatoes and lentils. These tend to be strongly flavored and tough, as do the native goats and mountain sheep. Even the animals are stockier and denser than the standard forms, in turn their meat is tougher. A typical De Moley meal is a stew slowly boiled for up to 36 hours—dreadful as it may sound this long cooking time works some strange magic upon the ingredients, indeed De Moleyan chefs are beginning to make a name for them-

selves on the more cultured worlds, even at the courts of Byzantium (with a De Moley eagle omelet being the height of fashionable extravagance). Towards the coast seafood plays more of a part in diet, but because of the dreadful (when they exist at all) roads little of this produce makes its way inland, let alone off-planet. The coast itself is sparsely populated, as a result of the awful transportation, combined with the lack of natural anchorages. The Brother Battle keep the only sizable settlement on the coast, Orabellicus, as a closed naval training facility.

Ctesiphon

Ctesiphon is the al-Malik capital on De Moley, although capital is maybe too strong a word. Although smaller and more compact than Castrensis, it runs along much the same lines. Mineral extraction and reprocessing is the order of the day—the geography of De Moley is extremely homogeneous, as is the climate; altitude, not longitude is the deciding factor here—albeit along more technological lines than elsewhere. Indeed, the Agora of Ctesiphon is the place to come if one requires (non-military) technical goods. Aside from the jabbering merchants and incessant haggling, Ctesiphon has little in common with the mighty al-Malik cities. A distinction that is not lost on the ruling family, the Sima al-Malik. Once a powerful Shaprut mercantile family, they were exiled, condemned some would say, to De Moley after voicing too strong an objection to Duke Hakim's succession. Ctesiphon was, he said, "A blessing for the wise, a challenge for the hardy, a yoke for the feckless". The nuances of the Graceful Tongue are lost on me, but I believe there is an insult in there.

A large minority of Ctesiphon's inhabitants are al-Malik émigrés—many of them unfortunate Sima al-Malik serfs—including (and I should have expected this in an al-Malik city) a sizable Ukari slum. The Ukari regiment here, Mehmed's Dragons, fought with distinction against the Decados during the Emperor Wars (and one hopes no further). The mark of the wars is evident throughout the city. Anti-Decados posters are everywhere in Ctesiphon, alongside exultations to be wary of saboteurs. This feels like a city under siege. I confronted the al-Malik ambassador, Marquessa Saffron Sima al-Malik about this. An elegant woman, with disconcertingly mismatched eyes, she said "rain beats down on leopard skin, it spots do ere remain". Quite. This attitude poisons the atmosphere as surely as a virus in the recycling plant.

Neo Zaporozhe

Neo Zaporozhe is the outpost of the Mantis. Built to similar design as Ctesiphon, the Decados have left their inimitable mark upon the city. Living and working areas are viciously demarked, the central areas given over for Mantis nobles and their functionaries, the outskirts for their servants. The border is marked, walled and patrolled. There can be no confusion as to one's status in Neo Zaporozhe. Noise predominates here; not the bellowing pumps or Castrensis



Solar System

Areia (Sun): Areia is a small star, relatively weak to start with yet it has faded less than other, brighter stars.

Salat: The second, and smaller, Sathraist stronghold in the De Moley system. Salat was their religious center, many altars to Sathra have been found and destroyed there by courageous Brothers. Doubtless many more persist.

De Moley: A rocky tumultuous world, its one major landmass is surrounded by turbulent seas. Its thin atmosphere and slightly higher-than-normal gravity breed tough indigents.

Primus: Largest moon of De Moley. Claimed by the Brother Battle and off-limits to all others, they maintain major communications equipment here.

Secundus: Prison moon of the order, serfs, and sometimes even Brothers, are exiled here. Strictly off-limits.

Tertius: Third moon. Little more than a captured asteroid.

Deione: A barren, rocky world, similar to De Moley in many respects but without the large seas or atmosphere. Deione was mined heavily for its mineral wealth and is now mostly a husk.

Chione: A cold desolate world of methane snow, once mined but now abandoned. The Brother Battle occasionally run war-games in its honeycomb tunnels.

Ishtar: A gas giant, half the size of Holy Terra's Jupiter. Once the Sathraists' main staging post.

and home to the Order of the Late Brothers. The leader of the order, one Sir Daneel Eastman (a somewhat dilapidated branch of the Gwynneth Hawkwoods, beset on all sides by a debilitating adequacy, their crest, the magpie *volent*) was kind enough to explain to me their focus. As is well known, Brother Battle aspirants are left at the walls of the monastery at Ruad whilst still in swaddling. What is less well known is that not all arrive on time, Sir Daneel for example arrived some twenty years too late. Rather than return to ignominy and—almost certainly—repetitious explanation he stayed on De Moley, the better to serve the Pancreator in his own way. Taking note of his jovial humor and his, to put it kindly, well-upholstered frame I am happy he made the right decision.

Herat

Sitting between Ctesiphon and Neo Zaporozhe is the al-Malik protectorate of Herat. Or rather, it was. Herat is no more. As best I can piece together events, fifty years of war in no-mans land bearing the brunt of assaults from both Mantis and Sunwheel was too much. The people had enough. Put simply, they rebelled. A crude sign outside proclaims the name "Freetown". Barely concealed chaos reigns here. There is no order, no leadership, unruly mobs roam the street without so much as a by-your-leave and blood stains the streets. The self-styled leader of Freetown, one Adam Nevar, is by appearance and manner an escaped serf of basest description. This wretch, illiterate and unwashed, had the temerity to detain my companions and me until we had answered questions to his satisfaction. Unschooled in diplomacy, he could hardly resist boasting of his achievements and what in a better class of person would be called his heritage. The son of a gravedigger, or some equally prestigious craftsman, he had lived his whole misbegotten life between two warring Houses. He said that he and his companions had enough of death and bloodshed and finally decided to throw off "the oppressive yolk" (his words) in a spectacularly deadly and bloody coup. In short, the noble rulers of Herat were rounded up and killed; the Guilders were robbed and killed; only the Churchmen were left unharmed. Thank the Pancreator for small mercies.

The leader of the small Brother Battle detachment stationed at the Orthodox "First Church of Freetown" could not explain this aberration. They were summoned by Deacon Josiah Blue to guard his flock and guard his flock is what they would do. Politics was not their concern, opined Oblate Mainwearing. Quite what Master Claudius thinks of this matter I would be interested to hear, for if the Church cannot take a lead in stemming the flow of blood, then who will? The servants of the Phoenix, perhaps.

It was with these dark thoughts I left De Moley, but I should not wish them to poison my portrayal. The world suits, to a greater extent, its custodians. Harsh and demanding, yet strong and unyielding. There is a strength born of De Moley that colors the Brother Battle, and they, and in turn we, are the better for its presence.

but mechanized factories as the Mantis has supplemented the mining business with some of their cartel's workshops. The sound of grinding metal from these never stops.

The administrator here is Baronet Anatoly Ivanovich Decados, a Mantis noble approaching his late thirties. An accomplished politician and budding statesman, he sees his task here as a stepping-stone. He is ably assisted in his efforts by the detachment of Jakovian Kossacks stationed here since before the end of the Wars, led by his brother Konstantin. Baronet Anatoly claimed relations with the al-Malik were "in the process of improving."

On the outskirts of Neo Zaporozhe stands the Altar of Divine Perseverance, a modest Orthodox chapel, guarded by,





Chapter Five: Pyre

"To the victor, the spoils." Such is ancient wisdom; such is the lesson of history. Such is the parable of Pyre. Or of the corollary at least. Pyre is a harsh world; burning desert covers eight tenths of the globe, ranging from unforgiving to impassable, but it is here of all the Worlds known to man that the flame of faith burns the brightest. The purging, purifying, eternal flame of the Temple Avesti.

History

Pyre is no man's idea of booty. Not now, not ever before. The victors—the rich and the powerful, corrupt with technology and hubris—took the best for their own, while the poor—the meek and the lost—were left scarce pickings from their masters' tables. So did the pilgrims come to Pyre. But they were far from the first.

The history of Pyre is indivisible from that of the Temple Avesti, such is the received wisdom. Of the coming of Pietrarcholus, of Archbishop Cciardi and his plea for clemency, of Grand Inquisitor Argus and his Eternal Vigilance and above all of the flame, the flame burning at the heart of the desert, the flame that will never go out.

But that is not the only history of Pyre, there is another, a parallel; a shadow history. That parallel begins before Pietrarcholus stumbled out of the desert, it begins before the coming of the flame.

In the beginning, there was the word, and the word was greed. In the darkness before the Prophet saw the Holy Flame, mankind was adrift on a sea of greed, blown by the winds of hubris and technosophy. It was in hubris that humanity poured through the jumpgates, in hubris they sought out new stars, new worlds to subjugate. Driven by the basest desires, their reward was anarchy and chaos. In the rush to grab as much new land as possible, there was little consideration given to questions of morality, the rights and wrongs, or humility and compassion. Greed was all. In the dark times, this was called human nature. In the time before the Prophet saw the Holy Flame.

Eventually expansion ceased, or at least slowed. The worlds that could be found had been found. The richest and most powerful (synonymous in those times) were ensconced on the richest worlds, the ones most strategically important,

Pyre Traits

Ruler: Temple Avesti, in the name of the Orthodoxy

Cathedral: Temple Avesti (Cathedra Vesti)

Agora: Charioteers, Scravers

Garrison: 5

Capital: Sanpietro

Jumps: One

Adjacent Worlds: Byzantium Secundus (dayside), Criticorum (adjacent), Grail (nightside)

Solar System: Mithra (Sun), Infernus (0.7 AU), Pyre (Rashid's Lantern) (0.89 AU), Shahidi's Belt (1.2–2.2 AU), Aqueus (3.3 AU), Desperation (25 AU), Jumpgate (55 AU)

Tech: 2

Human Population: 5,000,000 (estimated, the nomad tribes have never been reliably counted)

Alien Population: 35,000 (mostly Ukari)

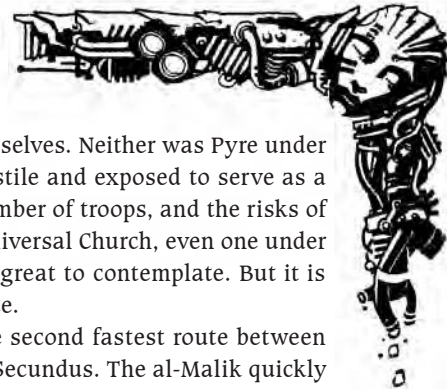
Resources: Camels, spices, Grolla Crawlers

Export: Camels, spices, herbs, Grolla Crawlers, Flameguns, Ka Oil, Pilgrims

Landscape: Blasted deserts. The Burning desert dominates the northern continent, beyond the only major sea lies the southern central broken desert land and beyond that the desolate southern Artic desert.

and the most beautiful. The second string was left to scabble for the leftovers.

Pyre was not then a good place to live. It had no mineral wealth, it had no useful products. Far too hot for habitation without significant terraforming it was passed by. Bridesmaid rather than bride.



Hallib-Searle-Schwab (HSS), a conglomeration that made its profits by purchasing the rights to inhospitable worlds, then exploiting them for all they were worth, colonized Pyre late (not as late as Artemis, but late). Corporate pirates of the first water. They secured the rights for a promise of later profits and quickly installed the cheapest terraforming engines on the market. All they needed now was a cheap workforce. They set about obtaining this in typically Republican manner, by deceiving the uneducated masses. Their propaganda knew neither shame nor subtlety, "Come to Pyre", they said, "The New Eden" they said. HSS transported thousands of colonists to Pyre, for the privilege of which they paid handsomely, some using their life savings as a down payment against a better tomorrow. They were cruelly deceived. Once HSS had their money, the colonists were no longer necessary, indeed neither was the planet. Overnight all traces of HSS vanished, save for minor stories propagated in the media at the time. Of the colonists abandoned to the burning sands and failing terraforming engines no one knew nor cared about.

We can only assume, then, who those first colonists were. Vagabonds and drifters: outcasts. Those with nowhere else to go. Undoubtedly there was a large criminal element amongst them, but also something else, a spirituality strong and true, the kind of people who would seek out a better life across the stars, who would willingly trade everything they owned for the promise of a dream.

So it was that on this tinder dry world, the *Templa Vesti* first lit their beacon. And on this world *Pietrarcholus* fanned those guttering flames. It was here that the pilgrims came, the dispossessed, the unwanted, and the outcasts. A few cold souls come to warm themselves by the fire.

In time, they became an inferno.

Slums grew around Pyre's only spaceport—once Izmir, renamed Sanpietro in 3975—heaving with the universe's "undesirables". The Avesti cared for many; many of these later joined their saviors, swelling the ranks of the pilgrims, yet many others were lost. Many went into the deserts, trying to find a way to survive and slowly communities formed which in time became tribes. These tribes became an intermittent fixture of Pyric life from that day to this.

Time passed, and with it went the terraforming engines; inferior to start with, Pyre had insufficient funds to repair them. The technology deteriorated and the deserts encroached, cities were lost, the climate became hotter and drier, the seas retreated. Throughout this, a physical fall to match the spiritual decline, the bonfires of the *Temple Avesti* burned on. Throughout trial and tribulation they never went out. They endured—a lesson for all who would see it.

Recent History

The Emperor Wars had more impact on Pyre than one might have expected. The strongest faction on the planet, the Avesti, were and remain avowedly neutral—most pilgrims see politics as inherently sinful—and played no

active role in the Wars themselves. Neither was Pyre under military threat, it is too hostile and exposed to serve as a mustering post for large number of troops, and the risks of attacking any sect of the Universal Church, even one under extreme penance, were too great to contemplate. But it is of some strategic importance.

Pyre is the middle of the second fastest route between *Criticorum* and *Byzantium Secundus*. The al-Malik quickly realized this and in 4959 sent an expeditionary force under General *Qansawh al-Ghawri* to assault the throne-world via Pyre. *Byzantium*, at that time under the tentative control of the *Decados* under General *Aleksandr Rodmitsev Decados*, was taken completely by surprise; seventy percent of the *Decados* fleet was rendered inoperable in the ensuing battle. General al-Ghawri correctly concluded he did not have the troops to occupy *Byzantium* and withdrew immediately back to *Criticorum*. Some analysts believe if the al-Malik had equipped a more thorough invasion force the course of the war may have turned on that engagement.

The import of the Pyre route proved, House al-Malik moved quickly to consolidate their advantage and safeguard the backdoor into their systems. House *Decados* on *Byzantium* did likewise. Both Houses sent fleets to the Pyre system. Battles ensued. Once the *Temple Avesti* discovered what was going on in what was nominally their system, they protested vigorously; Archbishop *Dolmen's* predecessor, Archbishop *Malachi Ignatius*, complained about the violation of Avesti space by the warring factions. Whether the Patriarch found this plea amusing is not recorded but he did affirm Pyre's neutrality. The response to this was typical, the war moved underground. Battle fleets were replaced with privateers, regiments with agent provocateurs. This state of cat-and-mouse inconclusive and predominantly defensive warfare continued until the armistice. By dint of their permanent position adjoining Pyre, the al-Malik were more successful in this venture than any of their opponents whose tenure on *Byzantium* was periodically interrupted by the flow of the war.

The al-Malik predilection for technology and subtlety served them well in this theatre. In space, small nimble ships and remote mines were the order of the day—the *Shahidi* asteroid belt is still declared unsafe by the *Charioteers*, although no official blame had been attached to the al-Malik for this. On land, distributed guerrilla forces were a necessity. Sanpietro was riddled with al-Malik spies and their enemies, but stayed under the direct authority of the Avesti. Inquisitorial investigations into *Decados* concerns in Sanpietro during the war were more than three times more common than before or after. The al-Malik had certain success motivating and mobilizing the nomad population into a guerrilla force—that eventually proved unnecessary—under the noses of the Avesti Pyric guardians.

The *Temple Avesti's* impotence during the war was a surprising, but in hindsight obvious, consequence of their pious duties. During wartime technological advance knows no boundaries and the Avesti, with their purer methods, were simply not able to compete with their opponents on



People of Note

Lieutenant Hank Morgan

Lieutenant Hank Morgan of the Charioteers guild is a larger than life figure. Six and half feet tall, and almost as much round, he always seems to be at the centre of Sanpietro Agora, or at least at the centre of attention. A trader, not a pilot, he runs the nascent Pyric import/export business. He also, very carefully, runs the illicit goods smuggling business—one of

his main imports (both taxed and untaxed) is salt, which off-world pilgrims find it hard to do without. In addition he also runs an underground distiller that provides most of the rum in Sanpietro.

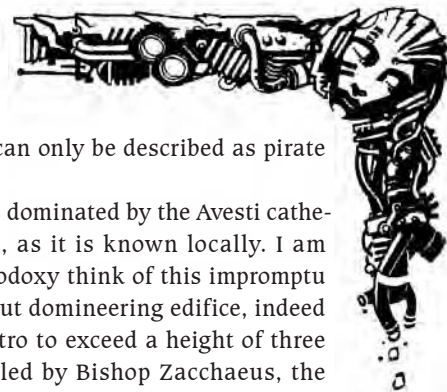
Nothing if not a workaholic, Hank is currently looking to expand his entrepreneurial empire into the desert—he is desperately looking for couriers brave or foolish enough to open up trading links between him and the desert nomads.

Abdur Rahman Kedi al Quraysh

Abdur Rahman Kedi al Quraysh: the Deliverer, the Uniter of the Tribes, the Most Holy! Abdur Rahman is destined to be all these things, at least according to his mother Rashida Kedi al Quraysh, the current de facto leader of the Pyric nomad tribes. Rashida is, on most accounts, a political genius—she planned her ascendancy for the past 30 years and her son's succession for the last 17. For her nothing less will do than her son as the leader of a united nomad nation—she seeks above all things an end to the incessant tribalism and feuding that plague the nomads.

Unfortunately, all Abdur wants is a life of poetic contemplation. He is in no way the son his mother wanted, but has managed to hide his lack of inclination and ability up until this point. Trouble is on the horizon, however, Rashida has arranged a marriage between Abdur and Fatimah Malik al Kharijite, the heir to the leadership of the Kharijite tribe. Abdur cannot stand the girl and wants no part of the marriage but is terrified of his mother's reaction. He turned to his elder sister Zarah for help. Far closer to her mother's temperament, Zarah is practical in the extreme, her only real weakness is her little brother, for whom she would do anything. The pair have recently taken to disguising themselves as each other (veils proliferate amongst desert-dwellers) to gain some manner of respite from the pressure surrounding them, but the wedding date draws ever nearer...





level ground. With the peace and the confirmation of both secular and theological law, this situation ceased to exist.

Archbishop Dolmen's succession in 4989 was uneventful in the extreme. Fortunately by that time the outcome of the war was no longer in serious doubt and the al-Malik had begun their de-militarization program, with limited success. But that story belongs to a separate phase of history.

People & Places

Pyre's wartime troubles resulted directly from the state of its armed forces. While none could doubt the commitment of the Avesti as ground troops (indeed in their every endeavor) they lacked the technical inclination and application to play a full part in a modern technological war, that is, a war in space. The space garrison of Pyre, while visually impressive, is, at best, functionally ornamental. The Avesti flagship *Ignis Astra* and its escorts are on par with most space-bound warships, but their crews lack finesse and their officers experience. In short, the squadron is not up to a full-scale space battle. But since the armistice such a battle is increasingly unlikely to occur. The customs frigate *Parmenion*, commanded by Deacon Celosia Jacobs, and its escorts stationed at the jumpgate are in slightly better repair and have the signal advantage of being piloted by Charioteers, who help run the customs checkpoints both at the jumpgate and on planet.

Sanpietro

Sanpietro is the only starport on Pyre and the only city that would earn that name on any other world. Founded in the dim and distant past, renamed after Pietrarcholus, who many would name the founder of the modern Temple Avesti, it is, with all due respect to the claims of Criticorum and Aragon, a slum without equal. The center of the city is ancient; bleached white stone and thatched roofs predominate within the city walls. These are more of a historical reference point than a civic boundary. Beyond them lie ramshackle, dust-saturated hovels and market places, bounded to the east by the turquoise edges of the Sea of Dissolution, Pyre's only sizable standing water, and to the west by the fringes of the all-encompassing desert.

Desert is desert is desert. This conceit is exposed and left for dead on Pyre (I point to my own Ravenna heritage as mitigation). There is the furnace and blasting air and scouring sand that is the Deserta Flamada to the north of Sanpietro (and occupying most of the northern hemisphere). There is the central southern desert, a mixture of sand dunes and broken scrubland, minor hill ranges and dotted oases, the home of the nomad tribes and merchant trails. Then far to the south is the laughably named Arctic Desert, which, according to the maps, is a rocky craggy land with almost no water and even less population.

The population of Pyre is small, concentrated in Sanpietro with a sprinkling throughout the central southern desert in oasis townships and around the edges of the

Sea of Dissolution in what can only be described as pirate shantytowns.

The center of Sanpietro is dominated by the Avesti cathedral of Saint Pietrarcholus, as it is known locally. I am unsure quite what the Orthodoxy think of this impromptu canonization—an austere but domineering edifice, indeed the only building in Sanpietro to exceed a height of three stories. Services there are led by Bishop Zacchaeus, the Avesti primate of Sanpietro. On any other world, the diocese of the major population center would be of major political importance, but not on Pyre. One of the defining characteristics of the Pyre Avesti is their disdain of politics. The Archbishop is respected to be sure, but not noticeable more so than any number of Inquisitors who make their way off-world to bring Holy Justice to the masses. Bishop Zacchaeus is a small wiry man, with tanned skin, peasant's hands and an unblinking stare. His sermons are not places of sophistry and dogmatic elegance, just the simple message of the Prophet. As I neared the end of my journey, I found his simple words refreshing beyond measure.

The main trade of Sanpietro and the surrounding areas, if trade it can be called, is that of smallholding. True to the agrarian ideal, the peasantry grows all manner of produce; I would particularly recommend the apricots. This farming culture is, obviously, dependant on water, and water on Pyre comes from only one place, the Sea of Dissolution. Consequently the other main endeavor driving Pyre's economy is irrigation, both its delivery and maintenance. Despite the overwhelming technological disinclination of the populace—some could unkindly compare them to Vuldrok savages—the sophistication of their irrigation works approach artistry. Several artisans' guilds have sprung up to safeguard it; the two main competing factions amongst these are the Water-Diggers Guild and the Life-Bringers Guild, although recently the Charioteer's chapter-house has been attempting to forge links with anyone that will take them. If the Charioteers can smell a potential profit the artisans must be of the highest quality.

The other main indigenous guild is the Kalomite Weaponsmith Company, the sole provider of flameguns to the Pyre Avesti. Although the Avesti are their main customers, under the influence of their chairman and founder, Zakiya Kalom they also export to other interested parties. They are the largest distributors of Ka oil, under strict license of the Temple.

The Sea of Dissolution

The Sea of Dissolution is unusual in that it is freshwater; this has been both a blessing and a curse to Pyre over the years. Chiefly this is lucky, without such a plentiful supply of freshwater at hand. A massive desalination program would be necessary to provide for the population's needs—the waterworks and pumping station in Sanpietro's dockland is the most heavily guarded building on Pyre after the Cathedra Vesti. The problems induced by the freshwater sea are twofold.





Firstly there are almost no natural salt-deposits on Pyre, and no simple way of extracting any. Therefore salting as a way of preserving food, especially meat, has never taken off. In culinary terms, this leads to a preponderance of smoked and dried foods, the stereotypical Pyric meal is smoked goat meat with a lentil dhal. Necessity has bred invention and the range of spices and flavorings (including fragranced woods for use in the curing process) are truly a wonder to behold. A word of caution, however; seasoning one's meal with salt on Pyre is nigh on sinful in its extravagance.

The second problem is maritime in nature, as freshwater is somewhat less buoyant than salt water. This does not particularly restrict sailing and trade, but foreign boats may experience problems when imported to Pyre—there are amusing and perhaps apocryphal tales of off-world infiltrators during the war whose state-of-the-art amphibious craft went straight to the bottom with all hands. To maybe give credence to these rumors, a Scriver salvage team has recently taken up residence in the docks.

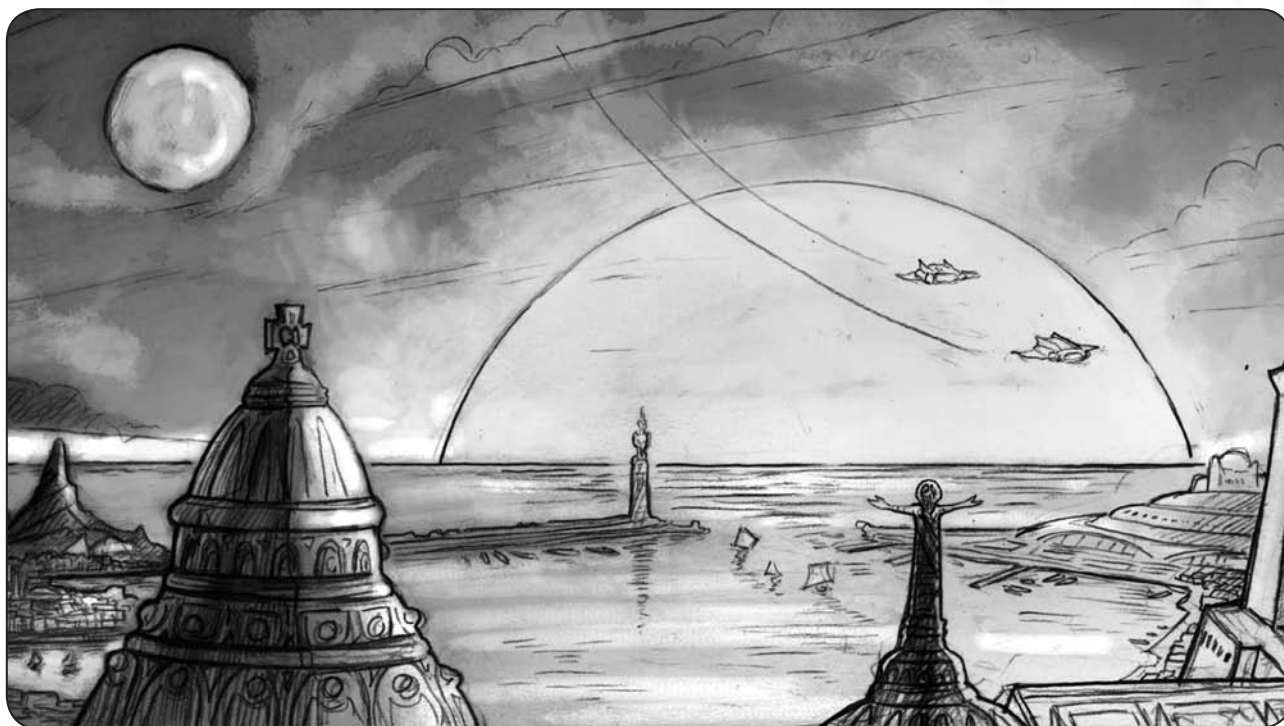
Shipping on Pyre is surprisingly active. Merchantmen criss-cross the sea carrying spices, semi-precious gems and other goods between the numerous trading posts that dot the coastline. Unfortunately, the sea is riddled with pirates. The problem has always existed but has recently escalated, mainly due to feud between the leaders of the two largest port communities, Gornal and Oldbury. I found out more about the situation by talking with Harbormaster Daffyd Jones, an ex-Muster mercenary now commanding the Sanpietro Navy.

Gornal and Oldbury sit at opposite ends of the sea, forming a rough triangle with Sanpietro. Historically they have been, at different times, economic partners and rivals. Over the last fifteen years the situation has deteriorated as each

town became the domain of a so-called minor Lord, Viscount Cadbury and the Earl of Bourneville. Although possessing no heritage I can readily recognize, these persons have styled themselves as nobility, even going so far as to declare vendettas against each other over matters of honor. Quite how base charlatans such as these should come to such notions escapes me. Unfortunately there is no authority of sufficient power on the planet to make the example of them they so fully deserve. The attitude of the Navy seems to be typical of the administration in Sanpietro, and therefore Pyre as a whole; that if they are more interested in fighting each other than attacking other shipping then so much the better. I tried to impart the seriousness of this breakdown of the natural order to Harbormaster Jones but with little success. I did not try to explain it to Bishop Zacchaeus.

Unfortunately Messrs Cadbury and Bourneville are not the only semi-coherent savages aping after noble recognition on Pyre. Even worse, there is a warren full of Trusnikrons. How my heart fell when I recognized, in approximate order, their odor, their accent and their livery. Before I could flee or claim sanctuary at the mercy of the Avesti I was, horror of horrors, invited to their squalid little hovel for afternoon tea.

Would that I could have avoided it, but no, compounding barbarism with insolence should never be a gentleman's solution. So I came to the compound of the beast tamers. House, if indeed it deserves the epithet, Trusnikron has the largest noble presence on Pyre. They certainly have a lot in common with the bucolic masses, a passion for coarse brown clothing and a lack of personal grooming being only the most apparent similarities. Pyre is one of the few worlds where the Trusnikron find their services indispensable, the prevailing weather conditions are unforgiving, to



say the least, on mechanical transport—even discounting the scouring sandstorms of the Deserta Flamada. Beasts of burden have the ascendancy here. Thus the Trusnikron's overt empathy with their mounts becomes useful. After an unsurprisingly rustic repast, their leader, Marquis Hesketh Trusnikron (he insisted on the title Trainer) showed me the stables. They hold an undeniably vast selection of horses, camels (long since imported to Pyre and perfectly suited for the conditions) and Grolla Crawlers; huge indigenous lizards, reminiscent of the Urth iguana but large enough to ride. Atop the largest of the Crawlers was Trainer Hesketh's daughter, Hand Phillipa, a wild-haired Amazon who seemed welded to her saddle, oblivious to the surroundings. I have the unpleasant suspicion Trainer Hesketh was more interested in showing me his daughter than his animals. I swiftly made my excuses and left.

Aside from the Trusnikron, there is little noble presence in Sanpietro, and little of the refinement it invariably brings. The presence of the Universal Church is dominated by the Temple Avesti, as one would expect. The pilgrims are everywhere, either coming or going. Despite everything, Sanpietro is a hive of activity at most hours of the day—apart from high noon, when a siesta is typical, “Only mad dogs and Hawkwoods go out in the midday sun”—most of that activity is transport, either to the Cathedra Vesti or off-planet. As such the enterprises of transport are myriad, locals and Trusnikron hiring beasts of burden, Charioteers booking passages and the ubiquitous Scravers selling seats on their desert crawlers—the second most popular form of transport after the camel and still the only way to reach the Cathedra during storm season.

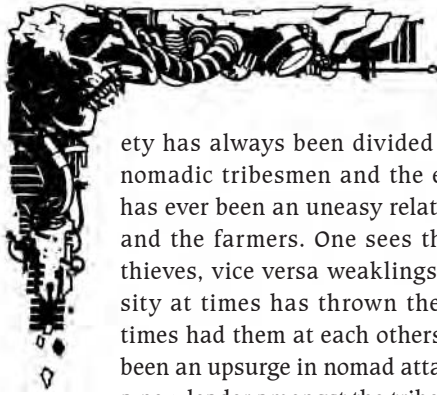
Tarnatia

There is life beyond Sanpietro, but not much. I traveled forthwith to Tarnatia, ancient home of the Templa Vesti Pyrae, the original Cathedral of the Vestic flame. The flame has long since gone, now housed deep within the burning desert, the shell of the old cathedral still stands, outside the city-walls, a site for the reflection, only the flame is eternal, all else crumbles and fades.

Tarnatia is a study in contrasts, the last staging post before the quest into the Deserta Flamada, it is a vibrant oasis town whose people live with piety and vigor and for the last ten years it has been a city under siege. Tarnatia stands in the southern borderlands of the Deserta Flamada; the view to the north is hellish, beyond the shimmering heat haze only a dull orange glow, deepening to angry red, the horizon is lost amid the churning maelstrom. A people on the edge of destruction. Tarnatia is not centered around a cathedral, as one might expect, rather a simple town-hall. There are churches, but the vacant Templa Vesti Pyrae has never been replaced, the locals insist to do so would be a sign of deepest disrespect. Yes, there are churches where the Avesti lead the services morning, noon and night. The Cathedra Vesti may be the center of the sect, but Tarnatia is its town. Everything here is simple, functional and pious. The chief administrator is also spiritual leader; I met with Bishop Dinah Royce in Saint Argus, the largest Tarnatian church. She was a small, wiry woman with the hooded eyes, olive skin and jet hair of a native. It was with sadness she told me of the war.

To understand the war, as it is called, raging around Tarnatia one must first understand the nature of the desert tribesman. This is easier said than done and I can only apologize for not having met any face to face. Pyric soci-





ety has always been divided between sedentary farmers, nomadic tribesmen and the ever-present pilgrims. There has ever been an uneasy relationship between the nomads and the farmers. One sees the others as vagabonds and thieves, vice versa weaklings and cowards. Mutual necessity at times has thrown these factions together and at times had them at each others' throats. Recently there has been an upsurge in nomad attacks on static settlements and a new leader amongst the tribesmen is blamed. The defining characteristic of the tribes, beside their scorn for farmers, is their independence. Fierce is an inadequate description. But with this independence comes disunity. Some say this is the reason the nomads do not rule the planet. On occasion, however, a leader appears with the strength of will, the personal charisma or the brutal cunning necessary to weld the disparate tribes into one. As the locals say, when the nomads wake, Pyre shakes. Things may not be quite that bad yet, but they are definitely heading that way. Raids on outlying farms are now more common and more daring and raiders of ostensibly different tribes have been working together.

The specific political layout of the nomads is a lot more difficult to grasp than the general. There are at least five major tribes, the Quraysh, Kharijite, Chagri, Alawis and the Hilal, but this definition is fluid as the web of allegiances, marriages and conquests shifts like the sands of the Deserta. During the Emperor Wars, the al-Malik attempted to fund the Quraysh; while funding and al-Malik advisors were present their loyalty was grudgingly guaranteed but once gone, the tribe reverted to its stubborn independence. The newest leader, known as Rashida Kedi seems to come from this same tribe, the most influential of last fifty years; it is her boast that "no king has ruled us, yet whenever there is war, we come".

I asked Bishop Royce why the Avesti have not done more to stamp out this menace. She told me temporal politics was not the preserve of the Temple Avesti. She further explained that the nomads were fiercely Orthodox in doctrine, firm supporters of the church. No holy places have been attacked during the latest uprising, no pilgrims assaulted. I cannot admit to being completely satisfied by this report, anarchy is anarchy after all, my liege, no matter its theology.

The Order of Lazar at least share some of my concerns. If I was surprised to find a Knighthly Order based on Pyre, I was even more surprised by their nature.

Founded in 4916 by Sir Jason Torensen, one of my renowned ancestors and first veterans of the Stigmata wars, the order is dedicated to prove its valor against the most terrible of foes. One factor marks the Knights of Lazar out from their brethren. They are to a man infected with leprosy. Sir Jason was infected with a mutated strain during his time of Stigmata and he saw the disease as a divine punishment. Forswearing his lands, his fortune and his wife (and passing out of our history it would seem, for I had not heard of him until this happy day) he made a pilgrimage to Pyre, to seek the answer to his question, "Why have I been punished, oh Lord?" In the grounds of the Templa Vesti Pyrae, where

the monastery of Lazar stands to this day, he received his revelation. He was not cursed, he was blessed. The disease that robbed him of his face and his senses would allow him the better to fight the darkness, in all its forms. These men are some of the most feared warriors in the Known Worlds. Their condition has robbed them of the ability to feel physical pain, or anything else, with their distinctive garb—faces wrapped in bandage like clothes, white tabards bearing the merciful jumpgate cross and the symbol of the order, small silver bells adorning their attire—they strike fear amongst friend and foe alike wherever they go. The current head of the order is Don Esteban Fuentes y Santa Dominguez the Cursed; once a mighty Hazat Lord, now a noble warrior of the Light. Invitations to join this order are naturally exclusive, membership is for life.

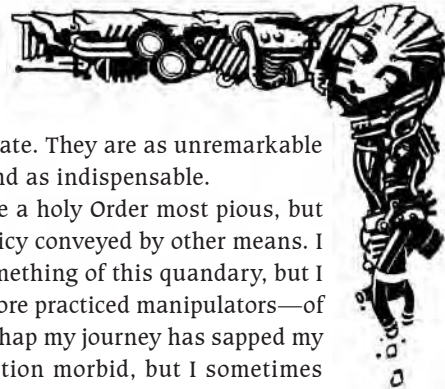
The Lazarites are concerned about not only the new cohesion to the nomad raids but also the weaponry and tactics used. Don Esteban showed me evidence of al-Malik made weaponry recovered from a foiled raid. He claims the tactics are those of al-Malik guerrillas. Given his reputation, I could not in good faith contradict him. He also elaborated of an (I assume) forlorn hope of his to secure several battalions of the Hazat to Pyre to aid him in purging the threat of the nomads. Quite why the court of Prince Juan Jacobi Alfonso Louis Eduardo de Aragon would consider acceding to such a request; exposing so many of their young troops to a harsh, poorly understood, nomadic, desert-dwelling enemy I could only speculate.

Pilgrims queue everywhere you look in Tarnatia. Mostly they queue for a place in a desert crawler, the only way, apart from a seven month window every thirteen years when the all but shattered terraforming engines are in the right phase, to traverse the Deserta Flamada. Scravers provide the machines and maintenance but Avesti drive them. The pilgrims oversee every trip to the Cathedra Vesti. Even within one of the mechanical monstrosities, the journey is not for the faint hearted. The journey is long, every transport is packed, and rations are meager. There are no noble carriages on these journeys, when one visits the eternal flame one does so humbly, one does so as a pilgrim.

I will not bore you with the details of the journey to the Cathedra Vesti. In truth there are few to recount—six weeks of cramped enclosed contemplation and now I near the end of my journey. My loyal companions I left in Tarnatia, some steps a man must take alone.

Cathedra Vesti

And during this sojourn my thoughts turned to what I had seen, and what I was to see. I attempted to summon and corral my thoughts and my words. The universe is wounded, only in the last five years of my 32 have I known what we would call peace. War is an evil cradling, so many souls born into conflict. Can the wounds be healed? Temporally, politically? We nobles perform our duties, but can perform only a superficial mending, without deeper salve rot may still grow.



The Amaltheans, the soul of science, do they heal the Worlds? They try, but oftentimes it seems they see first the casualty and the technique of mending the body, and only second, the soul. Have they focused too closely on the trappings of science and medicine? They undoubtedly grow closer to the Supreme Order of Engineers, makers of machines—have the Amaltheans become only menders of flesh? Few are the Amalthean sisters to be found beyond the grounds of a hospital, yet often from their lips the aphorism “prevention is better than cure”. I would that desiccated irony remained the property of the Guilders rather than those less deserving of it.

The Orthodoxy are truly the shepherds of the Known Worlds, and I fear I have done them scant justice in this missive, their hand is everywhere that the flame burns, which is everywhere mankind walks, this side of the dark. If I have dwelt little on the good yeomen of the Orthodoxy, as opposed to its potentates, it is due to familiarity bred

contempt, no wish to denigrate. They are as unremarkable as bread, or air, or water. And as indispensable.

The Brothers of Battle are a holy Order most pious, but more than that, they are policy conveyed by other means. I think the Brothers grasp something of this quandary, but I fear not as much as other, more practiced manipulators—of course it was ever thus. Mayhap my journey has sapped my will, or turned my imagination morbid, but I sometimes dread the future. Make no mistake, the Brother Battle are a sword, the finest in creation, hanging over us all.

The unknown and the unknowable, who can wisely speak of the motives of the Eskatonic Order—the seekers after the end. I have traveled in rarified company, Counts and Marquises, practiced dissemblers all, yet behind every Li Halan masque and Jakovian mirror is a common thread of want and desire, a lust for power, for good or for ill, but always for power. I peer into the well of the Eskatonic Order, and I do not see the bottom.



The Pilgrims of the Temple Avesti. Only the Orthodoxy are more populous and more visible than the Avesti, but none are more maligned. By, and it now shames me in the admission, my class and my rank, the illiterate pilgrims make common sport, a noble's jest, or a guilders' sneer. Untruth and misconception, the burning fires shrivel the shadows of deceit and deception, I am, I hope, beginning to see clearly.

And now I stand in the shadow of Bat's Head Peak looking upon the Cathedra of the Eternal Flame, red stone beneath my feet, red sand heavy in the air, I can not stay too long outside the walls, lest the burning desert claims another soul.

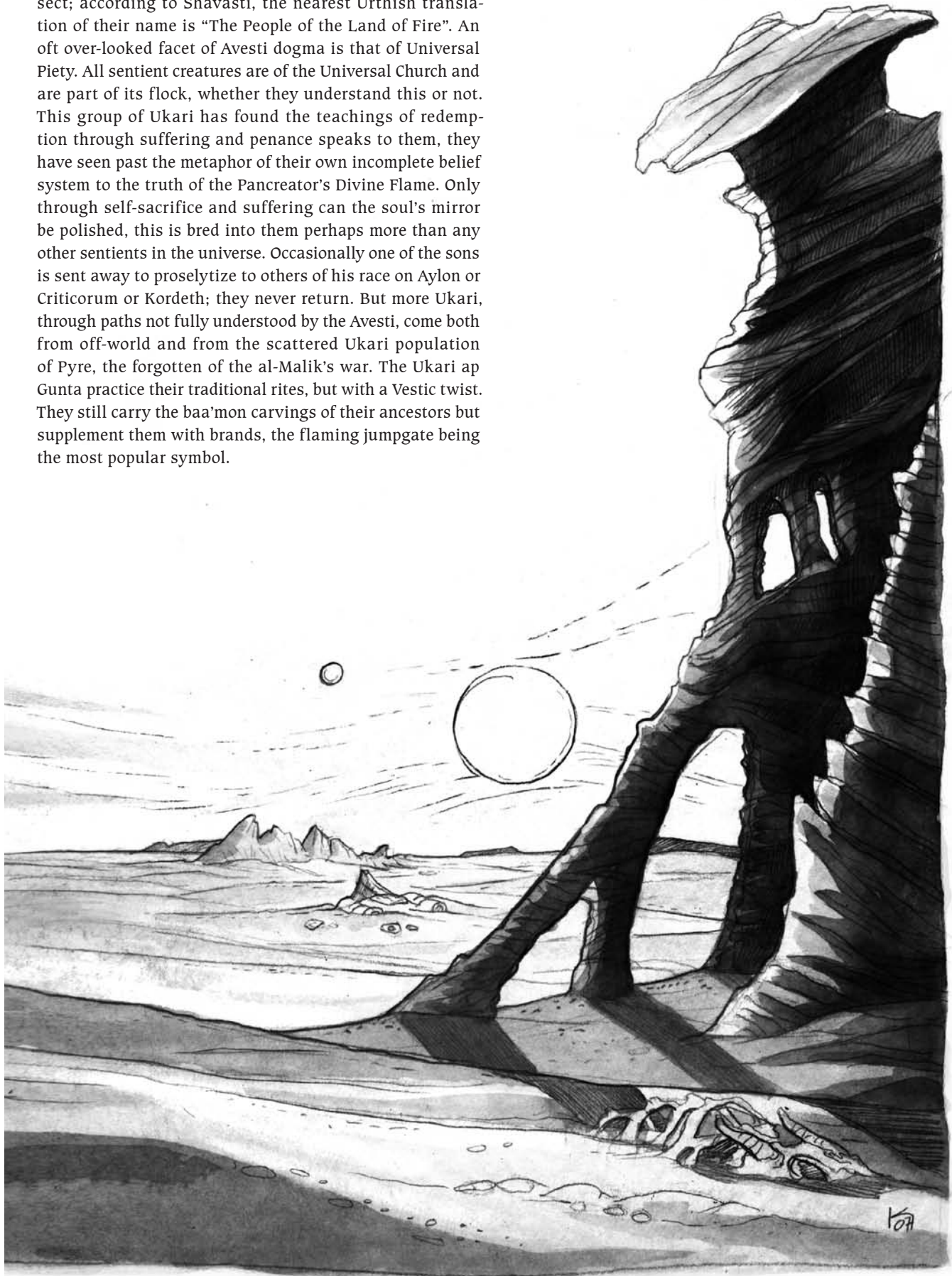
The Cathedra Vesti is a huge, imposing building, half carved into the mountainside, half nestling there. Yet it is not big enough to house all those who would stay here. Low tents' hide roofs cluster around the outer walls hiding in the lee from the perpetually abrasive winds. The people here are a strange mixture, a community purified. There are none here that did not desperately feel the call, no one here that wishes to be elsewhere. There are no rules, or no rulers outside the walls, but order is kept. And there are more here than an overflow of pilgrims bursting beyond the seams of their cathedral. Archbishop Dolmen explained all to me, after I had awaited my turn, as is only proper, and was inside the walls.

The majority outside are, of course, pilgrims, brown-robed and devout, come to view the eternal flame. But there are others, two main secondary groups, the first no less strange than the second.





The Ukari ap Gunta are, of all things, an Ukari splinter sect; according to Shavasti, the nearest Urthish translation of their name is "The People of the Land of Fire". An oft over-looked facet of Avesti dogma is that of Universal Piety. All sentient creatures are of the Universal Church and are part of its flock, whether they understand this or not. This group of Ukari has found the teachings of redemption through suffering and penance speaks to them, they have seen past the metaphor of their own incomplete belief system to the truth of the Pancreator's Divine Flame. Only through self-sacrifice and suffering can the soul's mirror be polished, this is bred into them perhaps more than any other sentients in the universe. Occasionally one of the sons is sent away to proselytize to others of his race on Aylon or Criticorum or Kordeth; they never return. But more Ukari, through paths not fully understood by the Avesti, come both from off-world and from the scattered Ukari population of Pyre, the forgotten of the al-Malik's war. The Ukari ap Gunta practice their traditional rites, but with a Vestic twist. They still carry the baa'mon carvings of their ancestors but supplement them with brands, the flaming jumpgate being the most popular symbol.



Solar System

Mithra (Sun): Mithra was once one of the brightest of stars, glowing white in the sky, now it shines a sullen red.

Infernus: Similar to Venus in many respects, Infernus was mined to its extinction during the Second Republic. Greenhouse gasses increased without control, eventually cooking the world to death. No living soul has ventured through Infernus' moiling atmosphere since the Fall of the Second Republic.

Pyre: A desert world covered in storms the majority of the time. There is only one sea of size on the planet.

Rashid's Lantern: Pyre's only moon. Predominantly basalt, it has no atmosphere and little mineral wealth. It is named after a legendary camel-thief who only worked by the light of the full moon.

Shahidi's Belt: An asteroid belt similar to that of the Holy Terra system, although less developed. The belt was allegedly made into a minefield by the al-Malik during the Emperor Wars. Charioteers will not fly through it to this day.

Aqueus: A water world, Aqueus' ocean would be frozen were it not so salty. Second Republican floating de-salination islands dot the turgid waters, but they are long since corroded and empty.

Desperation: A giant made up of frozen polycarbons, structurally extremely unstable. Several Engineers research stations have been lost to the unpredictable quakes.

The penitents are the other group. The Cathedra Vesti is the second largest penitent monastery, after Mars St. Michel. The penitents here are drawn from all walks of life, not all, as common fashionable rumor would have it, snatched from otherwise blissful existences. Many come to the Avesti of their own free will, or are delivered by their parents or guardians that they may be better cared for, looked after by ones who can guard the penitents from themselves. Some

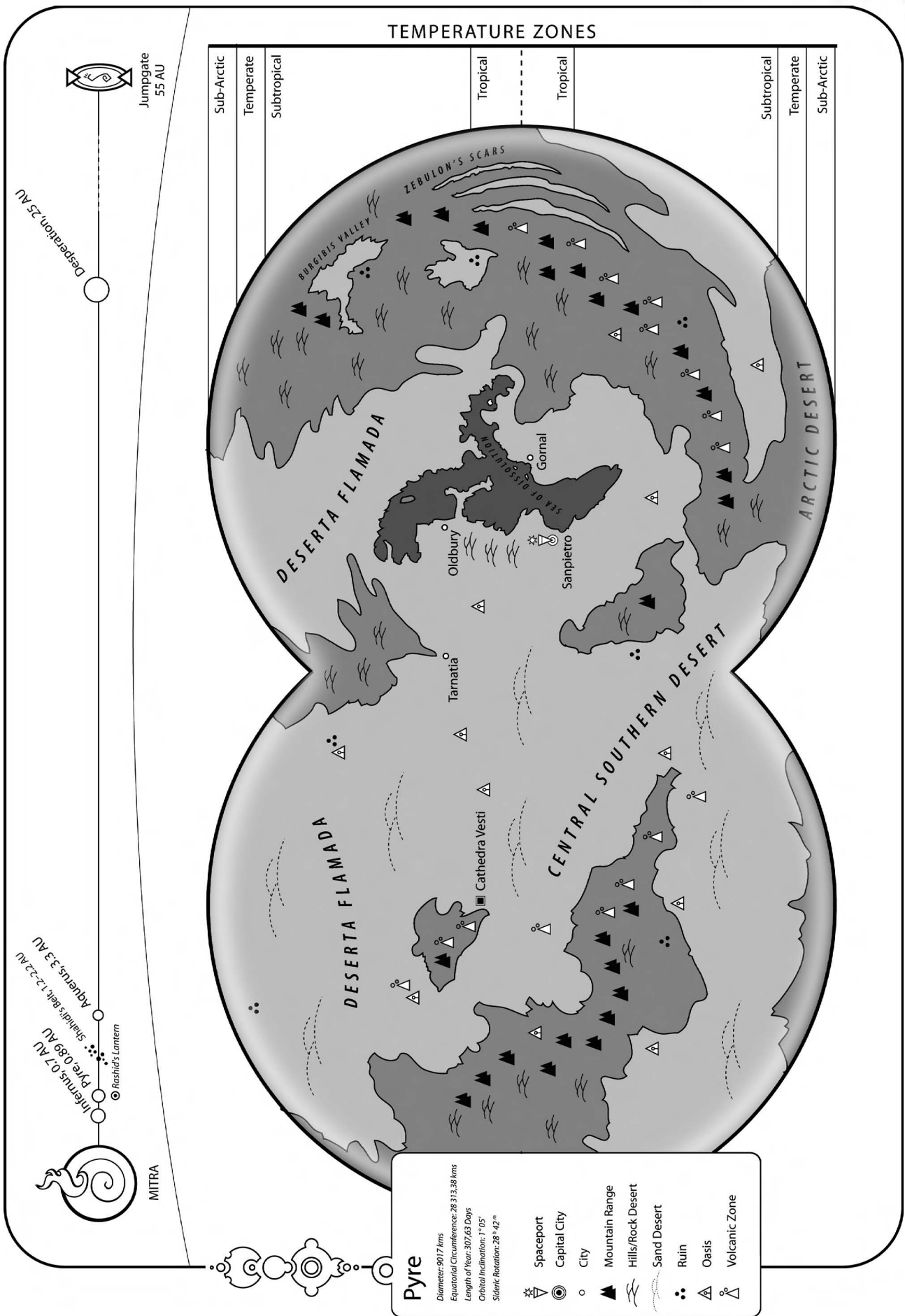
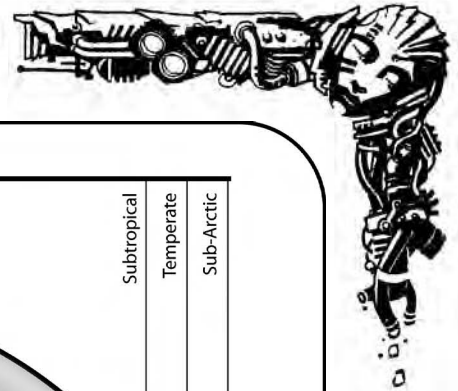
are drawn from the Ukari ap Gunta, others hail from off-world or the slums of Sanpietro but the majority here are nomad tribesmen. For reasons no one has been able, or willing, to explain, the tribes of Pyre possess a higher than normal proportion of psychics. Their faith is true and strong and these psychics are traditionally treated with much respect and brought to the Avesti for care.

Rarer than psychic ability, but still not unheard of, certain tribesmen have been known to manifest theurgic powers without clerical training. They treat these anomalies as if they were psychics. The tribesmen, it seems, draw no distinction between the two. Indeed, they are called by the same name, the Mat'wah, or Gifted Ones. These Mat'wah make some of the strongest penitents, their faith and fortitude hardened by exposure to the flames of Pyre.

I met with the current head of the Mat'wah and the current head of the Ukari ap Gunta—she and he both seemed very close, enjoying each others' company! Traditionally the head-Avesti has a 12-strong (or however many disciples there were) penitent guard made up of members of both sects—their services, I am informed, have often been offered to other sect leaders, yet only the Amalthean Ketcharcha has seen fit to accept the offers.

The heart of the Cathedra, the heart of the Temple Avesti, some would say the heart of the Universal Church, is the Eternal Flame. Pilgrims cross the Known Worlds to look upon it, one of the wonders of the universe. The Cathedra minded me of the Cathedral of the Rock yet I found myself more cleansed here than there. Though similar in scale the Cathedral of the Rock is a monument of nature to the Pancreator, the pilgrims that gather there do so in mute abeyance, witnesses to glory. The Cathedra Vesti is greater in that it is a monument both to the power of the Pancreator and to man's faith. Man brought the stones that built the ramparts that form the Cathedra, this is his monument to the flame. It is the hand of man that keeps the fires within burning. One cannot witness this monument without feeling a great humility, no man is an island, and no one man, not any man, could have wrought such an edifice alone. I crossed the threshold, I approached the flame with head bowed and heart laid bare.

The flame still filled my mind, and more than that, as I boarded the desert crawler later that night on the first step of my long journey back. It was then I was struck by revelation, there in the sweat and the reek, amongst the other pilgrims, my epiphany. There that I saw my quest as merely the first step on my journey, I have traveled across the worlds, my Lord Emperor, every step bringing me toward the flame, toward the light. I have reached apogee. But to turn back now? To return? I have seen the light, my Lord. I cannot return to the shadows.





Chapter Six: Other Holdings

Grail

Grail. Almost the second planet of the Amaltheans. Here Saint Amalthea healed the Prophet, the monastery of Santa Amalthea built on the very spot. And here the Amaltheans healed me.

On Pyre, we were attacked by desert tribal raiders, my Lord Emperor, as we made our way out of the Deserta Flamada. They were driven off with losses, but our desert crawler was ruined. Sevens days through the burning sands until sanctuary, until Tarnatia. My faithful companions tended my wounds as best they could. Fortunate, then, our next step took us to the healers' garden.

Santa Amalthea is a wonderful place. Cool, but never cold. Peaceful, but never dreary. Calmer than Artemis, that place's buzz of intrigue, or resentment, is refreshingly absent here. This place is completely restorative. The Amaltheans here care less for politics than their Artemisian brethren. The monastery head, Master Doctor Asa Kelson personally ministered to me and we spent long hours conversing, him telling me of Grail, me telling him of the Empire and the glorious new order. I think with him I have found peace.

Santa Amalthea is the Amalthean heart on Grail, shining luminite spires, sitting in the shadow of Mount Siddik—the legacy of Protos Adrian the Mysterious, the first of Saint Amalthea's followers to make camp on Grail. They control the majority of the continent of Diyarbakir and claim lands throughout the worlds. Officially House Keddah rules Grail, I would not impugn this claim, but they do so with much help from the Amalthean's acquiescence. Links between the two are close; Master Doctor Kelson is the bonded husband of Lady Kalila, the daughter of House leader Sheik Haroun Keddah. Her second-cousin, Deacon Sahar of Grail, also serves at Santa Amalthea.

Amalthean relations with the local Hazat seem strange. The Hazat—under the command of Don Diego de Huelva, a noted veteran of the Kurgan front—are boisterous and none

too subtle. Their designs on Keddah are obvious for even they see the need for Amalthean alliance. More a soldier than a diplomat, Don Diego has managed only to alienate Ketcharcha Sarai who has barred his troops from Amalthean lands without overwhelming medical need.

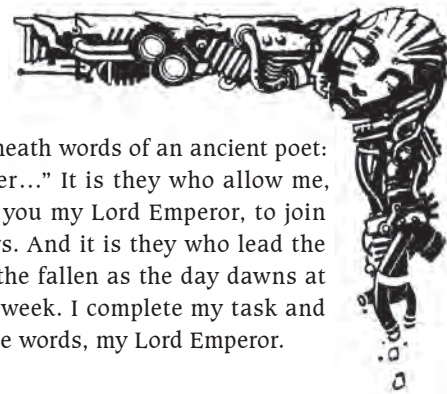
The Amalthean's relationship with the Etryi is more peaceful, if not as close as with House Keddah. Ketcharcha Sarai (Little Ketcharch, the spiritual leader of the Grail Amaltheans) strives to improve these, but to little effect. No Etryi have joined the Amalthean sect proper, although their renowned warrior, Tchekk'ar Tck'Tck, has pledged allegiance to the Knights of St. Yara and in particular to protect Protos Kasmira, the Grail Amalthean's envoy to Stigmata.

Stigmata

It is on Stigmata that my journey, and my quest, ends. I knew it my bones this must be so. The Universal Church has a presence on Stigmata that far outweighs the territory it controls. This is an Imperial protectorate—it is in your power, my Lord Emperor, to rectify this distortion.

The Manifest Light legion is at the forefront of the Universal Church's efforts against the Symbiots, our most implacable foe. All the legion has to show for its efforts is the Cathedral of Santa Serilda, its headquarters and base of operations. The Legion sits outside the usual military chain of command and is headed by the council of war, five members, and one from each sect who direct the Legion's military operations.

The council is headed, as one would expect, by the Brother Battle representative, Adept Stirling (the Manifest Light Brother Battle are separate from their own legion, the Scions of Zhal). The other council members are Protos Kasmira, Bishop Haig, Deacon Pandarex of the Avesti, and Philosophus Dee of the Eskatonic Order. There is a unity to



the Manifest Light that almost overcomes external political divides. Amaltheans serve hand in hand with Avesti with Orthodox here, as it should be. But the rapport needs time to build. Bishop Haig is the newest arrived council member and has caused resentment with his radical new ideas. He has, in the eyes of many, yet to prove himself. On Stigmata that chance will not be long coming.

Despite the tension of the knowledge of forestalled death all around, or perhaps because of it, there is peace to be found here. Protos Kasmira and her Etryi companion Tchekk'ar Tck'Tck (known admiringly amongst some of the troopers as "Fluffy") constantly lift the spirits. The Amaltheans are the smallest faction of the Manifest Light legion but they serve an important role. Their place is not at the frontline, but in healing the sick, and burying the dead. They are the memory of the Legion. It is they who carve the names of the fallen onto the clock tower within

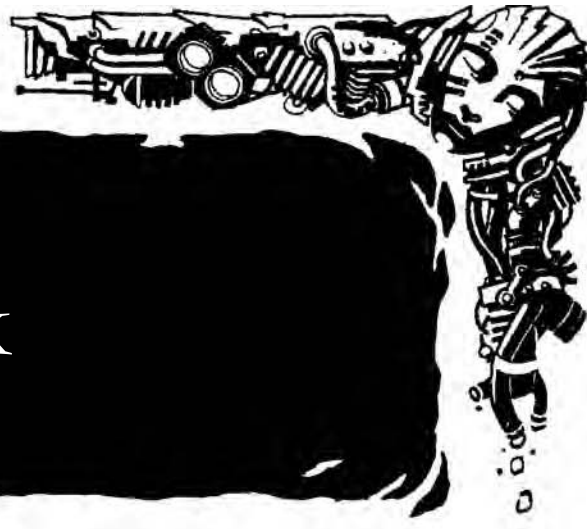
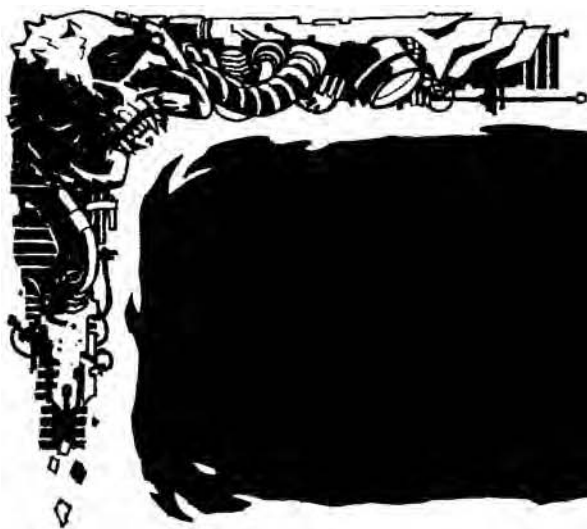
the cathedral courtyard, beneath words of an ancient poet: "We are the pilgrims, Master..." It is they who allow me, as I discharge this duty to you my Lord Emperor, to join the ranks of their protectors. And it is they who lead the prayer of remembrance for the fallen as the day dawns at the beginning of each new week. I complete my task and leave your service with these words, my Lord Emperor.

Yours, in faith

Sir Peregrine Obadiah Torenson, Knight of St. Yara

*"They shall not grow old,
as we that are left behind grow old:
Age shall not wither them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We shall remember them."*





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