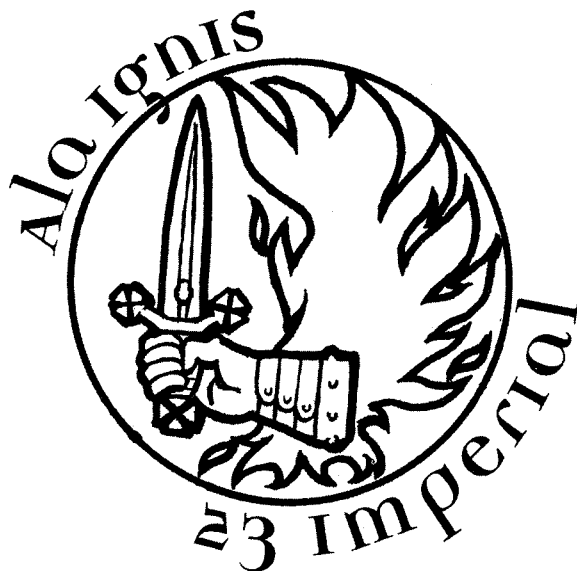


LEGIONS *of The* EMPIRE



FADING SUNS™

LEGIONS *of The* **EMPIRE**



by Bill Bridges, Andrew Greenberg,
Chris Howard & Ken Lightner

Credits

Writing: Bill Bridges, Andrew Greenberg, Christopher Howard, Ken Lightner

Development and typesetting: Bill Bridges

Editing and proofreading: Bill Bridges, Andrew Greenberg

Art direction: John Bridges

Cover art: John Bridges

Interior art: John Bridges, Mitch Byrd, Brian LeBlanc, Alex Sheikman

Stigmata Map: Chris Howard

Pilgrims:

"War. Oh, war. I ask you, O Pancreator — what good comes of it? Yeah, tell unto me!"
— Saint Lamentius, *Our Youth in Empyria*

"Think you on old Saint Lamentius and his desperate plea, and then witness the awesome fury of the Brother of Battle as they dispatch demonspawn, or feel you the heat of the flamewagon as it scorches the flesh of the damned heretic. Is there not an answer in this? The Pancreator's will is revealed in action."

— Canon Buchanan, *Third Address Before the Multitudes*



Holistic Design Inc.
5295 Hwy 78, D-337
Stone Mountain, GA 30087

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Alustro's Journal: Loyal Service

The old general stared out across the fields as if yearning to join the farmers working there. He shut his eyes for a long moment, and then shook off his ennui, turning to greet me with a smile. His movements were graceful and measured, practiced many times before in countless courts, but given an edge unusual by his years of military training and martial practice.

"Ah, Erian's young confessor," he said, gently cupping my hand in both of his, a gesture of familiarity normally reserved only for family. "Come, sit. I was preparing to take tea. I think today it shall be shava tea, in light of your visit from afar. Like you, it comes from Midian."

I bowed and took the cushioned chair he offered me. He reserved the hardwood stool for himself, spurning soft, physical luxuries even now, years after his last campaign. His age ensured that there would be no more battles for him.

"Thank you, my lord," I said. "I am pleased you consented to see me."

He nodded slightly. "Your liege is very dear to me. What concerns her, concerns me. Until yesterday, I had not seen her since her ninth natal day, yet ever has she remained dear to me, a luminous reflection of her mother, my dearest sister."

I waited for him to invite me to relate the matter upon which I had come, but knew that, as is Li Halan custom, such weighty matters would wait until he was ready to hear them. The servant arrived with a tray and teacups, and poured us each a steaming cup of the suffused exotic leaf. General Hanmei Usaki Li Halan sipped slowly, his attention again amidst the fields. The sun's noon heat rippled through the humid air and the thrumming sounds of insects filled our ears. After nearly five minutes of such quiet contemplation, he turned to me and spoke:

"What concerns you, holy man, and how does it involve my favored niece?"

"Her rivals, my lord," I said. "As you surely know, her

brother was most insulted by her refusal to stay in her father's home once it had passed into his rule. He fears she plots some method of overthrowing his inheritance. A most ridiculous and uncivilized assertion, but it stands nonetheless. He has sent agents against her many times, and has spread lies and deceit to his loyal allies, poisoning their minds against her."

"Yes," the old general said. "The masks of decorum occasionally fall from noble faces even in the Courts of Divine Mandate. The Li Halan, like so many others, preach a doctrine even they rarely hold."

I didn't know what to say to such a frank admittance. I was embarrassed, and unsure if he was testing me for a sign of disloyalty or if he had simply forgotten to whom he spoke. I have served his family for years, but I was not one of them, and thus not used to being privy to family criticism. I remained silent.

He smiled as he watched me, and then continued. "I know of her brother's campaign against her. He tried to initiate me into it. I refused. A simple thing, since I am so far removed from the courts." This last was said not wistfully, but with a startling righteousness, as if he had earned the right to exile. He looked at me and waited for me to speak again.

"Last night," I said, "my lady confided in you and told you of our plans, about how we are preparing to leave Byzantium Secundus for Leminkainen and then Hargard, and from there travel deeper into barbarian space in service to the Emperor. She said this trusting fully in your confidence, knowing that you would never reveal to others our mission."

"And yet?" he said, staring at me pointedly.

"Her brother has somehow heard of our plans. A leak among the Questing Knights, perhaps. His allies are here now, although I know not who or where they be. I do know that they will try to stop my lady from leaving, although how far they will go to achieve this end, I know not. But I

fear it will be far..."

I saw the general's anger for the first time. It was not a loud thing, but a simmering heat radiating from behind his eyes. I thanked the Pancreator that he did not direct his gaze at me, but inward in contemplation of some deed, act or person that ignited such a rage.

"And you seek protection from me for Erian? You need not speak it. It is her's, and always has been. I would muster all my armies for her, or receive myself the sword aimed at her breast." He stood and moved closer to the balcony, staring fiercely out at the fields and into the deeper distance, at the Ventriddi garrison town. "I have sat too long in this manse, rubbing wounds and replaying lost strategies. I had not heard that Inami's allies were here. The old man naps while the cats slip into the garden to steal the golden carp. How did you know this?"

"Cardanzo saw a familiar face at the inn late last night, a former bodyguard of Erian's father whom he had served with before. He knew this man to be disreputable and long-suspected to be in Inami's employ even before his father's death."

"A loyal man, Cardanzo. He truly understands the role the Pancreator has given him; his loyalty to Erian is his loyalty to the Pancreator. And I, too, am loyal to both. This man of Inami's will not make a move while Erian is my guest; he will instead cloak his actions, perhaps hiring locals to act for him. He will do this only when she is in town, away from my manse."

"But she is in town now! She insisted on overseeing the provisioning with Julia." My heart was clutched by a black hand. Fear and panic overcame me, and I stood, wanting to run to the town. "I should not have gone to Saint Maya's! Oh, selfish errant priest! I should have come to you first!"

"Fear causes the jackrabbit to rush before the wheels of the chariot," the general said, gripping my shoulders and seating me again. "We must act with surety in the time the Pancreator allows." He clapped thrice quickly, and a guard appeared from a hidden alcove I had been completely unaware of.

"You heard?" he asked the guard, and when the man nodded, the general spoke again in a tongue I did not know. It was surely a secret Li Halan battle tongue, a unique language used to hide communications from listening enemies on the field of war. The guard then turned and disappeared into the manse. "A general does not grow to great age without inspiring loyalty. Go now, there is a flitter waiting on the lawn to take you to Erian. But wear a mask as you go: your part is the innocent shazzle, unaware of the forces moving through the woods around him. Do nothing to alert Erian's enemies, and be assured that all is well; none will move against her without first encountering my displeasure."

I bowed, and hurried down the hall to the front lawn,

where the driver who had brought me here prepared to fly be back to the garrison town. Halfway to the car, I halted and forced myself to walk calmly. I must appear undisturbed, as if nothing had taken place but a pleasant conversation. I climbed into the car and sat in the back, my hands twisting and almost tearing at my robe in frustration and anxiety.

Soon the flitter landed in the square before the town gates, and I rushed out, hurriedly seeking sign of Erian or our friends, forgetting Usaki's advice. The place was full of soldiers, most of them imperial legionnaires recently arrived for a quiet retirement from Stigmata. While they were still a standing army, they had little to stand for here in Old Istanbul. Nonetheless, the imperial capital world must keep soldiers ever at the ready. Among them thronged mercenaries and soldiers from other armies — even a Church contingent — sharing uncomfortably the largest garrison town outside of the Imperial City.

It was market day in Ventriddi — the reason Erian had come — and merchants yelled over the low rumble of diverse conversations. I threaded my way through crowds, nearly scattering a pair of dice on the ground as I accidentally trod through an impromptu game of odds. Two burly and scarred veterans on their knees in the mud looked angrily up at me but I kept moving and was soon out of their sight.

I cried with relief when I saw Ong in the crowd, his head reaching above even the tallest soldier. I waved and yelled to gain his attention, and his keen eyes quickly darted in my direction. He smiled as he recognized me, and moved forward through the crowd as I struggled to pass a band of Hazat veterans.

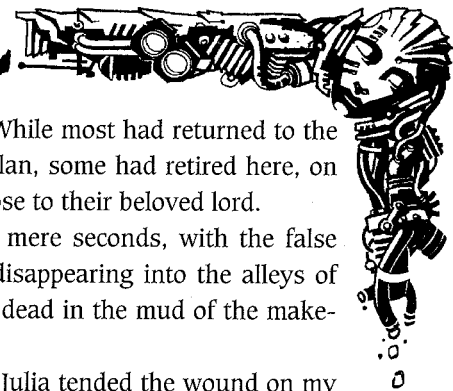
"Little father," he said when we reached one another, "I thought you went to see our lady's uncle."

"Erian is in trouble!" I said, as low as I could, fearful now that someone might overhear. Ong's keen ears had no trouble understanding what I said, and he stood to full height, his eyes searching for our lady. He apparently saw her and practically leapt in her direction, startling a group of beggars and scattering them in all directions. I followed in his wide wake.

Erian was standing outside a merchant's stall, Cardanzo by her side, while Julia haggled with an old crone over the price of what appeared to be old canned goods. They all looked at Ong as he came, and Cardanzo's hand instantly shot to his pistol, his eyes scanning the crowd for the source of Ong's anxiety. As I ran up, I saw his eyes tighten into hard slits and his pistol slide from its holster to point at a target to my left.

I had failed to notice the crowd clearing to the left for reasons other than our Vorox friend. A group of grimy mercenaries gathered there with clubs, maces and bats, all staring at Erian and our entourage. The leader stepped forward, boldly ignoring the blaster aimed at his eyes.





"Eh, you there! Li Halan!" he yelled.

Erian shot him a contemptuous glare and ignored him; he was well below her class and she was well within her rights to pretend he didn't exist.

"Don't turn from me!" he said. "You're the one that cheated us out of our pay. Twenty-five men dead, all because of you. The rest of us, abandoned on that field, bleeding and crying for evac. But you couldn't be bothered. What're a bunch of liege-less mercs to you? But we did our duty, and now we're going to take our pay out of your hide!"

Erian looked aghast. "I've never hired mercenaries in my life!"

I scanned the rest of the crowd. They were moving away, refusing to get involved in what they deemed a matter of pay between a mercenary group and a disloyal noble. No one here — all soldiers and veterans, surely wronged themselves at one time or another by a noble's whim — would defend Erian, a stranger to them. I moved to Erian's side. "They work for your brother, my lady. This is a trick."

She looked at me with shock and then back at the mercenaries. "You dare hide your affiliation to my brother under lies?! Step forward and fight me then!" She drew her sword and stepped clear of us.

Cardanzo moved in front of her. "They have no intention of honorable dueling, my lady. Step away. I will defend you."

The mercenaries fanned out; they intended to take us all. Even with Ong's strength and speed, and Cardanzo's skill, they posed a risk to Erian. I cried out to the throng: "Can't you all see this is about a noble vendetta, not about wronged soldiers?" No one responded.

I moved in front of Cardanzo, to stare in the mercenary leader's face. "If you intend harm to her, you must then harm me first."

He smiled. "All right, priest," and then swung his club. Too startled to resist, I felt the hard wood crack into my skull, and I sunk to the mud. The world seemed distant and like a magic lantern picture show. I could watch but not act. My limbs didn't respond to my thoughts.

A blaster bolt tore into my aggressor, charring his fatigues and knocking him back. But his men surged forward, weapons swinging. They did not reach Erian. Soldiers from the crowd appeared between them, slashing expertly left and right with katana blades. The mercenaries turned to defend themselves but could not stand before the equal but better-trained numbers that assaulted them.

As I recovered my senses and tried to rise, I saw the uniforms our allies wore, emblazoned with red hawks swooping over a field of bones. I knew who they were, and I whispered a prayer to the Pancreator for General Usaki's aid. The Red Hawk company, third regiment of General Usaki's Scarlet Legion, were renowned veterans of the Emperor Wars,

now retired like their lord. While most had returned to the Garden Worlds of the Li Halan, some had retired here, on the general's lands, to be close to their beloved lord.

The short battle lasted mere seconds, with the false mercenaries routed, many disappearing into the alleys of the garrison town but most dead in the mud of the makeshift market.

Ong helped me up, and Julia tended the wound on my head. "A little blood, but it's not that bad. You'll have quite a knob for a while, though." Cardanzo gave me a "what-the-hell-did-you-think-you-were-doing" look, but I just shrugged, unsure myself of what came over me.

Erian examined my wound and smiled. "My brave defender appears to have survived. But from now on, he had best perform the role of medic and not wounded soldier." I nodded but smiled.

One of the Red Hawks addressed Erian. "My lady Li Halan, I have been asked by my Most Notable Commander of Crimson Conflicts to escort you to his manse, where you may rest safely away from such rabble as tried to accost you today."

"I thank my uncle for his timely aid, and you for your valiant service. I accept his offer and will return with you to his estate."

The Red Hawks stood in a formation, waiting for sign that Erian was ready to depart. As soon as she saw we were together, she walked toward the gates, surrounded regally by this force of disciplined soldiers. As I walked among them, guarded on all sides by their regimented march, I saw that all were older than any of us. Indeed, there did not appear to be one of them under forty years of age. I marveled at the loyalty engendered by the general to keep such troops standing in his name even years after their days of glory in the Emperor Wars had passed.

My head hurts and I tire of writing. My letter to my uncle has already been given into the hands of Usaki's servant, with strict orders not to be delivered until after we depart tonight. Once aboard the *Resurgent*, I think I shall sleep for a week.

I will be safer than before. One of the Red Hawks, Lieutenant Chinzi Gosado, begged Erian's uncle to be allowed to accompany us into barbarian space. With Erian's permission, he agreed. He knows the soldier well, and vouches for her. There is no place for this woman of war on Byzantium Secundus, but among the Vuldrok and Kurgans, her tactical lore may do us much good, and she begs to be of assistance once more to her noble lord.

I witness his untiring devotion to a cause, even one that threatens her life constantly, and wonder at the nature of faith. I follow the call of the Pancreator's service, and I know now that people such as she do the same, even though their path is carved with blood and mine with words.







History of War

The flaming arrow flying straight for his head kept Brother Amestreus from laughing, but he would have if he could have. Stuck using a spear in the ruins of a defense post that once held the most sophisticated of energy guns. Hoping that stone walls could turn back blasters. The arrow buried itself in the dirt, and Amestreus stomped it out before his papers and maps could catch fire. His own troops opened fire with a volley of various munitions, and Amestreus went back to studying his map.

His battle wounds hurt, but not nearly as badly as did the knowledge of the mistakes he had made to bring his force here. He had not expected the heathen troops on this part of Kurga to attack him — he and his Hazat allies had had them on the run for weeks. Amestreus knew he should have prepared himself for their beast cavalry. Curse him for a novice! Their coordinated attacks reminded him of the ancient Frederick the Great at Lobositz. Old Father Pesson would laugh at how the heretics had repulsed Amestreus and his men, driving them back into a valley.

Amestreus looked around him, evaluating his troops — and losses. His troops represented a true cross section of the Known Worlds, including in their number peasant militiamen with pikes, artillery men pushing cannons and howitzers into position, snipers with laser rifles, and his own squad of elite Brother Battle monks.

Well, the battle was not lost. His enemies might think that they had him now, but he still had years of experience on which to draw. Their blasters and mobility had surprised him, but would not drive him back. Brother Amestreus' men may not carry blasters, but that did not matter. If there was one thing years of battle had taught the monk, it was that

technology granted its user a temporary advantage, but it was warriors who won the wars. Now Amestreus just had to figure out how to become that warrior.

From the first tribal feud between ancient hunters to the most modern space battles, armed conflicts have settled many of humanity's problems — and created even more. Every battle has its heroes, villains and cowards, and all their actions create the grand tapestry of war. War has long provided individuals with an opportunity to make their mark, either for good or ill.

The history of warfare runs right through human history. Their many wars have had an integral role in creating the culture of the Fading Suns, and a knowledge of their bellicose heritage can help an observer understand their many hostilities, rivalries and seemingly bizarre alliances. This chapter deals primarily with the wars that broke out once people reached space and were no longer locked into fights on Earth's surface.

War in Space

The militarists' dream of turning space into another battlefield came true in the 21st century after Christ. The nations of the Earth combined their abilities to construct a station in space, a monument to peace and progress. Terrorists and extremists began targeting it and the Earth's satellite network shortly thereafter. As the dangers on the ground increased, so did those in space. By the end of the century even probes to other worlds were not safe, and a weary human race turned to those who promised security.



The First Republic

This was the First Republic, run by the zaibatsu, giant corporations with ties to governments, industry, media and even terrorist groups. During the First Republic, combat between countries all but disappeared, replaced by disagreements between the zaibatsu. They usually fought out these disagreements in the boardrooms, courts and legislatures of the world, only occasionally resorting to violence. In fact, most people remained unaware of the battles they waged.

Zaibatsu wars differed from past conflicts in that profit was the bottom line. While previous combatants might have fought until they could fight no more, zaibatsu would call off their attacks the second the costs outweighed the gains. Thus while one zaibatsu might raid another's labs for research information, the other would rarely retaliate unless it could count on some pecuniary gain.

Secret attacks on factories, kidnappings of key workers, hijacking of resources and products, and sabotage of essential infrastructure (like satellites and computers) became the most common types of warfare. Mars saw innumerable battles during the early days of its colonization as the zaibatsu fought over its resources and possibilities.

But Mars was just an indication of what was to come with the discovery of the jumpgate. Suddenly the potential profits skyrocketed. Whole new worlds lay out there, ripe for the exploiting. Zaibatsu who could own a world would reap profits undreamed of. And the body count began.

Even before anyone made it through Earth's jumpgate, raids began on the zaibatsu's ship building efforts. The hiring of mercenaries, both for offense and defense, went through the roof. While violence did not mar the first trip to another solar system, it followed soon after. Outright violence marked several of the next races to new systems, and more battles often followed on the ground. The zaibatsu continued their arms race as they fought for control of the new worlds, and they vied for the loyalty of the best combat pilots, those who made spaceships do whatever they pleased. An elite corps came into being, and these pilots became some of the zaibatus' most prestigious and well-paid personnel. Then whispers of darker goals and misplaced loyalties began to spread before the zaibatus turned their troops against their own employees in the Sathra "rebellion".

This, the first large-scale war in space, grew out of many factors, not the least being the zaibatsu's own fear of one another. Attempts to both deny their pilots' the Sathra experience and to cut off their connections to one another spurred resentment, and the first minor confrontations soon turned into fleet battles. While the Sathraists had an advantage in skill, they had little luck replacing their losses in pilots and equipment. At first they won a series of victories, sending hordes of small ships against stationary space sta-

tions and poorly defended cargo ships.

When the First Republic began moving its fleets into threatened systems, the Sathraists would disappear, preferring to harry the enemy rather than engage in set battles. The zaibatsu quickly realized this and began targeting the Sathraists' families rather than the pilots themselves. Government troops would land on a planet suspected of housing Sathraists or their sympathizers and begin hunting them down.

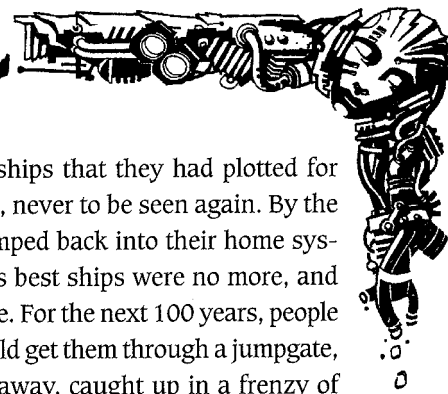
This forced the Sathraists into battles of the government's choosing. Instead of raiding when and where they wanted, they found themselves attacking heavily defended troop convoys, and their losses began mounting. The raid on Collier's Landing, one notable example of this, cost the Sathraists heavily. The home of many pilots, they could not ignore a zaibatsu fleet heading for their planet. The First Republic ships approached the planet in three waves: an initial force of 62 heavy ships, a landing force consisting of 80 troop carriers with 15 screening, and a final wave of carriers, fast attack ships and support craft to serve as a reaction force.

The Sathraists sent almost 140 small ships against this fleet, trying desperately to break through the first rank and attack the troop carriers behind them. Again and again they sallied out, sometimes penetrating and sometimes getting thrown back. By the time the First Republic fleet reached Collier's Landing, the Sathraists had destroyed almost all the troop carriers — at the expense of 130 of their own ships, along with almost their entire crews. The next week more First Republic troops landed unopposed and discovered a hastily abandoned outpost. While the Sathraists had won the battle of Collier's Landing, they had lost the fight for the planet. Later battles around Earth, New Mecca and Sathra's Boon sealed their fate.

The Diaspora

The First Republic may have won the war against the Sathraists, but it lost the greater fight to keep humanity under its supervision. The end of the Sathraist rebellion left the First Republic sorely lacking in experienced pilots but with a plethora of ships built to carry soldiers and equipment. The zaibatsu fell to battling among themselves again, for the rebellion had cost them all. Innumerable opportunists took advantage of this to found their own worlds, free of First Republic laws and restrictions. In the confusion following the rebellion, they had little problem making their break.

At first the zaibatsu did their best to keep these renegades under control, but following the Sathraist rebellion they lacked the strength and determination to enforce their will. By the time any of the interstellar corporations felt strong enough to stop this flight, it was too late. A number of re-



cently discovered systems had sprouted independent colonies, and these colonies had no intention of returning to the fold.

The First Republic tried everything it could to keep humanity united, but none of the renegades saw any reason to believe its promises of reform, free trade and greater freedoms. They could not ignore its history of treachery and deceit, and did all they could to encourage more emigration. The zaibatsu gave up on the carrot approach, and instead began using threats and intimidation. Fifth column teams infiltrated these new planets with orders to bring down their governments. When those groups failed, primarily due to the heroic efforts of these planets' leading families, a hastily assembled zaibatsu fleet lifted off to enforce unity.

The first planets it visited capitulated immediately at the prospect of off-planet bombardments. This changed at Luca. Admiral Jevin Johanson, confident of continued success, sent no scouts through the jumpgate, preferring to sail through en masse. The renegades sprang their trap on the other side of the gate. Luca's Folly, as the battle came to be known, marked the first large-scale fleet battle in deep space.

The renegades tore through the fleet's first ships before the armada could regroup. Disorganized and unsure of their enemy's strength, the zaibatsu ships could only respond to attacks as they came. The renegades, knowing that their ships lacked Johanson's firepower, organized their attacks in staggered strafing runs. As one wing of ships would come in, targeting one or two capital ships, the zaibatsu ships would turn in force to engage them. As Admiral Johanson's ships would finally get in position, another strafing run would come in from a different angle, and the first wing would use its greater momentum to break off.

Finally, Johanson broke his fleet into sections to chase the renegades' wings. The battle quickly disintegrated into absolute chaos as the renegades led their enemy farther and farther from the planet of Luca. Using preestablished rally points, wings would join up to combine firepower on individual sections, concentrating as much as possible on ships' engines. Soon dozens of First Republic ships were drifting helplessly, heading further and further into the dark between the stars.

Of course, the renegades did not escape untouched. The largest (and slowest) ships suffered the worst, and two of their eight wings took 100 percent casualties. Still, the zaibatsu suffered badly themselves, and less than 20 percent of their ships escaped through the jumpgate. Now began the folly part of Luca's folly. The many factions making up the renegades' fleet began a mad dash to recover whatever ships they could, both theirs and the First Republic's. Fights soon broke out over rights to prize vessels. The renegades, already at little more than 50 percent effectiveness, began suffering more and more casualties in the skirmishes

that sprang up.

In addition, numerous ships that they had plotted for recovery simply disappeared, never to be seen again. By the time the renegade's ships limped back into their home systems, the bulk of humanity's best ships were no more, and the Diaspora was unstoppable. For the next 100 years, people took off in anything that would get them through a jumpgate, and the First Republic died away, caught up in a frenzy of battles in Earth's own solar system. Some renegades cut deals with a few the zaibatsu, but most went their own ways. After the Battle of New Istanbul, detailed in **Byzantium Secundus**, the zaibatsu never regained their old power.

The Shifting Winds


While Earth remained the most populous and potentially most powerful planet, it was also the most divided. Other planets gained and lost power with amazing regularity, and small-scale wars became commonplace. Most planets had a unified world-wide government that would focus on three goals: exploiting their own world, extracting wealth from their solar system, and expanding their dominion to other systems, either by exploration and colonization or by conquest.

Many of the modern noble houses saw their births in this time, either as world protectors or attackers. For instance, House Hawkwood claims to have risen to prominence as defenders of Delphi, though other nobles tend to suggest that they defended their own property first and anything else last — and only after its owner pledged fealty to them. Others have even implied that the Hawkwood's founder instigated the Delphi rebellion that brought the house to power. Whatever the truth, after solidifying their power on Delphi, they reached out to other worlds, either through alliances or conquest. This is also the source of their ancient enmity with House Decados.

Other groups acted in a similar way, but not always with the same results. One episode, which became popularized in books and theater, was the rise and fall of House Biafra. Biafra, colonized in the classic Diasporan manner by several thousand émigrés from Eastern Africa, quickly became an industrial powerhouse thanks to off-planet investments and a committed populace. When the nearby system of Drake's Burden realized the amount of wealth accumulating one jump away, it organized an invasion fleet. This included one ship large enough to bombard from orbit, several smaller ships to take care of whatever spaceworthy craft the Biafrans might have, and a small flotilla of cargo ships converted into troop carriers.

The Drake's Burden fleet made quick work of what few ships the Biafrans could muster, and the invading army soon occupied the planet's main population centers. Then the guerrilla warfare began. Biafran troops had little problem





attacking when and where they pleased, topping off their exploits by hijacking a small freighter.

In a daring boarding action, they used the freighter to sneak up on and attack the largest warship in the Drake's Burden fleet. The guerrillas seized control of the ship in minutes, replacing its crew with their own trained personnel. The turned its guns on the other ships, crippling most of the escorts before they could react. The rest of the Drake's Burden fleet soon surrendered, and the ground troops followed suit when energy blasts began raining down on their barracks.

While many Biafrans called for peace now that they had freed their home, a cadre of military leaders overruled them and overthrew the government when it objected. The generals soon had the planet whipped up into a militaristic frenzy, and recruited its own invasion force.

Drake's Burden became the first target, and the world was unprepared when its own fleet began bombarding it. Drake's Burden fell quickly, having already lost many of its troops on Biafra, and soon dreams of empire began growing. Recruiting went into high gear on both worlds, and soon the Biafran leaders had a sizable army at the ready. By now their success had begun to grow into legend, and performers throughout human space helped spread the story.

The Biafrans' next target was Hot Rum, a lawless world rich in minerals. The invasion fleet lifted off, sailing in every ship on which the Biafrans could get their hands. This desperate scrounging meant that almost a third of the ships failed to even reach the jumpgate. By the time the remainder had completed the jump, the fleet lay spread out across more than a dozen AUs. Its invasion proceeded in a similar manner, with ships landing whenever and wherever they could. Hot Rum lacked any particular defensive force, but its inhabitants rallied to the banner much as the Biafrans did to fight off Drake's Burden. The piecemeal nature of the invasion worked to their advantage, as did the Biafrans inability to keep their one bombardment vessel working.

The Biafrans failed to concentrate their forces, and the war soon bogged down. It continued for several years, with the Biafrans sinking more and more of their resources into it. Drake's Burden suffered substantially during this period, with the Biafrans conscripting everyone of military age and selling off the planet's industry to support the war effort.

Following several Biafran setbacks on Hot Rum, Drake's Burden revolted, followed a few years later by Biafra itself. The revolution left Biafra broken and Balkanized, having gone from conquered to conqueror to decimated within 15 years. Thus their song became one of glory and hubris, an object lesson for generations to come.

Few interstellar empires lasted more than a generation before the pressures of time and space tore them apart. As the Diaspora continued, no one unifying force rose with the

strength to bring humanity back together. Even the other sentient races people encountered increased their confidence. Beginning with the Shantor and continuing through the Ascorbites, Gannok and others, humanity found itself far more powerful than anyone else. When conflicts arose, the aliens suffered and found themselves driven from their traditional homes. Even when humans and aliens coexisted peacefully, the aliens quickly found themselves in subordinate roles from which they never broke free. Thus, when people finally met a powerful foe, they could do little against this new threat.

The Vau Arrive

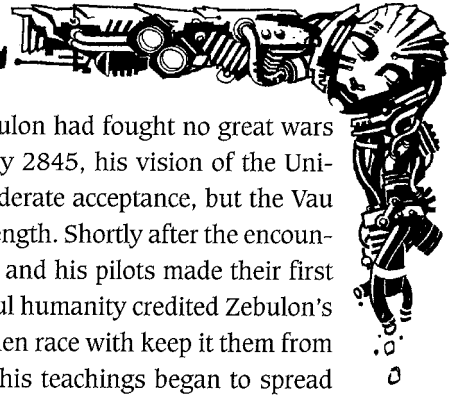
When House Harlisson landed on New Monaco (now call Apshai), its leaders embodied all the arrogance of the human race. They thought they had found an abundant source of riches that they could keep for themselves. The world boasted not only unexploited minerals and foodstuffs, but it also had a pacifistic native race dedicated to creating epic works of beauty. House Harlisson immediately moved in, claiming ownership and setting up tourist spots, cutting down forests and stripping out valuable minerals. Protests from the G'nesh, the native race, fell on deaf ears as Harlisson nobles began plans to move them to areas where tourists could observe them with ease and security.

House Harlisson's primary military presence in the system involved a few escort craft assigned to turning back any other factions that tried to claim New Monaco. They based a few thousand security officers on the planet to relocate the G'nesh. These forces had no chance when the Vau arrived. Massive energy bolts tore through the escorts instantly after they first detected the alien ship. Energy fields locked the security forces into place before frying all of those trapped within. Vau troops followed and mercilessly exterminated those few who survived the fields.

One escort vessel escaped the slaughter, running back to Midian to warn humanity about the threat. House Harlisson, with the assistance of House Li Halan and other nobles, immediately began assembling ships to retake its prize tourist trap. Within a month, the Harlisson's boasted a fleet of almost a dozen capital ships, several score escort craft and thousands of mercenary ground troops. They made the jump to New Monaco, where the Vau lay in wait.

The human troops and nobles flew forward confidently, for scanners revealed only a handful of Vau ships. Only one of these was larger than the capital ships — the rest seemed smaller than the escorts. As they began to close, however, things began to go awry. Before the Harlisson fleet could come within range to fire its own guns, the Vau had already destroyed most of the human's missile ships. Then, when the humans finally opened fire, they got their first experience of energy shields.





Lasers and slugs bathed the Vau ships in deadly energy, only to stop on contact. The humans continued their barrage, only to have their sensors register no effects. The Vau turned their focus from the escort ships to the capital ships, and within minutes reduced them to lifeless husks. At this point, the Harlisson fleet began breaking up. The mercenaries broke off first, with the noble troops holding on little longer. The Vau followed, destroying warships seemingly at will.

Three mercenary ships managed to escape the devastation, and their warnings sparked fear throughout human space. The greatest worries of all seemed to have come true. Humanity had encountered an invincible alien race with completely unknown motives. Everyone expected deadly ships to come streaming through the jumpgates at any moment, destroying everything in their path.

Instead of bringing humanity together in the face of a common enemy, it fractured what little unity did exist. The planets closest to Apshai screamed for military aid, while those further away chose to withdraw any nearby forces in preparation for their own defense. Out of this chaos strode Zebulon, a lone voice calling for humanity's unity.

The Rise of the Church

The Universal Church's earliest days were remarkably violence free. Despite the chaos and uncertainty running

through human society, Zebulon had fought no great wars while spreading his creed. By 2845, his vision of the Universal Flame had gained moderate acceptance, but the Vau confrontation gave it real strength. Shortly after the encounter at New Monaco, Zebulon and his pilots made their first visit to that system. A grateful humanity credited Zebulon's missions to this enigmatic alien race with keep it them from launching an invasion, and his teachings began to spread like wildfire.

The jumpgate accident that ended his days caused both fear and anger, but Palamedes managed to keep calls for revenge on the Vau in check. Instead, he focused that energy on increasing Church influence — and quietly building up an army of his own. With the Vau threat receding, humanity again spread through the stars. Now, however, most humans strode a little more carefully, always aware that any new place they visited might already belong to someone dangerous. Even human conflicts were muted, both due to fear of the growing Church and worries about how unknown adversaries might take advantage of such conflicts.

Thus when the Ur-Ukar began their offensive and the Shantor rebellion sprang up, humanity was surprised but not shocked. The Ur-Ukar struck throughout human space, decimating shipping and winning a number of early battles. They had secretly observed humanity, and though outnumbered, understood human technology fairly well. They also



had the advantage of stealth and surprise, and their hidden populations on Aylon and Istakhr proved extremely effective. The **Children of the Gods** sourcebook details the war from the Ur-Ukar side, but humanity had its own share of valor and perfidy.

The Siege of Acre, a small engagement on Istakhr, has remained a favorite of minstrels for centuries. Here al-Malik security forces, led by Davidka ibn Tarif and Ceryl al-Malik, defended a laboratory hospital complex converted from an old Universal Church mission. The compound stored not only a large amount of valuable research and data gathered on the Ur-Ukar, but it also provided one of the few truly defensible positions in the southern temperate region, near the Fada Sea. It also housed a magic lantern studio that broadcast both the preparations and the actual battle in their entirety.

Ur-Ukar psychics led the assault, followed by thousands of ground troops. The defenders consisted of less than five hundred humans and Ur-Obun determined not to let the attackers leave unscathed. The humans, followers of the al-Malik Path of Tarif, prepared their spirits through song and hymn while the Ur-Obun, disciples of Ven Lohji, prepared through psychic meditations. When the Ur-Ukar attacked, they found their great mental abilities useless before this combined power. Their lasers and cannons proved mostly ineffective against the recently developed energy shields the defenders had jury-rigged. Frustrated by the prospect of a prolonged engagement, they sent wave after wave of foot soldiers against Acre's walls.

Laser turrets mowed down hundreds of Ukari attackers before the aliens fell back. For three days, they continued their assault, losing more than two thousand in the process. Only on the fourth day, when the compound's energy supplies began failing, did the Ur-Ukar manage to breach its walls. Then the battle degenerated into a vicious crawl through the corridors, with the defenders contesting every inch of space. Hastily erected barricades met the Ur-Ukar at every turn, and slug guns and lasers forced them to retreat repeatedly.

The fighting through the rooms and halls went on for several more days until the defenders were finally forced back into the complex's main computer room. Here they made their final stand, broadcast planetwide and soon throughout human space. The invaders used heavy weapons to blast through the doors, only to find their weapons again limited against the defenders' personal shields. The battle quickly turned into a swirling melee of lasers, knives and bare hands. When it was over the floor was littered, packed with dead Ur-Ukar, under whom lay the bodies of the last defenders, including Davidka ibn Tarif. Almost 7000 Ur-Ukar had died during the battle, and the assault on Istakhr slowed dramatically. By the end of the siege, human reinforcements

had begun flooding the planet, and the Ur-Ukar soon found themselves driven back.

Palamedes, the founder of the Universal Church, personally lead the attack at Criticorum that turned the tide of the war. While it first appeared as though Criticorum would turn into a stalemate, with neither side able to advance, Palamedes took the field. His discovery of the jump coordinates for the Ur-Ukar homeworld of Kordeth allowed his fleet to make a massive surprise attack on humanity's enemies. The Ur-Ukar might have held had it not been for the revolts that suddenly broke out across the planet. While the war continued for decades, human space was no longer threatened. Ur-Ukar on all planets other than Kordeth itself surrendered long before the war ended.

Rise of the Republic

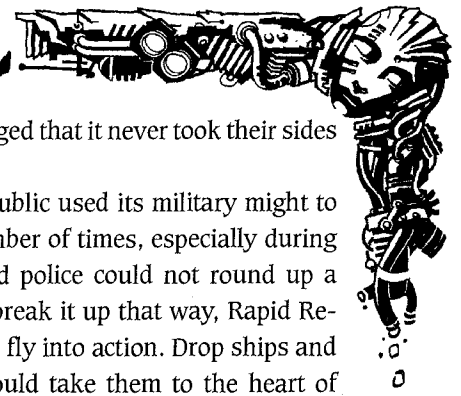
One positive result of the Ukar War was the way humanity found itself pulling together. Unlike the overpowering Vau threat that splintered humanity, the Ukar War brought people together. Some believe that it was the continuing nature of the Ukar menace — the war went on for more than 50 years — which forced different groups to work together. Others point to the growth of the Church, with its message of a universal community, as the main factor. Yet others say the time and conditions were right, for humanity had exploited enough to make interstellar trade and connections a primary part of many lives, and safeguarding these took priority over other disagreements.

Interstellar organizations and federations sprang up to facilitate and protect these growing ties. The solo, fiercely independent worlds became a greater and greater rarity, with confederations, trade leagues, empires and the like becoming the norm. Amazingly, few of these formed through force. Most grew through diplomacy, as people first formed representative, worldwide governments and then expanded their models through space.

Exceptions did exist, however, and not everyone came along quietly. By 3450, a dozen groups represented most of humanity. Fears that the biggest — groups like the Market Authority, the Market Confluence, or the Ired Consortium — would force the others into a union on their own terms became a growing concern. Two of the smaller groups decided to strike first to defend their sovereignty against the Ired Consortium.

The first battles of the unity war were inconclusive, but the smaller groups' combined forces began gaining the upper hand. One, the Priory of Cyan, had access to a substantial amount of Anunnaki relics, and put them to early use. This was the first time gargoyles and the like played a prominent role in combat, and they had dramatic effects. They neutralized enemy advantages in guns and men, and accentuated the Priory's advantages in speed and stealth. Also,





the Priory, while not the originator of the stealth ship, put them to use more than anyone else ever had. They scouted enemy positions and forces, raided shipping behind the lines, targeted key vessels, and sometimes turned the tide of important battles, either serving as a hidden reserve force or waiting in ambush for reinforcements.

When other powerful governments and organizations refused to come to the Consortium's assistance, it appeared that hopes for unity were fading. Then some of humanity's corporations, including remnants of the ancient zaibatsu, banded together. The war had hurt them, especially with Priory raids on their shipping and the increased chaos the war inspired. Increased munitions sales failed to make up for the lost income. Thus, these interstellar corporations took the unprecedented step of embargoing the two smaller factions.

At first, those two continued fighting as though nothing had happened, but soon the embargo began taking its toll. Efforts to build everything that had been provided by a multitude of worlds proved futile. They could not repair damaged ships and had to scavenge old ones to keep front-line vessels in operation. They could not replace their most sophisticated weapons and vehicles (especially stealth ships), and their land forces suffered during invasions and ground combat. Setback after setback began afflicting their military efforts, and they found it harder and harder to implement new operations.

Instead of being defeated in any climactic battle, the two factions lost ground slowly. The war did not stop as much as it ran out of steam. When the Priory finally signed a peace treaty, it was mainly with the embargoing corporations. Then, in an effort to prevent the new corporations from turning into another manifestation of the zaibatsu, the governing organizations began formalizing their own ties. By 3490, the largest factions shared almost exactly the same laws and regulations. The final effort to unify humanity followed shortly thereafter, driven by pressures to remove the last barriers to trade and commerce. The end result proved amazingly peaceful, as almost all worlds begged to join, and those who did not lacked the power to threaten the rest. Even tentative members found concerns about lost autonomy and external control unfounded as they managed to maintain great degrees of independence under the Second Republic.

War in the Great Age of Peace

While free of large interstellar wars, the Second Republic still suffered from innumerable conflicts. Humanity's new union did not eliminate all the old disagreements, and hostilities still broke out with unsettling regularity, especially the further one got from Byzantium Secundus. For instance, while the Second Republic claimed to treat all sentient races

as equals, non-humans charged that it never took their sides in disputes.

Indeed, the Second Republic used its military might to quash alien uprisings a number of times, especially during its earliest days. If standard police could not round up a rebellion's ringleaders and break it up that way, Rapid Response Teams (RRTs) would fly into action. Drop ships and armored assault landers would take them to the heart of alien cities, where the troops rounded up everyone. Alien informers would be recruited using both bribes and threats, and then the RRTs would pile into hovercrafts to track down their targets. Speed played a central role in these efforts, and while some RRTs sailed directly into ambushes, most caught their targets before they were ready for battle.

The second major tactic in ending alien rebellions was the destruction of their supply routes and sources. Imprisoning all the aliens the RRTs could lay their hands on was only the beginning. Stopping the flow of weapons and reinforcements took a backseat to cutting off their food. On some worlds Second Republic troops completely razed huge areas of food production, leaving them devastated for generations.

The third and final tactic was to coopt the main alien population by offering jobs, trade goods and money, all aimed at making them contented citizens. While this tactic took the longest, it also offered the surest outcome. The more comfortable the populace became, the less inclined it was to fight for its traditional lands, rights and culture. Usually it took ten years or less for alien rebellions to fade away.

While the alien insurrections may have been the most dramatic fights, they were by no means the only ones. Nobles still clashed, as did various factions on many planets and in space. For the most part, the Second Republic interfered as little as possible with these "internal" conflicts, stepping in mainly when fights threatened to spill over to other worlds. Additionally, with the growth of the Church, more and more of these conflicts took on religious overtones, and the government hesitated to take sides. Second Republic leaders feared violating any planet's self-determination, and used most of its military strength to explore new jump routes and police the trade lanes. While the Republican Fleet at first attracted some of humanity's best and brightest, this slowly began to change. Soon the military became seen as a sinecure for nobles and lazy commoners.

The Fall

Despite the Second Republic's efforts, these conflicts expanded and took on forms with which the government had trouble dealing. Mass combat became a rarity, replaced by terrorist attacks, hostage takings and large-scale sabotage. The Second Republic switched its focus from military actions to security measures. Numerous organizations cropped up to deal with the escalating instability, not all of



which helped. In fact, most accused the others of working with the very forces the people asked them to stop.

The military itself split into a number of different factions, with the space navy concentrating on exploration, the ground forces turning into corrupt money sources for corporations, and the intelligence agencies each going their own ways. As terrorism continued to increase, more and more of the resources to combat it went to private organizations. By 3950, terrorist campaigns only seemed to lessen when the nobles targeted them, using their own knowledge of their worlds to find suspects and then going after them with massive firepower. The Decados became especially capable at this, and the Mantis became a symbol for security, albeit at a price.

It began to seem as if every conceivable ideology spawned a violent branch. Self-proclaimed genetic and mental superiors battled alien sympathizers. Anarchists skirmished with those who called for more government power. Star worshippers clashed with darkness devotees. All manner of Anunnaki cults each fought over whose relationships with these ancient beings was the real one.

As more and more people had less and less to do, these conflicts became deadlier. What started as political debates escalated into street brawls and eventually armed attacks on the opposition. While golems and aliens did more of the work, the fruits of their labors funneling to people through the great welfare system, humans did more of the fighting. Then the computers crashed.

Ten of the leading noble houses moved immediately to stop the riots that broke out across human space. The Second Republic granted them major concessions in return for their efforts, and their troops began spreading from world to world. Despite this increase in noble power, the government still might have regained control had it not been for the fading of the suns.

The riots from the welfare collapse looked like hissy fits compared to the ones that broke out beneath darkening skies. Frenzied crowds took to the streets, destroying anything they thought might be to blame. Soldiers joined the rioters and turned their most sophisticated weapons against their commanders. All of the militant factions that had helped destabilize the Second Republic joined in the mayhem, trying to manipulate the mobs toward their agendas. The home rule groups had the most success, declaring their independence from the Second Republic and seizing military bases on their worlds.

In a desperate bid to reunite humanity and calm fears, the Second Republic gave the Universal Church official recognition. With this recognition came the ability for Church leaders to make and enforce its own laws. The Church put these new powers to work at once. Inquisitors took to the field to shut down rival theologies, blaming them for "incit-

ing anti-Pancreator hysteria." Squads of loyal believers stormed competing places of worship, torching them and their leaders. Some fights reached whole new heights of confusion, with Inquisitors fighting aliens fighting psychics fighting government troops fighting noble sympathizers. Innumerable factions could find a reason to fight, and often did.

Then, at the height of the confusion, ships from a number of rogue worlds met at Criticorum and sallied forth to attack Byzantium Secundus. Most of the Second Republic fleet stationed there had already sailed to other worlds, either trying to suppress upheaval or hijacked by commanders with their own plans. Aided by Ur-Ukar and other alien psychics, the rogue worlds succeeded in handily defeating the government fleet, and troops seized the world. Second Republic leaders were tried and executed for a variety of crimes, information on government troops and plans became public knowledge, and what remained of the official military found itself facing defeat after defeat all throughout space.

The final blow to the Second Republic came when 10 noble houses combined forces to retake Byzantium Secundus. They caught the rogue worlds' fleet napping, though many of the enemy ships managed to escape destruction or capture. When the noble troops landed, the rogue worlders quickly surrendered, and the nobles declared the Second Republic "no more."

Humanity Balkanizes

The end of democratic government did not halt the chaos, however. Innumerable little wars sprang up in the vacuum left by the Republic's passing. Planets sitting on multiple jump routes suffered the most, with battle ships from innumerable worlds passing by on their way to greater glory. The warriors targeted all the Second Republic military bases they could, destroying anything they could not take with them. Research facilities proved the second most popular targets, and battles over the major ones decimated entire cities. In a matter of years, the remaining grandeur of the Second Republic disappeared into the smoke of a thousand different raids, battles and invasions.

Yathrib, the world where the Prophet first saw the Holy Flame, became one such hot spot. Innumerable forces warred for its treasures, including the remnants of the Second Republic, pirates, Ur-Ukar freedom fighters, numerous noble houses, Church groups and even corporations hoping to control the world's tourism. Brother Battle helped stabilize conditions there, but only after much of the world felt the flames of war. Brother Battle then shifted its attention to Mazdak (now De Moley), where a Sathraist revival had begun.

The battles at Mazdak serve as an especially bloody example of the chaos that followed the Fall. Brother Battle



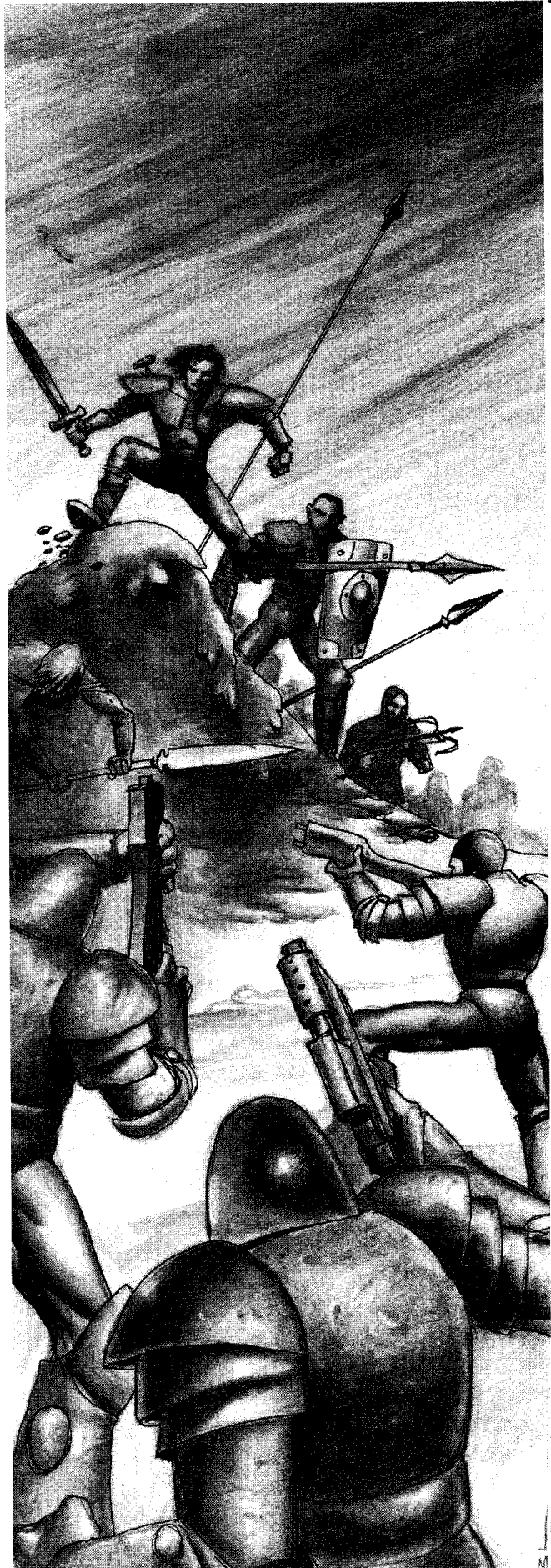
forces razed much of the structures on that planet, leaving it little more than the desolate wasteland it was before humanity's arrival. The Sathraists themselves took the blame for severing the jumproute to Yathrib, cutting off a number of worlds from the rest of humanity. Tens of thousands died and even more lost friends and family to both the war and the closing of the jumpgate. Trade and communication routes disappeared, leaving most people unable to do more than scramble for the bare necessities of life.

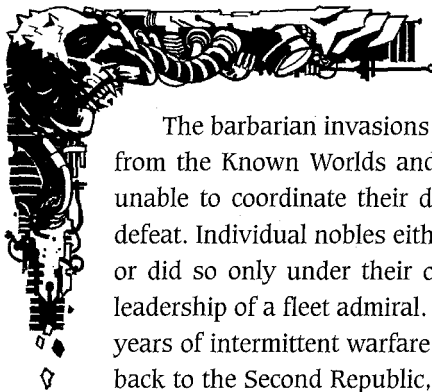
Into the void and havoc left by the collapse of the Second Republic strode the nobility, offering humanity protection at the expense of liberty. Of course, not all offers could be refused. For instance, a Hawkwood fleet in orbit around Ravenna convinced the Apollo Industries' shipyards there to agree to noble protection — in exchange for substantial ownership of those shipyards. Decados stealth ships persuaded mining installations in the Cadiz system that they needed a house's stewardship as well. Acts like these helped diminish the many conflicts raging through space, but not everyone was happy about it.

Even the houses themselves fell to warring, both with each other and with their own members. Many planets closed off their own jumpgates, afraid of becoming battlegrounds or losing their liberty to the nobles. Some nobles claimed worlds only to close them off so no one else could take them back. Noble and Church forces continued hunting down the survivors of the Second Republic, killing or making serfs of any they encountered.

While much of the interstellar combat had settled down within a few centuries, internal strife continued to plague every planet. The noble houses themselves fragmented as individual members made claims for each other's territory. Tanks crisscrossed the same roads many times, continuing the decimation begun during the Fall. The nobles were not the only ones so engaged, however. The Church had its own inner problems at this time, with all its orders and sects causing problems. Noble fleets actually went into orbit around Pyre to destroy the Avestites before the patriarch's intervention stopped the attack. Even the normally peaceful Amaltheans had problems, with corrupt priests raising small troops of followers to stop reform efforts by Ravenna's Archbishop Madost and his successors.

This also began the period of barbarian invasions, where Madost himself came to fame. Despite their growing influence, the ten leading noble houses certainly did not control all the planets still connected by jumproutes. Many of them had fallen into what the Ten considered "less-civilized" hands, and these barbarians (generally the precursors of the Vuldrok and Kurgans) began attacking. Since the incursions involved so many worlds and the nobility was so fractured, the barbarians had little difficulty penetrating deep into noble space.





The barbarian invasions began in areas now separated from the Known Worlds and spread rapidly. Noble fleets, unable to coordinate their defenses, suffered defeat after defeat. Individual nobles either refused to join house fleets or did so only under their own command, not under the leadership of a fleet admiral. Their ships had suffered from years of intermittent warfare, and even though most dated back to the Second Republic, the purge of technically competent individuals after the Fall meant that they enjoyed little skilled maintenance. Even when ships could coordinate their efforts, as when the Alecto, Hawkwood and Thana fleets combined to fight at Hargard, they suffered so many mechanical breakdowns that even while they defeated an inferior barbarian fleet, they could not pursue the enemy or follow up their victory.

The invasions continued for years, with the barbarians gaining ground constantly. They started colonies on worlds like Leminkainen and seized others (like Hargard) outright. They reached their height during the 44th century, when they managed to launch a sustained attack on Delphi itself. At Archbishop Madost's command, even the Amaltheans picked up weapons to defend themselves.

Of course, the fighting was not limited to nobility against the barbarians. The al-Malik used the uncertainty of the times to further their own agenda, seizing Istakhr in 4460 (almost completely destroying House Cestmir in the process) and then turned on Byzantium Secundus. The al-Malik, themselves mostly untouched by the barbarian invasions, believed that the other houses were too preoccupied to stop their growth. This sparked fears from other houses that the al-Malik intended to create a New Republic, and they moved to help House Hamid, then rulers of the planet.

Vladimir Alecto, then a young prince of 18, first came to prominence during these battles. He proved himself a natural warrior in the fight against the al-Malik and won their respect at the peace talks that followed when he called for unity instead of revenge. The al-Malik pulled back, licking their wounds, and the nobles again turned their attention back to the barbarians.

Vladimir's Rise and Fall

While each house had its own reason for joining Vladimir, many scholars point to the attack on Delphi as the turning point. Vladimir received credit for breaking the invasion by destroying the barbarian supply convoys with his own fleet. As a result, House Hawkwood agreed to turn its own forces over to his command. Other houses soon saw the benefit of this alliance. Soon a combined force of Gesar, Alecto, Windsor, Hawkwood, Van Gelder, Justinian, Hazat and other troops began driving the barbarians further and further back.

A massive battle at Leminkainen in 4524 succeeded in

turning the barbarians back, and the closing of several jump routes into barbarian space in 4525 ended the wars. With the barbarian threat diminished, reduced to pockets of them on various worlds, Vladimir turned his attentions back to the Known Worlds. His alliance strained in the face of his new ambitions.

House Decados began rallying the other houses to confront this new menace. Its leaders saw Vladimir's fleet as battered and battle weary, his alliance weak and fragmented. A number of houses, hoping to seize prize Alecto possessions, joined the Decados. Alecto turned his forces against the new threat immediately, and managed to keep much of his coalition in place. Houses Gesar, Windsor and Van Gelder immediately sided with Vladimir, with Houses Hawkwood and Justinian soon sending troops as well.

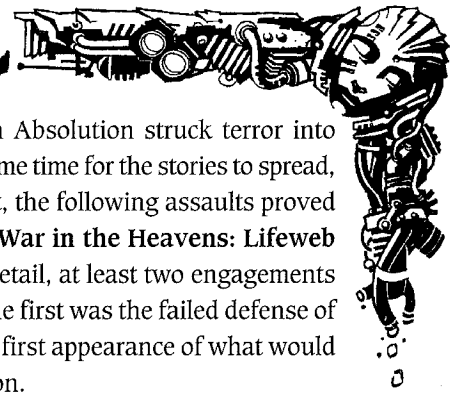
The Decados and their allies lost battle after battle to this superbly-led force of veterans. The Battle of Edenya drove the final nail into Decados plans. Alecto, Windsor and Gesar ships engaged the Decados fleet around Severus' moon while Justinian and Hawkwood vessels crept up on the planet from behind. Faced with an invasion of his throneworld, Baron Nicolai Decados surrendered to Vladimir and offered to support him as Emperor.

This caused one final schism when the Van Gelder refused to recognize him as their ruler. Vladimir accused them of war crimes and hostilities broke out anew. Vladimir sent Alecto ships streaming into battle, and he promised his other allies Van Gelder territory in exchange for their continued help. House Hawkwood, eyeing Van Gelder fiefs on its own worlds, quickly agreed, and the others soon followed. Using a newly discovered relic that allowed his flagship to travel between systems without using a jumpgate, Vladimir made an attack on a Van Gelder space station in orbit around Pentateuch. His surprise assault enabled him to capture the Van Gelder leadership, many of whom he executed for their actions against their own populations during the barbarian invasions.

By 4550, every noble house in the Known Worlds bowed to Vladimir as emperor, and even the Church and League acceded to his rule. His triumphal voyage to Byzantium Secundus involved ships from every Royal House as well as many of the minor ones. When he placed the crown on his head, magic lantern cameras broadcast it around the world and to the fleet. They also broadcast his immediate death. Numerous ships turned on the Alecto fleet at once, with the Hazat leading the charge. Vladimir's flagship was their main target, and it seemingly disintegrated under meson cannon bombardments, leaving nothing behind.

The fleets then turned against Vladimir's main supporters, and this time their troops proved as exhausted as the Decados had claimed. While House Hawkwood managed to retain much of its power, the others were not so lucky. The





jumpgate to Paradise, House Justinian's throne world, shut down shortly after Vladimir's death. Houses Gesar and Windsor faced rebellion at home from population's exhausted by decades of war and inflamed by Decados propaganda. This time, without the threat of barbarians or Church censure, the Li Halan and Hazat joined the Decados to destroy first House Alecto and then its allies.

The fighting proved brutal and unforgiving, with the victors leaving nothing behind. Scorched earth tactics became the strategy of choice, with both sides destroying anything the other might use against them. Since most of the battles took place on Alecto worlds and those of its allies, they suffered the most. By the start of the 47th century, the war was over and the ten major houses had been reduced to five.

The Symbiot War

Vladimir's death ushered in what some have called a period of "stable uncertainty". While wars certainly continued, the Known Worlds officially had one ruler — the regent. As Vladimir's successor, the regent could oversee all of humanity's actions and strive to coordinate those that mattered. Of course, this did little to stop the wars that continued to plague the Known Worlds.

The first major threat to peace came from the remnants of House Gesar, which made one final push for power in the 47th century. They claimed that Vladimir had promised them the throne should anything happen to his family, but the other houses ignored this claim. When the Gesar tried to become sole rulers of Byzantium Secundus, the combined weight of Houses Decados, al-Malik and Cameton wiped them out to the last noble.

The Li Halan, who tried to found a theocracy 36 years later, made up the next threat. Regent Halvor succeeded in getting himself elected Patriarch, and he immediately moved to combine the Church, Imperial and Li Halan fleets. The other houses cowered before this new might and, despite half-hearted protests from House Hawkwood, did little to interfere with this new power. Within a year, however, Halvor died, and House Hawkwood and the Hazat moved to stop his successor. With their forces suddenly seized by indecision, the Li Halan retreated from their theocracy, and things returned to normal.

Interstellar conflicts became a rarity, with most of the strife coming within the houses themselves. Various nobles rose to power within their houses, only to be cut down by their own relatives. The regents slowly gained more and more powers, though most of their duties remained ceremonial. They could outfit a fleet to protect commerce and field a police force to track down criminals, but could do little more. This changed when a new threat to the Known Worlds appeared.

The Symbiot assault on Absolution struck terror into all humanity. While it took some time for the stories to spread, and not all people believed it, the following assaults proved the Symbiot menace. While **War in the Heavens: Lifeweb** details the Symbiot War in detail, at least two engagements bear great relevance here. The first was the failed defense of Daishan, which featured the first appearance of what would become the Stigmata Garrison.

While the regent had a small ground force at his command, its main duty up to this point had been the defense of imperial lands. Since most regents turned these over to their own supporters, these troops really had little to do. Fighting the Symbiots required a unified force, however, and the regent soon threw these troops into the fray. While unprepared for the Symbiots' strength, the imperial troops at least gave Daishan's inhabitants the chance to get off planet. This gave the regent the opening he needed to extend his power and call up more troops for the newly-created post of Stigmata Garrison Commander.

The second engagement of import was Damiana and Friar Berthold's defense on Stigmata, which marked the first recognized use of theurgy and psychic powers together. While theirs was only a small engagement in a much larger war, it illustrated the Symbiot vulnerability to such powers.

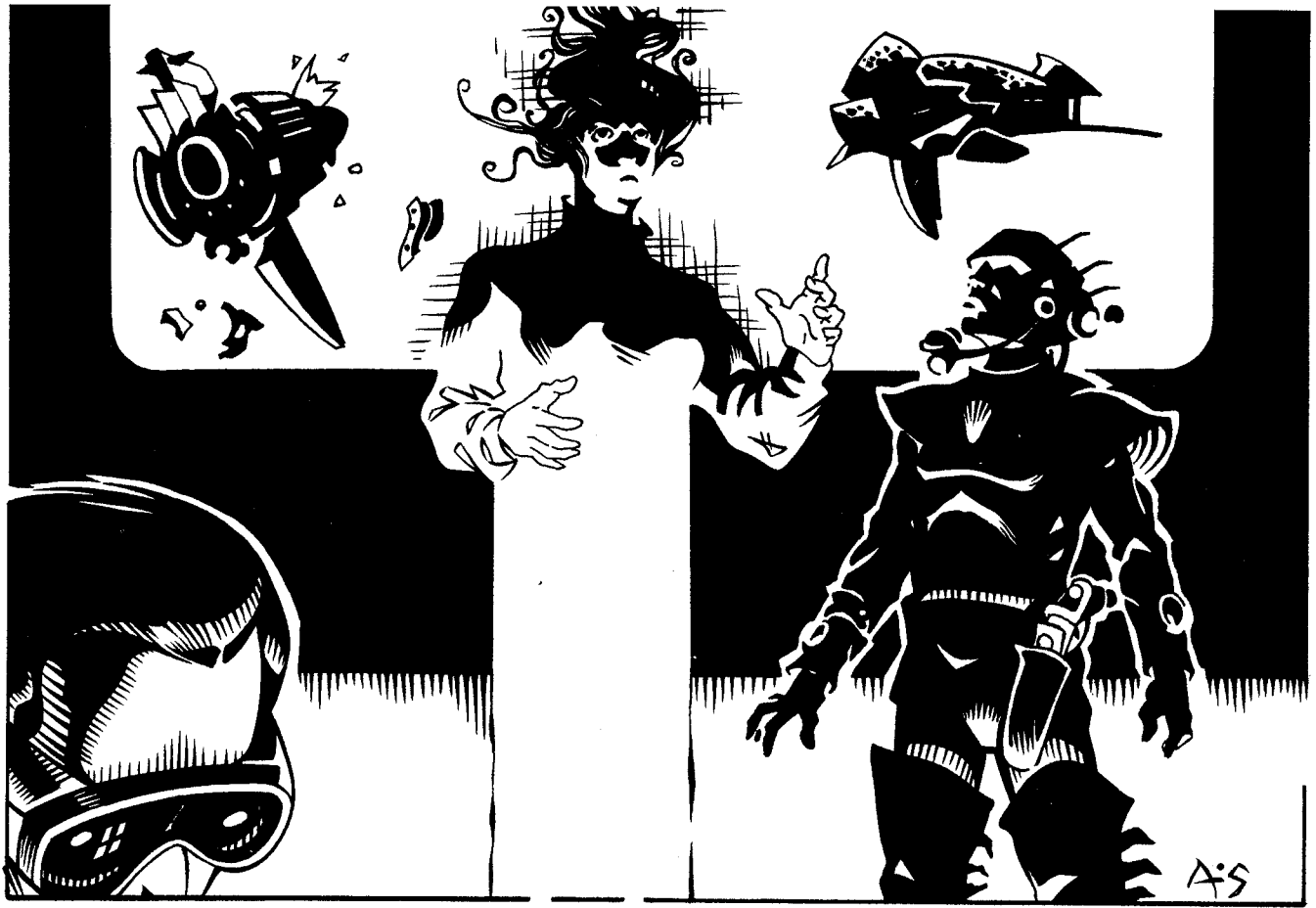
Soon the Stigmata Garrison included some of the only psychics approved and sanctioned by the Church, as well as a number of theurgists who earlier would have been considered heretical. These formed their own unit, the Manifest Light, and began working closely with the Stigmata Garrison as well as the Brother Battle and Muster troops on the planet.

Daishan, Chernobog and Absolution all fell before the horrifying might of the Symbiots, but Stigmata held. The combination of the Stigmata Garrison and Manifest Light proved undefeatable, and bit by bit humanity began recapturing the planet. Battles at Moskos and Loris Island showed that the Symbiots were not undefeatable, and when the Imperial Fleet showed up in strength, the war turned from regular battles to irregular skirmishes. While the Symbiots are still a major threat on the world, humanity now controls most of its surface.

The Emperor Wars

Like the Ukar War 2000 years before, the Symbiot War gave humanity the incentive it needed to strive again for unity. Not only did it drive home the fact that outside enemies still existed, it showed the potential in imperial power. After all, the regent now had three powerful offices reporting to him: the Imperial Eye, the Imperial Fleet, and the Stigmata Garrison. While regents had to promise these out to other houses to support their bids for office, an Emperor would not face such requirements.





The al-Malik unified first, as they were the most threatened by the Symbiot incursion. Seeing the growing threat, both from the Symbiots and the al-Malik, the other houses began bringing their members back into line. The Hawkwood proved the most successful, and under the leadership of Darius Hawkwood began the long road to empire. Early conflicts involved stopping internal dissension, and Darius proved a master of lightning attacks on his enemies. His troops would pour out of assault landers before rebelling Hawkwoods even knew they were in the solar system. Once his own house was in line, he began concentrating on taking control over all the Known Worlds.

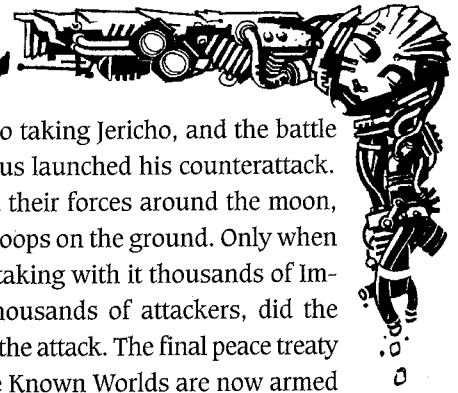
Of course, all the houses saw good reasons why they themselves should end up on top, and war again buffeted the stars. The al-Malik, while one of the first to make a push for the throne, were also the first to give up their claim. Realizing how much the Symbiot War had cost them, and reeling from attacks from both House Hawkwood and House Decados, the al-Malik instead pulled its fleet back to defend its worlds. It threw its support first to one house and then another before finally settling on the Hawkwoods.

The war continued to drag on before another house gave up its claim. The Li Halan, who still dreamed of establishing a theocracy, found themselves hard pressed on several fronts. The conquest of Rampart tied up legions of ground troops in

suppressing the ensuing rebellion, and the Decados took advantage of the situation to seize Malignatius. Even with Church backing, the Li Halan had little success in gaining more ground, and the war began to wear down even its loyal serfs. While not supporters of the Hawkwood bid for power, they too pulled back to their own worlds to defend what they had instead of taking more.

This left House Decados and the Hazat to stop the Hawkwood bid for power, and they proved inferior to the task. Like Vladimir, Alexius first proved himself against barbarians before taking on the other noble houses. His rescue of Stigmata solidified his reputation and earned him a grudging respect even on enemy worlds. With his borders safe, the Vuldrok and the Symbiots at bay, Alexius finally felt free to turn his full attentions to becoming Emperor.

His military victories helped to drive the al-Malik from the war, and his diplomatic maneuverings managed to bring them back in, though this time on his side. While the Li Halan and the Church never suffered too greatly at his hands, they also learned better than to continue opposing him. With these two down, the League and the al-Malik at least neutralized if not allied, Alexius felt confident about announcing his new title. First, he managed to drive out any military opposition to his claim on Byzantium Secundus, leading Hawkwood and Imperial troops against other houses' le-



gions stationed near the palace. Then he prepared the defense for the epic battle that concluded in the Siege of Jericho.

This battle became the turning point of the war. Both the Hazat and the Decados threw the full weight of their military machines against Alexius, and his own troops were hard pressed to hold out. The additions of mercenaries hired with a loan from the Reeves and some timely al-Malik intervention let them continue. Battles swirled all through Byzantium Secundus' solar system. Alexius began the battle at the jumpgate and contested every inch of matter in space. Spaceships fought it out over every planet, moon and asteroid as Alexius and his allies tried to deny the attackers access to anything they could use as a base.

Still the noose closed on Byzantium Secundus. The Decados and Hazat managed to capture and fortify the Imperial base at New Malta, a moon orbiting Aden. Here they marshaled the largest ground force of the war. Their plan: conquer Jericho, Byzantium Secundus' moon, and use it to prepare for the final invasion. Their heavy ships, lead by Decados stealth ships and Hazat fighters, penetrated through Alexius' defenses and tore through Jericho's defense. Both

factions contributed troops to taking Jericho, and the battle was not decided when Alexius launched his counterattack.

Both sides concentrated their forces around the moon, targeting enemy ships and troops on the ground. Only when Jericho's life support failed, taking with it thousands of Imperial troops and tens of thousands of attackers, did the Hazat and Decados break off the attack. The final peace treaty ended the hostilities, but the Known Worlds are now armed as they have never been before.

War Today

While the threat of massive warfare has faded, everyone knows better than to let their guard down. The barbarian threat never disappeared completely, and during the Emperor Wars it increased significantly on all fronts. The Symbiots are still out there, and Alexius has commented that he would like to liberate those worlds. The Vau increased their military presence on the border during the Emperor Wars, and everyone knows that they sent out scouts to gather as much information on human worlds as they could. Finally, Alexius has sent out the Questing Knights to reopen the lost jumpgates, and no one knows what they may find.

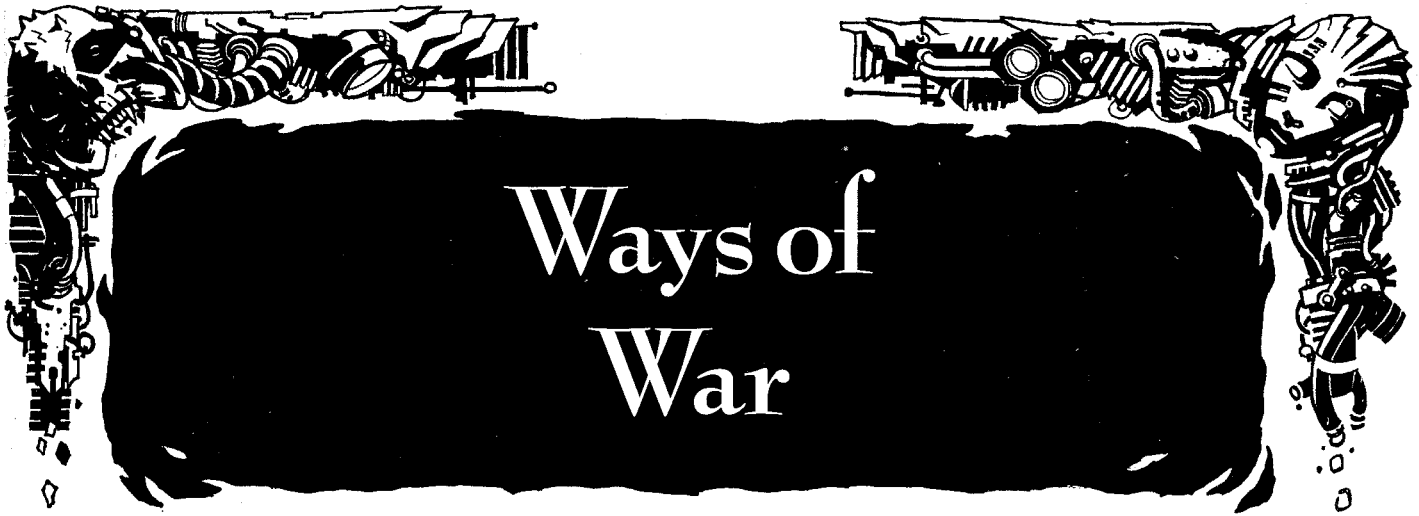


Demens Similis Vulpes

(Emblem of the Ninth Stigmata Legion's Grackle Foxes Company)







Brother Amestheus leaned on his great sword, using it to give his legs some rest. The forced march had taken a lot out of him and his men, but it could prove instrumental in tomorrow's engagement. He had brought several thousand troops through rough terrain – veteran troops the Kurgans had no way of knowing would be there. If the enemy had better weapons than he, he would just have to make the best use of what he had. That meant keeping his troops mobile so he could fight as if he had three times the strength.

It also meant positioning his followers in such a way that they would be at their best. He began picturing anti-armor rifles placed at key junctions to take out enemy officers and vehicles. Short-range artillery could pre-aim for places where the barbarians would concentrate their infantry. Flame guns set up where the most enemy could see (and fear) them would do much to break moral. His own Brother Battle cadre would stay ready to hit whenever and wherever it was needed. Finally, Amestheus would keep the worst-equipped troops in reserve, ready to fill gaps or exploit opportunities.

The fight tomorrow would be tough, but Amestheus felt confident. His plan took into account everything he knew about the enemy and made provisions for those things he could not know. With his Brothers ready to lead the counter attack that would sweep the Kurgans from the field, Amestheus prepared for a few hours of sleep.

Modern War

War in the 50th century varies dramatically from its 20th century cousin. In the 20th century, most armies featured similar armament, training and tactics. While they differed

in quality and quantity, they had more in common than they did in contrast. In the 50th century, however, troops within the same army might have nothing in common whatsoever. One lord fields knights in shining battle tanks equipped with heavy energy guns. Another commands a peasant levy wielding pitchforks and spears.

Thus tactics have become a crazed patchwork of options, with phalanxes of pikemen learning to avoid space bombardments and grav tanks having to defend themselves from sword-wielding bird riders. More than a few soldiers have lost their lives underestimating their enemies' lethality, and even nobles have fallen when their shields have shorted out before a storm of arrows.

Of course, the ground is not the only battlefield where commanders must devise new tactics and revise old ones. Space has long been one of the most fluid of warzones, and tacticians have always had to modify their plans to deal with new technology, abilities and directives. Strategies for a fleet of fighters vary remarkably from those used when several dreadnoughts slug it out.

Finally, the very nature of command, with individual lords and leaders having a great deal of leeway in what their troops do, makes modern tactics difficult to describe. This gets even harder with the realization that many leaders still have very little idea of what tactics are. Most combats involve charging straight at the enemy and hoping that he dies or runs away before your troops do. Feinting, holding troops in reserve or setting up ambushes are considered the heights of planning. Those leaders who can handle such basic schemes are considered battlemasters.



Styles of War

While some scholars (especially within the Brother Battle) have tried to create grand tomes of warcraft, expounding on what made great leaders great, these have not gained general acceptance. The fact that many military leaders cannot read has not helped. Still, the various factions have developed their own general systems, though whether they did so on purpose or not is not always clear. While such systems are not always the case – there are Hawkwood nobles who believe on always having large forces on hand and Decados who believe in protecting all their troops – they tend to be the norm.

The Hawkwood Cadres

Since House Hawkwood won the Emperor Wars, and their model is slowly becoming dominant in the Imperial Legions as well, their style receives the most attention. Alexius, like his uncle Darius, always relied on a core of strong, experienced and well-trained soldiers. These troops have the dual roles of carrying out the most important duties as well as bringing new recruits up to speed as quickly as possible.

During peacetime, the Hawkwood military stays small except at hot spots like Leminkainen. Most nobles keep a strong cadre of their best soldiers always on hand and teach them both how to make war and how to teach others to do the same. This meant the house had a constant flow of trained troops coming up, replacing those lost to battle.

Now that the wars have ended, most Hawkwood nobles have begun demobilizing their large forces, returning troops to more profitable enterprises. Before letting people go, however, they have selected those troops they believe are most able to pass on their experience to trainees. These troops stay on either full-time or part-time, training intensely and maintaining the lord's munitions. They also train the peasant militias once a month, trying to ensure that the skills they developed during the wars do not atrophy.

Those worlds that expect trouble try to maintain as large a force as they can, but due to the expense they all went through during the Emperor Wars, they find this difficult. Instead, they try to maintain a force capable of deterring most Vuldrok raids and holding up larger ones. The house itself hopes to be able to quickly mobilize larger forces, sending them into the fray as fast as possible. Thus, those lords at the edge of conflict should fight as long a delaying action as possible. The longer they hold out, the more reinforcements should arrive.

The significant first off-planet reinforcements should arrive within a month. Should the Vuldrok (or some other force) succeed in taking most of a planet, House Hawkwood could mount a strong counter offensive within six months

to a year. After all, the house has mothballed a lot of equipment since the Emperor Wars ended, and few doubt that the Imperial Legions would help out in a crisis. Nobles on Leminkainen have called for the house to stockpile extra equipment on their world so that all other planets would have to do is move troops, not their gear. The rest of the house has resisted this reforging plan, fearing that Leminkainen might use this equipment for something other than defense.

The Decados Grunts

The Decados also like to maintain groups of highly trained soldiers, but these elites rarely mix with the run-of-the-mill trooper. They get used on special operations, attacking enemy leaders, disrupting their communications, stealing special equipment, assassinating researchers and sabotaging key installations. These soldiers get exceptional equipment, cyber implants and (some say) chemical treatments to make them as effective as possible.

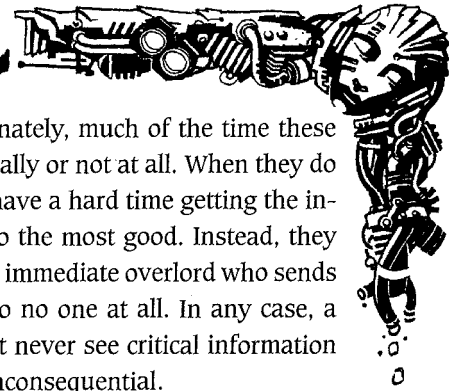
The bulk of the Decados military is made up of poorly trained serfs, hastily called up and given the most basic of equipment. Instructors with little more expertise than they tell them what to do and send them off to battle. Still, the Decados military had a number of prominent successes during the Emperor Wars. The mix of expert shock troops and hordes and hordes of grunts proved devastating, especially when mixed with as much artillery as the Decados like to use.

The Decados invasion of Malignatius showed all of these elements off to great effect. Elite commando teams struck the planet viciously, destroying much of its planet-to-space capabilities and establishing a landing zone for the navy. The main army poured in behind the cover of a massive off-planet bombardment that kept the Li Halan from attacking their fragile landing zone. Then the troops moved out behind rolling artillery barrages, with the special forces units taking out any major obstacles the house encountered. The Decados captured the entire planet within a year, and the Li Halan never got it back.

Of course, other battles have shown the dangers associated with the Decados strategy. When elite teams have attacked without adequate support or information, enemy garrisons have managed to force them into defensive positions for which they were neither trained nor equipped. Decados artillery bombardments, often called in very close to the house's own positions, have disrupted their own infantry assaults when their shells landed too close (like on top of the attackers). Finally, the basic grunt's lack of training means he is far more likely to break and run than are the troops of other houses, making him far less effective on defense than he is on attack.

Still, there are always more troops where those came





from. The Decados reliance on slave labor and mechanization means they can recruit large number of serfs for war without really damaging their economy. Propaganda officers work with all units to ensure their loyalty. Of course, their threat to torture stragglers to death is usually more effective than are exhortations to die for the glory of House Decados.

The al-Malik Gadgeteers

The al-Malik have never cared to send thousands of their serfs to their deaths. This is sometimes out of humanitarian concerns but usually stems from financial ones – if too many serfs die, who is going to work the fields and mines? Of course, these financial concerns do not keep them from spending thousands of firebirds on the fanciest military equipment the League can get them.

Thus, the al-Malik military tends to be the smallest of the noble houses but the most expensively equipped. While Decados legions are happy to go into battle with a spear and a leather jerkin, al-Malik infantry carry fancy automatic rifles, wear bulky protective vests and lug enough supplies to keep them going for weeks.

This is not the advantage it might at first appear. The rifles are often prone to jamming, the protective vests don't always protect, and the supplies slow them down and make it harder for them to hide or sneak up on enemies. These problems tend to affect all levels of the al-Malik military. The nobles' penchant for fancy new, usually untried gadgets means their own soldiers become guinea pigs for League and house scientists. Stories of soldiers carrying new weapons that blew up the first time they were used may be over-exaggerated but are based on reality.

This penchant has helped the house in some areas, however — especially those other houses tend to ignore. Air power is a prime example of this. al-Malik nobles have sunk large sums into purchasing flitters and anti-grav vehicles of all types, many of which have military applications. During the Emperor Wars, the al-Malik required very little time to ramp up their air force. It took other houses years to reach their level of sophistication. The same holds true for communications gear and spy devices.

This did not give the al-Malik the advantage one might think. For instance, while the al-Malik have some of the best air support out there, their air force spends much of its time on the ground undergoing repairs. While their pilots usually outdo those of the other houses, they primarily operate alone, without coordinating their efforts with other branches of the military or even other parts of the air force. Their intelligence operations suffer similar impediments. When all their spy gadgets — satellites, long-distance listening devices, hidden cameras, microscopic trackers, etc. — operate correctly, the al-Malik find themselves awash in

useful information. Unfortunately, much of the time these devices either work sporadically or not at all. When they do work, al-Malik technicians have a hard time getting the information to where it will do the most good. Instead, they send the information to their immediate overlord who sends it either to his overlord or to no one at all. In any case, a battlefield commander might never see critical information until long after it becomes inconsequential.

The Hazat Way

The Hazat have long lauded the abilities of the individual soldier. Hazat lords compete to see who can field the best fighting force, and their legionnaires undergo years of extensive training to make them the most effective warriors they can be. They spend much of their time practicing with the very weapons they might someday take into battle and side by side with the troops who they will serve with for their entire enlistment.


Hazat nobles also fight to see who can equip their force the best. While basic militia men might still rely on melee weapons, they keep them beautifully polished and razor sharp. If they are archers, then their bows and arrows receive meticulous maintenance. Any who carry slug guns clean these weapons daily to keep them in optimum condition. The same holds true for artillerymen, vehicle crews and the rest of the military. Even the nobles become involved in this, and while other houses may look down at a lord cleaning his own sword, the Hazat expect it.

As if this were not enough to worry the Hazat's enemies, Hazat nobles have proven themselves as skilled leaders and able tacticians. While some have criticized them for relying on frontal assaults and ignoring defense, not all nobles have these faults. Indeed, the famous Aragon military academy spends almost as much time teaching the history of war as it does modern practice. Thus, Hazat lords are at least aware of appropriate strategy and tactics, even if they fail in the practice.

Some Hazat nobles have gained strong reputations for their tactical abilities. For instance, Baroness Lucinda Dulcinea had proven very effective against human opponents when Alexius made her commander of the Stigmata Garrison. While he may sometimes regret this choice, knowing he may have given an enemy access to some of the best legions in the Known Worlds, the troops do not. She has proven effective on both offensive and defensive, establishing well-fortified positions and developing extremely mobile forces to aid them in case of attack. Both have proven effective.

During the Emperor Wars, the Hazat appeared as a strong contender for the throne. Prince Juan Jacobi Nelson Eduardo de Aragon, while not himself a noted military commander, surrounded himself with those who were. Early on





he used both diplomacy and military might to align the other Hazat branches under him. Then his troops moved out in what was the house's shining moment of the war – the first invasion of Byzantium Secundus. While outnumbered, the Hazat troops had little problem routing the combined forces of House Cameton, the Authority, the Imperial Legions, and a number of other opposition groups. They seized most of the planet in rapid fashion, only backing down when a combined al-Malik, Hawkwood, Li Halan and Church fleet poured through the jumpgate.

The second invasion of Byzantium Secundus highlighted Hazat weaknesses, however. The house lost many of its best troops during the Siege of Jericho, and as wars broke out on other worlds, the Hazat began having trouble bringing up skilled recruits. New enlistees lacked the training of their predecessors. Since the Hazat way stressed years of training, the house found itself in a quandary. Either it could hold up replacements, sending them to battle only when ready, or it could send out untrained rookies who did not know how to work with the existing legions.

The quality of its soldiers degraded rapidly during the last years of the war, much to the embarrassment of military leaders. While House Hawkwood had instituted a training campaign that rapidly churned out qualified troops, the Hazat plan required a lot more time. This has not changed since the wars ended, and some worry that this could spell trouble against the Kurgans.

The Li Halan Faithful

While the Hazat may have the best-trained soldiers, the Li Halan seem to have the best-motivated ones. Where Hazat legionnaires might advance on a position, availing themselves of whatever cover they can before charging the last 100 meters, the Li Halan will charge for a mile if that is what it takes. Their belief in their leaders and their own divine fate seems complete, and where the troops of other houses might balk at following seemingly dangerous orders, the Li Halan proceed without question.

Raised since birth with an unquestioning belief in their rulers and in their rulers' ties to the Pancreator, the average Li Halan soldier sees no reason to question. He knows that whatever command he follows has the Pancreator's blessing and his people's needs at heart. Thus, other houses tell stories of wave after wave of Li Halan legions charging into their machine guns, each wave falling only to be replaced with another. Additionally, the Li Halan have long tried to get the element of surprise on their side, attacking groups while still espousing peace.

In the Li Halan attack on Rampart, these tactics worked very well. They cleared space of enemy ships before anyone knew they had entered the system. While the Li Halan troops commanded the heavens, the less-numerous Rampart troops

had the edge in equipment and an advantage in knowing the terrain. Still, their rifles and trenches fell one after another before hordes of screaming soldiers. This did not work as well on Malignatius when the Decados attacked. The Li Halan had already transferred many of their soldiers off-world (primarily to deal with Rampart) and, while individual soldiers fought valiantly, they proved no match for their enemy's massive artillery bombardments and superbly equipped commandos. Li Halan soldiers died in droves, refusing to surrender before their leaders finally evacuated the planet.

The battle for Malignatius also highlighted other problems with the Li Halan system. Coordination between various branches and individual lords suffered from each one's insistence that only he knew what was best. Difficulties between the space navy and the ground forces proved especially damaging, as the two groups not only failed to cooperate but also fought over resources. The navy would impress the most qualified army troops when they transported them, and the army would forcibly enlist spacemen they caught on ground leave. Prince Flavius Li Halan did little to resolve these disputes, apparently fearing to offend any of his leading dukes. Indeed, these conflicts exist to this very day, with individual lords still sparring for the best troops and equipment.

The League Specialists

The League has always held to the position that war – at least war involving it – is bad for business. Consequently, its military lacks the manpower of the other factions. While the Muster can raise troops quickly if needed, this requires at least the noninterference of whomever controls the area where it “recruit”. Without this, it could never fulfill contracts for Stigmata or the Vuldrok front, much less raise its own army.

Thus, the noble houses publicly hold the League military in disdain, claiming that it could never hold the field against them. Privately, none of the houses wants to face it. After all, while the League armies might have trouble seizing and holding land, they handle their other duties with aplomb, many times having to go head to head with the houses. Enforcing loan agreements, chasing pirates, defending League planets and bases all bring them into conflict, and they have learned to handle all these situations effectively.

Instead of forming the massive military machines the other factions prefer, the League tends toward specialized teams and well-trained mercenaries. Skilled infiltration teams might raid a noble's coffers, while a less-mobile heavy-arms platoon protects a nearby factory. These operations often require outside operatives, and the League tends to pay well.

Of course, sometimes the League needs to flex its muscle.



A.S.



The League Fleet, while no match for the Church or the Emperor, can certainly intimidate most nobles who have to stare down its barrels. A force of heavily armed Muster troopers, supported by guild artillery and Charioteer pilots, paid by Reeve cash and maintained by Engineers, can give most other armies a serious run for their money. These actions are very rare. Not only are they expensive to establish, but getting the different guilds to work together long enough to reach any objectives is a monumental task in its own.

The Church Mobs

The Church may lack the specialized skills of the League, but it more than makes up for it in quantity. Although the Church does not maintain the largest standing army, it can draw on the largest pool of troops of any of the factions. Holy Terra itself supplies the bulk of its forces, but the Church recruits its legions from all the Known Worlds, for it owns estates on every planet. When the need has arisen, as when the Hazat invaded Byzantium Secundus, the Patriarch has managed to mobilize hundreds of thousands of troops in very little time. While these troops may not be well-trained or equipped, their sheer numbers makes them something with which to reckon.

The Church does have access to more than just mobs, however. Generally recognized as the best warriors in the

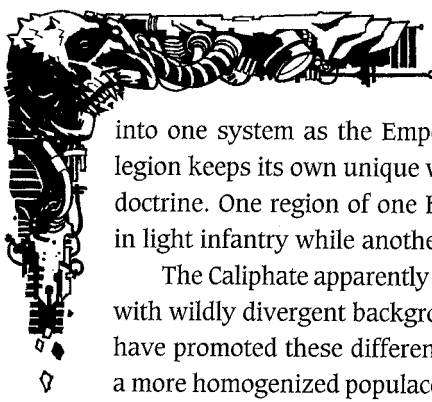
Known Worlds, the members of the Brother Battle Order can lead others as well as fight on their own. Their reputations precede them into battle, and just the rumor that one is on your side can boost morale, while the rumor that you are opposing one can give a fighting force serious misgivings.

The Avestites also give the Church a strong fanatic wing capable of great feats. While not always the most imaginative of soldiers, they seem to have no fear of death or injury, and gladly hold a position to the last breaths in their bodies. Additionally, while the Church lacks much in the way of advanced equipment like skimmers, flitters or rifled artillery, it does have one of the largest military fleets of any faction. While not necessarily as well-maintained as a house fleet or as well-operated as the League fleet, it has more than enough raw destructive power to make itself noticed.

Kurgan Diversity

The Hazat are just beginning to get a feel for the Kurgan style of war. They have had difficulty grasping any overarching philosophy, and only recently learned why. The problem comes from the Kurgan military itself – it has so much diversity and so little repeating themes. Only recently did the Hazat discover that all Kurgan locales must supply troops to the empire just as houses do in the Known Worlds. The main difference is that these troops do not get molded





into one system as the Emperor tries to do. Instead, each legion keeps its own unique weaponry, training and tactical doctrine. One region of one Kurgan world might specialize in light infantry while another supplies tanks and tankers.

The Caliphate apparently consists of a number of worlds with wildly divergent backgrounds and people. The Caliphs have promoted these differences instead of trying to create a more homogenized populace. Thus, the Hazat never know what they are about to face, and have learned to always expect the unexpected. They have met fierce resistance where there should be none and the lightest of resistance where it should be stiff.

The Caliphate's space fleet reflects this tradition, but not to the extent its land armies do. The ships certainly tend toward a more consistent look, though strategies and talents vary widely. The Hazat have encountered fleets that proved easy pickings and others that drove them from the system.

The only part of the Kurgan military that has maintained the same level of ability and accomplishment is a branch called The Blessed, which has caused the Hazat no end of trouble on Kurga. These fierce warriors mix advanced weaponry, occult powers, impressive martial arts skills and a seeming prescient awareness of Hazat plans and tactics. The Hazat have learned little more about these soldiers than to fear them.

Vuldrok Warriors

Vuldrok military forces are at least as mixed as the Kurgan, but without the command structure of their fellow barbarians. Each individual warlord supplies not only his own troops, but he usually brings his own battle plans as well. Vuldrok tribes do not coordinate as much as they just try to not shoot one another (most of the time). Hawkwood nobles tell many stories about the chaos of Vuldrok attacks, with ships barreling at them from every direction, landing on the planet, snatching whatever they could and then running away as quickly as possible.

This haphazard approach has made large-scale attacks easier to drive off but individual raids harder to cope with. The raids commence in no predictable fashion, and defenders find it next to impossible to guess what Vuldrok commanders intend to do. While they catch or kill a number of Vuldrok every time, at least some slip through to wreak havoc. Hawkwood commanders almost wish the Vuldrok would coordinate their efforts – the battle might be harder, but at least a victory would drive off all the attackers.

Of course, the Hawkwood realize that an organized Vuldrok confederation would pose a threat potentially dwarfing even House Decados. For instance, while Hazat soldiers train for years to gain their skills, the Vuldrok begin at birth. Their lives seem dedicated to their gods, their hunts and

their wars. The Hawkwood do not know if all Vuldrok are that way, but all they have encountered are.

The Hawkwood have long hoped that the Vuldrok technology would fall apart due to lack of innovation and maintenance, but this has yet to happen. Some Hawkwood nobles believe that the role of engineers has fallen to the Vuldrok shamans and that their blessings involve wrenches more than rosaries. Whatever the case, Vuldrok ships, weapons and vehicles still pose a very real problem along the borders.

Raising the Legions

One dictum of war that is as true now as it ever was is that the battle goes to the one who gets there "firstest with the mostest," as some Hazat like to put it. Thus mobilizing, training and equipping troops took center stage during the Emperor Wars, and those houses that did it the best saw the most success.

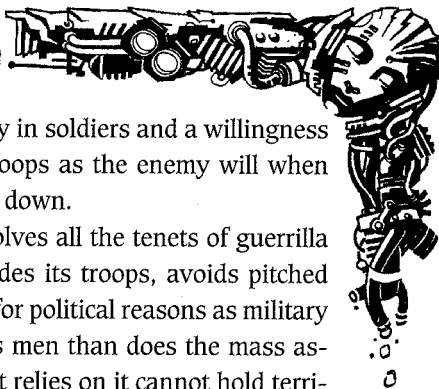
All princes (and now the Emperor) follow the same basic mustering method. Low-level nobles owe a debt of fealty to their overlord who owes a similar (but larger) debt to his liege lord, all the way up to the Emperor. A knight may have to supply himself and his entourage in times of war. A baronet might have to raise, equip and maintain a platoon of troops, while his baron might bring a full company or one spaceship. An earl or count might have to bring up a full regiment, while rich dukes get tagged for an entire legion.

Not all these troops have to come from a lord's own population. In the past, rich nobles have contracted with the Muster to supply the troops for their feudal obligations in order to keep their fiefs working without interruption. Still, most do come from the land of their lords, where they train part of the year and work the rest.

Until the Emperor Wars, standing armies were a rarity in the Known Worlds. While a noble might keep a troop of bodyguards on hand year round, only the most powerful could afford to maintain defensive forces that did nothing but train and stay ready to fight. Nobles much prefer having their people spring to arms when a threat actually appears. Aside from the cost of keeping the troops out of the field, most lords have an inherent distaste for letting serfs hold on to weapons any longer than they must.

During the Emperor Wars, all the major factions established full-time militaries, though peace has allowed them to prune back. They have not cut back nearly as much as they otherwise might have, and each gives its own reasons for not doing so – barbarian threat, worries about peasant revolt or whatever. In most cases, however, they point to the Emperor and ask him to scale back first. After all, why should a mere prince disband his armies if the Emperor continues to add more and more imperial legions?





Grand Strategies

Strategies differ from tactics in that strategies refer to large-scale and long-term efforts, while tactics refer to ways to take advantage of immediate combat situations. Tactics are what are necessary to carry out strategies. While both are somewhat lacking in the Known Worlds, attempts have been made. Both the Academy Interatta on Leagueheim and the Hazat Military Academy on Aragon have tried to codify these experiences, but getting current leaders to listen to them has proven a losing proposition.

Most generals still prefer to just send out wave after wave of soldiers until one side or the other breaks. Those with some knowledge of military tactics might soften up the enemy with an artillery barrage first. Spaceships have proven especially effective at this since their weapons can make direct attacks instead of the indirect, arching ones of ground artillery.

Combining these sorts of forces is the most some commanders can accomplish. More talented ones can effectively mix in skimmers and flitters, armored vehicles, various kinds of troops, space and air assaults, naval bombardments, effective terrain use, rapid redeployments and inspiring leadership.

Battling Ones' Betters

Members of the League have long promoted the idea that a technologically-inferior force cannot defeat its betters. This has helped them sell all manner of expensive military armaments to noble houses on the off chance that this over-priced rifle is just what they need to carry the day. Their assertion has a great deal of merit. Stories of less-advanced groups, especially alien races, getting decimated by their superiors, abound. The stories that get told less frequently, but hold just as much truth, tell of troops overcoming such differences through skill, planning and luck.

Scholars at the Jarod Amad College of War at the Academy Interatta have quietly assembled tactics for defeating a technologically superior foe. They have cataloged three main strategies an army can use to defeat such an enemy. The first, and least effective, is the mass assault strategy. This

requires a massive superiority in soldiers and a willingness to lose ten times as many troops as the enemy will when wave after wave gets mowed down.

The second strategy involves all the tenets of guerrilla warfare. The inferior side hides its troops, avoids pitched battles, and attacks as much for political reasons as military ones. This strategy costs less men than does the mass assault strategy, but a force that relies on it cannot hold territory. It usually requires off-planet involvement or a significant change in the enemy to win in the long run.

The third strategy, the evening approach, is the most challenging. It requires a commander (or commanders) who can balance a number of different factors to even out the enemy's superiority. The first requirement of this strategy is an extremely mobile force. One force that can fight two battles in two days can do as much damage as two forces that can fight battles every other day. Additionally, they can launch surprise attacks and move up equipment fast enough to handle most difficulties. They can also raid and interdict enemy supplies. After all, one of the surest ways to cancel out a technological advantage is to prevent replacement equipment from reaching the front.

The second requirement is optimal use of equipment. Stories of commanders funneling enemy troops into ditches, trapping enemy tanks with iron pots designed to look like mines, luring long-range troops into close combat, or suckering enemy planes into the range of antiaircraft guns abound. Tacticians recommend using fire against enemies hiding behind shields, concentrating volleys on less-armored foes before going for the tougher ones, and getting in as close as possible to neutralize enemy artillery, flitters and space ships.

The third, and perhaps most important strategy, involves imitation. No matter how talented a commander may be, his enemy will eventually learn to deal with his strategies. At some point that commander needs to either capture or develop equipment capable of dealing with his enemy's best. Otherwise his own troops eventually wear down and find themselves unable to deal with the continuing demands of war.





Barracks Culture

"Get 'em outta here!" yelled the barkeep. "E's had 'is fill, and now there'll be trouble."

Of course he was right, but we couldn't let him treat us like that anyway. After all, we're 3rd Co. of the fightin' fifth regiment — heroes of the Cadavus rebellion of '73. These fat civilian blokes rob us every night. Every now and then, we deserve a little R & R at their expense.

"Look, I've 'ad it with you lot. 'Ow can I stay in business with you constantly breaking all the furniture into tiny pieces? Do you know 'ow much one of those tables cost? And every night I'm here mopping up after every last one of ya' who can't hold their liquor down. A pig wouldn't live in the bathroom after a night of you!"

All right, we're not a high-class bunch, but for the prices they charge here, he can put up with us. Hell, where'd he be if it weren't for us? Probably starving with the damn rebels. 'Course, they don't remember that we risked our lives to save their hairy butts. All they're concerned about is how much extra they can charge us for our brew.

"Awww, by the saints man, he's throwing up right in the middle of the floor. Now who's gonna clean that up? Eh? I'll tell you. It'll be me again. Now please get him outta here before he does it again! You fraggin' soldiers think you own the place. Just because you carry a gun, we should all bow down and clean up yer mess. Well, I've had it! Get 'em outta here or I'm gettin' a heavy!"

Ernie's Bar was 3rd Co.'s bar. He wouldn't dare bring the friggin' heavy's in here. He's got too much respect for us, but he's got to put on a show so we know how serious he is.

"All right Ernie, we'll take care of him. Don't you worry, no fighting tonight. He's already sick on that rot gut brew you serve us," I said.

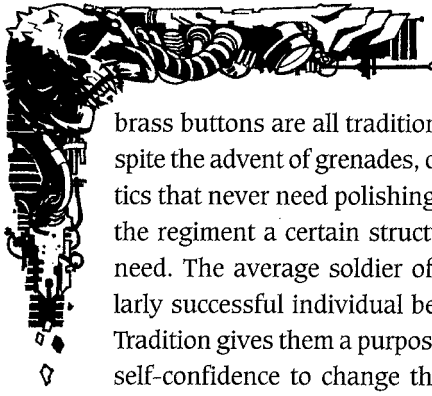
Jonesy's puke was started to stink, so I figured it was time to move on anyway. We could go back to the newbie bar on post and leave him there. He'll get a little time on the black list and we won't have to clean up the barracks after him. Anything's better than leaving him to the heavy's. Those bastards will beat him to a pulp just for fun.

Military Tradition

The military eats, shits and breathes tradition. You become a part of history when you join a regimental unit in the Empire, and the history of the unit infuses you. Each regiment carries a battle standard to the field with its unique icon. The standard flies ribbons for each campaign or battle the regiment fought in. Those ribbons represent the essence of the regiment in the same way each of its members represent their regiment. In a way, today's recruits are the heroes of yesteryear who earned those campaign ribbons by fighting and dying bravely for glory and honor.

This has a powerful effect on the way a regiment operates. Old shattered pieces of artillery are meticulously cleaned, polished, and maintained to remind the regiment of the battle it was damaged in. Companies and platoons earn nicknames like Pike's Sharpshooters or Gertrude's Grunts. They earned their names for actions that happened long ago, but the current members train hard to continue to deserve the name. Many things are done in outdated fashion for the sake of tradition. Close order marching drill, pressed uniforms, and





brass buttons are all traditions the military hangs on to despite the advent of grenades, camouflage uniforms, and plastics that never need polishing. However, this tradition gives the regiment a certain structure that many of its members need. The average soldier of the realm was not a particularly successful individual before ending up in a regiment. Tradition gives them a purpose, a sense of pride, and enough self-confidence to change their destinies. Many enjoy the camaraderie and the sense of importance, and as a result stay in the regiment their entire lives. Others find the restrictions too over-bearing and attempt desertion at every opportunity (and others just flee to avoid dying!)

Regimental Structure

Standing armies are not the norm in the Known Worlds. Usually, freemen and serfs are conscripted by the local lord as necessary to defend their fiefs or even as assault directed against distant enemies. However, since the Emperor Wars, lords who can afford it try to maintain some degree of ready troops.

Traditionally, standing armies all over the Known Worlds are based on the regiment system of organization. Its basis is long forgotten but probably stems from the social fact that a noble is unlikely to accept command of anything smaller. Under the feudal system, each earldom must maintain a certain sized regiment of soldiers based on the amount of land and serfs it controls. The Emperor's regiments are pulled from the Imperial worlds. A regimental commander is given the rank of Colonel and is more often than not of noble birth. He or she receives a monthly budget from the earl based on the regiment's muster book for food, clothing, shelter and arms. The Colonel is ultimately responsible for recruiting, obtaining supplies, and the training of the regiment itself in addition to leading it into battle. He chooses and promotes all his subordinate officers. The commissioned officers often supplement the Colonel's wage by "purchasing" their posts. Usually these posts are not offered to the unqualified, but sometimes money talks louder than actions.

Regiments all have a home base or garrison town somewhere in the earl's various fiefs that they occupy in times of

peace. The regiment is likely to be named after the inhabitants of the town and draw their recruits mostly from its populace. The Colonel is likely to be the local lord or one of her sons or daughters.

Regiments vary considerably in size but a typical one might be organized around three or four companies, each having two to five platoons. The platoons are further divided into three to five squads. Depending on the specialty of the squad, it might be divided into fire-teams. A squad consists of about a dozen soldiers, a platoon about fifty, and a company between 100 and 250. Regiments exist as small as a single company, or about 100 soldiers, but the average size is just short of a thousand. Larger regiments may organize several companies into battalions commanded by Lieutenant Colonels. Several battalions in turn making up the larger regiment.

In addition to the troops themselves, a regiment contains a small cadre of officers and men who make up the headquarters, or HQ staff. At the least, this cadre includes an Adjutant, a supply officer or Quartermaster, some medical staff usually headed by a surgeon, a Chaplain, a Sergeant Major, a Drum Major, and a staff of specialists for repairing equipment.

The Adjutant, of whom there may be more than one, is the assistant to the commanding officer; she usually holds the rank of Major. Her duties include assistance in the preparation of plans, responsibility for general reconnaissance and intelligence, and administration of disciplinary action.

The supply staff is responsible for obtaining and distributing all necessary food, clothing, and equipment. A good supply officer can get the troops anything they need and often retires a wealthy man from the frequent sale of unofficial goods. As such, they are paid little and the cost of obtaining the position from the Colonel is always high.

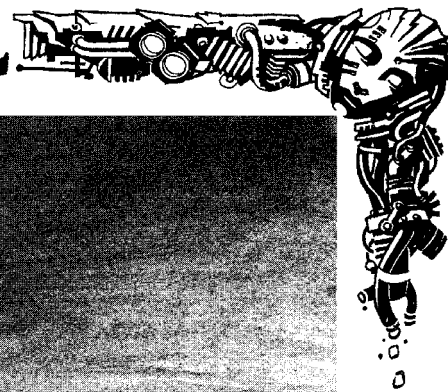
The medical staff also makes a little side money, since they are not officially required to treat social diseases. The unfortunate fornicator has to pay out of his own wage to rid himself of any small beasties inhabiting his privates.

The Sergeant Major is the highest ranking enlisted soldier and is always promoted based on performance and popu-

Troop Structure

Troop type	Complement	Commanding Rank	Mustering Lord
Legion	10,000	General	Duke
Regiment	1000-2000	Colonel	Earl
Battalions	2-3 companies	Lieutenant Colonel/Major	
Company	100-250	Captain	Baron
Platoons	50	Lieutenant (Staff Sergeant)	Baronet
Squad	12	Corporal	Knight
Fireteam	2-6	Private/PFC	





larity. She represents the interests of the enlisted soldiers. This may include anything from reporting overly-high charges from the Quartermaster to giving the ground eye view of a newly-planned operation.

The Drum Major leads the regiment's band at celebrations and formal occasions. Depending on the size of the regiment, the band may be volunteers from the regular troops or its own separate entity.

Captains command companies. This is the most prestigious post in the regiment next to the Colonel and although the pay is not great, the Colonel is often able to sell these posts at high rates. However, given the importance of the position, some less-greedy Colonels prefer to promote up their best lieutenants instead. The Captain usually has under his command a Quartermaster Sergeant to oversee the supplies needed to run the barracks house. Of course, the barracks houses may be smaller, but their organization still comes at the company level.

Lieutenants command platoons. A Staff Sergeant usually holds the true power at the platoon level, since Lieutenants are generally a little wet behind the ears. Corporals command their squad and their fire-team. Experienced Privates, or a Private First Class (PFC), lead the other fireteams within a squad.

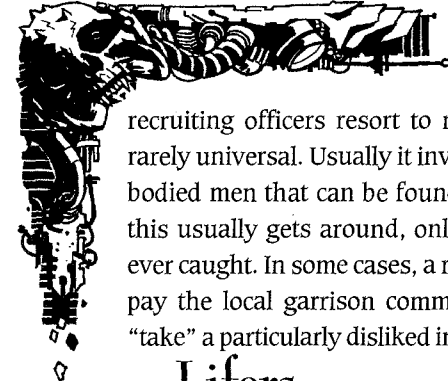
Recruits

The soldiers of a regiment are made up of two types of individuals: conscripts and professional soldiers. Of course, a Colonel would love to have an entire regiment of professionals, but it just isn't possible. He must supplement his professional staff with conscripts from the local populace. After all, the professionals are just conscripts who volunteered to remain with the regiment after their discharge.

In point of fact, living conditions in garrison are almost always better than in town (at least for the type of serf likely to end up in the regiment.) However, the lack of freedom and the chance of death in battle make soldiering a generally undesirable profession.

Universal mandatory conscription for all persons of age is the law in some areas, although some places get by with volunteers. Most areas manage with something in between the two. Volunteers who are usually down on their luck and unable to find any other employment are the first easy source of recruits. Other volunteers may join to be a part of something greater and may have a family tradition of military service. However, those groups are usually not enough to fill the regiment's muster books. The next source of recruits is petty criminals whose offense is light enough for the courts to offer military service instead of jail time. (These often turn out to be the best soldiers!) This source often gives the regiment a bad label as a gang of thieves. However, military discipline soon changes or kills the thief. Finally, regimental





recruiting officers resort to mandatory conscripts. This is rarely universal. Usually it involves rounding up all the able-bodied men that can be found around town. Since word of this usually gets around, only the unlucky or outcasts are ever caught. In some cases, a relatively well-off person might pay the local garrison commander or recruiting officer to “take” a particularly disliked individual or a competing suitor.

Lifers

Of course, for some people, the structured way of life, the free food, and the honor and glory associated with battle are strong draws. The conscripts and temporary volunteers refer to this group by a term that alludes to their enlistment term — “lifers.” In understanding the dynamics of barracks life, it is important to acknowledge that these two distinct groups in a regiment have vastly different motivations. The ordinary conscript is just trying to get by and survive until her discharge. The lifer is interested in advancement and glory. For example, if a conscript is asked to clean the barracks, he will likely do the minimum acceptable job. A lifer always wants the best. A conscript takes very seriously his camouflage and wisely and slothfully leaves his uniform rumpled and indistinct. A lifer, only interested in impressing her superiors, stands out walking proudly about in sharply-creased fatigues.

Field Economy

As well intended as the Quartermaster may be, the life of a soldier always involves going without something. That something always seems to be something extremely necessary for the particular area. If the regiment is drilling out on the tundra, you can bet heavy coats are in short supply. If it's maneuvers in the swamp, then dry socks are sure to be rare. The unfortunate soldier caught in this predicament must turn to his comrades for support. In the field, away from the barracks and the local population, firebirds have zero value. Currency becomes whatever is rare. It may be coffee, smokes, socks, or even boots.

Some merchants are well attuned to the needs of the soldier outside of town. They risk life and limb to tag along behind a regiment as it deploys for a drill or into a hostile area. They sell, for a steep premium, everything a soldier needs to feel at home — from smokes to fresh soap. In fact, when a regiment deploys away from home, a large civilian train of camp followers may trail behind. It may include everything from proprietors of the oldest profession to the wives and children of the soldiers (which, by the way, are not mutually exclusive groups!). Some regiment commanders encourage this for the morale of the troops (and so they can keep their own personal servants nearby). Others do everything they can to prevent it. Some Colonels worry about the safety of the civilians, but all are aware of the problems these

hangers-on cause when the supply road gets blocked. Suddenly, a dwindling supply of rations needs to feed twice as many!

Monotony of the Soldiers Life

Drill and inspection make up the daily peacetime life of a soldier of the Empire. Soldiers wake up at the crack of dawn and form up on the exercise field. They eat breakfast, shower, shave, dress and then clean the barracks. They report for duty and inspect their equipment and arms. Crews perform regular maintenance on their vehicles, beasts of burden and equipment. Grunts are assigned cleanup duties and ensure that the common areas of the base are spotless. Anything that can be is repainted over and over again. The Colonel assigns any trivial task he can think of that keeps the men and women busy and could improve the image of the regiment. Some houses place more importance on such tasks than others; the Hazat are perhaps the best-known for sharp and snappy appearances.

A few times a year, depending on the importance of the regiment, it takes to the practice field. The entire regiment deploys out in some remote area and stages mock battles between its companies. Maybe once a year, all the local regiments are brought together for a divisional exercise. The individual soldier may know of about half these exercises ahead of time. The rest are kept secret to test the unit's readiness. After a field exercise, the busy work resumes with soldiers cleaning their now mud-caked equipment.

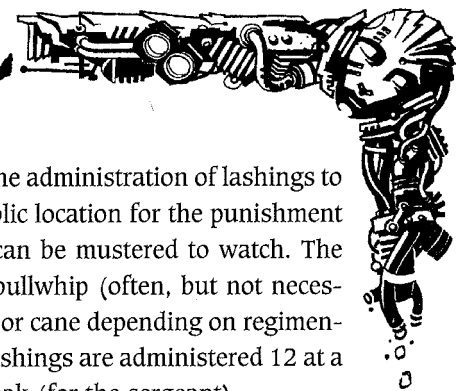
Once a week, most regiments have a training day where the troops are supposedly taught new ways of defeating their enemies. For all but the rawest recruits, these are the most boring and redundant days of the week. Since new recruits are mixed in with long veterans, the same lessons are repeated over and over again.

Finally, on the holy day, the whole regiment puts on its dress uniforms and attends the Church services. A talented Chaplain can redeem a whole week's worth of the drudgery. However, talented Chaplains rarely make the mistake of joining a military regiment. Most of the time the Chaplain bores the soldiers asleep with the tenth monotonous rendition of the same old sermon.

Law

In the year 4973, various military laws from the current regent and from the various noble houses were put together in the *Military Orders and Regulations of 4973*. This became the new basis of the Imperial Army. It is a surprisingly short book, which covers the basic mechanisms for choosing new officers and recruits, lists the powers of various command positions, and covers the most serious offenses





like desertion and sedition. Not surprisingly, the noble houses all adopted similar regulations shortly after its appearance.

As has been said above, the regimental commander chooses officers below the rank of Colonel. The Emperor or house lord selects officers of higher rank. In practice, the general staff and their subordinates make recommendations, which the lord rarely declines. The process is fraught with corruption and political favor. While notably successful leaders can rise through the ranks despite any lack of political power, the remaining promotions go to the best-connected nobles regardless of their ability.

The regimental officer or his adjutant deals with most common crimes. In fact, he is responsible for posting a list of Military Orders, which covers anything the *Military Orders and Regulations of 4973* (MOR 4973) do not cover. This includes various petty crimes like theft, failure to perform duty, insubordination and insolence. Many commanders opt to copy from readily available published books on the subject (those who can read, that is), so the Military Orders are fairly consistent from post to post. However, it is never wise to assume they are exactly the same. Smoking in the barracks may be tolerated at one post and subject to 50 lashings at another. The only limit placed on the commander is the level of punishment she may assign to any given offense. The MOR 4973 lists four dozen lashings as the maximum sentence a regimental court can sentence a person to. However, since any offense may break multiple rules, the limit of four dozen is generally ignored. Below are listed a few common petty crimes and their first offense sentences.

Crime	Punishment
Late for duty	Black List — 7 days
Slothfulness	Black List — 30 days
Failure to perform duty	Confinement — 7 days
Failure to perform duty in a combat situation	48 lashings
Insolence	Black List — 14 days
Disobeying an order	24 lashings
Striking a superior	48 lashings
Public Drunkenness	Confinement — 30 days
Theft	100 lashings
Desertion	Death

Black List

There are certain undesirable jobs on post, like dishwashing in the mess hall and cleaning the latrine. These duties are assigned to those on the Black List first (in addition to that offender's normal duties).

Confinement

Confinement may be to quarters, jail cells (if the post has them), or — worst of all — outdoor shacks or pits. This is entirely at the discretion of the post commander and her adjutant.

Lashings

The adjutant oversees the administration of lashings to prisoners. He chooses a public location for the punishment where the entire regiment can be mustered to watch. The prisoner's sergeant uses a bullwhip (often, but not necessarily, sterilized first), rope, or cane depending on regimental tradition and location. Lashings are administered 12 at a time followed by a short break (for the sergeant).

Death

The regiment holds hangings in the same formal matter as lashings. For particularly vile crimes like desertion, the body is left in the gallows until it rots free.

In order to adjudicate a MOR 4973 offense, the regimental commander must convene a higher court with two other officers of at least Adjutant rank. These other officers must be from outside the regiment. This higher court is not limited to sentence, and all offenses covered in the MOR 4973 are punishable by death. However, the panel may grant leniency and propose a lesser sentence. Guilt or innocence is decided by a majority vote of the panel. Offenses covered are Mutinous Behavior, Sedition, Murder and Desertion.

Honors

The MOR 4973 also lists all recognized medals, ribbons and other decorations a soldier may wear on her uniform along with the order they are to be worn in. The Emperor or a house lord may add new campaign ribbons at any time. Some of the most common citations are listed below:

Medals

The Imperial Medal of Honor

Awarded by the Emperor for conspicuous gallantry at risk of one's life in combat actions against enemies of the Emperor. (Benefice : 3 pts)

The Order of the Rising Phoenix

Awarded posthumously by the Emperor for extraordinary heroism in connection with operations against armed enemies of the Emperor.

Star of Valor

Awarded by a flag officer for meritorious service to the Emperor during a combat operation. (Benefice : 1 pt)

The Legion of the Gate

Awarded by the vote of three Legion members for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of duty to the Emperor. (Emperor Alexius selected the first five members following the Emperor Wars.) (Benefice : 4 pts)

The Distinguished Service Sword

Awarded by a flag officer for gallantry in action against an armed enemy of the Emperor. (Benefice : 2 pts)



The Order of the Mangled Crown

Awarded to any soldier wounded in combat operations against enemies of the Emperor. (Benefice : 1 pt)

The Order of the Lion

Awarded by the Hawkwood prince to an officer for an extraordinary display of leadership in battle against an enemy of House Hawkwood. (Benefice : 2 pts)

The Li Halan Silver Star

Awarded by the Li Halan prince to Li Halan house soldiers for conspicuous display of moral rectitude in the field of combat. (Benefice : 1 pt)

The al-Malik Rose

Awarded by the al-Malik for conspicuous achievements in ground or space combat against the Symbiots. (Benefice : 2 pts)

The Regimental Star

Awarded by a flag officer or regimental commander for meritorious achievement or service to a lord, not necessarily connected with armed conflict. A Bronze 'V' is sometimes added to the award to indicate valor under fire. (Benefice : 1 pt)

The Good Conduct Medal

Awarded by a regimental or company commander to his subordinate for completion of an enlistment term free from judicial action.

Campaign Ribbons

Ribbons are also awarded for participation in the various past military campaigns of the Emperor.

Duty Ribbons

Various posts earn a soldier the right to wear special duty ribbons. They are as follows, in order of precedence:

Vau Diplomatic Ribbon — (rare) for service in diplomatic delegations to Vau worlds.

Stigmata Garrison Ribbon — for service on the planet Stigmata.

Vorox Joint Forces Ribbon — for service in joint Vorox and human units.

Ukar Ribbon — for service on the planet Kordeth or in joint Ukari and human units.

Church Ribbon — for service on Church lands.

Crusader Ribbon — For service in barbarian space.

Note: Second and subsequent awards are denoted by bronze Oak Leaf Clusters; a silver Oak Leaf Cluster is worn in lieu of five bronze.

Additional Badges of Honor

Various specialty units earn the right to wear their insignia above the pockets of their uniforms or on the shoulder. These include but are not limited to: Dervishes, Psychic Corp, Manifest Light and Brother Battle.

Free Time on the Base

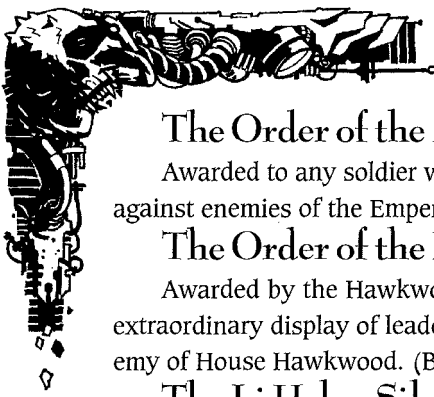
Since most involuntary recruits are only waiting on an opportunity to desert, they are, as a rule, restricted to base when not deployed. This means a number of services must be provided on base for the restricted soldiers. The Quartermaster's main peacetime job is the running of the commissary, mess hall and mail services. The commissary is sort of a regimental general store where recruits can buy snacks, tobacco, alcohol and other items as available. The Mess Hall provides free food to recruits three times a day.

For the less-restricted veteran, the support staff generally supplements their income by renting vehicles (from beastcraft to aircraft) from the motor pool. They must cover any additional maintenance costs incurred by their activity, but since the labor is free and available, rates can still be rather low. Of course, nothing dangerous is allowed out, but a horse or even a jeep is not too hard to arrange. Occasionally, a Sergeant will vouch for some of his troops and take them in town in a half-track or troop truck. For a little extra, flitters or hoppers may be available in the better regiments, although the regiment may reserve them for officers only.

Many regiments also have cavalry units and the stables are always available to the members. Few units are fully motorized enough to do without beasts of burden, so an ass or a donkey or other local species of riding animal (Pherizas, Draga Beasts, etc.) may be available for transportation to anyone else.

Other veterans are allowed to supplement their incomes by serving as bouncers in local pubs and dance halls. These veterans, or "heavies," receive armbands and small arms for the duty. The regiment covers their equipment costs, since they generally end up protecting the establishments from other members of the regiment. In some cases, the regiment commander himself will authorize the creation of small internal unit of these police to patrol the local town. In this case, the heavies may take small bribes from local establishments for specific protection.

The post armory is kept under strict control. Off-duty soldiers turn in their weapons to the central armory. In fact, they only draw the weapons on duty if they absolutely need them, and even then they are not likely to draw any ammo. The ammo itself is only issued during a live fire exercise or while deploying to a hostile region. Both ammo and weapons are stored in dispersed underground bunkers protected from air attack. Access to these bunkers is limited to the Colonel himself and one specifically-chosen Adjutant. The Adjutant then generally chooses one corporal from each platoon to physically issue the gear once he has unlocked the door. This corporal can generally convince the Adjutant to allow her to draw a weapon at anytime for cleaning. However, ammo for the weapon is another story. Given the care-





ful nature of command, some veterans stockpile a little ammo for themselves in case of emergency. It may be skimmed during a live fire exercise or bought in town off the black market.

Life Outside the Base

The town outside a regimental post enjoys a relative financial boon. It also bears the moral scars of a soldier's way of life. Vendors know that a soldier's wage is as certain as the taxman. Anyone allowed off the post is usually on his second term and is unlikely to desert. Credit flows easily to these veterans in exchange for signing over their next month's pay stub. (These signed-over pay stubs can be collected on even if the soldier is killed in action.) However, the things a soldier buys place a heavy moral burden on the town. Soldiers like to get drunk. They like their sexual partners for a price and not for life. To top things off, the many extremely gullible members of the arms profession attract a particularly unsavory group of trades people. As a result, the road leading up to the post gate is crowded with pawn shops, loan sharks, pubs bars, dance halls and whore houses.

Each company within the regiment likes to stake out its territory off post. These tend to be pubs and whore houses that enjoy regular business and cater to a specific company. Of course, bored soldiers frequently "cross the border" to

start a brawl. Other places cater to the officer cadre and refuse entry to the lesser ranks. These tend to be nicer places and located further from the post.

Loan sharks and pawn shops feed off the ignorance of the soldiers as well. They lend against the future pay a soldier may receive. By signing a voucher, a soldier can grant a freeman the right to collect his pay (originally started to make life easier for a soldier's spouse). However, a soldier may lose as much as half his earnings by visiting these unscrupulous men even a week before payday. (And they've been known to try and collect pay stubs for soldiers long dead as well.) Many post commanders prefer not to honor these vouchers, but the lower ranks always complain when they don't. Despite repeatedly losing half their pay, many gullible soldiers rely on and appreciate these advances.

It would be hard to find any other peasant vices not made available to the soldier in town. However, the influx of so much government money without the local production of goods to match causes the prices of most such items to rise sharply. It's not just that the retailers can get away with gouging the soldiers on prices; the sharp demand in the area allows the suppliers to gouge the retailers as well. Of course, in the end, the only one left moneyless is the soldier himself.







For-Hire Forces

Snakehead McGuire bit down hard on his St. Lextius medallion while he waited for the whites he just swallowed to blank out the pain. Only a flesh wound, but it hurt like Gehenne. He was a professional, but shit! A hot Leminkainen day like this was enough to fry anybody's nerves. It was supposed to be a cakewalk, damn it. A local lord had paid Snake's unit good money to destroy a troublesome pagan village and make it look like the work of bandits. Snake had done such work in the past and it troubled his conscience not a bit; when you hired the Muster you were paying for results. Problem was, it meant using bull-shit local low-tech weapons, and this required some finesse.

There had been problems from the beginning. The sheep-like villagers had somehow gained protection. Now half of Snake's 20-man squad were dead. Fessler had gotten it just minutes earlier. He'd been taking reds all morning and went kill happy on the road outside the village. He was laughing crazy and seemingly invulnerable as he hacked down the pagan shaman and his acolytes with his broadsword. Then — crack! Out of nowhere a gun-shot exploded through his heart. "I'm still alive! I'm still alive! I'm sti —"

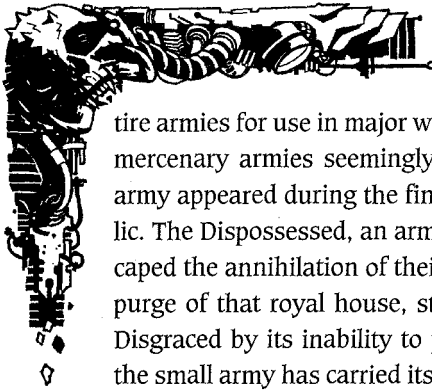
The poor dumbshit was more like a brother to Snakehead than any of his natural siblings; this was personal now. Snakehead spat and loaded Phlag-Shok shells into his .45 Mitchau Ripper. His men still easily outnumbered the village's defenders. The time for finesse was over; if the Skirrl-fuckers wanted to play it rough, so be it...

Despite its long and occasionally honorable history, the term "mercenary" has become something of an epithet throughout the Empire. Noble knights ideally fight for house and family, Brother Battle to safeguard humanity's soul from

the dark between the stars, and standing armies wage war to protect a given national or planetary homeland. Mercenaries, on the other hand, fight for money. This is not to say that they have no loyalties beyond their next payment (though for many this is true), but since many hire mercenaries to do jobs too dirty, dangerous or disreputable for their usual retainers, mercenaries frequently follow no code beyond fulfilling their next contract. Although their methods often bring them into disrepute, mercenaries are seen as necessary because of their efficiency, their tendency not to ask too many questions and the fact that many see them as expendable.

Mercenaries in the Empire of the Fading Suns are among the most crafty and dangerous warriors in human history. They played a role in humanity's earliest conflicts among the stars, lending their aid to both sides in the conflict between the zaibatsu and the Sathraists in the early Sathra Rebellion. During this and later conflicts, mercenary soldiers often served as either part, or as the bulk of, many standing armies. This was especially true in the formation of the Second Republic, when various consortiums, unable to legally draft soldiers on most worlds, were more than ready to hire large mercenary armies when their use best fit the bottom line. Names such as the Ired Irregulars and the Tethys Guard were both lionized and damned on the worlds where they fought. As a rule, however, since the Fall most mercenaries have belonged to far smaller military units or have been individuals with specialized combat or technical skills.

In more recent centuries the Muster, with its ability to assemble more trained human resources than almost any other group in the Known Worlds, has managed to field en-



tire armies for use in major wars — for the right price. Other mercenary armies seemingly fought for causes; one such army appeared during the final years of the Second Republic. The Dispossessed, an army of masterless ronin who escaped the annihilation of their Chauki masters in the Hazat purge of that royal house, still exist as a vagabond army. Disgraced by its inability to protect its original employers, the small army has carried its wounded honor through generations of new recruits, offering its services for pay, but also maintaining a strict ethical code.

Whether they work for the Muster, local military guilds or as free agents, most mercenaries come from a traditional military background. They are predominantly male, though quite a few women have made their mark in this auspicious — or infamous — trade. Mercenaries are often rough, boisterous and worldly, knowing that any day may be their last. Often not well paid, treated or respected for their services (some earning little more than conscripted serf militias), many mercenaries become cynical about their trade after years of working for double-dealing League deans, dilettante noble generals or Church leaders who use and revile them at the same time. Because they are often employed in desperate times and are not part of the usual military chain of command, many of them have earned the mercenary reputation as brutal thugs who murder, rape and torture the people in the cities they occupy. Others, however, such as the Aragon Martyrs, have gone down in Known Worlds history as stalwart defenders of the faith and true folk heroes.

Above the Fray: Charioteer Pilots

If any group of mercenaries have managed to escape the shabby reputation of the profession at large, it is the Charioteers. Frequently romanced for their dashing style and exciting adventures, even many of the Empire's most technophobic citizens have a secret admiration for the gallant space fighters. This is, in part, because they do not see them often, merely imagining their daring exploits through outer space. Even when Charioteer mercenaries participate in aerial bombardments, the victims are far more likely to blame the noble house behind the bombardments than the pilots themselves. A Charioteer commander, mercenary or otherwise, may tend to the day-to-day operations of the ship, but in noble fleets the *commander of record* is almost always a noble. This is a matter of law on most planets and a subject of ego for the nobility. A mercenary commander may lead his ship into battle while the ship's noble "captain" sips wine in comfort five jumps away. If the battle is successful, record of victory is added to the noble commander's long list of accomplishments. If the battle is lost, one can always hire more mercenaries. This tradition frequently draws resent-

ment, or at least derision, from the actual pilots.

Merely flying through space is dangerous enough, but when one adds the additional element of combat, the slightest miscalculation can spell disaster. The smallest tear in the fabric of one's environment suit, the merest breach of a bulkhead can mean a hideous death by suffocation or radiation poisoning. The "romance" of combat in space is somewhat marred when a human body undergoes explosive decompression, spraying the inside of a compromised cockpit with crimson gore. Mercenary missions among the Charioteers vary widely and, as with most mercenaries, include those jobs that are too dirty, dangerous or politically delicate for regular channels. A Charioteer who works these tenebrous realms may find herself flying anything from a slaver ship for the Chainers to secret ambassadorial missions between rival houses, or even smuggling, piracy or reconnaissance into alien or barbarian space.

As a rule, Charioteer combat pilots are better paid than their groundling counterparts in the Muster. Most of this is a simple matter of expertise. After all, as most Charioteers will readily remind you, any monkey with a gun can kill; it takes real skill to do so while piloting a spaceship. Although most space mercenaries work for simple pay, those who hire them may supply additional inducements. The temporary use of (and when the mission is complete, ownership of) a rare jumpgate key is enough to excite most pilots. Older keys are subject to data drift and become useless over time unless re-coded. This means that keys are rare and valuable; most Charioteers equate them with increased freedom to soar the spaceways and increase profitability. Although the Charioteers guild holds the majority of these artifacts (as well as the control of most spaceports), they do not automatically make them accessible to individual guild members for free. A wealthy noble or Church patron can go a long way toward allowing a Charioteer full access to the guild's resources.

Naturally Charioteers must charge more if they own the spaceship that will be used in the combat mission; repairing or replacing such a valuable piece of equipment is an expensive — and for many Charioteers, an embarrassing — proposition. Additionally, there are other costs to Charioteers who rent themselves out as combat pilots. There is the small matter of guild commission (as high as 75% in some cases). Of course this fee is often worth the cost, since in return the guild provides technical support, supplies, charts and, on occasion, jumpkeys. There is also other overhead, and the Charioteer's fellow guilders are quick to take their cut. The Reeves and Scravers provide the Charioteers with insurance for their spacecraft, though "insurance" is often in quotation marks where some Scraver syndicates are concerned — "accidents will happen." Muster specialists provide support and logistics for larger spacecraft. The Engineers are, of course, indispensable to any such enterprise; most Engi-



neers will readily remind patrons that any space jockey can fly a spaceship with an *operating* guidance system....

Merchants of Death

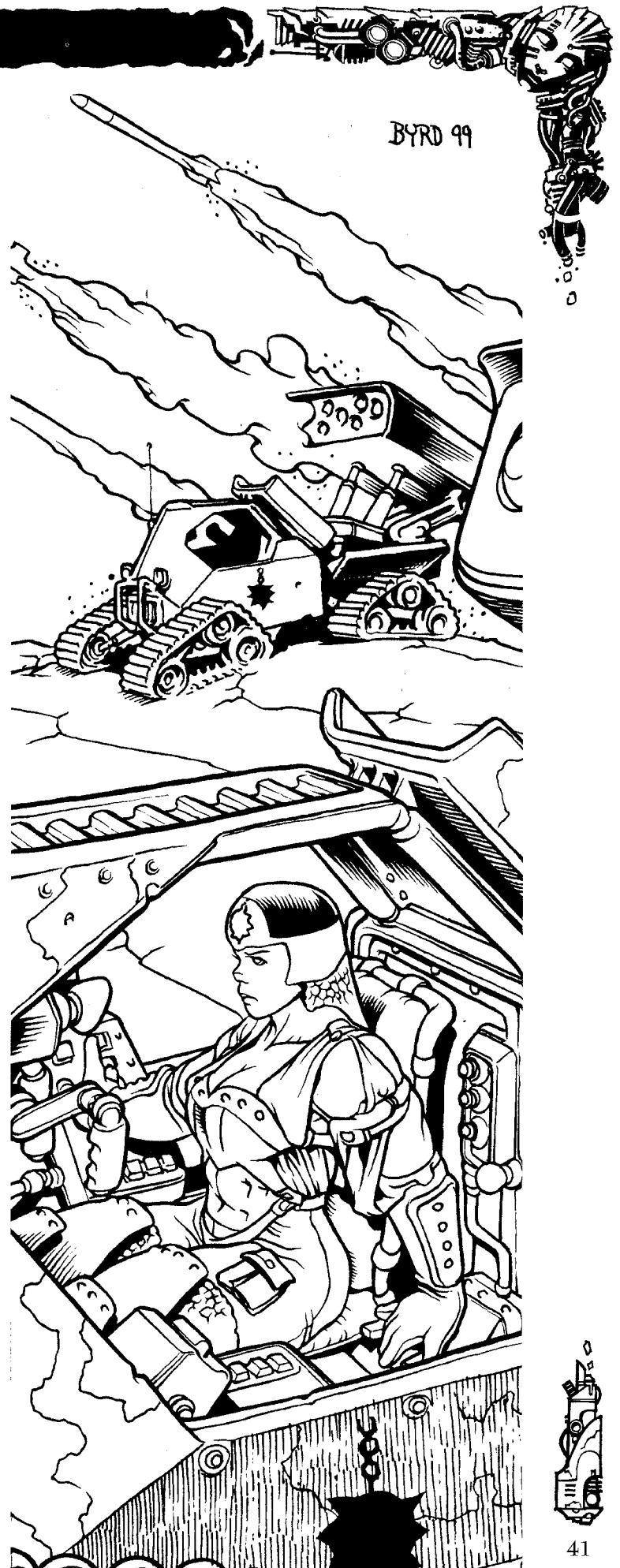
Even after the end of the Emperor Wars, small conflicts ranging from local feuds to major land wars are still all too common throughout the Empire. Those who fight in these wars — from the battlefield general to the lowest dog-face — often want an edge in weaponry, the better to kill their enemies and insure their own survival.

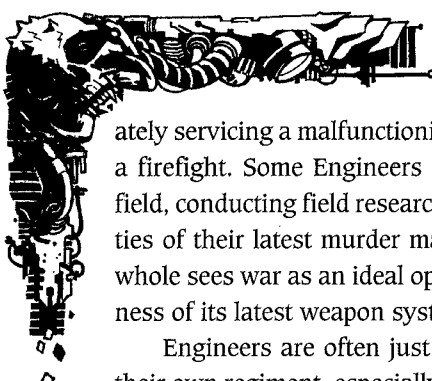
Battlefield Engineers

In a time when many common soldiers can't read their own name, let alone decipher the schematics for a tank engine, hands-on Engineer support is a necessity for keeping the modern war machine rolling. Although the stratospheric profits of the Emperor War are a thing of the past, the guild still reaps a handsome profit from armaments and the technical support that goes along with them. In many war zones, these battlefield grease monkeys are a common sight, scuttling through the ranks to repair the regimental transport or breech-loader. One may also see them running a forge for swords, armor and siege weapons in more primitive conflicts, though this is often more properly the purview of various low-tech weaponsmiths guilds (see below).

Because of the Church's prohibitions on technosophy, as well as the distrust of technology by the general public, it is only natural that some resent technicians who specialize in creating newer and better ways of killing. On many battlefields, brawn, steel and raw courage have long since replaced the cold methodical "video-arcade" feel of war as practiced during the godless Second Republic. Many soldiers view automated weapons as cowardly — indeed, almost unholy — believing that the true test of a warrior is to pit his mettle against another soldier, face to face. Of course, this philosophy is often exaggerated or at least narrowly applied. A noble commander generally has little problem with his Muster hirelings mowing down an army of opposing peasant soldiers with gatling lasers, as long as no one interferes while he engages Lord Thistlebottom in daring swordplay at the battle's climax.

The common soldiery also sometimes resents the technical maestros for more petty reasons, viewing them as receiving special treatment within the regiment. And indeed, as highly-skilled professionals, battlefield Engineers are able to command better quarters and pay without the daily risk to life and limb that constitutes the average soldier's life. This last resentment is not always true, however. Although Engineers are not frequently in the midst of the fray, the job is dangerous nonetheless. War is a fundamentally risky venture and even the most safety-conscious Engineers must sometimes advance to the front. One frequently sees them repairing perimeter fences, maintaining big guns or desper-





ately servicing a malfunctioning hover tank in the middle of a firefight. Some Engineers intentionally court the battlefield, conducting field research into the destructive capabilities of their latest murder machine. Indeed, the guild as a whole sees war as an ideal opportunity to test the effectiveness of its latest weapon systems.

Engineers are often just as likely to face danger from their own regiment, especially if their side is losing. Conflict may easily arise if a military unit feels that the Engineers are somehow holding back their best tricks. Because of their sometimes extravagant claims, Engineers are often viewed as wonder workers, whose geniuses are supposed to transcend limitations of individual skill, time or resources. Furthermore, Church, Engineer and local noble laws often limit an Engineer in what weapons she can introduce into the conflict. Engineers are frequently unable to supply that super weapon that the battalion's leader demands to save the day. More than one Engineer has met her demise at the hands of an impromptu court-marshal devised by a frustrated commander. Noble and non-Engineer League luminaries try to discourage such behavior because of the strict financial penalties for such behavior. Still, Engineers, aware that such events are at least a war-front possibility, generally keep their eyes on a convenient escape route. In general, however, battlefield Engineers are respected or, at the very least, feared.

Weaponsmiths

"Weaponsmiths" has become something of a catch-all phrase for the multitudinous weapons guilds, crafter families and even occasional noble houses (most notably the enigmatic House Shelit) who sell weapons out from under the aegis of the Engineers. These merchants of war may include anything from manufacturers of spaceships or biogenetic weapons to — on the more primitive side — well-crafted catapults, siege towers and armor. Most of the major crafter families were traditionally attached to noble families for life. In return for practicing her art, a weapons crafter could expect a generous stipend and the security of a lord's protection. As with many things, however, this relationship has changed since the tumult of the last war. In the flourishing of free trade that has accompanied the new peacetime, some crafters and guilds have been cut loose from these old contracts. Either their lords are dead, can no longer afford their services — the war made paupers of many nobles — or the crafters may negotiate their way out of their contract (often by performing one last extraordinary commission). Now many weaponsmiths are considered more truly mercenary as they seek out new patrons.

Arguments with Engineer and Muster weaponeers over turf have lead many independent weaponsmiths into specialty or niche markets, though some fearlessly compete head

to head with the major guilds. When competition becomes truly heated, however, it is usually the lesser guild that gives way, unable to compete with the Engineers on price, expertise or sheer ruthlessness (the Lypee-55 incident still resonates with those who would cross the Engineers). Many weapons guilds avoid such entanglements by staying small, specialized or by supplying more primitive weapons — a market in which the Engineers have little interest (usually a slug thrower or anything less advanced is safe). Some also enter into agreements with the Engineers for the mass production of components, thus freeing the Engineers to concentrate more fully on research and development.

Minor guilds and crafter families supply the vast majority of standard issue firearms in the Empire. Most famous of these are the Mitchau (attached to House Hazat), the Varsten and Radir families (who compete for Decados business) and the insanely wealthy Sumpter family (House al-Malik). As with many crafter groups, these families have recently taken advantage of new trade possibilities to expand their customer base. Many (with the exception of House Radir) now sell to other nobles besides their traditional patrons. Although these smiths have mostly stuck with basic slug-throwers to avoid Engineer entanglements, some — most notably the Radirs and the Sumpters — have ventured into more adventurous energy weapon technologies. Competition between weaponsmiths is fierce but usually civil. Sometimes, however, it can escalate into murder. A recent example of just how heated this competition can become occurred recently on Tethys when Lucius Ambrim (patriarch of the Ambrim spaceship crafting family) was found physically strapped to one of his own satellites — 5,000 miles above the planet! Suspicion for his murder has variably fallen on the Decados, Charioteers, the Engineers and his family heirs.

What the Mitchau and Sumpter names are to firearms, so too are certain crafter names synonymous with the best blade weapons. Usually overlooked by the Engineers and other higher-technology guilds, the making of finely crafted swords and daggers is a science all its own. While any village ironsmith can bang out a scythe for harvesting crops, nobles and other notable warriors have more discriminating tastes. In many ways, dueling remains the apex of the martial tradition, and sword-making concerns can command a high price and respect. Among these are the Passau family (whose running wolf logo is seen on many Hawkwood blades), the family Sahagun de Toledo who fashion blades for the Hazat, and the Masamune Shinkai dynasty that works for both Houses Li Halan and al-Malik. In contradiction to the archaic reputation fostered by these blade companies, they also take special commissions and deal in advanced weapons such as vibrating and monomolecular wireblades. It is rumored that the Shinkai smiths also still hold the secret to creating flux swords, though Church restrictions make



it far more likely that these would find their way into the hands of the technology-friendly al-Malik than the strict religious adherents of the Li Halan.

Masters of War

Although there are numerous reasons to wage war in the Empire — for family, faith or human survival — the most common is for pay. Those who kill for money are roughly divided into two groups; those who work for the Muster and everyone else.

Muster Mercenaries

Since its foundation as the M.S.T.R. (Mobile Strategic and Tactical Resources) during the Divestiture, the Muster has been in the business of supplying soldiers for hire. In its original incarnation it aided the noble houses in overthrowing the Second Republic. After the mysterious suicide/murder of its founder, General Roland Van Owen, the remaining mercenaries made their way to Leagueheim in 4352, providing military protection for the nascent guild structure. Since that time the guild has expanded its base significantly, supplying workers for numerous other professions, from builders to artisans and office workers. Nevertheless, its military faction has remained at the core of the guild and still holds the reins of power. (For more on the Muster's history, see *Merchants of the Jumpweb*.)

Fighting for the Muster

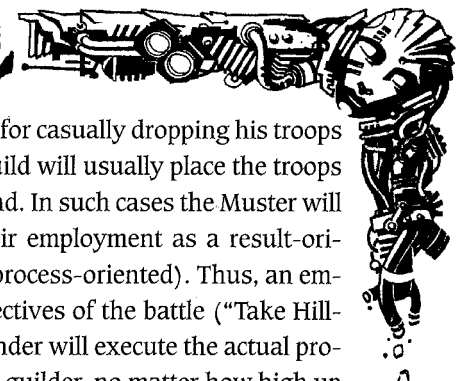
Those who fight for the Muster are among the most capable and powerful fighting forces ever assembled in human history. This is a good thing too, since the Muster sends its troops into the most dire and dangerous situations. Whether reinforcing the Stigmata Garrison against the fell Symbiots, fighting on the Kurgan front or guarding a research facility from that band of intrepid player characters, the Muster is the backbone of many military units and some of the most versatile soldiers in the Empire. Muster troops are simultaneously desired as able warriors and considered eminently expendable by those who hire them. As long as an employer can make a good case that she did not wantonly waste their lives, there are few consequences beyond financial penalties for losing these troops. Still, if their employers do not necessarily care about their lives, the Muster does look after its own.

Most military operations utilizing Muster soldiers involve a joint command. Thus a Muster army may simultaneously take orders from both a noble employer and a Muster officer. Such contracts are usually open to negotiation between the employer and the guild. If the employer (usually a noble) is a competent leader and looking for mercenaries to round out his own troops, then most Muster soldiers will cheerfully obey his commands. On the other hand,

if the noble has a reputation for casually dropping his troops into the meat grinder, the guild will usually place the troops under direct Muster command. In such cases the Muster will usually try to negotiate their employment as a result-oriented contract (rather than process-oriented). Thus, an employer will spell out the objectives of the battle ("Take Hill-81") but the Muster commander will execute the actual procedure. Since, in theory, any guildier, no matter how high up the chain of command, is inferior in status to any noble, it is sometimes difficult to work out these details with an inbred count who fancies himself a latter-day Vladimir.

As mercenaries who fight and kill for pay, many see Muster soldiering as a morally dubious occupation at best. Even the lowliest Muster private is aware of her guild's elite heritage and there is a tendency among many of them to divide the commoner population into two groups: soldiers and "little people." This mentality allows the worst elements in the Muster to murder, rape and torture their enemies (and neutral civilians) with abandon. Although the guild officially deplores such atrocities, the realists among them realize that such unfortunate incidents are just "part of the game." There are those among the guild who maintain a strict moral code, though this involves a sometimes difficult balancing act. Many outsiders see Muster mercs as occupying an ethical niche only slightly above that of the Chainers (Muster slave traders). Indeed, the slavers often follow in the soldiers' wake, taking every advantage of the dislocation and confusion of war to increase their trade. Some soldiers make a lucrative sideline by selling information and easy access to their slaver associates. For those Muster soldiers who consider soldiering an honorable trade, such exchanges are intolerable and are discouraged whenever possible. The fact that both trades are part of the same guild makes for difficult decisions for a mercenary with a conscience.

Although they fight for many masters, first and foremost the Muster is loyal to the Muster. That the guild's leaders have their own agendas, sometimes at odds with Church and the noble houses, also makes their employment a dubious necessity for those two groups. The Muster may fight for the Hawkwoods against the Decados, or the Decados against the Li Halan, but most realize that the Muster is looking out for its own long-term goals, independent of the current political situation. That many see the Muster as harboring secret Republican ideals also makes it unpopular in certain quarters. The Muster leadership is sensitive to charges of this kind — which, after all, cut into business — and have erected bureaucratic firewalls to assure that people who hire the Muster are getting unbiased soldiers. Armies that work for different houses are handled by separate departments which are allowed only minimal contact with each other. These departments are subject to sporadic oversight by both guild leaders and noble employers to make sure



that they stay independent. Sometimes these firewalls are breached, however, and there have been accusations that the Muster has expended its greatest efforts in supporting political interests that favor the Muster's political aspirations of the time.

Such accusations rose again after the Emperor Wars when House Hazat accused the Muster of selling its military secrets to House Hawkwood, citing a Muster withdrawal from the Byzantium Secundus moon of Jericho during the final days of the war. Shortly thereafter a combined Hazat and Decados offensive on the moon lost power to its shields and was consequently wiped out by Alexius Hawkwood's ships. In the wake of this route, Hawkwood, al-Malik and fresh Muster troops arrived, clenching the engagement and securing Alexius's designs on the imperial throne. Despite such accusations, the Muster has generally garnered a reputation for strict adherence to its contracts. Besides, no noble house can afford to stay mad at them for long. Once a fee is paid, the Muster soldiers must show full loyalty to their new employer — at least until their next assignment.

As with employees in other parts of the guild, Muster soldiers are usually contracted for ten years at a stretch and infrequently retire except through injury or death. The former can expect a generous pension, the latter a discount funeral. On occasion a noble or other satisfied customer may buy out the contract of a particularly favored soldier. The cost for such transfers are often exorbitant and the soldier *usually* has something to say about the transaction. On rare occasions a noble may use her superior social position to "steal" a soldier from the Muster. While technically legal in many cases (the nobles *do* make the laws), it can effectively poison the noble's future dealings with the guild.

One interesting, and (from the noble point of view) irritating feature of hiring guild mercenaries is the fact that Muster will not fight Muster. From a practical standpoint this means that, if contracted by two opposing nobles, one (or more likely both) groups of mercenaries will retire from the field. This can be somewhat embarrassing when two armies mass for battle and the fight is called while the Muster and leaders of the two opposing armies meet to arbitrate the fairest solution in terms of mercenary troop deployment. Occasionally nobles will try to force one side from the field through the calculated surprise use of mercenary troops (the Muster doesn't like this), while on other occasions a greedy Muster negotiator may try to encourage the two sides into a bidding war to retain the guild's services (nobles show a notable lack of humor on such occasions). While internecine combat is forbidden, there are occasions when Muster troops may come into conflict with each other. Sometimes because of bureaucratic mistakes or lack of communication, Muster troops will kill each other without realizing their mistake until after the battle is over. This is particularly true in high

technology conflicts where long-range artillery barrages take the place of face to face conflicts. Another exception to this rule occurs when a noble family hires an elite Muster company for generations. The Muster considers this a sacred trust and such guards are expected to protect their charge at all costs, even if the attackers are fellow Muster.

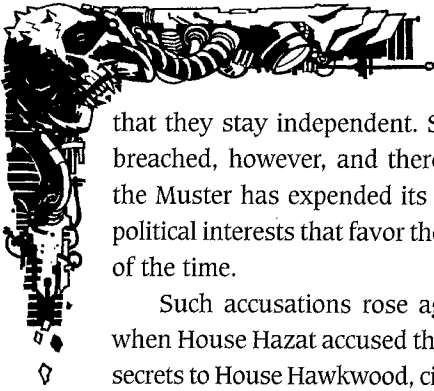
Chain of Command

As a descendant of the professional military bodies of the Second Republic and before, the Muster has retained many of the traditions, accouterments and command elements of these past armies. As a result the Muster's chain of command and unit hierarchy maintains far more similarities to a 20th-century Earth army than do the private armies of the various noble houses. The Muster maintains this hierarchy throughout many of its enterprises and even its non-military services display a touch of martial tradition. As a rule, paramilitary Muster groups such as Sentries (bodyguards), Ashtati (bounty hunters) edifiers, slavers and roustabouts are not part of this chain of command, though they are often hired/drafted to perform support functions.

Aside from the ranks listed below, there are two additional positions of note: the taskmaster and the vigil judge. In a military context these positions take on a specific relevance. The taskmaster is, in the guild's broader context, a guildier who passes out assignments and oversees individual jobs. In the military sphere a taskmaster of a given rank receives a temporary raise in position, often as a prelude toward a permanent promotion (see below). The military vigil judges act as the guild's military police, tribunals or inspector generals.

Impressed Militia (Skirmisher, Pezetairoi): At the bottom of any army, noble or guild, are these serf militia. These soldiers are usually farmers or villagers who are drafted into the army to add to its numbers, do the dirtiest tasks and for use in feints or to descry the enemy's strength or tactics. The regular army considers these fighters to be, at best, unfortunate scum. The skirmishers realize their place in the scheme of things and, although they have to fight, many do their best to get out of the way. Since they cannot be expected to command themselves, a more experienced Muster mercenary is usually placed in charge of these troops to make sure that they don't break rank or desert. Such commanders may be anything from an up-and-coming private to an experienced (sometimes disfavored) sergeant. If he shows the proper initiative, courage and skill, a skirmisher *may* be promoted into the ranks of the true Muster (a remote, though far more likely promotion than being knighted). Pezetairoi may be anything from weary and frightened local draftees to those impressed by the Imperial Levy to the religiously fanatic followers of House Li Halan.

Journeyman (Private 2nd Class, Velite, Psiloi): Only





provisional members of the Muster, velites are usually light infantry who maintain a frequently nebulous position between that of the serf militia and the true Muster. Usually soldiers with some promise or family members of true guilders, these soldiers haven't yet proved themselves. The psiloi often receive second-rate weapons and armor. Still, they usually receive better food and better training than their serf inferiors. They are frequently placed in a support or feinting position to the heavy infantry; penalties for desertion are, if anything, more draconian than those levied against deserting serfs. If there are no skirmishers available (i.e. if they have already been wiped out), the psiloi get the worst duties, such as KP, laying wire, bagging bodies and detecting mines.

Associate (Private 1st Class, Hoplite): Also sometimes called "hypaspists" or "cardaces," the hoplites are heavy infantry and the backbone of any Muster army. Rigorously trained and indoctrinated in Muster philosophy, the hoplites receive the best of everything that conditions allow. As with all true Muster, it is assumed that if they were not competent, they would not be there. These heavily armed privates may be anything from the rawest recruits to grizzled old veterans. Old war-horses who have somehow not gone beyond the rank of private are often cynical. Such soldiers are possibly lazy or have offended someone higher up in the

chain of command. It is not uncommon to meet "paper generals" at this level, soldiers who believe they are master tacticians, but who somehow never manage to go beyond the rank of private. Still, a veteran hoplite is usually the best person to be near when the flack starts flying.

Associate/Taskmaster (Corporal, Capo de Squadra): Usually the most competent and go-getting (or underhanded and ass-kissing) associates will draw a taskmaster assignment and act as the sergeant's right hand. The position of taskmaster is, as the name implies, a temporary lead position. In theory, a given assignment will end and the associate will go back to his old position, there to wait his next assignment or possible promotion to chief. In reality, however, a given commander will usually find a favorite assistant and that person will serve as semi-permanent corporal for the squad, holding power almost solely at the chief's discretion.

Chief (Sergeant): Soldiers who show true initiative may eventually work their way up through the ranks and take control of an entire squadron. Derived from the old Urthish word "serviens," or servant, a sergeant may be anything from a favored servant in a noble house (militarily one rank below that of knight) or the highest non-officer rank in the Muster. As a rule, sergeant is the highest a Muster soldier can expect to climb without connections or a stint at one of



the Muster's military colleges. In fact, there are several ranks of sergeant, including master sergeant, which is a temporary or semi-permanent taskmaster position. Sergeants are the most hands-on commanders in the Muster hierarchy and responsible for both training and leading the soldiers under their command.

Manager (Lieutenant): The lieutenant, or literally "place holder," is a minor officer who takes command when a superior officer is absent. Lieutenants have usually been through formal officers training at either the Vercingetorix Military Academy on Bannockburn or the Jarod Amad College of War on Leagueheim. A popular stereotype of the lieutenant (as popularized by Lieutenant Maximer in "The Ballad of the Lost Muster") is that of a coward who has somehow bought, rather than earned, his reputation. Although this portrayal is little more than a popular caricature, the few exceptions where this does happen serve to enforce the stereotype. The manager position in the Muster military usually, but not always, requires literacy as a minimum requirement. The lieutenant is also the paymaster for a given company and, as such, may be the most popular or unpopular (in the case of corruption or delayed payments) person in the platoon.

Director (Captain): In charge of an entire company, those who make captain in the Muster are either very competent or well-connected. Military directors are fully expected to be well versed in military tactics and there are usually a few in attendance as attaches at general war councils. Being a captain in the Muster is usually a lifetime career-track position and often a hereditary one. In some cases a given Muster company may pass from father to son (or mother to daughter) for generations.

Consul (Major): A powerful position and often one laden with political intrigue, a consul has control over a full Muster battalion. In some cases, this may be all of the guild's military assets on a given world! (Though this is a role also frequently taken by the guild dean.) In any event, the major is the dean's right hand and bears far more pressure and responsibility than almost any other position. In all but the largest planetary engagements, the consul is the superior officer of note and bears ultimate responsibility for the campaign's success or failure. It is little coincidence that the rate of suicide for majors is higher than any other rank.

Dean (Colonel): At this level, the guild's power puts her on a near equal footing with the highest nobles. Most of the guild's deans live on Bannockburn or Leagueheim, rarely taking the field, though this shouldn't fool opponents into thinking they are nothing but a bunch of desk jockeys. One doesn't reach this auspicious rank without extensive field experience, and tactical and political expertise. Other colonels are located every few planets or so. When they move their troops it is as military giants, commanding truly awe-

some powers. The deans deal with the Church and nobility at the highest levels.

Dean/Taskmaster (General): Every so often a dean may take on a taskmaster position for a given campaign, acquiring the role of general for the duration of the operation. A dean in this position controls the largest Muster military units except for the Janizary. This rank is temporary, honorary and may be withdrawn by the Muster High Command at any time. The position is highly political and gives the dean an almost unprecedented amount of power in the field, roughly analogous to that of the highest nobles. This position was last held during the Emperor War by Dean Halostro Sekimen, the guild's current Janizary. Before that, the last general was appointed at the turn of the 50th-century and the outbreak of the Symbiot War.

Army Hierarchical Chart

As is the case with rank, the size, make-up and organization of military units within the Muster (and, indeed, among the nobility) takes its form from ancient pre-Diasporan roots. Mercenary participation in these groups varies, depending on such factors as the general philosophy of the commanding noble, whether it is a time of peace or war (peace time armies tend to have less mercenaries) and by planet and era. As a general rule a larger military unit consists of three or so smaller subordinate groups with auxiliary units attached. None of these unit sizes are standardized throughout the Empire, however, though individual groups may have stricter definitions. Some military units may also carry more "modern" (20th-century) designations such as "battle groups" and "combat arms," though as a rule most prefer the more traditional military configurations.

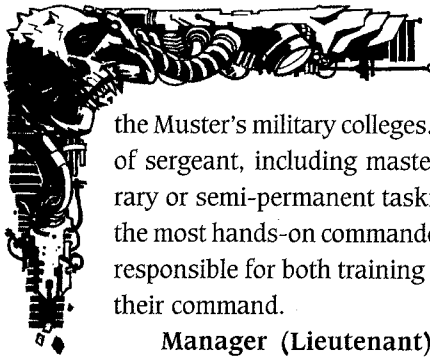
These are not hard and fast rules and likely vary by house, planet or individual mission. After all, a count on Criticorum can depend on far many more troops than a duke on deserted Istakhr or Cadiz. Although the numbers given below are roughly analogous to modern units, the gamemaster should remember that most imperial planets have a significantly smaller population than 20th-century Earth; overall army sizes are correspondingly smaller. Finally, the gamemaster should note that not all military organization throughout the Empire share this hierarchical model. The Empire, for example, uses the legion (approximately 10,000 soldiers) as their largest independent military unit. (See the *Barracks Culture* chapter for noble house standards.)

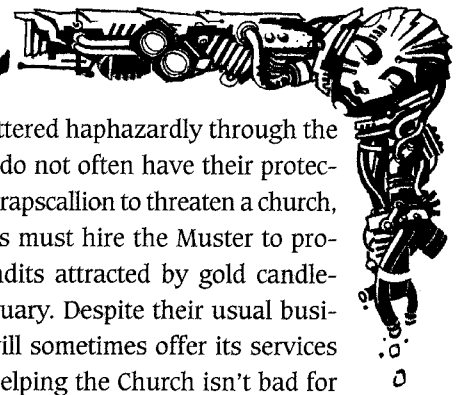
Employers

As the mercenary army of choice in the Empire, there are many who require the Muster's services.

Nobles

Despite widespread antipathy for the Muster among the nobility, they are also the largest customers for its services.





Of the major houses the al-Malik, Decados and Hawkwoods have the most uses for Muster mercenaries. The al-Malik have plenty of money and their own elite guards. These are highly trained, technologically well-equipped (of course) and are bolstered by their fierce Ur-Ukar Dark Legions. Nevertheless, they also have the smallest standing army of all the houses and often conserve their own loyal base by employing Muster and other mercenaries. The Decados have a smaller population base than some of their rivals (two of their planets are practically deserted) and often require mercenaries to advance their schemes. The Hawkwoods have a sizable and well-trained military, but often require Muster and Charioteer mercenaries to guard against the increasingly volatile Vuldrok barbarians.

The remaining two houses (the Hazat and Li Halan) also employ Muster mercenaries from time to time, though less consistently than other houses. The Hazat regard themselves as master tacticians and publicly disdain the use of mercenaries, though they use them nonetheless. Still smarting from perceived Muster betrayals during the siege of Jericho, however, they avoid using them except when absolutely necessary. Of all the noble houses, the Li Halan have the least use for mercenaries. In addition to their religious disdain for those who fight only for money, the Li Halan have literally millions of religious zealots they can call. Still, sometimes even the most inspired of holy warriors need outside training....

The League

Since its initial joining with the League in 4352, the Muster has played the part of big-brother to its fellow guilds, protecting their interests and preserving their autonomy. This does not mean that the guild renders its services or the lives of its members to the other guilds for free, but there is a substantial discount. Often the Muster is happy to take these transactions out in trade, bartering military muscle for other services. The Charioteers may provide escort for Muster ships; the Engineers and Scravers may provide the guild with new weapons technology and so on. In general, it is only the Reeves who usually pay major cash on the barrel head. Guild needs are also somewhat different from those of the nobility. Guilds do not have to raise major armies to take or hold vast geographical territories. Thus, the other guilds usually hire Muster mercenaries as guards or enforcers.

The Church

As with certain houses, the Church disdains the use of mercenaries publicly while hiring them in private. As devout followers of the faith, the Muster knows to be discreet in such instances, but also keeps a close tally of where certain Church bodies are buried. Within the Church, Muster mercenaries are most often used by individual high clergy with political aims (usually Orthodox clergy of the Red Priesthood). Since Brother Battle monks are either concentrated

on the Stigmata Front or scattered haphazardly through the Empire, individual parishes do not often have their protection. It takes the worst sort of rapsallion to threaten a church, but sometimes local parishes must hire the Muster to protect their grounds from bandits attracted by gold candlesticks and the church's reliquary. Despite their usual business instincts, the Muster will sometimes offer its services for free in such instances. Helping the Church isn't bad for business....

Aliens

Alien money is as good as anyone else's. Despite this, the Muster is leery about accepting contracts from aliens unless they can figure out all the angles and any possible political fallout ahead of time. After all, it would not do for the Muster to kill humans at the behest of creatures whose souls distort the Pancreator's light. Still, the guild does occasionally lend its forces to alien causes, usually at a higher premium than they require from their human employers. The Ur-Obun are the most common contractors of Muster strength and usually employ them as escorts for valuable art shipments and the like, or as personal bodyguards. The Obun are aware of the problems involved in such human/alien transactions and usually have the good taste not to make such dealings public. Of the other major alien races, the Ur-Ukar and the Vorox are far more likely to work for the Muster (which is infrequent) than to hire its services. It is unknown whether the Vau have ever stooped to hiring the guild.

Barbarians

Officially the Muster would never hire its forces for use by either the Kurgan Caliphate or the Vuldrok Star Nation. Such transactions would be viewed suspiciously to say the least and would border on treason. Nevertheless, this hasn't stopped the occasional accusation from rising to the surface. The Church, the Imperial Eye and the Hazat have all at different times accused the Muster of playing both ends against the middle in past conflicts with the Kurgans. Meanwhile House Hawkwood has questioned Muster contacts with Vuldrok chieftains in the Gwynneth system where Hawkwood, Bannockburn and barbarian interests intersect. The guild has vociferously denied any such charges and so far its accusers have forwarded little substantive proof.

Freelancers

Kyle Winters had done questionable things in his life; working for the Muster, one learned to make compromises. Eventually, however, enough had been enough. One too many bodies burning on the pyre had burned Kyle out as well. He'd tried to forget through drinking and by wandering from planet to planet, but he could never forget his past — until he came here. Among the Gjartins he had at last found a sense of peace and had even dreamed his life of



violence was in the past. That was before the raiders came. They were dressed as bandits, but he could spot a Muster operation a mile away.

Kyle had managed to gather six other warriors who agreed to protect the village for reasons of their own. They had given the raiders a bloody nose, but four of his fellow defenders died in the first wave. He knew that a second attack was not long in coming and this time they'd be carrying serious weaponry.

Nolana, a strange female mercenary who agreed to protect the village, but only if they paid her a bowl of millrice, was out laying traps on the perimeter. Kyle shared the village center with the only other remaining protector — "Master" Lear. Lear's bearing connoted nobility and he did not speak of his reasons for being there. Kyle didn't like him much, but admitted he knew how to fight. Lear fingered his St. Mantius medallion, its chain wrapped so tightly around his fingers it almost cut off his circulation. Kyle nodded wearily at him and chambered his two remaining bullets. Shadows shifted in the nearby woods....

Loners

In a universe as dangerous as that of the Fading Suns, the need for armed protection is at an all-time high. The Muster would like to meet all these needs, but quite frankly it doesn't have the means. As a result, a class of freelance mercenaries have stepped into the void. Freelancers differ from their Muster counterparts in a number of obvious, and some less than obvious, ways. They may be true loners — working as individual gunmen or bounty hunters — following their own code. Others belong to regional guilds, hiring agencies or even small freebooter armies who wander a region or the Empire, looking for a cause in which to fight. If working for the Muster is arduous and dangerous, work as a freelancer can be ten times as hard. Many freelancers have suffered some sort of social or financial dislocation in their lives and many were on the margins of society to begin with. This leaves the freelance profession far more open to aliens than any given house, guild or sect could ever be. Indeed, as fellow outcasts, there is often far more camaraderie between humans and aliens of this class than almost any other strata of society.

As one would expect, freelance mercenaries are a varied group and come to the profession for a wide variety of reasons. Individual motives may include the good, the bad and the very ugly. While simple profit is a common incentive, it is far from the only reason. Some mercenaries practice their craft because of a love of adventure, desire for vengeance or an addiction to the adrenaline rush that comes with putting one's life on the line. Many were formerly soldiers in other groups (the Muster, house companies or the Imperial Levy) and simply can't see returning to their farms.

Others are sadists who revel in the pain they cause and the heady feeling that comes with holding power over someone's life. Still others seek a higher justice and can only fulfill this role by lending their efforts to causes they deem worthy. Such soldiers of fortune may accept pay for their services, but often only enough to cover their expenses. If there is one common code shared by all freelancers, it is that of rendering the service that one is contracted for. While those who betray this sacred code are not, perhaps, as uncommon as most mercenaries would prefer, such activities damage the reputation of the profession as a whole and are discouraged.

Even more than their Muster counterparts, freelance mercenaries must live by their wits and realize that there are no guarantees. It takes a special sort of madness to go it alone and focusing on mere survival takes up much of their careers. This may mean scrounging for food, working odd-jobs between conflicts or taking personally-distasteful assignments. Many mercenaries find that they must compromise their personal code somewhere along the line. Survival also means honing one's fighting skills, whether that means practicing with a sword or performing zero-G maneuvers while traveling between worlds on that tramp starship. As is the case with many Muster mercenaries, freelancers often display a love of weapons gadgetry, a techno-fetishism bordering on the Church sin of technosophy. While mercenaries do not command the scientific mastery of the Engineers, many exhibit a remarkable knack for scavenging parts to customize their guns, jury-rig traps and invent other impromptu instruments of mayhem.

Freelancers and the Muster

The relationship between mercenary freelancers and those of the Muster varies on a case-by-case basis, but is generally strained. As a rule, freelancers get a lot of pressure from the Muster and must be very careful about how they hire themselves out. The Muster does not have the power (militarily or legally) to wipe out all its competitors. Further, since the Muster does not wage war against itself, it has found that a little healthy competition from freelancers is good for business — as long as they don't get too large. Particularly promising adversaries may even receive an invitation to join the guild — if they survive. In general, there are a number of tricks for freelancers to avoid/survive entanglements with the Muster. Most merely keep their heads down and don't get into direct conflict with the guild as a whole (as opposed to fighting a group of them in hired combat).

Investigating the local Muster before taking a job to avoid conflicts of interest is usually a good idea, though looking too deeply allows the guild to track the freelancer's activities as well. Manners of doing this may vary from the obvi-





ous to the very subtle. Because of its secrecy codes and sensitivity to its customers' need for anonymity, the guild usually doesn't release its itinerary to the local town-crier (though this has been known to happen). Thus, uncovering the Muster's military movements in a given area may take some research. Sometimes this is a matter of simply keeping one's ears open. After a military campaign has gained some steam, the average citizenry catches wind of who is fighting whom via the local gossip network. Shop owners sell supplies, farmers see troop movements through their land and so on. Sometimes the Muster itself will spell out its intentions by giving the freelancer a "friendly" warning to leave the area. These warnings may or may not involve broken limbs.

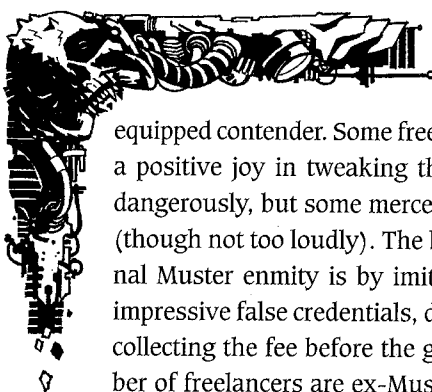
On other occasions the troop movements and hiring status of the guild may be more clandestine. In such cases the freelancer may need to do a little additional digging. Plying a soldier at the local tavern with wine and other bribes is one way of getting such information. Especially susceptible to these methods are the skirmishers who are generally impoverished and often resentful of their employers. The freelancers should bear in mind, however, that information garnered in such a manner is not necessarily correct and very rarely complete. Sometimes more successful freelancers may even take the most direct route and hire a Muster "liaison" to help him avoid such entanglements; the Muster isn't

picky about for whom they work, as long as they have firebirds to spend.

Eventually, however, no matter how careful a freelancer is, she will eventually run afoul of the guild. Dealing with such confrontations in the appropriate manner is indispensable to the freelancer's future occupation and survival. In general, the Muster does not mind freelancers who fight for the other side. Since the Muster doesn't fight itself, it needs worthy foes to swell the enemy ranks. (The Muster is far more upset by freelancers who try to undercut their business by approaching an existing customer.) Although the Muster will do everything in its power to kill its opponents on the field, this is merely a consequence of war and business as usual; there is nothing personal. As long as the freelancers on the other side "play fair" and don't go after the Muster as a whole (as opposed to going after its soldiers in the field), the guild will not hold grudges after the conflict ends; war is a messy business. If, on the other hand, the freelancer builds a reputation as targeting the guild as part of some misguided personal agenda, the Muster will spare little expense in not only killing the offender, but targeting his family, friends, home village or favorite pet.

Usually freelancers deal with possible conflicts of interest with the guild by simply getting out of the way. In nine cases out of 10, this is the recommended course of action, since the guild is almost always the bigger and better-





equipped contender. Some freelancers, however, seem to take a positive joy in tweaking the guild's nose. This is living dangerously, but some mercenaries even live to tell the tale (though not too loudly). The best way of guaranteeing eternal Muster enmity is by imitating its operatives, showing impressive false credentials, doing a job (or botching it) and collecting the fee before the guild is any the wiser. A number of freelancers are ex-Muster, though anyone who quits the Muster and then fights against it deserves what he gets from the guild's point of view. Such unfortunates may be in for extra harsh treatment if they are captured.

Freelance Armies

While many freelance mercenaries travel alone or in small bands, some have formed into larger professional armies that wander the stars. As with individuals, these bands have varied histories and reasons for fighting. The following is a small but representative sample.

The Aragon Martyrs

In a profession as sullied as that of the mercenary, there are few who are commonly accepted as heroes. The Aragon Martyrs, however, are just such an exception. Originally a band of bandits who threatened wayfarers on the roads of East Quechua, the band's leader, Carlos Federico de Sutek (a charismatic brigand with suspected Hazat blood), negotiated a pardon for his band in return for their services during the Emperor Wars. Gaining distinction against Duchess Catherine Hawkwood's elite Jyvässkylä regiments during the Tethys Campaign, the band's greatest glory came when it moved to the Kurgan Front. Reinforcing Baronet Teikorc Hazat's hard pressed soldiers against the Kurgan pagans, the former bandits sacrificed themselves to the last man in the defense of Fort Omala, buying House Hazat the time to prevent the Kurgan Caliphate from flooding into the Known Worlds. Already popularized in book form, the legend of the Aragon Martyrs has all the preferred elements of drama to imperial citizens: bravery, sacrifice, redemption. Carlos Federico's rumored and unrequited love for his former enemy, Duchess Catherine, adds just the right touch of romance and scandal to the mixture.

The Manitou Irregulars

A common-sounding name for a decidedly uncommon band of mercenaries, the Irregulars are a Changed and/or psychic coven based on Manitou. Although little beyond the fact of their existence is known about this band of formidable mercenaries, rumors are commonplace on Manitou and surrounding worlds. Unaffiliated with any house, guild or sect, the psychics are considered dangerous apostates by the Orthodox Church. Despite rumors to the contrary, however, the band has done little to cross either the Church or imperial security. Indeed, some rumor an occasional alliance between them and the Eskatonic Order, though again little

in the way of evidence is available. Others, pointing to the band's planet of origin, believe that they are humans genetically adapted by the Vau for unknown (and probably nefarious) mischief in Human Space. One thing that is known, however, is that the band recently took and executed a job that resulted in the death of a Cadiz noble, earning it the enmity of House Decados. As with other psychic covens, as long as the guild remains on Manitou it can use the Vau's presence as a partial shield for its operations. The coven is known to take assignments off-world, though hiring them is both difficult (one must first find them) and expensive (and not always in terms of mere money). The Irregulars are reputedly sought by the Imperial Eye, the Invisible Path and the Inquisition for different reasons.

The Dispossessed

Perhaps the largest and longest-lasting independent army in the Empire, the Dispossessed's record of victories and defeats reads like a list of the greatest battles in Known Worlds history. An army of masterless ronin who escaped the annihilation of their Chauki masters in the Hazat purge of that royal house, the Dispossessed took on the role of a vagabond army. Disgraced by its inability to protect its original employers, the small army exists to this day, wandering the stars offering its services to the highest bidder, but also maintaining a strict ethical code. In the centuries that have passed since its masters' deaths, the Dispossessed have gone through many incarnations and — if modern military historians are to be believed — has little beyond a passing resemblance to the organization from which it sprang. Nevertheless, the band's current leader, General Maxillo Vargas de Castillo allegedly traces his heritage to the band's founder. Beyond the usual mercenary code of honestly rendering the services for which they have been contracted, the army only lends its services to those whom they perceive as being the victim of aggression in an attack (because of its former masters' betrayal by House Hazat). Observers variously see this code as either hopelessly naive or as a master stroke of public relations.

In addition to its antipathy toward the Hazat, the freebooter army has traded occasionally bad blood with the Muster and the two factions have come to blows on more than one occasion, usually, but not always, during a war. (Current relations with the guild are chilly, but not openly hostile.) The army's fortunes have risen and fallen over the centuries, and the army has even disappeared (some say destroyed and rebuilt by others cynically using its name) for decades at a time. The army's current strength includes approximately three regiments (about 5,000 men) and about half again that number in support personnel. The army has several ships at its disposal and enjoys a professional escort contract with the Charioteers. The army's recent fortunes have been on the upswing. After it served on the Stigmata



Front during the Emperor War, it received a pardon from Emperor Alexius himself for its perceived past transgressions. The army is currently on retainer with House al-Malik and maintains offices and lands on Criticorum, where one more band of soldiers goes almost unnoticed. In the past the Dispossessed have engendered support from sympathetic nobles, clergy and even serfs.

The Nung

These mercenaries from Midian cover their shrewd business dealings under a patina of religious ardor. The technologically-advanced soldiers have most frequently sailed into battle on the side of House Li Halan with hymns to the Pancreator on their lips. Originating from the urban Lyonesse region on Midian during the earliest barbarian raids of the 44th-century, the army served the then-corrupt House Li Halan, reaping rich rewards for its ruthlessness in suppressing peasant unrest. When Cardano Li Halan became saved by the grace of the Pancreator in 4416, however, the Nung swiftly converted to the true faith as well. Since that time the mercenary guild has expanded its sphere of business interests, including lucrative, and somewhat shady, import/export businesses; their influence has extended to Icon, Kish and even faraway Criticorum. While some suspect the holy warriors of less than virtuous activities (including suspected connections to the Scravers and other organized crime ventures), few dare to question them in public. While the tong has served parties beside the Li Halan, they have wisely avoided going against their patron house's interests.

Employers

Some nobles and members of the Church distrust the Muster with its dubious republican sentiments. Others may simply not want the bureaucratic hassle, paper trail or expense of working with a major guild and instead seek out a non-League alternative. While this is sometimes risky (the Muster is notoriously thin-skinned about skills), it is not, technically, against the law in most areas. If a noble decides to hire outside the League, well, it is the nobles who make the law. Of course, you get what you pay for. Despite the occasional downside to hiring the Muster, their loyalty to their current employer is usually beyond reproach. With other mercenary bands you may or may not be getting what you pay for. There are, for example, stories of brigands who, disguised as freelance mercenary bands, hire themselves out to an employer and then turn on him, robbing or even murdering him. Such highwaymen are not completely uncommon. The Muster is fast to repeat these stories to educate unwary consumers.

Nobles

Since the Muster will not attack its own people, most nobles keep a few of that guild around them if, for no other reason, to preclude the use of Muster mercenaries against

them by their rivals. Nevertheless, many nobles dislike or distrust the guild and, if they need more soldiers than can be provided by their house guard, will often turn to non-guild mercenaries. The quality of these soldiers vary, but many nobles have become quite astute about researching backgrounds. Perhaps the most common reason for hiring freelancers, however, is if the noble has some secret or illicit scheme and doesn't want to involve notable outside parties. The Muster is discreet, but many nobles prefer to prevent future blackmail by keeping them out of the picture. Besides, it is far easier to make an inconvenient freelancer disappear than a Muster mercenary.

League

The Muster usually considers it to be in poor taste for its fellow guilds to hire anyone but approved Muster mercenaries, but then they are free agents and can do as they wish. The Muster realizes that business is business and doesn't object too vigorously, as long as it isn't a common occurrence. Of course, as with noble employers, the other guilds realize that quality varies wildly among freelancers and they cannot count on the usual discount offered by the Muster. Probably the most freelancers are hired by the Scravers, who offer many of the same services as the Muster (bodyguards, enforcers, etc.). The Scravers have an on and off antipathy toward the Muster, and are often on the lookout for talent to induct into their own ranks.

Church

The Church sometimes prefers to hire freelancers over the Muster. Even though all mercenaries are somewhat loathsome in the Church's eyes, the independents don't carry the Republican taint that many clergy associate with the Muster. Occasionally, clergy who wish to perform activities outside of the Church's jurisdiction will choose to hire freelance mercenaries in order to keep their activities secret.

Aliens

Because of their genuine distrust for most human institutions, many aliens are far more likely to hire a freelance mercenary than one from a major guild. The fact that many freelancers happen to *be* aliens only strengthens this equation. Aliens are a natural target for human hatred and their need for protection is great. Of course, only the wealthiest aliens can afford to hire bodyguards on a full-time basis. Aliens may hire either human or alien agents. Both strategies have advantages and drawbacks. Many aliens feel more comfortable among their own kind, and can work more easily with those who share their native language and cultural references. On the other hand, it is always useful to have a few human contacts in a universe where power is so firmly slanted in humanity's favor. An infuriated lynch-mob of human farmers will think twice if they have to go through fellow (armed) humans to get at the accursed aliens. The Ur-Obun and Ur-Ukar have both had occasion to hire non-



guild mercenaries in the past and sometimes use the merc's strength to buttress their position in conflicts with the guilds or nobility. It is at least a popular myth that the Vau have also employed freelance mercenaries to be their eyes and ears throughout the Empire.

Barbarians

A freelance mercenary who works for the Vuldrok or Kurgans is no less a traitor to the Empire than a Muster agent with such connections, but then one freelancer can't tar an entire guild with such an epithet. In past military actions it is known that expatriate mercenaries have gone over to the other side for money or political motives. Those who have survived have disappeared into foreign space and are generally not seen again. Currently neither foreign government openly employs any imperial citizens as soldiers, though it is highly likely that they employ spies. Imperial citizens who pass near barbarian space are generally noted and sometimes investigated by Houses Hawkwood, Hazat, the Imperial Eye or the Inquisition.

Running a Mercenary Drama

The legend of the mercenary is a rich subject for exploration and a popular archetype in fiction. Many players may wish to try their hand at playing a woman who lives solely by her wits and her word. Gamemasters who decide to run an epic that stresses the use of mercenaries, either as player or non-player characters, may wish to keep a number of things in mind. For some gamemasters the sheer scale of the military units listed in this and other chapters may be somewhat daunting. Many gamemasters prefer to run more "intimate" games, long on roleplaying and the more minute challenges of everyday life in the Empire. The complexities of running a major war may seem less than appealing. For starters, such a gamemaster should remember to keep his game as "real world" as possible and remember that the player characters' actions will not occur in a vacuum.

The military units listed here are not controlled *carte blanche* by their commanders, but have political realities with which to contend. A Muster dean who decides to take his division out for a spin against a local lord will find himself fighting not only that noble family, but the Church and maybe his own guild. A gamemaster may also simply decide to put a limitation on how high up in the organization a beginning (in this case Muster) character can start. That way, he can prevent the character from wielding undue influence on the game's military options. Of course, the gamemaster should also be fair in administering this rule. If the highest beginning guild rank available for a player character is that of chief/sergeant, then the gamemaster probably shouldn't let

noble or clerical characters start much higher than a baronet or canon.

On the other side of the equation, a gamemaster and his players may want to pull out all the stops and run a massive space war, ranging over several systems or even the entire Empire. Approaches to this vary, and the players may be anything from small cogs in the proceedings to major political or military players. (Or they may start out the campaign as one and end as the other.) And indeed, as the frontiers of the Empire open, such combat again becomes a great possibility. **Fading Suns** is well equipped to run such major campaigns. In addition to the information on tactics given in this book (see the *Ways of War* chapter), the gamemaster may also wish to reference **Noble Armada** for complete rules on starship combat.

The gamemaster may want to start out slowly, casting the first hints of war to the wind. Mercenary characters who start as local enforcers on a border planet may find themselves hired by mysterious parties, drawing them into plans of whose true scope they have no inkling. As the campaign continues and war breaks out, the characters find themselves in one battle after another with little initial knowledge of the grander strategies or political agendas involved. After all, part of being a mercenary is to be a part of someone else's plans. As the campaign reaches its climax, however, the characters may become more and more in charge of their own destinies.

Sample Outfit

The characters listed below are part of a sample freelance outfit which a gamesmaster can easily integrate into a game. These mercenaries may play the part of allies, rivals or deadly enemies to the player characters, depending on the gamemaster's desires and the player characters' actions. The gamesmaster may decide to merely use the mercenaries as a random encounter, as faceless ciphers across the battlefield from the characters. On the other hand, she may decide to use them as fleshed-out competitors who drop in and out of the epic on a regular basis. Although these NPCs are not Muster mercenaries, most of them have Muster connections and the gamesmaster can use them as Muster soldiers with minor alterations.

Captain Omar Zadillo

Born into an influential 12th-generation Muster family on Criticorum, Omar Zadillo learned the ropes at an early age. Serving as first a private and later a sergeant for both the Hawkwoods and the Hazat during the Emperor Wars, Zadillo earned distinction for his bravery and leadership abilities. In fact, his superiors saw him as a born leader. Through both his own talents and friendly family connections, Omar seemed destined to go far. Accepted into the Vercingetorix Military Academy, Zadillo excelled at his les-





sons, mastering both personal combat and tactical knowledge. Returning to the war, his star rose even faster than before and he soon held the rank of captain. There seemed to be little that could stop the cocky young officer, until he exhibited a major weakness for a Muster commander — a conscience.

The Tethys village was rumored to be a staging ground for Hawkwood partisans, but when Zadio and his battalion arrived they found nothing but women, children and the elderly. Ordered to proceed with the extermination, Captain Zadio balked and ordered his men to withdraw. Troubled by this decision, Omar's lieutenant took command, ordering his men to commence the slaughter and to imprison Zadio. After the battle, Muster justice ran swiftly; a panel of vigil judges sentenced the disgraced captain to 100 lashes and life imprisonment. Zadio was not without his supporters, however, and with the right bribes his life imprisonment was commuted to a decade of slavery in a Bannockburn mining colony. After 10 years, a tougher, angrier and more jaded Omar Zadio emerged from his confinement. His former status as a freeman was restored, allowing him to travel and regain something of his former life as a mercenary. Still tenuously clinging to the ideals that got him imprisoned, "Captain" Zadio nevertheless has a burning hatred for his former guild and surreptitiously damages them wherever possible.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Freeman (formerly a Muster captain)

Quote: "I'll give you a fair warning, friend; stay out of our way and you won't get hurt."

Description: Omar is a dusky, brown-skinned man in his mid-30s. Thin and wiry, the years he spent in captivity have etched themselves into his finely-lined face and he looks old for his age. Omar has long black hair, balding on top, and a neatly trimmed pointed beard. The former captain fa-

vors a paramilitary look and often wears well-made leather jackets and yellow sniper glasses.

Behavior: Ruthless when necessary, Omar nevertheless displays a code of honor and a certain quiet dignity. He is wisely quiet about his grudge with the Muster, but sometimes this bad blood shows through. As the leader of his mercenary band, he takes care of own people and provides for their needs.

Body: Strength 6, Dexterity 7, Endurance 8

Mind: Wits 6, Perception 6, Tech 4

Spirit: Extrovert 4, Introvert 4, Passion 3, Calm 5, Faith 4, Ego 5

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

Learned skills: Archery 4, Beast Lore 3, Bureaucracy 4, Disguise 2, Drive Landcraft 5, Empathy 4, Gambling 3, Inquiry 2, Knavery 2, Lockpicking 3, Read Urthish, Remedy 4, Tech Redemption (Mech) 3, Ride 5, Search 5, Leadership 8, Spacesuit, Speak Kurgan, Speak Vuldrok, Streetwise 4, Survival 7, Throwing 5, Tracking 5, Warfare (Tactics) 6

Blessings: Fast Draw (+1 Init drawing and firing gun in same action)

Curses: Vengeful (-3 Calm around Muster members)

Wyrd: 5

Equipment: Eruptor Blaster Pistol (7d), Scimitar (7d) with Shocker attachment (+3d), jumpgate cross

Martial Arts (Iron Heel): Martial Fist, Martial Kick, Block, Martial Throw

Fencing: Parry, Thrust, Slash, Flat of Blade, Draw & Strike, Disarm, Feint

Armor: Leather Jerkin (4d), Dueling Shield (5/10, 15 hits)

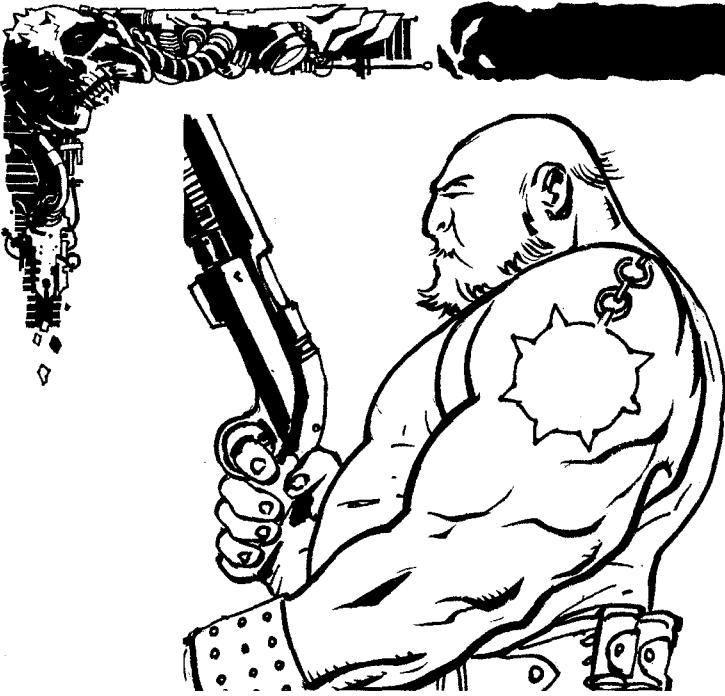
Vitality: -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Billy "Arms" MacNoland

The Vuldrok pirates who attacked the *Hephaestus* over Tantalus were looking for a rumored shipment of pygmalium carried by a noble courier. A slow-running Swellingpug freighter, the *Hephaestus* was outgunned and outmatched by the Vuldrok raider, but fought back desperately, knowing that to surrender was to die. Dispatching the last of the ship's defenders, the pirates tore the ship apart, fruitlessly seeking the non-existent treasure. Instead, all they found was a cargo bay filled with frightened passengers, mostly women and children. Determined to reap at least some benefit from the raid, the Vuldrok commander arranged a clandestine rendezvous with another captain, Red Scott Rakhm of the Chainer ship *L.C. Robards*. The *Robards* was a flying slave colony, dedicated to breaking free people into chattel, and swiftly went about its work.

One of the larger children, however, stood out from the rest. William MacNoland, son of a free merchant, brutalized his fellows and even reported a planned escape by one of the other prisoners. Impressed, the Chainer captain kept the





lad on as a mascot long after the other prisoners had been sold into bondage.

Billy MacNoland took to the slaver's life with gusto, making a small fortune for the guild before gaining full membership. Almost freakishly large and strong, the Chainer took on the nickname "Arms" because of his bulging biceps, and soon worked his way up to the rank of chief, keeping both prisoners and guild subordinates in line through physical intimidation. Unable to go much further up the ladder because of his illiteracy and explosive temper, he eventually became disenchanted with the Muster and yearned for a chance to go it alone. Aware of his desires and unwilling to lose such a valuable whip-hand, Billy's superiors made him a deal. Now, still on the Chainer payroll, MacNoland lives the life of a freelancer and masquerades as an unaffiliated freeman. Traveling around Bannockburn and Hawkwood space, he also disappeared for some time into Vuldrok territory. Most recently the Muster has planted MacNoland in Omar Zadillo's path where he gained the former captain's trust and reports his company's movements to the Chainers.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Freeman (secretly a Muster chief)

Quote: "Injuries reduce sales value. Surrender now and I won't hurt you *too* badly."

Description: Scars and lacerations from a hundred brawls form a jagged patchwork over MacNoland's craggy bald head. His face has a piggish quality which is only slightly ameliorated by a scraggly blonde beard. Strong as a brute and only slightly more intelligent, Billy's muscular frame is also padded with a layer of fat, giving him a decidedly unhealthy look. "Arms" is extremely proud of his great size and strength, and walks with a swaggering gait.

Behavior: Once a Chainer, always a Chainer. William MacNoland reaps not only financial benefits from the slave

trade but enjoyment as well. An opportunistic predator, he is always looking for chances to sell the survivors of his battles to the guild scavengers who never seem far away. MacNoland is both brutal and sadistic. The joy he gains from hurting his prisoners sometimes means he loses money, but he considers the pleasure he gains on such occasions worth the price. He is currently undercover, however, and generally shields his slaver's savagery behind a sullen silence punctuated by bursts of gruff laughter.

Body: Strength 10, Dexterity 7, Endurance 8

Mind: Wits 2, Perception 4, Tech 3

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

Natural skills: Charm 2, Dodge 5, Fight 7, Impress 5, Melee 7, Observe 5, Shoot 7, Sneak 4, Vigor 8

Learned skills: Bureaucracy 2, Drive (Landcraft) 2, Empathy 2, Gambling 3, Inquiry 4, Knavery 3, Remedy 2, Ride 3, Search 4, Spacesuit, Speak Urthish, Speak Vuldrok, Streetwise 6, Survival 6, Torture 4, Tracking 4, Warfare (Tactics) 3

Blessings: Giant (base run = 14 meters), Keen Ears (+2 Per hearing)

Curses: Bluster (-2 Extro when recounting deeds), Callous (-2 Passion when asked for aid), Greedy (-2 Calm when money involved), Homely (-1 Charm)

Wyrd: 5

Equipment: Broadsword (8d), Frap Stick (6d/5d), Hvy Autofeed (5d), Taffy Gun, Squawker, Muster Chains

Martial Arts (Iron Heel): Martial Fist, Block

Fencing: Parry, Thrust, Slash

Armor: Stiffsynth (7d)

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

Kareet'ch-eeet Chi

First scion of the honorable Chi warrior clan of the Chur'reesh region on Grail, Kareet'ch-eeet was the hunt leader and first among equals of the great Thunderhead Tribe. Long allied with Grail's human masters in House Keddah, the Chi clan shared a common bond of honor with the minor house. The same, unfortunately, could not be said of their masters in House Decados. Through unwise alliances House Keddah had become beholden to the Mantis throne. As the Known Worlds succumbed to the war fever during the struggle for Imperial succession, House Keddah, bound by its treaty, was forced into the conflict on the Decados side. Similarly, the Chi family oath of friendship to House Keddah soon saw Kareet'ch-eeet serving as an aerial soldier for the Decados on Malignatius.

Kareet'ch-eeet had never even seen a Decados before, but on the barren ice-world he came to hate them. Serving under the infamous Colonel Koyla Valikov, the honorable Etyri soon came to see the Decados as a symbol of pure evil. Honor bound to serve and moved by conscience to rebel, the





Etyri war leader chose the second option. Making contacts with the Li Halan troops massed nearby, the Etyri lead the Decados into a trap, resulting in the near death of Colonel Valikov. The Li Halan attempt to retake their frozen planet ultimately proved futile, but during the balance of the war Kareet'ch-ee served the house with honor and distinction. During the final years of the war, the Etyri also befriended another victim of Decados cruelty, Nadia Kolishnova (see below). Unfortunately, despite his deeds, Kareet'ch-ee's own people consider him dead. Because of his departure from Grail and his broken vows of service, the once-proud war leader is now without a world and wanders as a masterless knight.

Race: Etyri (Huar'raughq)

Rank/Class: Etyri Knight

Quote: "You fight well for one without wings!"

Description: Standing over 8' high, Kareet'ch-ee Chi is a powerful and imposing figure in any setting. The Etyri displays the dark blue feathers with purple underpinnings that mark most in his family and has a patch of malachite-colored feathers around his neck. When flying, his wingspan exceeds 18' and kicks up a miniature storm when he passes. He wears little clothing on most occasions besides a Keddite medallion inscribed with the swirling thunder and lightning symbol of his tribe, his one keepsake from a world that now denies him. He also wears a belt which holds a slender, jeweled blaster and a sash attached to a scabbard between his wings so he can easily draw his wireblade.

Behavior: In some ways the typical Huar'raughq noble, Kareet'ch-ee Chi is a proud, regal and stoic figure. Often taciturn, he doesn't suffer fools lightly and has little patience for Mokolo and his pranks (see below). Despite this, his wry humor occasionally shines through and he allows his curved beak to form a knowing smile. Having once broken a major oath — and suffering the consequences — he still

holds honor and truth above all things, though he is sophisticated in applying his ethical code and can compromise his word to serve what he sees as the larger good. In combat, he fights honorably with honorable foes and offers quarter to those who ask for it; against dishonorable enemies he is both sly and merciless.

Body: Strength 8, Dexterity 8, Endurance 7

Mind: Wits 7, Perception 10, Tech 4

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

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

Learned skills: Academia 3, Archery 8, Empathy 4, Inquiry 4, Read Urthish, Remedy 4, Search 5, Leadership 5, Speak Etyri, Speak Urthish, Stoic Body 2, Stoic Mind 2, Streetwise 2, Survival 6, Throwing 5, Tracking 7, Warfare (Tactics) 4

Blessings: Handsome (+1 Charm), Just (+2 Passion when righting wrongs), Keen Eyes (+2 Per sight)

Species Traits: Beak (3d), Claws (4d), Flight, Hollow Bones
Wyrd: 7

Equipment: Wireblade (8d), Hvy Revolver (5d), Sacred Scrolls of Mihanoom

Martial Arts (Shaidan): Martial Fist, Martial Kick, Martial Hold, Block, Martial Throw, Claw Fist, Block and Strike

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

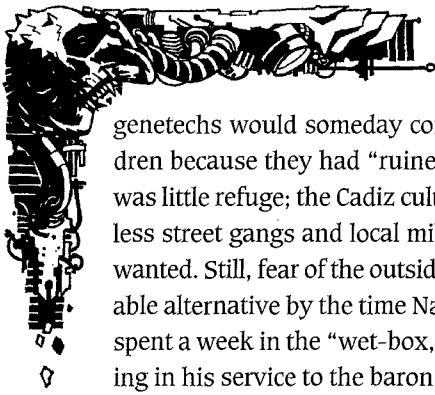
Armor: Assault Shield (5/15, 20 hits)

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

Nadia Kolishnova

Nadia grew up in an angry family in an angry city on an angry world. As a child in the Cadiz slums, violence was all Nadia and her younger brother, Alexei, knew. Father — a burly roustabout for a Decados baron — was a brutal man and ruled the family as a tyrant. Mother was no better and spent her time between bouts of binge drinking and terrifying the "ungrateful brats" with stories of how the Decados





genetechs would someday come to experiment on the children because they had "ruined her life." Outside the family was little refuge; the Cadiz culture of violence spawned ruthless street gangs and local militias who took whatever they wanted. Still, fear of the outside world became the more bearable alternative by the time Nadia turned twelve. Father had spent a week in the "wet-box," punishment for a minor failing in his service to the baron. Of course, the fault really did not lie with the baron (who was within his rights), or even with Mr. Kolishnova. No, it was the children's fault. Father beat Alexei so bad that his head swelled up to twice its normal size; Nadia spent the entire night in her room cradling him in her arms and watching him die. The next morning, as her parents lay sleeping off their last night's binge, Nadia took a sharp kitchen knife and made sure that they followed him.

On her own, Nadia joined a local gang to survive and lost herself in a world of drugs and violent melees with other gangs. She attracted numerous paramours; the last and longest lasting of these was a young Engineer who taught her technological secrets usually forbidden to one of her low birth. When the Engineer died in a barroom brawl, Nadia inherited his laboratory and was able to learn even more on her own. This ended, however, when a Decados press gang drafted her and other gang members into military service during the last years of the Emperor Wars. Nadia found herself on Malignatius where she met Kareet'ch-eeet Chi, who was fighting for the other side. At once fascinated by the avian warrior, Nadia struck up a dangerous and secret across-the-lines-friendship with the Etyri, who rekindled a long forgotten spark of honor and decency in her.

Race: Human

Rank/Class: Escaped Serf

Quote: "Don't kill you? Then convince me. Why do you deserve to live?"

Description: Attractive in a hardened sort of way, Nadia has a mousy quality and wears her black hair in a short-cropped, unadorned fashion. She typically wears whatever clothes are most common for a free woman in a given region and tries to blend into the background as much as possible. Her demeanor is intensely shy and she looks completely harmless until she enters combat. An expert knife thrower and crack shot, she prefers to pick off enemies from the shadows with her sniper rifle.

Behavior: Torn between darkness and light, almost to the point of having a split personality, Nadia Kolishnova is a study in contradictions. She has been badly hurt in the past and for a long time has used this as an excuse to hurt others. Fast living and hard drinking, she can drink even the monstrously large Arms MacNoland under the table. Little caring whether she lives or dies, she seeks oblivion through drugs and battle, hoping that one or the other will end her

suffering. Her friendship with Kareet'ch-eeet Chi, and later with Mokolo, have been her salvation in many ways, but her soul is still tempest-tossed by violent self-loathing urges. She is increasingly tired of a life of running and fighting but, as an escaped and wanted serf, she feels she has few options despite her great skill with machines. Nadia views herself as almost completely outside of human society, and prefers the company of aliens and other outsiders.

Body: Strength 6, Dexterity 8, Endurance 7

Mind: Wits 6, Perception 5, Tech 6

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

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

Learned skills: Disguise 3, Drive Landcraft 2, Empathy 4, Gambling 2, Inquiry 3, Knavery 3, Read Urthish, Tech Redemption (High Tech) 4, Tech Redemption (Mech) 5, Tech Redemption (Volt) 7, Ride 1, Search 5, Speak Urthish, Streetwise 8, Survival 7, Think Machine 2, Xeno-Empathy 3

Blessings: Bold (+2 Passion when others hesitate), Grease Monkey (+2 Tech Redemption skills), Handsome (+1 Charm), Suspicious (+2 Per when rivals about)

Curses: Callous (-2 Passion when asked for aid)

Wyrd: 5

Equipment: Suresnake Whip (4d), Sniper Rifle 8d), Med Autofeed (5d) w/ Sunder Slugs (+1d, halve target's armor dice), boot knife (3d), tools, Selchakah (5 hits), forged papers

Martial Arts (Jox Kai Von): Martial Fist, Martial Kick, Block, Martial Throw

Fencing: Parry, Thrust, Slash

Armor: Leather Jerkin (4d), Energy Shield (5/10, 10 hits)

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

Mokolo Chak Yaga

"Why can't you just try to fit in?" sobbed Mama Yaga, tears welling in her simian eyes. The Criticorum Chak Yagas had Muster connections dating back to the 47th-century and the family had done well by the guild. Mokolo's father, the legendary Fribilo Chak Yaga, had served the Muster as one of its few alien officers, gaining distinction in over 100 battles. But none of that for Mokolo. Oh, no. Mokolo was a "free spirit," a throwback to the family's carefree, irresponsible Bannockburn ancestors. He wanted to be an actor — a buffoon! — and perform before the crowned heads of Delphi and Istakhr. The Muster was not to be so easily deterred, however. The local guild needed Gannoks; their small size, dexterity and technical acumen made them useful indeed. Bowing at last to family pressure, Mokolo joined a unit and underwent weaponeer's training under a Martech freelance Engineer. The experience was an unqualified disaster to all concerned.



It soon became apparent to everyone that Mokolo wasn't cut from the same jib as his father. Belying the popular Gannok stereotype, Mokolo couldn't tell one end of a sonic screwdriver from another and generally mucked up everything mechanical he touched. Similarly, while Mokolo showed an above average aptitude with firearms, his persistent debauchery, laziness and dangerous pranks made him a poor soldier. Not wishing to insult his family (which still had its uses), the Muster did something that it rarely does and discharged Mokolo from service without too many accompanying negative consequences. Mokolo's entire tour of duty lasted less than four months. Unfortunately, so sure was the Muster that Mokolo had no value, they overlooked his greatest gift — a silver tongue that can charm the buttons off a bishop's cassock. Now, seven years later, Mokolo has made quite a profit from his short stay in the Muster. Benefiting from both his contacts and his reputation as an honorably-discharged guildsman, Mokolo has become something of a "taskmaster" for freelance mercenary talent, and currently plays the role of the band's manager and supply master.

Race: Gannok

Rank/Class: Independent alien

Quote: "Sure I can fix your skimmer; I'm a Gannok aren't I? Pay me now and come back in an hour. No, you can't watch..."

Description: Depending on his mood and the impression he is trying to convey, Mokolo wears any number of costumes ranging from rich silks to professional business garb or outlandish theatrical costumes. He may also run naked if he is feeling particularly natural that day or is trying to blend in with the local non-sentient primate population (most humans wouldn't recognize a Gannok if it bit them). When in dangerous situations he frequently favors a dark blue synth silk vest. He has also recently gained access to a blur suit through a grateful contact in the Engineers guild.

Behavior: Although Mokolo does not share most of his species' technological predilections, he is easily con-artist enough to convince the uninitiated that he is a mechanical marvel (he knows all the right buzz words). Despite his disinclination toward technology, Mokolo is a quintessential Gannok in his love for practical jokes. Indeed, even other Gannoks view him with admiration for his skill in this regard; he especially enjoys pranking the overly serious Kareet'ch-eet Chi with whom he vies for Natasha's attention. Although most of these pranks are harmless, they can take on a deadly aspect when directed at enemies. Mokolo is a wheeler-dealer and has a penchant for the finer things



in life (wine, women and song) that borders on decadence.

Body: Strength 4, Dexterity 9, Endurance 6

Mind: Wits 8, Perception 7, Tech 3

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

Natural skills: Charm 7, Dodge 6, Fight 2, Impress 4, Melee 3, Observe 6, Shoot 6, Sneak 7, Vigor 5

Learned skills: Arts (Reed Pipe) 3, Beast Lore 5, Bureaucracy 5, Disguise 2, Empathy 6, Gambling 6, Inquiry 7, Knavery 6, Lockpicking 6, Read Urthish, Search 5, Sleight of Hand 5, Social (Acting) 7, Social (Debate) 5, Speak Gannok, Speak Urthish, Speak Vuldrok, Streetwise 7, Survival 5

Blessing: Long Fingers & Toes (+2 Dex with fine manipulation tasks, most notably pick-pocketing)

Curses: Stench (-2 Extrovert among non-Gannok), Greedy (-2 Calm when money involved)

Species Traits: Agile Toes (feet can operate as hands for manipulative tasks, not combat), Dwarf (base run = 6 meters), Hungry, Immune to Symbiot taints, Omnidigestion, Prehensile Tail (+2 Grab, no fine manipulation), Regeneration (heal 1 Vitality per span)

Wyrd: 5

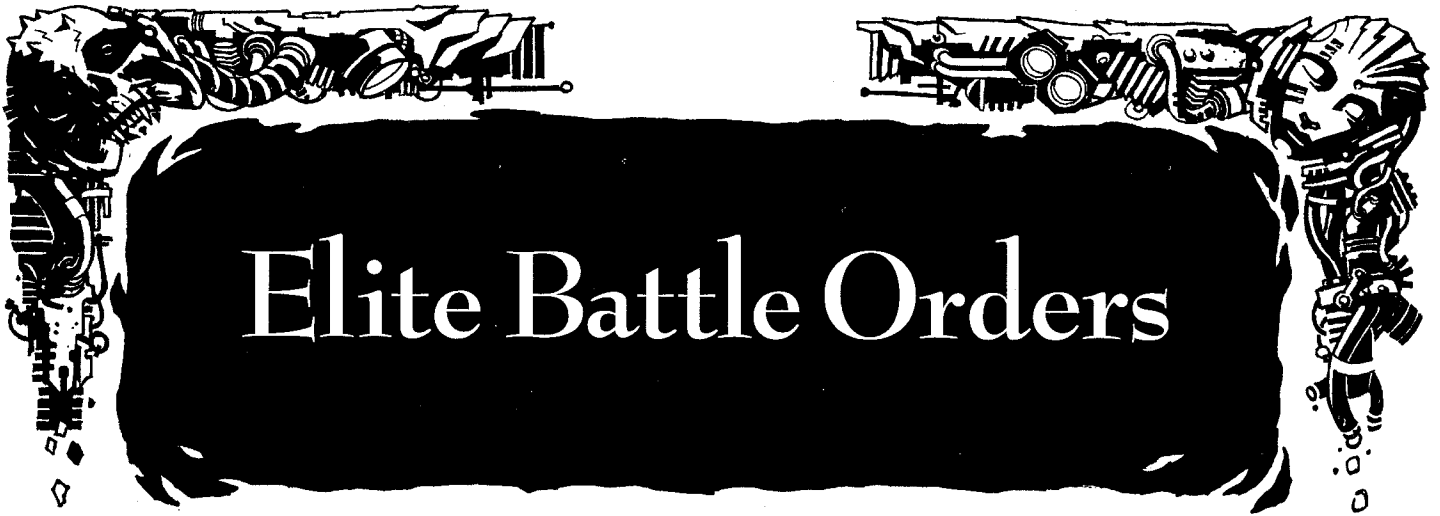
Equipment: Med Revolver (5d), Shield Damper, Thieves' Keys, Scrambler Pad, Blur Suit, marked cards

Armor: Synth silk (4d)

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







Elite Battle Orders

Sister Diana finished pulling her flux sword through one Kurgan's body as she fired her assault laser at a nearby enemy squad. Brother Amestreus had chosen this section for their break through, and break through the Kurgan lines they would. On her right, Brother Selied threw grenades at distant heretics while Sister Tallana threw herself at enemy troops, kicking, punching and throwing them into submission. When the Brother Battle contingent finished sending the Kurgans scurrying, the rest of Amestreus' reserves would follow.

Her flux sword swung faster and faster, its unstoppable energies cleaving bodies in two. Its energies crackled and spit in her grasp, much as it had in the grips of dozens of warriors before her, dating back almost to the founding of the Brother Battle order. Few of these powerful weapons still existed, and having her fellow warrior-monks give her one showed their confidence in her abilities. The ritual, where a dying Brother had passed it on to her, confirmed her place among these elite warriors.

Diana swung her sword at an armored Kurgan charging toward her but jumped back when his curved sword met hers and both turned black. Her eyes widened as she recognized it for a mist sword, an ancient blade that heightened psychic abilities. The Kurgan gestured toward her, and Diana felt as if a sledgehammer had hit her in the chest. He followed up with his own sword, and Diana found herself backing up, desperately parrying all the while.

Quickly looking about for aid, Diana noticed similarly-armored Kurgans engaging Brother Battle knights all across the battlefield. The break through might have to wait. Right now, simple survival was paramount, for the Kurgans had elite warriors of their own....

Crusaders

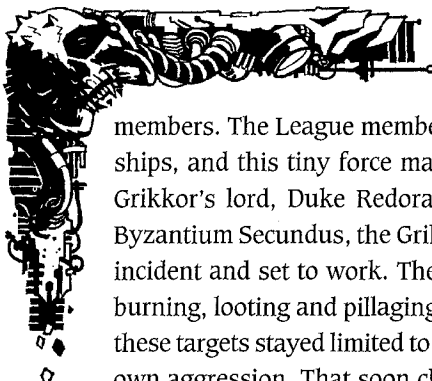
The common view of a Crusader is of a noble knight buoyed by his faith in the Pancreator, supported by his worshipful retainers. The knight charges onto the battlefield on horseback, wielding his sword and blaster, protected by armor, shields, and an unwavering belief in God. Together with several hundred more like himself, the Crusader cuts a wide swath through the heretical hordes, stopping only to save babies from being trampled by Pancreator-less heathens.

In reality, most Crusaders have been less-than-stellar representatives of the nobility. While it does attract the devout, it also attracts the greedy, nobles sent away to keep from embarrassing the family back home, those on the run from enemies, and those who just like to fight. Since so many of them are in it primarily for whatever they can grab, the Crusader reputation tends to suffer during a real crusade. Their acquisitiveness targets friends as well as foes, and allied communities have fallen before their attacks.

Despite the lack of official approval, a number of religious figures have called crusades against specific groups. Their targets have included the Kurga Caliphate, the Vuldrok, the Ur Ukar, and even non-orthodox communities within the Known Worlds. Without the patriarch's sanction, these crusades have amounted to little more than glorified bandit raids, with poorer nobles taking advantage of the opportunity to raid and loot with limited repercussions.

For instance, right at the close of the Emperor Wars, Father Kotick the Poor called for a crusade against several barbarian chieftains of the Grikkor continent on Leminkainen. He recruited about 30 nobles, ranging from knights to barons, their entourages, and several League





members. The League members brought along three spaceships, and this tiny force made its way to the target. With Grikkor's lord, Duke Redoran, off supporting Alexius on Byzantium Secundus, the Grikkor crusaders landed without incident and set to work. They started in outlying villages, burning, looting and pillaging whatever they found. At first these targets stayed limited to barbarian lands noted for their own aggression. That soon changed.

After attacking several small fiefs, the crusaders found themselves in conflict with Chief Ven Hosten, a warlord with ties to both the Vuldrok and Hawkwood. His forces included some artillery pieces, and these howitzers and rocket launchers drove the crusaders back to the fertile Mikkeshire region. Having lost much of their loot in their route, the Crusaders decided to grab what they could before leaving the planet. The Mikkeshire region, however, is not an especially barbarous area. Thus the Crusaders found themselves attacking lands belonging to the five royal houses and even the Church. By the time they left Leminkainen, they had torched hundreds of acres of prime farmland, razed several churches, lost more than half of their force, and found themselves having to flee returning Hawkwood forces.

This has begun to change, however. A number of minor crusades have sprung up on Hira, and while neither the Hazat nor the Church has authorized them, observers feel both groups have given the holy warriors both financial and military assistance. These Crusades generally have small, easily obtainable goals – freeing captured pilgrims, liberating a rumored holy site or recovering some lost relic. They also usually have a set time in which they operate, generally continuing for a season or two before officially dispersing.

The Church has called larger crusades in past, as when the barbarians threatened shortly before Vladimir's time. Then it called for all interested parties to help fight the Godless horde in exchange for conquered lands. The crusaders failed to gain much new ground, though individual knights did very well for themselves. More than a few took home substantial amounts of loot, while others created small fiefs in heathen lands. While some of these new fiefs undoubtedly fell after the crusades dispersed, more than a few maintained their new lands. Some of these planets eventually became part of the Known Worlds, and the crusaders' lands joined those of other recognized houses. Some of these planets have become lost, however, and nobody knows the status of these Crusader kingdoms.

These past crusades provide some idea of what large-scale crusades might be like if the Church called them. Powerful nobles agree to supply troops and then pass the order on down the feudal line. Individual knights, seeking glory, treasure, or even inspired by religious zeal, volunteer themselves and their followers. Merchant guilds, especially the Charioteers and Reeves, get strong-armed into providing

logistical help – though not without compensation. Finally, the Church itself provides monetary support, troops and whatever inspiration it can.

Usually a small coterie of very powerful nobles runs the whole affair, though an especially capable priest might find a place on their council. These lords divide various duties between all the crusaders, and then do the same with whatever rewards might appear. Such alliances often suffer as personalities begin to clash and goals come into conflict. More than one crusade has floundered when the crusaders began fighting each other instead of their ostensible enemies.

One weapon type that has often decided battles is the holy relic. Found as swords and blasters, armor and energy shields, necklaces and circuit boards, holy relics provide definite advantages to their wielders.

The Crusader

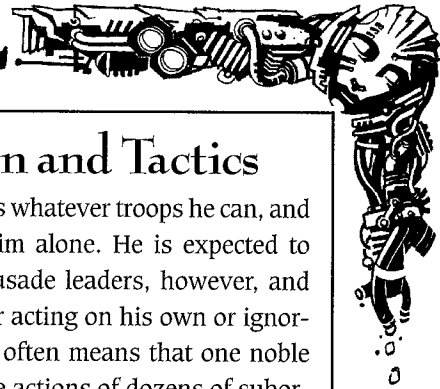
A crusade's weapons and other equipment are a mix of high-tech wonders and low-tech embarrassments. Its leaders might have the best devices money can buy, while many of their followers are lucky to have a rusty pistol. These arsenals also tend to change as the crusade continues. Since these warriors usually have to live off the spoils of their last victory, their weapon mix quickly begins to resemble that of their enemies.

In Kurgan lands, this means using the bizarre caliber weapons of the Caliphate. When battling Vuldrok, it means they are as likely to wield axes as swords. It also means that they start wearing their enemy's armor, coloring it as best they can so their allies do not mistake them for enemies. By the end of a crusade, the crusaders usually come back wielding anything but what they started with.

Their entourages usually end up much the same way. Most crusades have begun with their participants better equipped with religious fervor than with the heavy weapons necessary to win a protracted war. While surprise and numbers often lead to early successes, they soon find themselves up against well-armed foes within a short period of time. After suffering a few defeats from better-equipped forces, the Crusaders usually wise up and obtain heavier equipment of their own, either having it shipped in or stealing it from the enemy.

The Crusaders have usually enjoyed early advantages in vehicles, armor and troops, while lacking artillery, support troops and good supply lines. Experience teaches them what it is they need, but that does not mean they can always acquire it. A crusade with the full backing of the Church or a Royal House, however, would not have these problems. While the crusade would still center on the equipment the crusaders bring, its sponsor would supply everything else they need. Still, the sponsor might want to keep tight control over its possessions.





Future Crusades

That members of House Hawkwood want a crusade against the Vuldrok Star Nations and the Hazat want one against the Kurgan Caliphate comes as a shock to no one. The Hazat have sent missionary teams into parts of Hira to pave the way for just such an eventuality and pay explorers to try and penetrate deeper into Kurgan space. Hazat diplomats regularly petition Church leaders for their support, and Hazat bards often sing of the atrocities perpetrated by the Caliph. Hawkwood nobles have petitioned the Emperor for his support of a crusade as well.

In fact, a number of people believe that the houses have already drawn battle plans for just such an eventuality. Several Hazat lords, led by Baronet Sophia Zoe Eleleth, even announced that they had developed such plans as an exercise for the military academy on Aragon. It required crusaders buy a place in the crusade, with the Church handling the money to pay for supply and mercenaries.

In exchange for this buy-in, the crusaders would have the option to rule parts of Hira as vassals for either the Hazat or the Church. Each crusader would be responsible for his particular fief and be expected to render aid to all other crusaders. The plan came under attack due to the fact that it put numerous Church legions under crusader control. Rumors sprang up that these legions would just serve as cannon fodder while elite Hazat units moved in to conquer areas they softened up.

No such plans seem to exist for a crusade against the Vuldrok, and if one began, it would probably follow the more haphazard form of most crusades. House Hawkwood knows little about the planets beyond its gates, and drawing up concrete battle plans in advance would be very difficult. Of course, considering the Star Nations' own lack of coordination and cooperation, this might not prove so costly.

New Benefice

Crusader (1 pt): While lacking in some of the privileges granted by a Church Charter (see the **Fading Suns Players Companion**, p. 42), recognition as a Crusader does have its own benefits. Aside from the popular respect that generally comes with such a title, a knight gets occasional assistance from Church leaders (as well as occasional aid), a share of any booty (or land!) a crusade garners, and dispensation to kill heretics similar to that granted Brother Battle. The faithful are expected to render all possible help to a crusader, though this is usually limited to free food along the way. Someone with this benefice will also be among the first contacted whenever a new crusade begins.

Creating a Crusader

To create a crusader using the custom creation system (found on page 74 of **Fading Suns** Second Edition rulebook),

Organization and Tactics

Each crusader provides whatever troops he can, and these soldiers report to him alone. He is expected to follow orders from the crusade leaders, however, and may suffer punishment for acting on his own or ignoring their commands. This often means that one noble ends up responsible for the actions of dozens of subordinates and hundreds of their men, with no responsibility due to the other crusade leaders. This unwieldy command structure explains why so many crusades have suffered from poor coordination and bad communication.

Thus, a crusade usually relies on the most basic of tactics: mass assaults, one-on-one duels, and running away. Individual crusaders might prove themselves as skilled tacticians, leading their own followers in feints, diversions and ambushes, but most have lacked that ability. Their one advantage is that they often include a number of theurgists whose special link to the Pancreator provides an element of surprise.

pick a noble house and go through its normal character creation. Tours of duty are similar to those of a Questing Knight, except that instead of an Imperial Charter, the character gets the Crusader benefice, Lore (Heretical Lands) +1, a barbarian language, and Melee +1.

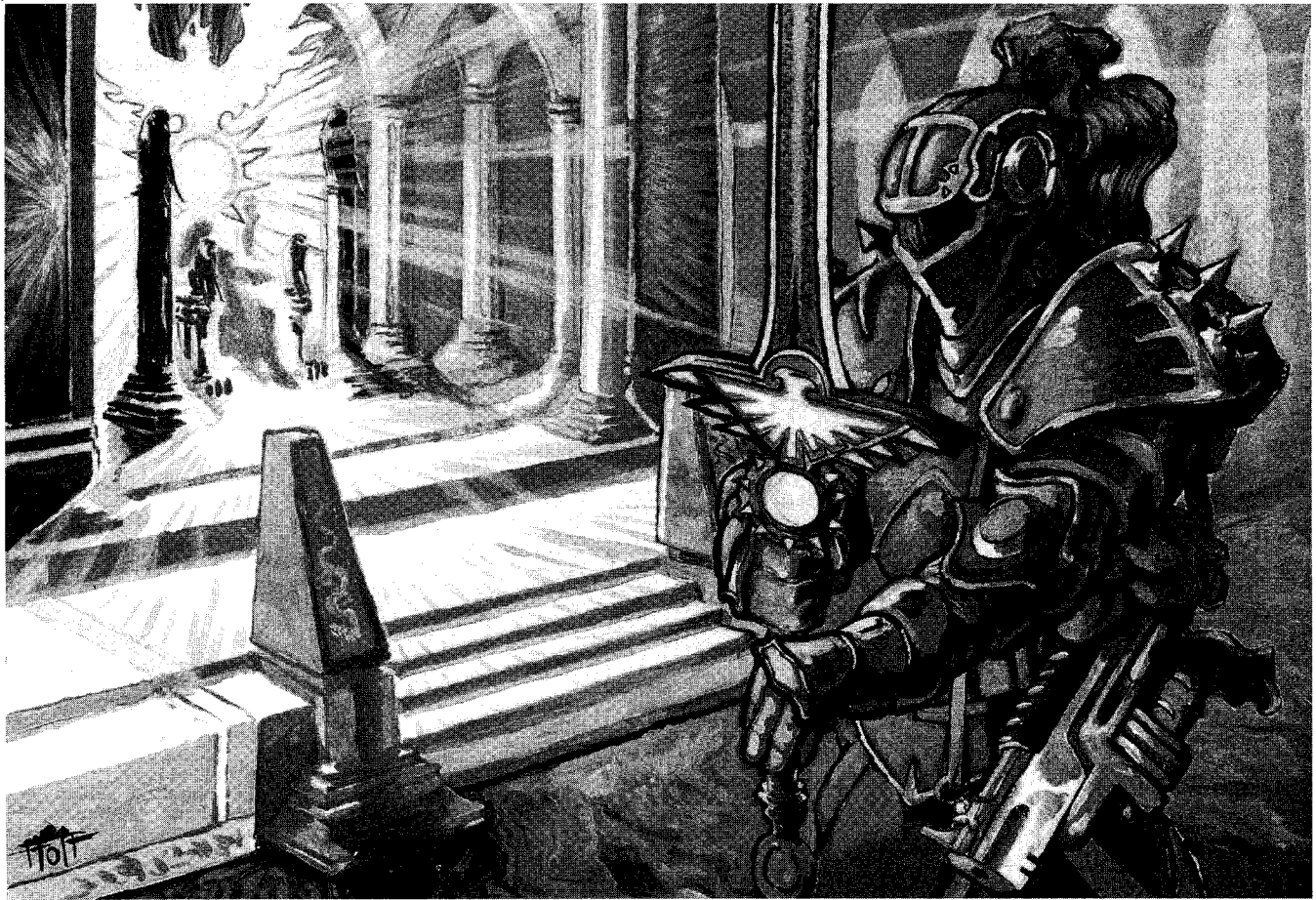
The Phoenix Guard

During the Emperor Wars, Prince Alexius established several units of elite troops much as the other houses did. Rangers scouted, shock troops lead the attacks, cybercorps scared the enemy, and Grimsons handled everything else. These troops proved themselves wherever they fought, and Alexius used the best to take care of problems for which he could not spare larger forces.

They thus became used to landing on unfamiliar worlds, making do with whatever equipment they could scavenge or steal, and giving their lives for their lord whenever necessary. Thus, when Emperor Alexius established the Phoenix Guard, he selected the best of his troops and rewarded them with the most advanced arms and equipment he could. Observers described it as being akin to Vorox in a butcher shop – multiple arms grabbing anything they could. Hardened veterans who had served with Alexius on Stigmata, Byzantium Secundus, Ravenna and a dozen other worlds suited up in ceramsteel armor, turned on battle shields, charged up heavy fusion guns, and tried out psi cloaks, morph suits, and plasma grenades.

Officially, these troops play the role of the Emperor's bodyguards, ensuring his safety and parading around cer-





emotionally. Alexius' enemies, on the other hand, accuse the Emperor of using these troops to enforce his dictums. After all, the Phoenix Guard has access to the best weapons in the empire, and the money to buy more comes from the imperial treasury. Alexius counters that the Phoenix Guard never gets involved in anything that does not involve his safety, but does not explain exactly what that means. No one can deny that the Guards have acted on worlds where Alexius neither was nor would visit soon.

For instance, a platoon of the Phoenix Guard landed on Bannockburn in 4998. It stormed a Scraver warehouse, killing several guildsmen in the process. When the guild complained, Alexius explained that the Guard had tracked down a plot to use Anunnaki relics to threaten his reign. The fact that the Guardsmen seized the relics for their own use did nothing to assuage people's fears.

A better-known incident involved a peasant revolt on Tethys. Alexius' efforts to standardize the bureaucracy (or, as his enemies said, replace old leaders with his stooges) met with fierce resistance there. While much of the reputation of the planet is that of a paper pusher's paradise, the majority of the planet is covered with farmland or forest. When Alexius' supporters came in to replace the villages' headmen and put large portions of the planet under the stewardships of nobles close to him, discontent began stirring.

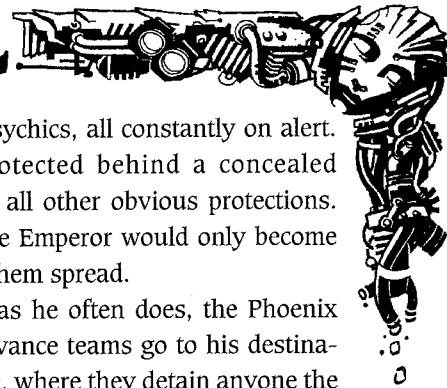
When these new leaders enforced their own customs, collected long-forgotten taxes and interfered with old ways, the discontent exploded on Tethys' main continent.

This happened prior to the final Decados and Hazat defeat at Byzantium Secundus, so Alexius took no chances. Two aegis of the newly-created Phoenix Guard, supported by the Tethys planetary guard and elements of the Imperial Navy, moved in to suppress the upheaval. Key villages disappeared under orbital bombardment. The planetary guard rounded up any suspected rebels, and then the Phoenix Guard moved in. With orders to crush the rebellion before it could spread, they swooped down in the most sophisticated hovercraft available, supported by hover assault craft, pestulator artillery, morphing dive bombers, and more. The rebels, armed with pitchforks, flails and the occasional rifle, had no chance. Within a month, the Phoenix Guard (aided by Imperial Eye operatives) arrested and executed the rebellion's leaders. They also razed every major rebel stronghold that the dreadnoughts missed. Finally, they rounded up many of the serfs in the affected areas and resettled them far from their families and friends. Needless to say, love of the Emperor has not been especially abundant in these parts.

Guardsmen and Equipment

The Phoenix Guard includes elite troops from a wide variety of specialties. While the security officer and the foot





soldier are the best-known types, it also includes expert vehicle crews, artilleryists, engineers, medics, communication specialists and more. Almost all of these soldiers tasted combat during the Emperor Wars, and most survived (and thrived) on multiple battlefields. Now the battles occur less frequently, but the risks still exist.

Their new equipment reduces this risk somewhat. While plastic plate mail or a standard energy shield might have once served them as exceptional protection, now they take the field in powered ceramsteel armor and a battle shield. They have replaced their old slug guns with lasers, blasters and fusion guns. Armored flitters soften up their opponents with missiles and bombs, while deadly accurate artillery provides a rolling barrage mere yards in front of them as they advance. If they still get injured in spite of all this, hoppers can rush to their aid and haul them out of trouble, injecting them with elixir and pain killers all the while.

The average Phoenix Guard foot soldier has an assault laser with wireblade bayonet, an assault shield, powered ceramsteel armor, two plasma grenades, and a squawker. Those on assignment to bodyguard the Emperor, however, carry fusion guns, smart grapplers and expedition medpacks; wear gleaming powered ceramsteel armor and battle shields; and stay in touch through helmet-mounted radios with planet-wide range. They carry a variety of grenades, including plasma, shock, flash and mist types. They can also draw on unlimited budgets for any other equipment they like.

Rumors abound as to where these stockpiles of equipment came from. While the regents always had elite bodyguards, they rarely had more than 100 or so. Somehow Alexius has managed to equip several thousand, and the troops say that he has enough equipment stockpiled to outfit several thousand more. Where these stockpiles are is as mysterious as where they might have come from.

Operations

The troops rotate through their duties, though most have their own specialties. Being part of Alexius' personal bodyguard is the penultimate assignment within the Guard, and the 500 on regular duty in the palace have proven their ability and loyalty time and time again. When Alexius sits upon the grand throne in the Imperial Palace, a squad of these troops stands guard around the room, with two officers positioned right by the throne. Two more squads maintain vigil right outside the doors of the throne room, and several more squads hold key positions throughout the palace or walk constant patrols. Hundreds of regular Imperial troops also stay in the palace at all times, and together these troops provide an obvious deterrent to trouble.

They are not Alexius' main defense, however. Hidden throughout the palace are highly trained Guards with energy detectors, personal radar units, poison sensors, explo-

sives readers and trained psychics, all constantly on alert. Alexius himself stays protected behind a concealed battleshield, but he refuses all other obvious protections. After all, signs of fear in the Emperor would only become magnified as stories about them spread.

When Alexius travels, as he often does, the Phoenix Guard travels with him. Advance teams go to his destination up to a week in advance, where they detain anyone the Imperial Eye has identified as a threat. They also study any location where the Emperor might be vulnerable, like courtyards where he gives speeches and forests where the might hunt. After Alexius arrives, they join with local police to provide perimeter defense, watch anyone who prepares his food, and examine those who hope to approach him. His vehicles undergo minute scrutiny and every room he enters goes through a discrete examination first.

While these precautions rarely expose threats to the Emperor, they have come across innumerable other situations that required their attention. The Phoenix Guard has found itself dealing with counterfeiterers, corrupt officials, dissident nobles, bizarre theurgists, smugglers and more. While the Emperor's protectors do not really have any authority beyond guarding his person, he has also charged them with safeguarding the Empire. As a result, they find themselves taking the law into their own hands on an almost-regular basis.

This also means that they take on more duties than just bodyguard work. When necessary, they can handle crowd control, riots, rebellions, hostage rescues, and full military operations. This is especially amazing considering how few of them are usually involved in an operation.

Organization

The main unit of the Phoenix Guard is the fireteam, a group of four-to-six highly trained individuals capable of any assignment. While individual members of the team might be highly specialized, experts in only a few areas, the team as a whole needs to be ready for any eventuality. Combat adepts, demolition experts, reconnaissance specialists, bodyguards, medics, drivers and even diplomats all have a place in a fireteam. Many members of the Guard served in other armed forces before joining up, often as NCOs or even officers. As a result, most have leadership experience as well as their combat skills.

The fireteam handles most of the Guard's dirty work. Guard leaders expect a single fireteam to be able to pacify a village, train hundreds of inexperienced troops, safeguard visiting dignitaries, rescue hostages, raid a military installation, or anything else they might get called on to do. They often operate far from other Guard units, and due to their experience, receive a great deal of autonomy in handling their assignments. They have also worked with various



Questing Knights in defeating more difficult threats to the Emperor and Empire.

Above the fireteam is the platoon, and Alexius has said on several occasions that one platoon is more than enough to handle any situation. A platoon generally includes 10 fireteams, and has some artillery and vehicle support. Almost all platoons have nobles as leaders, but these nobles have at least as much combat experience as do their troops. These leaders like to joke that their platoons have the firepower to level small cities.

Ten platoons combine into one Aegis, of which the Guard has eight. Five of these are combat Aegis, while the other three mainly provide support functions, though they could easily best almost any other fighting force. The Guard can also call on the Imperial Navy when it needs to, both for transportation and for orbital bombardments.

Byzantium Secundus houses five of these Aegis (three combat and two support), Tethys has two more (one combat and one support), and the last is currently on Stigmata, though some court watchers think Alexius will send it to Leminkainen to deal with the Vuldrok. Of course, just because a unit is based on one of these worlds does not mean it is usually there. Fireteams have found themselves on Ungavorox, Manitou, Kordeth, Pandemonium and other worlds. They have even accompanied Questing Knights to Lost Worlds, though they rarely speak of these travels. Any place that may prove a threat to the Emperor could see a visit.

New Benefice

Phoenix Guardsman (1 pt): In exchange for an absolute pledge of fealty to the Emperor and a willingness to take a blaster shot for him, the character gets access to the best equipment available. Of course, "available" is the key word here. When the character needs a piece of equipment he cannot afford, he can either acquire one through good roleplaying or requisition one. If the gamemaster decides that the equipment is available, the player can requisition it with a Calm + Bureaucracy roll — it can be a very frustrating experience. The character needs to accumulate one success for every hundred firebirds the equipment costs. Note that seduction or Impress rolls can complement this effort.

Creating a Guardsman

To create a guardsman using the character histories system (found on page 74 of *Fading Suns* Second Edition), follow the Muster Streets Apprenticeship and Mercenary Soldier paths before entering the tour of duty. Replace the Associate Rank with the Phoenix Guardsman benefice and Warfare (Tactics) +2. Then use the tours of duties to flesh him out.

Brother Battle

Brother Tactus crouched behind the low wall, surveying the grounds from behind cover. His platoon was taking position around Lord Dimitri's manor home, a stately old building with a beautifully ornate flower garden in the rear. Paths marked by low walls led through the garden to the etched glass rear doors of the mansion. Brother Tactus' team had three members. Brother Brutus hid behind a small mechanical structure nearby. Brother Cicero ducked in a flowerbed. Tactus would explain the weakness of his soft cover position tomorrow. Flowers don't stop bullets.

"A team in place," he whispered into his face mike. A few seconds later, B and C teams acknowledged their readiness as well. Tactus motioned his squad to lower their night vision helmets. "C team, cut the power. A and B teams move to the second check point." Before he could finish the sentence, the mansion fell into darkness. The world lit up around Tactus in the familiar green glow of the night vision gear.

Brother Cicero and Brutus rushed by and took up covering positions behind the columns flanking either side of the mansion's rear doors. Tactus charged forward. With a swift kick, the etched glass became a hundred flying shards bouncing harmlessly off his armor. Tactus rolled forward and came to a firing position behind an iron sculpture. More glass flew around Tactus as Brutus and Cicero sprayed covering fire around him. Tactus's assault laser took out two guards in the upper gallery as his teammates moved forward.

"Rear atrium secure. What's happening up front?"

"Just a sec, brother, almost there."

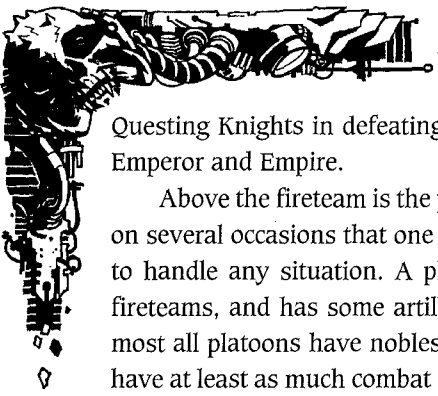
Boooooom! An explosion shook the entire building.

"Front entryway secure, brother. Heading upstairs."

Tactus stood and threw a grapple line onto the upper gallery while his teammates covered the atrium's interior doors. Tactus climbed the rope to the gallery and from there could see the front foyer, as well as the effects of the grenade blast that had taken out the last guard. To his left B team headed north to the master bedroom. A small red dot suddenly appeared on the back of the lead brother's head. Tactus rolled, aimed, and fired to his right. The guard went down and the light from the laser sight danced across the wall. Timing was everything. Tactus walked past the dead guard and found the lord taped into a chair in the guest bedroom. Mission accomplished.

Specialty Units

The Order of the Brothers of Battle is the premiere specialty unit in the Known Worlds. The noble houses attempt to hire the order for any number of critically important tasks. Of course, the Brothers are not the Muster, and they only take those jobs suited to their piety. Still, this places their





members in a number of difficult roles. To deal with this, the brotherhood developed a number of special units and special unit tactics. These special units and their accomplishments make up the majority of the order's notoriety. The rest of it comes from their extraordinary defense of the planet Stigmata. Defense is not something the Brothers are well trained for, but their bravery more than makes up for any lack of knowledge. Today, the Stigmata Garrison has specially trained units to seek out and destroy the remaining Symbiot units on Stigmata while auxiliary units get combat exposure defending the base from the heavier assaults.

Hostage Rescue

Many nobles in the Known Worlds have a relative who owes her life to these specialists. The disparity in wealth between the classes leads desperate men to take desperate actions. Armed rebel teams seize mansions, kidnap children and wives and steal priceless artifacts. The order never refuses when asked to help in these situations.

The order keeps rescue units on virtually every noble-owned planet. The units are small and recruited from oblates with an acolyte or two for leadership. The acolyte organizes the units into teams of two to four soldiers who outfit themselves with a considerable amount of special equipment, including night vision gear, accurate carbines with laser sights, armor and swords.

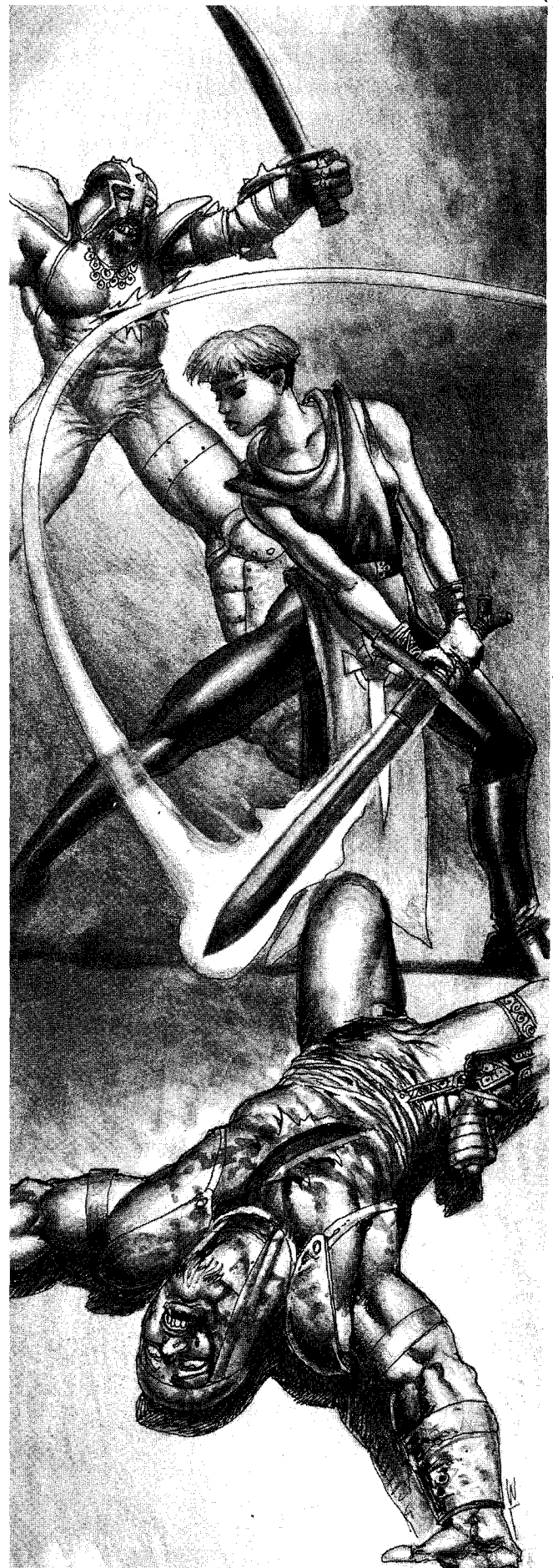
Of course, violence is not their sole tool. Oblates in charge of hostage rescue teams rank among the order's top missionaries. The ability to talk (or guilt) hostage takers into giving up is highly prized. The oblate will study a situation for a while before revealing himself. If he feels negotiation can work, he will try that. Sometimes, just revealing that a Brother Battle team is on the scene is enough to make someone surrender.

Still, the units train together to perfect their timing for those times that require a greater effort. The idea is to have multiple teams converge on heavily-defended areas from multiple directions. Defenders are caught in a crossfire and eliminated. Units also rely on speed to eliminate defenders before any harm can come to the victims. They prefer to work in the darkness where their technology gives them clear advantage.

Scouts/Forward Observers

The order places scouting units in active combat areas for intelligence gathering and forward observation. Their job is to see without being seen. They travel light and fast, and choose equipment which helps them hide or see. A few special units have chameleon armor which allows them to blend into the background and become nearly invisible. (See the **Fading Suns Players Companion**.)

Scouting units train in camouflage and stealth. They learn to move silently without leaving a trace. Some also train in the use of sniper weapons. All learn to call in sup-



port fire like artillery or air strikes. Forward observer units also learn to work closely with the Muster, which supplies most of the order's heavy support.

The order never uses uninitiated members in this role, and only recruits scouts from apprentices and oblates. They work in extremely small teams of one to three, and the casualty and capture rates can be high. A spotted scout is usually a dead scout.

Heavy Assault Units

In every battle, there exist key choke points. Many armies prefer to use specialized units against these heavily-fortified positions. If the cause is right, Brother Battle units are available. The duties of these units range from capturing small, isolated enemy bases to taking out key positions within a broader attack. These troops create the popular image of the order. They are the stockiest, most heavily armed and armored Brothers. They have at their disposal powerful weapons; to complement this arsenal, they contract additional heavy support elements from the Muster.

Brother Battle assault units include personnel from all ranks of the order, including uninitiated auxiliaries. They pack heavy, carrying enough food and ammo to last seven days at all times. Order-owned landing ships drop them behind enemy lines to carry out actions from unexpected directions. They always try to keep heavy support ordinance at the ready. Occasionally Muster light tanks accompany them. However, since these units often work away from traditional supply lines, some tanks have a hard time operating in this manner.

Heavy support ordinance comes in the form of heavy guns, gunships and orbital fire support. Whatever the order does not own itself, it arranges through the Muster. The saying goes "If we can see it brother, it can be killed." The order's tactics are to infiltrate the line from the rear, call in fire support on fixed positions, and overrun everything else.

These units carry a number of specially adapted weapons to help accomplish their task. Portable mortar tubes provide light fire support in a pinch. Hand-launched anti-tank rockets deal with any lightly-armored threats quickly and efficiently. Satchel charges are a nice substitute when the key to the front door is just not available. Radios and laser designators guide in the definitive answer to a sticky problem – long-range fire support. Some units also include theurgists. They may belong to the order or be on loan from the Eskatonics. In any event, they provide the local commander a number of interesting new options to use on the enemy.

Counter Insurgency — Search and Destroy Teams

When the enemy resorts to hit-and-run tactics, the order uses search-and-destroy teams to bring its superior technology and firepower to bear. Rebel uprisings, insurgents,

and some Symbiot units on Stigmata employ hit-and-run tactics to avoid receiving the heavy return fire the order is capable of dishing out. By the time an artillery mission can be called in, these units have disappeared back into the wilderness. Search and destroy teams seek to bring the support fire back into the battle. They go out on wide-ranging scouting missions, looking to attract the attention of enemy units. Once the enemy shows itself, the team calls in fire missions to level the entire area.

Casualty rates are the highest in these units, and experienced brothers tend to avoid duty in them. Thus, they mainly consist of uninitiated auxiliaries with one or two brothers capable of calling in the fire missions. More often than not, the enemy reveals itself through ambushes that take out half the team. In addition, the teams must deal with all kinds of booby traps and mines. The initiated members of the team may have armor to prevent some injury, but many of the auxiliaries lose limbs to well-placed traps. Landers provide immediate medical evacuation for these unfortunates, to prevent lost limbs turning into lost lives.

Normal Units

The remainder of Brothers of Battle form into traditional regiments. The largest number serve on Stigmata defending the planet from the Symbiot hordes. Other regiments post themselves around the Known Worlds at holy sites to protect the pilgrims and the relics they visit. These units receive basic military training and fight in relatively traditional manners.

Escort Duties

Another important duty of the order is the protection and escort of pilgrims on their way to and from the holy sites around the galaxy. Escort duty is a difficult job. The enemy can strike without warning and in sufficient force to overcome any local escort units. Luckily, the reputation of the order precedes it, and few are brave enough to assault anyone with a Brother Battle escort. Here their reputation is not overblown — escorts almost always fight to the death, sure of salvation, and take as many of the enemy with them as possible. The Brothers know they may not save their charges, but aggressors will think twice before attacking again. In addition, the order takes revenge seriously in these cases and spares no resource in tracking down anyone foolish enough to attack their escorts.

While the Brothers are fanatical about this aspect of their duties, they do know that some people hope to take advantage of them. This service is primarily for pilgrims, though the Brothers do provide escorts for other travelers. If a traveler does not forewarn them about threats, however, the order considers resulting losses of life to be that person's fault. The order then sends out Brothers to punish both the traveler and the actual killers.





Defense

The bulk of forces under control of the order are busy defending Stigmata (see the *Hot Spots* chapter). Defense is not the best use of elite forces. However, after the fiasco of the Emperor Wars, the order knows the noble houses can not be trusted with the job. Additionally, the order found service in the Stigmata garrisons to be a reliable way to season its less experienced members. Virtually no one passes the rank of apprentice without serving some time on Stigmata.

The order's traditional toys are not as useful on the defense, but the struggle for Stigmata has lasted long enough for some new developments. The order's problem with being on the defensive is the difficulty of concentrating fire-power at the point of attack without abandoning other possible venues of counterattack. They accomplish this by using terrain and technology to multiply the effectiveness of the individual Brother. This frees up more men and women for a large reserve force and makes the defense more adaptable to the changing conditions of battle.

The order prefers to dig in atop low hills with clear lanes of fire all around. The attacking enemy must cross approaches of up to a mile that lack any natural cover. Meanwhile, the Brothers build up a complete trench system with multiple firing positions per soldier. This gives them the advantage of complete hard cover without exposing themselves to artillery strikes.

To further multiply the effectiveness of the defenders, the order has a number of favored toys. The most loved are wire-controlled, forward-facing mines known as Redemption Mines. They appear to be flat containers, about the size of a sheet of paper folded lengthwise. It contains a flat piece of highly explosive powder with hundreds of small round lead balls embedded in it. The whole thing is arced slightly away from the lead ball side to direct the explosive power outward. A small electrical cap provides the ignition for the device. Defenders run wire from their covered positions down to the end of their fire lanes and connect them to the mines. They then hide the mines behind a little low grass or brush. When the enemy begins its approach up the fire lane, defenders who can view the situation set off the mines just as the attackers reach the kill zone. These devices can kill or maim an entire squad at a time. Well-prepared defenders install row after row of these mines and set them off again and again as the enemy makes its way up the slope. Another interesting trick is to place them inside the forward trench positions to set off should the attackers reach them.

Defenders also place razor wire along the approaches to slow the attacker. Razor wire comes in a lightweight handheld package that deploys into a bundle three meters long and one meter high of incredibly sharp monofilament wire. The small package allows defenders to throw the wire down

immediately following an attacker's preliminary bombardment, which would otherwise destroy the wire. Approaching troops must stop under fire and use explosives or blast-ers to clear paths through the wire before continuing. Symbiots have been known to cast their own bodies onto the wire to provide bridges for their fellow soldiers.

Once the attack is in full swing, the local commander commits the reserves to reinforce areas or even to counter-attack. If the defensive tools are effective enough, the commander may be able to go on the offensive. The counter-attack aims for any place the enemy is weak in order to target its rear areas in an attempt to compromise the attacker's support weapons and supplies. This often forces the attacking force to retire back to its fixed positions of supply. Once there, scouts and forward observers call in strike after strike until the foe is weak enough to be assaulted themselves.

While these tactics prove very effective against most human and alien opponents, the Symbiots have found ways to adapt to them. Prepared positions are really effective against a foe that can appear in the midst of one. Chasing a foe that can disappear into the earth rarely does any good. Even search-and-destroy teams can do little going after someone they cannot see.

This has created a definite rift between the order and the Stigmata Garrison. The order, involved in a holy war to save the faithful, believes no weapon is too extreme. Massive fire bombardments, chemical weapons and even nukes are permissible in their crusade. The Stigmata Garrison, however, hopes to make this planet home (veterans are often promised land in return for multiple tours of duty). While defeating the Symbiots takes priority, Garrison leaders and troops see no reason to destroy the planet in the process. Since the Garrison provides most of the planet's troops, the Brothers usually acquiesce. In battles where the order provides most of the troops, expect surreptitious use of these weapons anyway — after all, powered Adept Robe armor usually protect the Brothers.

Logistics

Logistics are an important concern for any military force; in the last century, the order developed ranks and positions to give logistics administrators the privilege they deserve. The rank of administrator in the order rates just below the local master. She is responsible for seeing to the supplies needed by her chapter and any other local posts. Unlike the noble armies, Brother Battle units rarely stay on the field for extended periods (with the glaring exception of Stigmata). Therefore, an administrator spends most of her time arranging for rare high-tech weapons and equipment. She also needs to route the order's small fleet of space landers to the right places at the right times. After all, the troops in the field get by without a traditional supply line because of the



mobility the landers provide.

The space lander is the core of the order's mobility. This is the most important piece of equipment for any of the teams. Hostage teams rely on them to get on location fast. Scouts use them for insertion and recovery, assault units need them to drop behind lines, and even the search-and-destroy teams save their own lives with them. The landers can also drop supplies when an assault team gets stuck waiting to be relieved beyond their seven days of field supplies.

Still, the administrator's most important duty is the negotiation and sale of services. When Royal Houses need the services of the order, the administrator must negotiate a fair price. She may also use this opportunity to get access to any special equipment that house produces. The administrator prices services based on traditional accounting practices. She must estimate casualties and determine a price for human lives lost. (For the order, the value of a life depends on the cost of recruiting and training a replacement.) She adds in expended fuel, supplies, time, and overhead. If the mission calls for any Muster support, she adds in those costs. For missions like hostage recovery, she must also factor the costs of maintaining the teams at the ready.

While this makes each contract different, the following are some past deals the Order struck:

- Rescuing Baronet Hosung Li Halan from rebels on Rampart. Required a five-person hostage-rescue team, use of a lander, and expenditure of several hundred rounds of ammo in killing 20 rebels and freeing the baron. 795 firebirds (100 per team member, 250 for the lander, and 45 to replace ammo).
- Safeguarding Baroness Tiffanni Kittia Decados on her 18th birthday voyage around the Known Worlds. Required a 10-person escort for a year as well as substantial extra equipment. Also required the services of some of the order's best confessors after the trip, as well as exceptional medical care. 2500 firebirds.
- Assault on feral Vorox camp on Ungavorox. Required entire regiment, heavy Muster support, and theurgical backup. 25,000 firebirds.

Muster Support

While the order collects the best equipment from all over the realm, they do not like to keep much heavy equipment on hand anywhere except De Moley and Stigmata. When a unit foresees the need for heavy fire support (and the assault teams always do!), they call up their local Muster representative. This makes for a tight relationship between the Muster and Brother Battle units. In fact, the two organizations often coordinate training operations.

Heavy Artillery

Artillery support comes in a variety of forms (see *Appendix: War Tech*). Laser designators guide in rounds from

the best-made guns. Spotters adjust fire for the older guns. All regular regiments of the Brother Battle include spotters capable of calling in either kind. Once called for, rounds take anywhere from a few seconds to 30 minutes to arrive. Older guns, which require spotters to adjust, usually shoot smoke rounds initially, in case their initial drift puts them on friendly units. Between radioing in the call to the first fire-for-effect rounds, the process may take two minutes to an hour depending on how far away the artillery is from the mission. Large guns can be more than a 100 kilometers away. Laser-guided rounds eliminate the spot and adjustment delay and bring the first rounds accurately on target.

Other Sources of Support

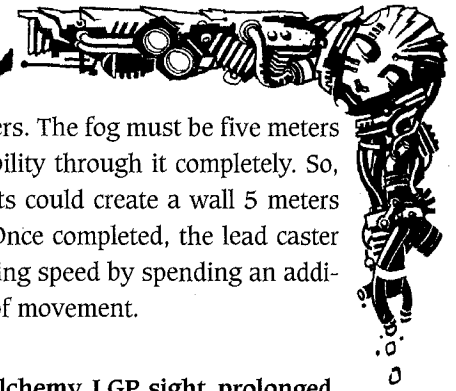
Cruisers and dreadnoughts orbiting above a planet are another source of fire support. Their guns can hit anywhere on the planet within minutes. The effect is similar to very heavy artillery rounds. The Muster sometimes uses ground-support aircraft to drop bombs. Long-range guided missiles are another source of support fire, but the expense of these weapons makes their use almost unheard of except by the Royal Houses.

Large Unit Theurgic Rites

Brother Battle monasteries often train specialists in the rites of theurgy. These specialists work closely with the Eskatonic order to share knowledge and ideas. Some even spend time at Eskatonic monasteries to learn directly from the best. However, the Brother Battle theurgists train for a more powerful use of their special skills. They gain additional power by working in groups. The most skilled theurgist in the group begins the battle rite and additional theurgists focus on the leader and provide her with the Wyrd necessary to accomplish the task. Every theurgist in battle group must know the rite. The result is an occult effect with enough power, range and area to have a significant effect on a battlefield.

There are some slight differences in group rites than in individual rites. All theurgists participating in a rite must have the sufficient skill level for it. The Wyrd cost listed is the total cost that must be paid. The theurgists may divide the cost amongst themselves in any way so long as each one in the rite spends at least one point towards the total. Finally, after the Wyrd cost, Battle Rites also list the number of theurgists required for the rite and the time it takes to summon the effect in turns. Example: (Level 9, Passion + Impress, LGP, 10W, 3P, 5T). This level nine rite requires that three theurgists spend 10 Wyrd and five turns.





Guiding Hand of Zakhayelos

(Level 2, Extrovert + Observe, LGP, sight, 3W, 2P, 1T)

Two theurgists within sight of an artillery unit can use this rite to give the shells the equivalent accuracy of laser-guided rounds. The theurgists gain the ability to see from the perspective of the shell and can guide it accurately to the intended target without wasting time adjusting or even rolling to hit, though the theurgists must still roll for a successful rite. The rite can guide any number of shells as long as they all have the same target. A spotter must maintain view of the target and radio contact with the theurgist during the rite. The referee should use discretion with this rite. The players may not guide rounds through windows or into trenches. However, they can explode on a building's roof or directly above a trench. The targets should be the sort of large targets a spotter would chose for a normal fire mission.

Haze

(Level 3, Passion + Impress, LGP, sight, prolonged, 5W, 2P, 2T)

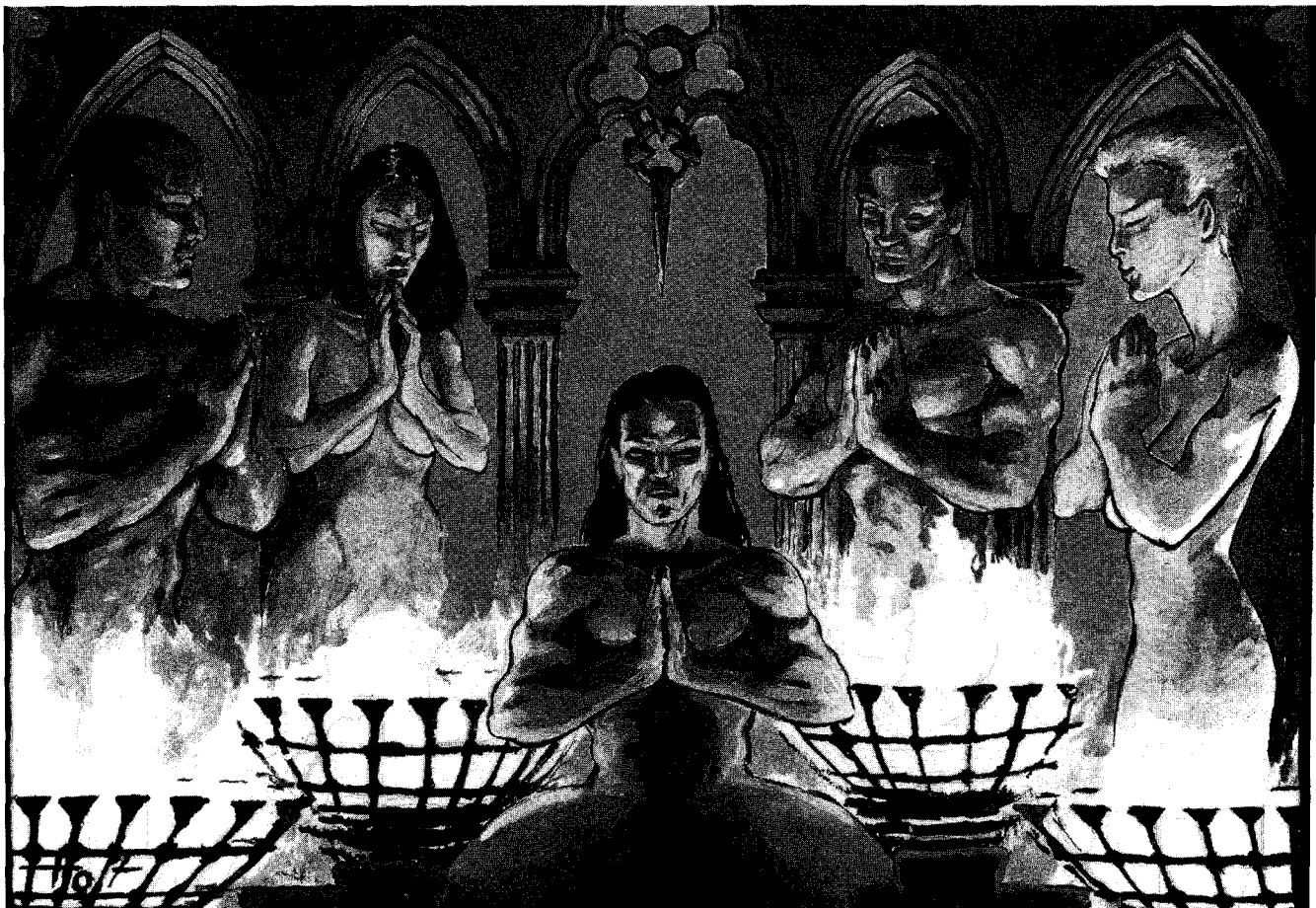
This rite simply causes a haze or fog to descend on the battlefield. The haze reduces visibility to five meters. Two theurgists create a bank of fog of 250 square meters. Each additional theurgist and point of Wyrd can extend the area

of effect by 100 square meters. The fog must be five meters thick in order to block visibility through it completely. So, for example, three theurgists could create a wall 5 meters thick and 70 meters long. Once completed, the lead caster may move the haze at walking speed by spending an additional Wyrd point per turn of movement.

Flood

(Level 6, Extrovert + Alchemy, LGP, sight, prolonged, 7W, 4P, 5T)

This rite creates a localized flood of water in any semi-enclosed structure. The rite can fill a pillbox or bunker with water. Used on trenches, the rite renders a small length of the trench unusable by air-breathing creatures. The rite works by siphoning any nearby water from the ground and concentrating it in one specific area. Therefore, the rite is useless in desert areas. (The referee can choose to charge double instead if there is a water source within 16 kilometers.) However, any planet with flora has sufficient water for this. It concentrates an area of water equal to 27 cubic meters. Each additional theurgist and Wyrd point can increase the volume by 10 cubic meters. For example, five theurgists could fill a section of a trench nine meters long if the trench was two meters deep and two meters wide. ($2 \times 2 \times 9 < 27+10$)





Weird Forces

There are innumerable oddities in the Known Worlds and some of them are soldiers. Tactical expectations are thrown off when an enemy fields a strange unit — without proper intelligence of enemy secrets, no one can possibly plan against a surprise legion of Changed mutants. Strange troops like these are rare but often turn the tides of battles due to their shock value. Since peasant soldiers are a superstitious lot taught from birth to fear mutants and aliens, they don't tend to fight well against them. However, if the existence of such units is known ahead of a battle, propaganda and hate speech can often inflame soldiers into a "mutie" killing frenzy.

The risks to these troops include poor treatment if captured as prisoners of war — they are often tortured simply for revenge and too often executed for fear that they might escape to rejoin their ranks. Since they are second-class citizens in the first place, they have little recourse to bring charges of war crimes against their captors. The main judicial authority of such matters, the Church, doesn't stretch its neck out for abominations. A small group of Amaltheans and liberal Orthodox priests, however, has begun an outreach program, trying to convince noble lords to enforce anti-abuse rulings for all P.O.W.s, regardless of race or background.

Among the number of oddities trained for war are:

The Misfits Guild

While existence of these genetically-engineered beings is usually hidden, they are occasionally caught and brought to the authorities to answer for their tainted genes. Some are offered the chance to join the army rather than face Church trial and imprisonment. Not all of these make good soldiers — mutant powers are no guarantor of combat mettle. Indeed, the sheer variety of powers makes them a tactical conundrum — if there were only an entire squad of tentacle-wielding Changed, they may be put to good tactical use, but when each comes with its own unique ability, it's hard to find a place for them.

Putting aside exceptions like the Grimsons — bred before and during the Emperor Wars for battlefield use — the question of how to field Changed soldiers has baffled most lords, and they usually wind up hiring eccentric tacticians from the Misfits guild, a small guild that specializes in marketing the abilities of the Changed to elite customers. Whether it be as combatants or bedmates, the Changed members of this secret guild service the exotic needs of their clientele. They are paid not only for their unique abilities but to keep their mouths shut — the last thing a respected duke wants is word of his bizarre tastes getting to the Inquisition's ears.

Similar to the likewise incognito Slayers guild, Misfit

jobs are handled by a procurer. Procurers are not themselves Changed; this allows them to move more easily in non-Changed society, a necessity when negotiating contracts. They take the lion's share of money for a deal, and dole the rest out to the members involved in the job — it's still a better living than most Changed can hope for otherwise. Procurers usually specialize in certain tasks: entertainment, burglary, combat units, and even the finding of new recruits — they must discover the Changed before the Inquisition does.

Mongrel Squads

Some procurers specialize in military units, and spend time molding a rag-tag group of freaks into a cohesive unit where each member's power adds to the whole. Such a cadre is known as a Mongrel Squad.

A Mongrel Squad leader becomes both parent and taskmaster to his unit. After enough training, most Changed lucky enough to have such a master wonder how they survived before without their new tightknit family and its caring but disciplined leader. While a squad leader rarely accompanies her teams into the field, instead coordinating efforts from a distance, she earns fierce loyalty from her band if for no other reason than that she champions their rights before nobles, guilds and priests. Although she keeps a major cut of their earnings, she also provides for them like no one has before.

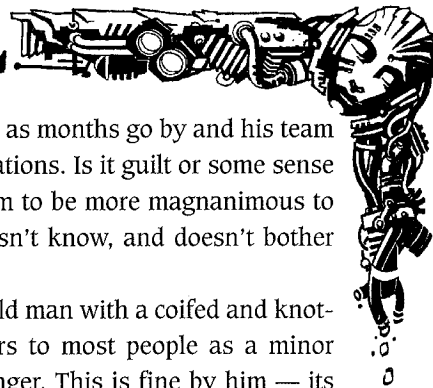
Mongrel Squads develop specialties, such as search-and-destroy, rescue, infiltration, intelligence, scouting or assault. A squad leader negotiates with a military commander about the squad's contract, ensures that proper equipment is provided, and is ever on the lookout for Inquisitors.

This particular Mongrel Squad was brought together and trained by Adolphus Shmel, a low-level guildsman from Byzantium Secundus's Authority guild. He quit his position (or was fired, his squad isn't sure) after using his contacts to track down some of that world's Changed, those who weren't known to the Church. These wretched few were eking out livings in slums, using their powers when possible, but ever wary about getting caught. Adolphus taught them to be proud of their heritage and assured them that they could make a rich living by using their abilities for hire.

The group, at first distrustful of Adolphus and each other, reluctantly agreed, expecting Church sanctions at any minute. When their first job, a minor burglary for a high-level Scraver, went off without a hitch, they all began to hope for the best. Now, after countless operations, they are convinced that the high life is almost theirs — retirement on a remote island of Madoc is in sight. Adolphus assures them this, after a "few more jobs..." of course.

While not every mission was successful, they have each so far resisted capture or serious injury. In the process, they





New Traits for the Changed

The **Fading Suns** Second Edition rulebook did away with first edition rule's Human/Alien set of paired characteristics. Since the Alien trait was used when building Changed characters, we introduce here an alternate system for balancing such characters.

Instead of the Alien trait, Changed characters must purchase a new Occult characteristic called Meta. This gives them no special powers or abilities, but is used to determine the limits of a character's Changed abilities in the same way the Alien trait formerly did. For instance, the Hazardous Breath power requires a character to have Alien +2. Simply change this to read: Meta +2.

A Changed character can begin character creation with his Meta trait equal to 3 for no cost (he can still spend points to increase this during the later stages of character creation). However, in doing so, he must reduce another characteristic that normally begins at 3 to 1. For example, Jarl Grimson reduces his Extrovert characteristic to 1 (even though he originally declared it primary), thus leaving him with both Extrovert and Introvert as secondary traits (both beginning at 1, unless he later spends points to raise them). Alternatively, he could reduce his Tech (or his Wits, or even Strength) to 1.

If a character does not wish to reduce another characteristic, his Meta traits begins at 1 — if he is a Changed character. He must take one of Changed Curses — making him an Inhuman, Animalized, Mutation, Tweaked, Grimson, Metonym or Clone — even if it is worth no points.

Meta can be increased during character creation at the same cost as any Occult characteristic. However, it cannot be increased during play without special gamemaster permission.

have learned to work well together, planning their tactics around each other's powers and skilled fortes.

Their specialty is infiltration — sneaking into someone's mansion or guildhouse to gain information, treasure, or kidnapped heiresses.

Adolphus Shmel — Squad Leader

Adolphus never involves himself in direct operations. He instead contracts work for his secret squad from any number of underworld sources he has. His clients have been nobles, guildsmembers, priests and even Antinomists. He keeps the employer's identity a secret even from his squad, for fear that Inquisitorial torture would easily extract names from them if they were captured.

While Adolphus pockets most of the money, he has got-

ten more and more generous as months go by and his team exceeds all his initial expectations. Is it guilt or some sense of fair play which causes him to be more magnanimous to the squadmembers? He doesn't know, and doesn't bother examining it.

Description: A small bald man with a coifed and knotted beard, Adolphus appears to most people as a minor money-lender or gossip monger. This is fine by him — its the persona he prefers to play when meeting his contacts.

Body: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Endurance 5

Mind: Wits 5, Perception 4, Tech 4

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

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

Learned skills: Etiquette 4, Inquiry 7, Knavery 8, Read Urthish 3, Remedy 3, Social (Leadership) 5, Stoic Mind 2, Streetwise 7, Tech Redemption (Mech) 4, Warfare (Military Tactics) 1, Xeno-Empathy 2

Blessings: Stubborn (+2 Wits to not change one's mind), Thrifty (+2 Wits in money matters)

Wyrd: 3

Weapons: Med Revolver (5d), Palm Laser (3d)

Armor: Synthsilk (4d), Energy Shield (5/10, 10 hits)

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

Eschen Timm — Metonym

The de facto leader of the squad, Eschen can shapechange to mimic nearly any facial or body feature of another person, as long as that person is not significantly taller, shorter, broader or thinner than he. Eschen carries a wide array of disguises and costumes to help him assume any identity required for the mission.

Description: When in his natural form, Eschen is a rather plain-looking man with what nobles might call peasant features: wind-hardened skin, dull eyes and inexpressive mouth. He is of average height and build and prefers dark clothing.

Body: Strength 4, Dexterity 7, Endurance 4

Mind: Wits 5, Perception 8, Tech 3

Spirit: Extrovert 7, Introvert 1, Passion 1, Calm 6, Faith 1, Ego 5

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

Learned skills: Disguise 8, Etiquette 4, Focus 4, Inquiry 6, Knavery 8, Sleight of Hand 3, Social (Acting) 5, Stoic Mind 3, Streetwise 4

Curses: Argumentative (-2 Extrovert in conversations)

Occult: Meta 2

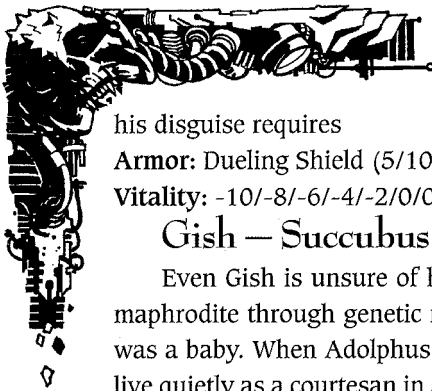
Powers: Transformation (16 goal to mimic another)

Wyrd: 3

Equipment: Whisper Pin radio (hidden in ear)

Weapons: Palm Laser (3d), Knife (3d), whatever weapon





his disguise requires

Armor: Dueling Shield (5/10, 15 hits)

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

Gish — Succubus

Even Gish is unsure of her birth sex — s/he is a hermaphrodite through genetic manipulation done while s/he was a baby. When Adolphus found her, s/he was trying to live quietly as a courtesan in a shantytown near the Byzantine capitol. Raised by a peasant nanny who died when Gish was in her early teens, s/he has few memories of childhood. From what Adolphus has been able to piece together from rumors, Gish was part of a secret Decados experiment to genetically engineer a group of court assassins. The labs that manipulated young Gish were raided and destroyed by the Inquisition, who burned all evidence. Apparently, Gish's nanny was an enslaved peasant who fled with the baby through a sewer system.

While it took some goading to convince Gish to use his/her powers to their fullest despite the Church-influenced admonitions that had been drummed into him/her by the fundamentalist nanny, s/he has taken to them well. S/he is able to separate his/her personal emotions from the seducing s/he often does to guards, nobles and rich bankers.

Description: An incredibly beautiful waif, Gish has been mistaken as a member of either sex — male to those attracted to young boys, and female for those attracted to girls. S/he has trained him/herself to play up either role to fool others.

Body: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Endurance 4

Mind: Wits 7, Perception 7, Tech 3

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

Natural skills: Charm 9, Dodge 4, Fight 4, Impress 5, Observe 7, Sneak 5

Learned skills: Disguise 3, Empathy 7, Etiquette 3, Focus 3, Inquiry 5, Knavery 5, Read Urthish 2, Social (Acting) 4, Streetwise 4

Blessings: Angelic appearance (+3 Charm)

Occult: Meta 4

Powers: Sexual Pheromones (+6 Charm against men and/or women), Trust pheromones (+6 Impress gaining others' trust)

Wyrd: 3

Equipment: Whisper Pin radio (hidden in ear)

Weapons: Palm Laser (3d), Knife (3d)

Armor: Dueling Shield (5/10, 15 hits)

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

Ve zod Clutch — Chameleon Assassin

The most inhuman looking of the squad, Ve zod was found living in the wilds, more at home with animals than humans. He still does not mix well with humans (or sen-

tient aliens), but has come to trust his squadmates, recognizing an outsider affinity with them all. His role is to remain hidden and unseen until he can strike — to silence a guard or kill the squad's target.

Description: Of average height and build, Ve zod's skin is weirdly textured and colored — like veined rubber — when he does not actively try to use his chameleon powers. His cat eyes are unnerving for his new friends to look at for long.

Body: Strength 6, Dexterity 7, Endurance 6

Mind: Wits 4, Perception 6, Tech 2

Spirit: Extrovert 1, Introvert 3, Passion 1, Calm 3, Faith 3, Ego 1

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

Learned skills: Beast Lore 3, Crossbow 4, Drive Landcraft 3, Focus 3, Inquiry 3, Remedy 2, Ride 4, Search 5, Stoic Body 3, Survival 6, Tracking 6

Curses: Secretive (-2 Extrovert around strangers)

Occult: Meta 5

Powers: Chameleon (+3 Sneak when moving, +5 when still, at will), Cat Eyes (see in the dark), Foot Pads (+4 Sneak when moving barefooted)

Wyrd: 4

Equipment: Whisper Pin radio (hidden in ear)

Weapons: Sniper Rifle (8d), Dirk (4d), Garrote (3d)

Armor: Stiffsynth (4d)

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

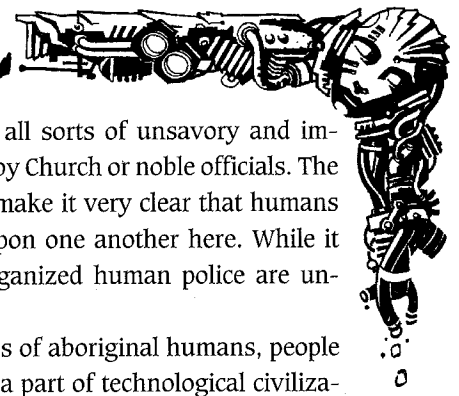
Hodgbin Velok — Human Think Machine

The son and greatest work of Crafter Ezra Velok, Hodgbin was bred for smarts. His cranium his in fact too big for his neck and shoulder to easily support, forcing him to wear a brace. Even in the womb, Hodgbin was subjected to chemicals and surgical procedures to develop his brain size. His learning began a week after birth (cesarean section); his father and hired tutors drilled higher learning into him, forcing him to recite mathematical mantras as soon as he could talk. By the time he was 10, he was smart enough to escape the Inquisition forces that came for his father, burning him and destroying all record of his work.

Unsure of where to go or how to hide with his overly-obvious head, Hodgbin hid in the nearby swamps for a time, living off the land using lore he had absorbed from a think machine program during his youth. Eventually, Adolphus came looking for him.

Following the whispered rumor trail that lead from Hodgbin's tutors, along with intercepted Inquisition communiqués about the raid on Ezra Velok's lab, Adolphus suspected a Changed child to be hiding in the region. He eventually found the boy, who was surprised at Adolphus's openness and honesty. Intrigued and lacking an alternative





(and near to starvation), he joined the squad. While he is somewhat backward emotionally even for a 10-year-old, his mental capacity and learning exceeds that of most Known Worlders.

Description: The body of a 10-year-old boy with a head twice its natural size. His brace supports his skull, but doesn't allow for easy mobility when looking left or right. His role in the team, however, is usually to stay hidden in a vehicle or central operations base, coordinating the others through whisper pin transmissions.

Body: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Endurance 3

Mind: Wits 12, Perception 6, Tech 9

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

Natural skills: Observe 5

Learned skills: Academia 5, Alchemy 3, Drive (Aircraft, Landcraft, Starship) 3, Focus 4, Inquiry 3, Lore (almost all subjects) 3, Physick 4, Read Urthish, Read Latin, Read Urthtech, Remedy 2, Science (Chemistry) 6, Science (Genetics) 5, Speak Urthish, Speak Latin, Stoic Mind 8, Survival 2, Tech Redemption (all kinds) 7, Think Machine 9, Warfare (Military Tactics) 4

Curses: Surly (-2 Extrovert when upset)

Occult: Meta 2

Powers: Boosted mental capacity (see Wits)

Wyrd: 4

Equipment: Think Machine (multi-functional), Whisper Pin radio

Weapons: Blaster Pistol (7d)

Armor: Assault Shield (5/15, 20 hits; a dueling shield he adjusted himself)

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

Chemical Soldiers

The taking of drugs is considered filthy by most people, but certain soldiers are encouraged to do it anyway. The problem with combat drugs, however, is that they are often dirtier than most recreational substances — they tend to cause bad side effects, from exhaustion upon coming down to muscle cramps to full-blown hallucinations. Nonetheless, it seems easy to find volunteers for these units — mostly addicts and others looking for a new fix or high, intrigued by the promise of regular supplies.

Chemical troops are looked upon by nearly every other unit as a doomed brigade — a bunch of losers headed for oblivion. No matter the battles they win or medals they earn, if they live out their tours, they still have a mean addiction to nurse — abrupt withdrawal from heavy-duty combat drugs can often kill a soldier.

Vritra's Warriors

The planet Manitou is home to all sorts of addicts and derelicts from Known Worlds culture, a world where they

are often free to engage in all sorts of unsavory and immoral pastimes unmolested by Church or noble officials. The Vau overlords of the world make it very clear that humans are not to inflict violence upon one another here. While it still happens, of course, organized human police are uncommon.

Manitou also has groups of aboriginal humans, people whose ancestors were once a part of technological civilization but who dropped out long ago (some as early as the Diaspora) to follow pagan woodsman ways. Some claim to preserve rites from ancient Urth, mystical heritages long forgotten by the rest of humanity.

One such group is a cult based around the worship of a psychedelic fungus unique to Manitou, but supposedly once widely available in the Second Republic. While most of the group considers themselves priests, shamans or simple farmers, some take on the role of warriors, divinely inspired by ingestion of the drug.

Outsiders don't understand the effects of Vritra (the fungus): it seems to be different depending on the mental state of the ingestor. The cult claims that effects depend on the ritual used to access the drug — that priests have a different rite than warriors. Regardless, the warriors of Vritra are formidable opponents, displaying bursts of intense energy and cunning after ingesting their god.

These drug-crazed warriors sometimes hire themselves out to fight on other worlds, although they usually wind-up facing some sort of Church authorities afterwards. They are also useful only as long as their drug supply holds out.

Effects: Ingesting the cap of the Vritra mushroom brings euphoria and a feeling of invincibility for the next five hours, as long as the proper ritual is maintained. After an hour-long ceremony of dancing and drumming, the ritualists may ingest the Vritra cap. The effects begin within half an hour. While the user can feel pain, she is not bothered by it (she suffers no wound penalties). In addition, all her Body characteristics are increased by two for the duration of effect. However, she experiences a narrowing of the visual field — objects focused on are seen with intense clarity, but all else goes unnoticed (+1 Observe to examine single objects or people, -2 Perception for general rolls). Finally, Vritra sharpens the mind: users can solve normally confusing puzzles and anticipate an enemy's actions (+2 Wits).

Once the effects wear off, the user is sluggish (-2 penalty on all actions) and dull of mind (-2 Wits) for the next 24 hours. Rumors of severe side-effects (amnesia, paranoia, visions of snake-gods) after repeated use have been denied by the cultists but supposedly witnessed by Universal Church priests.

Firebird cost: 15 per cap on Manitou, +50-100 off-world (to avoid loss of potency, the drug must be dried with a particular method known to the cultists)



Penitent Spies

The noble houses are not the only groups to use spies against their enemies and allies. The Orthodox Church also engages in illicit intelligence gathering. While the Inquisition can usually break down doors to search for sin, its can rarely hide its coming from the better-informed factions. Hence, the Orthodoxy sometimes uses Penitent psychics. These psychics turned themselves in or were caught by the Church and forced to report their movements to an Orthodox priest; they often suffer re-education brainwashing, to convince them that their powers are sinful and must be monitored by priests.

In return for lenience and the lure of future freedom from scrutiny, some of them are recruited to spy on Church targets — anyone from guild merchants or Republican sympathizers to noble lords. While they are not combat-trained dervishes, a few of them are given some self-defense training. Most are poor souls pressed into intelligence-gathering service, all on the hush-hush. Since this information sometimes involves warfare — plans for coming battles — they can often encounter actual soldiers. Indeed, some may disguise themselves as soldiers for certain missions.

If they are caught, the Orthodoxy of course denies any knowledge of their spying, instead blaming the psychic's own sinful powers and the urge to use them. They add that only the Church's own program to deal with stray psychics has any chance to curb these dangerous anarchists. Collecting the wayward penitents back into the fold, the Church usually sticks them in distant monasteries where they won't embarrass the Church again. The best spies, however, are simply reassigned to other locations.

The range of penitent powers is broad. The Church has used telepaths, telekinetics, prophets, body manipulators and those with the second sight. It helps them to disguise as priests, guildsmen, freemen or noble householders. Certain cathedrals and chapels over the Known Worlds act as safehouses for these spies, places they can hide from alerted enemies or drop off data. Few people, even nobles, guess the true extent of the Orthodoxy's penitent spy network.

Alien Special Forces

The organizing and fielding of aliens troops tends to be limited to a race's homeworld or within the lording house's fiefs, although certain races provide exceptions (Vorox commandos are highly-prized everywhere). These worlds have a certain home team advantage in defense, since the aliens are well-adapted to unusual environments — no one knows the seas of Madoc like the Oro'ym. However, centuries of bad treatment tends to breed resentful soldiers disrespectful of authority. Alien units are thus kept separate from human units — separate barracks, mess halls — so that they don't

taint the morale of the common soldier (or suffer too much prejudice themselves). Most alien soldiers know that their tour of duty is probably the best chance they'll get to make good money or rise to a better profession — many can seek employ with the Muster when their terms are over, or serve as bodyguards for Scraver bosses.

Below are some examples of alien troop units and their specialties:

Oro'ym SEALS

Living up to the name frogmen, the Oro'ym make excellent sea and land commandos. They are cheap to outfit (they don't need scuba gear!) and quick to train, for most are eager to join League operations. The Muster makes good use of them by shopping their abilities to other worlds, even though most teams operate solely on Madoc. The local authorities use them as scouts and spies to spot out illegal smuggling or piracy, or as sentries for delicate undersea mining or scavenging operations.

Oro'ym Aquatic Commandos

Description: Bearing the emblem of their guild affiliation on the breasts of their plastic mesh bodysuits, these tough Oro'ym may also have scars and signs of one of more limb regrowths due to their combat experiences.

Body: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Endurance 5

Mind: Wits 3, Perception 5, Tech 3

Spirit: Extrovert 3, Introvert 1, Passion 1, Calm 3, Faith 3, Ego 1

Natural skills: Dodge 5, Fight 5, Melee 6, Observe 4, Shoot 7, Stealth 7, Vigor 7

Learned skills: Beast Lore 1, God Lore 1, Search 6, Speak Oro'ym, Speak Urthish, Survival 6, Tracking 6

Species Traits: Fangs (2d), Gills, Regrowth, Strong Tail (3d dmg, +1 meter/victory point swim), Cold-blooded, Requires Moisture

Equipment: Capek .40 Aquatic Rifle (7d), Knife (3d)

Armor: Light-weave Plastic Mesh suit (4d, no Dex penalty, 30 firebirds)

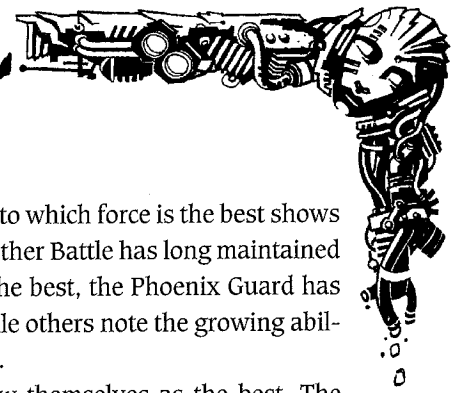
Vitality: -10/-8/-6/-4/-2/0/0/0/0

Etyri War Wings

On Grail, Etyri are used by House Keddah to aid infantry and cavalry movements and to stealthily scout terrain. They are also trained in the rudiments of mech redemption, so they can monkeywrench enemy air forces — they often sneak up on air patrols in blind spots, land on the craft and begin denting wings or unbolting important joints. When the craft spins into freefall, the Etyri simply fly away on their own wingpower.

Most military forces are Huar'raugh, the strongest of the race and those best equipped for combat. Since most are also nobles, they expect good treatment from the Keddah,





and see their service as an alliance, not servitude. Indeed, during a decisive Emperor Wars battle against invading Hazat, a Keddah commander took this relationship for granted and tried to rudely boss the Etyri around. The Etyri commander and his entire wing quit the field. Without their support, the Hazat claimed more land than they otherwise would have.

Etyri Air Commandos

Description: While not as beautiful colored as other Etyri, these majestic soldiers inspire awe with their wide wingspans and graceful air maneuvers. They wear leather harnesses hung with weapons and tools. Their family symbols are emblazoned on their breasts. Wing leaders sometimes have energy shields.

Body: Strength 4, Dexterity 7, Endurance 6

Mind: Wits 3, Perception 7, Tech 3

Spirit: Extrovert 3, Introvert 1, Passion 1, Calm 3, Faith 3, Ego 1

Natural skills: Dodge 7, Fight 4, Fly 7, Melee 6, Shoot 8, Stealth 7, Vigor 7

Learned skills: Speak Etyri, Speak Urthish, Survival 4, Tech Redemption (Mech) 2, Tracking 5

Species Traits: Claws (3d), Beak (2d), Flight, Hawkeye (+2 Shoot or Throw when self or target is in motion), Keen Eyes (+3 Per sight), Hollow Bones

Curses: Claustrophobia (-2 Calm in close quarters)

Equipment: High-Powered Rifle (8d), Broadsword (6d), Mech Tools

Armor: Leather harness (4d)

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

Shantor Cavalry

The Shantor are used by the al-Malik as cavalry units. They are relied upon for defense on Shaprut, where they have in the past proven themselves to be strong and untiring warriors. But they can't be fully trusted, and some — those pushed too far for too long — have exploded into bitter frenzies like mad elephants. Until they come out of their trance, they can't be reasoned with and often have to be put down by heavy weapons. Those that live may still be executed or sold into slavery. However, these crazed few are the exception, not the rule, and most Shantor do their duties well. The most decorated are retired ("put out to pasture") on a reservation with their families, and are well-provided for.

(The **Sinners & Saints** sourcebook provides a fully-fleshed out sample of a Shantor cavalry trooper: Loadbearer Hulaaloo.)

Rivalries

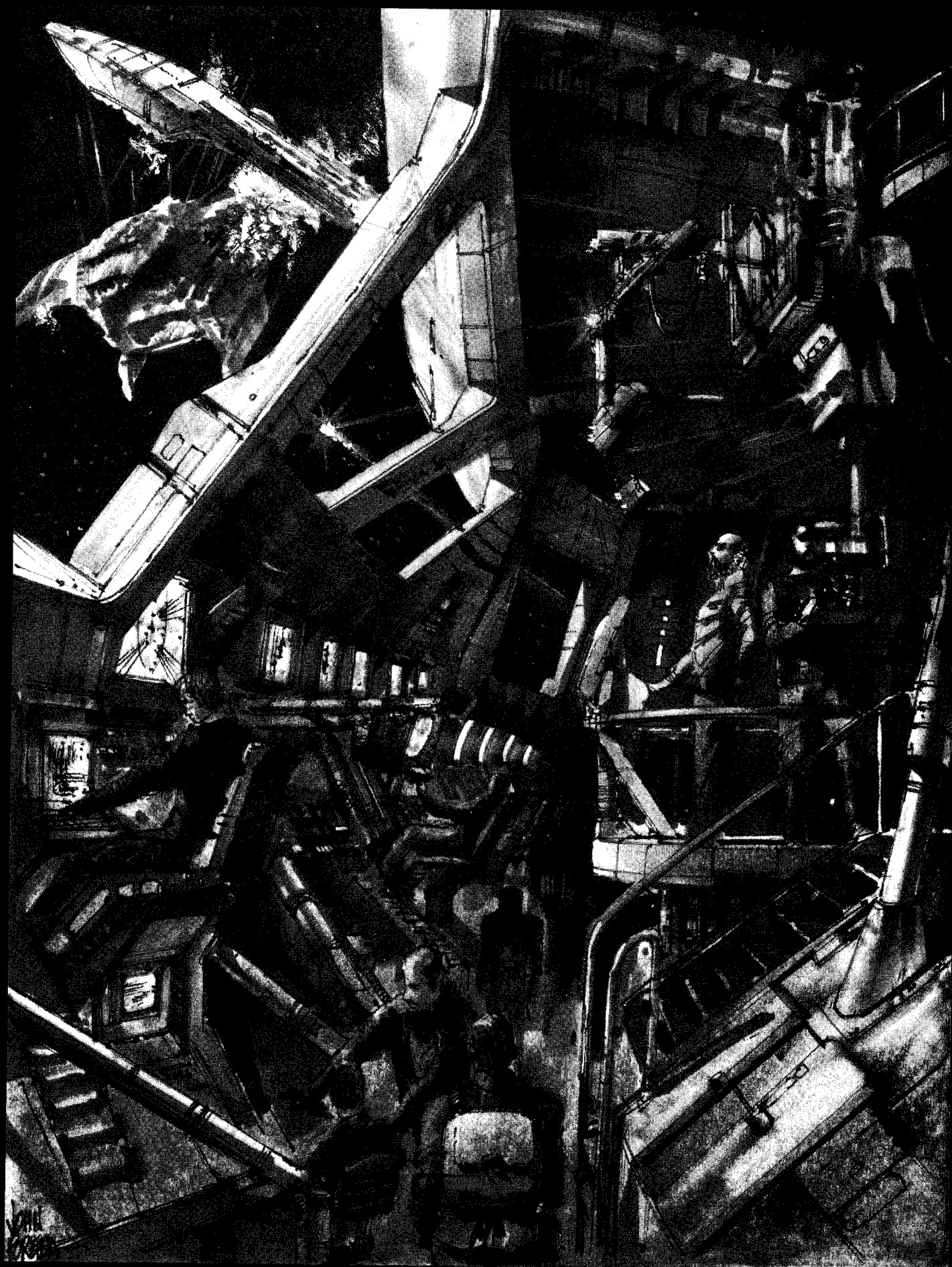
The on-going debate as to which force is the best shows no sign of ending. While Brother Battle has long maintained a reputation as the best of the best, the Phoenix Guard has begun to challenge that, while others note the growing ability of the Stigmata Garrison.

Aliens also tend to view themselves as the best. The Oro'ym commandos feel that no one else confronts the horrors they do on such a regular basis, the Ur-Ukar see themselves as the most deadly, and few Vorox will even consider anyone else qualified to oppose them.

The Emperor Wars gave these groups many opportunities to test themselves against one another, with Decados Kossacks shooting down Trusnikron urroc riders, crusaders facing down Vuldrok hordes, and Shantor cavalry charging House Li Halan's Vorox commandos. However, their use in a tactical setting generally precluded their efforts to prove for once and for all whom was best.

Indeed, the two most elite forces, the Phoenix Guard and Brother Battle, never met as opponents, and each side can only guess that it is better than the other. Members of the two groups have many opportunities to meet, spending as much time as they do both in hostile situations and in social ones, but the questions continue to plague both. As a result, individual Brothers and Guardsmen frequently attempt to outshine the other, and their attempts range from athletic contests to drinking matches to attempts to defeat dangerous enemies with as little exertion as possible. Rumors among the Brothers that the Guardsmen are coming dangerously close to technology worship and rumors among the Guard that the Brothers have found new gods to worship go unheeded.







When we saw the al-Malik frigate approach, Captain Prag suggested the crew debark and try and mix in with the local populace. He knew the al-Malik were always a bit short of crew and their press gang would be visiting our merchant vessel soon enough. Saul and Raj had the stow holes in the cargo bay, but there wasn't space for us all.

Dirk was with me and he'd dodged them before, so I stuck close and followed his advice. He'd been pressed during the Emperor Wars and had escaped halfway through. 'Course, the Hawkwood thought of it as desertion and not escape, so he got real good at avoiding them. We stopped by a tailor's first and bought new duds. They cost me two months pay, but Dirk said we'd never avoid them in our jumpsuits. No one else generally wore them but spacemen, and the press gang would spot us a mile off. The only problem was the new cloths itched like a thousand swamp bug bites, and the shoes just plain hurt to walk in.

The next step was to get as far from the docks as possible. Dirk said our best chance was to hire a transport to a nearby city, but since we needed to leave tomorrow, we'd have to risk it here. We stopped at a quaint little bed and breakfast to arrange rooms for the night. The old witch working there came out, looked us up and down and told us to get lost. Dirk just flashed some phoenixes and she changed her mind, but I couldn't help but cuss her out on the way up. Her face turned as red as blood, and I was feeling the sweet flavor of revenge until Dirk turned and apologized for me. I couldn't believe he was being nice to the old bitch!

Well, I couldn't take much of that place, so I left and wandered straight down to the nearest pub. I was scratching the whole way. Man, I can't believe what a landlubber will put up with in clothing. Dirk came running after and said we'd attracted too much attention and should leave. Shit! We already paid the bitch. I was getting close to broke and didn't care. I needed a slug of spirits bad, so I ignored his plea and entered the pub. He just cussed me out and left. Like I was the nasty sailor in the B&B, but it was OK for

him to cuss me out? Screw him. I drank.

"Hello lad, can I buy you a drink?" I heard through a drunken haze. Sure, I thought, buy me five. It's the only way I can keep drinking. I grabbed the glass from him and slugged it down. At that point I didn't even care what it was. I almost gagged on the piece of metal someone had stuck in the bottom of the drink.

"You trying to kill me?" I said as I pulled a coin from my mouth. Uh oh, Dirk had told me not to take money from anyone. It's the same as accepting a contract. I scratched at my clothing and looked up.

My patron was all smiles. "Mrs. Biddles sends her best. She informs me you're quite an experienced spaceman. I see you've accepted our enlistment contract? Good, come along, and we'll get you into some clothes you're more used to."

"You buggerer! I ain't goin' nowhere with you!" Who was Mrs. Biddles? Was she that hag at the B&B? How would she know my abilities on board a ship?

My patron pointed at three thugs standing behind him with cattle prods. "Of course, if you come along involuntary, then you'll receive no share of the prize money." He smiled broadly and held out a stack of papers. "Please sign these if you'd like to volunteer now."

I didn't know what any of it said. I don't read. I scratched an "X" and followed them out the door. Apparently, Mrs. Biddles had the last laugh after all...

Commissioned Officers

Nobles get their second or third sons placed aboard ship as midshipmen through their family connections. Some well-off freeman may get their sons onboard by paying small bribes to the captain of a ship. Once on board as a midshipman, or "middy," the prospective officer can make it all the way to admiral. However, skill and social position are necessary to get the next few important positions. A middy must record at least three years in space, be at least seventeen, and pass the lieutenant's exam before ever being consid-



ered for promotion. In order to actually get the promotion, she must gain the favor of a captain with an open position. This takes family connections or a reputation for knowing the job. Lieutenants struggle from ship to ship trying to find more and more important positions until they get command of a ship and become Post Captain. (Anyone commanding a frigate or larger earns the title of captain.)

Anyone with the rank of captain is placed on the promotion list for admiral. Promotion to admiral is purely by seniority. (Of course, being an admiral with a position still takes political connections or a reputation for success as a captain.)

A middy's main task in life is to learn everything there is to know about starflight. They start with the low "learning" jobs like cleaning the bilge, lubing the machinery or refueling. Their social position keeps them out of the lowest jobs like dish washing and laundry (mainly because these jobs do not teach a midshipman much about the ship). As early as possible, the middies get command experience. It starts with command of the bilge detail or some other similar job. Depending on the needs of the ship, they may end up in command of a prize on the way back to home port.

A lieutenant is commissioned to lead the various details and watches on board ship. The first lieutenant (or second in command) shifts the captain on the bridge. He must know and learn navigation and piloting skills (usually taught under contract by the Charioteer's guild). The second runs the engine room and maneuver jets. She knows some repair and maintenance skill. The third leads the gun crews. He must know everything about the heavy guns. A good captain has served in all these positions at one time and knows the complete operation of the ship inside and out. On a smaller ship, positions may be combined or an experienced midshipman may lead a detail. Larger ships may have up to five or six lieutenants by splitting the responsibilities even more.

The captain is a complete dictator on board ship. So long as her orders conform to the loose Articles of Space Service, her word is law. She is held completely responsible for anything that happens on the ship. She gives her orders to her lieutenants and expects them to be carried out. She is also judge and juror in matters of law and discipline. The Articles give her the power to preside over any military trials and sentence the guilty to a variety of harsh disciplines, including flogging, extra duty, and reduction of rank. More serious crimes are tried in port with the assistance of two other captains or admirals.

The first few echelons of admirals (with jobs) are placed in charge of the various fleets and arenas of operation. Above them are the few administrators who work under the First Lord of the Fleet. The First Lord is the top man in the star navy. He acts mainly as an administrator, assigning ships

and supplies to various arenas of operation in order to carry out the wishes of the house leader. A captain only needs to stay alive long enough to reach the eventual rank of admiral. However, family, power, influence, and connections are the difference between a working admiral on full pay and a retired admiral on half pay. The choice arenas of command are those with current privateering operations. The commanding admiral gets a portion of all prize money distributed under her command.

Masters

Just below the ships officers in rank are the masters. These are experienced starmen who know everything there is to know about the tasks they are charged with. Their main task is to train the average loser the press gang brings in and calls crew. Most ships contain a Master, Bosun, Gunner, Purser, Cook, Master Engineer (Guild), and Master Pilot (Guild).

The Master runs the ship itself. He assigns the duty roster and oversees the other masters. He is responsible for the ship's press gang and for hiring an engineer and pilot. The master is the most knowledgeable starman on the ship. It is hard to find a qualified master who is not a Charioteer, but they do exist.

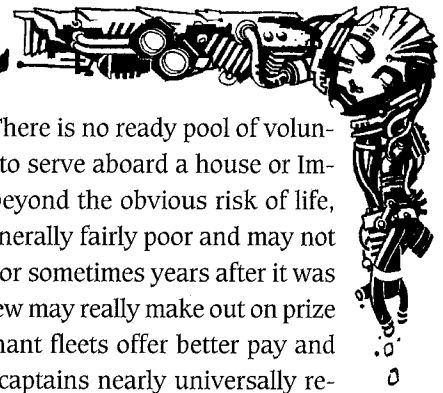
The Boatswain or Bosun is charged with the general running of the ship. He assigns the watch and is responsible for the maintenance of all the miscellaneous equipment not covered by the other masters on board. These include maintenance of and crew training in vac bags. (Vac bags are loose fitting vacuum suits worn during combat that connect via hoses and cables to the ship's emergency life support systems. They are used because ship-to-ship combat often results in hull breaches and the loss of interior atmosphere.) He also maintains the ship's boats and escape pods. Finally, the Bosun administers any punishments given by the captain to the crew.

The master gunner runs the gun decks and turrets. She is responsible for ensuring the upkeep of the guns and the training of the crew. This is an especially hard task since most of the gun crew performs other tasks in the day-to-day operation of the ship. She must schedule around meal times and the ever-necessary scrubbing of the decks. She also keeps the only other key to the ammunitions stores besides the captain.

The Master Marine is in charge of the marines and the grapple gunners. He is responsible for the upkeep of the marine combat armor and weapons, the marine launch bays, the grapple guns, and the marine quarters. He also trains the marines in the use of the combat armor, weapons, boarding tactics, and grapple gunnery.

The purser is the business guy of the ship. He arranges for all the supplies the ship needs. The fleet provides him a budget from which to supply the ship. If he gets better than





average rates, he can pocket some money. However, if some of the food goes bad, he may have to cover the loss from his own pocket.

Guild Positions

Most Imperial Navy and house fleet ships require the services of specialists from the League. Most important are a Master Pilot and a Master Engineer.

The Master Pilot is not required every minute of the trip between a planet and its jumpgate. However, an experienced pilot is necessary to plot the initial course, to dock, to activate the jumpgate properly, and to maneuver effectively in combat. At other times, any pressed flunky with a few days practice can watch the dials and ensure the ship stays on course.

The Master Pilot of a ship must be at least a lieutenant in the Charioteers Guild.

The Master Engineer has the know-how to maintain the various systems on board ship. These include the stardrive and jump engines in addition to the less obvious systems like the repulsor plates used to create artificial gravity, the atmospheric electrolysis systems used to maintain the oxygen level, the water purification tanks, the ship's internal power routing, and the ship's think machines. Her crewmen are the most intelligent and experienced aboard the ship. Most are capable of removing and replacing anything the master tells them to. This leaves her to relax in her work area and coax the components back to life without having to crawl anywhere uncomfortable.

The Master Engineer of a ship must be at least of entered rank in the Engineer's Guild.

Able Starmen & Marines

The remaining crewmen assist the masters, man the guns during battle, clean the decks, and serve the food. The average starman is not a well educated person, but trains daily in the tasks he needs to perform. In other words, just about any loser qualifies to join. The masters are tasked with training new recruits to perform useful tasks, like serving food, washing dishes, and firing the broadsides. Starmen with a bit of experience are promoted to Able Starman and, if intelligent enough, they are trained to do more important maintenance tasks like cleaning fuel filters, greasing the maneuver jet manipulators, or checking the torque on the thrust nozzles. Of course, a Master Engineer still tells them when and what. (Many of the best Able Starmen eventually end up in the League after their enlistment term.) Other Able Starmen may specialize in gunnery or any other aspect of running the ship. Like their land-lubber cousins in the regiment, some enjoy life shipboard and go on to become masters; others try to escape their enlistment at every port.

The captain of a ship has the primary responsibility for finding sufficient crew for her ship. There is no central re-

cruiting arm of the Empire. There is no ready pool of volunteers waiting for the chance to serve aboard a house or Imperial starship. Above and beyond the obvious risk of life, pay aboard noble ships is generally fairly poor and may not even be issued until months or sometimes years after it was earned. (Although a lucky crew may really make out on prize money.) All in all, the merchant fleets offer better pay and treatment. Therefore, noble captains nearly universally resort to press gangs to recruit their crews.

Luckily for the press gangs, starmen are a unique lot. Most start out their careers by hiring on a merchant vessel for money or simply to escape an otherwise monotonous life planetside. Before long they start wearing jumpsuits everywhere they go and pick up a unique gait from constantly adjusting to different gravity conditions. Aboard a starbase or anywhere near a starport planetside, they are easy picking for the press gangs. A press gang often picks up unemployed merchant sailors carousing around town. The gangs even board merchant ships in attempts to find all the crew they need. The Imperial Navy gang's are even authorized to draft anyone they find, with the exception of essential crew aboard a ship. (In practice, any starman without guild credentials is susceptible. Of course, merchant vessels usually contain a secret stow hole or two for the most valued crew.) House press gangs sometimes board rival house fleet ships as well. However, this is only done in the direst of emergencies. These ships tend to resist boarding by their rivals most violently.

Officially, a starman may enter the service by volunteering or by temporary impressment. The volunteer qualifies for a share of any prize money captured, whereas the impressed starman does not. Since in practice, impressment is rarely temporary, most knowledgeable starmen volunteer for service when confronted with a press gang. Lucky for them, the gang members get twice the commission for volunteers.

Fighter Pilots

The magic lantern shows make the pilot's life out to be quite glamorous, but fighter pilots rarely survive a combat mission. Those that do often make it out in survival pods. On top of this, few people in the Known Worlds qualify for the position. Becoming a fighter pilot requires a certain level of education that is rare in the Empire. Therefore, fighter pilots mostly come from the noble class, and few nobles can be convinced to fly fighters. (This is the main reason fleet carriers are so rare.) However, promotion within the pilot ranks can be fast and furious. In addition, a noble wishing officer status in the Imperial Navy can attend the piloting school for six months and gain her commission. Compare that with the years she might have to serve as a midshipman otherwise.



However, like in the magic lantern shows, fighters are a wild bunch. They drink hard and carouse better than any in the star navy. Perhaps their often short lives encourage them to live for the moment.

Economics

The captain stands to make a good deal of money while in command a ship. However, the day-to-day operation of the ship can often leave him destitute. His pay barely covers the cost of maps, uniforms, and various fees and bribes he must pay to the Admiralty office just to maintain his commission. He also has final responsibility for the ship. Should his purser go bankrupt, he must cover any remaining expenses for supplies.

The Admiralty pays the captain a regular stipend for ammunition as well. However, this stipend covers one live practice volley a month. To achieve any success, a captain usually pays for additional practice rounds out of his own pocket. A captain with a wealthy family can train an elite crew and collect a healthy return on his investment in prize money.

Prize Money

To encourage the intact capture of enemy vessels, the noble houses (and the Emperor) award prize money. Once a captured ship arrives at its house's prize court, the court appraises and assigns a value. According to long-standing tradition, the prize money is divided amongst the crew as follows:

1/8 to the commanding admiral of the fleet. (This eighth goes to the captain when the ship is operating independently.)

2/8's to the captain of the vessel.

1/8 to the master of the ship, the ship's lieutenants, and the ship's physick.

1/8 to the marine officers, boatswain, master gunner, purser, master pilot and master engineer.

1/8 to the midshipman, master cook, clerks, mates and marine sergeants.

2/8's to the remaining volunteer crew. (Involuntarily pressed crew receive no share.)

Amongst each group, the prize money is divided equally.

Of course, things are never as easy as they seem. In practice, prize money is rarely paid out. The captured ship must make it back to a friendly port for refit. In active areas, forward stations receive and refit foreign captured ships; the station at Leminkainen takes in captured Vuldrok ships and the one at Vera Cruz receives captured Kurgan ships.

Like most bureaucrats, prize agents are all too willing to accept a little kickback in return for overvaluing a prize ship for a captain. However, the process usually runs fine since captured ships must be sailed back to a safe port with a prize court and the captain must stay on station with his own ship. However, at the forward stations, corruption is

the standard practice.

In addition to prize money, the house leader can authorize head money as additional incentive. Head money is an additional bounty paid for captured prisoners on an enemy ship. Head money is divided in the same manner as prize money. For instance, the Hawkwoods currently offer 10 firebirds per head for captured Vuldrok crew members.

Purser's Economy

The purser stocks the ship with all the necessary supplies, except for ammunition. She is given a regular budget from the fleet and is then held financially responsible for providing for the crew of the ship. If she manages to buy supplies at a good price, she can retire wealthy. However, if a load of food goes bad, the purser must replace it from her own funds.

Pursers have their own special way of skimming a little off the top. For example, the crew receives a pound of meat a week as their normal ration. However, what they actually received is a purser's pound, or only about 14 ounces. The purser is expected to skim a few ounces to make up for spoilage and shortages. Unfortunately for the purser, his suppliers work similar tricks. The purser normally buys dried meat by the barrel for the crew. The purser weighs the barrels to ensure they are packed full, but they often end up containing hides and other waste products instead of meat. Some suppliers even pack the barrels with stones to hide shortages.

Crime & Punishment Aboard Ship

Emperor Vladimir established his Imperial Space Navy with the creation of the Articles of Space Service. These articles laid out the foundation of a new service under a new Emperor. They established the First Lord of the Fleet and the Admiralty Board, who were given the power to appoint fleet admirals for each system and captains for each ship. The First Lord continued to serve the regent during the Emperor Wars and Emperor Alexius saw no reason to change the structure when he was elected Emperor of the Known Worlds. During the regency period, most houses adopted similar structures and rules.

The Articles of the Space Service also laid down the general regulations for serious crimes like mutiny, sedition or murder. The local Admiral in charge is to appoint three persons of captain or higher rank to sit on a board of inquiry in the case of such serious crimes. The board exercises complete discretion in these cases and may sentence the guilty party to death and the gibbets.

Captains take responsibility for recruiting the remainder of their crew and posting regulations on board which cover all the lesser crimes not covered by the articles. Con-

veniently, most captains buy a copy of "Captain Foreshaw's Guide to Common Shipboard Regulations" and post the included pull-out summary. In fact, the Admiralty frowns on much deviation from this commercially printed guidebook. (Although there is a write-in area for personal additions each captain may have.) The wise crewman always finds someone aboard who can read to tell him what additional regulations his new captain may have added.

Common Crimes and Sentences

Captain Foreshaw's Guide covers everything from how often a heavy slug gun should be cleaned to what the definition of sedition is. Some of the commonly broken rules and their punishments are as follows:

Crime	Punishment
Late for duty	Black List — 7 days
Slothfulness	Black List — 30 days
Sloppily performed duty	Confinement — 2 days
Cursing	6 lashings
Stashing grog ration	12 lashings
Insolence	24 lashings
Buggery*	24 lashings
Theft	48 lashings with studs
Mutinous Behavior	Flogging around the Fleet

* Relations with another enlisted crewmember

The Black List is simply extra duty. Confinement is not prescribed often since ships have limited abilities to confine their personnel and can little do without the guilty person on duty. The guide recommends a maximum of 24 lashings before death becomes a risk (the Admiralty places no limit, though). Of course, with a thief, sometimes death is the goal anyway.

Flogging

The navy performs a lashing or flogging in a serious, traditional and ritualistic fashion. To avoid the unnecessary transmission of disease, the boatswain fashions a new cat-o-nine tails for each occasion. It is made from four feet of thick hemp rope. The boatswain covers the first two feet with leather straps to form the handle. She unwinds the other half to form nine thin lengths, and ties off each end to avoid fraying. For thieves, she may tie small nuts and bolts into the end knots for added effect. She wraps the finished device in red cellophane to keep it clean until the flogging.

The ceremony begins with the captain reading the charges against the accused and listing the assignment of power from the First Lord of the house's fleet through the articles to the Admiralty board and finally to himself. The boatswain then brings out the cat-o-nine tails and begins the lashings. A mate may shift her if the punishment calls for more than twelve lashings.





Flogging Around the Fleet

For particularly dangerous crimes, like those listed specifically in the articles, the accused may be sentenced to a Flogging Around the Fleet. The sentence can only be assigned by a panel of captains in port under the direct jurisdiction of the articles. It usually involves 200-300 lashings for an individual the captains feel should be made an example of to everyone. The local admiral divides the total lashings sentenced amongst all the ships currently in dock. Each ship in turn then assigns an escort to bring the prisoner from the previous ship to theirs to administer their share of the lashings. In practice, after one or two ships, the prisoner passes out and the escort brings him back to the dock to recover enough to continue the lashings on some future day. The careful pacing of the lashes ensures this extremely brutal punishment is rarely fatal.

Bodies Left in Gibbets

As might be imagined from the previous descriptions, the navy feels strongly that punishment is for the benefit of everyone. Lashings are a public ceremony, which everyone on the ship must watch. Flogging Around the Fleet demonstrates the wages of sin to everyone available. Similarly, when the navy executes a prisoner, they want as many other starmen as possible to know what happened. Therefore, the navy prefers to display their executed prisoners in gibbets. Gibbets are an upright post placed outside a navy base or dock with the body chained to it. On a starbase, the navy chains the body directly to the hull in some prominent position near the docking bays. Planetside, the bodies degenerate to skeletons quickly. However, in space, the bodies may stay intact (although completely dehydrated) for quite a long time. These macabre displays are a constant reminder to the crew of how seriously the navy treats mutiny and sedition.

Keel Hauling

Keel Hauling is rarely practiced in the navy anymore, but rumor has it an occasional thieving bastard is still put through this. The practice originates from the wet navy. However, space navies developed an interesting variation on the theme. The boatswain runs a cable from the airlock around the ship and back again to the airlock. The unfortunate accused is suited in an unconnected Vac bag and placed in the air lock. He must hold his breath and pull himself around the ship before his shipmates will cycle the airlock and let him back in. A crewman has about a fifty-fifty chance of making it around before passing out and asphyxiating — depending on how much air the boatswain allowed him in his suit before he started. The unfortunate crewman must also be careful to stay close to the ship. If he allows himself to swing too wide, he is no longer within the ship's protective shield and passing debris might kill him. (Player characters roll Endurance + Vigor. To survive, they must achieve one success per 10 meters of distance. A typical frigate would

require about two successes; a scout only needs one.)

Marooning

An even worse punishment rumored to still occur is marooning. A deposed captain often suffers this fate as well. Sometimes the crew puts the unfortunate prisoner down in some backwater area where she's unlikely to make it off planet ever again. Sometimes the crew drops a prisoner on an uninhabited planet barely capable of sustaining her life. It may only be days before exposure or poisons in the atmosphere kill the abandoned crewman.

The Relative Barbarity of Ship Life

Of course, some may think that life in the star navy is too harsh. Just remember that while there are a few more ways to get in trouble in the navy, that trouble rarely leads to death. A normal citizen can be put to death at the whim of any local judge or clergyman. The punishment for thieving aboard ship is definitely harsh, but land lubbers are more likely to lose their lives or at least their hands as punishment for similar acts. The simple truth is that the navy is desperate for recruits and is not about to go around killing or maiming the ones it has.

Conditions aboard Ship

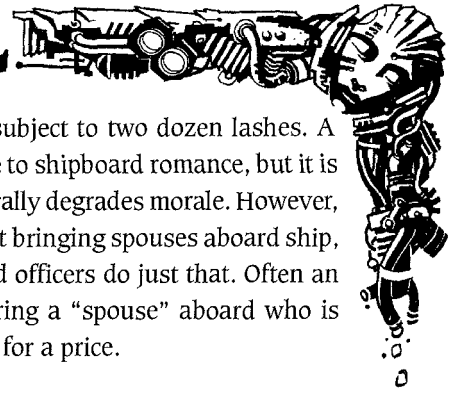
The largest problem with life aboard a starship is the tedium. Crews work in four-hour shifts. Duties depend on the position, but most of the crew are cleaning something or cooking something. The rest stare at dials or do routine maintenance on the equipment. Only the brief periods at launch and right before jumping are remotely interesting and then only for the pilot and navigator. If the ship is fully crewed, then everyone gets two four-hour shifts off for every one he works. However, anyone in an understaffed position may be on duty every other shift.

Bells announce the time since the beginning of the last shift. Each half hour, the ship's loud speakers announce the slow tedious progress through the shift by ringing one more bell than the last time. Shifts change over at eight bells. Seven bells means time for wake-up calls. Usually, the most obnoxious midshipman gets this duty. He must be annoying enough to wake even the heaviest sleeper and ranking enough to avoid a punch in the mouth! The watches are named as well. The Mid watch starts at midnight; next comes the Morning watch; then Forenoon, Afternoon, Dogs, and finally First. Sometimes the crew may refer to the time in terms of the watch and the bells. For example, "Three bells into the Dog watch." The Dog watch starts at 4:00 pm, so three bells into it is 5:30 pm.

Living Space

Most of the time off duty is spent sleeping. The sleeping space is confined, but not as cramped as it might be. When not asleep, the crew generally hangs out in the mess area





playing cards, sipping grog, or studying the manuals necessary for advancement. Another popular hang out area is the gun decks. However, a fully crewed ship may have a few people sleeping there in hammocks slung between the gun mounts. There is also usually a small space in the engine room where the guildsmen aboard meet to socialize. The bridge is strictly off-limits to anyone off-duty.

Larger ships may contain sparing or practice areas for the marine contingent. This area becomes the prime hang out for the marines themselves. Any starman ignorant enough to wander through may be instructed to serve as a punching bag by the commanding marine officer.

Food

Water is always available in the scuttle-butt, although the cook rations virtually everything else. (The scuttle-butt is just a water fountain in the mess area. Aboard older ships it is sometimes a barrel with the top cut off. The barrel is essentially scuttled, or no longer useful, and became known as the scuttle-butt.)

Meals are served from seven bells to one bell of the next watch, so that everyone has a chance to grab food either before or after their watch. A snack is available between each watch, but the best meal is served between the Dog and the First watches. Any meat ration available that day is served then, along with bread and anything else the purser managed to buy at the last port of call. Snacks consist of a standard carb and protein ration (called sludge by most crews). It is a milky yellow liquid which fills all the nutritional needs of the crew and tastes like transmission oil.

Alcohol and Other Vices

The cook issues grog everyday between the Dog and the First watch. (Grog is a general term referring to watered-down liquor; it originally referred to half-rum and half-water. However, the purser wisely chooses the best, cheaply-available local liquor, depending on the port of call.) It is against regulations to save the ration. It must be imbibed immediately or not taken. Inevitably, the crew regularly saves up its rations until it has enough to get at least a little drunk. Some captains look the other way and some of the more pious regularly assign floggings for the practice.

Any other intoxicants aboard ship are against regulations and subject to a flogging, which is to say, the crew is often flogged for bringing on various drugs and intoxicants. There is usually someone aboard who runs a little black market for whatever his shipmates' desire.

Sex is the trickiest vice on ship though. The Admiralty frowns on any relations between the crew, and civilians are not allowed on combat vessels. However, in practice, this decision is left to the captain of the vessel. Captain Foreshaw's Guide strongly discourages shipboard romances and lists

any infraction as buggery, subject to two dozen lashes. A few captains turn a blind eye to shipboard romance, but it is widely-accepted that it generally degrades morale. However, the guide says nothing about bringing spouses aboard ship, and often the elder crew and officers do just that. Often an entrepreneurial mate will bring a "spouse" aboard who is available to any of the crew for a price.

Fleets

The noble houses model their fleets on the Vladimir's Imperial Fleet. Their organizations, ranks, regulations, and pay scales are all very similar. Noble house captains also use Captain Foreshaw's Guide, although they are a bit more likely to write in a few modifications of their own. Each house does have a few unique strategies and regulations for the starman to be aware of.

Imperial Fleet

The model fleet, still strictly following Vladimir's reforms and setting the standard for others. During the regency period, it had little power and was mainly captained by levies from other houses, usually noble sons and daughters with little experience. This changed during the Emperor Wars, when Alexius scuttled nearly the entire command structure to place his own allies in charge, to great effect. Now, mostly Imperial nobles captain the fleet, swearing fealty only to Alexius, although a few nobles on loan from other houses fill out the ranks in non-conflict zones like Holy Terra.

The Imperial Fleet headquarters and prize court is at Tethys.

Al-Malik Fleet

The al-Malik navy worries about the Symbiots every minute of every day. The Symbiots create a few unique elements in the al-Malik fleet. Al-Malik captains prefer to fight at range and shun boarding actions. (Probably too many of their friends have been "cleansed" after a hard fight with the Symbiots for them to take any further risks.) They like to stand off at their maximum range and launch missiles until the racks are empty and then leave. As a policy, they often carry psychics (usually Ukari) to minimize the risk of Symbiot infiltrators. The psychics have learned to be useful in battle as well.

The al-Malik fleet headquarters and prize court is at Istakhr.

Decados Fleet

The Decados love to play at war. They have the largest fleet of raiders and stealth ships in the Known Worlds and tend to use them to strong-arm their neighbors and subjects. New captains gain invaluable experience in action in the raider fleet. However, sometimes the experiences are not as useful in wartime. Decados captains tend to think more



independently and do not work well together in fleet actions.

The Decados captains are the most likely to abuse their power, but also allow their crew the most freedoms with respect to vices. Any rumors of keel hauling or marooning are usually attributed to the Decados fleet.

The Decados fleet headquarters and prize court is at Severus.

Hawkwood Fleet

Hawkwood captains constantly test their mettle against the Vuldrok. Since the Vuldrok usually raid in strength, the Hawkwoods tend to learn the best fleet tactics of any house. Their captains are the most respected leaders in the Known Worlds, with reputations for stern fairness. Their ships are the cleanest as well, since the crew is allowed little idle time while on duty.

They tend not to specialize in any one weapon, preferring instead a balance. This does tend to make their individual ships slightly weaker against a specialized opponent. However, it keeps them adaptable to varied situations.

The Hawkwood Admiralty receives the largest budgets of any noble house. They tend to spend it on research and improved training. Hawkwood captains receive the highest budgets for training ammunition.

The Hawkwood fleet headquarters and prize court is at Delphi.

Hazat Fleet

The Hazat love to fight and they love to do it up close. Most of their ships carry large complements of marines and lots of small, short-range weapons. In battle, they close quickly and shred their opponent's ships with their larger number of guns, and then board for the capture. Hazat crews enjoy more prize money than any other fleet thanks to this strategy and the proximity of the Kurgans.

The large number of smaller guns also helps defend them against Kurgan fighter squadrons. The Kurgan have an advantage in trained fighter pilots, and they often use it.

Hazat captains also have a tradition of military excellence and almost always spend their own money to better train their crews in gunnery.

The Hazat fleet headquarters and prize court is at Aragon.

Li Halan Fleet

Outside of the Decados, the Vau are the only significant threat to the Li Halan. (The Hazat and the Hawkwood are on crusades.) Luckily for the Li Halan, the Vau rarely show themselves. On the other hand, Li Halan captains have few opportunities to gain experience. They tend to be follow-the-book types and their regulations are the strictest. Most captains do not allow grog rations, cursing or vices of any

type. Officers and masters may bring spouses aboard, but few captains allow any other civilians.

The Li Halan also favor shipboard theurgists and have learned ways to use them in battle.

The Li Halan fleet headquarters and prize court is at Kish.

Church Fleet

Church crews tend to come up through the various monastic orders. This gives them a certain higher level of discipline than most crews. They tend to use rules and regulations specific to their order as well.

The Church also has the most toys of any fleet in the Empire. Their ships sometimes carry technologies otherwise proscribed to the rest of the Known Worlds. Heat blasters and tractor beams are outfitted on a number of their ships.

The Church fleet headquarters and prize court is at Holy Terra.

Merchant Escort Fleet

As a rule, combat captains hate escort duty. However, the League has a fleet of ships that do nothing but escort. As might be imagined, it does not attract the most talented captains. When engagements happen, they are usually stacked against the escorts. Pirates rarely attack escorted convoys, but when they do, the escorts and their crew are usually left in the void of space in disabled ships. These unlucky men and women are almost never heard from again.

The freighters they are escorting are a constant nuisance as well. Most commercial captains run with as little crew as possible. Escort captains constantly have to loan out crew to do repairs or to replace key personnel who have fallen ill or died. This leaves them in tight conditions when the raiders attack, but if they do not loan the crew, the entire convoy travels slower.

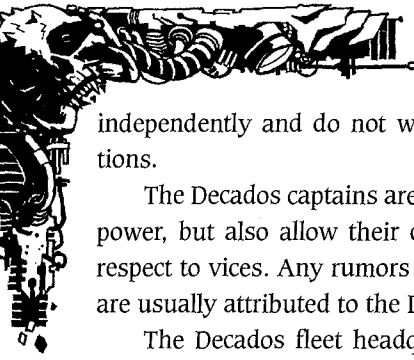
The only way the League manages to keep the escort fleet crewed is by making it the training fleet for new members. Anyone seeking a League position of master pilot or master engineer aboard a ship must first serve in the League Escort Fleet. In some ways, this makes an escort captain's job even harder, but at least she is guaranteed a full crew.

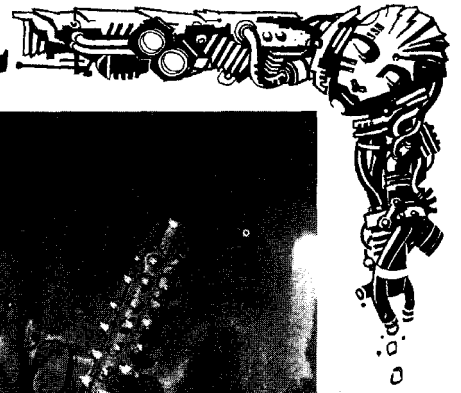
All League ships are only marginally treated as military vessels and the regulations aboard are generally extremely loose.

Obviously, escort captains would like nothing better than to end the practice of prize money for captured ships. However, while it lasts, they take any captured raiders to the nearest house or Imperial prize court — with the exception that every effort is made not to sell the raider back to its previous owner.

Reeves Debt Collection Fleet

Captains who survive escort duty make it into the debt collection fleet. Since a percentage of the collection is con-





sidered prize money, old guild engineers and pilots constantly apply to these ships as well. This makes the crews of the debt collection fleets the highest-trained pilots and engineers anywhere. The Reeves created the fleet to enable them to enforce loan payments owed by noble houses and even Church sects. Petty nobles make up most delinquent loans, but without the fleet to collect, the petty noble's more powerful cousins might intervene. Debt collection duty is a walk on easy street. Since the Emperor Wars, no one has challenged it. The Reeves take it seriously and invests the money to make it formidable.

System Fleets

Many planets established system defense fleets to guard their trade lanes from pirates. They built crude ships without jump engines to patrol the trade lanes between the planet and the jumpgate. They also bought decommissioned ships from the noble houses to use. In other words, the ships are cramped, dirty and in generally-bad condition. Most leak air and must return to dock often to replenish. Officers avoid them like the plague. They become a sort of welfare area for defeated captains and officers with no social ability. The masters and mates aboard fall into the same category. Thankfully for the lower-ranking crew, any other combat vessel can board them and press the lower ranks for their own needs. This means they usually sit in the docks for lack of

sufficient crew to sail them. Many have rusted into their docking clamps and serve no purpose other than convenient storage for spare parts.

Planetary governors sometimes also commission fixed defense posts along the trade routes. These are rarely more than watch posts and attract the same level of crew as the system defense fleets. Assignment to one can be a death sentence since they are so poorly-maintained and infrequently visited. Slowly, the Known Worlds factions are turning to automated satellites to serve this purpose, despite complaints from the church.

Starbases

On the other hand, many an old captain begs for command of a starbase. A starbase command is like being mayor of a large town. There are numerous opportunities to skim a few dollars off the trade going in and out of a base. Bribes to allow illegal imports, docking fees, kickbacks for under assessment of import taxes — the list goes on. The captain's crew often works with her for a share of the take. They know little of how to fire their guns, but excel in their bartering skills. They enjoy the best quarters in the navy and the most perks. Discipline is almost non-existent. The captain simply passes any unruly members of his crew off to a visiting ship's press gang.







Hot Spots

Brother Amestreus and Sister Diana stood at the top of Mount Durano, surveying the destruction in the dying light of dusk. The Kurgans had held for the entire day before relinquishing the battlefield, and the dead lay strewn about over almost a dozen acres of land. Trees lay where explosions had knocked them, and giant furrows marred the earth where several tanks had clashed.

Except for the barbarian uniforms on many of the bodies, the battlefield could have been any of a dozen on which the two had fought before. Smoke rose from numerous sources, obscuring the vultures circling over the dead. Nothing could obscure the moans and cries of the wounded, however.

"A successful day," Diana said as she peered in the direction the Kurgans had retreated. "With just one fresh company we could have pursued them all the way back to their base. They wouldn't have been ready to fight again for months."

Amestreus stretched his arms far over his head, and a low growl rumbled up from his chest. "They would be as ready to fight as we, Diana. Should they attack our monastery, we would fight them with every ounce of passion the Pancreator has blessed us. Despite their heathen ways, they would do the same."

Diana glanced at him, a worried look on her face. "You sound tired, Amestreus. You know our enemies will fall before us. The Pancreator has promised us success as long as we uphold His glory. We may die but His works grow and prosper."

A tight smile crossed Amestreus' lips. "May his works continue to flourish. May they prosper wherever humans kill each other. May they advance on every world where lasers tear apart alien flesh. May they blossom wherever our blood feeds the earth. With this rich fodder, how could they not?"

The Known Worlds gave a collective sigh of relief when the Emperor Wars ended, and inhabitants from Artemis to Vrill-Ya felt free to hope that they would never see such destruction again. After all, the successful crowning of an Emperor would surely end war for all time. Unfortunately, that was not to be. While giant fleets no longer roam the space lanes, dropping legions of bloodthirsty warriors to burn and pillage as they please, serfs and freemen still have reason to fear.

While most educated citizens know of the problems with the barbarians and the Symbiot threat, many are unaware of the many minor conflicts plaguing their worlds. No world is entirely free of armed conflict, though most stay localized. Such skirmishes generally involve neighboring feudal lords arguing over territory, guildmembers trying to establish trade routes and monopolies, and sect leaders settling theological arguments with their followers' fists.


Planetary leaders also find themselves using their military might to suppress all manner of dissent, from peasant rebellions to religious upheaval to coup attempts. While these can occur anywhere, some places seem more prone to them than others. Of course, anywhere player characters go somehow seems more at risk than other places.

Regional Conflicts

Regional conflicts in the Known Worlds tend to fall into one of three categories: those between the major factions or their allies, those between indigenous peoples and those they view as their oppressors, and those between local groups unaffiliated with any of the real powers. Those last are rare. Usually at least one faction can find reason to support one armed group or another, and most combatants would not refuse such aid.

Of course, such assistance comes with strings attached — and these strings have a way of becoming completely





wrapped around their recipients. For instance, when several communities of freeholders on Criticorum banded together to fight al-Malik taxes and conscription shortly after the Emperor Wars ended, they sought help from both the Li Halan and the Decados. Both groups offered weapons, but required that the rebels target their own special foes. The Li Halan insisted that they target a bard known for his pro-Rampart/anti-Li Halan songs while the Decados sought the destruction of an Imperial Eye safehouse. These attacks attracted the attention of the guilds and the Emperor. In the end the al-Malik sat back and watched as Imperial Eye field troops, supported by League spacecraft, made short work of the malcontents.

While all worlds occasionally see some kind of hostilities, continuous warfare now only plagues a few. All of these conflicts regularly utilize mercenaries, specially skilled individuals and anyone else willing to get involved. While the pay may or may not be the best, the causes unfailingly attract outsiders from across the Known Worlds.

Leminkainen

To the casual observer, Leminkainen appears the most pastoral of planets. Peasants till its green fields, hunters catch herds of game in its forests, and fishermen catch schools of fish in its streams. The nobles spend much of their time at tournaments, and festivals distract their serfs every month. However, this casual glance misses the truth of the situation.

Small-scale wars have afflicted this hot, forested world for generations. Barbarian raids have hit Leminkainen repeatedly, and a number of Vuldrok warlords have jumpkeys from their systems to it. Most raids involve a few spaceships zipping past the defenders at the jumpgate and either heading straight for the planet or hiding in the system for a month or two. Those who attack the planet immediately are the easiest to deal with as Leminkainen generally has warning of their approach. The others wait until the planet's defenses relax and then sneak in. These raiders generally get the best plunder as long as their crews do not starve to death in space first.

The worst of the raids began in 4525 and touched virtually every part of the planet. Along the way the Vuldrok have used every type of weapon from axes to plague bombs to tactical nukes to meson cannons. Over time, the Vuldrok even came to claim land on the world, and these little communities provided aid and succor to the raiders. During the Emperor Wars, these communities and several off-planet warlords combined forces to temporarily conquer the entire world. While they did not hold it long, preferring to trade their contested claim to recognized ownership of one of the planet's continents (Valdalla), they managed to become a deep-rooted part of the world.

Their warrior heritage seems to have infected the rest of Leminkainen's inhabitants. The Vuldrok descendants make war on each other and their Hawkwood neighbors. The Hawkwoods defend themselves in these wars but have also begun instigating their own, both against the Vuldrok and each other. This especially worries Hawkwood leaders, considering the planet's bloody past and its excommunication by the Church in the 43rd century. Many feel it has long been the house's weakest link.

Thus when two Hawkwood nobles rally their troops against each other, as when Baroness Margaret Spencer Hawkwood recently went to war with Earl William James Hawkwood, the leaders worry. She called up her peasant militia, gathered her knights and their entourages, and moved against Earl William's finest pastures. He and his knights met her outside the town of Pucklechurch where their clash soon destroyed acres of farmland. As their feud continued, Vuldrok raiders took advantage of the confusion to attack the baroness' estates. She in turn hired mercenaries to defend her lands and accused the earl of collaborating with the barbarians.

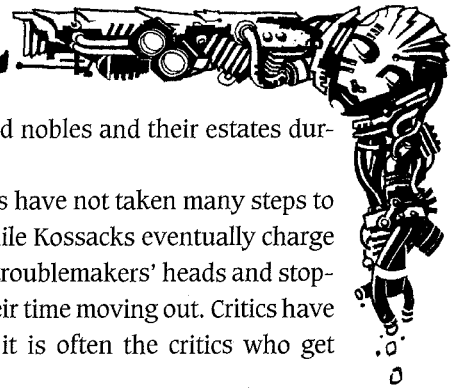
Such accusations have grown as old family loyalties appear in upheaval and new alliances with the barbarians begin. A large number of the planet's leading nobles either died in service to Alexius or moved to Byzantium Secundus to help him run things. Many of those still on the planet feel betrayed by the Emperor and think he should have moved immediately against the barbarians. These are often younger nobles or those who did little to support Alexius' bid for power.

Alexius and a number of Hawkwood nobles have taken steps to increase the solar system's protection. After all, it is only one jump away from both Ravenna and Byzantium Secundus. A number of House Hawkwood's strongest warships and most experienced crews have taken up positions around the jumpgate. The house regularly sponsors voyages through the solar system to seek out any Vuldrok ships that may hide near asteroids or on its other planets.

Finally, both the Imperial Eye and the Questing Knights have established bases here — a small castle for the Knights and a series of safe houses for the Eye. Both groups organize forays into Vuldrok territory, both on Leminkainen and on other planets. While ostensibly for making contacts and gathering information, these operations have also proven amazingly successful at stopping raids before they start.

Still, this has done little to stop the many conflicts flaring up on Leminkainen. Nobles and warlords clash on a regular basis, and alliances have become very fluid things. A number of priests and cathedrals have mounted their own expeditions, against both barbarians and nobles they saw backsliding. Brother Battle, while not at the forefront of these efforts, has seen some involvement and begun eyeing the





barbarian lands covetously. The Muster operates here regularly, bringing in mercenaries from Bannockburn to work with the planetary guard or for individual nobles. Even aliens have gotten involved, with Ur-Obun helping nobles in exchange for land and Ur-Ukar occasionally appearing in Vuldrok fiefs.

Malignatius

The constant chaos on Malignatius could only happen on a Decados planet, or so its enemies claim. Once a stable if slightly eccentric part of House Li Halan's holdings, the Decados conquest and ensuing years of occupation have caused a dramatic change. The Decados invasion went as smoothly as could be expected, but its occupation met opposition, especially from local Church leaders. It did not take long for Decados officials to "discover" massive corruption among the Li Halan-aligned Church officials. Several ended up in jail before the archbishop arranged to ship the rest off-planet to various monasteries.

The archbishop and the Decados haggled for years over replacements. During this time the faithful found themselves without guidance, and preachers of all types flocked to fill the void. When the Church and Decados finally agreed on who would replace who, these self-proclaimed holy men had gathered thousands of followers. The official priesthood had little success bringing these new converts back to the fold, and the turmoil began.

The most obvious conflict is within the legion of evangelists. Charges of heresy and apostasy fly back and forth with amazing regularity, and believers usually end up settling theological disputes in the streets with fists and clubs. Some of these religious riots have torn up cathedrals, devastated villages and left entire cities in shambles. On a few occasions, this religious fervor has swept across continents and even the entire planet, leaving smoking ruins of once-gleaming metropolises.

The second major conflict is between the organized Church and these many hesychasts. Priests have tried their best to bring these dissenters into line with official doctrine, but with little success. Indeed, the dissenters have had more success luring away the Church's followers (and even occasional priests) than the Church has had reeling them back in. The Church has called in some of its most persuasive proselytizers to deal with the situation (including more than a few inquisitors), but without the support of the local nobility, they have made little headway.

No one is really sure what the Decados' role in this is. On the face of it, it would appear that they suffer the most. After all, every time one of these waves of religious hysteria pounds the planet, production goes to hell as everyone stops working. Far more gets destroyed than gets built during these periods. It takes a while for things to calm down,

and mobs have even attacked nobles and their estates during their frenzies.

Despite this, the Decados have not taken many steps to prevent these outbreaks. While Kossacks eventually charge into the streets, knocking in troublemakers' heads and stopping the tumult, they take their time moving out. Critics have complained about this, but it is often the critics who get targeted first by the mobs.

What these riots have succeeded in doing is destroying the planet's old Li Halan power structure and bureaucracy, allowing the Decados to fully replace it with their own. While a number of Li Halan sympathizers still live on Malignatius, any chance of an organized resistance has faded, and even the old Li Halan caste system has broken down.

Additionally, when the Kossacks finally do move out, they arrest thousands, many of whom end up exiled to undermanned fiefs on other planets. While the Church would usually move to protect serfs against this uprooting, the priests have proven far more reticent in defending potential heretics. Thus, the Decados get a source of exploitable labor far cheaper than their Muster purchases that they can do with as they please.

Finally, the destruction has made it easier for the Decados to begin turning Malignatius into a penal colony. Hardened criminals from other worlds (murderers, rapists, Hawkwood sympathizers, etc.) often find themselves in Malignatius' depopulated wastes, living out the rest of their (usually short) lives in mining gulags. The planet's one moon, Julka, has become a jail for the very worst of these, and a sentence here is the equivalent of being slowly tortured to death.

Outsiders find this world unpredictable in the extreme, but the chaos presents plenty of opportunity. Scavengers have been especially active, for the Li Halan never fully exploited the planet's ancient ruins, and the scavengers find plenty of good technology here. Their less-savory brethren have also found Malignatius' serfs to be excellent clients for gambling and black market goods — the very goods their religious leaders rail against. Other groups have begun studying the planet's bizarre dynamics for fear it might spread. Even some of the local religious leaders, like Brother Lazio Urtana, have begun hiring off-worlders for their own purposes.

Rampart

For many years Rampart served as a sort of safety valve to the Empire, a place where cast-offs and troublemakers ended up before someone killed them. This led to a free-wheeling, egalitarian community — the closest thing to a democracy in the Known Worlds. It also became a hot spot for intrigue as well as a center for criminals of all types. While a number of noble houses owned fiefs around the world, none commanded the entire planet, and its leader-





ship consisted mostly of guild officials.

When the Li Halan invaded during the early stages of the Emperor Wars, officially due to fears that House Decados or Hawkwood planned to use it to launch an invasion, the League was in no position to respond. First, the guild that ruled the planet had never actually joined the League. Second, and perhaps more important, was the fact that the League fleet was busy off Istakhr trying to get the al-Malik to pay off old debts. By the time they could respond, the world had already fallen.

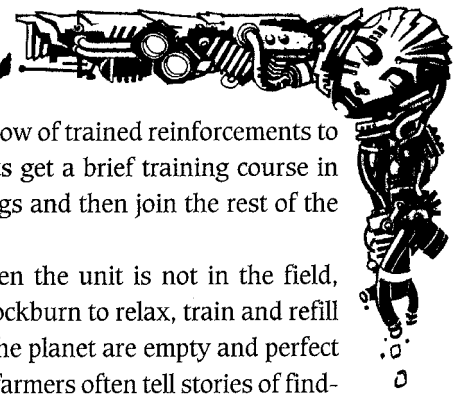
Despite this, many of the planet's residents hope that the League will come to their rescue. They have not left their fate completely in the League's hands, however. The initial Li Halan assault faced little difficulty, blowing past the Rampart's meager space fleet and planet-to-space guns before pounding the planet from space as troops rained down. House Li Halan's continued control has not been that easy, however.

The Rampart rebellion might appear sporadic, flaring up out of nowhere and then disappearing just as quickly, but that is because it is so well organized. Its leaders know they cannot defeat the Li Halan in open battle, especially now that the house can bring the full strength of its experienced military to bear. Instead, they hope to score points politically, either making the planet too costly for the Li Halan to hold or bringing outside attention to their cause.

Thus, attacks occur whenever the rebels feel the time is right. This may be when prominent non-Li Halan arrive, tax collectors try to ferry money to Kish, major Li Halan festivals are underway, or a major installation lets its guard down. For instance, when the giant smelters at Parlsburg began manufacturing ceramsteel late in the Emperor Wars, it maintained the same security force it had when it developed less-valuable iron. Somehow, the rebels found out when its production hit full capacity to fill an order for a number of new capital ships for the Li Halan navy. That was when they struck. Not only did they destroy the plant's production capability, but they also introduced advanced rust agents into the raw materials waiting transformation, setting back the plant's ability to produce anything by more than a year.

The rebels have also hit power plants, large mining operations, cathedrals and more. They have assassinated several Li Halan nobles, visiting Church officials and local leaders they consider quislings. Such actions have inspired especially harsh responses by the Li Halan governors. Inquisitors and other Church officials have a free reign on the planet, going wherever they want to root out evil. The Li Halan legal system, which encourages a caste-like system, enforces it on Rampart with severe penalties to violators. When these efforts did not succeed in breaking the uprising, the Li Halan set their Vorox commandos loose on the planet.

Giant multi-limbed monstrosities ripped through remote



villages, seeking anyone with any ties to the rebellion. They struck at night, crashing through doors, walls and roofs in search of their prey. They yanked people out of their beds, hauling them outside to wait in the cold Rampart night as the Vorox tore apart their worldly possessions. The slightest hint that someone had aided the rebellion would end in their removal, the confiscation or destruction of their goods, the arrest of the families and sometimes the burning of entire villages.

While the Vorox commandos did not see that much use (there being only a limited number of them), horror stories about their depravations spread like wildfire. The whole planet, even those parts not involved in the rebellion, quickly came to fear and hate these aliens. In fact, as the stories spread and grew, distrust of all aliens began to grow as well. Non-humans have found their visits to the planet marred by discourtesy, insults and even violence. Local alien communities have suffered similar problems, and some have secretly hired mercenaries to protect them.

Bannockburn

Also known as "Warriors' World" and "Battleburn," Bannockburn provides soldiers for most of the Known World's hostilities. The Muster handles most of this, molding together legions of troops for duty on Stigmata, Leminkainen, Kurga, and anywhere else the need arises. These troops come from all over the Known Worlds, though League planets provide more than anyone else does. Leagueheim, Madoc and Bannockburn all supply a fair number, though Bannockburn supplies the most.

The planet's heyday came during the Emperor Wars, when every major house kept their buyers busy with constant orders. While the al-Malik started out as their best customers, by the end of the wars Alexius had replaced them. Much of his army at the Siege of Jericho came from Bannockburn. Of course, the Decados also utilized their services to an extreme degree, though they tended to buy slaves instead of hiring mercenaries.

Thus, while Stigmata may boast more soldiers and De Moley may have more weapons per capita, Bannockburn still has good reason to consider itself the warriors' planet. After all, warfare provides so many of its inhabitants their livelihood, whether as mercenaries, weapons makers, camp followers or whatever. With the end of the Emperor Wars, even more soldiers have moved here as the noble houses scaled back their militaries. These unemployed soldiers now seek whatever work they can find.

This means that the planet's many mercenary units have little problem finding experienced soldiers to fill their ranks. Renowned mercenary units like the Desert Tigers, the Black Uliks and the Phlag Dogs of War maintain offices here so that even when the bulk of the legion is away on a job, they

can maintain a continuous flow of trained reinforcements to the front. These new recruits get a brief training course in the unit's way of doing things and then join the rest of the legion in action.

During those times when the unit is not in the field, they usually return to Bannockburn to relax, train and refill their ranks. Large areas of the planet are empty and perfect for practice exercises. Rural farmers often tell stories of finding unexploded artillery shells or destroyed vehicles in their fields. Several units will sometimes work together on a particular exercise, as when the Desert Tigers wanted to practice anti-personnel operations and the Black Uliks wanted to learn how to kill tanks. Some of these have involved up to a dozen different groups, and native Gannok find themselves best off avoiding these test areas.

Of course, not all combat takes place in the hinterlands or involves mercenary units. Bannockburn also provides innumerable opportunities for the gladiatorial combats that have always been popular in the Known Worlds. Ex-soldiers and veteran pugilists duel it out here with bare fists, blades, cybernetic equipment, guns and sometimes even flitters and skimmers. While the Church officially opposes fighting to the death, these things do happen. The fact that most of the crowd knows beforehand that one of the combatants is likely to die is only coincidental.

The cities have also seen less-controlled instances of violence. As even mercenary operations (and the employment that comes with these) have become scarcer, unemployed soldiers have begun taking to the streets. Some do this for profit, becoming bandits and pirates, while others do it for the sheer thrill. Some Oubliette's (mind physicks) believe these people only feel alive when in combat and will fight even if it means they will die. They call this Bannockburn's Blight. Instructors at Bannockburn's Veringetorix Military Academy have looked for ways to deal with this, but they usually just recommend shooting those with the Blight.

Such individuals pose a special danger to Bannockburn since so many of them have access to military weapons, have experienced combat, purchased cybernetic enhancements, or are even more dangerous. When a veteran of a dozen battles, equipped with an assault laser and an arm that fires off energy grenades, goes on a rampage, more than a few people are going to die.

Other Places

These worlds are certainly not the only ones offering warriors opportunity. Almost every planet has its own internal conflicts that turn violent. Nobles feud everywhere, guilds compete for exclusives, and even the Church occasionally needs someone to stop a peasant rebellion. Mercenaries have made contacts on Grail, believing that the royal houses might



seek to move on House Keddah's turf. They have also begun casting eyes at Iver in the belief that the Hazat, House Decados or even the Church might want to add it to their collection of worlds. Any more Lost Worlds that make contact with the Known Worlds with certainly have their own armed conflicts. And of course, there is Srtigmata, the most intense conflict current in the Known Worlds (see below).

The Vuldrok Frontier

Following Alexius' rise to the throne, many Hawkwoods felt they had it made. With one of their own ruling all the Known Worlds, surely nothing could stand in their way. The 51st century would belong to them. Unfortunately, more than a few people seem to feel otherwise. Not least of these are the Vuldrok, a loose confederation of tribes and races who seem to survive by raids and piracy.

The Vuldrok have targeted fiefs on Leminkainen and Gwynneth repeatedly, and every Hawkwood on those planets lives in constant readiness. Some would call this readiness "fear." After all, the Vuldrok raids have resulted in almost as many deaths among the nobility as did the Emperor Wars. Thus Hawkwood nobles in targeted areas view the Vuldrok as an even greater threat than the Decados.

In fact, nobles on these worlds spread horror stories about how Vuldrok treat captured soldiers, serfs and freemen. Tales of mass murders, horrible tortures and dark, savage rituals are just the beginning. The Vuldrok destruction of Olson, a village on Gwynneth, has almost become a cause unto itself, with more than one knight pledging himself to avenging those souls.

According to those who tell this tale, Vuldrok ships appeared in orbit about 100 years before the Emperor Wars began. They tried to strike at one of the richest fief's on the planet, that of Duchess Clarise Hawkwood. Their ships sliced through the atmosphere, unloading ferocious warriors into the heart of her mining and farming communities. The barbarians stormed through farms, granaries, pastures and churches, taking what they could and burning the rest. They disrupted the planet's entire communications system (or what passed for one at the time), and sent the entire world into paroxysms of terror.

The raids cut Olson, a distant farming village, off from the rest of the fief. When the Vuldrok left, finally driven off by the planet's defenders, Duchess Clarise tried to reestablish contact with the many areas ravaged by the raids. When her troops finally reached Olson, the town had become little more than a memory. Its buildings lay in ashes, razed to the ground. Corpses littered its desolate streets, and even the gnawing of wild animals could not cover up the atrocities those bodies had suffered while alive.

Thus the story has existed as the standard for judging all Vuldrok: ferocious killers interested in nothing but loot

and destruction. Unfortunately, more informed sources doubt that the Vuldrok had anything to do with the attack. The area around Olson could have attracted anyone due to rumors of a recently uncovered Second Republic factory. Thus scholars have quietly pinned the blame on local bandits, Decados troops using the Vuldrok raid as cover for their own depredations, Hawkwood experiments, Duchess Clarise's opponents within her own family, mistaken Inquisitors, and even attempts to resurrect the Anunnaki.

While the Vuldrok have committed their share of atrocities (Leminkainen still bears the scars of their plague bombs), those who have studied them the most know that they are far more than unthinking barbarians. Indeed, trying to classify them as any one kind of person is exceptionally difficult. The Vuldrok share little except a love of their gods and disdain for non-Vuldrok. Each planet in the Vuldrok confederation varies a great deal, and different tribes on each world maintain distinct differences. As far as any Known World is aware, the Vuldrok do not have a single leader. Indeed, none of their planets seems to have a single ruler, despite individual Vuldrok chieftain's attempts to present themselves as such.

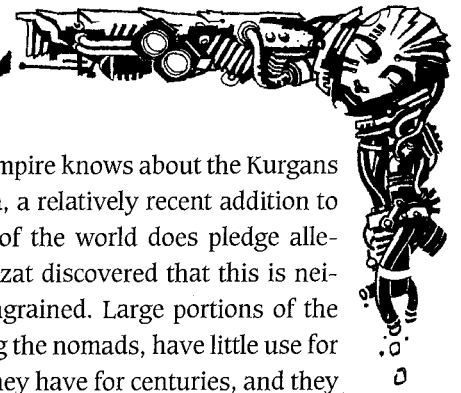
Instead, individual warlords have as much authority as they can command. The most influential ones can rally large fleets to attack other groups and defend their own worlds. Even though the Vuldrok lack the scientific acumen of the Known Worlds (limited as that might be), they have maintained a great deal of old technology. While members of the League drool at the chance to sell their least-sophisticated equipment to these barbarians as high-tech marvels, others worry about how the Vuldrok have managed to maintain space travel.

The Church especially worries about the Vuldrok Runecasters and shamans responsible for maintaining ships and weapons. Vuldrok seem convinced that these *vitki* keep them operating in space, ensure that their blasters still fire, and prevent Krakens from stealing their immortal souls. The League scoffs at such beliefs, but the Church fears that the Vuldrok clergy, embracing both the spirit and devices, may prove attractive to its own adherents. This, combined with the Brother Battle order's own desire for new lands to conquer, has added weight to calls for a Crusade.

For years those who hoped to take the battle to Vuldrok worlds faced more than a few obstacles. First and most daunting was the lack of jumpkeys — while the Vuldrok had access to the Known Worlds, only a few legendary figures went the other way. Up-to-date keys never seemed to make it into the hands of the Charioteers. Those that did suffered from data drift.

A second major problem stemmed from the growing Vuldrok population on Leminkainen. As the main portal to barbarian space, no one could mount an expedition without





word reaching the planet. The inhabitants seemed to have some way of warning their brethren elsewhere, for such expeditions always seemed to encounter immediate resistance.

The lack of definite information about the Vuldrok poses a third difficulty. What information the Known Worlds do have contradicts itself. Some believe the Vuldrok have split into hundreds of autonomous tribes, while others think each planet has its own ruler. Of course, no one even knows how many worlds make up the confederation. Some say as few as five while others claim fifty.

Of course, the main obstacle is the Vuldroks' own ferocity and skill. One thing all Vuldrok seem to have in common is an inbred lust for battle and war. The Vuldrok start young, joining their elders on hunts by the time they are four and war parties by age eight. While the Vuldrok community on Leminkainen has farmers and settlements — even some towns approaching city size — these are the exception. Most Vuldrok still live close to the land, following a partially nomadic existence. They also make war on each other incessantly, though they seem to save their deadliest weapons for use against other cultures. Finally, they hoard and maintain old technology fanatically, only breaking it out to use or for a ritual blessing from the *vitki*. The image of a dirty, fur-clad warrior with an axe in one hand and a blaster in the other has been the last one many Hawkwood soldiers have seen.

The Kurgan Caliphate

While the Known Worlds have been content to classify all Vuldrok as psychopathic savages, the Kurgans have proven far harder to pigeonhole. While most Hazat describe them as barbarians who speak a coarse tongue and ascribe to bizarre customs, other observers dismiss such talk. They point to captured art and equipment as giving evidence of a more sophisticated culture, and prisoners describe beautiful cities with towering buildings and happy people. The Known Worlds have begun putting together greater knowledge of the Caliphate, and both the Emperor and the Hazat have offered rewards for jumpkeys into Kurgan space. Gossip has it that both have found such keys and have funded expeditions into the Caliphate with the aid of the Charioteers.

The first concrete details about the Caliphate began dribbling in shortly after the Emperor Wars ended. Now rumors fly through the Empire about the Caliphate. Some people say upheaval has gripped its worlds, with their inhabitants taking advantage of the continuing war on Kurga (known to its inhabitants as Hira) to push for autonomy. Others say the Caliph has begun marshalling a massive armada to move against the Known Worlds, beginning either with Vera Cruz or with whole new jumproutes. Needless to say, House Hawkwood especially fears a Vuldrok/Kurgan alliance

against its worlds.

Still, most of what the Empire knows about the Kurgans comes from fighting on Hira, a relatively recent addition to the Caliphate. While much of the world does pledge allegiance to the Caliph, the Hazat discovered that this is neither universal nor deeply ingrained. Large portions of the population, especially among the nomads, have little use for the Caliphate. They live as they have for centuries, and they fight the Kurgans as willingly as they do the Hazat.

Of course, bringing the natives over to their side is, at best, a secondary goal to defeating the Kurgans. Despite the reinforcements the Hazat have brought to the battle since the Emperor Wars ended, they have not made much headway. The Kurgans have also brought in more troops, and despite frequent clashes at the jumpgate and above the planet, neither side has managed to stop the other's flow of reinforcements and supplies. The Hazat have found the Kurgan space fleet a match for their own, and neither side seems ready to risk a decisive space battle.

The conflict on the ground is another story. The Hazat began this war like any other, with individual nobles seizing land and claiming it for their own. They hit the Kurgans in their weakest areas, but then found themselves stymied. Only after these nobles managed to consolidate their efforts did they manage to seize the planet's main spaceport. They have not expanded much farther.

Luckily for the Hazat, the Kurgans have not appeared much more unified. The spaceport gets attacked on a regular basis, but not in a very coordinated manner. The Hazat believe the Kurgan commanders come from different parts of the Caliphate, often with different orders and objectives. As a result, while individual battles are invariably bitter, their form is always unpredictable.

While one might have the Hazat battling a few thousand irregulars who can attack and disappear at will, another may place them against tanks and beast cavalry supported by catapults and flitters. The Kurgans might throw thousands of sword-wielding fanatics into seizing a distant outpost but only commit a few snipers to defending a supply depot.

Kurgan forces seem as diversely equipped as they are utilized. Since each region of the Caliphate supplies its own troops, standardization is almost nonexistent. Despite these weaknesses, however, the Kurgans have not lost. Their leaders' abilities are unquestionable, and ranks seem primarily based on ability. Additionally, the Kurgans control most of the planet. While a significant portion of their force must stay devoted to keeping the natives in line, the rest still outnumber the Hazat and control the best terrain. Indeed, assaults on the spaceport have intensified of late, and the Hazat fear that a new commander may be bringing the Kurgans together at last.



Stigmata Garrison

Baylor couldn't hold back his lunch anymore — it came streaming out of him hot and wet, spraying the sergeant's leg.

"Damn it, newbie!" the sarge said, more pissed at the young serf's behavior than the stain on his pants (he was already covered in mud). "He's been dead a while now, no reason to get all pukey."

The person he referred to was Lt. Garrick of the Fifth legion, Typhon company. He'd been missing for days now, assumed captured by Symbiot infiltrators. Baylor's platoon had just stumbled across his body in the woods east of Sytan. The poor soldier had been bound to a tree by plant fibers, and his stomach had exploded from within, birthing some sort of white maggots. A few still wiggled on the ground, but most had moved on or been gathered by their Symbiot masters. Garrick's corpse still held a face of horror frozen upon it.

"What the hell happened to him, sir?!" Baylor yelled, unable to look away from the dead soldier.

"Get a grip," the sarge said. "They used him as a womb for something. I've seen it before. And if you don't pull it together now, recruit, it'll happen to you! There's a mess of wrong going on here — these sicko mutants warp the Pancreator's creations left and right. You'll get used to it."

Baylor closed his eyes and whispered a litany his father used to read to the parish back on Rampart. It comforted him, and he remembered his purpose here — to prevent what happened to Garrick from touching anyone in the Known Worlds. He was a holy warrior of sorts, he told himself. The Pancreator would watch over him here. Even though he was just a serf, a farmer for his Li Halan lords, fate had chosen him for the Levy, and brought him here. He swore that he would return with honors and medals, and stood up again, wiping spittle from his chin.

He looked over at his sergeant to give him a nod and saw the color go out of the old veteran's face as he stared into the woods. Baylor followed his gaze and saw the thing, a white, pulpy mass of maggots writhing its way through the underbrush towards them. It had somehow mutated a mouth which opened and closed as if licking its chops. Between chews, he could see human remains, waiting to be digested by the slowly oozing acids within.

He felt something hot and brown form between his legs before he ran, ignoring the screams of his platoon mates...

The Screaming Land

Stigmata has always been a cursed world. Since its discovery by corporate explorers in the early Diaspora, the world presented a challenge to colonists and terraformers. While

the natural environment resembled that of Urth, the planet (then called Shiraz) proved unstable; its continents continuously shifted. The southern continent of Iden had only broken away from its parent Durem within recent centuries — moments in geological time.

Technicians brought the nascent science of terraforming with full force to the world, and scientists tried to pry under the planet's crust and calm the grinding plates. They only exacerbated the problem and initiated a massive earthquake which created Durem's eastern archipelago, sinking and raising portions of land. Many workers and colonists lost their lives in the cataclysms, prompting the world's new moniker: Sepulcher.

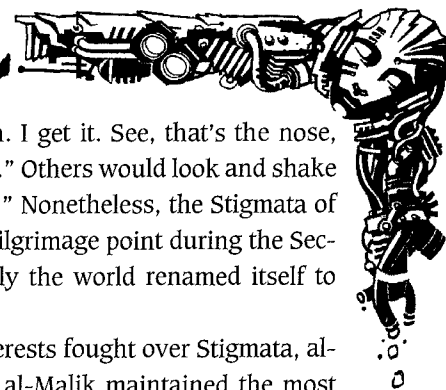
Nonetheless, hardy colonists still came to Sepulcher to eke out a living free from authoritarian influence. The corporate interests which shared ownership of the world were content to mine its newly-revealed reserves. In 2933, a large group of pilgrims arrived. This band, under the leadership of the charismatic priest J'waltan, were descended from nomads who had once followed the Prophet, a wagon train of supplicants and believers that grew up around Zebulon and his saints.

Like other nomadic bands, they traveled from world to world as they wore out their welcome in each place they stayed. With no ties to any noble house or corporation, their squatting constantly annoyed the powers that were. Only their connection to the rising Universal Church offered them any relief from harassment.

Their journeys eventually led J'waltan's band to Sepulcher. As soon as he set foot on the world, J'waltan declared that his peoples' wanderings were over. Here they would pitch their tents, grow roots into the soil, and never leave. Their journey was at its end, no matter the challenges that faced them here. And there were harsh challenges indeed...

A second planetwide seismic disturbance wracked the world, flinging up mountains and thrusting land into the seas. Fully a quarter of J'waltan's people died, their bodies buried under mountains or sucked into the waters. Despair overcame them and they begged J'waltan to leave the world, but he resisted, leaving them for a month to roam the wastes alone, seeking a vision. He knew in his heart that this was their world, but their tragedy planted doubt.

He returned to his people a changed man. While some of the band had already given up and left, traveling to a corporate town and indenturing themselves for passage off-world, most had stayed, waiting for the return of their leader. He spoke to them, claiming that he would leave them again soon, and this time he would not return. But he bade them not to despair, for he was to give himself to the Holy Flame



that resided in the heart of the world, a fire raging in anger at the wrongs done to the planet. This fire he would quench. He told them how his trial would be hard and full of pain, but that they would see the evidence of his triumph themselves, revealed in a miracle should he succeed.

The bandmembers held a month-long celebration, renewing their vows as pilgrims and cherishing the life they had led under J'waltan. Then he left, going into the mountains of central Durem. The next weeks were full of terrible portents, as minor earthquakes again shook the planet, and the worst storms yet seen attacked their spirits. Then, of a sudden, the skies cleared and the earth stilled. David, the new leader of the band, went with a small group into the mountains to find their former leader, and they saw the sign. On the side of a great mountain they saw his visage, the face of J'waltan seemingly carved from stone, his features at peace. And they knew that he had given his life to calm the world, and that the storms and quakes had been signs of his suffering. What's more, over the following years, they learned that when the rocks of J'waltan's face took on a reddish sheen, the worldsoul was troubled. By this sign, this stigmata, they knew to pray and fast.

When the corporate workers eventually investigated this miraculous phenomenon spoken of so reverently by the pilgrim colonists, they could see little of note. A few imaginative executives, after staring for a while at the rocks, finally

nodded and said: "Oh, yeah. I get it. See, that's the nose, and those caves are the eyes." Others would look and shake their heads: "It's just a rock." Nonetheless, the Stigmata of J'waltan became a popular pilgrimage point during the Second Republic, and eventually the world renamed itself to reflect its most famous site.

After the Fall, many interests fought over Stigmata, although the League and the al-Malik maintained the most control over the world. When the Symbiots invaded in the early part of the century, however, the defense of Stigmata and the Known Worlds fell to the regent, and the world also fell under full regency control, eventually becoming an Imperial world once Alexius took the throne.

War has marred the landscape of Stigmata terribly over the last century of war. The ruins of old human settlements dot the land in both territories, some reclaimed by humans, others lost to Symbiot-accelerated organic growth, and still others lying unused. The mountainous Stigmata of J'waltan still stands, suffering near misses from orbital bombs, and the faithful claim that one eye now weeps. But all recognize that the color of the rocks is red, and has been so for many years.

The Symbiots, of course, perceive a different history. They see a world wounded and marred by human terraforming. Only some strange resilience of the World Egg (or J'waltan's sacrifice?) has kept the world alive. Indeed,



Stigmata

Ruler: Imperial/Symbiot (contested)

Cathedral: Orthodox/Eskatonic Order

Agora: The Muster

Garrison: 9

Capital: Darmak Station

Jumps: 3

Adjacent Worlds: Bannockburn (dayside), Istakhr (dayside), Shaprut (dayside), Nowhere (nightside), Ab-solution (nightside), Daishan (nightside), Chernobog (nightside)

Solar System: Blood 1 (0.453 AU), Ubix 2 (0.82 AU), Celadon 3 (1.23 AU; Gozo), Stigmata 4 (1.93 AU; Martyr), Spacestation Ventris (2.53 AU), Sargasso Belt (3.573-4.23 AU), Krag 5 (15.742 AU; Caltrop, Least, Mulwen), Vixen 6 (31.12 AU; Predator, Prey), Jumpgate (45.62 AU)

Tech: 6

Human Population: 70,000 (estimated)

Alien Population: Unknown

Resources: Minerals, deuterium

Exports: None

Landscape: Stigmata is an Urthlike world with one large continental landmass (Durem), a smaller, southern continent (Iden), a large northern island (Thrace), and vast seas (the Tibid is northwest of Durem, the Geber northeast, Sardil southwest, and Zos between Durem and Iden). Small arctic wastes cap the northern and southern poles of the world. Once an arboreal world, whole areas have been desertified due to human aerial and orbital bombing. Some of these territories have been reclaimed by the Symbiots and now show signs of new growth. However, the Symbiot war effort, low on lifeorce, cannot always spare energy to regenerate a dead region.

The seas belong largely to the Symbiots, especially Ornzai hivers mostly unaligned to the war effort (although this is unknown to most humans). The Symbiot war command does not control the seas, and must often petition the Ornzai primals for passage permission on the waters.

Humans control the solar system (for the most part), although its immensity prevents complete pacification, and certain areas are heavily occupied by Symbiots, to the extent that it is unfeasible for space navies to intervene. The jumpgate is the main source of human activity, and fleets stay on constant alertness to prevent Symbiots from coming and going.

the planet is a source of curiosity for the Phazûl, who wonder why, after so much war, the planet still seems to produce reserves of life and growth.

Nonetheless, Stigmata is called Akglazoth, the "Screaming Land," for its very plants are said to scream in pain for the damage done to the world. The Stigmata of J'waltan seemingly means nothing to the Symbiots, but its close proximity to the alleged location of the World Egg has lead some Phazûl to speculate on the connections between the local human faith and the Lifeweb.

(Note: See **War in the Heavens: Lifeweb** for details on Symbiots.)

Territories

The territories claimed by either side of the conflict have shifted dramatically back and forth over the past century of warfare. However, the Galzai war command has halted its advances of late, and seems content to dig in and hold the territories they have claimed. Such lulls in the war are not uncommon, but the humans nonetheless breathe a sigh of relief whenever they get such an extended break from the action.

The current territories and unclaimed regions are as follows:

Human Occupied Lands

The Stigmata Garrison controls the western regions of the Durem continent, everything west of the Zuped and Istal mountain ranges. While the coastal regions suffer occasional Symbiot insurgents, the interior is, for the most part, pacified.

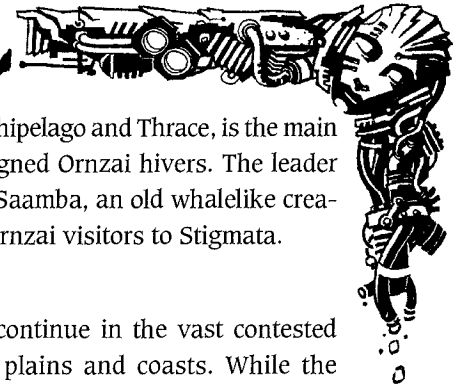
Working farmlands actually make up most of the interior plains, heavily guarded by air and land patrols. While no one living and working there is foolish enough to let down their guard, there have been very few battles since Alexius drove off the Symbiot assault in the early days of the Emperor Wars. Alexius has awarded many of the farms and plots in this region to retired knights and other combatants; they are fiercely loyal to him above any other faction.

The Vrool Forests west of the plains are largely unoccupied, for they represent a potential danger should Symbiots convert the flora and fauna en masse. Patrols still routinely travel through the woods on the lookout for enemy infiltrators.

Darmak Station: Located on Durem, just west of where the northern Zuped and southern Istal mountain ranges face each other across a delta, Darmak Station is the main headquarters of the Garrison and sits amid the ruins of the old capitol city. (Further details on Darmak Station can be found in **War in the Heavens: Lifeweb**.)

The Stigmata of J'waltan: Near Darmak is a nexus of roadways leading east to an ancient Second Republic moun-





tain base, now stripped of any valuable tech but still used as a watchpost and way station for troop travel. From here, a stunning vista looks out at the famous Stigmata of J'waltan mountain outcropping.

Unknown to the human occupiers, the base is the central entrance to the world's terraforming engines and the location of Stigmata's World Egg, the territorial goal of the Symbiots. So far, the Symbiots have kept their desire for this location secret by not assaulting it; they instead attempt to drive humans from the region. Initial scouts realized that physical access to the core is blocked by cave-ins and would need an excavation just to get a Symbiot close enough to hatch the egg. Such a project requires that the Symbiots control the territory first.

Symbiot Territory

The Symbiots control the southern Iden continent, although most of it has become a barren desert due to orbital bombing. They also control large areas of Durem's eastern archipelago.

Gilzothmû (Safehaven Mountain): Deep in the mountains of Iden, where many Symbiots hid during the firebombing of the continent, is the headquarters of the Galzai war command. The chief Xokor is Oglu Dukeer, a hardened Galzai hiver and cousin to the Xokor Tlan. He is typical of the vengeance-driven war faction of Symbiots which seek to drive humans from all worlds.

Yimkozoth (Red Coral Sea Home): In the deep sea,

between Durem's eastern archipelago and Thrace, is the main gathering place of the unaligned Ornzai hivers. The leader of the loose group is Saalto Saamba, an old whalelike creature converted by the first Ornzai visitors to Stigmata.

The Front

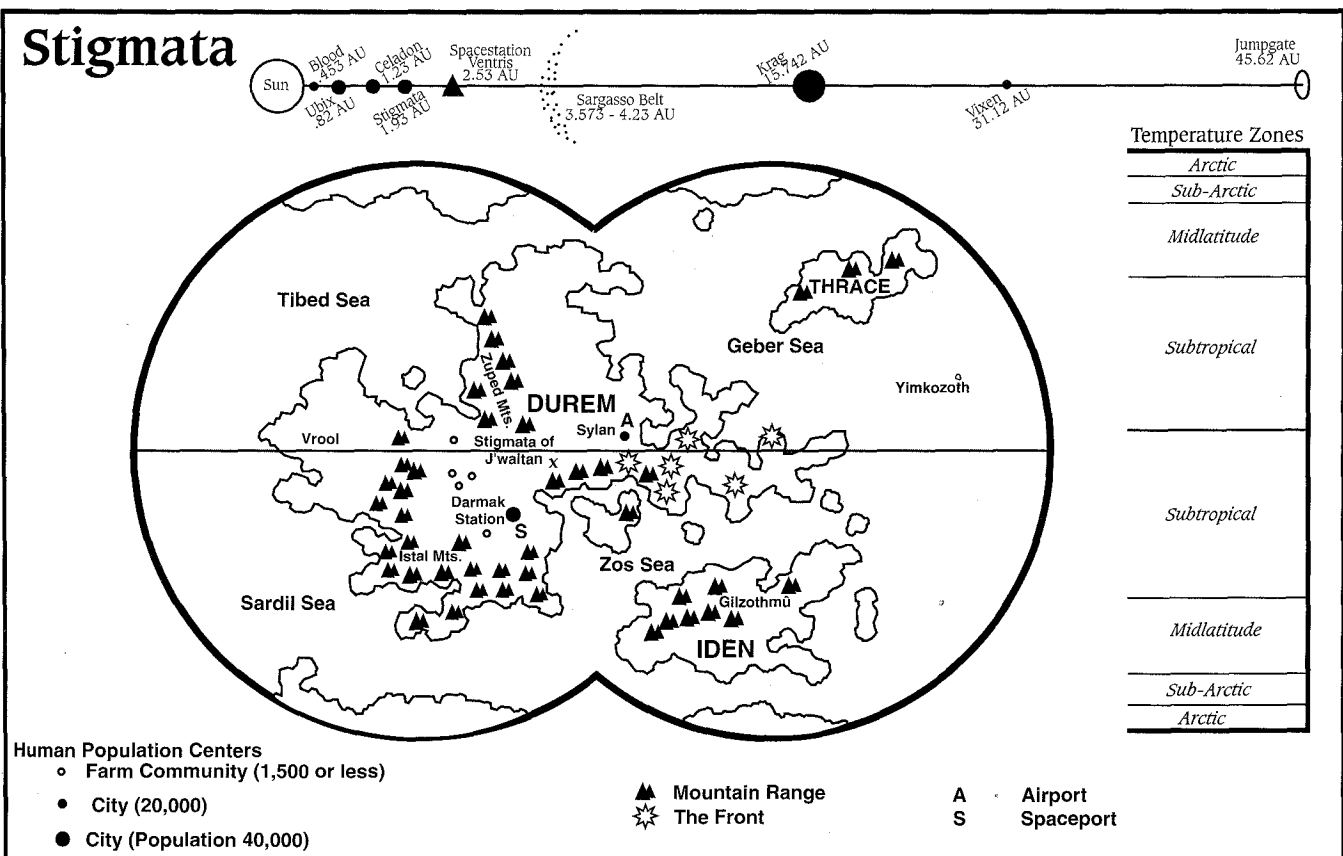
The worst battles still continue in the vast contested region of Durem's eastern plains and coasts. While the Symbiots have a good hold on the archipelago and islands, the humans have so far kept them from swarming over the plains. Although Symbiot encroachment has fallen off of late, skirmishes still ignite when human and Symbiot patrols meet.

The human headquarters here are in the ruins of Sylan, a former League trading town. It now houses the Fifth and Ninth Imperial legions.

The Garrison High Command is contemplating using this lull in the war to begin a new offensive and attempt to reclaim land from the Symbiots. Many field commanders, however, argue against this, pointing out the exhaustion of most of their troops and the impossibility of rooting out Symbiot spores without a firebombing campaign.

No Man's Lands

The southern bulk of the Istal Mountains has proven hard to claim by either party; it is too barren for most Symbiots, and too treacherous for most humans — fierce winds lash at flitters and hoppers, and no roads exist for



landcraft (old Second Republic roads are long ruined). Since few human soldiers use beasts for fear they can be converted, human travel in these mountains is limited to scouting patrols. The Symbiots keep watches here, but spend their energy elsewhere, where lifeforms are more abundant — and more exploitable.

The northern regions of Durem were likewise abandoned after suffering orbital bombardment. Symbiots waste little time on the region, and humans, too busy fighting for the eastern portions of the continent, rarely even send scouts anymore.

Thrace is largely ignored by both sides, for it serves little strategic purpose. It is too hard for the humans to constantly resupply an island, and it is too far from the World Egg to greatly interest the Symbiots. It has thus become a home for deserters and resisters from both sides. Unknown to the Garrison or the Galzai, humans and Symbiots have been forming scant, tentative alliances here as each tries to eke out a low-tech living far from sight and sound of the conflict. Many Indigenes have retired here.

Solar System

Blood: A small, mercurylike planet orbiting close to the sun.

Ubix: A world wracked by toxic storms, it nonetheless saw some Second Republic mining of its surface. The technology required for such an operation on this hazardous world no longer exists.

Celadon: While this wet world has a light atmosphere, its chemical seas sustain no advanced lifeforms. Its moon, Gozo, hosts an old mining facility that now acts as a small military base for humans. Rumors of a similar Symbiot base on the moon are so far unproven.

Stigmata: An Urthlike world wracked by war. Even its lightly-atmosphered moon, Martyr, has been scarred by firebombings and constant sorties. A Symbiot attempt to claim the moon years ago failed after a massive ordnance drop by human forces, ruining territory for both sides.

Spacestation Ventris: See details, below.

Sargasso Belt: A vast asteroid belt encircles the system. Here, ruined hulks of human ships and dead, rotting Symbiot vessels float amidst a chaotic array of rocks. Recovery of these vessels is often too risky; only vital systems are stripped, leaving the hulks behind. Nonetheless, the belt serves as the most dangerous point in the system, for Symbiot raiders hide out here, waiting for human prey to pass.

Krag: A gas giant orbited by three moons (Caltrop, Least, Mulwen). Mulwen has an atmosphere and a junglescape, known to hide Symbiot insurgents who recently crash-landed.

Vixen: An icy world with unbreathable atmosphere, a recent human survey discovered Symbiots living under its

surface. They had apparently metamorphosed breathing gills capable of handling the toxins in the subterranean atmosphere. Plans are being made to send troops in to flush them out. Vixen's moons, Predator and Prey, have erratic orbits, whereby Predator often comes dangerously close to Prey; piloting near them is perilous during this time.

Jumpgate: At least one dreadnought and a fleet of ships guards the gate. Symbiots are forced to fight intense fleet actions whenever they come into and go from the system, usually losing ships in the conflict. Rotting Symbiot hulls are propelled by escort ships past the jumpgate into deep space.

Human Ground Troops

Stigmata hosts seven legions: the Third, Fifth, Seventh, Ninth and Eleventh Imperial legions, the Manifest Light occult legion, and the Scions of Zhal, a Brother Battle legion. The Third, Seventh and Eleventh legions are based at Darmak Station; the latter two mainly specialize in cavalry and air support. The Fifth and Ninth, based in Sytan, are mainly infantry units. The Scions of Zhal, based in Darmak but with companies in Sytan, consists of equal parts elite infantry and cavalry. Manifest Light soldiers are assigned to various units throughout Stigmata, in space and planetside.

The Fifth and the Eleventh are both relatively new to the conflict, replacing the nearly-wiped out Sixth regiment and glory-winning Tenth (now stationed at Byzantium Secundus).

Each legion is composed of about 10,000 troops, and has about five regiments (designated by numbers, counting from the First Legion on: the Third legion's regiments are the 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th and 15th regiments), each of which has between three and five companies (designated by unique names: the Third legion's 11th regiment has the Cestus, Orpheus and Euresstes companies). Each company in turn is divided into platoons, which are further divided into squads and then fire-teams. Most of these are designated by unique titles earned in previous battles, although freshly-formed units are often given a Greek letter designation (Alpha, Beta, etc.) until they earn a name. Some examples are provided below.

Infantry

Stigmatan infantry is like infantry everywhere — mostly expendable. Most battles use infantry to secure territory. They are meant to finish a fight, not start one. They usually sweep in and clean up what enemy troops were not removed by an aerial bombing, and root out any Symbiots hiding in the region or who are literally rooted to its ground (not all Symbiots are mobile). However, this one-on-one fighting is



the most deadly, for Symbiots excel in personal combat over tactical actions. A few Symbiots can often wipe out a company of infantry — and convert some of them.

An infantry man's life is thus the most tense on Stigmata, for his contact with the enemy is the most intimate. Few can withstand this stress for long, and those infantry men who survive usually have the shortest tours of duty (18 months at best). While a lack of new troops (more die than can be brought in) keeps the Stigmata Garrison Command from easily committing to battles requiring infantry, their necessity nonetheless ensures that an infantry trooper on Stigmata will see battle more than once on his tour.

The lower-level units (the bulk of defense forces) use spears and swords, and some even have rifles. Medium-level units use assault rifles or Imperial rifles. Heavy units may be equipped with ceramsteel armor and blasters. Some specialty sniper units use lasers.

The most famed infantry units are the Black Saints, a platoon of the Fifth legion's Daros company, and the Grackle Foxes, a heavy weapons company of the Ninth legion.

Tour: 18 months

Pay: 4 firebirds/month

Equipment: Imperial Rifle, Scale Armor

Cavalry

Mounted soldiers are a necessity on Stigmata — those on foot are too slow and vulnerable to Symbiot assault. Besides, the heavy firepower required to take down a regenerating Symbiot is best used from a vehicle.

Below are the different types of cavalry currently used on Stigmata:

Beast

Living mounts are a rarity among humans here, for they have been too easily corrupted by Symbiots. Apparently, a horse can easily be converted or controlled to turn on its human master. Hence, animals are usually used only for bearing equipment well within safe territory. The initial use of Shantor cavalry units was quickly halted, once it was realized that their resentment against humanity often survived Symbiot conversion, creating monsters set on revenge.

Landcraft

A variety of landcrafts from all tech levels are utilized; equipment has been called up from many worlds, and not all of it is standardized. This lack of uniformity has made it very hard to maintain the wide variety of craft, and most usually wind up running on whatever makeshift repairs their engineers can provide — a rag-tag collection of jalopies.

Tanks

The majority of cavalry vehicles are armored tanks running on treads or armored wheels. While they are slow, they

All Walks of Life: the Imperial Levy

Most of the human troops waging war on Stigmata wish desperately to be anywhere else. Indeed, few of them actually chose to serve here; the majority of troops are conscripted serfs from fiefs across the Known Worlds, called up by the Imperial Levy. The Emperor demands an annual quota of troops (including noble officers) from every noble house, major and minor alike. Most of this quota is filled with serfs, but some of it includes free-men who have willingly sold their services in exchange for money or promises of land upon their retirement (an unlikely event).

However, as the war drags on, and the Levy threatens to draw too many serfs from noble lands, the noble houses often contract with the Muster to fill out their quota reserves. While this sometimes means the hire of mercenary units and professional troops, it more often means slaves. Muster press-gangs roam the Known Worlds, capturing whomever they think will go unmissed or who cannot afford to raise ransom or political trouble. Worlds like Pandemonium, whose refugees flock to the main city, have become de facto recruiting zones for the war effort.

Hence, the majority of troops who end up on Stigmata are unwilling, untrained and resentful of authority. This matters little, however, since most are doomed to harrowing service on the front lines, where they face the threat of Symbiot conversion and death. Those few who survive their tours of duty return home to find their noble lieges scheming some way out of the land grant promises they made. Appeals to the Emperor have brought Questing Knights to certain fiefs, a valiant few individuals who try to uphold the feudal contracts, but there are far too few of these knights, let alone those noble enough to do their duty to vassals.

And then there are the Indigenes, those troops who "go native." Some are insane, seeking pain or death, but others have become so immersed in the war, their whole identities formed by it, that they've forgotten how to live outside the war. Some of these are too unstable to use as troops, but attempts to forcibly return them to the Known Worlds are not always successful. Cadres have disappeared into the jungles, appearing again occasionally to turn the tide of a battle toward the humans, and then fleeing once more to their jungle haunts.

Until the war winds down or is resolved, misery is the lot of most serfs called upon to serve on Stigmata.





can withstand a lot of punishment. However, they are not air-tight; tentacles and spore-spitters are the bane of tank units.

The most feared tank unit is perhaps the Wheeled Citadel platoon of the Eleventh legion's Zabrud company. While it is a non-standard unit composed of various tech-levels of tank machinery, its soldiers' fearlessness even when swarmed by enemies has earned many medals.

Tour: 2 years

Pay: 8 firebirds/month

Equipment: Submachine Gun, Mech Tools, Volt Tools
Skimmers

The elite of the landcraft brigades are the skimmer corps, those troops lucky enough to be assigned to these fast anti-grav crafts. While rarely as well-armored as a tank, they can evade Symbiot traps better, especially spore-mines. For this reason, they are mainly used as scout vehicles, designed to flee upon encountering the enemy and warn the main troop columns.

The golden unit is currently the Jackrabbits, a light skimmer squad of the Eleventh legion's Quatro company. The unit's daring forays into the Symbiot-held archipelago make for thrilling campside tales.

Tour: 2 years

Pay: 8 firebirds/month

Equipment: Assault Rifle, Mech Tools, Volt Tools, Leather jerkin

Flitters/Hoppers

The most envied units are the air-cav: the flitters and hoppers that transport infantry troops and equipment to the frontlines. Their job is to get in, drop their load, and get out again — and also to rescue troops forced to fall back. Their crews rarely suffer much exposure to Symbiots, but their tours are usually the longer for it.

Every infantry soldier hopes Mihanoom's Minions is the unit to get them out of a tight fix, since the pilots of this hopper squad are the most renowned. The unit belongs to the Seventh's Xemed company.

Tour: 3 years

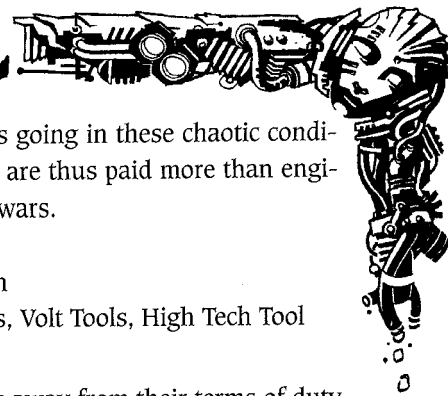
Pay: 8 firebirds/month

Equipment: Med Autofeed, Mech Tools, Volt Tools

Air Force

While the war has recently ground down into ground skirmishes, the High Command's desire is to maintain air superiority over the Symbiots, who now desperately rely on outside supplies. Of late, the Stigmata Garrison's air force has done a superlative job of keeping Symbiots out of the air, and their bombings have forced them underground or undersea.

The Garrison air force is a separate division from the ground legions. There are two Wings operating on Stigmata:



the Ninth and Tenth Imperial Wings. Each is divided into equipment-based units: bombers, fighters, stealth craft and transports. Each of these units is divided into squadrons.

Bombers

The Garrison maintains an array of bombers, from stealth planes or flitters designed to fly silently (not always effective against Symbiot senses) to larger, heavy-payload aircraft. Bombers usually are accompanied by an escort of fighters to engage any flying Symbiots. The duty of a bomber pilot is one of the easiest on the planet, since Symbiot air attacks are rare of late. Of course, there is no surviving a mishap.

Tour: 3 years

Pay: 9 firebirds/month

Equipment: Med Autofeed Pistol, Mech Tools

Aerial Intercept

Perhaps the toughest job in the air belongs to the crack fighter pilots who must intercept incoming Symbiot craft that have eluded the space defense fleet, or engage outgoing crafts. They are also called on to fight flying creatures of all ilks, metamorphosing Symbiots who are usually more maneuverable than any plane or flitter (although usually less well-armored).

The glory-hound unit here is the Black Bolts, a fighter squadron of the Ninth wing.

Tour: 2 years

Pay: 10 firebirds/month

Equipment: Med Autofeed Pistol, Mech Tools, Survival

Kit

Support

Behind every legion is a vast support team of artillerymen, engineers and medics. Behind them are the transport crews, camp workers, mess hall cooks and — inevitable even for Stigmata — merchants.

Artillery

A wide variety of artillery is used by a number of squads, from catapults to mortars to plasma tubes. Each artillery squad or platoon is based around a type of equipment, and includes plotters, porters, munitions specialists and repair engineers.

Tour: 2 years

Pay: 6 firebirds/month

Equipment: Compass, Squawker, Mech Tools

Combat Engineers

Unlike most conventional or better-planned wars, the Stigmata Garrison is forced to use non-standard equipment called up from a number of worlds. Parts clash with others, and repairing a faulty device requires ingenuity and invention. It's not just the equipment to take care of — fortifications and roads must be built and maintained. Those indi-

viduals who can keep things going in these chaotic conditions are highly-prized, and are thus paid more than engineers in most conventional wars.

Tour: 2 years

Pay: 10 firebirds/month

Equipment: Mech Tools, Volt Tools, High Tech Tool

Medics

Those medics who walk away from their terms of duty on Stigmata either become superb doctors or wasted wrecks from the stress. Few battlefields educate a physician more in the sheer variety of war injuries than those on Stigmata: from serrated bone-sword wounds, acidic slugs to tentacle-implanted spores. The spores are the worst — medics must work quickly to tear into the patient and retrieve the spore before it blossoms. This is a risky operation not only for the patient but the doctor — the spore could “go off” just as he extracts it, effecting him rather than its original target. Some medics don't even bother to heal spore wounds — they euthanize the patient rather than risk conversion to themselves or others.

While some medics are trained by the Amalthean order, most are troopers who displayed some aptitude for first aid or combat medicine.

Tour: 2 years

Pay: 10 firebirds/month

Equipment: Surgery Kit, Elixir doses, flame torch (for burning Symbiot infections and parasites)

Chaplains

While healing a body ravaged by Symbiot infestation is harrowing, healing the soul is harder — few soldiers leave Stigmata without permanent mental scars and phobias about insects, plants or even household pets. Chaplains often also act as medics, and are sometimes even combatants. Priests from any order can be found tending to the spiritual wounds of the Garrison soldier, but those with theurgic talent are urged to join the Manifest Light regiment.

A non-military order of volunteer chaplains called the Shriveners follows the regiment camps and attempts to relieve the misery of the wounded at camp. They also specialize in disposing of Symbiot-tainted bodies, holding moving last rites ceremonies before pyres while wearing plague masks.

Tour: 2 years

Pay: 5 firebirds/month

Equipment: MedPac with Elixir doses, Omega Gospels

Special Ops

As in any engagement, there are a number of special forces units designed for various purposes, from psychic assault to scouting to the fielding of intelligent war machines.



Scions of Zhal: Brother Battle Legion

A search and destroy outfit, the Scions of Zhal are the best troopers on the planet. Like all Brother Battle legions, these are superbly-trained fanatics. While they are more than willing to give up their lives to defend the Known Worlds from what they perceive as a demon menace, they are not eager to do so (unlike less well-trained Avestite troopers here). What's more, some of their companies specialize in theurgy, and are thus quite effective against Symbiots.

The bulk of the legion is stationed at Sytan, ready to go mobile at a moment's notice in search of reported enemy movements. Others are positioned at Darmak Station to add in its defense in case of surprise assault, and to even train non-Brother Battle troops in combat basics (certainly not advanced order secrets).

They are also one of the better-equipped legions, with two assault landers reserved exclusively for their use. One lander is usually at Sytan and the other at Darmak, ready to move Darmak's regiment to the field quickly. They also have a small fleet of armored flitters and skimmers, and a corps of guild Engineers on exclusive contract to constantly maintain their motor pool.

The problem they suffer, however, is that while they have been amazingly successful against encountered Symbiots, they do nonetheless suffer casualties — including converted Brothers. This is slowly whittling down the legion's numbers. An elite order like the Brothers can't simply resupply troops through conscription — it takes years to initiate and train a combat Brother. Thus, the longer the war drags on, the less effective this force becomes. For this reason, the order has recently joined the forefront of the faction calling for Stigmata's abandonment and firebombing.

The Brothers also see in the Manifest Light legion a substitute for their theurgic skills. They use this legion as an excuse to slow their resupply of new troops, hoping to let the Manifest Light soak up their losses. Of course, they also work to ensure that the Manifest Light stays on Stigmata and doesn't provide competition for the order's contracts elsewhere.

Manifest Light Legion

Composed of theurges and psychics working together, the Manifest Light is the Stigmata Garrison's elite assault force against the Symbiots, for the metamorphs have no natural defenses against the Manifest Light's unique weaponry — occult powers.

The order's leaders tend to come from the Eskatonic Order sect, but Avestite and Orthodox priests, psychic nobles and guildsmen also serve in high positions. While the Manifest Light is considered a separate legion, its troops are as-

signed to posts with other legions throughout the Stigmata system. While on such assignment, a Manifest Light trooper follows the local chain of command. However, promotions, medals and reassignments are handled by the legion's own command.

This hodgepodge of occultists are thrown together into battlefield units used to supplement infantry, cavalry or special forces — any unit that may encounter Symbiots. While such closeness allows them to better learn group rites or psychic powers across sectarian boundaries, it does tend to fuel theological arguments when conflicting dogmas meet on the field. However, Symbiot distractions often quickly put an end to sectarian differences.

Each Manifest Light trooper is given a special knife with the legion's emblem. This acts as a vestment for theurgy (+1 goal to any offensive or protective rite). In addition, some veteran troopers collect relics, battlefield remains (equipment or body pieces) of fallen comrades whose faith and power was such that a residue still remains with their mortal things. These vary in potency and effect, usually depending on the legendry the relic's original owner inspired.

Recruits to this legion are given the rank of private no matter what their civilian rank (even if it's a bishop!); those with proven combat experience may begin their tours as corporals instead. Promotion thereafter depends on battlefield expertise and — more rarely — the ability to bribe or kiss-up to higher ranks. Officer status in the Manifest Light is not reserved to just nobles; priests or psychics of any background can conceivably rise to officer status. However, it may not mean much outside of Stigmata.

Manifest Light theurges are taught to eat and breathe a unique form of combat theology; this tends to make them fanatics with an extreme black and white worldview. Priests outside of Stigmata worry about the soldier's effectiveness as priests once they leave their tours.

Tour: 3 years

Pay: 10 firebirds/month

Equipment: Vestment knife (1 Benefice pt), Flamegun, Med Revolver, Leather Jerkin

Manifest Light Theurgic Rites

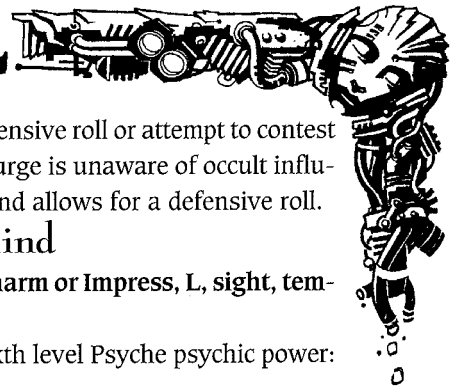
These rites were learned through years of hard labor in the battlefields of Stigmata, and appeared to the faithful as divine inspirations. Unique theurgies are also known, but most as yet have not been spread in repeatable ritual forms to others. Below are rites that can be learned by most Manifest Light recruits.

Sense Symbiot

(Level 1, Faith + Observe, P, temporary, 1W)

The theurge can intone a silent prayer which allows him to perceive any Symbiots within sight, even if they are mim-





icking a non-Symbiotic being (human, animal, plant, etc.). This isn't necessarily a visual sense, although it can be: theurges report smelling evil or hearing strange tones or feeling nauseous, in addition to the more common ability to actually see a Symbiot's motherform regardless of its current manifestation.

Note that a very few Symbiots with high Synergy levels (7+) have developed a form of Mimicry that allows them to mask their Symbiotic signatures from this rite and the Discern Lifeforce Synergy power.

Consecrated Body

(Level 2, Faith + Focus, GP, touch, one act, 1W)

This rite acts like the level one Orthodox rite: Consecration, except that it applies to individuals rather than things. In addition to the usual protection against psychic powers, Antinomy, Hubris, etc., the target gains protection from Symbiot powers, including conversion or lifeforce theft.

Fiery Doom

(Level 3, Dexterity + Shoot, LG, instant, 1W)

The theurge can shoot a stream of mystical flame at a target. He choose as a source either a weapon (such as the legion's unique knife) or his hands, eyes, etc. The range is 10 meters (this can be doubled per extra Wyrd spent) and the damage is five dice. The fire catches on its target and continues to burn, delivering five dice per turn for five turns. The flames cannot be extinguished through normal means (waters, rolling on the ground, etc.), but must be put out with mystical or metamorphic powers (armor does defend against this damage, although it may bleed through on rolls on 1 or 2). Note that metamorphic powers that lend flame resistance will work against this fire.

Reveal Thoughts

(Level 4, Extrovert + Observe, L, sight, temporary, 1W)

This rite acts like the third-level Psyche psychic power: MindSight.

A higher level version of this rite (level five) allows the theurge to read the minds of anyone mentally connected through the Hive Mind metamorphic power — thus revealing the Symbiot puppet master behind a servitor unit.

Divine Warning

(Level 4, Perception + Observe, P, temporary, 1W)

This rite acts like the fourth-level Sixth Sense psychic power: Premonition.

Cloistered Mind

(Level 5, Wits + Focus or Stoic Mind, P, temporary, 1W)

The theurge can erect a mystical shield about her mind, preventing others from using Psyche or metamorphic powers (such as Organic Empathy or Hive Mind) to read or influence her thoughts. The successes gained on the activa-

tion roll are added to any defensive roll or attempt to contest a power/rite. Even if the theurge is unaware of occult influence, this power alerts her and allows for a defensive roll.

Command the Mind

(Level 6, Extrovert + Charm or Impress, L, sight, temporary, 1W)

This rite acts like the sixth level Psyche psychic power: Headshackle.

Prevent Metamorphosis

(Level 6, Faith + Impress, LG, temporary, 1W)

The theurge may abjure a Symbiot to abstain from using any metamorphic powers. Any currently active power remains active, but the victim cannot use any new powers for 10 turns. Note that it does not matter whether or not the Symbiot understands the theurge's liturgical command; the rite is efficacious as long as he can hear it (deaf Symbiots are immune, and those on noisy battlefields may not hear the command).

A higher level version of this rite (level seven) allows the theurge to force a Symbiot into reverting to its motherform.

A still higher level version (level eight) can revert a converted Symbiot to its former identity for the duration of the rite. The greater the amount of victory points on the roll, the more memories of the victim's pre-conversion life are retained. In this way, a former comrade who became a Symbiot can be reverted long enough to perform a final confession before being righteously slain.

Disinfect

(Level 7, Faith + Stoic Body, PLG, instant, 1W)

The theurgist can purge Symbiot or Antinomist taint from a target, as long as that taint has not been with the target long (no more than a span). This rite cannot drive out possessing demons or undo conversion or shaping, but it can cancel Antinomy spells cast upon the target or kill Symbiot spores on the target's person. It can also destroy metamorphic powered taints, such as Symbiot toxins, ooze, webbing, etc.

Smite the Chain

(Level 8, Faith + Stoic Body, PLG, instant, 1W)

This amazing rite allows the caster to affect anyone linked through a Hive Mind (or psychic Sympaticus, etc.) with another rite, such as Smiting Hand (level six Brother Battle) or Tortures of the Damned (level eight Avestite). The second rite is cast immediately after Smite the Chain is successful (this takes a separate turn). If the second rite is successful, then all in the Hive Mind are affected by it — regardless of distance. For example, the Smiting Hand rite, even though targeted at one target in melee combat, will affect anyone as if he were punched or kicked — even if he is a kilometer away!



Disemblem Shaping

(Level 8, Faith + Physick, PLG, touch, instant, 1W)

The theurge can reverse a Symbiotic Shaping — the power used to form biotech. This is an extended action, although multiple castings are not required (unless a critical failure is rolled, in which case all victory points are lost). The theurge must collect as many victory points as were required to Shape the target in the first place. If successful, the device (person or thing) reverts back to its natural (pre-Shaping) form. Of course, most Symbiot devices are alive and may fight back...

Entreaty to Zala-Kyal

(Level 9, Passion + Charm, PLG, 1W)

The leaders of the Manifest Light have managed to keep the existence of this rite a close secret for now — nobody in the High Command or Inquisition is aware of it. It has only been used on two previous occasions. It summons an obscure Emyrean Intelligence called Zala-Kyal who has the power to reverse chaos and restore order to the natural world. Knowledge of her came from an Eskatonic bishop recruit who spent much of his life seeking the scant references to her in ancient Diasporan manuscripts. She was apparently an earth goddess worshipped by backwards colonists on some now lost world; when this planet was visited by the Prophet, her “wild allure and frenzy was tamed,” and she pledged to protect Zebulon’s vision ever since.

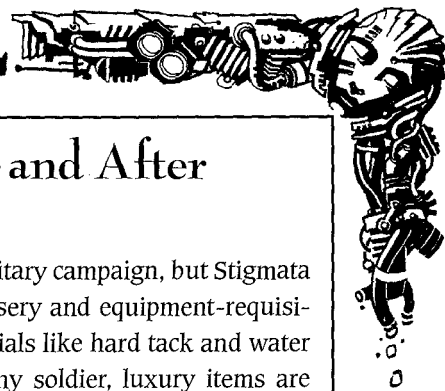
On the two occasions on which she was called, she appeared as a naked crone who spat gobs of spittle at Symbiot foes. Those among them who were recently-converted were cured — their Symbiotic conversions reversed. Since there is no known cure for Symbiosis, this miracle was shocking to the Manifest Light. They did not spread word of the event, however, for fear of the Inquisition. Zaya-Kyal’s Circle of Emanation is as yet unknown, and she appears in some apocryphal sources as a demoness who tempts men into the woods and rapes them, later birthing dopplegangers. Until the mystery of this entity’s allegiance is fully assured, the leadership is being very careful about entreaties to her.

Dervishes

Culled from psychic outfits originally created and trained for the Emperor Wars, the Stigmata Garrison dervishes often have clashing loyalties with one another — a Hazat dervish is usually brainwashed to despise the Decados dervish he now works alongside. For this reason, Imperial Eye dervishes (one of the dirty secrets of the wars) are assigned to each unit to help reprogram them to work together (and, of course, pledge loyalty to the Emperor over their original house masters).

Dervish units are assigned to various companies throughout the Stigmata legions, and the Manifest Light gets the bulk of them. However, some nobles with influence are





able to steer dervish assignments into their units instead of giving them up to the Manifest Light. The most renowned is the Ineffable Hand, a unit specializing in mind control assigned to the Fifth Legion's Typhon company. (More information on dervishes can be found in **The Dark Between the Stars**.)

Tour: 3 years

Pay: 7 firebirds/month

Equipment: Assault Rifle or sidearm, Dirk, Stiffsynth suit

Rangers/Scouts

This job is reserved for extremely good rangers and scouts, those who know how to keep alert at all times and know when to get the hell out of a situation. Many of them are Ukari, although the Empire preferred the old Vorox troops it once used before too many conversions ruined their effectiveness. Etyri are also favored scouts, for they can add aerial reconnaissance skills to their repertoires.

Tour: 2 years

Pay: 9 firebirds/month

Equipment: Assault Rifle, Chameleon Suit, Wrist Squawker

War Golems

Golems are forbidden tech almost everywhere across the Known Worlds, banned by the Church as soulless monstrosities forged by a corrupt Republic. Everywhere, that is, except Stigmata. The horrors of the Symbiot conflict have allowed Alexius to constantly push the envelope of acceptable war tech. With each new Symbiot advance and display of godless powers, Alexius is able to sway the Church into allowing him new forms of tech use. His most successful endeavor yet is the War Golems Company (currently assigned to the Seventh legion).

As inorganic, non-living metal entities, golems cannot be converted by Symbiots and are immune to their empathic sway. They are the perfect soldier to field against the metamorphs, as evinced by the fear and confusion they cause among the tech-ignorant Symbiots who encounter them. However, they are few and their high-tech upkeep is expensive, requiring highly-skilled technicians and equipment. Unless the Church is convinced to relax its ban further and import more Engineers and golems, this division's ultimate effectiveness is limited. (Another problem is finding more golems — as banned tech, nobody is supposed to harbor them; nonetheless, a few factions occasionally "discover" golems in their basements, donated to the war effort for a hefty sum or political reward.)

No matter the sophistication of a golem's A.I. (artificial intelligence), they are commanded by humans (noble officers and guild techs). They are often accompanied at camp

Life During and After Stigmata

Life is hard in any military campaign, but Stigmata brings special cases of misery and equipment-requisition hurdles. While essentials like hard tack and water are readily available to any soldier, luxury items are rare and expensive. Magic lantern entertainments are occasionally provided at Darmak Station by visiting entertainment guilds, but they are infrequent. Battlefield boredom is spiked with the knowledge that Symbiots could assault anywhere at anytime.

Troopers often fight over equipment access, and the looting of battlefields for rare stuff (energy weapons, etc.) from the hands of dead soldiers is not uncommon. Some soldiers brought with them their own unique non-issued items. However, possessing a blaster may be cool, and one's superiors probably won't take it away, but its very possession volunteers the soldier for dangerous jobs until he gives it up to someone willing to do those jobs.

Service on Stigmata does have its rewards, however. Soldiers are transported home after their tours, are considered heroes by the locals, and are even often invited to an occasional feast by the local lord. Medals and badges of honor add to prestige, and may lead to a job working for the local lord as a sheriff or constable. Soldiers of superlative service have even been granted land by Alexius. In one famous case, when House Masseri failed to meet its levy quota, Alexius seized a portion of their land on Cadavus and awarded it to a retiring soldier. This gives the Emperor an Imperial toe-hold in Masseri territory, and demonstrates his generosity to his legionnaires.

Finally, perhaps the greatest reward for the common soldier is the distant allure of knighthood. Although the instances are few, some soldiers have received Imperial knighthoods for their valiant actions on Stigmata.


by a special combat engineer capable of effecting repairs on them.

The company is made up mainly of Askari and scouts, although a few unique golems have been included and upgraded for warfare. (Traits can be found in **Forbidden Lore: Technology**.)

Indigenes

Stigmata Garrison folklore tells of the Indigenes, lifers who went completely native rather than return to the Known Worlds at the end of their tours. Some are said to survive in the deep woods, constantly evading Symbiot forces and be-





coming a terror to them. They are believed to have gained mystic powers or the luck of saints which allows them special abilities to evade and even track Symbiots. No one can confirm these rumors, since no Indigene has returned to any human fort, but many are the stories of battles won at the last minute only through the surprise intervention of Indigene cadres. Even the Symbiots fear them...

The truth of the matter is that most troopers who go native this way die quickly, either from exposure to the elements, jungle diseases, or Symbiot encounter. But some do survive, and are lucky enough to join Ezrakiah's Brood. This cadre of elite forest-survivalists is lead by Brother Ezrakiah, a hesychast monk who had been press-ganged into service only to later gain a mystical insight into the planet's own misery. Blessed with a strange empathy with the land itself, Ezrakiah leads his fanatic band against Symbiot incursions.

But it's not that simple. Ezrakiah's allies are other Symbiots — members of hives opposed to the war and the damage it does to the planet's lifeforce. Ornzai and Phazûl hivers deliver intelligence about Galzai and Zûldor troop movements and missions, and Ezrakiah's Brood monkeywrenches them. However, Ezrakiah is not against turning his wrath on human targets; plans for an orbital bombardment of a region were botched when Ezrakiah's Brood leaked word to the Symbiots, allowing them to defend the region with a space-based assault on the bombers.

Only the most desperate are allowed to join the Brood, and then only after a harrowing initiation whereby Ezrakiah is convinced of the applicant's whole-hearted sincerity. Those who are refused usually wake-up within sight of a human fort, but those who are accepted are trained in the meticulous anti-Symbiot tactics of the unit. All members develop an intense loyalty to Ezrakiah, whom they are convinced is a saint.

Wet Navy

The seas are ruled by Symbiots, although humans have maintained a hold on some areas. Luckily for the humans, the oceanic Symbiots are not always allied with the land-oriented war effort (they are mostly Ornzai, and are often opposed to the Galzai).

The Garrison sea battle fleet consists mainly of a few military destroyers and a small fleet of submarines, used mainly for scouting. Smaller corvettes patrol the coasts.

Tour: 2 years

Pay: Varies with duty (3-8 firebirds/month)

Equipment: Varies with duty

Space Navy

While the heart of the Garrison's defense may be on Stigmata, it is the space navy that protects against Symbiots reinforcements — and against infiltration of the Known

Worlds. Every man, woman and child of the Known Worlds owes their safety to the brave starmen of the Stigmata Garrison Space Fleet.

There are a number of tasks the fleet is chiefly concerned with:

Orbital Support

A number of cruisers orbit Stigmata or are docked at the nearby Spacestation Ventris, ready to unleash a bombardment on the world when necessary. In addition, assault landers routinely pick up troops from bases and ferry them to hot spots across the world, supplementing the work of the smaller air cavalry corps.

Interception

Frigates, raiders and escorts also patrol space close to Stigmata, ready to engage any Symbiot ship attempting a landing — or any trying to escape. The greatest number of intercept vessels, however, awaits at the jumpgate, ready to chase incoming and outgoing vessels, Symbiot or not. Patrols of the other planets in the system, and the Sargasso Belt, also often lead to encounters with Symbiot raiders, members of earlier fleet engagements that escaped to hide on these backworlds.

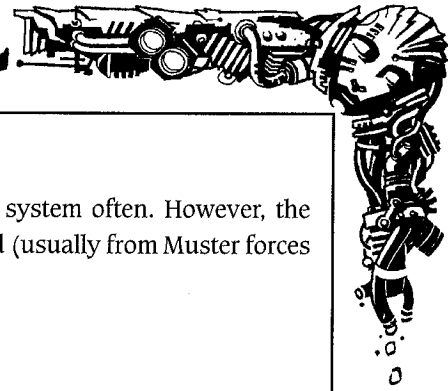
Interdiction

The fleet is charged with protecting the Known Worlds from infestation from all sources. Thus, all ships coming and going, Symbiot and otherwise, are carefully monitored and are often boarded to ensure that no Symbiot taint makes its way back to the Known Worlds. Spacestation Ventris maintains an advanced, high-tech process for determining whether or not a person knowingly or unknowingly carries spores. The procedure is horribly invasive, but all who pass are provided a certificate proving their purity — a valuable item when faced with nosy inquisitors at the jumpgate.

Bannockburn, Shaprut and Istakhr host similar scrutinizers, but they charge for the privilege of peering into the subject's every orifice — and the procedure is mandatory under threat of death for refusal. While in practice many nobles, priests and guildsmen have bribed their way out of the procedure (or at least got the technicians to go easy on them), such leniency can't be counted on.

Every ship entering or exiting the system is hailed by a capital ship and forced to undergo a series of questions; if any one of these is not answered to the satisfaction of the questioner, the ship is targeted for boarding, and Imperial troops search it until satisfied that it holds no threat. Often, inquisitors accompany the boarders, or even administer the questions. In addition, any ship that gets past this military embargo may still be subject to any of the Inquisition ships roaming the system.





Battlefleet

The composition of the Stigmata space fleet varies, as ships come and go from the system often. However, the following composition can almost always be counted on, and even added to in times of need (usually from Muster forces at Bannockburn):

Quantity	Ship	Location
1	Imperial dreadnought	Jumpgate
1	Dreadnought from another noble house	Ventris
2	Imperial cruisers	Ventris and planetside
1	Cruiser from another noble house	Jumpgate
3	Imperial destroyers	Planetside
5	Destroyers from other noble houses	Jumpgate/Ventris
1	Muster assault lander	Ventris or planetside
2	Brother Battle assault landers	Planetside
6	Assault landers from various houses	Ventris or planetside
1	Imperial galliot	Jumpgate
3	Galliotics from various houses	Jumpgate or Ventris
5	Imperial frigates	Throughout system
5	Frigates from various houses	Throughout system
10	Explorers from various houses and guilds	Throughout system
Varies	Shuttles and listening posts	Throughout system
1-3	Inquisition ships	Jumpgate
10	Guild supply ships: freighters & escorts	Throughout system

Spacestation Ventris

A space platform capable of repairing a dreadnought and housing a large number of ships, this is the center of the Stigmata High Command, and the location where the Stigmata Garrison Commander spends most of her time. A host of marines guards it from enemy boardings, and a cadre of League Engineers and Charioteers ensures its upkeep (and that of its docked ships).

It is heavily guarded by fleet ships at all times since the Symbiots have tried suicide bombings against it in the past. It is the main repair and fueling facility in the system (the Darmak Station spaceport planetside can't handle dreadnoughts or cruisers). Its malfunctioning or loss would greatly hinder the space navy's operations.

Ventris was originally a corporate spacestation built during the Second Republic to facilitate mining operations throughout the system, especially in the Sargasso Belt. After the Fall, the Scravers kept it running, since the Sargasso Belt was a goldmine of abandoned ships from post-Fall conflicts. Eventually, the regency took over the station and manned it as the system's main defense headquarters during the Symbiots Wars.

Since it was not originally designed for military purposes, it has less turrets and guns than its commanders desire, but the constant coming and going of fleet ships makes up for this lack.

Anyone coming from Stigmata must stop off at Ventris for a purification procedure, to ensure that they do not bear Symbiot taint.

Internequine Conflicts

The Stigmata Garrison is not wholly united in its war against the Symbiots — each faction involved as its own self-interests to look out for. During times of Symbiot assault, these differences are overlooked as everyone works together for the common defense. But in times of quiet on the battlefield, schemers once again work to further their own plots even at the expense of another valuable faction.

Now that the Symbiots have calmed their offensive, the Emperor is trying to more fully cement his control over the entire war effort. Increasing commands from Imperial authorities often irk the non-Imperial commanders or units. Alexius now promises land and appointments to new political allies at the expense of the old veterans he once courted.

Baroness Lucinda Dulcinea, the Hazat Garrison Commander, is well aware that her appointment a few years ago was a purely political affair, an effort to appease the Hazat's capitulation to Alexius' ascension to the throne. However, she also knows that a hardened soldier like Alexius never would have allowed an incompetent candidate to take the post, and she has been flattered many times by his approval of various tactics. Nonetheless, she realizes that he now wishes her gone so that he can place a more politically loyal



person in her place.

This gives her a bargaining card as her house tries to gain Alexius's favor in their crusade against the Kurgan barbarian heathens. While he has so far done little to favor or deny their claims against the Kurgans, his tacit approval is a necessity if their war effort is to go forward — that or the declaration of a holy war by the Church, which would force Alexius to follow. While others in her house pursue the Church option, Lucinda plays a game of cat and mouse with Alexius, hinting that she would be willing to step down from her post in return for an Imperial commission to lead an attack deeper into Kurgan space. Such a commission would more fully open the coffers of the Reeves guild — necessary loans to raise more legions. For now, there has been little response from the Emperor, but her intelligence sources lead her to believe he is considering the offer seriously.

Of course, such a move might anger many factions who have loyally followed Lucinda but would hesitate to fully back an Imperial commander, for fear that it would only strengthen the emperor's control at the expense of their own faction's power. Many noble house officers serving in the war worry that they have already capitulated too much to the emperor. They fear the eventual demise of their own intergalactic power.

In addition, there is increasing conflict on the ground with the new Imperial allies, those promised land or rewards from Alexius, against the non-Imperial lifers who also deserve rewards, but whose factions may not be able to reward them as richly.

Left out of this whole rewards equation are the serfs forced to serve in the war. The best they can hope for on their return home is a life of drudgery back in the fields, collecting crops for their lords. The Church has made increasing complaints to all parties, demanding freedom from serfdom for all Stigmata veterans. Some priests have even called for land grants to the most decorated serfs. While the noble houses see this as a means to cement the Church's popularity among the lower classes and a threat to their own power, the Church seems serious. Some say that the patriarch, after suffering too many defeats to Church power during and after the Emperor Wars, is prepared to make an example of the Stigmata veterans and push for serf reforms galaxy wide. However, the Syneculla's office have played down such rumors, reminding querents of the current patriarch's conservative bent.

But the Church itself is not allied on its own goals concerning Stigmata. The Manifest Light and the Inquisition have fought a long feud over jurisdiction on many matters. So far, the occult order has won most arguments, due only to timely Symbiot assaults and their effectiveness in turning them back, but few doubt their power can ever extend

outside of Stigmata, where their occult abilities and Eskatonic-tainted theology are feared as a threat to Orthodox hegemony.

Outside of the Garrison itself, other forces conspire for prizes — the al-Malik want the planet back (they once shared it with the League), and constantly pester the Emperor for control of the Garrison (Duke Hakim presses the Emperor's paramour, Lady Theafana al-Malik, as the prime candidate for the post).

The Merchant League guilds fight over choice supply contracts, often getting brutal against any non-League guild that tries to move in. While the Muster has pretty well sealed up the munitions supply contracts, and the Charioteers own the naval supply routes, the Scravers are muscling in, offering cheaper goods scavenged from all over. The Reeves want a part of it to, offering massive loans to all parties, especially the noble houses who prefer to hire mercenaries to fill out their Levy quotas.

War hawks all over the Known Worlds call for the firebombing of planet, to get the whole thing over with, and some even call for an invasion of Symbiot worlds, to take the war to the aggressors. So far the Emperor and most noble house heads resist this, hoping to retake the world. They point out important trends in their favor and hint at secret intelligence that promises the world can again be claimed. The patriarch, angered at these rumors of possible secret contacts with Symbiot envoys, demands to be informed, but no proof is yet forthcoming.

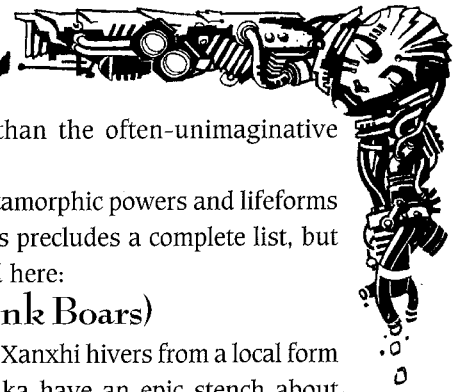
Symbiot Troops

The war effort is lead by soldiers of the Galzai hive and biotech engineers of the Zûldor hive, with assistance from some Xanxi hivers. For the most part, Symbiots do not take to the field, preferring to stay behind the lines, far from human occult influence. Some do go out on scouting or intelligence missions — those with objectives too complex to leave to stupider servitors — but they avoid direct contact with humans.

Thus, most commanders involve themselves in overseeing the operations of servitors and drones. A field commander's most common tactic is to link a unit through a Hive Mind so that he can command it from afar. Humans rarely realize that a puppet master is pulling the strings of the seemingly mindless brutes he encounters on the battlefield.

Because of the lifeforce cost for these tactics (especially if used at longer ranges), Symbiots are forced to conserve lifeforce and save it for mass assaults; they can little afford to wage a host of minor conflicts, instead relying on major blitzkrieg actions until their energies run low, forcing a retreat.

Against the warnings of the Phazûl hivers, some



Symbiots urge the capture of humans not for conversion purposes, but to drain their life force and add it to the reserves. Since such power is rare even among Symbiots, it does not occur often, but even scant use risks Antipathy.

Most troops used in the war were originally brought in from Symbiot worlds, but with the growth of the human fleet, it has become harder to deliver new troops to the planet. Thus, captured humans are converted, and servitors and drones are encouraged to breed like wildfire, and their offspring are converted as soon as feasible. Since most drones and servitors are from lower animal or plant backgrounds, their gestation and maturation periods are shorter than humans, and they can thus be put into the field sooner.

Units are not nearly so regimented as human troops; each Kor (Galzai commander) leads whatever group he can muster through sheer force of personality and/or fear. The hierarchy of Kors determines the makeup of certain units, as some commanders prefer to lead cavalry units, while others are better at artillery or infantry. Each warlord must fight it out with the others as to which of them gets control of prized units and missions. However, the orders of the Xokor, or grand warlord, stand no matter what — at risk of painful torture and death.

Some Zûldor lead biotech-oriented units in place of Galzai commanders, and some special forces are commanded by Xanxi hivers, more expert at metamorphosing or adapt-

ing to strange conditions than the often-unimaginative Galzai.

The sheer variety of metamorphic powers and lifeforms found among Symbiot forces precludes a complete list, but some examples are provided here:

Kolo Zarnka (Stink Boars)

Description: Created by Xanxi hivers from a local form of wild boar, the Kolo Zarnka have an epic stench about them — just a whiff of them can cause an uncontrollable gag reflex in humans (most of whom are not routinely equipped with gas masks). They are also now faster than their native kind, thundering through woods and across plains as a small herd with amazing speed, charging into their targets and goring them with their super-sharp tusks.

Body: Strength 8, Dexterity 7, Endurance 8

Mind: Wits 1, Perception 2, Tech 0

Natural skills: Fight 6, Vigor 9

Synergy: 2

Powers: Running (22 meter base run)

Weapons: Tusks (4d), Gore charge (-1 init, -1 goal, 6d damage), Stench (anyone in 10 meters without breathing protection must roll Wits + Stoic Mind to resist vomiting: -4 penalty on all actions for three turns)

Armor: Thick hide (2d)

Vitality: -6/-3/-1/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0



Zaibo

Description: Sometimes, the Kolo Zarnka are ridden into battle like cavalry beasts by small creatures called Zaibo. These mutated marmets wield captured human weaponry to good effect against humans.

Body: Strength 3, Dexterity 7, Endurance 3

Mind: Wits 3, Perception 5, Tech 0

Natural skills: Dodge 5, Fight 4, Melee 6, Shoot 5, Sneak 6

Synergy: 1

Powers: Foot pads (+4 sneak roll)

Weapons: Claws 1d, Assault Rifle 7d, Rapier 5d

Armor: Leather jerkin (2d)

Vitality: -8/-4/-2/-1/0/0/0

Zag Kanta

Description: Heavier forces are often required, and the Zag Kanta fit the bill nicely. Mutated amphibians from the deep sea bottom, Zag Kanta cannot feel pain and are usually mind controlled by distant hivers to fight until dead. They usually stand about five meters tall.

Body: Strength 13, Dexterity 5, Endurance 15

Mind: Wits 2, Perception 3, Tech 0

Natural skills: Dodge 5, Fight 9, Vigor 10

Synergy: 3

Powers: Breathing (Gills), Immunity (High Pressure), Limbs (2 additional arms)

Weapons: Fist 5d + Acid (+3d for three turns), Kick 7d + Acid

Armor: 5d (+3d against fire, +3d against energy weapons)

Vitality: 0/0

(Due to lack of pain receptors, the Zag Kanta suffers no wound penalties.)

Wymgantai

Description: The Symbiots have their own version of air cav, usually involving flying creatures. One such are these mutated pterodactyl-like creatures from Chernobog.

Body: Strength 5, Dexterity 8, Endurance 3

Mind: Wits 3, Perception 8, Tech 0

Natural skills: Dodge 7, Fight 5, Fly 6, Shoot 7, Sneak 7, Vigor 4

Synergy: 52

Powers: Flight (Wings: 6 meters fly),

Weapons: Claws 2d, Needle projectiles 5d (30/50 range)

Armor: Leather jerkin (2d)

Vitality: -8/-4/-2/-1/0/0/0

Biotech

The above troops are meant to be used against human infantry; when coming up against human tech (cavalry, air cav, etc.), Symbiots field their biotech machines. These are sometimes commanded by an actual Symbiot, but are more often led by intelligent and loyal servitors.

Artillery: Bazozad

Biotech Level: 3

Synergy Level: 2

Victory Points: 15

A biotech golem of sorts, this device is launched like a mortar at a region. Upon landing it activates and goes berserk, killing anything in its path. It moves in a spinning motion 10 meters per turn, lashing its serrated tentacles at any heat source. If it is killed, it will explode, spraying acid in a five meter radius (7d dmg).

Weapons: Armor-piercing Tentacles (8d dmg; rolls of 1, 2 or 3 ignore armor)

Vitality: -3/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0

Tank: Galka Setzo

Biotech Level: 4

Synergy Level: 4

Victory Points: 18

The Symbiot version of a heavy tank, this thing is a huge mass of flesh and carapace that roams slowly across the ground on eight thick, rhino-like legs. It must be fed an animal the size of a horse every once and a while or it stops moving (although its guns may still fire, as long as they have the ammunition). Its acid bomb cannon can alternatively fire spore bombs (they carry a limited load of these at best, since they cost so much lifeforce to produce).

Speed	Armor	Fuel	Rng	Cargo	People
50 km/hr	30d	Feed	150 km	3 tons	3/10*

* Two extra people inside, 8 on the chassis

Weapons: Acid bomb cannon (20d), spore bombs (anyone in 7 meters of impact suffers conversion), two anti-personnel slug machineguns (7d autofire)

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

Air Fighter: Wymzeeset

Biotech Level: 4

Synergy Level: 5

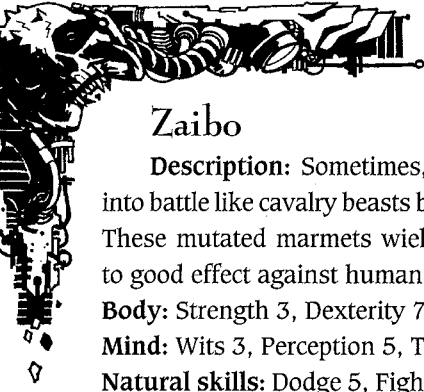
Victory Points: 30

Designed to protect incoming Symbiot spacecraft from human air fighters, this sleek beast runs on lifeforce energy (biomass cels similar to those used on Symbiot starships). It hosts two slug cannons that fire exploding acid (similar to a starship's acid spitter). Its light armor is its weak point; the pilot must rely on outmaneuvering enemy ships. However, if hit, the pilot (most often a servitor but sometimes a Symbiot) has a webbing parachute to take him safely to the ground.

Speed	Armor	Fuel	Rng	Cargo	People
1000 km/hr	9d	Biomass	2000 km	25 kg	1

Weapons: Acid slug cannons (12d)

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





Appendix

Military Characters

While nobles, priests and guildsmembers can participate in military operations, they stand somewhat outside of the military structure. They are answerable first to their house, sect or guild masters, and their military commanders second. Military characters who aren't members of any of these factions have different training and lives within a military campaign; thus, their Character Histories are different from those given in the **Fading Suns** Second Edition rulebook.

Officers

Officers are almost always nobles. Characters should use the histories given for nobles in **Fading Suns** Second Edition, taking the Military Command option in the Early Career stage, and perhaps the Military option in the Apprenticeship stage (either of which also provide the character with a lieutenant's rank).

A noble's actual peerage rank has little to do with his commanding rank. Noble characters are assumed to begin at the lowest officer level (lieutenant) for free, and must gain more rank levels to rise from there (the ranks given in the Worldly Benefits of the Tours of Duty can be applied to either peerage or military rank). See the Military Rank Benefice, below.

Enlisted

Enlisted men (non-officers) are usually freemen or serfs. They use the same Upbringing stage as priests and guildsmembers. As with officers, the promotions given during the Worldly Benefits stage of character creation can be applied to military rank.

NOTE: Enlisted military characters do not need to pay for Professional Contracts to learn guild skills while they are serving in their units.

New Benefice

Military Rank (0–9 pts): There are certain benefits that come with military rank even for mustered-out (retired) soldiers. A veteran member of a regiment can always stop by the old garrison and buy a few items on the cheap at the commissary or perhaps get a free meal in the mess hall. A veteran of sufficient rank may even be able to rent a truck from the motor pool, while veteran officers might enjoy the stables or might even talk an Adjutant into loaning them a small weapon. An ex-commander has the ear of the current commander and may convince him to use the regiment against a common enemy of the Empire.

If the character is a noble, it is extremely rare to serve in the regiment except as an officer (lieutenant rank and higher). Conversely, if she is not a noble, it is highly unlikely she could reach any rank above Staff Sergeant.

Note: These ranks apply only to Imperial and noble house regiments; Muster and other freelance mercenary armies have their own ranks.

<i>Pts</i>	<i>Army Enlisted</i>	<i>Star Navy Sailor</i>
0	Private	Starman
1	Private First Class	Able Starman
2	Corporal	Mate
3	Sergeant	Master (Bosun, Gunner, etc.)*
4	Staff Sergeant	Master of the Ship
	<i>Army Officer (noble)</i>	<i>Star Navy Officer (noble)</i>
0	Lieutenant	Midshipman
3	Captain	2nd (or lower) Lieutenant
5	Major	1st Lieutenant
7	Colonel	Captain
9	General	Admiral

* The positions of Master Pilot and Master Engineer are not ranks, and are available only to those holding rank in a guild.



Apprenticeship

It is not unusual in the Known Worlds to see adolescents serving in the military — press gangs and house conscriptors often seek vigor over brains. People who spend their youths in military service tend to be psychologically molded by that service (represented by the Blessings and Curses below).

Regular Army

All servicemen gain the following Blessing and Curse during their Apprenticeship: *Blessing* — Proud (+2 Faith or Ego when suffering hardship); *Curse* — Cynical (-2 Passion when asked to volunteer)

Infantry: *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +1, Endurance +2, Passion or Calm +1; *Skills* — Primary Combat skill (choose Fight or Melee) +2, Secondary Combat skill (choose Fight or Melee) +1, Shoot +2, Vigor +2, Gambling 1, Remedy 1, Survival 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Heavy Weapons Specialist: *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +1, Endurance +1, Tech +1, Passion or Calm +1; *Skills* — Fight +1, Melee +1, Shoot +2, Vigor +2, Gambling 1, Remedy 1, Survival 1, Tech Redemption (Mech) 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Tracker: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Endurance +1, Perception +2, Calm +1; *Skills* — Melee +1, Observe +1, Shoot +1, Sneak +1, Vigor +1, Lore (one planet) 1, Remedy 1, Search 1, Survival 1, Tracking 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Beast Cavalry: *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Endurance +1, Passion +1; *Skills* — Impress +1, Melee +1, Shoot +1, Vigor +1, Beast Lore 2, Remedy 1, Ride 2, Survival 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Armored Craft Cavalry: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +1, Tech +1, Passion or Calm +1; *Skills* — Observe +1, Shoot +1, Drive Landcraft 2, Read Urthtech (2 pts), Tech Redemption (Mech) 1, Tech Redemption (Volt) 1, Warfare (Gunnery) 2; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Artillerist: *Characteristics* — Wits +2, Tech +2, Calm +1; *Skills* — Observe +2, Academia 1, Tech Redemption (Mech) 2, Tech Redemption (High Tech) 2, Think Machine 1, Warfare (Artillery) 2; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Combat Engineer: *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Wits +1, Tech +2, Passion or Calm +1; *Skills* — Shoot +1, Vigor +1, Academia 1, Tech Redemption (Mech) 2, Tech Redemption (Volt) 1, Tech Redemption (High Tech) 1, Science (Engineering) 1, Warfare (Demolitions) 2; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Medic: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +1, Passion or Calm +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Observe +1, Vigor +1, Academia 1, Empathy 1, Physick 1, Read Latin (2 pts), Remedy 2, Science (Medicine) 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Military Police: *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +1, Endurance +2, Passion or Calm +1; *Skills* — Primary Combat skill (choose Fight or Melee) +2, Secondary Combat skill (choose Fight or Melee) +1, Observe +1, Shoot +1, Vigor +1, Inquiry 1, Search 1, Streetwise 1, Torture 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Chem/Bio Warrior: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Wits +2, Calm +2; *Skills* — Observe +1, Shoot +1, Vigor +1, Academia 1, Alchemy 2, Science (Chemistry) 2, Spacesuit (2 pts); *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Special Forces

Ranger: *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +1, Endurance +2, Passion or Calm +1; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Melee +1, Shoot +1, Sneak +1, Vigor +1, Remedy 1, Search 1, Survival 1, Tech Redemption (Mech) 1, Warfare (Demolitions) 1; *Blessing* — Disciplined (+2 Calm in combat situations); *Curse* — Secretive (-2 Extrovert around strangers); *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Cybercorps: (Must also take the Cybernetics Tweaked or Loaded-for-Bear Extra Stages) *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Tech +1, Passion or Calm +1, Ego +2; *Skills* — Fight +1, Impress +1, Melee +1, Shoot +1, Vigor +1, Tech Redemption (High Tech) 2, Tech Redemption (Mech) 1, Remedy 1, Warfare (Military Tactics) 1; *Blessing* — Disciplined (+2 Calm in combat situations); *Curse* — Scary (-2 Extrovert); *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Stigmata Garrison Trooper: *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +1, Endurance +1, Perception +1, Passion or Calm +1; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Fight +1, Melee +1, Observe +1, Shoot +1, Vigor +1, Lore (Symbiots) 1, Remedy 1, Stoic Body 1, Survival 1; *Blessing* — Disciplined (+2 Calm in combat situations); *Curse* — Twitchy (-2 Calm around strangers); *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Guerrilla

Characteristics — Dexterity +1, Endurance +1, Passion +2, Extrovert +1; *Skills* — Combat skill (choose Fight or Melee) +1, Impress +1, Observe +1, Shoot +1, Sneak +1, Vigor +1, Knavery 1, Lore (one planet) 1, Remedy 1, Survival 1; *Blessing* — Partisan (+2 Passion when fighting for cause); *Curse* — Secretive (-2 Extrovert around strangers); *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Air Force

All servicemen gain the following Blessing and Curse during their Apprenticeship: *Blessing* — Curious (+2 Extrovert when seeing something new); *Curse* — Possessive (-2 Calm when cut out of the action)

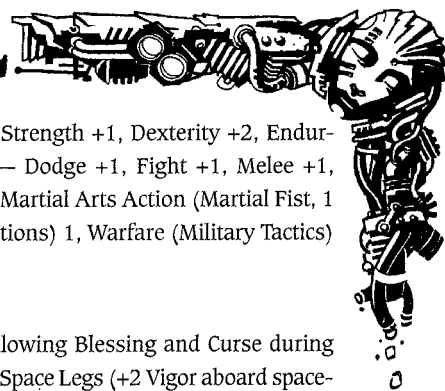
Pilot: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Wits +1, Perception +1, Tech +1, Extrovert or Introvert +1; *Skills* — Observe +1, Shoot +1, Drive Aircraft 2, Lore (regional) 1, Read Urthtech (2 pts), Science (Astronomy or Meteorology) 1, Think Machine 1, Warfare (Gunnery) 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Gunner/Bombardier: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Perception +2, Tech +1, Passion or Calm +1; *Skills* — Observe +2, Shoot +1, Lore (terrain) 1, Read Urthtech (2 pts), Warfare (Artillery) 2, Warfare (Gunnery) 2; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Aircraft Mechanic: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Wits +1, Tech +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1; *Skills* — Observe +1, Read Urthtech (2 pts), Science (Physics) 1, Tech Redemption (Mech) 2, Tech Redemption (Volt) 2, Tech Redemption (High Tech) 2; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Air Traffic Controller/Radar Specialist: *Characteristics* — Wits +1, Perception +1, Tech +2, Calm +1; *Skills* — Observe +1, Lore (regional) 1, Read Urthtech (2 pts), Science (Astronomy) 1, Science (Meteorology) 1, Think Machine 2, Warfare (Military Tactics) 2; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)





Sea Navy

All servicemen gain the following Blessing and Curse during their Apprenticeship: *Blessing* — Sea Legs (+2 Vigor aboard ships); *Curse* — Fickle (-2 Passion in close relationships)

Technician: *Characteristics* — Wits +1, Perception +1, Tech +2, Calm +1; *Skills* — Observe +1, Vigor +1, Gambling 1, Read Urthtech (2 pts), Science (Physics) 1, Tech Redemption (Mech) 2, Tech Redemption (Volt) 2; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Frogman: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Endurance +1, Wits +1, Calm +1; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Melee +1, Shoot +1, Sneak +1, Vigor +1, Drive Watercraft 1, Martial Arts Action (Martial Fist, 1 pt), Stoic Body 1, Warfare (Demolitions) 1, Warfare (Military Tactics) 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Gunner: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Perception +1, Tech +1, Passion +1; *Skills* — Observe +1, Shoot +2, Vigor +1, Tech Redemption (Mech) 2, Warfare (Artillery) 2, Warfare (Gunnery) 2; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Helmsman: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +1, Tech +1, Extrovert or Introvert +1; *Skills* — Observe +1, Vigor +1, Drive Watercraft 2, Lore (regional) 1, Read Urthtech (2 pts), Science (Metereology) 1, Think Machine 1, Warfare (Military Tactics) 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Coast Guard Tradewatchman: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +1, Perception +1, Extrovert or Introvert +1; *Skills* — Fight +1, Melee +1, Observe +1, Shoot +1, Vigor +1, Drive Watercraft 1, Inquiry 2, Tech Redemption (Mech) 1, Search 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Marine: *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Endurance +1, Perception +1; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Fight +1, Melee +1, Observe +1, Shoot +1, Vigor +1, Martial Arts Action (Martial Fist, 1 pt), Tracking 1, Warfare (Demolitions) 1, Warfare (Military Tactics) 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Star Navy

All servicemen gain the following Blessing and Curse during their Apprenticeship: *Blessing* — Space Legs (+2 Vigor aboard spacecrafts); *Curse* — Grav Disease (-2 Vigor on planet surface)

Sailor: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Wits +1, Tech +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1; *Skills* — Combat skill (choose Fight or Melee) +1, Drive Spacecraft 1, Gambling 1, Read Urthish (2 pts), Spacesuit (2 pts), Tech Redemption (Mech, Volt or High Tech) 1, Think Machine 1, Warfare (Gunnery) 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Starman)

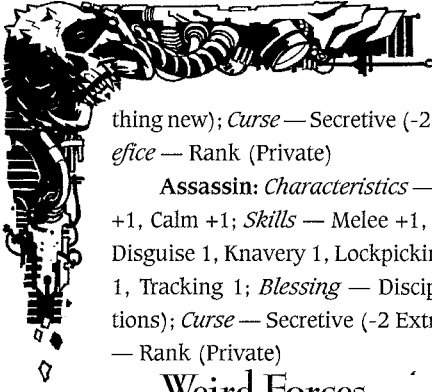
Fighter Pilot: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +1, Tech +1, Extrovert or Introvert +1; *Skills* — Shoot +1, Drive Spacecraft 2, Read Urthish (2 pts), Science (Astronomy) 1, Spacesuit (2 pts), Think Machine 1, Warfare (Gunnery) 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Starman)

Marauder: *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Endurance +1, Passion +1; *Skills* — Fight +1, Melee +2, Shoot +1, Vigor +1, Gambling 1, Lockpicking 1, Spacesuit (2 pts), Warfare (Demolitions) 1; *Benefice* — Rank (Starman)

Intelligence

Spy: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Wits +2, Perception +1, Calm +1; *Skills* — Observe +1, Sneak +1, Inquiry 2, Knavery 1, Lockpicking 1, Search 1, Sleight of Hand 1, Social (Acting) 1, Streetwise 1; *Blessing* — Curious (+2 Extrovert when seeing some-





thing new); *Curse* — Secretive (-2 Extrovert around strangers); *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Assassin: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +1, Perception +1, Calm +1; *Skills* — Melee +1, Observe +1, Shoot +1, Sneak +1, Disguise 1, Knavery 1, Lockpicking 1, Sleight of Hand 1, Streetwise 1, Tracking 1; *Blessing* — Disciplined (+2 Calm in combat situations); *Curse* — Secretive (-2 Extrovert around strangers); *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Weird Forces

Vorox Commando: (Can take only one Extra Stage option) *Characteristics* — Strength +2, Dexterity +2, Endurance +1; *Skills* — Fight +1, Impress +1, Melee +1, Shoot +2, Vigor +1, Survival 1, Tracking 1, Speak Urthish (2 pts) OR Stoic Body 2; *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Manifest Light Trooper: (Must also take an Occult Power option during the Extra Stages) *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Wits +1, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +2; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Combat skill (choose Fight or Melee)+1, Shoot +1, Focus +2, Lore (Symbiots) 1, Remedy 1, Stoic Mind +1, Survival 1, Warfare (Military Tactics) 1; *Blessing* — Disciplined (+2 Calm in combat situations); *Curse* — Unnerving (-2 Extrovert around superstitious people); *Benefice* — Rank (Private)

Early Career

Characters do not have to first take an Apprenticeship to serve a tour of duty in any of the units below. Additionally, characters who have served military Apprenticeships need not serve their Early Careers in the same unit; they can switch to another unit in the same branch or a new branch (although switching branches is rare).

At the end of a character's Early Career, he may choose one of the following before proceeding on to the Extra Stages:

- **Promotion:** Rise in military rank one level.
- **Friends:** Choose 3 pts from Ally, Contact, Gossip Network or Passage Contract.

Regular Army

Infantry: *Characteristics* — Strength +2, Dexterity +2, Endurance +2, Perception +1, Passion or Calm +1, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Fight +2, Impress +1, Melee +2, Shoot +2, Vigor +2, Gambling 1, Lore (army) 1, Lore (regional) 1, Remedy 1, Survival 1

Heavy Weapons Specialist: *Characteristics* — Strength +2, Dexterity +2, Endurance +2, Tech +1, Passion or Calm +1, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Fight +2, Impress +1, Melee +2, Shoot +2, Vigor +2, Gambling 1, Lore (army) 1, Lore (regional) 1, Remedy 1, Survival 1, Tech Redemption (Mech) 1

Tracker: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Endurance +2, Perception +2, Calm +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Melee +1, Observe +2, Shoot +2, Sneak +2, Vigor +1, Lore (one planet) 1, Remedy 1, Search 1, Survival 1, Tracking 2

Beast Cavalry: *Characteristics* — Strength +2, Dexterity +2, Endurance +2, Passion +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Impress +1, Melee +2, Shoot +2, Vigor +2, Beast Lore 2, Lore (army) 1, Lore (regional) 1, Remedy 1, Ride 2, Survival 1

Armored Craft Cavalry: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +2, Tech +2, Passion or Calm +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Observe +1, Shoot +2, Drive Landcraft 3, Lore (army life) 1, Tech Redemption (Mech) 2, Tech Redemption (Volt) 2, Warfare (Gunnery) 2, Read Urthtech (2 pts) OR Tech Redemption (High Tech) 2

Artillerist: *Characteristics* — Wits +2, Perception +2, Tech +2, Calm +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Observe +2, Shoot +1, Academia 1, Lore (army life) 1, Read Urthtech (2 pts), Tech Redemption (Mech) 2, Tech Redemption (High Tech) 2, Think Machine 2, Warfare (Artillery) 2

Combat Engineer: *Characteristics* — Strength +2, Wits +2, Tech +2, Passion or Calm +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Shoot +2, Vigor +2, Academia 1, Lore (army life) 1, Tech Redemption (Mech) 3, Tech Redemption (Volt) 2, Tech Redemption (High Tech) 2, Science (Engineering) 1, Warfare (Demolitions) 1

Medic: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Endurance +1, Wits +2, Perception +1, Passion or Calm +1, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +2; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Observe +2, Vigor +2, Academia 1, Empathy 1, Physick 2, Remedy 3, Science (Medicine) 1, Read Latin (2 pts) OR Read Urthtech (2 pts)

Military Police: *Characteristics* — Strength +2, Dexterity +2, Endurance +2, Passion or Calm +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Fight +1, Impress +2, Melee +1, Observe +1, Shoot +1, Vigor +2, Inquiry 2, Search 2, Streetwise 2, Torture 1

Chem/Bio Warrior: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Endurance +1, Wits +2, Perception +1, Calm +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Combat skill (choose Fight or Melee) +1, Impress +1, Observe +2, Shoot +2, Vigor +2, Academia 1, Alchemy 2, Science (Chemistry) 2, Spacesuit (2 pts) OR Stoic Body 2

Special Forces

Ranger: *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Endurance +2, Wits +1, Perception +1, Passion or Calm +1, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Melee +1, Shoot +2, Sneak +1, Vigor +1, Lockpicking 1, Read Urthish (2 pts), Remedy 1, Search 1, Survival 1, Tech Redemption (Mech) 1, Tracking 1, Warfare (Demolitions) 1

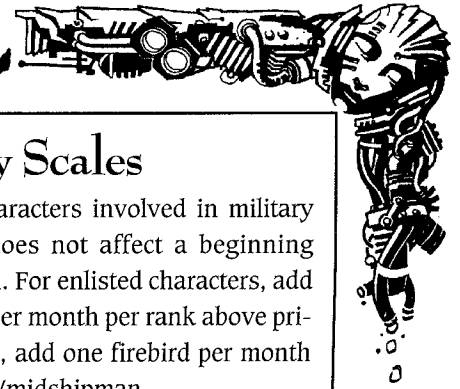
Cybercorps: (Must also take the Cybernetics Tweaked or Loaded-for-Bear Extra Stages) *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +1, Tech +2, Passion or Calm +1, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Ego +3; *Skills* — Fight +2, Impress +1, Melee +2, Shoot +2, Vigor +1, Tech Redemption (High Tech) 2, Tech Redemption (Mech) 2, Remedy 1, Warfare (Military Tactics) 2

Stigmata Garrison Trooper: *Characteristics* — Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Endurance +2, Perception +1, Passion or Calm +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Dodge +2, Fight +2, Melee +2, Observe +1, Shoot +2, Vigor +2, Lore (Symbiots) 1, Remedy 1, Stoic Body 1, Survival 1

Guerrilla

Characteristics — Strength +1, Dexterity +2, Endurance +2, Wits +1, Passion +2, Extrovert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Fight +1, Melee +1, Impress +1, Observe +1, Shoot +2, Sneak +2, Vigor +2, Knavery 1, Lore (one planet) 1, Remedy 1, Streetwise 1, Survival 1





Air Force

Pilot: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +2, Perception +2, Tech +1, Passion or Calm +1, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Observe +2, Shoot +2, Drive Aircraft 3, Lore (regional) 1, Science (Astronomy) 1, Science (Meteorology) 1, Think Machine 1, Warfare (Gunnery) 1, Read Urthtech (2 pts) OR Read Urthish (2 pts)

Gunner/Bombardier: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +1, Perception +2, Tech +1, Passion or Calm +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Observe +2, Shoot +2, Lore (terrain) 1, Tech Redemption (Mech) 1, Warfare (Artillery) 3, Warfare (Gunnery) 3, Read Urthtech (2 pts) OR Read Urthish (2 pts)

Aircraft Mechanic: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +2, Tech +2, Passion or Calm +1, Extrovert or Introvert +2, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Observe +2, Lore (army life) 1, Science (Physics) 1, Tech Redemption (Mech) 3, Tech Redemption (Volt) 3, Tech Redemption (High Tech) 2, Read Urthtech (2 pts) OR Read Urthish (2 pts)

Air Traffic Controller/Radar Specialist: *Characteristics* — Wits +2, Perception +2, Tech +2, Calm +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Observe +2, Focus 1, Lore (regional) 1, Science (Astronomy) 1, Science (Meteorology) 1, Think Machine 3, Warfare (Military Tactics) 3, Read Urthtech (2 pts) OR Read Urthish (2 pts)

Sea Navy

Technician: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +1, Wits +2, Perception +2, Tech +2, Calm +1, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Observe +2, Vigor +1, Gambling 1, Science (Physics) 1, Speak Dialect (2 pts), Tech Redemption (Mech) 3, Tech Redemption (Volt) 2, Read Urthtech (2 pts) OR Read Urthish (2 pts)

Frogman: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Endurance +1, Wits +2, Perception +1, Calm +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Melee +1, Shoot +1, Sneak +2, Vigor +1, Drive Watercraft 1, Martial Arts Action (Martial Kick, Martial Hold, 5 pts), Stoic Body 1, Warfare (Demolitions) 1, Warfare (Military Tactics) 1

Gunner: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +1, Perception +2, Tech +1, Passion +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Combat skill (Fight or Melee) +1, Impress +1, Observe +2, Shoot +2, Vigor +2, Tech Redemption (Mech) 3, Warfare (Artillery) 2, Warfare (Gunnery) 2

Helmsman: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +2, Perception +1, Tech +1, Passion or Calm +1, Extrovert or Introvert +2, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Observe +2, Vigor +1, Drive Watercraft 3, Lore (regional) 1, Science (Meteorology) 1, Speak Dialect (2 pts), Think Machine 1, Warfare (Military Tactics) 1, Read Urthtech (2 pts) OR Read Urthish 1

Coast Guard Tradewatchman: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +2, Perception +2, Passion or Calm +1, Extrovert or Introvert +2, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Primary Combat skill (choose Fight or Melee) +2, Secondary Combat skill (choose Fight or Melee) +1, Impress +1, Observe +1, Shoot +2, Vigor +2, Drive Watercraft 1, Inquiry 2, Tech Redemption (Mech) 1, Search 1, Streetwise 1

Military Pay Scales

Use this scale for characters involved in military service during play; it does not affect a beginning character's starting wealth. For enlisted characters, add one crest (1/2 a firebird) per month per rank above private/starman. For officers, add one firebird per month per rank above lieutenant/midshipman.

Soldier **Firebirds per month**

Regular Army

Infantry	4
Heavy Weapons Specialist	4
Tracker	6
Beast Cavalry	8
Armored Cavalry	8
Artillerist	6
Combat Engineer	8
Medic	10
Military Police	5
Chem/Bio Warrior	8
<i>Special Forces</i>	
Ranger	9
Cybercorp	15
Cehmical Shock Trooper	9
Stigmata Garrison Trooper	6

Air Force

Pilot	10
Gunner/Bombardier	9
Aircraft Mechanic	8
Air Traffic Controller/ Radar Specialist	8

Sea Navy

Technician	6
Frogman	8
Gunner	5
Helmsman	8
Coast Guard Tradewatchman	6
Marine	4

*Star Navy**

Sailor	8
Fighter Pilot	10
Marauder	8

Intelligence

Spy	10
Assassin	20

Weird Forces

Vorox Commando	4
Manifest Light Trooper	6

* Pay varies with fortune: prize money can increase pay, while lost conflicts can decrease it.



Marine: *Characteristics* — Strength +2, Dexterity +2, Endurance +2, Perception +2, Passion or Calm +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Dodge +1, Fight +1, Melee +1, Observe +1, Shoot +2, Vigor +1, Martial Arts Action (Martial Kick, Martial Hold, 5 pt), Tracking 1, Warfare (Demolitions) 1, Warfare (Military Tactics) 1

Star Navy

Sailor: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +2, Tech +2, Passion or Calm +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Fight +1, Melee +1, Drive Spacecraft 1, Gambling 1, Lore (people and places seen) 1, Tech Redemption (Mech, Volt or High Tech) 1, Think Machine 2, Warfare (Gunnery) 2, Read Urthish (2 pts) OR Read Urthtech (2 pts), Spacesuit (2 pts) OR Speak Dialect (2 pts)

Fighter Pilot: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +2, Perception +1, Tech +1, Passion or Calm +1, Extrovert or Introvert +2, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Shoot +2, Drive Spacecraft 3, Lore (people and places seen) 1, Science (Astronomy) 1, Think Machine 1, Warfare (Gunnery) 2, Read Urthish (2 pts) OR Read Urthtech (2 pts), Spacesuit (2 pts) OR Speak Dialect (2 pts)

Marauder: *Characteristics* — Strength +2, Dexterity +3, Endurance +2, Perception +1, Passion +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Fight +2, Impress +1, Melee +3, Shoot +2, Vigor +1, Gambling 1, Lockpicking 1, Warfare (Demolitions) 2, Spacesuit (2 pts) OR Stoic Body 2

Intelligence

Spy: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +2, Perception +2,

Calm +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Observe +2, Sneak +1, Bureaucracy 1, Inquiry 2, Knavery 1, Lockpicking 1, Read Urthish (2 pts), Search 1, Sleight of Hand 1, Social (Acting) 1, Streetwise 1

Assassin: *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Wits +2, Perception +2, Calm +2, Extrovert or Introvert +1, Faith or Ego +1; *Skills* — Melee +1, Observe +1, Shoot +1, Sneak +2, Archery 1, Crossbow (2 pts), Disguise 1, Knavery 1, Lockpicking 1, Lore (poisons) 1, Sleight of Hand 1, Streetwise 1, Tracking 1

Weird Forces

Vorox Commando: (Can take only one Extra Stage option) *Characteristics* — Strength +2, Dexterity +2, Endurance +2, Perception +2, Passion +2; *Skills* — Fight +2, Impress +2, Melee +2, Shoot +2, Sneak +1, Vigor +2, Survival 2, Tracking 2

Manifest Light Trooper: (Must also take an Occult Power option during the Extra Stages) *Characteristics* — Dexterity +2, Endurance +1, Wits +1, Perception +1, Extrovert or Introvert +2, Passion or Calm +1, Faith or Ego +2; *Skills* — Charm or Impress +1, Combat skill (choose Fight or Melee) +1, Shoot +1, Academia 1, Focus +3, Lore (Symbiots) 1, Remedy 1, Speak Latin (2 pts), Stoic Mind +2, Survival 1, Warfare (Military Tactics) 1

Extra Stages

Military characters use the same Extra Stages as nobles, priests and guildsmembers (see the **Fading Suns** Second Edition rulebook).

War Tech

Medical Gear

Radiation Serum

Tech Level: 5

Cost: 300 firebirds for one dose

Although the use of radiation as a weapon, either in a bomb or in a hand-held weapon such as a radium blaster (see below), are censored by the Church, there are times when someone may have need of healing such damage. The best radiation serums can swiftly halt the patient's loss of Endurance due to radiation poisoning, and give his body's natural recuperative powers and other treatments a chance to work. If taken shortly after exposure, the serum may also prevent long-term damage such as cancer. The patient must gain one or more victory points on an Endurance + Vigor roll (difficulty increases by a penalty of -1 for each day after the initial exposure).

Tools

Thermasilk

Tech Level: 6

Cost: 500 firebirds

Weather conditions vary wildly throughout the Known

Worlds. Depending on the planet, continent, elevation, season or time of day, a soldier may be called to survive in extremes of great heat and cold. While an army may supply different uniforms for each of these conditions, such changes in uniform can add a lot of unnecessary weight to the soldier's backpack. Realizing this problem, scientists during the Second Republic developed a thin three-layer synthetic material which reacts to minute changes of temperature and keeps the wearer's skin temperature at exactly 70.2° F at all times. Rugged and tear resistant, the material is also water proof from the outside, but allows the skin to "breathe" and to disperse sweat. The technology to make thermasilk is available but rare, with the majority of it being produced on Leagueheim.

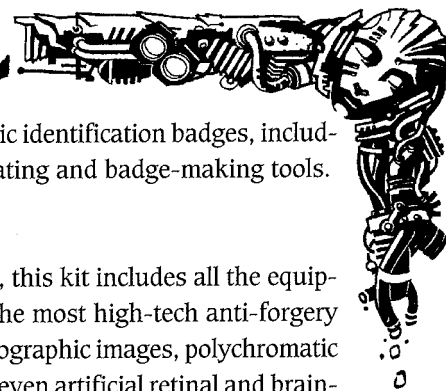
Parachutes

Tech Level: 4

Cost: 250 firebirds, 25 firebirds to repack it after use

Why your character would want to jump out of a perfectly good flitter is beyond me, but if she does, let's hope she has a parachute. There are two main kinds of parachutes — the standard free-fall version and the maneuverable one. The free-fall parachute is designed to get its user to the ground as safely as possible without a lot of hassle. It works





at altitudes above 100 meters, but does little good if its user activates it under that ceiling. If activated correctly, it completely negates falling damage. Note that the user has little control over where she will land with this parachute – that is purely at the gamemaster's discretion. Upon landing, she must make a Dexterity + Vigor (or Acrobatics) roll or suffer five dice of damage. Armor cannot block this damage, but energy shields can. At the gamemaster's discretion, critical failures cause more damage and put the character in the most compromising position possible.

Maneuverable parachutes allow their users to direct their descent in order to land on a specific site. This requires a Dexterity + Vigor roll. Five or more victory points means the user lands exactly where she wanted to. The less successes, the further she is from her goal. Failure allows the gamemaster to place her anywhere. Characters who take the learned skill Parachuting only need to make one success to land where they want to (unless the target spot is especially difficult).

Note that critical failures do not necessarily result in the parachute failing to open. Parachutes almost always work unless the gamemaster has a reason why they should not. If a parachute does not open, then gamemasters get to apply all the falling damage the character would take.

Forgery Kit

Being a soldier in the Empire of the Fading Suns requires not only brute force, but sometimes a little finesse. Occasionally a warrior may find that she needs to be in a place where she is not permitted. Noble title, guild rank or Church influence takes years to accumulate and wield properly — why go through the hassle when one can pretend to be somebody else, at least on paper? Forgery can allow less honest soldiers to gain access to usually restricted ordinance or forbidden sectors by forging special orders from real or fictitious commanders. Forgery also plays a role in military intelligence. Commanders often employ master forgers to recreate allied or enemy documents, planting them in the proper place to mislead their enemies. Obviously the difficulty for forging a document increases as the technology involved becomes more sophisticated. This equipment is used in tandem with the Learned Skill: Bureaucracy and is of little use to illiterate characters.

Tech Level: 2

Cost: 30 firebirds

At this level the forger has various writing and drafting utensils, official looking sheathes of paper and parchment, wax for making seals and impressions of signet rings (also impressions of keys, but that's another matter), and perhaps a book on handwriting.

Tech Level: 4

Cost: 300 firebirds

In addition to the above, this kit includes all the equip-

ment for making photographic identification badges, including a camera, printer, laminating and badge-making tools.

Tech Level: 7

Cost: 3,000 firebirds

In addition to the above, this kit includes all the equipment for breaking some of the most high-tech anti-forgery measures. It can produce holographic images, polychromatic inks, false thumb prints and even artificial retinal and brain-pattern scans (assuming that the forger somehow gains access to these in the first place). The gamemaster should note that breaking such high-tech security may, in addition to the usual Wits + Bureaucracy roll, require Tech + Think Machine or other applicable rolls.

Drop Kits

Tech Level: 6

Cost: 1000 firebirds, 100 firebirds to prepare it for reuse

Attempts to land troops on planet face innumerable difficulties — planet-to-space guns, interceptors, and the lack of a preexisting foothold being just some of them. Drop troops are one way around this. Specially equipped ships get in a geosynchronous orbit with the planet and fire off troops in special one-person landers. These drop kits have very limited maneuverability, relying on the ship to aim them where they need to go. The person in the kit can make small adjustments, but they are extremely difficult.

Drop kits negate all damage from falling from orbit, but their users need to make Wits + Spacesuit rolls to land on their target. Also, upon landing, she must make an Endurance + Spacesuit roll or suffer five dice of damage. Armor cannot block this damage, but energy shields can. The dropkit also serves as 10 dice of armor against any attacks on the way down. There are also stealth dropkits that only offer 3 dice of armor but which are much harder for detection devices to pick up.

Security Device

Razor Wire

Tech Level: 7

Deployable razor wire comes in a small container about the size of a canteen and weighs around 15 pounds. To deploy the wire, first refer to the diagram on the top of the package. This indicates the direction in which the wire will deploy. Next, press the activation button next to the diagram. The container counts down for 20 seconds; the container then bursts open and deploys the razor wire in a one meter-high wall three meters long. The ultra-sharp monofilament ceramsteel wire that makes up this device is deadly to the touch. If a person walks into the wire or is thrown on it, he immediately suffers 4d of damage. Shields do not prevent this damage. However, the wire can only cut if there is some minimal kinetic energy difference between it and the



character. By accumulating nine Vigor + Dexterity victory points on a sustained action, anyone can slowly move through the wire without being hurt. However, failures cause damage. The wire can also be crossed by slowly placing a blanket of some sort over it. Lastly, any weapon with a blast radius (such as a grenade) destroys the wire.

Detection Devices

Proximity Detector

Some enemies move silently or almost invisibly in the shadows, beyond a sentry's range of perception. Proximity detectors have been around since at least the First Republic and come in many shapes and forms, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. Some are merely glorified radar guns which send out a sonic or radio pulse that echoes off nearby targets. While such instruments are available at Tech Level 4, they are incapable of giving an accurate sounding on size, speed or direction. The user only knows that "something is out there." More advanced models have think machine technology that allows them to deduce these variables, reporting them to a small oracle panel or audibly to a separate ear piece. More advanced detectors may key off genetic coding (these have been used on Stigmata with some success), EMS readings or even micro-changes in air density. Range and accuracy vary widely with these detectors, but get steadily better, regardless of the basic technology employed, as the detector crawls up the technology scale.

Tech Level: 4

Cost: 150 firebirds

A simple radar or sonar gun, detectors of this class have a reliable range of 20 meters, cannot see through solid objects and are notorious for picking up false signals.

Tech Level: 5

Cost: 500 firebirds

Units at this level also typically use radar or sonar, but are far more sophisticated in how they retrieve and report this information, displaying reliable data on size, speed and location (accuracy diminishes with distance). Units at this level cannot detect through solid obstructions and are generally omni-directional (they must be pointed in the general direction of the moving object, usually in about a 30° cone). Reliable range varies, but rarely exceeds 100 meters.

Tech Level: 6

Cost: 2,000 firebirds

Detectors produced with this level of technology may employ any number of technologies, but most typically work in the electromagnetic spectrum. They are multi-directional (360° radius) and can accurately detail the size, speed, location, shape and material of any number of targets in the scanning area. Range varies, but the reliable reading area is usually about 200 meters. Scanners of this sort can also detect movement through most solid objects, but can be

blocked by various substances (lead, luminite or heavy banks of active machinery).

Tech Level: 7

Cost: 4,500 firebirds (+1,000 for the surgery if cybernetically implanted)

Extremely rare and expensive, detectors of this sort may do all of the above and are also miniaturized to the point where they can be hidden anywhere. (They are sometimes implanted as cybernetic enhancements.) Using multiple sensing technologies and sophisticated computer programs, such sensors can approximate the surrounding *visual* environment in even the worst conditions. Range may exceed 300 meters or more.

Metal Detectors

Tech Level: 4

Cost: 100 firebirds

Designed to sense and locate even small amounts of metal, these can be hand held or fixed in place. They generally have a rather limited range, though the range and sensitivity increase with cost and tech level.

Explosive Detectors

Tech Level: 4

Cost: 150 firebirds

Designed to sense and locate even small amounts of explosive materials, these can be hand held or fixed in place. They generally have a rather limited range, though the range and sensitivity increase with cost and tech level.

Energy Detectors

Tech Level: 6

Cost: 250 firebirds

Designed to sense and locate charged fusion cells, these can be hand held or fixed in place. They generally have a rather limited range, though the range and sensitivity increase with cost and tech level.

Personal Weaponry

Melee Weapons

Avestite Sword of Penance

Roll	Init	Goal	DMG	STR	SIZ
Dx+Melee			6/2	4	L

Tech Level: 5

Cost: 75 (10 firebirds/cel)

Used primarily by Avestite leaders and some Church soldiers, the Avestite Sword of Penance is designed as much to intimidate its foes as it is to kill them. With the push of a button flame covers the entire blade. This flame is hot enough to cause second-degree burns to anyone who comes in contact with it. It provides two extra dice of damage that can leak through like flamethrower damage. The fire is also good for impressing the superstitious.

Note that these flames are not good for the metal of the blade. These swords tend to be weaker than others, and if they are used to parry an attack, the wielder must roll a 13 or less to ensure that the flame mechanism has not broken. Critical failures are as likely to break the sword as they are to burn the user. The sword otherwise acts as a normal broadsword. A standard cell can keep the flame burning for one minute (20 turns).

Boot Knife

Roll	Init	Goal	DMG	STR	SIZ
Dex+Fight	+1	3	1	1	S

Tech Level: 3

Cost: 15 firebirds

A kick to the schiskas can hurt, but the same kick with one of these can be deadly. A great equalizer in dirty barroom brawls, the knife boot is a 6" spring-loaded blade that pops from the toe of the boot. Activated by flexing the toes twice in quick succession, the blade is just as easily retracted when the dust clears. Knife boots are rare enough that most casual weapon searches don't uncover them.

Cestus

Roll	Init	Goal	DMG	STR	SIZ
Dx+Fight			+1		S

Tech Level: 1

Cost: 1 firebird

These knuckle covers, usually made out of any metal from brass to ceramsteel, provide an extra die of damage when their users punch someone. Most of these are simple lumps of metal worn over the knuckles, but some are ornate designs with hooks, poison jets, and spikes. The latter are especially popular among Bannockburn's professional pugilists.

Trench Knife

Roll	Init	Goal	DMG	STR	SIZ
Dx+Melee/Fight			3/+1	1	M

Tech Level: 1

Cost: 6 firebirds

The trench knife traditionally attaches a strong cutting and slashing blade to a large hilt. The hilt acts as a cestus, and its user gets an extra die of damage whenever she punches somebody.

Bow

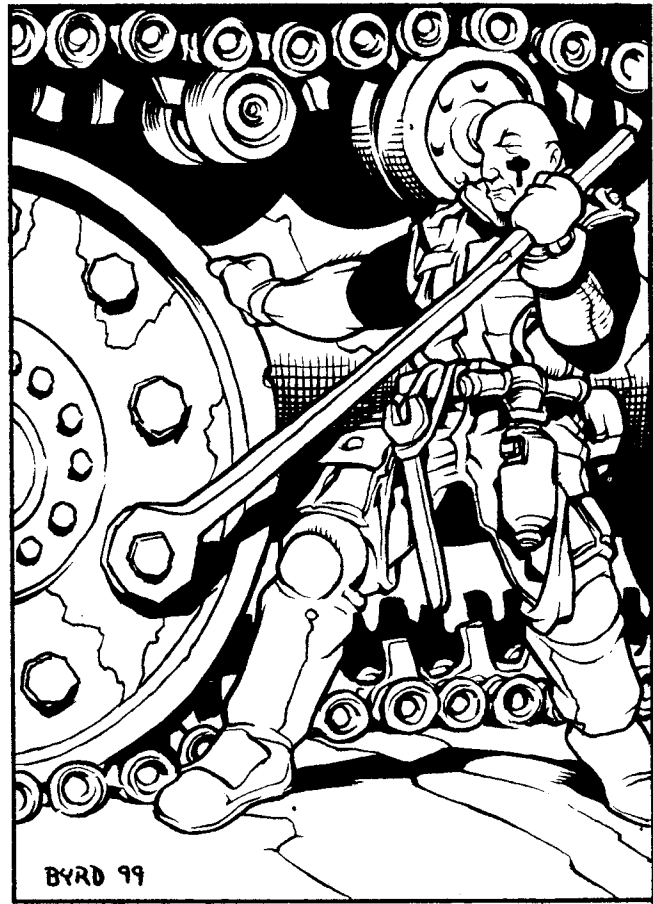
Thungari (Vorox Double-Bow)

Roll	Goal	DMG	STR	RNG	Rate	SIZ
Dx+Archery	0/-1*	8	6**	40/60	4***	XL

* No penalty for one arrow, -1 if two are fired at once.

** -1 goal for every Strength required above the user's own.

*** Two arrows can be fired at a single target per turn without a multiple action penalty; four arrows can be fired in pairs of two at the same or different targets with the two actions penalty (-4).



Pull: 120 lbs. (wheels and pulleys allow easier pull)

Tech Level: 4

Cost: 25 firebirds (1 crest/arrow)

A huge bow designed to be used with four hands (two to hold the bow, two more to nock two arrows, one above the other), this bow uses a clever wheel and pulley system to allow two arrows to be fired at a single target at once. A staple among the Li Halan Vorox Commando units, these bows require extra long arrows (which can be fitted with most arrowheads).

Energy Weapons

Microwave Guns

Roll	Goal	DMG	RNG	Shots	Rate	SIZ
Dex+Shoot		Special	10/30	10	1	L

Tech Level: 5

Cost: 500 (10/cel)

During the Diaspora, humanity came up with innumerable ways to try to kill itself off. The use of microwaves for weaponry became popular for a while, being used in everything from guns to planes to artillery shells. It quickly proved less effective than other death-dealing methods and faded away. Some microwave guns still surface from time to time, however, and in the right (or wrong!) hands, can cause especially gruesome damage.



The most common form of microwave gun does a gradually escalating amount of damage to its target, slowly cooking it from the inside out. The user must roll to hit every turn, and if something (like lead shielding) interrupts the beam, then the user must begin over again. Every turn the beam rests on its target, he takes an additional die of damage according to the following chart:

First Turn	No Damage
Second Turn	One die
Third Turn	Two dice
Fourth Turn	Three dice
Etc.	

While regular armor and energy shields provide no defense against this attack, a spacesuit or similar kind of armor provides complete protection.

Radium Blaster

Traits: As blaster, except for damage (below)

Tech Level: 6

Cost: +700 firebirds to normal weapons cost

Damage: In addition to its standard blaster damage, radium blasters do an equal amount of non-recoverable damage to the victim's Vitality every day minus the number of Victory Points the victim makes on an Endurance + Vigor roll. This damage continues until the victim acquires some sort of specialized aid (see below). Additionally, a critical success means that the radiation entered some vital and not easily treated part of the body, where it will eventually turn into a deadly cancer unless the patient receives prolonged and comprehensive treatment.

This gruesome weapon is banned on almost every civilized planet in the Empire. In addition to the usual burns and concussion damage familiar to standard blasters, radium blasters deliver a strong dose of radiation (about 400 RADs). Even if the victim survives the initial injury, he runs the risk of either radiation poisoning or cancer, which may take weeks or years to finally kill him. Fortunately, there are technological and mystical cures available to heal such injuries, at least for people with the proper resources. Cures for radiation sickness include radiation serums (listed above); these are a component of some advanced surgery kits. A NanoTech MedPac can deal with almost any illness or injury, and has little difficulty with most radiation burns. The Sanctuary Aeon Ritual: Healing Hand of Saint Amalthea can also completely heal the damage caused by this weapon. The only weaponsmiths currently known to produce these evil weapons are smiths of the Radir family, who work solely under the aegis of House Decados.

Heavy Weapons

Terrakin Borer

Roll	Goal	DMG	RNG	Shots	Rate	SIZ
Dex+Shoot	+1	10*	60/90	1	1	XL

* Ignores armor on d6 rolls of 1, 2 or 3

Tech Level: 5

Cost: 1000 firebirds (5 firebirds/slug)

The Deamasine weaponsmiths of Midian specialize in these high-velocity, large-bore firearms. Designed to punch through armor, these weapons get used against foes in cover, heavy armor or in vehicles (their original targets). Its ammo is specially designed and coated to punch through metal and ceramsteel. However, its tremendous impact means that it is more likely to activate shields.

Demolitions

Redemption Mines

Tech Level: 4

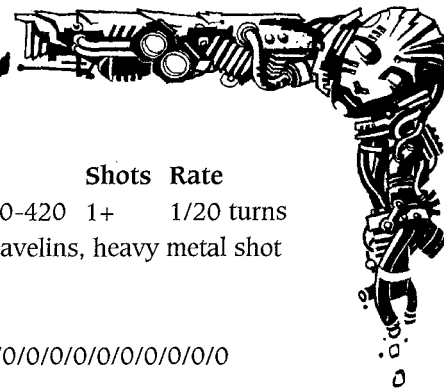
Any grenade type can be fashioned into a Redemption Mine. It works exactly like any other grenade except for the blast radius and the detonation. The mine directs the blast mainly in one direction. Therefore, it effects anyone in front of it out to about 8 meters (in a 60-degree arc). In any direction except its front, its radius is only about one meter. Every Redemption Mine also comes with a remote detonator. The detonator sends an electrical pulse down its 30-meter length to the device. This means anyone at the end of the wire can detonate the device instantly (this does not even require an action).

Chemical Weapons

Sinners' Ash

Tech Level: 6

In conjunction with the Engineers guild, the Brother Battle order has developed extremely powerful defoliants capable of killing any organic material with which it comes in contact. In addition, Sinners' Ash stays in a location for years, preventing growth and infecting anything that passes along it. Any living thing that comes in contact with Sinners' Ash suffers an immediate die of damage, which continues as long as it is in contact with it. Inhaling the ash causes an immediate 10 dice of damage. Additionally, the character needs to make an Endurance + Vigor roll or permanently lose one point of Endurance. Its effectiveness breaks down over time, and it loses its lethality within five years; until then, it continues to destroy organic material. The order prefers to spray this from aircraft, but they have been known to spray it from back canisters and fire it in artillery shells.



Artillery

Artillery in the Empire of the Fading Suns varies greatly, from the most primitive devices (catapults, trebuchet, etc.) to smoothbore or breech-loading cannons, to the most advanced terrestrial-based anti-spacecraft ordinance. This section gives a representative — though by no means comprehensive — listing.

To fire artillery, a character rolls Wits + Warfare (Artillery). Since most artillery is indirect fire (it travels on an arc to hit its target), it is difficult to hit with any accuracy. Plotters often spend a number of turns aiming: for each turn spent calculating and re-aiming the weapon, offset the weapon's goal penalty by one, up to a maximum amount of the plotter's Warfare (Artillery) skill. However, aiming cannot provide goal bonuses — it can only offset a weapon's goal penalties.

Extreme Range: Most of the figures on RNG given below are the standard figures as given in the main **Fading Suns** rulebook (Short Range/Long Range). In addition to these ranges, each of the *primitive* artillery pieces listed here have two extreme range figures which refer, respectively, to the outer ranges of the *average* machine and the *largest*, best made models.

Primitive Artillery

This category includes those weapons which do not use explosives or fusion cells to do their damage. It includes the catapult, the spring engine, ballista, trebuchet and more. These are used by armies in low-technology areas or that cannot afford anything better. Artillery of this sort is generally used against fortifications and (except for ballista) has great difficulty hitting anything smaller than the broad side of a barn. In reality, even the best primitive siege weapons have a hard time with heavily fortified installations. Against soldiers defended behind stone or maxicrete walls (sometimes 10 meters or more thick), even the largest siege weapons often prove ineffective without a good deal of ingenuity. Additional measures used by attacking armies may include firing flaming balls of pitch, bodies of dead defenders or propaganda leaflet bombs (to affect morale), or even disease-ridden animal corpses (a primitive version of germ warfare).

Primitive artillery usually proves pathetically inadequate against even marginally more advanced artillery, such as gunpowder cannons, let alone the super-tech energy weapons available to some armies. Still, such devices are inexpensive, easy to build and maintain, and are not forbidden by Church law. They are, thus, still in regular use throughout the Empire.

Ballista (Heavy)

Goal	DMG	RNG	Shots	Rate
-5	15 or 20	50/100/270-420	1+	1/20 turns

Ammunition: Large rocks, javelins, heavy metal shot
Tech Level: 1
Armor: 8d
Vitality: Ruin/-10/-6/-3/-1/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0
Cost: 100 firebirds

Ballista can fire large stones or javelins on a low, straight trajectory. Typically complex in construction, ballista are powered by one or two torsion skeins. (A skein is formed by two axles with cord or hair wrapped around them in a corkscrew braid. An armature is fitted into the skein which is wound up by winches and ratchets. When released the skein spins, pushing the armature forward and hurling whatever ammunition is used toward its target.) Ballista may be simple or complex in construction. Modern additions to some ballista may include autofeed magazines of multiple lances or ramps which feed round, metal shot balls. Heavy ballista usually take two or three people to operate them effectively in battlefield conditions.

Ballista (Light Field)

Goal	DMG	RNG	Shots	Rate
-3	10	50/100/180-360	5-10	1/10 turns

Ammunition: Metal or wooden bolts
Tech Level: 1
Armor: 5d
Vitality: Ruin/-10/-6/-3/-1/0/0/0
Cost: 50 firebirds

Light ballista fire bolts on a low, straight trajectory. In many ways similar to a very heavy crossbow, light ballista are nevertheless considered artillery rather than personal weapons. They are powered by torsion skeins and are typically mounted on a platform, often a swiveling tripod. Additionally, modern light ballista are typically faster loading (many have a chamber to accept additional bolts), do not require a STR roll to reload and have better penetration than the hand held variety. While it is possible for a single individual to use and transport a light ballista (-2 goal), it usually requires a two-person crew.

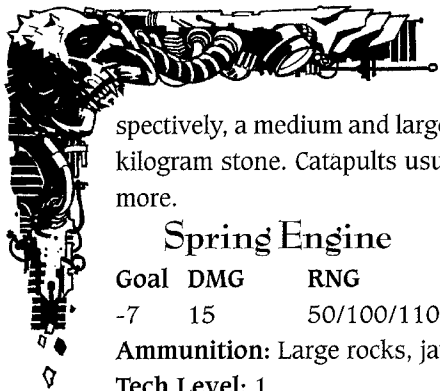
Catapult

Goal	DMG	RNG	Shots	Rate
-3	20 or 25	50/100/180-365	1	1/60 turns

Ammunition: Very large rocks
Tech Level: 1
Armor: 8d
Vitality: Ruin/-10/-6/-3/-1/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0
Cost: 75 firebirds

A catapult is a lever-operated, torsion skein device capable of hurling heavy stones with great force in a high arcing trajectory. The damage ratings given here are for, re-





spectively, a medium and large catapult throwing a 20 or 25 kilogram stone. Catapults usually require crews of three or more.

Spring Engine

Goal	DMG	RNG	Shots	Rate
-7	15	50/100/110-160	1	1/40 turns

Ammunition: Large rocks, javelins, heavy metal shot

Tech Level: 1

Armor: 8d

Vitality: Ruin/-10/-6/-3/-1/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Cost: 70 firebirds

The most basic of the heavy artillery listed here, spring engines are simply spring-powered units made to fire an arrow or medium-sized rocks in a high arcing trajectory. (The spring is most often made of flexible wood, horn or sinew.) While easier to make and maintain, spring engines are not as efficient as those using torsion skeins or counterweights, and are generally inferior in range, accuracy and damage inflicted. Spring engines usually have a crew of one or two operators.

Trebuchet

Goal	DMG	RNG	Shots	Rate
-9	30	50/100/270-420	1	1/40 turns

Ammunition: Extremely large rocks, javelins, heavy metal shot

Tech Level: 1

Armor: 8d

Vitality: Ruin/-10/-6/-3/-1/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Cost: 90 firebirds

Simultaneously the most powerful, and in many ways the simplest, of the above units — at least in basic construction — the trebuchet is little more than a sling coupled with a heavy counterweight. (Some use a system of windlasses, ropes and pulleys to fire and reload.) The trebuchet can potentially throw heavier weights than any other type of primitive artillery, but with less range than the best-made ballista or catapults. It is best used for siege situations rather than open battlefield conditions. A trebuchet may take anywhere from two to six men to operate, depending on the size of the counterweight and the sophistication of its reloading system. The example here is an extremely large trebuchet throwing a 136-kilogram stone.

Advanced Artillery

Breech-Loading Artillery

Breech-loading artillery has been around since before humanity first reached the stars and, when counting firebirds to sheer devastation, there are still few weapons that can surpass the value of these long range cannons. These weapons range in firing power, accuracy and portability. Some are pack artillery, drawn by horse or motorized vehicle. Some

are naval, coastal or fortress weaponry, permanently mounted onto steel decks or poured maxicrete foundations. Below are just a few examples of the hundreds of models currently available in the Known Worlds.

The Kagor "Tusker" 76mm

Goal	DMG	RNG	Shots	Rate
-5	20	800/2,000	1	1/10 turns

Ammunition: 76mm shells

Tech Level: 3

Armor: 8d

Vitality: Ruin/-10/-6/-3/-1/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Cost: 2500 firebirds (shells cost 50 each)

Named for a wild boar native to the forests of Leminkainen, this primitive breech loading cannon is nevertheless rugged, easily drawn by horses and inexpensive to make and maintain. Originated by House Hawkwood, the Kagor (or similar models) is now popular throughout the Known Worlds. The Kagor has an ornate, rifled barrel with a boar's head at the end and can accurately hit a target over two kilometers away. The Tusker can be operated by one person, but requires a crew of two for maximum efficiency (one to load and the other to fire).

The L-66 "Wild Wombat"

Goal	DMG	RNG	Shots	Rate
-1	35	10 km	1	1/5 turns

Ammunition: 155mm shells

Tech Level: 5

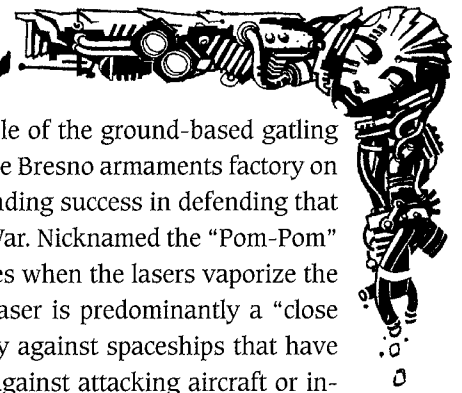
Armor: 10d

Vitality: Ruin/-10/-6/-3/-1/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Cost: 6,000 firebirds (shells cost 100 each)

This heavy recoilless howitzer first made its appearance during the early years of the Emperor Wars and proved a major boon to the Hazat on several worlds, forming the mainstay of their artillery batteries through to the present. Known for its heavily-armored blast shield and stumpy barrel, the Wild Wombat is most famous for firing shells especially equipped with sirens and simple gyroscopes. Designed by a mad Kurgan weapons designer from the planet Khayyam, who had defected years before, these shells screamed in unpredictable zigzag patterns across the sky before accurately homing in on their target, instilling a good deal of fear and apprehension in the process. The L-66 has an effective range of 10 kilometers, a task made much easier by the howitzer's targeting computer. The L-66 requires a crew of four to maintain and operate, at least one of whom must be familiar with think-machines.





Decados 62cm Xf-123 "City Killer"

Goal	DMG	RNG	Shots	Rate
-7	50	250 km	1	1/20 turns

Ammunition: 62cm shells

Tech Level: 4

Armor: 14d

Vitality: Ruin/-10/-6/-3/-1/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Cost: 16,000 firebirds (shells cost 250 each)

Almost a vehicle, this armored super cannon is an immense, slow-moving gun platform used for sieges against heavily fortified urban areas. Because of its range and accuracy, this "city killer" can hurl its explosive 62cm shells 250 km or more onto its terrified targets without ever coming within visual range. Hitting a specific target at this range requires either *very* good computational skills or a separate targeting computer, though usually this weapon rarely targets anything smaller than an urban district. Indeed, initial volleys often miss the city completely! The sheer randomness of these attacks are enough to demoralize many foes. The Decados have been known to load the cannon's shells with chemical or biological agents to exact the maximum effect, though usually regular explosive shells are more than sufficient. Huge, complicated and notably temperamental, the Xf-123 is easily susceptible to the elements or sabotage. It also occasionally explodes, killing its crew when overheated, thus giving it a reputation as something of a white elephant in the armaments industry. The Xf-123 requires heavy ground support for protection and a minimum crew of seven to maintain and operate.

Ground to Space Ordinance

Various sides in the Emperor Wars battled to create bigger and better spaceship-mounted energy weapons. At the same time, a separate arms race took place to create similar weapons of destruction for more terrestrial battlefields and to defend planets against attacks from space.

Bresno MkV "Pom-Pom" Laser

Goal	DMG	RNG	Shots	Rate
	4*	Near-orbit	Varies	1/4 turns

* -1d DMG in inclement environments such as dust storms, clouds or heavy rain. This is starship scale damage: x5 DMG dice against planetside targets. However, it is a direct-fire beam; anything in the way will interrupt the beam and take damage.

Ammunition: Local power grid (unlimited shots) or mega-fusion cel (10 shots per cel; worth 100 charges of regular cel)

Tech Level: 5

Armor: 10d

Vitality: Ruin/-10/-6/-3/-1/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Cost: 25,000 firebirds

Perhaps the most reliable of the ground-based gatling lasers, the MkV is built by the Bresno armaments factory on Criticorum and was a resounding success in defending that planet during the Emperor War. Nicknamed the "Pom-Pom" because of the noise it makes when the lasers vaporize the air around its barrels, the laser is predominantly a "close range" weapon, used mainly against spaceships that have entered planetary orbit, or against attacking aircraft or incoming missiles. The unit itself consists of four separate laser barrels connected to a spinning, circular blast shield. Firing control is linked to a central think-machine which relays tactical information to a crude but utilitarian oracle panel. The laser is mounted on a fast-turning platform with a 360° firing radius and is fully capable of tracking all but the fastest moving targets. The MkV requires only a crew of one to operate (the operator must be familiar with think-machines), though maintenance requires additional trained personnel. The Bresno Pom-pom is most used by the Muster and the al-Malik, though other houses have produced suspiciously-similar units since the end of the war.

Falling Star Cannon

Goal	DMG	RNG	Shots	Rate
-1	20*	Orbit	Varies	1/4 turns (or 1 per 8)

* Overpowers shields: each shield stops only 1 DMG pt. This is starship scale damage: x5 DMG dice against planetside targets. However, it is a direct-fire beam; anything in the way will interrupt the beam and take damage.

Ammunition: Meson beam powered by mega-fusion cel (two shots per cel) or major power grid (unlimited shots). Cannons with an independent fusion cel can only fire once per eight turns, while those attached to a reliable energy grid can fire every four turns.

Tech Level: 6

Armor: 12d

Vitality: Ruin/-10/-6/-3/-1/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

Cost: 48,000 firebirds

The Falling Star is, perhaps, the most effective ground-based planetary defense system available in the Empire today. Employing a heavy meson beam equaled in power by only the most powerful shipboard armaments, this devastating weapon has been known to rip the heaviest dreadnoughts in two, tearing them from orbit to fiery destruction below. Most typically positioned in hardened bunkers, other "portable" versions may be mounted on flat-bed trains or mounted on naval vessels. The premier ocean-going naval cruisers of Byzantium Secundus, for example, often have such a weapon.

The Falling Star is based in turrets with a 360° firing radius. Although the Falling Star has some advantages over space born weapons (e.g. the ability to fire once a turn if properly powered), their relative immobility makes them tempting targets for retaliation. Despite the inordinate ex-



pense involved in building and maintaining such a high-tech weapon, the cost is minuscule in comparison to fielding a naval armada. Despite this, however, many tacticians feel that when it comes to defending a planet from orbital bombardment, ground-based space defense is a poor second alternative.

Military Vehicles

Military vehicles are built to be rugged, self-defending killing machines. As with most technologically advanced weapons, price, technical sophistication and Church doctrine tend to keep the number of these weapons down (or at least under wraps when not in use).

al-Malik Flying Crescent

Speed	Armor	Fuel	RNG	Cargo	People
950 km/hr	12d*	Fusion	2,700km	2 tons	6/3

* 21d for propeller blade

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

Propeller blade: Ruin/-6/-3/0/0/0

Weapons: The flying crescent usually carries three starship-grade Med Lasers (15d), and one Antipersonnel Blaster (9d, shield bleed on rolls of 1, 2 or 3).

Tech Level: 7

Cost: 75,000 firebirds

Sleek, silent and deadly, the Flying Crescent employs the most advanced stealth technologies to render itself almost invisible on the battlefield. First "appearing" on both the Severus and Malignatius fronts during the final years of the Emperor War, this tank killer played havoc on Decados armor and personnel alike. Built of top secret sensor refracting and light-bending composites, this black and silver craft is almost invisible to the naked eye and all but the most advanced EMS sensors. The craft is shaped like a crescent moon surrounding a large and virtually silent propeller blade. This blade is virtually invulnerable to damage because its computerized turning system varies its turn rate to avoid any missile traveling slower than a sustained laser burst (5 Victory Points needed to hit the blade with a missile weapon).

Combining the best attributes of a jet and a helicopter, the flying crescent is a virtual battle platform in the sky. It can go from a full stop to maximum speed and vice versa in one turn. It can bank, roll or reverse direction with consummate ease, and is as adept at flying two meters above the ground as it is traversing the upper stratosphere. Still under top secret control by the al-Malik and the Martech group, it is unknown what other capabilities the aircraft possesses.



Hazat Cx-Omega "Mini-Mite"

Speed	Armor	Fuel	RNG	Cargo	People
120km/hr	8d*	Varies**	1,700km**	1/2 ton	3/2

* 4d treads

** Solar or fusion

*** Triple range in sunny regions

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

Treads: Ruin/-6/-3/0/0/0

Weapons: Twin-barelled 70mm cannon (20d), Hvy turret-mounted Machinegun (10d)

Tech Level: 4

Cost: 12,000 firebirds

Epitomizing the Hazat preference for reliable, low-tech weaponry, the Mini-Mite is cheaply produced, easy to maintain and literally swarmed over its higher-tech opponents in the last war. Known for its rounded beetle-like exterior (complete with rounded turret and stumpy, double snub-nosed cannons), the Cx-Omega has also come into increasing use in border skirmishes against the Kurgan Caliphate. Frequently fitted with high-yield solar collectors, this tank is ideally suited for desert campaigns or other regions with a good amount of sun.

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ISBN 1-888906-16-2

