# Lords & Priests



FADING SUNS™

"Priests of the Celestial Sun" by Michael William Kaluta

# PRIESTS OF THE CELESTIAL SUN

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## Pilgrims:

O Pancreator, lift the veil from mine eyes and let me see the light! Thy creatures yearn for the truth and the reality behind reality. All around are shadows, shifting patterns and form — illusion. Ignite the stars! Banish the shadows! Free your creatures to live fully within Creation!




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# PRIESTS OF THE CELESTIAL SUN

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# Alustro's Journal: Visions

For too long have I delayed writing of the two most significant events in my life. I feared to put them into words lest their power disappear like a dream upon the morning. But over the years and months since, they remain with me, as powerful as when I first experienced them. The vision from my youth and the dream of the Gargoyle of Nowhere have changed me, and I cannot yet say where they shall take me.

I am aware that these things are uncomfortable to many, who would rather not read such intimate portraits of another's inner life when they are often too confused to read their own. Faith — even quiet, enduring faith — unnerves many, for they either equate it with foolery or with the fires of the punishing Inquisition. Most would prefer to leave spiritual matters to experts. If this is so for you, reader, then read no further. For I will write of naked experience and the raw power of the Pancreator. If such beliefs make you nervous, turn the pages and return to matters more mundane.

When I was little, I was fed on the bread and milk of the Church. Raised in pious fashion on Midian, I knew no other ambition than that of the vestry. My dear, sweet mother wished only ordination for me, as did my well-placed uncle, none other than the Archbishop of Byzantium Secundus. But the Pancreator often has his own goals for our futures, and reveals them in his own time.

I was 14 years old when I took vows and received my novitiates' robes. My family connections ushered me in early to such duties, for my friends were still altar boys and cantors. I was neither bothered by this, nor was I overjoyed. My career in the Church was a given, not something I looked forward to with any excitement nor misgiving. This changed in the gardens of Lady Tara Li Halan.

Walking there alone one afternoon on a gray day, I came upon a dying *wuwei* bird. The *mokuto neko* which had mauled it slipped away as I came down the path, leaving the bird to weakly flutter in fear and pain. I bent down to watch its last moments, more from curiosity than compassion. Dying animals are no rare occurrence. But as I watched its weak struggles, I realized that my presence caused it only more pain. Foolishly, I reached down to stroke it, hoping to allay its fears. Birds, of course, do not like being petted. I do not know what I was thinking. Stupid boy.

Then, a remarkable thing occurred. The bird stilled, not yet dead, but calm, as if it accepted my weak gesture of peace. Its eyes looked into mine and I saw in them an inner light. Indeed, I now saw a light limned about its entire tiny body, a warm glow which spread outward. As I watched, my vision became clearer, as if fogs rolled aside so that I could truly see, for the first time, another being in its full glory. The light radiated out and met another brilliance, a deeper, brighter light descending from above. When the lights met, the entire area was suffused with the glow, spreading all around, engulfing me within it.

I gasped. Light now escaped from me, as if a furnace burned in my breast and my flesh could not contain the glow. I looked again at the dying bird and saw its light burst from its heart and shoot into the sky. As it disappeared into the heavy clouds, the radiance around me dimmed and returned to gray. My own light retreated within once more.

I was exhausted. The world returned to its previous state. The fog rolled in again, concealing the secret luminosity of the world. The bird's body lay unmoving, a dead husk.

I believe that I was gifted with a vision of the Pancreator's Descent of Grace, and the Luminous Return to the Empyrean of one of its divine creatures. But the experience was different from what I was taught by my Orthodox tutors. For the bird had revealed a flame within itself — and its display had in turn revealed to me my own light, drawn outward by the Pancreator's presence.

This holy vision changed my entire outlook on my career, my very life. Yet I could not tell my teachers, for it departed too far from their doctrines. I knew even then, as a young boy, that my vision was truer than the theology carried in books over a millennia. I knew then and there that I would eventually leave my order to join the Eskatonics, whose own doctrines spoke of the very thing I had experienced.

I have since spoken with many priests, my age and older, and discovered that such a vision as was afforded me is rare. Most travel through life with no such experience, relying only on faith as proof of the Pancreator. I understood why the Church was important to them; it was their only experience of the divine, mediated through the accounts of those who had touched Creation. I knew how truly blessed I was, that I had received what so many others have not. I did not need books and debates; the truth of the Pancreator resided in my memory, in my soul.

But I also knew that to count my self above them for such a gift was wrong, and would lead only to hubris. To the contrary, I believed myself humbled. Why was such vision afforded me? Surely it meant that I must perform a duty for the Pancreator, to give my life in service to him. I began to envy those who were blind to visions, for they could choose their courses as they saw fit, with no divine prodding to sway them. I began to question all my actions in the light of my vision. I was paralyzed with indecision, lest I choose wrongly.

Only time has allayed such fears in me. Only the rhythms of the mundane over the months and years have brought me to a sense of peace with my self. I must trust my heart, my own light. Why else was my burning heart shown to me if not for this meaning, that the truth lies within?

But I could not forget the heavens, to which the dying soul of the bird had fled. My yearning for the stars and for questing began there. It is still strong in me. It is this yearning and the memory of that early vision which prepared me for the quest given by the Gargoyle.

My Lady Erian Li Halan led me to Nowhere to seek the famed oracle. With the rest of her entourage, we bought access past Stigmata to Nowhere, realizing that we might not be allowed to return should the garrison fear Symbiot taint among us. But to Erian, it was worth the risk. Her lands were stolen from her and she was rootless.

An old matron of her pious house had told her of the Gargoyle, which had delivered to her grandfather a vision long ago, one which revealed to him the secret needed to rise to power within the family. Returning from that oracle, her grandfather had, within a number of years, deftly rid himself of all his rivals and uncannily predicted which of his allies would betray him. Emboldened by this tale, Erian swore to seek the oracle herself.

Once on Nowhere, we had to purchase transportation and a guide to take us to the wastes, where the Gargoyle had sat for more years than recorded history. Few ships can risk landing in the wastes, lest the winds of the upper atmosphere scour the vessel's hull and breach it. Yet the winds on the lower plain are eerily still and dead. The atmosphere of the wasted planet required that we wear breathing masks, although atmosphere suits were not needed. After a journey of a week, we finally saw the thing across the vast plain.

After setting up camp, we approached and examined it. Its architecture was impressive, its sculpting so lifelike that it seemed a creature frozen rather than carved. But it did not move, and thus could not be alive as we know it.

I then performed a rite so that I might view its occult properties. When I opened my eyes with the Second Sight, I saw that it was staring at me. Its eyes had moved, rolling in their massive sockets to peer down at me. I shuddered, for its gaze was inhuman. No emotion could be read from it, except perhaps that of fear.

I looked to Erian and saw that she was the only one of my companions who remained. The others were gone. Even the wastes were gone, replaced by lush grass over a purplish-green plain dotted with groves of oddly shaped trees. We stood in the Garden of Nowhere, the legendary state of the planet long ago, before it was turned to waste by mysterious forces.

Erian looked up at the Gargoyle and beseeched it. "Show me," she said, with a pride and bearing which I hoped would not insult the artifact. But it was, as ever, unmoved. Its eyes had rolled to gaze upon her, but its silence was supernal.

"Blessed be the works of the Pancreator," I said in prayer. "Let wisdom come to those who are open to it, whose cups are empty and whose minds are as guileless as those of small children. Show us thy will so that we may complete it."

I do not remember exactly what happened next, but I know that I dreamed. I saw more than I can recall, but what I saw was strange enough. I was back aboard the pilgrim ship we had arrived in, but it was empty of pilgrims and my companions. I found my way to the bridge and discovered that it, too, was empty. Looking out the port, I saw that the ship approached a jumpgate. Although no pilot had willed it so, the gate began to open, space and light warping within its hoop to open a strange portal to another star system. As the ship entered, I realized with a shock of fear (in that form of dream logic where one knows things which have not been told) that the Sathra Damper was disabled and that my soul was at risk.

Instead of the fabled euphoria, however, I saw a mist outside the ship. The pilot (yes, for there was now a pilot there, as if he had always been there) turned to me and asked me why it had taken me so long to get here. I replied that I had been on the bridge since before the jump, but he said that that was not what he meant.

The ship then exited another gate and we were back in normal space. A ship awaited us, but it did not belong to any noble house, guild or sect. It was Vau. The pilot was

gone again and the ship flew randomly. The Vau ship shot forth a beam and caught my ship in a cocoon of light. I went to the hatch to greet the visitors (which I knew would be coming).

I was then in a sumptuous dining-room, eating with a Vau mandarin. Soldiers stood by the doors and half-naked servants brought us plates of oddly colored plants and meats, but they all tasted good. The mandarin turned to me and said, "Now that you have truly traveled space, you must become a priest."

I got up from the table and left the room, returning (instantly in the way of dreams) to the bridge of my ship (although it was now a different ship — the very one we would later acquire from one of Erian's Hazat allies). Julia Abrams flew the ship and asked me where I had found the strange clothes which I wore. I realized that I was wearing Vau priestly robes, and replied, "I earned them."

She told me to strap in, because we were going to have to fight the Symbiots to get out of there. "There" was a different place than I had been before. We were now back in the Stigmata system, apparently pursued by a Symbiot spacefighter. It was faster than us, and shot forth a spiderweb from its guns. The web wrapped about our ship and I could see tiny spiders crawling across our hull, strengthening the web with their own silk. Our ship slowed to a crawl as the web dragged us back.

The spiders were now in the ship, crawling underfoot. I shooed them away, but Julia was frantic. I told her to calm down, for we would all one day be food for the spiders. I said that we must climb the web to get home. I led her to the hatch and we crawled out onto the hull (without spacesuits!) and grasped the sticky webbing around it. Using it as a ladder, we climbed out into space, toward the sun. Julia complained about the cold, but I said that the sun was hot and we'd be warm when we would arrive there.

But as we got closer, it only got colder. The sun seemed less bright. I knew that we had to connect the web to the sun, but I did not know why. I then realized that my own inner light would keep us warm. A small sun seemed to be inside my breast, and it radiated heat into space. I then remembered a Vau word to shape the light, and began to weave it into an extension of the web, building a ladder from our ship to the sun.

I woke on the wastelands of Nowhere at the foot of the Gargoyle. I had been unconscious for nearly a day. Our guide had instructed Cardanzo and Julia to shade my body, but told them that this coma was the way of visions.

Erian had dreamed also, but not the same dream as I. Her dream was populated by famous figures of her family's past, many from before the Conversion, when her relatives were demons among men. She has yet to tell all that she saw, but one of the elements of her dream was the discovery of a family relic on some unnamed world. Whether this world is one of those we know or a Lost World is unclear, as is the nature of the relic. Erian seems to remember less of her dream than I, but traces of it return to her in dreams.

As to the meaning of my dream, I cannot say for sure. I am still trying to unravel it. Perhaps I must bring the word of the Pancreator and the Holy Flame to the Vau and Symbiots? But this seems too simple an explanation for such a profound seeming vision — and profound for me it was, even if such emotion is lost in dry writing.

Whomever reads this account in my journals, temper any charge of heresy that you may have with the knowledge that even the Prophet revered the Gargoyles, and believed that they represented a purpose as yet to be revealed to Creation.



# Introduction: The Quest

*On this star, in this hard star-adventure, knowing not what the fires mean to the right and left, nor whether a meaning was intended or presumed, man can stand up, and look out blind and say: in all these turning lights I find no clue, only a masterless night, and in my blood no certain answer, yet is my mind my own, yet is my heart a cry toward something dim in the distance, which is higher than I am and makes me emperor of the endless night even in seeking!*

— Maxwell Anderson, *Winterset*

*And we will all die and the stars will go out one after another....*

— William S. Burroughs

Humanity's sojourn to the stars led to chaos, anarchy and confusion. In the wake of the First Republic's dissolution, the Diasporan colonists questioned everything that had gone before. All values were suspect, culprits for the tyranny the First Republic had forged from innocent ideals. The bedrock of civilization crumbled. Humanity was alone in the void, bereft of guideposts. The only truth was doubt.

Zebulon the Prophet came from the planet of Yathrib to fill the void in humanity's heart, to bolster the weak with words and to overcome doubt with faith. From the fragments of Earth's religions, he forged a new spirituality, one with the strength to survive humankind's struggles on distant soils.

After his death, a great Church formed around his teachings, and debates over interpretations of his words forged many sects. After the Fall of the Second Republic, the Church was the only universal institution left to the people. They clung to it like passengers from a sinking ship to a lifeboat. As more and more people were forced into the generational contracts of the nobility, becoming hereditary serfs, the Church became their only solace, consoling them with a victory in the afterlife which transcended their toil in this life.

Zebulon's original teachings about the questing spirit were quietly ignored, considered the pastime of the bourgeois. The workers of the field had not the luxury to seek for answers to their questions of faith; the Church provided all the answers they required — or so the bishops believed. But spirituality springs anew from unexpected sources, and cannot be shut away from sight. The people often resisted the dogmatic laws of the Church, breaking away from their parishes to begin worship of their own in new sects with new ideas.

Such sects have a colorful history; some survived while others faded or were persecuted out of existence. But all enriched the tapestry of Known Worlds spirituality. And not all spirituality takes the form of the Universal Church. The Emperor Wars not only birthed new sects, eager to break from the overly political Church, but saw the rebirth of old religions: Ancestor worship and animism now thrive again on backwater worlds. These "heathens" and "pagans" worship in their own ways, untouched by the dogmatism of bishops and patriarchs. But these few must keep their religion hidden from the Inquisition, which has no patience for alternate views of God.

Aside from the coercive and political arms of the Church, however, there are many priests deeply committed to the quest for truth and enlightenment, or compassion and release from suffering. These seekers make up the true core of the Church, its ever-evolving heart which keeps the institution viable even after years of political powerplays. It is these truly faithful who most exemplify Zebulon's teachings, which he meant to enliven a spiritless age, not an age of religious tyranny.

The teachings and ways of each sect and order are designed as guideposts on the path of spiritual growth — or as protection from the dangers that threaten innocent souls. But regardless of the answers put forth by the Church — whether it be the fanatic truths of the Avestites or the more gentle convictions of the Amaltheans — new questions will arise. They always do. The challenge of each sect is to answer these questions not just adequately, but nobly, in such a way as to lend new possibilities to living.

But no single doctrine can answer all concerns. A continual questing is necessary. The Prophet knew this, and set the course of humanity's sojourn by the stars in the heavens, the most potent symbols of hope and renewal.

## Playing a Priest Amidst the Fading Suns

Perhaps the most challenging character to roleplay in **Fading Suns** is a priest. Religion is often an uncomfortable issue in Western society. For those not actively involved in a church, it is often a private rather than public conviction — or not an issue at all. Those involved in a real religion may find it problematic to play a character involved in a fictitious one. Unfortunately, there are no easy answers to such dilemmas.

**Fading Suns** involves spirituality because it is a part of human existence, regardless of the wishes of those rationalists who claim otherwise. Arguments about the existence, omnipotence or death of God aside, religion is an element of human culture — if for no other reason than that it gives atheists and theists alike something to argue about.

Orson Scott Card calls science fiction the last viable form of religious writing our culture has left. Classics such as *2001: A Space Odyssey* or Card's own *Memory of Earth* series provide excellent frameworks to speculate on such issues. **Fading Suns** emulates this tradition, for roleplaying can be one of the greatest art forms available for imaginative dialectic and debate — without giving up on fun and entertainment.

This book can be taken as seriously as you desire. Use it as an inspiration to explore spiritual issues that are important to you, as a source for crackpot messiahs and evolutionary footdraggers, or something in between. But don't use it as an excuse to start fights. Nothing in this book is intended by the authors as insult, and only respect is accorded to real-world religions. Likewise, players and gamemasters should respect the comfort levels of those in their gaming group, and allow that not everybody is ready to bring deep issues into a roleplaying game.

Nonetheless, **Fading Suns** is a speculative future setting wherein religion is dealt with in depth. Future supplements will continue to expand on the subjects introduced here: revealing counter viewpoints (pagans and others), alien religions and occult secrets.

The mythic tapestry continually grows.





# Readings from the Omega Gosples

by Bill Bridges

The all-embracing Universal Church of the Celestial Sun is the one common thread running through the lives of every sentient in the Known Worlds. Even apostates and pagans define their spirituality in terms of their opposition to or differences from the Church. The Church is an inescapable fact. The Prophet's wisdom, insight and sayings have greatly influenced the very way people think — with help from 1000 years of interpretation and guidance by priests, bishops and patriarchs. Indeed, the present Church is a boiling pot of diverse theology, sectarianism, and even politics. It is little wonder that the lives of common sentients, removed from the "professional" concerns of the clergy, are often informed more by the examples of saints than by learned parish priests. To truly understand the world-view of the Known Worlder, one must know the saints: their lives, thoughts and mystical purviews.

## Lives of the Saints

There are more saints listed in the Nomocanon of the Orthodoxy than is feasible to list here. There are interstellar saints, those recognized throughout the Known Worlds, planetary saints and local saints, those known mainly in the place of their ascension or martyrdom. The most influential and beloved of all saints are the Prophet's Disciples, those original followers of his light who toiled by his side as he spread the word of the Pancreator to a darkened universe. While they died long ago, before the rise of the Second Republic, they live on in parables and legend. Indeed, they sometimes live on in reality, for many is the peasant who swears to have seen one of the apostles, come to aid the Pancreator's children in their toil.

The age of the Prophet and his Disciples is a legendary time, remembered by the late Dark Age Known Worlders much the way biblical times are for late 20th-century Westerners — although with even less rigorous historical scrutiny. Seperating hyperbole and metaphor from reality is a herculean task requiring data no longer readily available to most Known Worlders (although all secrets are said to lie in the Great Library of Urth — if one could gain admittance for the decades it would require to gather it all). A magical glow envelops the people of those Diasporan times, and it is hard to say that such magic is wholy fictional. The reality of psychic powers, theurgical rites, and even bogeymen such as the Symbiots raises questions about the borders between science and magic.

But such speculation is for twisted, morally blind guildsmen and perverted nobles; no truly faithful churchgoer would bother to ask such questions. For them, the saints and their miracles are real, not just in far yesterdays, but today, here and now. While the priests may speak of sin, darkness and the dimming stars, most folk believe in their hearts that such doom cannot truly fall. Will not the saints save us? Nothing is so harsh that it cannot be endured without hope, and the saints are the harbingers of hope. During the worst noble excesses of the Emperor Wars, peasants knew that their vile overlords would suffer retribution once Lextius the Knight returned from afar to claim the throne and usher in a proper, just rule. Some now believe that Emperor Alexius is Lextius returned.

The saints inspire others with their deeds. A truly efficacious idea is often believed to have come from a saint. For instance, a soldier who wins the day through a tactic thought up in a dream says that Mantius inspired him. A scholar who realizes a sudden solution to a long-standing quandary says that Horace instilled the answer in him. While many believe that these are merely convenient phrases to communicate an inspiration from within, most people truly believe that such inspiration comes from the

saints, not from the subconscious. To doubt this, however, is not heresy, for Church theologians are divided on the issue themselves, with some arguing the "saints as metaphor" approach, while others argue the "participation of the saints" belief. The issue has remained unresolved since the early Dark Ages.

The names of the saints were latinized by Palamedes as he chose that ancient language as the ritual tongue of the Church, stamping out similar attempts by rival followers using other dead tongues (among them Sanskrit, Lakota and Martian Protocol). The true names of the saints (those still in the historical records) are given in parentheses following their well-known Latin titles.

So, on to the saints. Remember, one should choose well who one swears by, for prayers may find receptive ears....

## Paulus the Traveler
### (Paul Deveroux)

The starpilot who flew the Prophet from Yathrib, the place of his Vision, Paulus is said to have been the first to hear of Zebulon's experience of the Holy Flame (the First Sermon). He became the Prophet's first follower and is believed to have been more of a personal friend to him than any other disciple.

He is known as a gregarious fellow, ever laughing at danger or ill luck, convinced that his own wits — and the grace of the Pancreator — would deliver him from harm. He sought adventure and excitment, and was all too eager to pilot the Prophet to worlds where he was not welcome in an effort to win such worlds to the light. His personal starship, the *Spider*, renamed the *Emissary* once it became the Prophet's flag ship, is itself legendary. Long ago lost, it is a treasure sought by all starpilots. Some claim to have seen it flying the spaceways, a Flying Dutchman-like ghost ship of the stars.

So well-liked and trusted is Paulus that pacts are often sworn in his name, and oaths of companionship are made seeking his blessing. No matter how much the latter-day Dark Ages priests may condemn star travel or the loose morals of starpilots, they cannot curse Paulus, for his adventures are firmly grounded in the hearts of all Known Worlders while they are children. Indeed, Paulus is the patron saint of children, acting as a big brother figure and defender. But he is not the kind of moral wag to prevent a child from being bullied by rivals; he will instead instill courage into the child — and perhaps inspire a few dirty tricks to turn the tables.

The Omega Gospels provides an edited version of many private conversations between Paulus and Zebulon, later transcribed by the faithful from Paulus' accounts in his old age. An apocryphal account claims that he forever carried the shame and guilt of not piloting the Prophet on his final journey. He fell into a fever, and was not aware that Zebulon had left until his friend had died, at which time Paulus jumped from his sick bed, moaning: "My companion travels the Dark Road without me. I am lost."



Two pilots ferried the Prophet instead: Li Chan took him as far as Manitou, and Vithram the Black flew him into the jumpgate accident which took both their lives. Paulus never forgave himself and ever quested for respite. Legend states that he died alone of old age on Nowhere, although early accounts say it was "in the Garden of Nowhere," prompting speculation that the planet's present barrenness is upon account of Paulus' great sadness.

**Iconography:** Paulus appears in Church art as a dark-haired caucasian wearing a Diasporan starpilot's outfit festooned with patches representing the planets he traveled to (some of these symbols now represent Lost Worlds). He almost always has a large pistol strapped at his side (a blaster?). On some worlds, he appears as a member of the dominant race of that planet (asian on Kish, hispanic on Vera Cruz, black on Istakhr, etc.).

**Purview:** Questing, travel, extroversion, adventure, friendship, trust, children, sorrow

**Followers:** Starpilots (he is the patron saint of the Charioteers), children, adventurers, traveling merchants

## Lextius the Knight
### (Lucas Kambei)

The lord whose Lord was the Prophet. Lextius is the Holy Writ personified, wherein the noble estate swears fealty to the Church. Lextius was set to inherit vast lands and wealth, but he gave them up to follow the Prophet. For this, he was reviled by many of his contemporary nobles, who saw him as an addle-brained lap dog. But some nobles saw the light with him, and followed his and the Prophet's lead. Parables tell of the Pancreator's punishment on those nobles who cursed Lextius in his mission, and the awful fates of those who actively tried to halt him. Especially famous is the final battle between Lextius and his chief rival, Baron Gorcian Chauki, spitted upon Lextius' sword after an hour of fighting on the precipices of Byzantium Secundus (then New Istanbul). The site is

still a popular spot for resolving vendettas.

After Zebulon's death, Lextius returned to his fief on Dogen and became the perfect ruler, governing wisely, an example to all nobles. Legend states that when he realized the enormous sin into which the universe had sunk following the death of the Prophet, he despaired. Determined to keep his kingdom pure, he shut down the jumpgate to Dogen, stating: "Only when the universe is again ruled by Faith will my kingdom return to provide example for others." Dogen's location is now lost; no one even knows where to begin looking for it, although most surmise that it is close to the Li Halan worlds (some say it is closest to Daishan). Many believed that it would reapear during Halvor Li Halan's theocratic reign; its failure to return has only convinced later generations of the foolishness of Halvor's endeavor.

Lextius noble line (House Kambei) died with him, and no one can today claim lineage. This has not prevented the Li Halan from attempting the claim, but the Church refuses to acknowledge it.

**Iconography:** Lextius is always dressed in the finest noble garb imaginable, although he is usually seen in his black-and-silver kimono. This kimono was left behind in the Known Worlds and has traded hands many times since; although its whereabouts are presently unknown, many seek it for its reputed properties. It is said to clear the mind of its wearer so that he can weigh decisions with perfection, always seeing the right courses of action.

Depictions of his race usually vary from fief to fief. Most often asian, he sometimes appears as the race of the noble family ruling the fief in question (Anglo-Saxon for Hawkwood fiefs, Hispanic for Hazat, etc.). He is sometimes shown wearing the (supposed) emblem of House Kambei (now a symbol for the Swords of Lextius order of Church knights).

**Purview:** Loyalty, honor, *noblesse oblige*, rulership, wise governing





**Relics:** The Seal of Binding (waxen seal with House Kambei's emblem, said to sanctify any pact sealed with it), *Vajra* (his sword), the Cloak of Authority (his cloak, awe-inspiring just to gaze upon)

**Followers:** Nobles (especially errant knights)

## Amalthea the Healer

Amalthea's history and theology are fully detailed later in this book (see "Eternal Compassion: Sanctuary Aeon").

**Iconography:** Amalthea is depicted as an Indian woman wearing flowing, diaphenous robes, with a glow about her entire body. She is often shown with her cup, the famous grail given to her by Zebulon, from which light pours forth. Sometimes she is shown crying tears of light (luxia) for the world. Certain rarer art depicts a winged figure of light hovering behind and above her; this is Ahnkelbion, her angel.

**Purview:** Compassion, healing, instinctual wisdom, wholeness, ethics

**Followers:** Healers, missionaries, concerned parents

## Mantius the Soldier
## (Avram Manchewitz)

The brutal solder who learned that all soldiers must have a cause to fight for — his became the Pancreator. Love of the Creator of All taught him discipline to rein in his destructive tendancies, and cultivation for his excesses.

Mantius became the Prophet's personal bodyguard, protecting him on many occassions from assassination attempts. Perhaps the most famous of these was the Miracle of the Bullets, when the Prophet first spoke before the Hazat nobles of Aragon. One of the hot-headed lords became insulted with the Prophet's derogation of the noble ego and ordered his troops to open fire on the man. Mantius leaped in front of the Prophet, shielding him against the hail of bullets with his own body. Yet he did not perish before the onslaught, for the bullets returned



to their sources, plugging up the barrels of the guns and exploding them in the hands of their users — except for one, which embedded itself in the ledge right before the Hazat lord who had ordered the execution. Recognizing the warning, the Hazat begged forgiveness of the Prophet and converted on the spot.

Mantius is credited with many amazing and superhuman feats, and has thus become the patron of many Changed (genetically engineered), although many priests find the idea perverted.

His legendary flux sword, *Manjusri*, is a holy relic last seen on Absolution before the loss of that world to the Symbiots. It is said to cleave through anything which bares the way of the faithful — either ceramsteel walls or Symbiot flesh. Many Brother Battle monks have considered journeying to Absolution to rescue it, but there is little hope of return from such a mission. Rumors of its whereabouts within the Known Worlds still crop up from time to time.

After the Prophet's death, Mantius refused Palamedes's plea to lead the nascent Church's armies against the Ur-Ukar, retreating instead to seclusion in a regimen of self-mastery, developing the secret levels of Mantok, his martial art. He occasionally resurfaced to aid the faithful, but rarely in a politically devisive situation. This has lead some Orthodox leaders to believe that he is not a proper patron of the Church, for they worry about this influence on the Brother Battle monks. Since stories of his death are unknown, many believe that he never died, and concoct stories about his self-willed longevity and hibernation.

**Iconography:** Always depicted in a helmetless suit of powered armor, Mantius is most often of semitic descent, although like Paulus, this varies from planet to planet. He usually bears *Manjusri* (his flux sword) in his right hand and a blaster rifle in his left, while his suit brims with holstered weaponry (sometimes with a rocket launcher on his back).

**Purview:** Soldiery, Holy War, skill, personal cultivation, athleticism, protection, demon-slaying

**Followers:** Brother Battle monks, mercenaries and soldiers of all types, bodyguards, bouncers, martial artists, weapons crafters

## Maya the Scorned Woman

Maya represents the triumph of a transcendant moral code over false social order and worldly law. Her quest for justice lead her to the Prophet, who tempered her anger with wisdom and forged her moral crusade and cutting condemnation of all who sin.

Legend states that she was a housewife in a poor household on Shaprut. Her husband beat her and openly cheated with other women. Her anger grew too great, and she sought out banned magics to weave a revenge against him. At first, she prayed in dark, moonlit groves to forbidden, alien deities. But she was overcome by a vision of fear, glimpsing that she only empowered sin by serving it so. Desperate for justice, she prayed for deliverance from a physical world of cruelty and a supernatural world of evil. When she opened her eyes, she saw a star fall from heaven, landing on the great plain nearby.

She raced to find the star and came upon the *Emissary*, Paulus' starship. As Zebulon disembarked, she blocked his path and asked him: "Are you another man come from places of power to punish those weaker than you?" He smiled and said: "I am come to deliver the light, so that it might shine upon all. Power blinds the vision, but the free can see well enough. Are you powerful or are you free?"

At this revelation, that power has its own chains, Maya gave up her search for revenge and instead begged the Prophet to show her how to live free from sin. She joined his entourage, leaving her husband behind, and became a strong voice for moral justice.

An apocryphal account states that, as Maya reached the star vessel, a herd of Shantor were gathered before it, bowing to the Prophet. This account was ridiculed dur-



ing the Second Republic as racist humanocentrism. Some scholars, however, linked this to the Shantor's account of a being they call the Voice of the Sun, who visited them in their misery and consoled them with visions of a victorious delivery from bondage.

After the Prophet's death, Maya toured the Known Worlds, praising those who deserved it and condemning those who were unjust — including Baron Ferros Decados. The insulted lord, believing that her power had died with the Prophet, captured her and personally oversaw her torture. But the rack split when she was tied to it. The hot pincers turned to ice when placed on her skin, the knives to rubber when they tried to cut. His final attempt to electrocute her with a monstrous device succeeded, but it caused every fusion cel and generator in his fief to break down; never again would power flow for Baron Ferros. Before he threw the deadly switch, Maya said to him: "I am weary of the world and can no longer resist such hatred. I go to my reward. But know that your deeds shall return to you ten-fold, and that you shall provide example for a universe enthralled to power yet bereft of justice."

The site of her martyrdom on Malignatius is a popular pilgrimage for the downtrodden, despite the fact that the Decados lords milk such visitors for heavy profit.

The chains in which she was bound are considered sacred, said to impart a vision of one's own karma to those who are shackled with them. Some have left the chains in tears, convinced of their great weight of sin, while others have been emboldened to cleanse their wrongs and walk the path of the righteous.

**Iconography:** Maya appears as a small woman with fiery eyes, dressed in mannish clothing. She is most often depicted as aboriginal, but sometimes appears as a planet's minority race (she has even appeared as a Shantor!).

**Purview:** Divine law, karma, justice, retribution, Church law

**Followers:** Lawyers, oppressed sentients, moralists

## Horace the Learned Man (Horace Abdalim)

The sophist turned true believer, Horace was a member of that breed of Diasporan philosophers who preached that all one could truly know was Doubt, that all else was illusion, an attempt to find succor in musings of eternities and absolutes. Insulted by the perceived irrationality of the Prophet's teachings, he began trailing Zebulon's entourage, speaking to the crowds who, mere days before, were enthralled by the Prophet's orations. In his attempts to return the people to reason and rationality, he left them confused and mistrusting of all doctrines, with the inadverdant effect that many small communities fragmented and dissolved as the common bonds which held them together frayed under his logical yet reductionist assaults.

Finally, Zebulon waited for Horace to catch up with his band. As expected, Horace challenged Zebulon to a



debate before the gathered crowds. While most of their words are now lost, legend tells of a long battle of ideas between the two men. Horace was ever on the assault, while Zebulon was ever calm and imperturbable. After many hours, with as yet no clear victor, Zebulon declared that: "Words can seduce minds, but they cannot win hearts. You speak of doubt and fear, and a Great Unknowing. Your sharp mind, a gift from the Pancreator, has become a sword that you use on yourself. Cease thy thrusts and slashes and let the wounds of your heart heal."

And Horace replied: "You say such things because you cannot prove them."

Zebulon sighed and said: "You shade your eyes from the light of truth and call it a virtue. How can you understand until you truly glimpse the light, unhindered by your resisting eyes? I tire of debate and would show you." He then struck Horace in the head with his staff. The scholar fell to the ground and the crowd stared in shock. Horace slowly rose, stumbling to his feet and shaking his head. He then said, "I understand. You have much to teach me."

This event is called the Miracle of the Club, and is generally interpreted to mean that logic must ultimately serve the real. Eskatonic priests claim that the blow caused Horace to witness for the first time the Holy Flame within him, and his later sayings seem to support this view.

Horace followed Zebulon from then on, becoming, with Amalthea, one of his most diligent students in philosophical matters. His wisdom and lore are legendary, and he is the patron saint of the Eskatonic Order. He was a Diasporan upperclass freemen, born into wealth, an excuse the Church now uses to keep learning within that class.

After Zebulon's death, he travelled for a time with the other disciples and eventually started a traveling school of philosophy, incorporating Zebulon's teachings on questing both literally and figuratively. He eventually died a peaceful death in bed.

**Iconography:** Horace is always depicted with a long beard, the symbol of his erudition. His clothes are that of a common Diaporan man, and he is usually of Middle Eastern extraction. He is often shown with a book in one hand (*The Book of Revealings*, with one koan per page, each said to deliver enlightenment) and a staff in the other (The Staff of Teachings, said to reveal wisdom to those who hold it; some believe it is a highly advanced think machine. It is sought avidly by Engineers). Some images depict a bump on his forehead.

**Purview:** Wisdom, gnosis, learning, clever wit, analytic intelligence turned to faith

**Followers:** Scholars, philosophers, mystics

## Hombor the Beggar

The poor man made rich in spirit. Hombor was a member of a loose guild of beggars on Criticorum. Each day, he would choose a street corner in the commerce district and stand there, looking pitiful and wretched, all the while soliciting the charity of passersby. One day, the Prophet passed by.

Hombor was not the only beggar working the street, and Zebulon had casually given coin to three of them before he neared Hombor. When Hombor put forth a shaking, begrimmed palm and asked for alms, Zebulon stopped and stared him in the eye. He then turned to Amalthea, who followed with him, and said: "This one needs medicine to heal his open sores."

Hombor balked and cried: "If you heal my sores, how shall I make a living?!"

Zebulon replied: "It is not because of pity for you that people give, it is pity for themselves. Your sores are not of the flesh, but of the spirit. Only when you give freely to another are you alive."

Hombor frowned, looking at the Prophet's plain but well-made robes. "Ah, but you say this looking down on me, not eye to eye. I have nothing to give. And who would give to one such as I for my sake alone? I once took life from another man, so now I take my living from other men. Only a fool gives without receiving."

"Is the Pancreator such a fool?" Zebulon said. "He gives freely of his coin every moment of our lives."

"You're just like all priests. How can you prove such things?"

"Look upon me. What is the most valuable thing I can give? Ask and it shall be yours."

"Ho! But you will gain by doing so. Unless... Give me your voice, that which you use to take from others."

Zebulon drew a knife and cut his vocal cords. Amalthea cried out that she could not heal such a wound, but she staunched his bleeding.

Hombor stared in awe at Zebulon, his rags now stained in the Prophet's blood, and cried: "No! I did not mean for you to do it! Oh, I have been the death of this man! I am the death of faith, for he was not yet done speaking!"

He clutched Zebulon's legs and cried to the Pancreator to take back the deed, to restore the Prophet's voice. And then Zebulon placed a hand on Hombor's head and spoke: "For once you have freely given. I accept your alms."

Hombor followed the Prophet ever after the Miracle of Giving, rallying the poor and oppressed to his cause. He continued to beg, however, but only to support Zebulon and his entourage during their worst times. His bufoonery brought many a smile to the disciples' faces, and he became one of the most beloved among them, although they still locked their chests at night.

After the Prophet's death, he dissapeared. No one knows what became of him.

**Iconography:** Hombor is always dressed in rags, a man of indeterminate race. He sometimes has a gnarled crutch to lean on, and his open sores glow, reflecting the light of the Holy Flame. His open palm reveals the fabled Coin of Giving which, when given to another, transforms into a coin of the largest currency in the region.

**Purview:** Humility, charity, the virtue of simplicity, reliance on faith to provide. Also fast talk, thievery, foolishness.

**Followers:** Beggars, thieves, con men

## Ven Lohji

The alien bearing wisdom and receiving it in return. Ven Lohji was one of the earliest Ur-Obun diplomats to meet with humanity. Her mission was to travel Human Space and discover the motives of this newly encountered race. Her first contacts were noble houses, and she was mightily impressed with them until she inadverdantly encountered their serfs. Horrified at the squalor which over half the human population was forced to endure, she slipped away from her Hawkwood hosts and set out on her own, to discover the truth behind humanity's noble mask. The barbarity of Leminkainen's peasantry and outland barbarians appalled her, and she resolved to give up and return to Obun, counseling her fellows to stay as far away from humans as possible, lest they corrupt the delicate Obun spiritual balance. Then she met the Prophet.





Zebulon had left his entourage to journey into the woods of Leminkainen for spiritual renewal and meditation. He realized that, while he had mastered the world of human concerns, deep understanding of nature eluded him. He sat meditating in a small meadow when it began to rain; so deep was he in thought that he did not even notice.

Ven Lohji came upon him. She was tired and hungry, for her horse had been stolen by bandits, forcing her to walk back to the civilized settlements. At first, she was prepared to run, fearing another bandit, but she noticed that a nearby tree had reached out its great branches to shield the meditating man. As she watched in curiosity, a bird landed upon his shoulder and began to pluck out his beard to make a nest, yet Zebulon did not move.

Thinking him dead, Ven Lohji slowly approached him. The bird flew away and only then did Zebulon awaken. He opened his eyes and felt his chin, suprised at the lack of hair. As he stood, and the loose hair fell from his shoulders, he chuckled. Then he noticed the Obun staring at him in wonder, and he asked: "Are you a bird who desires to make a nest of my teachings?"

Ven Lohji smiled, and replied: "I had thought there was no wisdom to be had among humans. But the birds and trees believe otherwise. Perhaps our relationship is a seed which needs watering." They sat together and spent long hours talking about mystical truths concerning nature and creation. Ven Lohji taught Zebulon about Obun animistic beliefs and he revealed his vision to her. When he returned from the woods, she came with him. While a member of his entourage, she is not considered so much a follower as a guest. She taught him new meditation techniques and ritual gestures which he incorporated into his rites, some of which are used even by the Orthodox Church in their theurgy rituals. She also taught him much of the Obun lore about the Anunnaki and their artifacts, helping him come to a greater understanding of the Pancreator's younger universe.

She is said to have taught him the Glyph of Unfolding, a secret Obun symbol said to impart occult lore concerning the Anunnaki to those who see it. This glyph is supposedly protected from view by the Ven Lohji priests on Obun, who teach it only to the most expert theurges.

After Zebulon's death, Ven Lohji returned to Obun to found a religion based on the Prophet's teachings, a syncretic faith born from native Obun beliefs and Zebulon's mysticism. While it is considered a sect of the Universal Church, most Orthodox priests believe it has too many alien teachings, and is thus a hindrance on the path of true faith.

**Iconography:** Ven Lohji is usually depicted in the dark green robes of a Bintaru priestess, the native religion of Obun. She is sometimes shown with a bird on her shoulder, and is called "Zebulon's sparrow."

**Purview:** Discipline, nature, the Other, solidarity of sentients, the past, the stars

**Followers:** Ur-Obun, aliens, naturalists, mystics

## Divers Saints

There are many other saints associated with the Church: former Patriarchs, martyrs, well-loved nobles and even popular guilders. Each planet has its own hagiography of such heroes of the faith. The canonization of saints can only be declared by the Patriarch, although many worlds and peoples recognize local saints regardless of patriarchal approval on the matter.

# Theological Themes

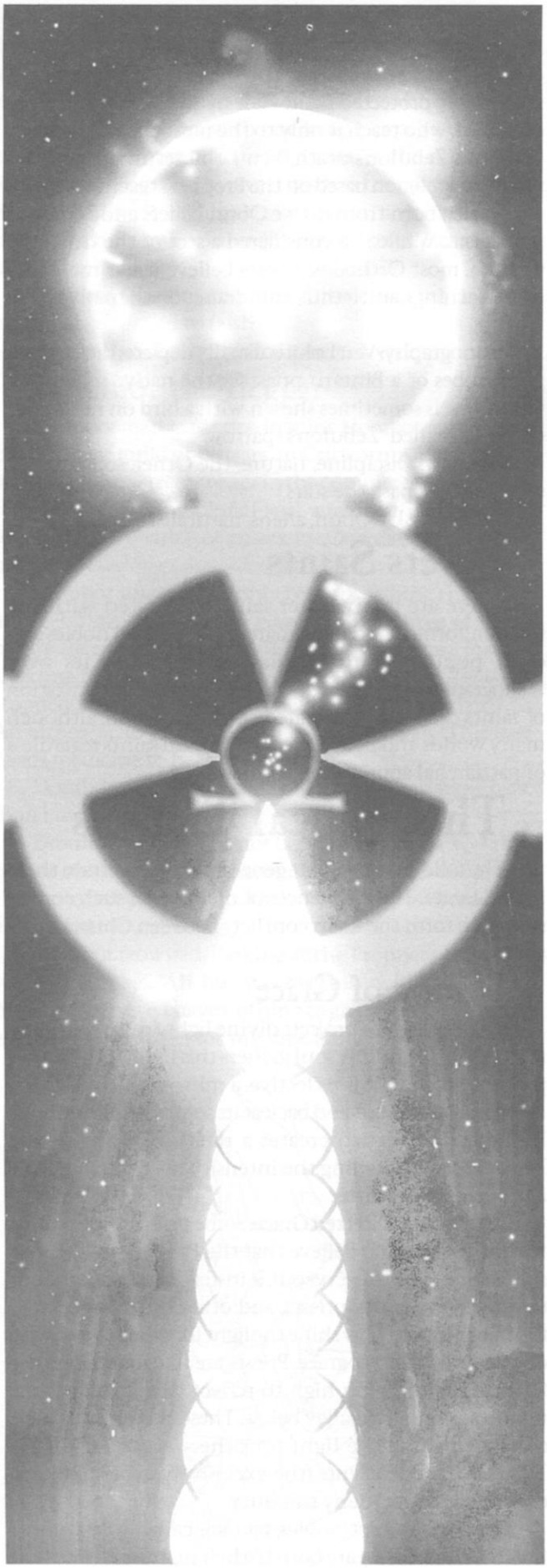
The following are some general notes on certain theological issues. The differences of opinion on such core issue often form the main conflicts between Church sects and orders.

## Descent of Grace

The Pancreator projects divine light from the Empyrean into the world. A soul gathers this light. If the soul is proper and good, it is reflective, a mirror which casts the light in all directions and back at its source (the Luminous Return). The return creates a relationship with the Pancreator, brightening the intensity of successive grace and successive returns.

**Doctrine of Directed Grace:** Some priests and factions within the Church believe that the Pancreator does not shine directly onto every soul. It instead sends its light out to only a few: saints, priests, and other duly consecrated folk. These chosen few shine the light for others, those who do not receive direct grace. Priests are like mirrors for the faithful, standing on high to reflect the light over the mountain into the valley below. These chosen thus have a duty to shine the light for others, to be reflective. Nonreflective sentients (the excessively cybermodified, certain aliens, etc.) deny this duty.

Some claim that nobles, too, are called to this duty, that the reason they are born to their high estate is so that



they may act as mirrors for all (Saint Lextius is the perfect example). Sinful nobles are thus a great crime, for they deny their serfs the light. The Holy Writ is designed to ensure that the noble estate reflects the light, for under the writ, whatever a noble's sin, at least he and his subject will receive the Patriarch's reflected light.

This doctrine is popular among most, although not all, Hinayana Orthodox priests and Avestites, although it also finds some sympathetic listeners among the more elitist Eskatonics. The more authoritarian Brother Battle monks rely on a form of this doctrine (Doctrine of Earned Grace) which states that grace is potentially available to all but is actually delivered only to those who work for it.

**Doctrine of Universal Grace:** Others believe that the Pancreator shines for all. It is up to individual sentients to "polish their mirrors" and cast this light back to God (and to others in the world). If they do not, they damn themselves and also harm the world by not directly contributing reflected light to it. The duty of a priest is to guide other sentients from the darkness to the light. This doctrine is popular among most Mayahana Orthodox priests, Amaltheans and Ven Lohji Obun priests.

## Internal Flame

While the Orthodoxy believe that Holy Light comes only from the Pancreator, that the best a sentient can do is to reflect it, the Eskatonics and Incarnates believe that each sentient has a spark of the flame within them.

**Doctrine of the Inherant Flame:** The Eskatonics believe that each sentient can cultivate her own internal flame, projecting it outwards to meet the Pancreator's light. Passive sentients can receive grace, but active sentients — those who cultivate their flame through mystical exercises — can receive more grace.

But a bright flame burns more fuel; without proper fuel (faith and right practice), the flame will begin to consume the body, leading to sickness and premature death. With the proper techniques and feeding of the flame, this process can be reversed, whereby the flame's excess energy is given to the body, leading to good health and longevity. Certain Eskatonics even believe that a sentient can engineer his own sainthood or ascension, become an angel after death through proper cultivation in life.

However, and very importantly, this flame cannot be indefinately fed without the Pancreator's light (grace). Thus, only Antinomists seek to work their flames without exposing them to grace. This leads to Black Light, an ever-burning, cold soul flame which can supposedly sustain a sentient forever, although only with supplements from other sentients' energies: blood, flesh, Wyrd, etc. Such cold sentients cannot withstand the light of the Pancreator.

**Doctrine of the Light Incarnate:** Each sentient has a spark of the flame within them, and each can cultivate it, using it to cut through the darkness and forge a path for

the Pancreator's light to reach the soul. Only those who do so will receive grace, for in this world of sin, the Pancreator's light is otherwise blocked by shadows. Alone, the incarnate flame is not enough to ensure life after death in the Empyrean. The sentient must fight her way through to God; all others are damned. Priests are those who have suffered these trials themselves and guide others through them.

## Truth

The Hinayana Orthodox priests believe that, until the Prophet, the Pancreator could not reveal the full truth of the universe without burning the minds of his sentient creations. But Zebulon represents the first full disclosure of the truth. The goal of creation was revealed in full with Zebulon's vision; it is up to the Church to complete it. Once all are members of the Universal Church, then Creation will end and all will enter the Empyrean.

The Mahayana Orthodox priests, on the other hand, believe that the first dislosure of real truth began with Zebulon, but that the Pancreator still reveals further truths to saints and chosen vehicles. Creation is not yet completed, and thus not all truths have been revealed.

An example of such a debate is the search for a true test of sin. Avestites believe that morality can be truly ascertained with the aid of certain theurgy rites that allow the theurge to see the condition of a sentient's soul. However, Hinayana priests and Amaltheans are unwilling to recognize such a procedure as final, for such rites seem to be self-fulfulling, since they reveal the Church's present moral code, not necesarilly the universal code these priests strive to attain. Such an argument has its basis in the struggle for final or unrevealed truths.

## Death and Eskaton

Upon death, a soul becomes light (or sheds its lantern, releasing its core light). If the soul's mirror is properly reflective (or projective, in the case of Eskatonics), the soul will join in the Luminous Return to the Empyrean. Otherwise, it will get lost in the shadows.

To become Lost is one of the most wretched of fates. Alone and quivering in the cold, black void, the sinful soul yearns for the light it cannot touch lest it burn. Left shrieking in the dark, the soul's lonely screams eventually attract the demons which reside in utter blackness. If the soul is not devoured by such an entity, it becomes a wretched vassal, a hungry ghost sent to haunt the world of light and tempt others to join it in afterlife misery.

Only two means of hope exist for the sinful dead: rescue by a saint or the Final Radiance. The Prophet's spirit traveled to the dark between the stars when he suffered the Demon Touch. As Amalthea healed him, casting her light into the Abyss, his spirit returned to the world of light. Some accounts say that he brought three souls back with him. These souls defied their demon masters to protect Zebulon's spirit from being devoured; their reward was Amalthea's compassionate light, allowing their Luminous Return to the Empyrean. Since this miraculous event, other saints are said to have journeyed into the dark to rescue the Lost.

The last hope left to the Lost is the Final Radiance. This fabled event will occur at the end of time, when the Pancreator will cause the suns to go nova, sending forth a great burst of Holy Flame into the dark between the stars. Then the Lost will be found; only then can they participate in a final Luminous Return to the Empyrean. But the fading suns phenomenon threatens the fulfillment of this final rescue, for if the stars die before their time has rightly come, the Final Radiance will not reach all the corners of the universe.

Certain souls, once returned as light to the Empyrean, can return to the world with the Descent of Grace. These angels need a soul's mirror by which to return again to the Empyrean; otherwise, they will be trapped in the world until such a mirror allows them a Luminous Return. Such trapped angels, stranded due to an abundance of sin among the sentients they came to serve, can become demons.

Eskatonics believe that a mirrored soul is not necessary to return a soul to the Empyrean, as long as the internal flame is properly cultivated. Some believe that they can gain control over their post-mortem destination, choosing reincarnation over Empyreal existence.

The remains of famed saints (their knuckle bones, garments, weapons, etc.) are believed to be valuable because they are highly polished mirrors, aiding sentients to better reflect light themselves. Legend tells of Saint Oman's trials at the hands of Count Eshram Hamid. After suffering many tortures, his dead body was dunked into boiling water so that Count Eshram could claim his bones as a trophy. But when the bones were lifted from the vat, they were perfectly mirrored and reflected the fusion lamps so brightly that Count Eshram was struck blind.

## The Jumpweb

The Prophet was the perfect mirror; his death during a jump "sanctified" the jumproutes, cleansing them of darkness. He thus paved the way for spiritually safe star travel. However, those routes which were discovered after his death are considered dark, unless they were travelled by a saint. Paulus' travels after the Prophet's death are said to have brought light to previously undiscovered routes. One of the reasons the Church fears the rediscovery of Lost Worlds is that they will open unsanctified routes, risking the souls of the faithful — for who in this age can now bring light to them?

Some believe that Vladimir brought light to some barbarian worlds, and that Alexius is expected to do the same, although the Patriarch frowns on such a deification of the Emperor.



# Mirror of God: Urth Orthodox

by Christopher Howard

*Bishop Jaeger's rump hurt abominably as the truck bounced down the rocky Bannockburn road. A cold rain fell and water drizzled through a rusted hole in the truck's roof. The bishop was not a proud man, but he keenly felt that such a conveyance was inappropriate for a theologian of his accomplishments. Here he was — an agent of the Kalinthi, a master of theurgy, one of the Prophet's chosen... He cautioned himself against hubris and tried to regain some of the peace he had woken with that morning. It was no good. His mind reluctantly returned to the presence of his companions, a sullen farmer and Father Nydar of the Eskatonic Order. Nydar continued his oration, unaware of Jaeger's mental wanderings.*

*"The problem with the Orthodoxy," continued the priest, "is not in its static world view, nor even in its blind adherence to dogma. You have combined these flaws, however, making stasis your only virtue. You have denied the Prophet's holy call to Questing, creating — "* Mercifully, *the truck lurched to a halt.*

*"We're here," their Muster driver called through the broken cab window. Jaeger grunted with gratitude as he stiffly disembarked. A cold wet wind battered at them as they surveyed the ill-kempt farm around them.*

*"It's down here, good fathers," said the farmer. "From the moment I dug it up, I knew it was cursed. Don't forget my reward," he added, blessing himself with a circular motion of his hand.*

*The serf led them down into a rocky culvert. The place had a menacing and unholy air. A black spiderlike device sat at the base of a jagged embankment. The priests studied its shiny metal surface, seeking any clue to its original function.*

*"Anunnaki," pronounced Nydar, and Jaeger could only nod his head in agreement. "We must open it; a simple ritual of opening should suffice," continued Nydar in a hypnotized tone. Before Jaeger could protest, the mesmerized priest passed his hand over the artifact's surface, intoning in Latin. The black metal began to shimmer.*

*"Demons' work— " said the farmer, who then fell silent. The world about them receded into sinister patterns of black and red. An icy cold clutched Jaeger's heart as a cacophony of mocking voices rose about him. Lying on his back in the rain he blindly sought their source, at last realizing the torturous sounds emanated from his own throat. His lips formed sounds no human could make. "Etath, a'rou-l, Ur-Ulek, slaa, slaa..."*

*He vomited forth a funnel of blood that twisted upward, spinning above him in a widening disc. He tried to clasp his hands over his mouth to prevent the profane torrent, but his hands waved madly of their own accord, beckoning to the gathering shadows as though summoning an old friend. His eyes rolled madly, spotting his ribcage. It mimicked the Ur artifact, opening spiderlike from his chest. Raw and distended, his ribs danced like the keys of a mad Sutekian violachord. Black meat and congealed blood spattered his face.*

*Nydar screamed from somewhere nearby and Jaeger remembered: "A virtue of stasis..." He clenched his teeth together, feeling them splay and crumble beneath the pressure. His bloody gums sopped against each other, but he momentarily silenced the demon voices. His mouth began to grind out the Ritualis Staticus. "Si Pancreatus justus — unde malum?"*

*"Ur-Uvit, ul-malignum," the demon voices rejoined, seeking to divert him from his course. No matter. The rite was a short one.*

*"Creatio ex — nihilo," he croaked. The world wrenched about them in one final violent spasm, then snapped back to its former twilight gray. Rain fell about them. No sign of demonic incursion remained, save for the unfortunate farmer who had dashed his brains out against the cliff wall.*

*Nydar sat, fiddling with his jumpgate cross. "Now I have flesh. Now I have flesh," he mumbled. Jaeger sighed, gently helping the incoherent priest back to the truck. Perhaps when Nydar recovered, he would better appreciate the virtues of stasis.*

The Orthodox Church of the Celestial Sun is one of the influences of day to day life in the Known Worlds. From the highest noble to the humblest serf, few go for long without interacting with the Church in some way. For over 2000 years, the Orthodoxy has been a voice for both expansion and stasis, mercy and oppression. Once the bold creator of a new social order, the Orthodoxy now represents the authoritarian old guard of the Prophet's Church. Its laws and traditions are a way of life for untold billions. The Church decides what is normal behavior on most worlds, and controls humanity's perceptions of history. Most people see the Church as the only true interpreter of the Pancreator's words and the Orthodox Patriarchs as the Prophet's direct spiritual and theological descendants. Although some see the Church as a regressive instrument of oppression, billions more see it as a stern but loving parent, protecting its flock from the unholy forces that wait beyond Human Space.

# History

## The Early Church

Every child knows how the Church began in the year 2723, when the Prophet Zebulon beheld the Holy Flame and received the Pancreator's wisdom. The First Republic had fallen and humanity had made its first contact with an alien race less than a century earlier. The Prophet's early teachings spread unevenly from planet to planet, and between social classes. On some worlds, people ridiculed his message as the faith of the poor and ignorant. On others, the lower classes viewed his teachings with suspicion, as either the latest fad of the jaded intelligentsia or as a repressive tool of the vested elite. Other religions and secular authorities mocked, imprisoned and even killed the Prophet's early followers. Humanity was in a time of transition, seeking a new direction after its initial push into space. The Prophet held aloft a guiding light, and those who listened to his teachings came away profoundly changed. One such convert was a young nobleman named Palamedes Alecto from the war-torn planet of Midian.

Knowing nothing but a lifetime of war, the Prophet's vision of an orderly universe appealed to Palamedes. Born 30 years after the Prophet saw the Holy Flame; Palamedes attached himself to the Prophet's retinue with a new convert's zeal. Palamedes was also an early devotee of the Prophet's disciples, Lextius the Knight, exemplar of the pious nobility, and Maya the Scorned Woman. Maya's parables about a universal scheme of justice and retribution struck a responsive chord in the youthful disciple. Palamedes rose swiftly among the Prophet's followers and was soon a well-known figure among them. Unlike the Prophet's more spiritual disciples, Palamedes retained a sense of worldliness and was instrumental in spreading the Prophet's word in places where it would otherwise have been unwelcome. Palamedes organized rallies and provided logistical support; some of the Church's critics also believe he controlled access to the Prophet and filtered his message for his own purposes.

On an evangelical mission to a now-forgotten planet, Palamedes met one of the other formative influences in his life, Mantius the Soldier. One account of the meeting, recovered from a Midian archive, tells how the disciple saved him from a wild beast. Mantius then thrashed Palamedes, using the incident to bestow some humility on the young evangelist. The Apocrypha of the Omega Gospels states that he did so to illustrate how the faithful had a holy duty to protect humanity from the demons who dwelt in the "dark between the stars." Although the logic behind Mantius' lesson remains obscure, this episode makes the Church's founder more vulnerable, and thus more human in many people's eyes; the passage has survived repeated attempts at revision.

In the year 2845, humanity's first disastrous contact with the Vau cast a pall over the Known Worlds. Up to this time the human race had pursued its manifest destiny among the stars virtually unopposed. Meeting only primitive or peaceful races, such as the Shantor or the Ur-Obun, humanity reacted with dismay when the technologically superior Vau displaced them from their lofty position. Although the Vau showed no signs of invading, worried converts flooded the Prophet's sermons, seeking a strong shelter against the alien menace. The Prophet responded, reassuring the populace in a way the secular authorities could not, yet counseling against rash action. Palamedes rallied the formative church behind the now ancient Prophet's mission of peace to the Vau in 2849, and it consoled the faithful when he died in deep space on that mission.

The faithful, now rudderless, sought a new leader. Many eyes fell on Palamedes Alecto. His oratory skills and his formidable organizational talents had already won him an ardent following on several worlds, and in the year 2850, he officially founded the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun. A year after that, the nascent Church's First Holy Synod appointed him as the Church's first Patriarch. With boundless energy, Palamedes built many cathedrals and wrote extensively on the Prophet's teachings. While some historians believe that Palamede's influences were more political than religious, the revival of faith he spawned was undeniable. Some heretics claim that his wife was an animistic pagan and that his Orthodox tendencies were his way of establishing his own identity. The faithful have little patience for such psychological witchery, however.

By the year 2854, Palamedes' Church had a strong following on over two dozen worlds. The Church's Second Holy Synod moved the Church's center from Midian to Urth, the cradle of humanity. Palamedes' branch of the faith spoke to humanity's desire for order and surety, providing many with a unifying direction after the Prophet's death. During this time Palamedes' Church also vied for followers with the Disciple Amalthea, who sought to take the faithful down a different path. Although theologians



sometimes exaggerate the difference between the two figures for effect — the stern Patriarch and the saintly healer — they did stress fundamentally divergent aspects of the Prophet's message. For a time it was not clear whose message would prevail. As it would turn out, events beyond both their powers would decide the issue for them.

The faithful soon had reason to be grateful for their decision in choosing Palamedes as their spiritual leader. The Vau were, it seemed, a nonexpansionist power; humanity's next alien contacts were not. The Ur-Ukar brutally attacked Criticorum from a previously unknown jumproute, causing death and destruction. Fear spread through the Known Worlds and Amalthea's message of Universal healing became lost against the din. The Prophet's demons took on an alien face in the ensuing war and the Patriarch rallied humanity behind the nobles to stand against the Ukari. It was at this time that the Orthodoxy took on its anti-alien ideology, an impulse that remains through the present.

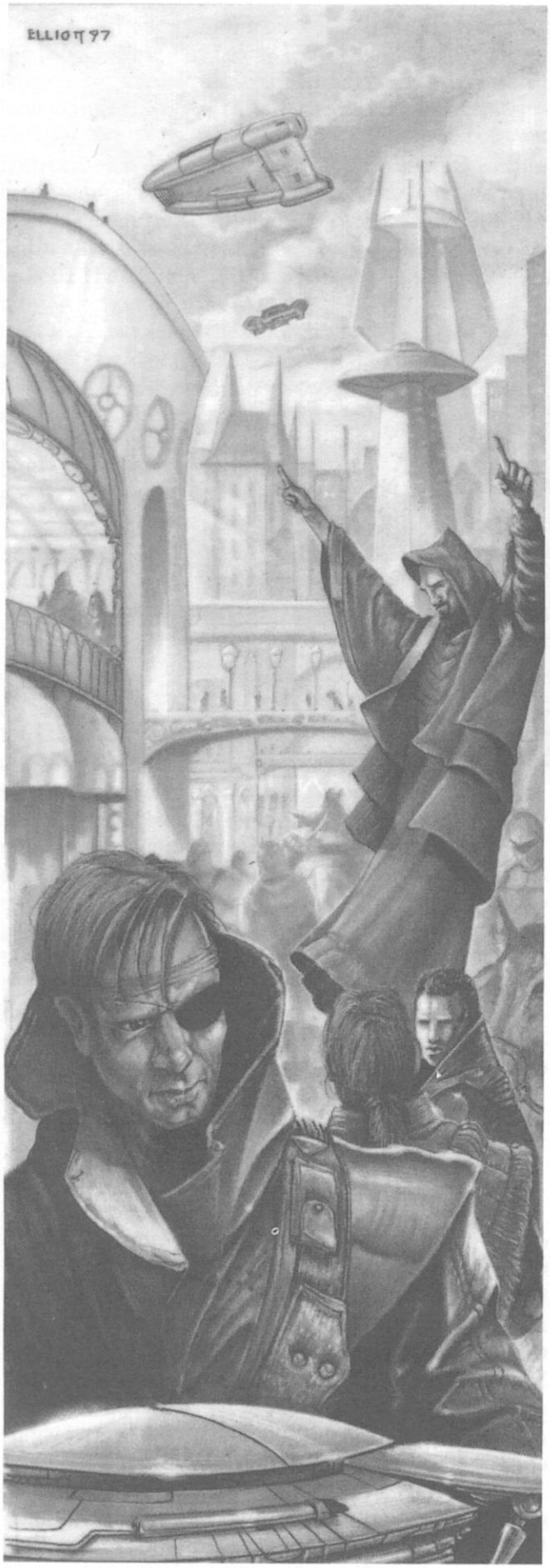
Reacting to Ur-Ukar barbarity, the Holy Synod passed the Doctrine of the Unethical Alien (2957). This writ stated that some aliens were demonstrably further from the Pancreator's grace than others. While the document fell into disrepute during the Second Republic, the Orthodoxy dusted it off again after the Fall. Near the war's end Palamedes himself was instrumental in finding the location of the Ur-Ukar homeworld. The Ukar's subsequent defeat, because of Palamedes' information, established the Church's power forever.

Palamedes reputedly shied away from the public accolades, preferring, as he wrote, "the quiet contemplation of the Pancreator's simple wonders, to the adoration of the teeming crowds." When the Patriarch died quietly in his sleep during the Spring of 3020 at the ripe old age of 267, however, over two million of the faithful converged on his funeral. His burial place is now the site of the grand Palamedes Cathedral in the Northern Actaine provinces of Holy Terra.

## The Age of Human Ascension (3000-3500)

As humanity expanded farther among the stars, it developed new technologies and philosophies. The Church unified humanity, urging it ever outward with its questing spirit. On many planets, ruled by despotic nobles or the emerging interplanetary super corporations, the Church was the lone voice for toleration and freedom. Many of the Church's greatest saints lived and taught during this time, and this period saw rise of the split into two philosophical schools: the Hinayana, or conservative wing, and the Mahayana, or reform school.

The Church encouraged sensible technological growth and the creation of humane social institutions, helping to foster a burgeoning form of liberal democracy




unparalleled in human history. Ironically its efforts in this regard also helped create the Second Republic, an institution that would eclipse the Church for the next five hundred years.

## Second Republic (3500-4000)

During the Second Republic, humanity experienced its highest pinnacle of technological and social sophistication. The modern Church also maintains that it reached its lowest depths of spirituality and decadence. Travel between planets was common, leading to a flowering of other religions and philosophies. The Pancreator's Church became just one more voice in this milieu. Its membership dwindled precipitously in the face of secularist philosophies, alternative faiths and sheer materialism. The Church often became a subject for parody by the media because of both its anti-materialistic views and its often strident pronouncements.

In the "great melting pot" of the Second Republic, the Orthodoxy became more representative in some ways. The Mahayana created outreach ministries to aliens and other disenfranchised groups. At its worst the Orthodoxy took on the grossest trappings of 20th Century televangelism; yet the Orthodoxy remained an advocate for those left behind by Second Republic progress. At the same time, however, the Hinayana branch of the Orthodoxy coalesced into a reactionary core against the era's prevailing Republican sentiments. This set the ground for a Hinayana takeover of Church institutions during the Republic's final decades.

## The Great Cleansing (3957-4150)

The end came quickly for the Second Republic. While many of the reasons behind the Fall were economic and political, the Orthodoxy also claimed a spiritual malaise was responsible. As society crumbled, the government tried to buy time by dealing with the Orthodoxy who were now among the state's most strident and powerful opponents. The Religious Freedom Act of 3957 declared Orthodoxy the Second Republic's "official religion," effectively outlawing all other faiths. Modern Church historians often date the Second Republic's end to this document.

Some clergy attempted to prevent the Orthodoxy's wholesale attacks on the state; the Holy Synod passed several resolutions calling for Church neutrality in the growing political turmoil. In response, the anti-Republican Patriarch Adrian II (3977-3999) created the College of Ethicals in 3986. Ostensibly formed as a regulatory body to stem the "excesses of the Synod," the College was initially to be an interdenominational advisory council. It quickly became a personal policy tool of the Patriarch.

As the 40th Century ground to a close, the resurgent noble families openly attacked Second Republic interests, often with the Church's blessing. As the economic situation worsened and violence erupted, the Orthodoxy declared humanity's hubris was calling down the Pancreator's wrath. The Orthodoxy especially blamed what they saw as a conspiracy of corrupt Second Republic senators in league with criminal corporate cartels and sinister alien forces. While many clergy spoke out against the Church's role in the ensuing chaos, many others delighted in society's fall. On some worlds Church inquisitors tortured and killed many dissidents, shipping the survivors to Church gulags. The Divestiture took over a hundred and fifty years to sweep throughout the Known Worlds. Some planets held onto their Second Republic institutions longer than others. Some even closed their jumpgates, slipping into the realm of myth rather than capitulate to the new order of Church and noble rule.

The height of the Orthodoxy's role in the Great Cleansing culminated over a generation after the millenarian furor of the year 4000 and the fall of Byzantium Secundus. The now powerful College of Ethicals passed a series of Patriarchal proclamations, including the Doctrine of Universal Inheritance (4067) which mandated a return to an agrarian society. Resisted by many, the Church finally enforced this doctrine when Patriarch Ustir II passed the Doctrine of the Cleansing Flame in 4079. Backed by noble gun-ships, the Church enforced the doctrine's enactment on several intransigent worlds. The patriarch himself oversaw several such bombardments from the helm of his red flagship, the Phlogiston. The modern Orthodoxy tries to downplay these events, instead picturing the Great Cleansing as a great and almost wholly voluntary spiritual awakening.

## The Dark Ages (4000 – )

The stars began to darken. Few questioned the Orthodoxy's teachings that human sin was the cause, or rejected the comfort that the Church offered in the gathering darkness. The Orthodoxy enthusiastically backed the rise of noble power, preferring the nobility's stolid predictability to the "all-truths-are-equal" school of thought they perceived as the hallmark of the previous age. The Church, and the Orthodoxy in particular, now constituted an unquestioned third of the great ruling triumvirate of Church, guild and nobility. In this new setting, the Orthodoxy had almost unlimited power to re-weave society's laws to its liking. Church historians began the long process of rewriting human history, using scripture (sometimes of dubious authenticity) to attack the sinful past age.

Besides the bully-pulpit of now nearly mandatory Church services, the Orthodoxy also governed the content of more secular entertainment forms such as books, plays and the few remaining magic lantern companies. The nobility quickly recognized the Orthodoxy's moral authority in this arena, seeing it as a stabilizing force. The Church in return lionized the nobility as bold knights who quested to heal the darkening stars. While the nobility enjoyed these accolades, the early Dark Ages Church usually made sure that only the truly deserving received them. Some nobles grew disappointed when the Orthodoxy acted as a force for social justice, protecting the peasantry from the nobility's harsher excesses.

## The Jacobean Patriarchs (4355-4665)

The Patriarchs of the Dark Ages have been a vastly varied breed, ranging from earnest reformers to staunchly authoritarian and even decadent despots. The three hundred year raj of the so-called Jacobean Patriarchs best personifies this latter category. The Jacobean Patriarchs were not consistently Mahayana or Hinayana, and the nature of their "crimes" varied greatly. The only factor they hold in common is their disrepute in modern eyes. Some believe that their detractors have exaggerated their crimes for political or personal reasons. The Orthodox historian Bishop Nagel of Rampart wrote: "None is so hated by the wicked, than the righteous few who find high favor in the Pancreator's eyes. We who climb so high up Heaven's ladder, must be wary; lest jealous heretics push the ladder from beneath us."

### Jacob I (4355-4377)

Jacob I, the line's namesake, was a moderate example of the decadent Patriarchs to come. Jacob I's sins were mostly those of usury and were not as harmful as those of later Patriarchs, though he certainly set the tone for the next 300 years. Enchanted by money and beautiful objects, he became a patron of the arts and the Church built some of its greatest cathedrals during his tenure. Despite his flaws, Jacob I was also an able politician. He passed two of the Church's most famous doctrines, the Doctrine of the Privilege of Martyrs (4357) and the Universal Creed (4360). The Doctrine of the Privilege of Martyrs placed the clergy under a form of "extreme penance," exempting them from the anti-technology laws that governed the rest of the Known Worlds. Gaining legal access to hitherto proscribed technologies, the Patriarch and other privileged clergy effectively proclaimed themselves as no longer servants of the laity, but as spiritually superior to those they professed to serve. Still, if there was hypocrisy in a class that decried technology for the lay people while lounging in air-conditioned apartments and secretly using forbidden Second Republic playthings, few dared to voice this opinion.

### Jacob II (4377-4402)

Jacob II was both more corrupt and less effective than his predecessor. He tried to strengthen the nobility by weakening the few remaining laws protecting the serfs. Only a hunger strike by Sister Ananda of Sanctuary Aeon stopped the final enactment of this bull. The modern

Orthodoxy now lionizes the brave Amalthean for saving them from making a dreadful mistake; Jacob's bull would have given the nobles a disproportionate amount of power at the Church's expense as well. The fallout from this embarrassment took its toll on Jacob II who took ill and died a year later. His successor was the reform minded Patriarch Adrian IX (4402-4425). Adrian briefly interrupted the Orthodoxy's trend toward decadence long enough to welcome the newly converted House Li Halan to the fold in 4416. This served to give the Li Halan a cleaner bill of health than a Jacobean Patriarch could have. However, even the newly sanctified nobles could not prevent the Orthodoxy's continued descent after Adrian's death.

## Patriarch Nadrim (4524-4598)

The 46th Century was a trying time for the Known Worlds; the start of the barbarian invasions and first Emperor Wars tore apart the stability the Church had worked so long to build. Alliances shifted and planets fell. The only constant to many during this period was the uninspiring, yet somehow comforting, presence of Patriarch Alphonse Nadrim. Traditionally considered a weak Patriarch, scholars are only now reassessing his place in history. Born in a poor industrial region on Leagueheim, Nadrim behaved more like a Reeves accountant than a religious leader. In contrast to the decadence of his immediate successor, Valdos the Mad (4521-4524), however, his leadership was a welcome respite. There is much debate over Nadrim's legacy. Many saw him as little more than a puppet of the noble and guild interests who financed his lavish lifestyle and rumored taste for Ur-Obun women. They site his extension of "extreme penance" to the nobles in 4545 and to the guilds 15 years later as an example of his corruption.

Nadrim realized the Church's power in this regard, however, and did not "sell" the favor of extreme penance cheaply. In return for the Church's permission to wield technology openly (but discreetly), Nadrim's agreement allowed the Church to claim any technology not directly owned by the other two groups. This especially applied to ancient human and alien artifacts that endangered the faithful by their very existence. Lastly the document permitted the Church to build its own fleet from ships not already owned by the guilds or the noble houses. The Patriarchal Fleet was first launched in the year 4546. Nadrim also tirelessly worked behind the scenes to guarantee that the Church received its five rightful voting scepters from the prospective Emperor Vladimir.

Despite his accomplishments, Patriarch Nadrim retains his position as a Jacobean Patriarch in Orthodox history books. His critics charge (correctly) that noble and League corruption marked his rule. They say this rather than publicly admit to his forbidden Republican and alien sympathies. Nadrim's apparent use of longevity serums also proved irksome to his political enemies; not so much because of the technocratic sin involved, but because af-



ter almost seventy-five years in office they despaired that he would never die. When he finally did die in 4598 his enemies sought to undo his work and discredit him in the history books. Indeed, Nadrim — like almost every other person of high position at that time — was accussed of assassinating Vladimir. Although his enemies successfully stained his reputation, the covert treaties he wove outside the Church were almost impossible to unravel. Patriarch Nadrim's legacy confounds the Church's more reactionary elements to the present day.

### Matriarch Cassia II (4655-4665)

Few names in Church history are as reviled as that of Matriarch Cassia II, sometimes called the Silver Matriarch. Within a year of gaining power the Matriarch embroiled the Orthodoxy in a major theological debate on the subject of reflectivity (see *Theology*, below). The Matriarch sought to use the debate to bring the excessively independent and reform minded hierophant of Byzantium Secundus, Archbishop Questor, under Holy Terra's sway.

The level of conflict between the two sees quickly escalated into a dangerous interplanetary dispute. The Matriarch branded the hierophant a heretic and excommunicated him. Undaunted, Questor proclaimed himself Patriarch and called for the faithful to "turn the witch from her cathedral." The twin sees exchanged mutual anathemas, thereby splitting all ties and calling for the other's destruction. Elements of the Patriarchal Fleet split and flew in scattered sorties against each other. Cassia's detractors rumor that she practiced Antinomy and sadistic blood orgies in the holiest Cathedrals. Reputable historians cast scorn on such stories, but still describe the Matriarch as a corrupt and violent demagogue.

A favorite (and disturbingly widespread) folktale about Cassia's fall states that, sensing her rapidly dwindling political support, the Matriarch claimed that she would call down the Pancreator's wrath upon the Byzantine pretender. Convening a Holy Synod on Titan (one of Saturn's moons and a holy site since the Church's earliest history), the Matriarch called — ostensibly for the Pancreator — in a strange and alien tongue. A great flash of white light blinded the assembled priests. When their vision returned, the terrified clergy found the Matriarch's body frozen solid, a look of horror in her eyes. More sober historians believe that Cassia fell victim to a poisoning plot by her worried inner circle in an attempt to save their necks.

In either event, word of the Matriarch's death spread like wildfire through the Church hierarchy. The Church immediately convened a secret Synod. Other sects, orders and Orthodox reformers alike called for immediate reforms. The shocked Church hierarchy could do nothing but capitulate. The Orthodoxy could only survive as the Church's leaders by bringing in reformers from other sects and ceding them greater oversight power in various institutions. The council named Archbishop Questor as the new Patriarch, thus ending the most sordid chapter in the Church's history. But Cassia's shadow still looms large.

## Recovery and Reform (4665-4908)

In the wake of Matriarch Cassia's death, the Orthodoxy entered a reform phase. Patriarch Questor (4665-4676) was a vigorous reformer and the Mahayana wing of the Church enjoyed new power and influence. With setbacks and countertrends, the Church's efforts at liberal reform inched forward for over 246 years.

The Synod gained new prestige at the College of Ethicals' expense, and other sects and orders enjoyed a new respectability. The reformers loosened the Church's grip on technology somewhat; this trend culminated during the Symbiot War with the Doctrine of Exemption Exceptional and the lesser Doctrine of Temporal Exception (4905). These documents allowed freeman and even serfs a greater (though still-limited) access to technology. The Symbiot War also proved the value of psychics and nontraditional theurgy such as that practiced by the Eskatonic Order. Even Church conservatives had to cede the value of the mystic order in the wake of the alien incursions. The Mahayana finally went too far in many people's eyes when they passed the Doctrine of Alien Rights in 4908. A popular Hinayana backlash quickly ensued, bringing the era of aggressive reform to an end.

### Theocracy (4690)

The early reform movement suffered a brief but spectacular set-back in the year 4690 when the Patriarch, Halvor Li Halan, ascended the Imperial throne. Supported by House Li Halan and a Hinayana insurgency, the Patriarch-Regent issued the Decree of Theocratic Succession, declaring that the Known Worlds were now a theocracy. Although initially a Hinayana victory, the theocracy ultimately ended up strengthening the reform hand. A popular revolt ensued and Halvor shriveled away from an unknown disease; some say struck down by the Pancreator's wrath. The Church revoked the Decree of Theocratic Succession and the Mahayana retook the helm; though Church conservatives secreted away the actual document, dreaming of future theocracies. (For more on Halvor, see the Li Halan chapter in **Lords of the Known Worlds**.)

### Matriarch Hadara (4868-4877)

The people of the 50th Century look back upon the 49th Century as one of peace and progress on many worlds. Few enemies pressed the Known Worlds and many subjects saw their standard of living increase. Coupled with these improvements, many planets also instituted various social reforms. Nobles on many planets passed progressive land reform bills and the guilds thrived from the resulting increase in trade.

In truth, however, turmoil surged beneath the seemingly idyllic surface, as internal tensions mounted between the nobles, guilds and Church. Many of the noble reforms are now seen as attempts by the houses to gain

popular support for imminent bids at the throne. But whatever plots toward this end would have to wait, as the turn-of-the-century Symbiot War interrupted everyone's sense of progress and security.

The Orthodoxy supported the age's trends toward liberalization under Matriarch Hadara. Born in a poverty stricken fishing village on Madoc, Natih Hadara reputedly showed miraculous healing powers as a child. The faithful came from throughout Madoc and even other planets; she cured them while standing in the crashing surf. One such supplicant was Archbishop Dralsey of Holy Terra who suffered a disease thought incurable even by the Amaltheans. The bishop left the planet cured, taking the young healer with him.

Because of Dralsey's influence, Hadara narrowly chose the Orthodoxy over Sanctuary Aeon. Despite this, there is little doubt that Amalthean beliefs deeply influenced her throughout her life. Something of a historical anomaly, Hadara did not campaign for the post of Matriarch. A combination of her miraculous powers, Dralsey's influence and a Mahayana-controlled Synod seemed to make her ascension to the Matriarchal Dais appear almost inevitable. Despite this, she was not without enemies. She gained a number of potent rivals among the disenfranchised Hinayana and the nobility (especially Houses Li Halan and Decados).

Modern historians claim she was a mere (though wildly popular) figurehead for reckless Mahayana reforms, and there may be some truth to the charge. The Matriarch showed little interest in governing, leaving the political decisions to trusted subordinates. She instead spent her time touring the Known Worlds, healing the sick and bringing hope to the dark corners of Human Space. Nevertheless, she showed an uncanny ability to tell when someone was lying and her approval of a piece of legislation was a virtual guarantee of its acceptance. The matriarch died under suspicious circumstances while touring Ur ruins on Bannockburn. The Church elevated her to sainthood almost immediately after her death. She retains that status in a million home shrines across the Known Worlds, despite early Hinayana attempts to rewrite her history.

## The Present (4908 – )

The Orthodoxy is on the cusp of rapid change, but few would dare to guess in what direction. The 50th Century has been the most tumultuous time for the Known Worlds since the 46th. In rapid succession the Known Worlds have faced the reappearance of the Symbiots, the second Emperor Wars and border wars with the Vuldrok Raiders and the Kurgan Empire. A dark feeling of pessimism and impending eschaton have pervaded much of the century; only the recent ascension of the New Emperor has partially broken this spell. In a bid for a second theocracy, Holy Terra initially supported Flavius Li Halan during the early Emperor Wars. Such a move was doomed to failure, however, and Patriarch Hezekiah the Elder wisely switched the Orthodoxy's support to Alexius. In return the new Emperor reaffirmed the Orthodoxy as the Empire's one true faith.

Most Orthodox leaders view Alexius's popularity as a "cult of personality" that may soon fail. The Orthodoxy frowns upon his "Age of Discovery," seeing it as hubris that raises false hopes and upsets the existing stable social order. Many in the Orthodoxy's upper hierarchy complain that the Emperor is undoing in three years all their hard work since the Great Cleansing. Church leaders are especially afraid that the Emperor's explorers may stir up ancient Anunnaki and demonic forces, thereby initiating the approaching eschaton before they can adequately prepare.

Even worse, in the rapid changes after the Emperor Wars, there has been a flowering of new sects and alternative faiths. The Orthodoxy cannot stop all of them (though it will crush anything openly pagan), but is biding its time and gathering its forces for another crackdown. The reasons for this are not wholly political or self-serving, however. The past few decades have also seen a disturbing increase in Antinomy and other dark forces. The Orthodoxy will do whatever it takes to protect its flock from these forces, even if it means increasing its authoritarian hold. The Inquisition has gained a wider array of discretionary powers and the Church is desperately trying to collect all the strange technological artifacts sought by Alexius's questing knights. The Church is trying to take the long view of things, looking at the current troubles as an opportunity to increase its influence.

## Theology

The large majority of the Known Worlds population accepts the Orthodoxy's interpretation of the Omega Gospels as irrefutable truth. Every Restday, billions of the faithful hear the Prophet's words retold by a representative of the faith. Some critics charge that the self-serving dogma of a hundred patriarchs has long ago buried the Prophet's true words. Orthodox doctrine is not totally unquestioned or uniform, however. The Orthodoxy hotly debates various theological issues and how to implement the Pancreator's words in an imperfect universe. Despite its dogma, the Church offers solace to a populace suffering beneath the dying suns.

The Church involves itself with three areas of concern: The right ordering of the soul, the right ordering of society and protecting its flock from the "dark between the stars." The Church sees these three goals as interrelated and believes that it cannot accomplish one without the others.

*The right ordering of the soul.*

The Prophet taught in a time of constantly expanding boundaries, when the universe still beckoned to an outwardly searching humanity. The universe seemed huge and frightening, but challenging as well. The

## Cosmology

The Orthodoxy promotes the Prophet's teachings about a Celestial Sun that fills the universe with its light. Like other orders, they believe the Holy Light shines through varying emanations or spheres of existence (Sefiros), of which the material universe is the 10th. They teach that sin and other evils emanate from a dark source that blocks off this Celestial Light. Church theologians who study these matters believe that these dark emanations (or Qlippoth) also spawn the creatures called demons. The Orthodoxy only vaguely describes the particulars of these theories to its flock, however.

Unlike some other sects, the Orthodoxy believes that people can only reflect Holy Light, but cannot project it on their own. Most Orthodox clergy view this as a fairly straightforward proposition and have little patience for the Eskatonic Order's belief that people can project their own Holy Light. This is not always the case, however. Some Orthodox clergy of the Mahayana philosophy believe that the soul *can*, under certain circumstances, project Holy Light. See the *Readings from the Omega Gospel* chapter for more details.

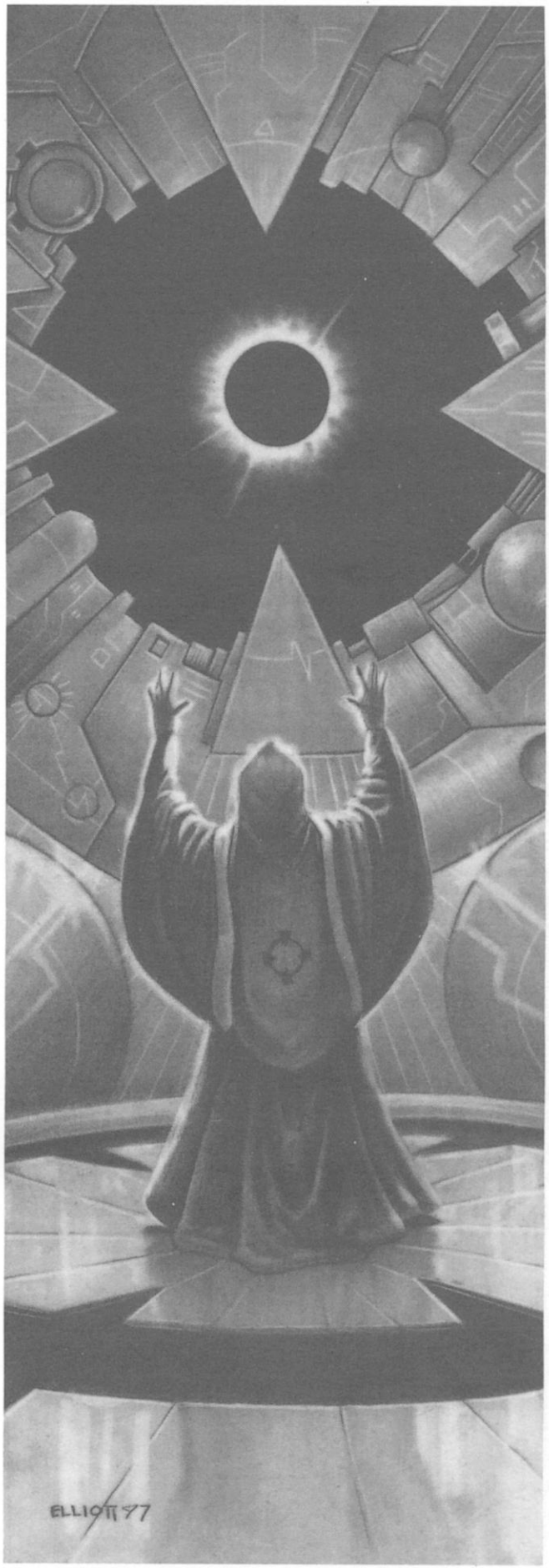
Prophet spoke of preparing the soul to face the new challenges ahead. Nowhere is this more clear than in the Prophet's call toward a questing spirit, where the intention was to prepare the soul for the challenges ahead. The Orthodoxy acknowledges this, but simply states that now is a different time. What was fitting at the beginning of the passion play is no longer appropriate at the end of all things. The modern Church teaches that the individual must order his soul readiness for divine judgment.

*The right ordering of society.*

The individual may forge an intimate relationship with the divine, but only with the Church as intercessor. The Orthodoxy fervently believes that these are dangerous times. Those who spurn Orthodox teachings may harm the souls of others; the wicked few can damn the entire species. Church sermons often describe the path toward salvation as a narrow precipice with spiritual and physical dangers at every turn. Dark presences, aliens and tainted humans alike try to lead the faithful astray, deceiving them with base temptations and false theologies. As the Pancreator's chosen emissaries, only the Orthodoxy can lead the great flock down the narrow path toward salvation.

*Protecting the flock from the "dark between the stars."*

Dark alien presences, genetic monstrosities and the dead walk openly beneath the fading suns. No longer relegated to the realms of myth or the subconscious, these monstrous presences have left a deep and lasting scar on the human psyche. Even in the "safe" places, where there






is light and life and music, the darkness is never far away. To most people, the Church is the only light that holds the darkness at bay. The Church openly professes the reality of these dangers, but does not tell all that it knows. The Orthodoxy leadership is all too aware of the black tidal wave crashing down on the huddled masses of humanity, and it knows that prayer alone is not always enough.

## Schools

The Orthodoxy consists of two philosophical schools of thought: Hinayana and Mahayana Orthodoxy. This division is philosophical, theological and social, coloring all aspects of Church life. These opposing philosophies have struggled for preeminence almost since the Church's founding, though the Church has embodied neither of them in its liturgy nor canon. One of the primary points of contention between the two schools is the status of aliens as embodied in a cryptic passage of the Doctrine of the Unethical Alien. This passage seems to state that some aliens, with faith and grace, may become fully reflective.

## Mahayana Orthodoxy

Mahayana draws its name from an ancient Urth philosophy and means "greater vessel." The Mahayana tend to be more inclusive and egalitarian in their faith. They believe the Pancreator's divine light exists in all sentients and that the Church must be a vehicle large enough for all believers, even aliens. The Mahayana have been out of power since the beginning of the current century, though they have recently enjoyed an upswing since the end of the Emperor Wars. The Mahayana school generally holds sway in urban areas, and on more cosmopolitan worlds such as Criticorum, Istakhr, Leaguheim and Byzantium Secundus.

## Hinayana Orthodoxy

The Hinayana School is the Orthodox branch of the Orthodoxy. Its name, meaning "lesser vehicle," was originally a pejorative term the Mahayanaists used to describe it. The Hinayana branch tends to be more exclusive and authoritarian; most of its followers believe that only humans possess a soul mirror untainted enough to reflect the Holy Flame. Most Hinayana believe that aliens have warped and smudged soul mirrors, that reflect the Pancreator's light in obscene ways. They believe that few aliens, if any, will ever receive any measure of divine grace. The Hinayana have dominated the Church for the past 90 years and have been largely successful at cementing their power on most worlds. This power base has begun to fracture somewhat over the last few years. Many of them blame this on Emperor Alexius and his "permissive" reforms.

## Sin

The Church believes that sin tarnishes the soul, darkening it so that it can no longer reflect the Pancreator's

Holy Light. The Church does everything it can to prevent its flock from going astray. In its battle against sin it employs gentle persuasion, theological truth and, when necessary, the inquisitor's lash. The Orthodoxy mainly involves itself in crimes against the Church. It does little to enforce secular laws (against murder, robbery, etc.), leaving normal police duties to the nobles or local authorities. The Church divides sin into two major categories: Heretical sins (sins directly against the Church and Pancreator) and "petty" sins. A portion of the Nomocanon, called the Analects of Maya, describes the Church's punishments for most crimes.

## Heretical Sins

There is a hierarchy of heretical sins that the Nomocanon lists in order of ascending vice:

**Schism:** Schism is a willful separation of oneself from the Church without denying its teachings. The Church considers schism the least dangerous of the heretical sins, though far from harmless. Schismatics may include minor sects still nominally connected to the Church such as Incarnates, excessively independent hesychasts and even some members of variant Orthodox sects. The definition of a schismatic varies somewhat from see to see. On some planets, the Orthodoxy labels members of the Eskatonic Order schismatics. Iconography may be a schismatic sin on some worlds, while on other planets it is not a sin at all. The Orthodoxy often does not seek out these sinners unless they become too vocal in their rejection of Church doctrine. Schismatics may become targets during Inquisitorial flare-ups.

**Heresy:** Heresy is the willful rejection of the Church's religious norms. Heresy angers the faithful because many heretics stay within the Church, twisting the Omega Gospels to their foul purposes. Heresy often includes the support of "doctrinal errors," including doctrines that the Church once accepted. The Church's list of heretics is long and growing longer. Among these are dark sentients (unconverted aliens), Preceptors (who do not recognize the Church's stance on technology), "innocent pagans" (those who have not yet heard the Prophet's words, as opposed to those who actively reject them), Republicans and blasphemers. Heretics must keep a low profile, or risk imprisonment or worse by Church authorities.

**Apostasy:** Apostasy is a complete abandonment of the Prophet's faith. The Church lists apostates as enemies of the faithful and the very rumor of them is enough to galvanize the local Inquisition. The Orthodoxy's list of apostates include such wretches as willful pagan cultists, Sathraists, extreme technocrats (such as those who build golems), unrepentant psychics (or at least those without powerful noble or guild patrons) and Antinomists. Apostates must stay hidden, or risk imprisonment or execution at the hands of the Church, secular authorities and terrified serfs.

## Petty Sins

The Church is somewhat cautious about using the term "petty sin," since no sin is petty in the Pancreator's eyes. Petty sin merely means sin that does not have a specific anti-Church tint to it. The word "petty" is, thus, something of a misnomer and does not necessarily refer to the seriousness of the sin in the Orthodoxy's eyes. The Orthodoxy thus breaks petty sin into major and minor sins. The major sins are: Pride, Greed, Lust, Envy, Sloth, Wrath and Oathbreaking. The Prophet specifically mentioned these sins and the Church has officially codified them in the Omega Gospels. The Church takes these acts seriously and the Analects of Maya lays out a number of often draconian punishments for such sins. Enforcement of these punishments varies greatly from see to see, however.

Orthodox clergy preach sermons about gluttonous serfs who eat ham on Restday or about debauched nobles who conduct lascivious orgies on luxury liners in space. (These sermons are a favorite among the serfs and a guaranteed draw for churches with a diminishing congregation.) The Church also gives sermons on temperance and alcohol, but most do not consider the use of alcohol a sin unless it becomes excessive and leads to other crimes. Similarly, the Church does not frown on any particular sexual orientation, only on those who promiscuously pursue relationships with multiple partners. The only exception to this rule involves the sin of "mysigination" (carnal relations between humans and aliens). People on such iniquitous worlds as Byzantium Secundus and Leagueheim may consider this a minor sin, but on many worlds it is enough to spark an instant lynch mob.

The Church also enforces laws against sins not specifically mentioned by the Prophet. These sins include Usury, Technosophy (see **Forbidden Lore: Technology**) and various dietary restrictions. The Orthodoxy often pushes for punishments against Usury when they wish to pressure the guilds, but many must admit that this sin is not rare in the Church. Many petty sins are not absolute and vary from world to world. The worst punishment the Church *usually* enforces in such cases is moral censure and acts of penance. The Orthodoxy takes a mostly pragmatic view of such sins, often leaving the fire and brimstone to Temple Avesti.

## Soul Death

The Orthodoxy teaches that one can help people darkened by sin, but only up to a certain point. Only those who become Soul Dead are beyond help in the Church's eyes. Soul Death can happen in a number of ways. One way is for a human to replace over sixty-four percent of her body with cybernetic parts (an Alien trait of 7 or more). Other acts, such as cold-blooded murder and Antinomy can also irrevocably destroy a person's soul. After this happens, nothing short of an act of divine grace can save the unfortunate sinner. Not all sects follow the Orthodoxy's

## The Five Metropilae

The five metropilae currently coincide with the capital worlds run by the five major noble houses, though they also claim jurisdiction over planets not ruled by these houses. The actual power of the metropolitans varies from planet to planet. Metropolitans may claim some worlds, but hold no real power there. Indeed the Church claims some planets, such as Vuldrok or Kurga, where it has no more than a few missionaries. Some worlds come directly under Patriarchal rule and are off limits to the metropolitans, or restricted to the faithful altogether (such as the Symbiot Worlds and Vau). Still others (such as the major order/sect homeworlds) are autocephalous and do not come under metropolitan sway. Some hotly contested worlds fall between metropolitan territories.

**Patriarchal Planets:** Bannockburn, Holy Terra, Nowhere, Obun and Stigmata.

**The Aragon Metropilae (Archbishop Jordano):** Aragon, Kurga (claimed), Sutek, Vera Cruz.

**The Cadavus Metropilae (Archbishop Nadia):** Cadavus, Cadiz, Malignatius, Pandemonium, Severus and Vril-Ya (claimed).

**The Criticorum Metropilae (Archbishop Tara-leng):** Aylon, Criticorum, Istakhr, Shaprut and Ukar.

**The Delphian Metropilae (Archbishop Lyander):** Delphi, Gwynneth, Leminkainen, Ravenna, Tethys and Vuldrok (claimed).

**The Kish Metropilae (Archbishop Marcion Li Halan):** Apshai, Grail, Icon, Kish, Midian, Rampart and Vorox.

**Autocephalous Worlds:** Atremis, Byzantium Secundus, De Moley, Pentateuch and Pyre.

**Contested Worlds:** Iver (Aragon/Cadavus contested), Leagueheim and Madoc (Aragon/Kish contested) and Manitou (Cadavus/Kish contested).

**Restricted Worlds:** Absolution, Chernobog, Daishan and Vau

line on soul death. The Amaltheans do not recognize its verity, while the Eskatonic Order does not agree with the Orthodoxy on what constitutes this state.

# Canon

The Orthodoxy has codified Church law in a rigidly structured system called the Nomocanon. The Nomocanon details everything about Church life, from the proper wearing of vestments, to the listing of sins and Church holidays. It specifies the intricacies of Church polity (structure) and how a member of the clergy must behave to advance in rank. The Orthodoxy believes that all citizens of the Known Worlds must follow this code.

# Polity

During the Church's early history, apostles, evangelists and lone prophets represented and spread the faith. By the time of Patriarch Palamedes' death, however, a firm and immutable power structure had taken their place. Perhaps more than any other organization in the Known Worlds, the modern Orthodoxy adheres to a strict code of hierarchy. Deviation from this system is punishable by reprimand, censure, demotion, expulsion or even investigation by the Inquisition. Regardless of this uniformity, most priests are a product of their own local cultures. A priest from Holy Terra or Sutek may behave very differently from a priest from Ravenna or Stigmata. The Orthodoxy jealously hoards the Church's highest positions for itself, though occasionally clergy from other sects or orders break through this stained-glass ceiling.

## Patriarch

With the possible exception of the Emperor, the Patriarch of the Celestial Church is the most influential person in the Known Worlds. The Patriarch's decisions affect billions of souls across 40 planets. Knowledge of this fact is readily apparent to the man or woman who sits on the Patriarchal dais. The reality of the Pancreator, and of unholy demons, is an unquestioned fact in most people's belief. The pressures of being the intermediary between these powers and the great masses of humanity drives some Patriarchs mad. The current Patriarch of the Celestial Church is Hezekiah the Elder. The Patriarch may be from any sect or order, though non-Orthodox Patriarchs are a rare exception.

## Syneculla

The Syneculla is the Patriarch's deputy and the only member of the Church who can never become Patriarch. The Syneculla carries out the Patriarch's orders and coordinates the Church's political machinery. Besides this, the Syneculla has the ultimate responsibility in Church security issues. Only a member of the Orthodox clergy born on Holy Terra may hold this position. The current Syneculla is Archbishop Sigmund Drual.

## Metropolitan

Sometimes called "the little patriarchs," metropolitans are powerful archbishops who oversee the Church's largest holdings or "metropilae." Metropilae consist of multiple planetary dioceses. Historically the number of metropilae in Human Space has varied as planetary powers have risen and fallen. There are currently five metropilae with borders roughly corresponding to the territories of the noble houses. The five metropolitans are: Archbishop Lyander of Delphi, Archbishop Marcion Li Halan of Kish, Archbishop Nadia of Cadavus, Archbishop Tara-leng of Criticorum and Archbishop Jordano of Aragon. Some reformers have attempted to widen the number of metropilae to include seats on Byzantium

Secundus and Leagueheim, but Church traditionalists strongly oppose such a move.

While clergy from any sect (or even aliens) can technically become metropolitans, they are traditionally Orthodox. The sect affiliation of the metropolitan does not necessarily influence what sect holds the most influence on a given planet; thus, a planet under an Orthodox metropolitan may still have an Amalthean run Holy See. Metropolitans may not hold a seat on the Synodal Council, but are often major contenders for the patriarchy when the old patriarch dies.

## Archbishop

Archbishops typically oversee single planetary sees, though there are rare occasions where an archbishop may influence multiple worlds. Archbishops may be of any sect or order, though the Orthodoxy has garnered most of these positions. Notable Orthodox archbishops include Hierophant Palamon on Byzantium Secundus, Archbishop Ivar Decados of Malignatius and Archbishop Lycrecia of Stigmata.

## Bishop

Bishops oversee multiple parishes called "bishophorics." These territories range in size and may include anything from a continent to a large city. The majority of bishops are Orthodox, but members of other sects and orders also have many bishops.

### Terms of Address

The following are the formal titles of address for clergy of varying ranks. While Church titles are the same for both men and women, the terms below are often more gender-specific.

Novitiate, Canon or Deacon — Brother or Sister

Priest — Father or Mother

Bishop or Archbishop — Your Excellency, Your Grace, Most Revered Father or Mother

Metropolitan — Your Eminence

Patriarch — Most Reverend Lord, Your Beatitude or Your Holiness

## Priest

Priests are the backbone of the Church and the most recognizable figures to the laity. They are generally either parish priests and oversee their own church, or temple priests attached to higher ranking officials. Parishes range widely in size. A single parish may serve an entire village, while there may be many parishes in a larger city. The common laity, especially serfs, often venerate priests in a way that bishops and higher members of the clergy can only envy. Sure, there may be corruption in the Church, but not *my* priest.






## Deacon

Deacons assist the priests in the performance of their duties and form a valuable bridge between the clergy and the laity. Deacons are typically people who have committed their life to the Church and strive to be priests one day. Some, however, never advance in rank and become cynical. The drunken or lecherous deacon is a favorite mainstay in bawdy folk tales.

## Canon

The canon is both a clerical and a lay position. A canon may be a favored novitiate or lay member of the congregation. The canon handles the day to day temporal duties of the parish. These duties include contracting guild workers to do any specialty labor that is beyond the ability of the parish novitiates. Church canons often have an inordinate amount of control over the parish's purse-strings. There are harsh punishments for canons who abuse this position, but corrupt canons are almost as popular a stereotype as dirty deacons.

## Novitiate

Novitiates are the young acolytes who join the Church. While many do this because of a heartfelt desire for the spiritual life, many others do so to escape a life of grinding poverty. Novitiates receive instruction in the Nomocanon and work long hours doing menial labor for their parish. The Church teaches most to read and write, including a smattering of Latin. All clergy must start out as novitiates, though novices from wealthy noble or merchant families may find their progress up the social ladder somewhat easier than that of their poorer peers.

## Additional Positions

Along with the ranks listed above there are other positions that fall outside the usual Church hierarchy.

**Chartophylax:** A Chartophylax is a Church record keeper and may be responsible for anything from a small parish book collection to a giant planetary library.

**The Great Chartophylax:** The Great Chartophylax is the chief archivist on Holy Terra and is responsible for maintaining the Church's massive store of arcane lore. The current Great Chartophylax is an Ur-Obun scholar, Bishop Nyana voDret.

**Agent Syneculla:** These agents are members of the Church's security apparatus and report directly to the Syneculla or one of his subordinates.

**Legate:** Legates are Church ambassadors and perform a wide array of diplomatic missions for the Church. Legates may negotiate with noble houses, the League, aliens or even barbarians. Legates officially have diplomatic immunity, though not everyone recognizes the Church's privileges in these matters.

**Others:** The Church also has a wide range of lay positions available. These include readers, cantors (singers), bell-ringers and door keepers.

# Priesthoods

The Orthodox clerical system consists of two distinct disciplinary paths, the White and Red Priesthoods. The Red Priesthood is the more rarefied and ascetic branch. Members of this path take vows of chastity and gain promotions more frequently than their White Priesthood counterparts. The last member of the White Priesthood to become Patriarch was in the 48th Century. Most members of this priesthood become temple priests and help to run the larger cathedrals. Members of the White Priesthood have more social freedom (they may marry) and are most frequently parish priests. Both groups may learn theurgy rites, although it is the Red Priesthood that usually delves into the greater secrets.

# Governing Bodies

Along with powerful individual clergy such as patriarchs and metropolitans, a number of ecclesiastical groups control the Church.

## The Holy Synod

The Holy Synod is a council of powerful bishops and archbishops from many different sects, philosophies and worlds. It is not a full time body, but was traditionally only convened when the Church wanted to discuss major shifts in social or theological policy. The First Holy Synod declared Palamedes the Church's first Patriarch in 2851, while the Second Synod in 2854 moved the Church's center from Midian to Urth. During the Second Republic the Synod became increasingly independent of patriarchal control, often stopping the autocratic excesses of the more power hungry patriarchs. Since the formation of the Council of Ethicals, however, the Holy Synod has lost much of its former influence. The Synod is a deliberative, rather than a policy making, body. Its varied structure makes it a hotbed of intrigue, as well as an incubator for truly original discussions of theology.

## College of Ethicals

Created in 3986, shortly before the fall of the Second Republic, the College of Ethicals' original mandate was as a regulatory advisory body to stem the "excesses of the Synod." To gain widespread support for the College's creation, the Patriarch promised to make it a cross-denominational advisory council. In a matter of years, however, the College of Ethicals became a personal policy tool of the patriarchs, rubber-stamping almost any doctrine they cared to pass. Consisting mainly of patriarchal cronies, the College of Ethicals has a somewhat illegitimate reputation among the other sects who only maintain a token presence. Many clergy outside the College have attempted to diminish its power for centuries, but with little success. To the Orthodoxy's critics, the College of Ethicals represents the worst aspects of Church corruption. The College of Ethicals resides on Holy Terra and meets on a regular basis, thereby presenting a more consolidated front than the factious Synod and lesser bishopric councils.

## Vestments

From the humblest parish priest to the Patriarch himself, the Orthodoxy has a great sense of ceremony and tradition. One of Patriarch Jacob I's accomplishments was the standardization of Church vestments. A deacon who is a member of the White Priesthood on Leminkainen will typically wear similar vestments as his colleague on Aylon or Rampart. Despite this uniformity, the Church still allows local clergy a degree of latitude in "customizing" their ceremonial clothing to fit local needs and conditions. Generally, the higher the priest's rank, the more ornate her ensemble becomes. Orthodox priests wear robes made of varying local or imported materials. These may consist of anything from humble Aragon cotton, to Ravenna silk, warm Drom-wool on Malignatius to the latest synthetics on Leagueheim. All Orthodox clergy wear jumpgate crosses. These may consist of anything from wood or scrap iron to Shaprutan gold.

### The White Priesthood

Low ranking clergy of the White Priesthood typically wear more modest vestments, though these become ever more ornate (and lighter) as they rise in rank. Novitiates through deacons wear conservative black robes. Priests wear charcoal-gray vestments with silver filigree and receive a gold cross when they become ordained. White bishops and archbishops wear white robes. Bishops carry crosiers and wear miters during services and other official functions.

### The Red Priesthood

Low ranking clergy of the Red Priesthood typically wear more modest vestments, though these become ever more ornate (and darker) as they rise in rank. Novitiates through Deacons wear scarlet robes that are little different in color from the scarlet worn by the Avesti, though the cut is less voluminous and they do not usually wear hoods. Priests wear crimson vestments with gold filigree, while bishops and archbishops have dark burgundy robes. Bishops carry crosiers and wear miters during services and other official functions.

## Bishopric Councils

Bishopric councils are less powerful versions of the Holy Synod and steer Church policy on a smaller scale. There are two levels of bishopric councils, each designed to check the power of the more powerful autocephalous theologians. These councils are metropolitan and planetary bishoprics.

**Metropolitan Bishoprics:** There are five metropolitan

bishoprics, one for each metropilae. These councils usually consist of planetary archbishops. Metropolitan councils range in power and effectiveness. For example, the Delphian Bishopric is a powerful democratic institution, while the Cadavus council is virtually impotent. Like the Holy Synod, metropolitan bishoprics only meet on a sporadic basis to discuss matters of major theological or political importance, though members of these councils regularly communicate through their legates.

**Planetary Bishoprics:** Planetary bishoprics consist of various regional bishops who interpret matters of Church law on the planetary level. Planetary councils check the power of the planet's archbishop and meet on a far more regular basis than metropolitan bishoprics or the Holy Synod. While predominantly made up of bishops, some powerful priests may also belong to these planetary councils.

# Security Apparatus

The Orthodoxy's security apparatus protects both Church interests and power, as well as the lives of the faithful.

## The Synecullum

Synecullar agents are members of the Church's political enforcement wing and report directly to the Patriarch's Syneculla or one of his subordinates. Members of this organization are the Church's dreaded secret police or the truest defenders of the faith depending on whom one believes. While the actual existence of the organization is public knowledge, few know much about its internal workings or its mandate. The Synecullum primarily involves itself with the Church's role in the temporal world, leaving spiritual issues to the Inquisition and supernatural matters to the Kalinthi. The Synecullum spends much of its resources investigating the Orthodoxy's competitors, namely the guilds, nobles and other sects. Only members of the Orthodoxy may become Synecullar agents.

## Inqisitorial Synod

Originally a governing body, the Orthodoxy have relegated the Inquisitorial Synod to the status of a security branch since the Avesti took over the majority of its seats. The Orthodoxy is well aware of the Inquisition's controversial nature and seeks to distance itself from the Inquisition publicly, while using its resources to maintain its hold on power. The Inquisition's agents seek out and punish heretics, users of proscribed technologies, demon worshippers, psychics, pagans, non-Church aliens, political dissenters and a wide array of other malcontents. The Orthodoxy views the Inquisition as a political tool, and keeps it on a short leash when it does not need it. Next to the Avestites, Orthodox clergy make up the largest number of Inquisitors and still supply the Synod with many of its theological underpinnings.

## The Kalinthi

The Orthodoxy has documented numerous occurrences of demonic possession since its beginnings. The Omega Gospels relate how the Prophet himself drove a demon out of a peasant on Grail. The Church has a wealth of anecdotal evidence about the existence of demons and some very compelling hard proof. To further its investigations, the Orthodoxy has formed a highly secretive investigative branch that researches Antinomist cults, as well as rogue psychics and Ur-ruins. The Kalinthi answer only to the Patriarch and his selected deputies. Named for an ancient Sutek sect, they enjoy a wide range of discretionary powers in the pursuit of their duties.

The Kalinthi share a secret language known only to those in their sect. These investigators have documented an increase in demonic activity in recent decades. The Kalinthi are getting closer to the truth, and several well-placed demon hunters have died grisly deaths in recent years. The Kalinthi maintain a covert presence on most planets and enjoy a great deal of discretionary power and Church support, as long as they remain hidden. Clergy from any sect may join the Kalinthi.

# The Patriarchal Fleet

Following Patriarch Nadrim's extension of extreme penance to the nobility, the Church gained the power to field its own fleet. First launched in 4546; the fleet has steadily grown over the last 450 years. The same document that allowed nobles access to technology also stated that any ship not belonging to the League or the nobility automatically becomes Church property. Over the years the Church has confiscated a respectable armada. While not as large or technologically advanced as the Imperial or League fleets, the Patriarchal Fleet can hold its own in most engagements. Many of the armada's ships are castoffs, and many are antiquated or in poor repair. The fleet mostly consists of small frigates such as the Hearth Inquisition or fast scouts similar to the Imperial Lekaf, though they also have a few capital ships such as their Phlogiston class battleships.

As with the noble fleets, the Patriarchal Fleet is highly dependent on League Charioteers and Engineers to keep its ships operational. Recent patriarchs have made an attempt to change this, and the modern Patriarchal Fleet has far more clergy at its controls than in the past. Unlike most fleets, members of Church crews prefer to use Holy Terra, rather than Byzantium Secundus, as their navigational center point. Instead of going dayside or nightside when they jump, fleet members speak of "moving toward, or away, from grace." Members of any sect may join the Patriarchal Fleet.

# Penitents

The Orthodoxy keeps jealous control over the Church's psychics. The Orthodoxy alone oversees their

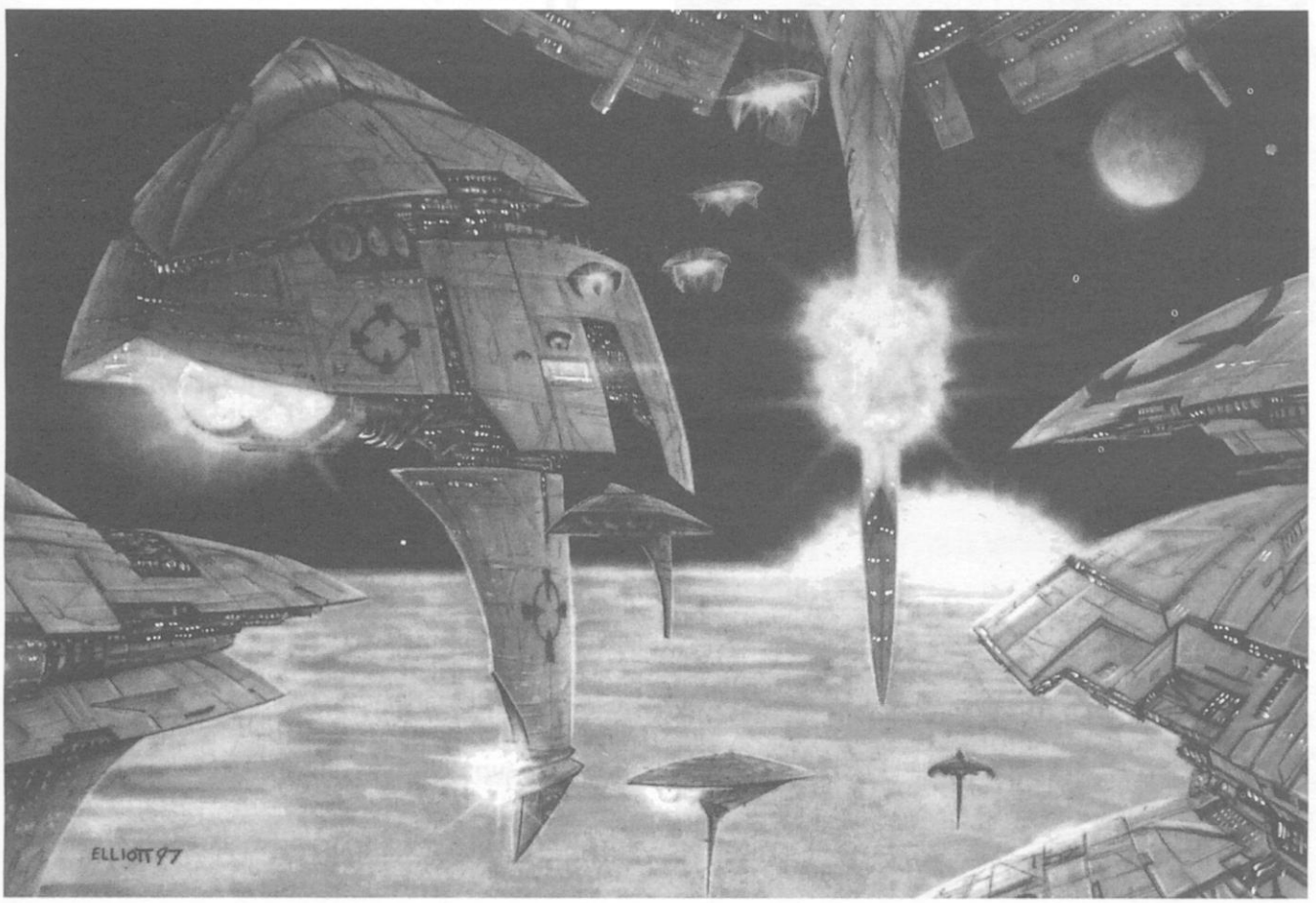
initial indoctrination into the Church. Once indoctrinated, Penitents are members of the clergy in good standing and may even choose to enter other sects or orders, though this is rare. Some even rise high within the Church hierarchy, though many still view them with suspicion. Penitents of any sect must obey the dictates of an Orthodox priest of higher rank without question, but they do not have to obey commands from clergy from other sects or order. Thus, a Brother Battle penitent must obey a command from a Brother Battle or Orthodox priest of higher rank, but would not have to obey the orders of an Eskatonic priest. To enforce their command over the Penitents, the Orthodoxy has developed a number of special rituals to ensure their obedience. The Orthodoxy views non-Church psychics as not only sinful, but as a threat to Church security. The Church is trying to crack down on psychic groups such as the Favyana and the Invisible Path, and have even occasionally worked with the Imperial Eye to this end. The Orthodoxy frequently uses Penitents to seek out unrepentant psychics, giving them orders to either kill these apostates or return them for indoctrination.

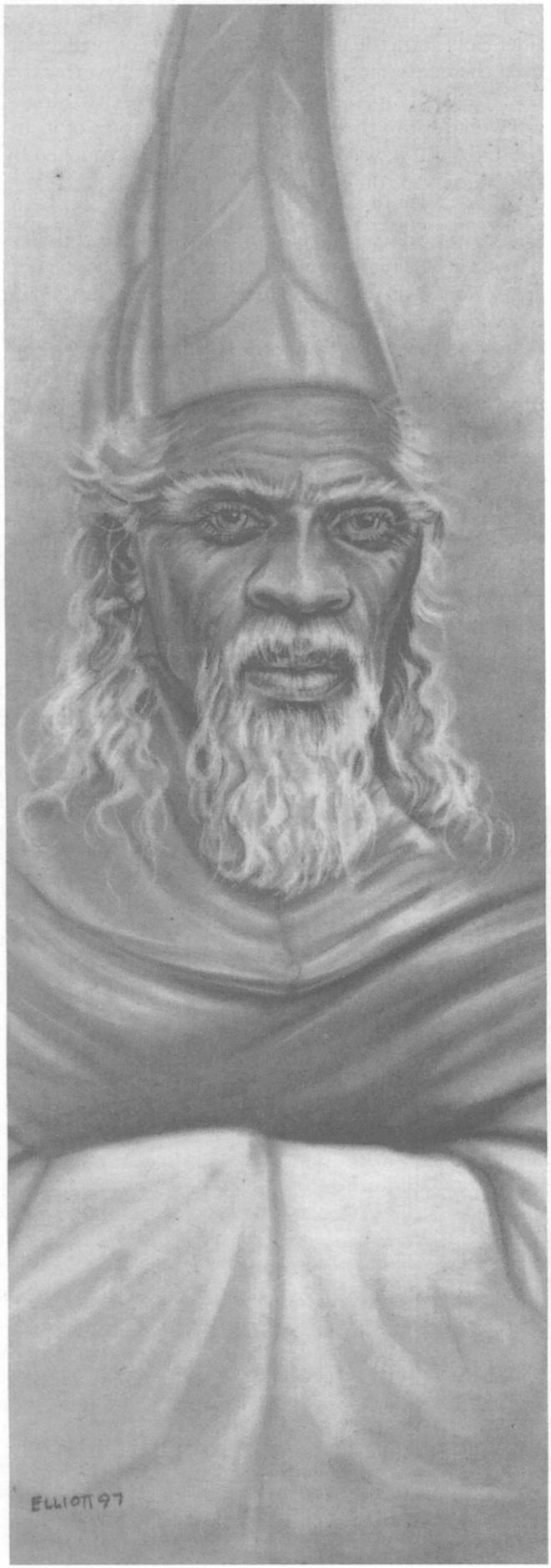
# Holy See

## Holy Terra

It is no accident that the first act of the Second Synod was to move the seat of the Orthodoxy from Patriarch Palamedes' home planet of Midian to Holy Terra. The cradle of human civilization, billions of humans still consider Holy Terra the purest and most holy of planets. Indeed, there are some compelling reasons to believe that this is so. Theurgy supposedly works better here than almost anywhere else in the Empire and Urth, as some of its inhabitants call it, was one of the last planets touched by the fading suns phenomenon. The Holy See has a large population by modern Imperial standards; over four billion people call the planet home. The Church considers native Urthers more holy than those from other planets and jealously guards the planet from change, enforcing strict immigration laws. Urth natives who travel abroad often find that those from other planets approach them with a mixed sense of curiosity and awe. Holy Terra is an orderly world on the surface, but this outward calm belies a culture rife with political intrigue.

During the First Republic and early Diaspora, Urth became somewhat of an industrial nightmare. But once the Second Republic took charge, a refurbishment movement for the cradle of humanity began. Under the rule of the Orthodox Church since the Fall, Urth has returned to its idyllic past: vast forests carpet the continets, and the buffalo roam again on the North American plains. But new works are forbidden — no new industry or building is allowed, only reconstruction of existing structures is permitted. The streets of Paris, New York, Rome and other cities are like museums of the past, with strong ordinances for keeping them that way.






Living conditions, however, can become quite cramped; people are not allowed to expand into the parks or pristine regions. The only way to go is up — to space. The moon, Mars and the asteroid belt have large colonies, most of them from poor families or those whose ancestries do not allow them plots on Holy Terra. Urth is a center of pilgrimage, but to live there requires a certain privilege, as decided by the Church. Industry long ago depleted Urth's resources, so the rest of the solar system must provide.

The Church tries hard to keep the planet from change. The technology over most of Urth is that of the Victorian era at best (TL 3, but the Church has access to the TL 6 and 7 tech). Such folksy living is considered pure by the Church, for Urth is meant to be a paradise, a reward for the truly devout.

While most ruins on the planet have long since been looted, there are many untouched sites, maintained for their primacy. These include famous allegedly Ur sites such as the Sphinx, the earth carvings on the Nazca plain in Peru, and more.

The Patriarchal Fleet defends the solar system, and thus the cradle, from assault. However, so many pilgrims come to Urth every day that not every one can possibly be checked. The Inquisition (mainly Orthodox here) searches only those vessels or persons that are suspicious. Most pilgrims are allowed access for a pre-determined time: a week or a month (rarely more).

# Personages

## Patriarch Hezekiah the Elder (4972 –)

Hezekiah the Elder was born to a middle class merchant family on Sutek and joined the Church rather than carry on the family business. A brilliant politician, many in the upper clergy secretly consider him a second-rate theologian. Nevertheless, he quickly climbed the ranks, becoming Patriarch in the tumultuous middle years of the Emperor Wars. One of his first moves was to recognize the claim of Alexius Hawkwood above the other houses, including the Li Halan. Many credit his decision to back the eventual winner as vital to the Orthodoxy's post-wars power; with the rising sectarianism, it would have been much worse for the Church if their chosen candidate had lost. Nonetheless, as a staunch Hinayana theologian, the current Patriarch has tried to tighten the Church's control over all aspects of Known World life. The tighter he has tried to close his grasp, however, the more things have eluded him.

Hezekiah's reign has seen a flowering of divergent sects and even new pagan religions. Religious unrest has grown, especially among the rural populations. The patriarch has moved to suppress these growing schisms and many believe he has been too casual in his use of the Inquisition. Despite his use of longevity serums, the patriarch has aged quickly and is now a sick and frail leader. The College of

Ethicals and the Holy Synod have stepped into the vacuum created by his illness and various powers are jockeying for position. Some major candidates include the metropolitans: Archbishop Lyander of Delphi, Archbishop Marcion Li Halan of Kish, and Archbishop Taraleng of Criticorum (who would be the first matriarch in over a century). A dark horse contender is Hierophant Palamon of Byzantium Secundus.

### Bishop Nyana vo Dret (The Great Chartophylax)

Bishop Nyana vo Dret is an Obun native who left her homeworld to follow in the tradition of the Prophet's disciple, Ven Lohji. Blessed with a razor keen intellect and a penchant for firm but gentle political maneuvering, the mendicant scholar quickly gained a following among the Church's Mahayana intelligentsia. She served for a number of years as the chartophylax for the great Church libraries on Istakhr, Obun and Ravenna before answering the call to serve on Holy Terra. Nyana is fully aware that her appointment was a political one, made by the Patriarch to appease the Church's growing Mahayana wing during the final years of the Emperor Wars. Nevertheless, she has put her position to good use, declassifying more Church information than the last three chartophylax before her combined. This has earned her an ardent following among many Church scholars, but she has made some powerful enemies as well.

### Archbishop Sigmund Drual (Syneculla)

Staunchly Hinayana, the Syneculla has been the power behind the patriarchal dais for over two decades. Born deformed, Archbishop Drual is a small intense man with a cleft pallet and a club-foot. Despite these disadvantages he quickly rose through the Church hierarchy, becoming archbishop by the age of 30 and syneculla at a younger age than anyone since the Fall. Along with his political machinations, the syneculla has been instrumental in strengthening the Synecullum and the Kalinthi. The archbishop is highly aware of the growing darkness on many worlds and will do what is necessary to protect the flock. Currently he is casting about for a successor to the aging patriarch. He has given an early nod to Archbishop Marcion Li Halan of Kish, but also maintains cordial relations with Archbishops Lyander and Jordano. No one underestimates the syneculla's role in deciding the next patriarch.

# Roleplaying

## Playing an Urth Orthodox Priest

The Urth Orthodox Church constitutes the great body of the Church and thus encompasses as many different types as there are sentient beings. Despite its rigid hierarchical structure, the Orthodoxy allows its clergy a fair amount of latitude when interpreting Omega Gospel scripture and applying it to daily life among the fading suns. Despite their tendencies toward dogma, the Orthodox clergy are among the best educated people in the Known Worlds.

— The character is a scholar in a Church-run university, parochial school or library. Such clergy often know many of the secrets about the surrounding area.

— The character is a traveling tutor, teaching theology, history and logic to a young noble or merchant. These traveling scholars are among the most open minded of the Orthodox clergy and try to learn from members of other organizations.

— The character is a political climber, interested only in gaining power within the Church hierarchy. Such clergy may work with members outside the faith to broaden their base and strengthen their position.

— The character is a debauched deacon or embezzling canon. The Church has kicked him out of the parish but not yet stripped him of his position. Clergy of this stripe may join a traveling party to escape their angry parishioners or as part of a Church-imposed penance.

— The character is an occult investigator for the Kalinthi. This is one of the most dangerous jobs in the Church and few of these agents live long enough to retire.

— The character is a synecullar agent for the Church's political arm. This type of character travels far, seeking out Church corruption, heretics and the patriarch's political enemies.

— The character is a Penitent psychic who has gained some authority in the Church, despite the stigma of such a position. The Penitent is under constant surveillance and must work twice as hard to gain the Church's trust.

— The character is a parish priest who helps other characters clear up a mystery in her parish. The priest must apply for a sabbatical to the local bishop to leave the parish for any time.

— The Orthodoxy often lauds the loyalty of the "simple but faithful Vorox." The Vorox character is a staunch defender of the faith, but still feels a pull toward his more feral nature.

## Gamesmastering the Urth Orthodox

Examples of possible dramas involving the Orthodox Church include:

**Metropolis:** The characters become embroiled in the metropolitan battles over such contested worlds as Leagueheim, Madoc and Manitou. Such conflicts affect the political structure of these worlds and may easily draw in the attentions of the local League and noble interests.

**A Mission From God:** The Orthodoxy is trying to win new souls for the Pancreator and is sending missionaries to border worlds such as Iver, Kurga, Vuldrok or Ukar. The natives are not necessarily friendly and the missionary may need the protection of stout-hearted companions.

**Claim-jumpers:** The Orthodoxy is rushing to claim

rumored Ur-ruins, but other interests desire the technology for themselves. Can the Church claim the proscribed technology, or will it fall into less devout hands? If the characters are a mixed party, how will they decide who gets the ruins — or will they try to keep them for themselves?

# Traits

## New Character Roles

The Church has several groups who help it fulfill its holy mission. Below are two such groups and the requirements to join them.

### Agent Synecullа

Synecullar agents are members of the Church's political security branch and report directly to the Synecullа or his subordinates. Agents of this branch have various duties, including the monitoring of the Orthodoxy's political rivals and the overall security of the Church. This responsibility carries with it a wide array of powers, including on occasion, a license to kill. Only members of the Orthodoxy may become Synecullar agents. Synecullar agents are highly educated.

**Characteristics:** Dexterity, Wits, Extrovert
**Natural skills:** Impress, Melee, Observe, Shoot
**Learned skills:** Academia, Bureaucracy, Disguise, Focus, Inquiry, Read Latin, Read Urthish, Search, Streetwise
**Blessings/Curses:** Suspicious (2 pts: +2 Perception when rivals about)/ Vindictive (+2 pts: -2 Calm when thwarted)
**Benefices:** Secrets, Protection

### Kalinthi

The Kalinthi are the Church's demon hunters. Kalinthi agents can be from any sect. Gaining membership in the Kalinthi is difficult and requires an advanced knowledge of Theurgy (Level 6 or above) and an extensive background check and approval by the Synecullum.

**Characteristics:** Faith, Theurgy (6+)
**Natural skills:** Impress, Observe, Shoot, Vigor
**Learned skills:** Academia, Alchemy, Focus, Inquiry, Read Latin, Read Urthish, Search, Speak Kalinthi (secret language), Stoic Body, Stoic Mind
**Powers:** Theurgy rites
**Blessings/Curses:** Sanctified (2 pts: +2 Faith among the occult)/ Solemn (+2 pts: -2 Extrovert among the unordained)
**Benefices:** Secrets, Protection, Occult Warrant (see above)

# Benefices

**Lay Position** (1 pt): Similar to the Householder Benefice in the main rulebook, this Benefice allows a character who is not a full member of the Church some small influence in the Church hierarchy. The character is a favored lay person, who has volunteered her time and energy in furthering the faith. The character may be a groundskeeper, a reader, cantor (singer) or a doorkeeper. This Benefice confers no real rank, but does have occasional privileges. At the very least, people are less likely to accuse the character of heresy and witchcraft.

**University Contract** (1 pt): The character is a teacher or college dean at one of the Church's great universities. Rank within this structure corresponds with the cleric's rank within the Church as a whole. Thus, a priest or below will usually be a professor or teaching assistant, while bishops may become college administrators. Powerful archbishops run the Church's most prestigious universities.

**Occult Warrant** (4 pt): The character has gained special dispensation from the Church to gain entrance to places where she suspects occult taint. Members of the Synecullum, Inquisition and Kalinthi may buy this Benefice. This is a powerful Benefice in that it can even gain the priest entry to a noble or powerful guild dean's domicile if the need warrants it. Nobles and powerful guilders may successfully resist such a warrant (by calling their guards, etc.), but they may permanently gain a bad reputation in the Church's eyes. Few subjects are brave enough to court such censure. The Church does not give out such warrants lightly, however, since it can lead the Church into unwanted conflicts with the guilds and nobility. The agent had better be prepared to back up her suspicions.

## Additional Ordained Positions

The following are additional rights and duties a member of the clergy may gain within the Church. Most of these positions are applicable to all sects and orders. The Benefice costs for these ranks are in addition to the Church Ranks listed above.

**Legate** (3 pts): Legates are Church ambassadors and carry out a wide array of diplomatic missions for the Church. Legates have diplomatic immunity, though not everyone recognizes the Church's privileges in these matters.

**Inquisitor** (2 pts): The character is a certified agent of the Inquisitorial Synod and enjoys all the privileges and unpopularity thereof.

**Chartophylax** (varies): A Chartophylax is a Church record keeper. She may be responsible for anything from a small parish book collection (1 pt), to a regional cathedral (2 pts) a giant planetary library (3 pts). No minimum rank is necessary for any of these positions, but the gamesmaster should use common sense. A deacon will not become the chartophylax of a major library, no matter how talented a scholar she is.

# Afflictions

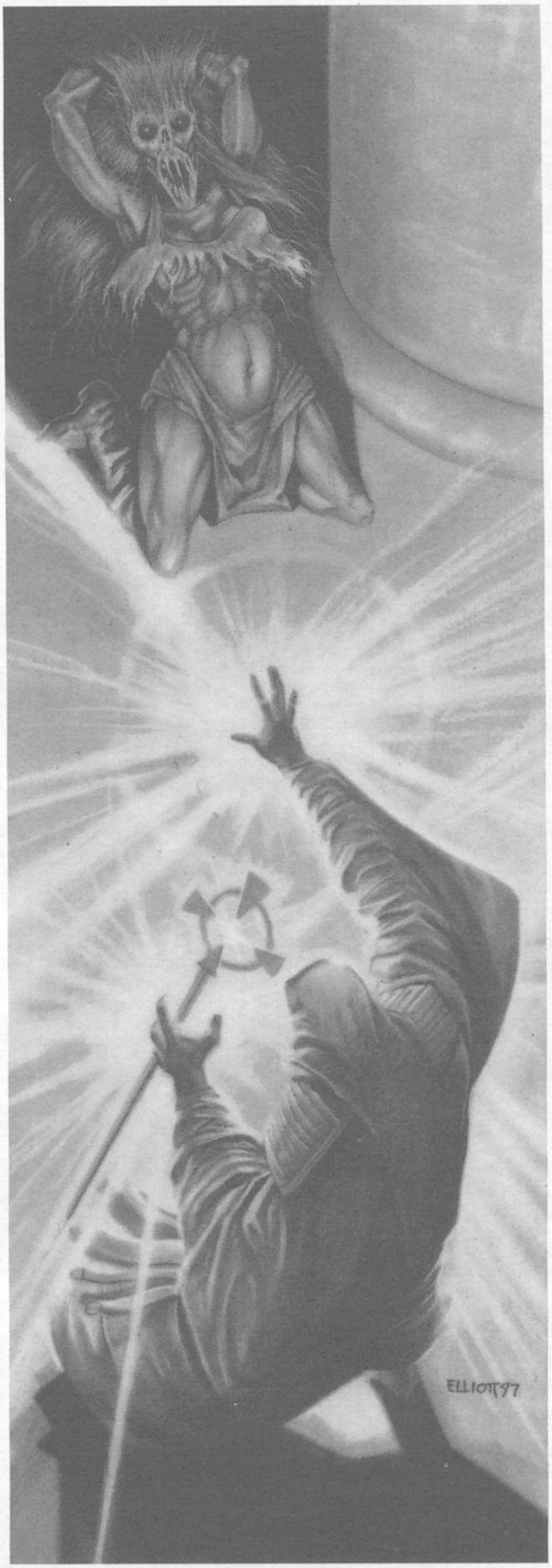
**Repentant Heretic** (varies): The character once committed some heresy that put her at odds with the Church. The nature of this transgression is up to the player and the gamesmaster to decide together. This Affliction ties in with the Church's ranking of sins as described in Chapter Two. The character may have been a schismatic, which the Church regards as a relatively minor offense (1 pt). The character may have committed a more major crime; a heresy (2 pts) or even been branded an apostate (3 pts). In any event, the character has repented and the Church has officially welcomed the character back into its good graces. Nevertheless, the character is still under suspicion and many of the faithful will become hostile, though not necessarily violent, if they find out about her sins.

# Theurgy

## Ritualis Staticus

**(Level 6, Faith + Focus, L, perpetual, 1W)**

This potent ritual protects the flock from demonic incursions from the other planes of existence. This ritual may only serve to block a demon's initial entry into the mundane plane. Once a demon has fully entered the material plane, this ritual is helpless to expel it. The theurge must cast this spell, matching his powers against the demon's Ego + its number of infernal Qlippoth. (See the **Fading Suns** rulebook for an explanation of emanations.) If the demon is trying to possess a willing host (e.g., an Antinomist), it may add the host's Ego to its own for the purpose of resisting this ritual. The contest between theurge and demon is not one of degrees; whoever has the most victory points wins. If the theurge wins, he banishes the demon and it must wait for another summoning to reenter the material plane. If the demon wins, it may use the opportunity to corrupt the theurge's soul. The theurge must roll his Faith + Stoic Mind versus the demon's Ego + Qlippoth. If the demon wins, the theurge gains a level of Hubris for each victory point the demon scored.





# Divine Weapon: Brother Battle

by Andrew Greenberg and Ken Lightner

*Aleki Bartlow desperately gripped the hilt of his great sword with relentless intensity while he peered anxiously into the dark for the source of the next attack. Sweat ran down his face from his exertions. The slightest flicker of movement on his left caught his attention, and he swung his sword just in time to deflect the axe aimed toward his side. "What is the most fearsome weapon?" came a voice from where the axe had appeared. Considering the shock which had shaken his body during his parry, Aleki was tempted to respond, "Your axe." This was an easy question, however, for while blasters and flux swords all had their places, only one weapon could change the face of the Known Worlds. "Majesty," he replied.*

*A breeze to his right announced the next assault, and Aleki ducked as the spiked head of a morning star whistled over his head. Another voice demanded, "Who is the most majestic of men?" Aleki thought feverishly. Surely that would be the Emperor. But then no one had more spiritual majesty than the Patriarch. Then, what if the Prophet lived on forever, as the Church taught? Wouldn't he still be the most majestic of men? "The Prophet," Aleki announced, a little uncertainly.*

*A knife flew out of the dark, and Aleki did not manage to twist fully out of the way. He felt the burning in his leg where the knife had cut him. "What conquered him?" came the question. Aleki had to bite his tongue to keep from shouting out "Nothing." Such a question bordered on heresy. No one could be mightier than the Prophet. As a Brother Battle Oblate Aleki had sworn to do everything in his power to ensure the Prophet's ascendancy. Now, in this test to become Acolyte, they could not be asking him to denounce his earlier oaths.*

*So nothing had to be the answer. But the Prophet did disappear, vanishing in a jumpgate accident while bringing peace to the Vau. Did the Vau conquer him? Absolutely not. Indeed, it was that final mission which eventually lead the Vau to cease their hostilities. If anything, it was space that conquered him — in other words, nothing. "The Void," Aleki yelled out.*

*Suddenly he felt the floor beneath him give way, and he plummeted into blackness, stopping suddenly as he hit a blanket of chain links. Something tore his sword from his hands, and then the chains wrapped around him. Before he could move he was completely wrapped in steel. Hands grabbed him and lifted him up. Booted feet slapped against stone as his captors rushed him along. Without warning, light burst forth around him, and his bearers pulled him back and then flung him forward. Aleki sailed through the air and landed with a splash. He managed to cry out before water closed over him. He held his breath but soon felt his lungs about to burst. With a silent prayer to the Pancreator he prepared to die, only to feel himself fly out of the water once more.*

*Hands held him just above the water, bound, helpless and gasping for breath. Lights shone in his eyes and Aleki could barely make out the robed figures who lined the banks of what appeared to be an underground lake. One, who stood directly across from him, raised his arms, making the sign of the sword in the jumpgate. "Oblate Aleki Bartlow, it is time to begin your initiation as an Acolyte of Brother Battle."*

## Introduction

*Plead my cause, Blessed Pancreator, with those who strive with me: Fight against them that fight against me.*

— The Rule of Battle

Even elite members of the Muster recognize that the Brother Battle order is the preeminent fighting force in the Known Worlds. But what is an elite warrior without a war to give him purpose? This is the question that the Order's critics, and even some members of the Order, have begun asking.

To hear the most strident of these detractors, the Brothers have no place anywhere but on Stigmata, and

even there their need is questionable since the Emperor has come to power. After all, with the Imperial garrison now properly manned, equipped and lead, the Brothers have become unnecessary. The same is true of the Barbarian Marches. With the rise of the Emperor, what role can the Brothers have?

The Brothers themselves appear split over what they should do next. During the Emperor Wars, they served vital roles, keeping the Known Worlds safe from internal and external threats. They served on Stigmata when Carmetha the Reckless took the Imperial legions off the planet to attack Istakhr. They fought the Vuldrok when House Hawkwood's attentions were elsewhere. They ferried pilgrims from religious site to religious site when house conflicts threatened to shut down the jump routes. Perhaps most important of all, they battled those nobles whose excesses threatened both the Church and its people.

The Order's leaders seem content with these duties. The Emperor cannot be everywhere at once, they say, and Brother Battle provides a crucial ideal for these dark times. While the Emperor keeps Symbiots and Barbarians from flooding into the Known Worlds, the Brothers look for ways to reclaim lost territory. While the Emperor's forces try to police the spaceways, the Brothers hope to end misdeeds both by force and example. Finally, they stress that military might untempered by religious devotion is a sure route to calamity.

Younger members see these as limiting goals. They see a universe at risk, both physically and spiritually. The darkness between the stars is growing, as is the darkness in people's hearts. They want to both expand their role on the Empire's borders, perhaps even making efforts against the Vau, and within, actively seeking out evil doers on all planets. Older members of the order do not see these as mutually exclusive views. Many say they felt the same way when they were young and, indeed, they do little to reign in the younger brothers. Instead they seem content to let their less experienced cohorts learn this lesson on their own.

Still, the Order knows it has to reaffirm its role in society. It grew at a tremendous rate during the Emperor Wars, adding members, territory and duties at a constant pace. Some people murmur that it has grown too large and too wealthy to fulfill its ancient mandates. Of course, as long as these complaints do not gain the ear of the Patriarch, everything should be all right.

# History

*Blessed be the Pancreator, my strength, which teacheth my hands to war and my fingers to fight.*

— The Rule of Battle

The Order of Brother Battle was officially founded in 4139 with a writ issued by Patriarch Innocent IV, although the Order had existed unrecognized before then. In his writ, Innocent IV spelled out the need for an order of warriors "imbued with the spirit of the Pancreator" and willing to sacrifice for the good of all humanity. He made only a passing mention of the attempt on his life in the previous year which two Brothers managed to stop, saying only that "All humanity owes the Brothers for their vigilant defense of the faithful."

## The Earliest Brothers

Many people know that the Order actually predates its official founding, having originally dedicated itself to protecting pilgrims traveling to holy sites. This began as the Second Republic fell, and the Order dates its start to 4053, when Sir Malcolm Xavier Justinian and Lord Godfrey de Moley swore on their honor to keep the jump route open from Aylon to Yathrib, the planet upon which the Prophet witnessed the Holy Flame. These two knights were expert pilots as well, and they spent weeks in space, battling pirates, Republican forces, aliens and unbelievers. Slowly other nobles and ship commanders felt themselves drawn to this cause and, within a few years, Malcolm and Godfrey found themselves in command of a significant fleet.

They began assigning other warriors, pledged as their brothers, to other trouble spots. They began escorting pilgrims around the Known Worlds, bringing them safely from home to destination. These grateful worshippers spread the word of this protective Order, these knights who feared nothing. In 4061, the two established Brother Battle as a brotherhood of monastic knights, all pledged to the Pancreator.

With the collapse of the Second Republic, the two found their services in constant demand. Word of their activities spread like wildfire, and more and more young nobles flocked to their banner. Sathraism made a reappearance at this time, cropping up on innumerable different worlds. One of the systems most threatened was Mazdak (now De Moley), and from there this heresy spread like wildfire to the nearest planets. Malcolm and Godfrey rededicated the order to stopping this growing plague, and marshaled their forces for battle.

Their earliest efforts received the blessings of Matriarch Khadija, who is said to have inspired the sword-in-the-jumpgate emblem which became their symbol. As a result of her blessing and the group's reputation, hundreds of nobles and their entourages flocked to their banner. While the Sathraists boasted some of the best pilots in existence, the Brothers had the Pancreator on their side. They won few battles in space but proved unbeatable on the ground. Their theurgical rites appeared at this time, countering the Sathraists own psychic abilities. Most noted of Brother Battle theurgists was Count Jackson Fiate de Moley, Godfrey's own cousin.

Jackson had spent years on pilgrimage, traveling the Prophet's own route between the stars. He had also spent a number of years on Holy Terra, studying with Church leaders in his ancestral homeland. He joined the Order shortly before the wars against the Sathraists and proved



his worth time and time again. After Malcolm was killed and Godfrey crippled during the infamous assault on Mazdak of 4073, Jackson became master of the Order. He regrouped his forces on Aylon and instituted a new hierarchy as well as more intense religious study.

The tide slowly turned against the Sathraists and their alien allies. While the Brothers would lose ships while attacking Mazdak, once their troops landed, they proved unbeatable. Some knights would lead their followers in attacks against Sathraist strongholds, while others formed crack legions capable of defeating any threat. The Order finally eliminated the Sathraist threat, but not before Sathraist terrorists shut down the jump route between Aylon and Yathrib, then the Brothers' main source of income. As a result, Count Jackson claimed Mazdak for the Order, and in 4096 petitioned Patriarch Benedict III to recognize his group.

Thus began the periodic schisms between Brother Battle and the Patriarch. Initially Benedict wanted both ownership of Mazdak and a pledge of loyalty to him from all the Brothers. Count Jackson refused both of these, insisting that the Brothers would only swear loyalty to the Prophet and Pancreator. Rumors began to fly back and forth, with Jackson accusing the Patriarch of unseemly greed and the Church questioning Jackson's background.

Most troubling of its allegations, and one which has lasted to the present day, is that while on Holy Terra Jackson had studied with the masters of certain heretical societies and still maintained ties to them. The Brothers scoffed at such assertions, though Jackson did admit to having visited a shrine to Mantius the Soldier at which he received a vision. Jackson said the vision commanded him to organize a force of warriors committed to battle in the name of the Pancreator. He also claimed that the acolytes at the shrine gave him the "Rule of Battle," a manuscript which became the basis for the Brother Battle command structure and training.

This feud lasted for more than 40 years, until Jackson' death in 4135. At this point, the Order sent a number of secret emissaries to Holy Terra, and their discussions with then-Patriarch Innocent IV proved fruitful. The Patriarch had risen to power over the protests of several noble houses, and these houses complained loudly about his interference in their affairs. They especially disliked his attempts to stop the growing practice of generational contracts, under which people would pledge themselves, their families, and their descendants to a noble in exchange for protection and the right to work in the noble's lands.

Negotiations between the Brothers and the Patriarch continued as hostility between the nobles and the Church grew. Things reached a head in 4138, when several especially incensed nobles from Absolution and Daishan sneaked into the Grand Cathedral on Holy Terra. The secret Brother Battle representatives on the planet inter-



cepted the assassins moments before they could attack the Patriarch, and they killed all but one. The surviving assassin confessed the plot, and the Patriarch assigned him to the Order to make penance.

Following the aborted assassination, relations between the Church and the Order improved. The Patriarch felt he needed the Order to help ward off whatever other threats the nobles might make. In March of the following year he officially recognized Brother Battle as a Church Order charged with protecting the faithful and spreading the faith. The Order became free of all ecclesiastical authority short of the Patriarch, and he in turn made the Order's master, Kevin Robertson, fully responsible for its activities. Even when the feud with nobility ended, with the Church sanctifying generational contracts and most nobles recognizing the Church as the only religion allowed in their territories, the Order maintained its favorable position.

A few centuries later the Church even made Godfrey and Malcolm saints, though Jackson never received a similar honor. The Order changed Mazdak's name to de Moley on its own to honor its former leader. This was never an official change; the Brothers just started referring to it by that name and the new appellation stuck.

## The Order Matures

Brother Battle has been one of the most successful religious orders, maintaining a place of prominence for more than 800 years. It has survived countless Church schisms and internal wars, kept its position when Patriarchs and anti-Patriarchs have excommunicated one another, and grown whenever it had the chance. Innumerable Brothers have come and gone, but the Order has endured.

Until the 4900s, the Brothers spent most of their time battling heretics, barbarians and rogue noble houses. They became most active around Stigmata and the planets around it as other jump routes closed. Thus they were in the front lines when the Symbiots appeared, and were among the first to take advantage of the theurgical research that came out of the wars. A number of Brothers died on Absolution and Daishan before humanity stabilized its position on Stigmata, but the Order came out of the wars stronger than it was before, and in control of much of the land on Stigmata.

The Emperor Wars, following as they did shortly after the Symbiot War, gave the Order even more power. All sides courted the Brothers, offering them land, money and weapons in exchange for their services. Additionally, Brother Battle offered one of the few avenues for protection available during those years. Pilgrims sought its aid for any travels, and the Church itself turned to it to collect tithes. By the end of the wars the Order had gained land throughout the Known Worlds and, despite setbacks on Stigmata and other places, found itself stronger than it had ever been before.

# The Order Today

*My fortress and my righteousness; my castle and my deliverer; my shield and He in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me.*

— The Rule of Battle

Despite their growing status, the adepts of Brother Battle find themselves casting about for new endeavors worthy of their talents. During the Emperor Wars they found their roles changing. They no longer just protected the lives of the faithful. They also protected the faithfuls' money and property. Most importantly, they often found themselves at odds with others who claimed to worship the Pancreator.

On more than a few occasions, the Brothers found themselves caught between battling groups of the faithful. House Li Halan seemed to expect the Brothers to aid them, while both the Hazat and House Hawkwood tried to make demands of their nobles who had joined the Order. Even the al-Malik and the Decados seemed to think that the Order should support them because of the financial ties between their worlds and De Moley.

The Order itself never officially supported any of the candidates for Emperor, but following Alexius's rescue of the beleaguered Brothers on Stigmata, no one could deny that the Brothers and he were close. At the end of the Emperor Wars the Decados accused the Order of having sided with Alexius, especially after a number of raids on Decados military bases at Severus. The Order loudly protested its neutrality, but the allegations bother more than a few adepts, especially those who believe the Order's only role is protecting the faithful from unbelievers. They worry that the Order's interests have gone from being purely military and religious to being financial and political as well.

# Martial Interests

Brother Battle is most famous for its military might and the martial monasteries it maintains on a number of troubled worlds. The Order actually has a presence on almost all of the Known Worlds, but these are usually small houses instead of fully equipped bases. On those worlds where it has a strong presence, however, its mark is unmistakable.

The monasteries are generally large compounds centered around a temple. The temple is also the most heavily fortified building in the compound, generally built over bunkers or a cave system where the Brothers can take cover. All of the Brothers have an extensive training in warfare. While the Brothers themselves are the most famous aspect of the Order, each one usually commands at least a squad of well-trained soldiers who have not been initiated into the order. These followers, usually called auxiliary troops, have not pledged their lives to the Order but do follow it out of devotion and loyalty.

## Chivalry

More than a few of the Brother Battle leaders worry that Alexius's peace is a temporary lull at best. These Brothers may well be the primary factor behind the nobility's growing interest in such honorable gallantry. The Order began pushing these codes of conduct during the Emperor Wars as way of combating the nobles' worst excesses. The code of chivalry has not had much time to set root and is nowhere near as commonly practiced as the nobles' rules of etiquette, but it is beginning to spread.

The essence of chivalry is respect towards one's friends and enemies and compassion to one's inferiors. The more skeptical see it as a way for knights to legitimize their actions, gaining fame in this universe while ensuring salvation in the next. Chivalry is as much a goal as a code, urging warriors on to greater and greater feats of glory. Those who sally forth to fight injustice and help the oppressed will find their deeds celebrated in story, song and magic lantern shows across the Known Worlds.

On other worlds, the Brother Battle house is usually little more than a rest stop for wandering Brothers. The few members associated with it carry out the Order's business on that world. This primarily consists of taking care of the material needs of pilgrims and wandering Brothers. It has also grown into taking care of their financial needs.

During the Emperor Wars activity filled these dwellings. Brothers stayed on the move constantly, tracking down the growing rumors of Symbiot infestations, depraved mercenaries and heretics. Since the Wars ended, however, the Brother Battle outposts have become far less frantic. Some Brothers worry that the growing feeling of stability in the Known Worlds is a facade, lulling them into a false sense of security.

Thus the Order is looking for new roles it can fill. Its bases on Stigmata stay busy, and most young Brothers spend at least some time here, learning everything they can about a threat which can pop up on any planet. For instance, a number of Brothers recently seized a church on Istakhr, claiming that Symbiots had infected its pastor and several others. This has caused a bit of a political situation, as several Orthodox leaders feel the Brothers should have consulted them before taking such drastic action, and the pastor was an al-Malik by birth.

Since the end of the Emperor Wars, the Brothers have become more active in trying to reclaim territory lost to the Symbiots. They have brought peasants to work their fiefs on Stigmata and hope to reclaim Absolution and Daishan. Rumors also crop up about a human planet just a jump or two away from Chernobog that has held out

against the Symbiots for centuries. Most of these rumors center around the planet's long-lived king, Pater Juan, who some storytellers describe as a Brother Battle initiate and others as a mighty warrior priest. Brothers have tried to activate the jump gate from Chernobog, but none have returned.

The Brothers have also become more active in the Barbarian Marches. The Order has very active monasteries on Ravenna, Leminkainen, Vera Cruz and Kurga, and Brothers head off on regular excursions into Vuldrok and Kurgan territory to spread the light. These missions are not necessarily as violent as the ones against the Symbiots, and the Order often chooses its representatives as much for their diplomatic skills as their military prowess.

This is especially true of Brothers going against the Vuldrok. While most of the Known World views these barbarians as mere pirates and butchers, the Brothers have seen glimpses of a more complex society. While the Order's most important missions against the Vuldrok tend toward hostage rescues and assaults on pirate bases, the Brothers understand that information gathering is almost as important. Some Brothers have come to respect these opponents, and they hope to start Church missions (under Brother Battle protection) to the Vuldrok.

The Kurgan front does not offer as much room for diplomatic maneuverings because of the Hazat leadership in the situation. The Hazat have made it clear that outside negotiations with these barbarian heretics will not be tolerated. The Hazat claim the Kurgan worlds for themselves, and the Brothers do not have nearly as much leeway here. Still, this conflict attracts many Brothers, primarily because it gives them an obvious opportunity to battle heresy. The Kurgans are heretics, twisting the Prophet's teachings for their own purposes. The Brothers have had some success raiding Kurgan positions and the Order hopes to claim a fief on this world soon.

Heresy also rears its head within the Known Worlds. Battling these heretics helped establish the Order during its earliest days, and it still keeps a constant watch for apostasy. Critics, especially within the nobility, say that the Brothers' main interest in battling heretics is to seize their lands when they are dead, but no one can deny that the Order has gallantly battled Sathraists, Antimonists and splinter sects, including those of the Ur-Ukar and other alien races.

Some Brothers want to push this war against alien heresies all the way to the Vau systems. After all, were not the Vau responsible for the Prophet's death? Have they not made war against humanity? And does not the mere presence of their worlds on the borders of human space encourage people to imitate their own unorthodox ways? The Brothers who advocate a more militant stance against the Vau tend to be the more fanatical — the ones who believe that the Pancreator will protect them in any righteous cause. Calmer Brothers have prevented any recent attacks against the Vau, but the Order has expanded its



missions in those systems closest to the Vau worlds.

Another role that grew larger during the Emperor Wars was the collecting of tithes. Church leaders approached the Brothers about collecting tithes from those suspected of hiding what they owed. This included nobles, merchants, freemen and even some Church leaders. The Church lets the Order keep 10 percent of what it recovers, and the Brothers achieved some notable successes. The Order handles all tithe collections on a number of worlds, including De Moley, Tethys, Madoc and Bannockburn, and it also takes care of trouble spots on other planets. All these missions combine diplomacy with the constant threat of battle.

The Order hopes to expand this job to other worlds as well. Pandemonium looks like a prime spot, as does the recently discovered world of Iver. Rumors abound regarding Brothers in the dusty depths of their monasteries uncovering the jump codes to lost worlds. The Order has made such efforts a priority, but so far it has not announced any discoveries.

## Religious Interests

The first line in a Brother Battle apprentice's oath is "I offer my body to protect the faithful as the Prophet gave his to protect all humanity." This is their central tenet — that in defending pilgrims and fighting for those who follow the Universal Church, they are emulating the Prophet. In the Omega Gospels the Prophet laid out strict rules against killing, but this prohibition has weakened over the years. As De Moley himself wrote many years ago, "We fight for the Prophet in safety, not fearing sin in killing His enemies, nor fearing that we might die, since neither dealing out death nor dying, for the Prophet's sake, are crimes, but rather merit glorious reward. We are the Pancreator's instruments, and when we execute evil doers, we commit not homicide but malicide."

Not only are the Brothers exempt from dictums against murder, but the Patriarchal bull which established the order also put them out of the jurisdiction of secular taxes and courts. A Brother acting in the interests of the Order, which members claim is a permanent state of affairs, are above local laws, though a few misguided Brothers have found that they are not above the justice of vigilantes or the Order itself.

While religious leaders have validated their actions, the Brothers place within the Church is less definite. While the Order has always supported the Terran Patriarch, even in times of multiple patriarchs and anti-patriarchs, its allegiance has often been less than enthusiastic. When the relationship has been strong, as in the time of Innocent IV, the Order has picked up more authority. It started collecting tithes during this time, though the practice reached new heights during the Emperor Wars.

Since the end of the Emperor Wars a number of Church leaders have recommended curtailing the Order's power, though Patriarch Hezekiah the Elder has not yet acted on their concerns. The Order, despite its small size, has a great deal of power, and the Patriarch might have difficulty moving against it without direct proof of massive misdeeds. The occasional rumors of heresy which crop up do not provide nearly enough justification. The Patriarch continues to remind his supporters that many of the Brothers are former nobles who have trouble bending to another's will. Only time, discipline and faith will lead them to embracing the full light of the Church.

On the other hand, some Brothers want to see the Order take on greater involvement in Church affairs. They argue that Brother Battle stands as a major bulwark against apostasy and should receive more respect than it does. The Order's leader has never been included in the ranks of those who elect the Patriarch, and the Order has almost no presence on Holy Terra. So far the Order has continued to look to the most distant of the Known Worlds for its role, but some would prefer that it look closer to home.

### Soldiers or Missionaries

While the Order has long considered its primary mission to be the protection of those who already believe in the Pancreator, a growing number of Brothers feel their main role should be spreading the faith to the unenlightened. These missionaries, generally coming from the ranks of those Brothers who have spent their entire lives with the Order, clamor for the chance to go to the Vuldroks or the Kurgan Caliphate or even the Vau. Surely their own purity shall be enough to win over the heretics.

Brother Battle leaders do not actively encourage proselytizing, but they also do nothing to stop it. Those who most actively seek converts know nothing but dedication to the Pancreator, and they find it unbelievable that other sentient beings could live in darkness. Their determination only grows with every noble who joins the Order, bringing with her tales of the evil and depravity spreading between the stars.

## Financial Interests

Part of the reason some Brothers would like to see the Order take a closer look at the Known Worlds is the financial stake which the Order now has in those worlds. At the same time the Order has increased its numbers, it has also increased its wealth. Through most of its history, this has happened slowly, as new Brothers donated their old wealth to the group. This is the main reason the Order has holdings on so many planets. The Brothers also did a limited amount of banking for pilgrims, taking their money on one world and returning it (minus a fee) on another.

The Order's property grew at a slow, steady rate until the Emperor Wars. Then its treasury exploded. Any travelers who lacked strong ties to the Reeves (and their

money) utilized the Order to protect their money. Brother Battle also began giving money to the many combatants. It never insisted on repayment or interest, but somehow the recipients of its largesse donated far more money back than they initially received. Additionally, Brothers began collecting the tithe on a number of worlds where Church officials had problems, and the Order received a percentage of what it gathered. Finally, as the wars dragged on, demand for products from the Brothers' many holdings grew at a phenomenal rate, as did the prices they could charge.

Of course, complaints against the Order have also grown phenomenally. Nobles tend to dislike the number of fiefs it has gained on so many worlds. Additionally, more than a few nobles have complained that the Brothers are overzealous in collecting their tithes and overestimate how much they should take. Church officials worry that the Brothers are not turning over everything they collect. Both groups, as well as the League, look at the Brothers' entry into money lending with consternation. Finally, while pilgrims have little problem retrieving their money from the Order, the relatives of dead pilgrims have found it much tougher.

Some people, especially nobles, worry that firebird lust now takes precedence in the Order's decisions. After all, fighting the Symbiots makes the order far less money than does declaring some noble a heretic and seizing her lands. The fact that the Order has representatives on all planets except Iver, Pyre and Vau makes them even more worried — nobody knows where greed may take the Brothers.

## Political Interests

Also of concern to many nobles is the Order's growing interest in politics. During the Emperor Wars the Brothers went to great lengths to emphasize their neutrality, but now many doubt just how neutral they really were. The Order's detractors point to the ties between Emperor Alexius and the Brothers as an example of this partisanship. They have no idea just how close the relationship has become.

Rumors of Emperor worship are just beginning to crop up. Brothers involved in such activities would have a hard time avoiding charges of heresy, for the Prophet commands that people pay such homage to the Pancreator alone. Former and current Brothers are among those involved in these growing cults, and the Order may have a hard time defending them if their involvement became known. Just how high such veneration goes is completely unknown.

Brother Battle's political involvement does not stop there. Accusations have sprung up on many of the planets the Brother's call home of the Order taking sides in local disputes. The Order denies such charges, and has publicly disciplined Brothers found taking such actions, but criticisms linger.

## Competing Interests

Brother Battle is not the only military order in the Church, only the largest and most famous. For instance, the Avestites have a similar (though some would say more fanatical) group of holy warriors called the Sacred and Devout Order of the Sons of Asaph. The Sons protect inquisitors and Avestites from enraged locals and act as a police force against those accused of heresy. The Sons only became an order shortly before the Emperor Wars began. Most of the Sons come from common backgrounds, though it counts some nobles among its leaders.

There are also the Swords of Lextius, a well-known knightly order composed of individual nobles from many houses who have sworn to protect and defend the Church either for a set period of time or for life. Another, much smaller group of religious knights is the Vanguard, which has taken it on itself to keep Vau culture from corrupting humanity. It has chapter houses on Manitou, Vril-Ya, Apshai and Icon. The Brothers have dismissed this as a group of Li Halan agents, but knights from several houses have joined it.

A group which recently petitioned the Patriarch to recognize it as an order is the Sanare, founded by Brother Battle knights who left the Order during the Emperor Wars. Its members serve as non-violent protectors of Amaltheans, and Sanctuary Aeon converted its leaders away from violence and toward peaceful means of persuasion.

Finally, some Hawkwood and Hazat knights have tried to form new orders to deal with their houses' respective barbarian threats. Brothers already fighting the barbarians complain about such a fracturing of authority, but should the Patriarch declare a crusade against one or both of these threats, the ranks of these new orders could swell over night.

## Theology

*Fighting for the Prophet is the Prophet attained.*
— The Rule of Battle

The Order's masters stress that they do not espouse any belief system except that practiced by the Church as a whole. They keep copies of the official Omega Gospels in all chapter houses, and Brothers recite accepted prayers every day. Visitors find themselves welcome at Order worship services, and none ever found anything even resembling unorthodoxy.

## Core Beliefs

What visitors have discovered are sermons stressing duty and devotion, fealty and faith. A person's obligation to all other people plays a central role in these exhortations, but the Order does not ask its members to sublimate their own goals for the good of humanity. Instead they are exhorted to act in all ways as the very best of people,

## Adept Robes

Brother Battle calls its best powered armor "Adept Robes," and these get passed from adept to adept through the generations. Some of the oldest armor dates back to the early Dark Ages, and technicians have repaired them time and time again. Such a suit is not an automatic part of being a Brother; characters must either spend the points to start the game with one or pull off a suitable feat of heroism to earn one.

Adept Robes vary from user to user, though **Forbidden Lore: Technology** presents information on a standard suit. The Brothers do their best to uphold the suits' pedigrees — or restore them if their last wearers disgraced them. After all, it is far more common for a Brother to get armor from one who died in battle than one who died in bed.

and they can infer from these sermons that at least part of the reason for their duties stems from their own extraordinary natures. Brothers must avoid pride while at the same time recognizing that their special abilities bring with them special responsibilities.

The Order's justification of its role as the Prophet's warriors is its main addition to Church theology. Its belief that murder in the Prophet's name is not only acceptable but glorious gained wide acceptance in the years after the Order formed. Many different factions took advantage of this new interpretation to justify their own violence.

# Initiation

Despite the Order's public avowals of Orthodoxy, it has its secrets. No outsider has ever witnessed an initiation ceremony, and no Brother over the rank of Acolyte has ever left the Order, much less revealed high-level secrets and rites. While little is known of the higher initiation rites, occasional ex-monks filled in the following brief details on the lower rites.

### Apprentice

The Order introduces the apprentice to the militaristic aspects of her new life. She must swear fealty to the Order and agree to strictly follow its Rule. Apprentices spend most of their time training in seclusion with other monks of their status. It is a period of cleansing and physical development, symbolized by the sword. After one year as an apprentice, the Brother takes command of a squad of soldiers. She may command a platoon before becoming an oblate.

### Oblate

The oblate test of passage is purely physical in nature, and no Brother may reach the rank of oblate without gaining some combat experience. A potential oblate must






fight his way to the center of a ring of Brothers. This ring represents the symbol of this phase of initiation, the jump gate. New oblates are then encouraged to turn their efforts to the Word of the Pancreator. Oblates can command a platoon or company of troops, so they generally begin their studies of military tactics and strategies. Some Brothers at this level specialize in support areas and give up command.

### Acolyte

Even Church officials known little of the initiation ceremony beyond this level. The symbol of this level is the symbol of the Order, the sword and the jumpgate. It is known that many Brothers of this level have some theurgic knowledge. They usually command regiments or brigades, but may opt instead to head up various support level departments. They may have command of an entire mission or outpost monastery.

### Master

A master commands an entire monastery. In military terms, this can mean a corps or even a small army. The symbol of a Brother Battle master is the sword and the jumpgate with three stars across the top of the jumpgate. Nothing is known of the initiation rite for masters, or even if there is one. Historically, Acolytes who have opted for support positions rarely reached this level of command, though the Order's new-found wealth has made the support role more important. Consequently, the Order recently added the new rank of Administrator to give these Acolytes a chance to come closer to illumination without expecting them to lead troops.

## Rumors of Heresy

The Order certainly has its detractors, and they all seem to delight in the many tales of Brother Battle misdeeds. The Order tries to take care of its own black sheep before word of their actions get out, but since most Brothers serve in remote areas far from their leaders, this is not always possible. Often local authorities end up having to deal with Brothers who have begun to violate the Rules or whose actions smack of unorthodoxy.

Most of these incidents had minor enough consequences that the Order could point to them as the activities of one or two rogues, but some have remained associated with the Order. Additionally, some small groups of Brothers have broken off from the Order, and these splinter sects have almost always reflected poorly on the main body.

Most recently, a rogue group of fanatical oblates and apprentices attacked and razed a Decados manor on Severus. While the Order says they acted without authority, the rogue Brothers gathered evidence implying that the Decados baronet who owned the manor had embezzled tithe money due the Church and practiced a strange, heretical religion involving machine worship and cyber-fetishism.

After that incident, the Bishop of Mistanza (Leonus Yosef Decados) has pushed for an investigation of the Order's activities. From his offices on Severus, Bishop Leonus sent forth missives questioning several of the Order's known practices. He points to the Brothers practice of referring to themselves as Brothers "of" Battle, as though it were a being. He claims his concern is that the order may have formed some twisted animistic and completely heretical belief in Battle as an entity to worship. To corroborate the story, Leonus has shown off paintings allegedly obtained from Order monasteries which depict the Brothers prostrating themselves before their swords, their tanks and their suits of armor. He has also questioned descriptions of the Order's theurgic rites to Zakhayelos, Master of Battle.

These are not new allegations, but no one at the level of a bishop has ever publicly voiced them before. The "Rule of Battle" lies at heart of these complaints, for more than a few people claim the original book provides a worship guide as well as a manual of battle tactics. The Brothers have not made the original version available to any outsider other than Patriarch Innocent IV, and requests to see it (including one by Leonus) have all been denied. No other patriarch has ever asked to see the book, however.

Some Brothers insist that these concerns have a political source. After all, De Moley is only a single jump from Severus, and Decados leaders have made clear in the past that Mazdak, as they sometimes refer to it, rightfully belongs to the Severus branch family. While the claim is true to a degree, it is mostly based on properties held by one of the leaders of the Sathraist revival which occurred on De Moley centuries ago.

The Order does not appear overly concerned about the new allegations, and while it does not officially shield the Brothers who razed the manor, most are still alive and staying near areas of Brother Battle strength. Some say the Order feels confident in its alliance with the Emperor. Of course, if some Brothers have begun worshipping the Emperor as a new rumor suggests, the Patriarch may try to end this closeness.

## Corpus Cultus

One higher level Brother Battle belief which has become known is that of the Corpus Cultus, or divine body. Mantok martial art practictioners tend to accept this doctrine, which emphasizes the perfect nature of the Prophet's body and soul. They hold that working toward a perfect physical body can complement efforts toward a more perfect spiritual life. While there is nothing heretical about this belief, as the perfection of the Prophet is an orthodox belief, some worry that the Brothers take this belief too far and turn it into a worship of the body, placing the body over the spirt.

Rumors exist of Mantok experts fanatical in their devotion to their bodies and capable of amazing feats. Early in the Symbiot Wars some Brothers tried to develop new theurgical rituals which would bring their bodies closer to those of Mantius the Soldier, the purest embodiment of the martial form. Such efforts might prove close to hubris, however, for any mere human who tries to achieve perfection can never match the accomplishments of the Prophet or his disciples — or so says the Church.

Some Brothers who follow the Corpus Cultus involve themselves in the study of somatological sciences, sometimes in cross study with the Eskatonic Order. (See the Eskatonic Order chapter for more information on this occult science.)

# Canon

*Yea, though I walk through the field of death I fear no evil: for Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

— The Rule of Battle

Jackson Fiate de Moley claims he received the original "Rule of Battle" from acolytes on Holy Terra. The Order updated the Rule in 4135 when emissaries from the Order met with Patriarch Innocent IV to agree on an "official" Rule. The official Rule is publicly available at the Holy Archive of Records on Holy Terra. However, no one outside the Order and Innocent IV has ever seen the original Rule. Some say that Brothers above the rank of Acolyte still follow the original Rule.

Masters drill the Rules' teachings into new Brothers and test them on these commandments regularly. "I offer my body to protect the faithful," "My superior's word is law," "There is no heresy in the Order," "Thou shalt not have knowledge of a fellow Brother" — all of these dictums and more a Brother must know by heart. The Rule contains numerous details on the daily life and ritual of an Order monk. Most are too tedious to list here, but the recognized important points are as follows:

1. A brother shall freely offer up his corporeal body to protect the faithful as the Prophet gave His to protect all humanity.

2. A brother shall dedicate his day-to-day existence to increasing his awareness of the Pancreator.

3. A brother must pray to the Pancreator through the rites of Battle at prescribed times throughout the day.

4. The brothers devote themselves to the Word of the Pancreator wheresoever they shall find it.

The first point covers the Order's recognized reason for existence — the protection and escort of pilgrims. This is not its main objective, however. The Order primarily exists to bring its members closer to the Pancreator. It takes on the task of protection because of its devotion to the Pancreator and because it can.

Point two highlights this truth. Brothers commit themselves to the Pancreator and serve in the best way they can. They believe they can increase their understanding of the Pancreator through the study of Battle. To a monk of the Order, Battle is the most intense human experience. Through Battle comes illumination, if spirit and body are prepared to accept the knowledge it bestows.

The Rites of Battle (Mantok) are an example of this



belief. Brothers throughout the Known Worlds practice these elaborate movements in one form or another twice daily. On the surface this seems like martial practice for a fight, but to the Brothers this is a way of preparing their bodies to accept the Pancreator.

Lastly, the Brothers devote themselves to discovery of the Word of the Pancreator wheresoever they find it. This point in the Rule often justifies their esoteric theurgic studies. They claim these studies bring them closer to understanding the Pancreator.

# Holy See

The Order's main monastery and its current master, Claudius, are on De Moley, once known as Mazdak. Brother Battle claims most of the planet, though both House Decados and al-Malik own large tracts of land. Most people know of the famous Brother Battle monastery at Ruad on De Moley, a giant fortress effective both as a place of worship and a place of war. When the Order defeated the planet's Sathraists, they converted its main Sathraist worship center to their own uses, and turned its elaborate underground cave system into a military bunker. Most Brothers get some training in the upper levels of the caverns, though no one will tell what goes on there for fear of giving new Brothers an unwarranted advantage.

De Moley itself is inhospitable at best, but its mountains yield incredible mineral wealth. Peasants work the mines, dredging up its many ores, though more than a few toil in the Order's factories and food arboretums. The toughest of these peasants join the Order's military legions or even the Order itself.

While De Moley hosts most of the Order's holdings, Brother Battle owns property throughout the Known Worlds. These estates range from the great Brother Battle training center on Gwynneth and the Order's many farms on Stigmata to small offices on Vorox and Madoc. The most important part of any of these possessions is the sanctum where Brothers go to pray and become closer to the Pancreator. These sanctums often feature ornate decorations and beautiful art, either crafted, bought or captured by the Brothers. The next most important areas are the military training facilities, though critics argue that the Brothers seem more concerned with the money lending capabilities these days.

# Prominent Brothers

## Master Claudius of De Moley

Master Claudius never knew who his parents were, for they abandoned him on the steps of Ruad when he was just an infant. He grew swiftly, and while the Order turns many such foundlings into miners or factory workers, Claudius showed promise. Whispers that his parents may have been members of the Order engaged in an illicit relationship aside, Claudius went through his apprentice initiation on his 10th birthday and has moved swiftly

through the Order's ranks.

He received his baptism of fire during the Symbiot Wars and quickly distinguished himself. He joined Absolution's Avengers, a small force of Brothers developing the theurgical techniques which, combined with Eskatonic lore, most contributed to finally stopping the Symbiots. By the end of the war he had achieved prominence both for his combat abilities, leadership qualities and his aptitude with a wide variety of theurgical rituals.

When the Emperor Wars began, Claudius became one of the most vocal Brothers advocating the Order's neutrality. He took command of the Order when Master Balian retired from command of the Ruad cathedral and continued to push neutrality. This remained his official position even after Alexius and his Hawkwood forces saved the Brother Battle monastery on Stigmata, but Claudius did begin hosting more Hawkwood envoys. As the war drew to a close, these visits seemed to occur monthly, and while no one can show evidence that Brothers helped Alexius' forces, such rumors did spring up.

Now that the Emperor Wars have ended, many Brothers are calling for the Order to plot a new course. Claudius has resisted such efforts, telling hot-heads to be patient, for Brother Battle still feeds the same need it always has. The Order has only begun its mission, Claudius preaches, and its most glorious days are yet to come.

### Adept Falkner of Stigmata

Adpet Falkner had established a reputation as a wastrel and a fop before an encounter with the Symbiots drove him to join Brother Battle. A landless knight with House Trusnikron, Falkner uncovered a Symbiot nest in the basement of a tavern on Malignatius where he had stopped for the night. He barely escaped them, and fled through a rain-swept night to the Brother Battle chapter house miles away. He returned with the Brothers to cleanse the site, and pledged his life to the Order in the torched rubble of the tavern.

Falkner has served almost his entire time on Stigmata, learning the Symbiots' ways and the methods of defeating them. He has also taken an active role in raiding Symbiot worlds, and has brought back disturbing reports of humans working with and for the parasites. Falkner says he has no idea whether these people are slaves, collaborators or Symbiots masquerading as humans, but hopes to put together an expert team to learn more.

### Master Aaron of Lucca

Aaron's family presented him to the Order against his will. As the fifth child of a Hazat household, Aaron had little chance of gaining more status in the family. His parents also hoped that the Order would curb the boy's growing temper and cruel streak. Aaron cried for days after his parents left him, and only the relentless torment heaped on him by other children hoping to become Brothers dried his tears.

After that, Aaron's desire to rise through the Order's ranks seemed to blossom. He became a leader of the other new apprentices, though the adepts and masters who trained them complained that he too often found ways for the other youths to do his duties — and often found ways for the other youths to hurt each other. Still, Aaron's knack for leadership and his ability to get other Brother's to trust him helped take him through the ranks, despite the high casualty rates Brothers fighting with him always seemed to suffer. He has also cultivated a number of contacts throughout the Church, and Claudius recently appointed him head of the Order's mission on Holy Terra. Here Aaron has become a key player in Church politics, and has caught the ear of a number of archbishops hoping to take the Patriarch's place when he dies.

### Adept Halatine Kwon Chua

Some say the Brothers who survived the dark hours on Stigmata when the Decados removed the Imperial legions to attack the al-Malik have become obsessed with preventing such terror from ever happening again. Halatine is a prime example of this obsession. A teenage apprentice at the time, she has since devoted herself to killing Symbiots, and has turned her body into a complete extermination machine.

She has replaced her mouth with War Jaws (see below), added subdermal armor and Slick Skin, and charges into battle to engage her enemies hand to hand. A number of Brothers follow her now, and they will charge in at the first word of a Symbiot infestation. While they may suffer, they leave no enemies alive.

### Sister Theafana al-Malik

Sister Theafana is detailed in the **Byzantium Secundus** sourcebook.

# Roleplaying

## Playing a Brother

Despite the view most people have of the Brothers as all being ascetic warriors, the Order does feature a great deal of diversity. Noble knights, martial artists, weapons specialists, militant theurgists, cybernetically enhanced commandos, technical geniuses — they all have their place in Brother Battle. After all, the Order's professed emphasis is not on combat. Its emphasis is on creating a more complete relationship with the Pancreator.

### Joining the Order

Brother Battle stresses that its members train for their role from a very young age. The Order chose them before they turned 10, or that is the point when their parents turned them over. This is not always the case, however. More than a few nobles have joined the Order as adults, either proving themselves in battle at the side of the monks or bringing with them large tracts of land.

Nobles who join the Order later in life almost never progress as quickly as do those born into it, though they

often get assigned to important diplomatic posts. They become emissaries to other noble houses, guilds, Church groups and other places where manners and breeding make a difference. Only a rare few become respected military leaders, for those Brothers who spent their lives in the Order seem reluctant to follow into the fray someone with less extensive ties.

Most of those who join as children come to the Order with the full knowledge and blessings of their parents, though more than a few were orphans or abandoned. Due to the Order's growing ties to the Muster, there are whispers that some adepts have presented detailed lists of requirements to that guild, and the Chainers are culling the ranks of their slaves for acceptable youths.

### Roles

Most players who create a Brother Battle character seem to enjoy the Wandering Knight role more than any other. These characters go from planet to planet looking for wrongs to right and evils to smite. The Order may call on them at any time to fulfill whatever dangerous tasks must be done, but usually the character acts on his own. He might be a combat junkie, a religious fanatic or a seeker of mysteries, but he finds a reason to go from planet to planet, living up to the Order's best traditions of honor and skill. This is certainly not the only role open to Brother Battle characters, however.

After all, most Brothers have an assigned duty, generally centered around some location. The best known of these is the Stigmata front, where the character spends her time battling Symbiots, exploring the worlds lost to this threat and trying to come up with new methods of combating their evil. Another popular battlefront is the Barbarian Marches, with the character battling either the Vuldrok or the Kurgans, raiding their lands and defending the Known Worlds. Of course, the character must also work with double-dealing nobles, generally either Hawkwood or Hazat.

The Order also assigns monks to its many fiefs around the Known Worlds. These Brothers handle pilgrims' requests, act as liaisons to the local factions and keep an eye out for dangers that need to be dealt with. Most Brothers work these posts for only a few years, but some spend decades at these posts. The Order also sends out Brothers to establish new posts. For instance, Iver has no Brother Battle post, and the Order would like to change that.

Church protection has also become an important role. On some worlds the Brothers collect the tithe, and on others they protect the priests themselves. Pandemonium is a good example of this. The Patriarch charged the Order with providing physical protection to the Cathedral being built in the Badlands and left them under the command of the planet's archbishop.

Some Brothers have a roving assignment, attached as they are to an individual, not a place. For its own reasons, the Order has seen fit to assign Brothers as liaisons to specific nobles, bodyguards to priests and envoys to League members. The Brothers are not under this person's direct command, but are expected to work with him as much as possible.

Finally there are the Brothers doing penitence for past misdeeds. These transgressions might have happened before or after the character joined the Order, but either way the character had best act as a paragon of virtue or face serious consequences.

### Ex-Brothers

Not all Brothers stay part of the Order until their deaths. A few have committed crimes which were not heinous enough to deserve death but which were too extreme to allow the Brother to stay in the Order. Others have had their fill and left voluntarily. If a character left the Order, for whatever reason, then she would have to give up all her equipment owned by the Order (which would be everything) and pledge never to reveal the Order's secrets.

The Order would also keep an eye on its former Brother, ensuring that she did nothing to disgrace its name.

## Gamemastering Brother Battle

It is not difficult to find dramas which attract a Brother Battle. Wherever there is injustice and chaos, there you will find a Brother Battle. Wherever heresy and sin raise their ugly heads, there you will find a Brother Battle. Wherever there's a chance to kick a little butt, there you will find a Brother Battle.

Indeed, the Brothers find themselves faced with so many options that prayer is required just to decide who to target next. Symbiot or barbarian? Heretic or Antimonist? Offense or defense? The bards tell many stories about Brother Battle adventures, singing of the Brother who rescued an Eskatonic from the Symbiots who she tried to make peace with or defending an Avestite against a mob which thought he had burned the wrong person. Brother Battle monks can find a drama anywhere.

### Brothers and Allies

Brothers rarely work completely alone, however. While there may only be a handful of Brothers on any given world, they have the sense to ally themselves with other talented individuals. The Order's connections with the Eskatonics and Muster are well known, but individual Brothers have friends in every major faction including the Reeves, Temple Avestite and the Royal Houses.

Brothers do keep a close eye on these allies, knowing that their actions also reflect both on the Brother and on the Order. They strive to keep their friends "right" with the Pancreator, on the correct side of the law, and alive. To do otherwise would mean going counter to the Order's central tenets.

### The Deepest Mysteries

Of course, some Brothers look for more than a good fight. These monks realize that what people don't know can hurt them. Some of these Brothers work with the

## The Fading Suns

Brother Battle came into existence shortly after the revelation that the suns were fading, and uncovering the cause of that mystery has occupied more than a few of the Order's monks. They have searched ancient libraries, visited ruined temples, explored alien ruins, conversed with mysterious oracles and prayed for years to determine the answer.

Much of the Order's initiation ceremonies involve dealing with darkness, and this partially serves as a metaphor for the growing night. Some Brothers have agitated for a more active stance in dealing with the dark. In the past this has usually come down to a split between those who wanted to do nothing extra and those who, along with the Eskatonics, wanted to push the Church into taking a more active stance.

Now a third path has started, being walked by those Brothers who believe that the Emperor is humanity's best chance to turn back the dark. Some of these Brothers see the Emperor as the Pancreator's agent, and believe that following him is as important as following the Prophet. Should such rumors be true, then the Order would be on the brink of a major heresy — but it might also be on the verge of saving humanity.

Eskatonics while others strike out on their own, but all are looking for the mysteries which effect all humanity.

The Order's masters seem to realize this, and more experienced members of Brother Battle say that the Order's initiation ceremonies seem designed to promote this understanding. For them, a character's suitability for promotion is not based as much on physical prowess as it is on the ability to comprehend these mysteries — and their possible answers.

# Traits

## Benefice

**Brother Battle Auxiliary** (1 pt): The character is a member of the Brother Battle auxiliary troops. As such, he is a nominally well-trained soldier, although not privy to the special training in strategy and tactics received by Brother Battle monks. He may attend common Brother Battle services and is welcome in most chapels or fortresses of the Order. In return for these privileges, he is expected to serve in a support position for Brother Battle military operations.

## Affliction

**Penitent Knight (1 pt):** The character is on a quest to remove the stain of past misconduct. This should take years — Brother Battle does not send its members out to





do penitence lightly. The character is at the beck and call of every true believer in trouble, and if word gets around that he has avoided such a task, he may well be drummed out of the Order.

## Cybernetics

While the Church frowns on most uses of cybernetics, it tends to look the other way when Brothers alter themselves in this way. After all, in the hands of a Brother these become the Pancreator's tools, and the Pancreator can do no wrong. The Brothers usually attach these to each other, but they lack the skill of groups like the Engineers. They rarely have cybernetic attachments of a tech level higher than five.

### War Jaws (2 pts)

TL5

**Features:** Organic, Unsightly, Weaponry (metal teeth)
**Incompatibility:** 3
**Firebird cost:** 326 (20 metal teeth, 306 surgery)

This implant takes the place of the character's mouth and jaws, and allows him to bite down with the force of an Urthish alligator. War Jaws have become especially popular with fanatical members of the Stigmata monastery, especially those who follow Adept Halatine Kwon Chua and engage the Symbiots up close and personal. Roll Dexterity + Fight, DMG 5

### Slick Skin (3 pts)

TL5

**Features:** Incognito, Messy, Slippery (+6 vs grapples)*
**Incompatibility:** 4
**Firebird cost:** 1365 (600 device, 765 surgery)

* **New Function — Slippery** (1 pt per +2): The cyborg exudes slippery oil from his skin, making him very hard to grasp. It costs 1 pt per +2 bonus versus grappling and wrestling attacks. Some types of oil may provide Armor (such as with Frictionless Gel). An oil pump and reservoir are implanted along with a network of tubes to release the oil at places all over the body upon activation. It needs to be refilled after constant use (24 hours of activation). Firebird cost: 300 for device, plus 50 per grapple bonus (increased network of tubes). Incompatibility +2.

There is no greater pleasure for a Brother Battle than destroying Symbiots. There is no greater fear than that one

### Adept Rank

The title "adept" is actually more of an honor than a rank. While the Brother's duties still include those of an acolyte, the sect has recognized her for her abilities, most commonly for combat mastery. She can become adept for other reasons, including tactical acumen, theurgical accomplishment, technological wonders, and more. The adept symbol is the same as the acolyte's, though many also wear some designation of their specialty. For instance, if Sister Lee gained recognition as an adept through her martial arts ability, she might wear a small pin shaped like a fist.

will become infected by them. Thus Brothers will do everything they can to make sure that these vile creatures never capture one of their own. Slick Skin came out of this concern, and helps Brothers escape the clutching hands, claws and tentacles of the Symbiots. The cybernetic implant excretes a slick oil which makes it almost impossible to hold on to the user. Of course, this means users do not wear armor (or clothes, for that matter) as that would block the oil, though it works fine with energy shields.

## Relics

More than a few Brothers have left behind powerful momentos of their time with the Order, and accomplished newcomers might find themselves given one by an impressed old timer. Of course, these relics always belong to the Order — should anything happen to the character, they go back to it, not the character's family.

### LePree's Greaves

Pa-Ool LePree died centuries ago, but Brothers still invoke his name whenever they feel bereft or without direction. Most of the parts of his command armor have disappeared over the years, but his greaves still get passed along to deserving commanders. They serve as a five point Wyrd tabernacle, allow a character to cast Righteous Fervor and *doubles* her natural Extrovert trait (not cybermodified characteristics) when she makes a role involving leadership. They are usually worn as part of a suit of ceramsteel armor and offer no special armor bonus.

## Theurgy

While the Order has developed its form of theurgy since its earliest days, the Symbiot Wars gave these studies an even greater impetus. While most of the Order's traditional rituals improve the user's physical capabilities, more recent ones have placed a greater emphasis on knowledge and understanding.

### Battle Sense

**(Level 2, Perception + Fight, Melee or Shoot, LG, temporary, 1W)**

The character gains insight into a particular opponent's combat style and adds the victory points from casting this rite to any Dodge or Parry actions against that foe.

### Zakhayelos's Eyes

**(Level 3, Perception + Empathy, LGP, sensory, prolonged, 1W)**

Zakhayelos, Lord of Hosts, never sleeps, or so the legends go. When a character enacts this ritual, he can watch the world around him while he is asleep or unconscious. His surroundings fill his dreams, and he can make Perception rolls as though he were awake.


BRIDGES

# Subtle and Quick to Anger: Eskatonic Order

by James Estes

*The burning winds of Pyre licked at her throat, her face, stealing the last bit of moisture from her body, but Dahlia pressed on. Here, in the hot sterile sands of the Burning Desert was the secret for which she had quested for so long — of this she was sure. And this knowledge pressed Dahlia onward, helped her ignore the life-draining heat. Let these winds be a physical reminder of the Holy Flame within, the Eskatonic priest reminded herself. Her mind went back to her training: slow the heart. Gaze ahead. The goal and the process are the same — you are your quest.*

*How many more hours passed like that, she did not know. She had learned to ignore the passing of time as an ephemeral distraction. She carefully unrolled the map she purchased in the agora weeks ago. Was this truly Balthazar she had found, who had uttered, "the secret of the ancients is buried beneath the shifting sands of Pyre."*

*Just as the vision had foretold. Just as she had dreamed for years, but told no one. And now she heard these words, spoken from the lips of a prophet. And she knew that indeed the Pancreator had spoken to her in her sleep, in her childhood; His words were inescapable. She knew then that she was destined to something greater than the servitude her family paid to the Hazat, and so she fled to those peculiar mystics who understood these voices. The voices of God. "The Flame Within speaks," they said, "demanding your attention," and she knew she was not alone.*

*And now, years later. Just ahead, she knew, dragging herself step by step. She shall see the sign of the ancient city, and the next of the Anunnaki Thunders shall be found. By Dahlia, crazy Dahlia. Her family will praise her name, and no longer mention her in hushed whispers.*

*Again she repeated the mantra. You are your quest.*

*Together you are one.*

*One step more.*

Secrets have power. This is one of the ineffable lessons of the universe, and few have mastered this lesson like the mystics of the Eskatonic Order. In the past, they were a banned order, reviled for their heretical theurgies and mystical teachings; now, having proven themselves in the war against the Symbiots, they are a valid order, accepted by the Universal Church — but they are still often feared by those around them.

Who are the Eskatonics? To some, they are the guardians of ancient knowledge, preserving and protecting it from ignorant and narrow-minded bigots; they are mystics who travel the stars in search of lost and hidden secrets, and who have taken for themselves the duty of enlightening those souls shrouded in darkness. For others, they are vain, hungry magicians, who traffic with unholy forces in order to gain glory and power. To yet others, they are simply lunatics, who ignore the Prophet's teachings in favor of lavish, foolish metaphysics and inherently false teachings.

The Eskatonics claim they know the secrets of the dark between the stars, and the fire that burns in humanity's soul — but whether they will use their knowledge for the betterment of humanity or for their own vainglorious ends has yet to be seen.

## History

The Eskatonics first appeared in the Known Worlds during the Dark Ages, but their story goes back much further: they would say to the very beginning of time, but for our purposes we shall start somewhat later.

## The First Republic

The First Republic was a testament to human progress. With each colony established, each ship propelled into deep space, pride in humanity's achievements grew. The spirit was forgotten, and the dawning age of rekindled spirituality in the late 20th century was a thing of the past.

The discovery of the jumpgate was both exhilarating and humbling. Humans found conclusive evidence of the existence of sentient life elsewhere in the universe — a sentience far more advanced, and far older, than humanity. The jumpgate became more than a scientific curiosity; it was symbol of alien history. The field of xenoarcheology, the study of ancient alien histories — until then a fringe movement filled with speculation but no verifiable fact — erupted with activity.

But the Anunnaki also inflamed the imagination of mystics and occultists across Earth. "Starchildren," archeoastronomers, scholars of the occult and the esoteric: all began integrating the Anunnaki into myriad Terran mythologies and philosophical systems. This was a fecund period, and advocates of Anunnaki studies too often strayed into sheer fantasy. The Anunnaki were alternately responsible for the rise (and fall) of Atlantis and countless other lost civilizations (some on Mars and neighboring planets), the construction of the pyramids, psychic abilities, comparative mysticism, the epiphanies of gods, angels, demons, and more.

## Behind All Things, Sathra

Sathraism and its subsequent ban sent wide ripples through Terran religions. One-time Sathraists vainly attempted to recapture their longed-for ecstasy through Terran esoteric movements. The recovery of the Sathra experience was their Holy Grail, and these neo-Sathraists were prophets and visionaries who saw Sathra behind everything. But First Republic zaibatsu were not content with merely outlawing Sathraism — they harassed and tormented any who sought to recapture its essence, claiming that these neo-Sathraists were insurrectionists.

Sathraism was forced underground; in many places it continued unchanged, but on some worlds it fractured into a multitude of different beliefs and practices. Sathraists joined with mystics and occultists, all of whom sought to find the Sathra experience apart from the jumpgate; their work brought about a revival of the ancient Terran mystery religions, dead for 2000 years. Some were modern forms of the ancient traditions, given new meaning by Sathraism; others were wholly new constructs — the Martian Eleusinian Mysteries, Subekite Mysteries, Bollingen Cultists, Eliadian Rites and Campbellite Mysteries, and more. Fasting, prayer and meditation were shared traits of these movements, most of which ultimately moved away from their Sathraic roots toward new directions.

The governments of the First Republic, more concerned with regaining dwindling control over various territories, had little to fear from neo-Sathraists and other occultists, who were more intent on discovering their gods through meditation and study than through shipboard sabotage. By the time central Urth authority was completely broken down, there was but a small handful of occult fellowships publicly known, and they were treated as little more than fringe cults.

Many mystics of the Known Worlds look back to this time as the childhood of galactic esoterism — though many of the movements and philosophies rarely lasted longer than a single generation, at the heart of all of them beat a genuine numinous experience. It was a proving ground, a crucible, where the ancient religions and esoteric beliefs of Terra were forged anew for a spacebound humankind.

## A Holy Flame, Burning Bright

The Prophet united a star-faring humankind with a new faith in the divine. Transformed by a vision of the Pancreator, his teachings were rooted in the seemingly disparate faiths of Holy Terra, pointing to a hidden unity between Urth's religions that could only now be revealed: And thus he taught humanity of the Holy Flame, and people looked to the suns and stars as the visible sign of the Pancreator's presence.

After the Prophet's death, his miscellaneous teachings were gathered into the Omega Gospels. Many variant texts were ommitted — testaments of missing periods in the Prophet's life, alleged private teachings to his apostles, hymns and mystery visions and the stories of those around him. In the Church's earliest days many of these were an accepted part of Church teachings. But in the process of determining canon, the Church excluded these texts because of deemed doctrinal error.

These books were not ignored, in spite of Church doctrine: indeed, they were closely scrutinized by the mystics and esoterists of the Second Republic, who saw in them the glimmer of occult wisdom. Many commentaries were written about these excluded documents, now called collectively the Digamma Apocrypha, which included the Horace Literatures, the Subek Epistles, the Hymn of the Mystery, the Vision of the Gate and the 114 Hymns.

## The Occult Renaissance

The Second Republic was an anomaly — a time of equal scientific advancement and supernatural advocacy.

Humankind was filled to excess with pride — look how far it had come! The final frontier of space was slowly but surely being tamed. Terraforming, genetics, and weather control; science and technology: all these were the tools of man's genius, and with them humanity had overcome the stars themselves. This was the time of pure sci-

## The Apocrypha of Horace

One of the most well-known sections of the Digamma Apocrypha is the corpus attributed to Horace the Learned, the Prophet's beloved disciple. Although a prominent figure in the Omega Gospels, and typically considered the exemplar of saintly wisdom and the quest for divine knowledge, the four texts concerned with Horace (the Apocrypha of Horace, or the Horace Literatures) were rejected by the Church, citing alleged false authorship and theological error.

**The Logos Gospel**: The private teachings of the Prophet to Horace, and of Horace to his successors, on the nature of Sacred Wisdom. This text reveals and details the Holy Flame that burns within each of us — and it is because of this teaching ("the Universalist Heresy") that the Church deemed the Gospel to be in error.

**The Acts of Horace**: Written by Saint Nicodemus, Horace's greatest student, this text details the life and miracles of Horace after the death of the Prophet, as the Learned follow the Prophet's injunction to "quest after the things of God."

**The Epistles of Horace**: The letters of Horace to his own disciples — written as he traveled across space — in which he teaches how to cultivate Wisdom and fan the flame of the divine within. It is a superb manual on discipline and meditation.

**The Eskaton**: Horace's deathbed vision, narrated to Nicodemus, this text is filled with frightening images of the End Times and the destruction of all Creation.

ence and reason, for by the power of the human mind, all obstacles could be overcome. Later historians would lament that perhaps progress had progressed beyond man's ability to cope morally: was it possible that man's intellectual growth had outstripped his moral capacity? Theologians would just mutter, "Invention. Bah!"

Ironically, in this scientific age, a penchant for mysticism flowered. The new human potential for psychic abilities was explored. "Psionics," for millennia dismissed as pseudoscience, became the queen of all sciences. The mysteries of the Anunnaki were still unexplained. The enigmatic Vau and the philosophical Ur-Obun had been encountered, and their animistic and mystical philosophies were plundered (or sometimes invented) by wisdom-seekers. The Second Republic, the pinnacle of scientific achievement, boasted an occult renaissance unlike anything seen for millennia.

Some Church mystics claimed that their secret



knowledge rested not in the weak and emasculated doctrine of orthodoxy. The true teachings were to be found in the Digamma Apocyrpha, and in other documents — texts such as the Gospel of the Empyrean, the Hymn of Sacred Pain, the Gospel of the Whores, the Martian Apocalypse and the Sathra Excerpts — quoted in part in the Digamma Apocrypha but never found in whole.

"Secret" societies, occult fraternities, magical fellowships and covens; hosts of hermetic groups rose and fell over the course of two centuries. Some were revivals of Terran magical philosophies, from Vedic India to the Greco-Egyptian Corpus Hermeticum. Others were homegrown movements, postulating the "recovered teachings" of the Anunnaki, or secret Ur teachings. The Anunnaki Rosicrucians, the Latter-Day Celestials, the Obun-Vedanta Society, the Church of the Vau — all clamored for attention and offered their own brand of secret wisdom. The Second Republic was a melting pot for disparate beliefs, and brewed an esoteric stew with elements of Terran and alien philosophical systems.

At times, these esoteric teachings were even in vogue, especially toward the end of the Second Republic — the Phavian Institute recruited alleged sorcerers in attempts to divine a connection between psychic power and magic. Occult societies struggled against each other, each one claiming its own light on the hidden truth. Their members claimed the wars were magical, with hosts of sorcerers casting spells at one another. The mystery religions begun by Sathraism had grown and changed — though some true Sathraic enclaves could still be found — and were now public. Though they were rooted in Sathraism, they had moved far enough away from true Sathraism that they were no longer considered a threat.

Many scientists held certain esoteric teachings in great regard — some terraformers, such as Doramos of Tyre, claimed their practice to be one-part mysticism, one-part science — and they studied alchemy and geomancy as adjunct skills. All manner of yogins, alchemists, geomancers, and mystics were accepted as representatives of cutting-edge science. Government leaders had metaphysical advisors, and occult counseling clinics opened to the public. The College of Sacred Sciences was opened on Byzantium Secundus. Not all scientists, however, had a liberal attitude toward esoteric sciences, and were quite alarmed by their meteoric rise in popularity — journals filled with scientific railings against the pseudoscientific babble infiltrating true science.

The Church was unhappy with this popularity, of course. It was lamentable that so many were blind to the teachings of the Prophet and were ensorcelled by the glamor of science. And truly it was insufferable that heretics and deviants ran about, hawking their "secret teachings" like religious carpetbaggers. Those occultists and would-be mystics who claimed to possess the true teachings of the Prophet were an abomination and an insult — priests taught and preached against the "Digammite Heresies" and warned the faithful against the dangers of intellectual pride. "Had we the power," said one bishop, "we would burn them to the ground." But the Church had little power against the psychics and mystics who boasted of their might and knowledge.

And now the occult had become accepted — in theory, at least — alongside with technology. The pious clergy of the Church prayed for salvation. Godless science was now married to diabolical magic.

## The Dark Ages

The fading of the suns gave the Church the power that it needed, and rallied the faithful around the common enemy of boundless science. To be sure, the sin of Invention was seen by most as the reason for the fading suns — "what horrors hath man wrought?" cried out Saint Dena. But others within the Church pointed to the "demoniac heresies" rampant in the Second Republic; and the esoteric schools which had been so popular toward the end of the Republic became public enemies, obvious havens of demon-worshippers and Antinomists. If Promethean science alone was not fully responsible for the fading suns, then these dark magics contributed.

The Digamma Apocrypha, for centuries merely a collection of circumspect religious texts, was officially a reviled corpus of dangerous and heretical occult teachings. Within centuries after the Divestiture, the books of the Digamma Apocrypha — and anything referred to them, or which simply reeked of "Digammite tendencies" — were banned, and possession of them was a heretical act.

The Church waged an ideological war against heresy on all fronts, but it could not crush the mystics and sorcerers. It is the nature of the occult to be hidden, and occult metaphysics survived the Church's onslaught. You could torture mystics and burn magical tomes, but esoteric belief is quite resilient; indeed, it thrives on secrecy, for as every occultist knows: Secrets have power.

## Destination: Eskaton

In the years following Vladimir's assassination, reports of a new "Eskatonic" movement were heard. Men and women had begun to travel the Known Worlds, questing after lost and hidden knowledge, ancient magics and alien artifacts. They had revived the Universalist Heresy, preaching the intolerable notion that the Pancreator's Divine Flame burned deeply within each and every one. They boldly quoted the Digamma Apocrypha, and even alluded to other verboten texts. *The Eskaton is coming!* they cried. *Fan the Flame within, lest ye be extinguished in the End Times! No man, no woman — no hireling priest! — is safe from oblivion that does not kindle the Burning Light of the Pancreator within thy breast!*

The key to salvation was not morality or obedience to the Church, they taught — in public! — but meditation and theurgy: magical arts which would ensure that the Flame Within burned brightly. Church leaders were more

## The Satanic Verses

The Second Republic was a time rich in esoteric discovery and exploration, as evinced not just by the number of sects which spontaneously grew but also by the number of esoteric tomes produced. Ancient texts were rediscovered and new texts penned, each offering tantalizing clues to the mysteries of the universe and purportedly teaching the magical arts.

Almost all of these tomes were banned by the Church after the Second Republic for reasons of heretical content and alien tendencies. Copies were diligently found and destroyed: rumors of hidden libraries still propel Eskatonics and Inquisitors alike in pursuit of these lost repositories, each with her own agenda.

### Stellar Apocryphon

One of the most famous — if not notorious — occult tomes, the Secret Book of the Stars, contains forgotten scriptures of the Prophet, much like the Digamma Apocrypha. But where the Digamma Apocrypha enjoyed at least some acceptability, the Stellar Apocryphon was banned immediately as a dark and unwholesome text. For more information on this text, see **Weird Places**.

### Apshai Tablets

The Apshai Tablets are among the most unusual occult texts of the Known Worlds. Salinas Vost, the author of the Tablets, was once an Orthodox priest sent by a vision to Apshai: there he learned many horrible secrets about the Universe from a secret group of Vau priests. After a terrifying ordeal in caves deep beneath the surface of Apshai, he was struck by a series of revelatory visions that spoke of a hostile intelligence at work in the universe — "a dark hand that closeth over the divine light."

Written many years before the Fall, this text contains many images that critics believe were prophecies of the fading suns. Sadly it foretells doom for the universe, as "the dark hand weighs victorious."

### The Ur-Texts

Lhan vo Khanash was, by many accounts, a madman: an Ur-Obun philosopher who traveled across space in pursuit of occult wisdom. Something happened in the pursuit of his studies that drove him irrevocably mad. The Ur-Texts are the result of either madness or divine revelation: "for the hand of the Maker did touch mine eyes, and open them to the past, the present, and the future."

Written in an ancient Obun dialect, the Ur-Texts tell of the ancient times, and an epic battle between celestial races seen as the forebears of the Ur-Obun and the Ur-Ukar — a battle which, if interpreted correctly, will be repeated at the end of time. In addition to "prophetic histories," the Ur-Text are manuals of discipline, offering techniques to develop the body as a theurgic vessel for theurgic rites the likes of which have not been seen in millennia, but will play an important part in the future.

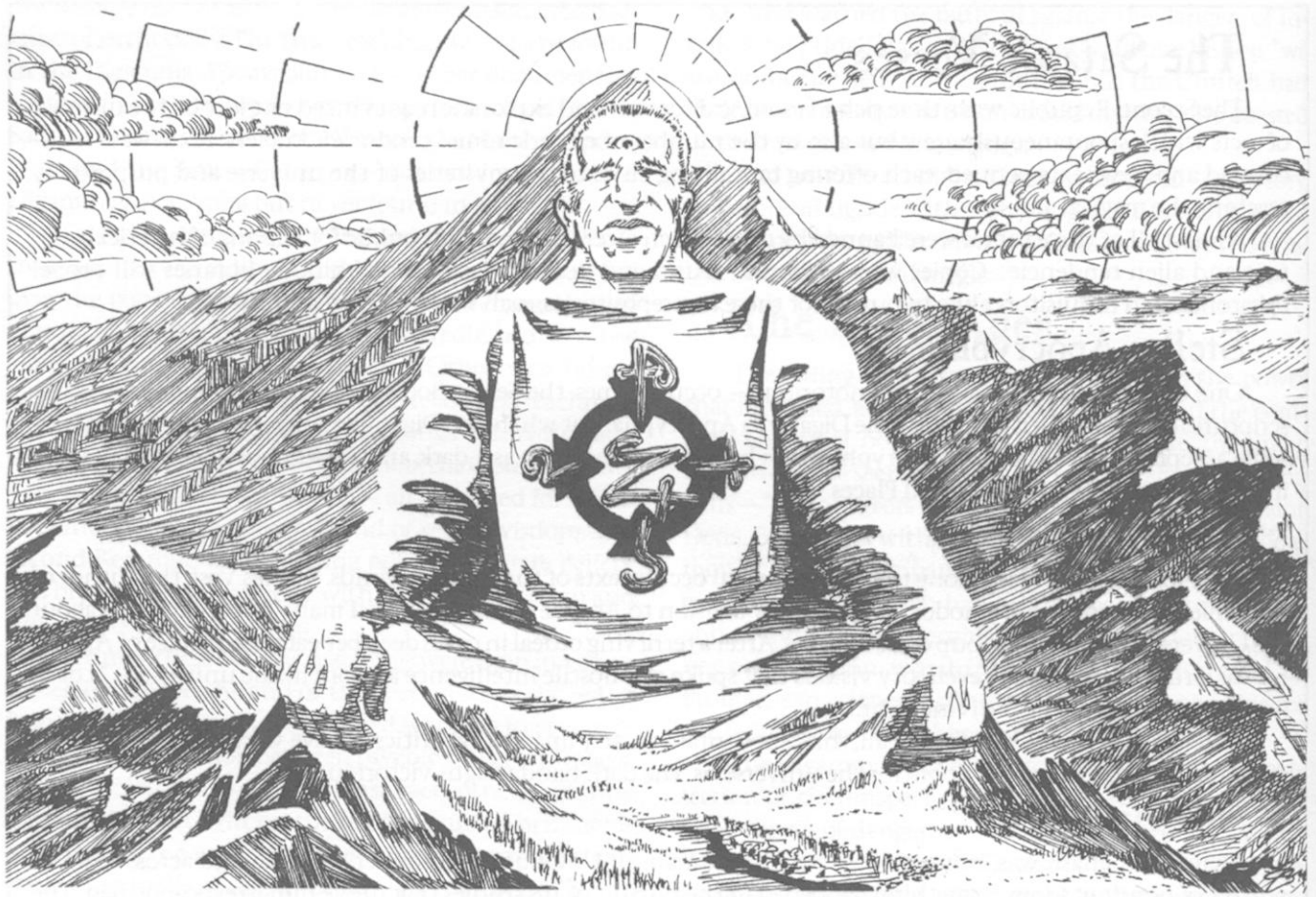
### Anunnaki Thunders

The Anunnaki Thunders are either an ancient revelation or an incredible hoax. The Thunders claim to be nothing less than direct teachings of the Anunnaki, revealed to an unnamed scribe who broke the text into 15 separate books, and distributed the books across space. Eleven of these have been recovered, although the Church destroyed most copies.

Each book of the Thunders contains a different revelation or mystical teaching, including the secrets of immortality, Anunnaki metaphysics, and doctrines of reincarnation. The first book claims that when the final book has been discovered at the appointed time, Creation shall be destroyed in a cataclysm — and only those who have mastered the teachings of the Thunders shall be saved. Some criticize the Thunders as so much hogwash, but apparently there is something in there worthy of Church hostility. Perhaps, as some have suggested, the Anunnaki Thunders are indeed a parody or hoax, but nonetheless contain within their words primal truths, hidden for only the most clever to see.

than simply concerned about the resurrection of the Universalist Heresy — they were outraged at the arrogance of such an affront to Church authority.

In many worlds, the Eskatonics had an electrifying effect: they taught that the power for salvation lay within, and not with the priesthood or the Church. The duty of the enlightened was to help the unenlightened, not to dispense grace with one hand and admonition with another. It was an empowering teaching, one which had its converts. It was this same essential idea which fired the popularity of the Incarnates, although that sect preached a more openly political message and sneered at the



Eskatonics' mystical hogwash.

When the Eskatonics first appeared, cycnics assumed that they would be simply a flash in the pan — if the Inquisition didn't deal with them, they would simply dissipate on their own. But then word spread of Deimos, the man behind the movement and the apparent cause of all this trouble.

## Deimos of the Holy Mountain

Little was known about the man before this period, but he claimed to have been an Orthodox priest:

*I was a selfish man, then, thinking only of my own station, as many priests are wont to do. I followed the precepts of the Church, and I preached devotion to Her and obedience to the Pancreator. But as I meditated one night, in a vision, Saint Horace, the Learned Man, appeared to me: and he spoke unto me, and bade me take and read his own words — for the Eskaton approached, and the Light of the Pancreator burned in so few of the faithful. Quest, and ye shall find.*

And so Deimos retired to a place he simply called "The Holy Mountain" and there he studied the entirety of the Digamma Apocrypha, and other esoteric texts. Where this mountain rests is still not known, although various "sacred mountains" across the Known Worlds have been suggested. Al-Malik Eskatonics have linked the Holy Mountain to the al-Malik esoteric philosophies of the Way of the Three Mountains — specifically, the Third Mountain itself — and some have even claimed that Deimos was a member of House al-Malik. While this is not a majority view within the Order, it is regarded with some interest. Many Eskatonics now believe that the Holy Mountain was simply a metaphor for isolated enlightenment, and that the Holy Mountain is a psychological state within everyone.

At times he traveled the Known Worlds, seeking sacred wisdom wherever it may be found. Eventually, he knew the time had come. Leaving the Holy Mountain, the took his gospels and his simple robe, and began teaching. Soon others like him flocked to him for guidance and leadership — here was a man compelled by the teachings of Saint Horace, a man who taught that there was strength in unity. All he asked for was a common acceptance of the Apocrypha of Horace — beyond that, men and women were free to argue what they so chose, as long as they continued to cultivate the Flame Within and share their knowledge with others in the hopes of enlightening a humanity shackled by the burden of ignorance. In his name, and in the name of the Eskaton, these men and women traveled and taught.

After a few years of "religious terrorism" — as the Church charged him with — Deimos disappeared; having served his holy purpose, he told his followers, the Holy Mountain called to him once more. He gave his blessings,

and appointed a successor, and departed his people's company. When he first appeared, it was with a rucksack filled with sacred texts; having learned that the truth was within, he departed with nothing but a staff. At least, so goes the Life of Saint Deimos, the compilation of Deimos' own teachings and last acts, penned in the last days of his leadership.

Outsiders have far less sentimental a view of Deimos. His less-tolerant critics accuse him of Antinomism, and call him the Devil's Own — guilty of spreading hateful lies about the Church, countermanding Orthodox authority, and popularizing the Universalist Heresy. Less-zealous critics merely find him to be a conman, a false priest lured by the powers of the occult, who preyed on the beliefs of the gullible and raised for himself an army of worshippers. He was certainly a charismatic speaker, and as a leader he did what few people could ever do — uniting mystics is as difficult as raising an army of cats, for both are easily distracted by their own fleeting agendas. But a saint? Never!

His followers ignore such criticisms, of course. Their own existence is a testament to Saint Deimos' holy purpose.

## The Pogrom

In spite of the popularity of some Eskatonics, many Eskatonics were simply ignored as lunatics teaching ancient meditative practices and quacking about alien texts and magic. And in some cases, the Eskatonics went too far. Mysticism just isn't palatable to the common man, they learned. Lydia of Daishan's tale is still remembered: *I am God!* had barely escaped her lips when a maddened crowd tore her apart, limb from limb. Sadly, they missed her sermon on the enlightened soul and the dissolution of the ego, which the martyred Lydia had prepared days before. It was actually quite good, if a bit opaque.

The Church stepped up its efforts. Eskatonic mystics and "priests" were no longer simply suspicious lunatics. They were outright heretics, and considered a threat to the Church. It certainly didn't help that many Eskatonics called the Church "the Weeping Whore" and the Prophet, "the Cuckold" — references to allegorical figures in the *Book of the Eskaton* — and cried out for the dissolution of a corrupt Orthodoxy.

Church officials demanded an outright pogrom of the Eskatonic heretics. The Eskatonics had taught in public but met in private: Now they were forced into complete secrecy. They preached in safehouses, open only to a select membership. Those few that preached in public were rounded up by Avestites within moments, and taken to Inquisition frigates for "penance." What Deimos began, the Church itself finished, however: the Church's oppression had only served to galvanize the beleaguered mystics, who sought the strength which lies in unity.

And so the Eskatonics continued their arcane practices in secret, harried by the Church at times but usually hidden enough to avoid detection. Many journeyed to Pentateuch — a world renowned for a population inclined toward mystical pursuits, and a world of many strange goings-on. There, many Eskatonics felt, they could hide in plain sight. In time Pentateuch developed a significant Eskatonic population, one which profited from Pentateuch's rich history of metaphysical pursuits.

## The Pentateuch Concordat

And so it went for a few centuries. Eskatonics skulked in philosophical alleyways, preached their outlawed ideologies in private, and secretly traversed the Known Worlds in constant pursuit of ancient knowledge and secret teachings, dodging Inquisitorial forces with some adroitness.

The Church and the general populace learned to associate metaphysical peculiarity with the Eskatonics. If something was Eskatonic, it was probably weird, and if something was weird it was no doubt Eskatonic. Just because something reeked of arcane doom-saying, however, it wasn't necessarily Eskatonic, and in fact many hermetic groups, unaffiliated with the Eskatonics, were lumped by outsiders with the Eskatonics. The "town Eskatonic" became a comical figure preaching imminent doom and chanting nonsense syllables as proof of his enlightenment.

The Symbiot Wars changed many things for the Known Worlds. When psionics and Eskatonic theurgy triumphed over the Symbiots, the Church was forced into some sort of compromise. Immediately after the Symbiot Wars, the Church called for a temporary moratorium on the persecution of "theurges, mystics, psychics, and others of ill repute, in the spirit of tolerance and salvation." The Patriarch called for a synod in 4955, to be held on Pentateuch, to discuss the issue of compromise and conciliation.

There, priests and theologians met with mystics and theurges, finally able to declare themselves publicly without reprisal (though many feared a trap, and wondered what would happen should the talks fall through). The delegates hammered out the details of a compromise over the course of two months, weighing the many options of integrating the Eskatonics into the Church Universal. The conference ended with the Pentateuch Concordat.

Summed up, the Concordat states the following:

I. *The Eskatonic Order* — No longer would the Eskatonics be persecuted as a verboten sect or a heretical society; instead, the Eskatonics would be integrated as a full Order of the Church Universal. Deimos of the Holy Mountain was begrudgingly accepted as a lesser Saint of the Church.

II. *The Authority of the Church* — As the Church shall end Eskatonic persecution, the Eskatonics shall recognize the authority of the Church Universal. Although the Eskatonic Order would maintain some autonomy, the Order as a whole was still answerable to the Patriarch, and its priests were still bound to the Canons of the Church.

III. *The Doctrinal Acceptance of the Digamma Apocrypha*

— The Church would no longer ban the Digamma Apocrypha and condemn its readers as heretics and Antinomists. The Digamma Apocrypha was now considered deuterocanonical: lesser revelations, and thus edifying scripture worthy of instruction and study — but still secondary to the Omega Gospels.

IV. *The Primacy of the Omega Gospels* — The Eskatonics shall accept the primacy of the Omega Gospels as the pure, revealed Truth of the Church and the manifest work of the Pancreator.

V. *The Teachings of the Universalist Heterodoxy* — The Universalist Heresy was moved to the vague position of Heterodoxy: thus it was still different from established Church Doctrine, but it was not a damnable belief.

VI. *The Practice of Theurgy* — The Church recognized the validity of theurgy as a spiritual practice, provided it satisfied two goals: the improvement of the human condition and the protection of the Church.

VII. *The Governance of Pentateuch* — The newfound Eskatonic Order would be granted governance of Pentateuch, which had long been a haven for many secret occultists.

The reaction was explosive. Many within the Church felt that Syneculla Salados, the leading Orthodox delegate, had surrendered too much to the Eskatonics — particularly where the governance of Pentateuch was concerned. Avestites accused Eskatonics of psychic dominion of the conference, and priests and theologians fumed at the notion that the Eskatonics would be their "equals." But the document was final, for the Syneculla's word was as binding and authoritative as that of the Patriarch, and the Church would have to endure.

## The Eskatonics Today

Acceptance breeds conformity.

Many hoped — or feared — that official recognition of the Eskatonics would lead to a new flowering of metaphysical study. It didn't.

Conciliation with the Church led to a new Eskatonic exploration of the Omega Gospels, which had been derided and cast aside as exoteric dross. Now that the Omega Gospels had to be accepted as supreme revelation, many Eskatonics turned to them and initiated a remarkable metaphysical exegesis of the Prophet's teachings — exegetical texts now read outside the Order with some measure of respect. Sadly, though, many within the fledgling Order now try to wean themselves off the disparate non-canonical texts which were once their lifeblood, in favor of exclusive study of the Omega Gospels.

The Eskatonics were guarded in their activities: although they were free from persecution, they were not given free reign to practice whatever arcane novelty came their way. Their studies had to exist entirely within the context of what some malcontents call the "Omega Tyranny" — the notion that everything must fall within the parameters of Orthodox acceptance. The Eskatonics were accepted, and this acceptance led some outspoken proponents within the Order to attempt to "mainstream" their beliefs, and thus attract new recruits. Many within the Eskatonics were already nominal members of the Church (albeit with their own slant), and the movement toward some Orthodoxy was inevitable.

This did little to repudiate their reputation as lunatics, however. The Eskatonics, for centuries an underground practice, were once more out in the open, and priests could parade down the streets, preaching of the still-imminent Eschaton and the need to fan the Inner Flame. But with these Eskatonics came those whose beliefs were utterly outside the pale: religious mystics branding themselves with arcane symbols, and talking to the spirits of the rocks and trees and even machines.

The Church holds little love for the Eskatonics, in spite of the tolerance espoused by the Pentateuch Concordat. Critics within the Church charge that the Eskatonics still study and teach forbidden alien teachings, and that the Order harbors many malcontents who would overthrow the Church — either for atheistic Republican ideals or in the name of Antinomism.

Deep within the Order are still those who hold the faith — those who quest in the mysteries of space for the clues to salvation. They wonder what has been lost by public acceptance, and some have even lamented the days of their past when adversity fueled the fire of their belief. Theirs are the secret roads to the stars and the hidden paths of illumination.

## Theology

*The Learned spoke unto his disciples, saying: the word of the Pancreator is like this. The thief in the night who steals the silver set atop the table shall not see the gold that lies hidden in dark corners. How is the word of the Pancreator like this?*

— The Logos Gospel

Attempting to define Eskatonic theology is much like trying to nail the proverbial jello to the tree — Eskatonic beliefs are slippery and often incoherent. It may be said that for each Eskatonic there is a different brand of belief, and no order within the Church encourages heterogeneity as much as the Eskatonics.

The Eskatonics have drawn their beliefs from a variety of disparate sources: ancient Terran metaphysics, alien philosophies, Second Republic hermetic beliefs, and Church teachings both orthodox and unorthodox. As such, Eskatonic teachings are a core sampling of different metaphysical strains held together loosely within the construct of Church epistemologies, and supplemented by a variety of different practices.

In spite of Eskatonic diversity, a set of core beliefs can be found at the heart of Eskatonic metaphysics; these ideas originate in the Omege Gospels but reach fruition in the Horace Literatures of the Digamma Apocrypha. The Pentateuch Concordat forced the Church to accept the legitimacy of these texts, if not their canonical status. Now,

common men and women have become attracted to these teachings, and look to the Eskatonics for instruction in them — threatening an already suspicious Orthodoxy.

## The Holy Flame

*And the Prophet said unto the Learned: bright is the soul of the man who is a shining lamp for the light of heaven, and salvation shall be his, for he is enlightened. Brighter still is the light of the enlightened who worketh to rekindle the divine light in the ignorant, and he shall be doubly-blessed.*

— The Logos Gospel

At the very heart of Eskatonic beliefs are the Digamma Apocrypha (particularly the Horace Literatures) and the Universalist Heterodoxy (born from a piece of stray scripture buried in the Omega Gospels).

Where Orthodoxy teaches that the soul of man is but a mirror for the Divine Light of the Pancreator, Universalist teachings espouse the notion that man's soul contains a very spark of the Holy Flame. Every single man or woman (human and alien) contains such a spark, called alternately the Flame Within, the Holy Flame, or the Inner Light. Yet only in the enlightened does the flame burn bright; in all others it is but a fading ember. After death, this flame — be it a blazing pyre or a small coal — continues onward, an everlasting soul, and returns to the Empyrean.

The Inner Light can be nourished, and fed. For most people, it is but a mere ember with a hint of light, though for some it may burn a little more strongly than others. The Enlightened, however, are those who have learned techniques to fan the flame of God within them, so that it burns brightly.

The Incarnates also subscribe to the Universalist Heterodoxy, but in a very different form. They have few if any mystical practices and do not believe that the individual has any power over fanning his own flame — that comes only from the Pancreator's grace. The responsibility of the Incarnate is to reach this transformative grace through right living.

## The End Times

*I have seen the end of time, when the hand of the Enemy shall close fast on Creation, snuffing out all Light. Only those souls whose Divine Light burneth as an inferno shall survive the cataclysm; all others shall perish.*

— The Book of the Eskaton

Inexorably linked to the Universalist beliefs are the teachings of the the End Times. The Digamma Apocrypha is filled with visions and revelations of the eschaton, or end times, but none play as strong a role as the Book of the Eskaton.

The Book of the Eskaton talks of the end of time, and the actions of Infernos, the "great enemy" — he who strives to snuff the Light of the Pancreator from the Universe. The Eskaton teaches of a great war, of the battle between good and evil, light and darkness, and how all beings — living and dead, clergy and laity, peasant and noble alike



— have a role to play. Those whose Inner Flame have been snuffed out through neglect or ignorance shall themselves be destroyed; but those who have fanned the Flame Within shall survive the great war, the time of icy cold and black shadow, and shall reside in the Empyrean with a victorious Pancreator.

## Theurgy

*Study, that ye may light the match of the soul: meditate, that ye may apply the match to the quiescent ember of God within: act, that ye may kindle the flame into a pyre. True theurgy is the working of the nourished soul.*

— The Epistles of Horace

The human soul is a spark of the divine, and in the Eskaton, only the brightest burning souls shall endure. How then is the Flame Within to be rekindled and nourished? For the Eskatonics, there are many ways to feed the Holy Flame, including study of sacred scriptures and meditation; but no way excels as much as the practice of theurgy.

True theurges learn that they do not practice theurgic arts simply to affect the world about them, but to affect their inner state — it tempers the soul and strengthens it, lighting the spark of the Pancreator so that is a blazing pyre of Divine Light. What so many people fail to realize is that for the Eskatonics, theurgy is as process-oriented as it is goal-oriented. The process of learning and practicing theurgy is important as the goal sought, and is of vital importance in rekindling the divine light. The magical effect, no matter how powerful, is a fleeting thing — but the condition required to use theurgy is long-lasting, and to develop it is to climb toward enlightenment.

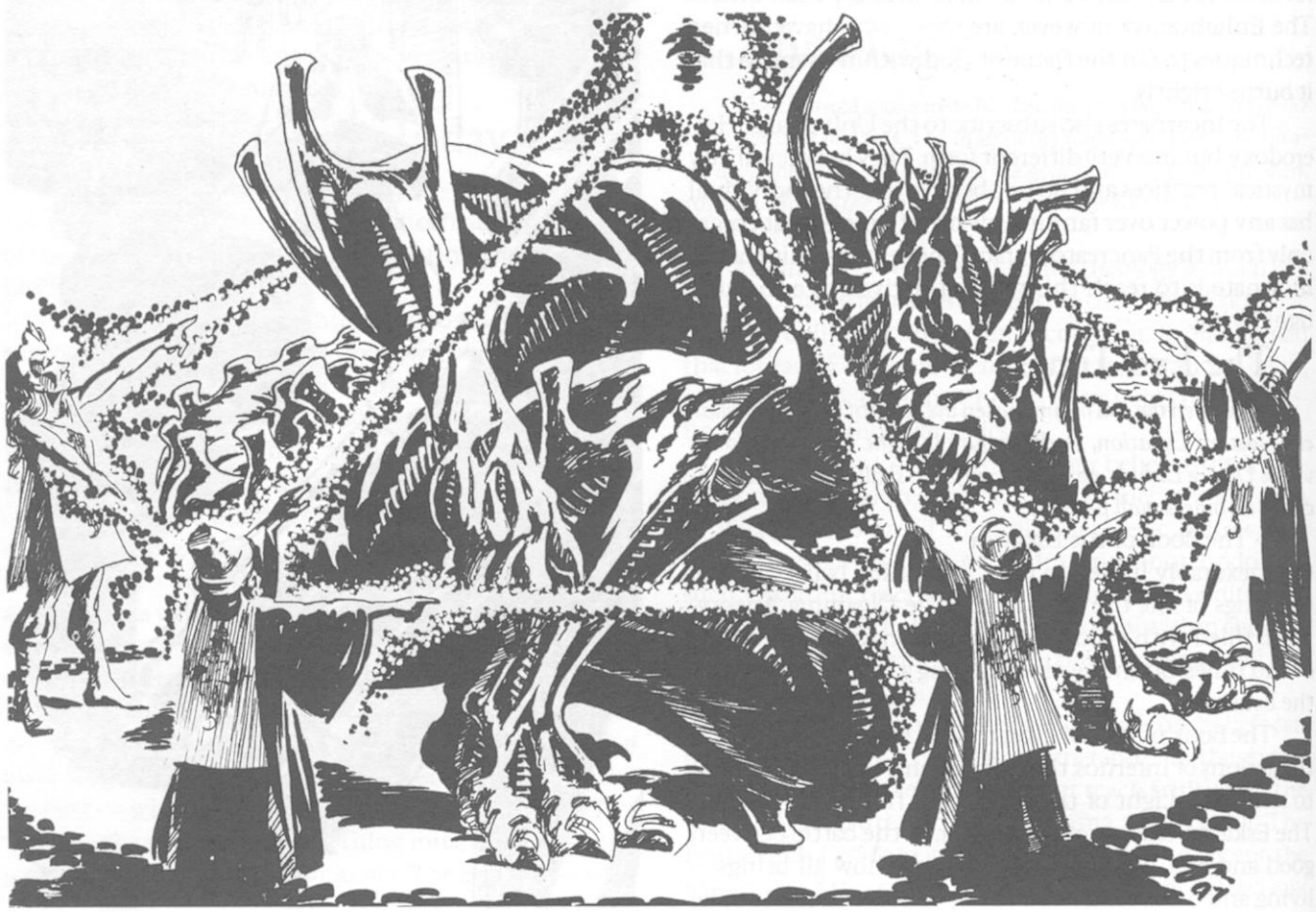
## Sacred Sciences

To understand the Eskatonics purely in light of their core teachings would be to underestimate the depths of their metaphysics. Beyond the basic beliefs of Eskatonic Universalism are the various sacred sciences that are the repositories of millennia of arcane teachings on the metaphysical nature of the Universe: some Eskatonics are so involved in these issues, in fact, that they often seem to ignore the ministry of enlightening the ignorant — thus leading to the not entirely false stereotype of the Eskatonic as the selfish magician obsessed with his quest for knowledge.

In truth, many of these sciences overlap, just as within each science there is no small amount of conflict. An Eskatonic who has mastered Ur-Obun concepts on the nature of the soul will not necessarily agree with a mystic knowledgeable in reconstructed Terran tribal beliefs. And all too often they will argue with each other instead of trying to find a common ground.

The sacred sciences are frequently classified as various Colleges, each one emphasizing a different concern:

**Cosmogony**: A good many Eskatonics are concerned with the nature of Cosmogony, a reflection of primordial



truths. Eskatonic cosmologies include the ancient model of the 10 Emanations of the Celestial Sun, a concept millennia old. Some Eskatonics believe that certain glyphs found burned into rocks on uninhabited planets are Anunnaki representations of this very same cosmogony. For some Eskatonics, cosmogonic study is purely theoretical, but others know better. It is also the study of the Empyreans aligned with the 10 Sefiros, and many cosmogonic texts include rites of summoning various Empyric intelligences.

Some mystics study in darkened chambers, reading banned texts which detail the Qlippoth, or opposing Emanations of Infernos — the dark counterpart and rival to the Pancreator. Herein there be demons. This entire branch of study has been long forbidden to the Eskatonics, even before the Pentateuch Concordat; but the lure of great power is often too difficult to overcome.

**Astrology**: With the new Empire and the acceptance of the Eskatonics, astrological studies are making a comeback. The Eskatonics preserved and embellished the occult teachings of the Doctrine of the Holy Flame, and the notion that each star emanated different energies. Countless starmaps and astrological treatises, lost since the Fall, are now being sought by Eskatonics across the Known Worlds — texts which detail the occult properties of stars now lost to the Empire, and which the Emperor would dearly love to find anew.

**Geomancy**: Deep within each planet is a piece of the Holy Flame, just as deep within the soul of humanity lies the Flame Within — at least, according to the geomancers who study the spiritual landscape of planets. Geomancy reached its zenith during the Second Republic, as some schools of terraforming combined science and mysticism. Eskatonic Geomancers have preserved one half of the ancient science — the purely mystical side — but have lost the technological skills possessed by Second Republic geomancers. Still, they study planet after planet in attempts to divine where the world's Holy Flame erupts to the surface, creating junctures of pure magical energy that connect and crisscross in ley lines. They hope to discern geomantic rites which will affect the physical makeup of a planet, and to learn how to tap Wyrd directly from a planet's native energies in order to fuel massive, powerful theurgies the likes of which have never been seen.

**Alchemy**: Alchemy is the science of transmutation: for the base, it is merely the transmutation of material substances, while for the enlightened, it is the transformation of the soul. Alchemical operations work by analogy and allegory, and the belief in correspondences: the work of the alchemist in performing the transmutation of one material into another is mirrored within the alchemist's soul; thus many see alchemy as a viable means of burnishing the Flame Within. Gold is a prized metal in alchemy, but not simply because of its monetary value: gold is the metal of the sun, and thus it is the metal which represents the Pancreator's Holy Flame.

**Somatology**: Somatology is the study of the body; but for the Eskatonics, it is more properly the study of the relationship between the living body and the Flame Within. Somatologists purport that the Holy Flame within also erupts at the surface of the body in specific points, and a series of meridians connect these points — not at all unlike the philosophies of the Geomancers. The body is the vessel for the quickening spirit of the divine, and as such the vessel is sometimes unworthy or incapable of containing the Inner Flame.

Thus the somatologists study and practice various means to improve the physical body, and make it a more worthy vessel of the Holy Flame: from herbal treatments to cleanse and strengthen the body, to body movements and bodywork designed to clear the meridians, these are all techniques which also cultivate the Inner Light.

Many somatological teachings are oral, and only a few tomes contain their secrets: they must be passed on from teacher to student. It is not surprising that somatologists tend to be among the most hearty and healthy members of the Order, often in robust physical shape. They are also quite talented healers, who use unorthodox treatments like inserting gold needles along meridians to speed up the healing process or boost immunity to disease. The practitioners of Bharata zhoVeda, a technique combining ancient Terran and Ur-Obun arts, are among the most well-known somatologists of the Eskatonic Order.

**Pneumatology**: Pneumatology is the study of the spirit, including the human soul, the Flame Within, and the Empyric intelligences. Pneumatologists also seek ways to cultivate the Inner Flame, but seek more mental paths than do the Somatologists, including prayer and meditation. Pneumatology, like cosmology, is a highly theoretical field, and it draws upon a number of sources.

Orthodox critics accuse Eskatonic pneumatologies of "smacking of pagan animism," and with just cause — it is common for Eskatonic pneumatologists to preach of the "spirit of the wind, of the trees, of the animals, of the very rocks at our feet," (as Davin of Lethos put it) alleging that the Holy Flame, in fact, pervades everything in space, in one unifying web of Creation.

**Psychology**: Esoteric psychology is the occult study of human behavior; to the Eskatonics, it is the belief that various personality types and disorders tell us different things about the condition of the Flame Within. Equally important is the ongoing study of whether eccentrics are encouraged to mysticism or whether the study of theurgy breaks down the mind — many Eskatonics have ended their careers as madmen, in pursuit of "the horrible truth."

**Eschatology**: This is literally the study of the End Times, and many Eskatonics pore over apocalyptic revelations in an attempt to greater understand the coming Eskaton. When will it happen? What will it be like, exactly? What are the signs of its imminent arrival? The Eskatonics have cataloged hundreds of omens and prophecies which speak of the End Times. This is a course of

## Opinions

**Urth Orthodox**: They peddle chaff and burn wheat. Too bound by their own aspirations.

**Brother Battle**: These martyrs have too often been turned against us. What we fight in spirit they fight in body.

**Temple Avesti**: Superstitious zealots with flameguns.

**Sanctuary Aeon**: Helpful, if simple.

**Hesychasts**: An unpredictable lot, they would unknowingly use the Stellar Apocryphon as kindling on a cold night.

**Charioteers**: Purveyors of ill-gotten goods and pilots to forbidden destinations...we like them!

**House Juandaastas**: Spiritually minded and well-versed in philosophy. What the nobility should be like.

**Ur-Obun**: There is still much to learn from them; somewhere in their culture are the keys to ancient wisdom.

study that sadly leads to doom-saying and slight paranoia, as every darkening sky is the hand of the Pancreator over a sinful world.

# Canon

When the Eskatonics became an Order of the Church, they were forced to codify many of their practices into discrete traditions and patterns of behavior. The Eskatonics were now a single Order of priests, and it meant some consolidation of tradition and behavior.

## Eskatonic Rank

When among themselves and away from Orthodox ears, the Eskatonics follow a different set of terms for levels of authority within their Order:

| Eskatonic | Orthodox equivalent |
|---|---|
| Novitiate | Novitiate |
| Provost | Canon |
| Illuminatus | Deacon |
| Philosophus | Priest |
| Magister | Bishop |
| Presbuteros | Archbishop |

Eskatonics frequently refer to each other simply as "Brother" or "Sister," regardless of rank.

# Ordination

The Eskatonics pride themselves on their learning and their vast philosophical speculation; however, since they believe that anyone with the proper training may learn to cultivate the Inner Flame — the Pancreator would not create a being condemned to oblivion! — they do not have any educational or intellectual criteria as requisites to joining the Order, beyond a questing mind and sympathy for Eskatonic Universalism.

**Tertiaries**: Men or women interested in joining the Order may do so at any age, and from any station in life. They are admitted to the Order as Tertiaries — allowed to observe the more common Eskatonic rituals, live in Eskatonic communities, and even share in open discussions. Typically the Tertiary finds the speculative occultism of the Eskatonics intimidating or incomprehensible and leaves of his own accord; a Tertiary may always return to the Eskatonic community at a later time. A good many people have flirted with Eskatonic teachings, and Eskatonic Tertiaries may be found in all walks of life, from nobles to merchants to soldiers.

A tertiary considered bright enough to pursue esoteric studies. A tertiary is usually enrolled in the Naos, the Eskatonic seminary on Pentateuch where she learns the basics of Eskatonic (and Church) history, and any academic skills necessary to pursue arcane studies. Upon completion of this study, she is initiated into the lowest rung of Eskatonic authority and becomes a novitiate — a full-fledged priest of the Universal Church.

**Novitiate**: As a priest, the Eskatonic dispenses grace as a priest of the Universal Church. All Eskatonic priests have the twofold duty of study and preaching. They must cultivate the Holy Flame and encourage others to do so as well, teaching meditative methods and warning of the dangers of the upcoming Eskaton.

Each novitiate is assigned a Confessor — an older, wiser Eskatonic who hears the novitiates' confession and also offers guidance along his spiritual path. Although any priest may hear a confession, the role of Confessor-as-mentor must always be filled by a priest of at least Illuminatus rank.

**Ordination Rituals**: Each rung along the Eskatonic political ladder is accompanied by a unique ritual. Secret Eskatonic Ordination rituals are essentially unchanged from those first devised by Saint Deimos, although some facile wording about obedience to the Church Universal has since been added.

## Advancement

In principle, advancement in the Eskatonic Order is a fairly simple process, and is supposed to be an indication of enlightenment and wisdom; in reality, it is a convoluted practice and an exercise in politics. A priest wishing to be Ordained to a higher rank must first petition another priest of superior rank; an oversight committee closely observes the priest's preaching and behavior. He must attend a series of interviews with Eskatonic hierophants, who will determine his "degree of illumination." Based upon all this, the Committee will potentially recommend Ordination to a higher rank. For some priests, the process is easy and fast — "the fire burns brightly within, and is evident to all" — but for most it is a lengthy process taken up with meetings, interviews, and some political positioning.

With each subsequent initiation, the priest gains more authority within the Order and even some modicum of respectability from the Church at large. Rank is also significant in terms of arcane learning — a higher-ranked priest will not teach all of his or her secrets to a lesser ranked priest, and with each initiation, more arcane secrets are revealed.

There is a common misconception, however, that the Eskatonics have a single corpus shared at each initiatory level: this is untrue. A philosophus expert on Ur somatological techniques and a philosophus scholar of Second Republic astrology each has his own secrets. Of course, this makes the learning process within the Eskatonic Order somewhat challenging — one may have to travel across space to find an Eskatonic versed in the same interests.

More than one Eskatonic has entirely eschewed the political process of advancement in favor of personal illumination. Think not that the novitiate encountered in the deep reaches of space is a green and callow mystic! A true master is not always determined by his vestments.

**Presbuteroi:** The Presbuteroi are the Council of Elders which oversee the Order's activities. Its members choose one of their grouping to act as Magus — the leader of the entire Order. The Presbuteroi meet annually to review the actions of the past year, and if necessary, reverse decisions or actions of the Magus and even select a new one.

Before the Pentateuch Concordat, the Presbuteroi were the final authority on Eskatonic matters. That authority has now been ceded to the Patriarch.

# Behavior

## Ethics

The Eskatonics were not known for moral purity, and more than one Eskatonic has fallen into vice. The Orthodox use this little-concealed fact to repudiate the Eskatonics whenever possible, showing that the way of the occultist is the way of immorality. Surely Invention cannot be far behind!

Regardless, members of the Eskatonic Order do follow a code of behavior, based on the teachings of the Learned as interpreted by Saint Deimos. This code is called the Rule of Perfection, and calls for the following:

**Celibacy** — Eskatonics may not marry; the Enlightened must marry Sacred Sophia, the ideal of wisdom, not some earthly creature. (Interestingly, this says absolutely nothing of chastity.)

**Obedience** — No Eskatonic may ever countermand the authority of one of higher rank. An Eskatonic priest must always be obedient to the wishes of his Confessor. No priest may tutor a priest of higher rank, for it is unseemly.

**Humility** — Pride is the downfall of the mighty. Hubris is to be avoided, lest the guilty soul walk the road to damnation and leave a burnt world in its wake. Flagellation and constant penance are required to avert this dark





end — particularly among eager Eskatonics whose feckless practice of theurgy reaps bitter fruit.

**Secrecy** — The secrets of the Eskatonics are not for mass consumption, for many of them are too powerful and would scorch the minds of the ignorant, and be weapons in the hands of evil. While some general teachings may be shared, theurgy is among the most guarded secrets of the Order.

## Dress

Eskatonics are often visible by their garments. A priest living in an Eskatonic community must wear a simple black, brown, or white robe covered by a short black mantle adorned with the Eskatonic Order's symbol.

Itinerant Eskatonics may dress as they like, but typically will wear their mantle of priesthood over traveling clothes. As one of the Enlightened, they must always announce their presence for the ignorant to see. There are times when a priest must travel incognito, of course, and this reality is recognized.

In fact, many wandering Eskatonics adopt styles of dress designed to inculcate humility. Typically the priest will wear a camel-hair shirt (or some other rough fabric) — constant discomfort can have a humbling effect. Some go overboard, though, and adopt even more peculiar styles of dress: the occasional reports surface of an Eskatonic naked beneath his priestly mantle — which does nothing to conceal — and hauled off to jail for public indecency. "Clothing is vanity!" cry some, while others mumble about the negative energy interactions of fabric with the Inner Light's external currents.

# Holy See

## Lands

The Eskatonics own very few properties; they measure their wealth in spiritual wisdom, not firebirds, but enlightenment does not pay rent.

## Pentateuch

Pentateuch is the home world for the Eskatonic Order, and a more suitable world could not be found. Terraformed by the Second Republic world-alchemist Doramos of Tyre, Pentateuch is a land of sweeping plains, vast forests, and arid desert, with minimal human settlement. A safe haven to bohemians, artists, philosophers, poets and mystics, Pentateuch is now emerging from centuries of harsh Orthodox dominion.

The world is known for strange incidents, including mysterious appearances or disappearance and rains of fire from the sky, but the most peculiar such phenomenon is the recurrent Sirocco — a psychic storm which sweeps Pentateuch's surface, sometimes causing physical devastation and often leaving strange visions or psychic abilities in its wake.

**Heliopolis**: The capital of Pentateuch, Heliopolis, is the

## The Sanhedrin

Policing the Eskatonics is quite a feat; forbidden teachings, Antinomism, occult dangers all threaten to tempt and seduce Eskatonics questing for divine insight. Outsiders mutter that the whole lot is suspect, but in truth only a few drift into blatently diabolical studies.

Eskatonic teachings lead one close to occult dangers, and more than one Eskatonic has strayed into dark territories. The Sanhedrin are Eskatonics called in to investigate cases before the Inquisition is alerted; priest found guilty of such offenses are counseled against their sin and sometimes forced to undergo rigorous penance.

A few rogue Eskatonics are deemed corrupt enough to actually necessitate being surrendered to the Inquisition. The Eskatonics know all too well the dangers of Hubris, and realize that in spite of the Inquisition's many excesses, it does have a valid role to fill. Sanhedrin are often called in to locate and round up rogue Eskatonics, and theirs is a dangerous task: Their culprits are often versed in dark and deadly ways, and will think nothing of slaying a Sanhedrin investigator.

**Dress**: A Sanhedrin is easily identified (by other Eskatonics) by his black hooded cloak and gold pin with the Eskatonic emblem, and by his Staff of Censure — a meter-long gold-toned rod engraved with symbols marking his legislative authority, which can be used as a mace if things get messy. Some Sanhedrin are believed to have magically augmented staves which serve as Wyrd tabernacles or aid in theurgic practice.

### Sanhedrin Characters

The Sanhedrin have the authority — and the ability — to act as necessary to fulfill their office. They are equally investigator, bounty-hunter, marshal, and judge, as the case demands.

**Characteristics**: Faith, Perception, Calm, Theurgy
**Natural Skills**: Fight, Impress, Observe, Shoot
**Learned Skills**: Inquiry, Stoic Mind, Lore (Occult), Lore (Doctrine), Search
**Benefices**: Sanhedrin Commission (3 pts), Studded Leather Armor (1 pt), med pistol (2 pts)

philosophical center of the Eskatonic universe. The Basilica of Ss. Paulus and Horace is located in the very center of the city — Eskatonics pray and meditate here day and night, and the courtyard surrounding it is filled with Eskatonic preachers, each with his own fevered visions. The Naos is located in Heliopolis, where the Order trains new priests and Eskatonic mystics sometimes come to study in the Naos Library.

For more information on Pentateuch, see **Weird Places**.

### The Monastery of St. Horace

Listen long enough, and you'll hear rumors about the Monastery of St. Horace — a place whose existence few can confirm. These rumors say that this well-hidden monastery is carved out of a large asteroid, floating in space. The asteroid was located by the Learned, who instructed his followers to retire here in contemplation of the sacred mysteries; some identify it with Deimos' "Holy Mountain."

The monastery's library is filled with occult lore and ancient tomes from across space, many which are otherwise lost to time. According to the legends which speak of the monastery, only the most enlightened Eskatonics may even find the library. According to some rumors, the monastery is in orbit around around a Lost Sun, its jumpgate sealed after the Fall; others place it in any number of systems, including Vau and Symbiot space. Some tales indicate that the monastery is mobile, propelled slowly by massive, ancient engines.

### Other Monasteries

With the acceptance of the Eskatonic Order, Eskatonic monasteries — some the homes of only a handful of priests — are cropping up across the Known Worlds, much to the Orthodoxy's chagrin. These are typically out of the way, in remote places inaccessible by common transportation, and free from prying eyes.

## Flock

The Eskatonics preach to whomever will listen, and Eskatonics wander towns and cities, preaching from atop crates in bazaars, hawking their metaphysical wares and warning of the End Times. Others take more subtle routes, and preach from small chapels to a regular congregation.

The Eskatonic message is appealing, and intriguing — as the suns continue to fade, and dark times loom in the future, more people turn to the Order's teachings for solace and protection. Now that the Order is a valid Church order, more nobles have begun to include Eskatonic priests in their entourage. Not all Eskatonics are madmen — they can be filled with sound, sensible advice, and some Eskatonic priests are intuitive folk who make excellent counselors and advisors.

## Hagiography

### Magus Moore

Moore was chosen as Magus of the Eskatonic Order only recently. Originally from Manitou, he migrated to Pentateuch under the lure of the world's rich philosophical community; it was there he met a representative of the then-hidden Eskatonic society and joined its ranks. He acted as an advisor and legate during the Pentateuch Concordat and succeeded the previous Magus after that sage's disapearance during the Emperor Wars. His is not an easy




task: he must balance the radical teachings of the Eskatonics with the extreme fears of the Orthodox and not undo the gains of the Pentateuch Concordat.

Magus Moore's role at the Concordat was instrumental: he was able to convey many of the less-appreciated Eskatonic beliefs to the Orthodox, making the teachings more understandable and less frightening. He has continued in this role since becoming Magus. Before his political role he studied storytelling as a means of conveying primal truth, and he has continued to apply his studies in semiotics, metaphor and art to the dissemination of frequently misunderstood Eskatonic teachings.

### Brother Balthazar

"If it is to be known, Balthazar will know it." This is the mantra of those who have met with this enigmatic priest and those who seek him out.

Very little is known about Balthazar's background, but those who have met with him report meeting a remarkable man. In addition to his charisma and spiritual mastery, he is a treasure trove of information unknown elsewhere. Although he does not accept students, many Eskatonics claim to have met him and been utterly transformed by the experience. For this reason, many seek him out across the Known Worlds — sometimes in pursuit of his knowledge, other times simply in the hopes of receiving great wisdom.

Brother Balthazar can almost never be found. He finds you. Typically he is encountered in various agoras, in a small stall filled with books he never seems to reference. (One visitor reported seeing a copy of the Stellar Apocryphon within Balthazar's book-stall.) One week he could be on one world, and then he is across space a week later. There is no apparent pattern to his journeys, and he never stays in one place for very long — usually no more than a day.

Some Eskatonics have even begun to claim that Brother Balthazar is not truly human, but is an embodied Empyric intelligence. Of course, they'll claim anything, so who is to say?

# Roleplaying

## Playing an Eskatonic Priest

Here are some suggested character types:

Sorcerer: Enlightenment be damned. You pay lipservice to the Order and the Church, but you're in it for the magic.

Collector: The possession of an occult artifact interests you only half as much as the actual acquisition of it. You are an expert scholar and investigator — and yes, even thief if need be.

Republican: You long for the days of old, when the sacred sciences were not mocked and your kind was not subservient to the Orthodox. You are one of the conspirators aiming to build a Third Republic.

Apostate: You've dabbled in one forbidden text too

many, and you've delved in studies forbidden even by the Eskatonics. Defrocked and exiled, you're on the run from Eskatonic and Inquisitor alike.

## Gamemastering the Eskatonic Order

The **Fading Suns** setting is one of weird occultism, collapsed empires and a dark future — and the Eskatonics play on all these themes. Gamemasters wishing to run games for Eskatonic characters, or who want to incorporate the Order into a new or ongoing story, can consider the following ideas.

**In Search of...** Eskatonics quest, following the word of the Prophet and the Learned, and any number of Eskatonic stories could be established around the quest for ancient artifacts, lost magical tomes, and hidden civilizations. All too often, the quest will end in complete failure, but even one success can change the face of the Empire, as some terrifying weapon is discovered or a demonic entity unleashed....

**The Dogs of War:** A group composed equally of Eskatonic, Brother Battle and Avestite priests is dispatched to a distant world to investigate rumors of a possible coven of Antinomists. The truth turns out to be far worse, as the priests must fight an entire town possessed by demonic entities. At stake: the future of the planet itself, as powerful Antinomist magics threaten to scar and stain the besieged world.

**The Heart of Darkness:** Terrorist activities on both Byzantium Secundus and Holy Terra are linked to a pro-Republican group with contacts in the Eskatonic Order. The Eskatonic characters (and their colleagues) must try to unravel the tangled web of cat-and-mouse politics, find who is responsible, and stop them.

# Traits

The following new traits may be used in creating **Fading Suns** characters, particularly when designing Eskatonic priests.

## Occult Sciences

Church skill

**Roll:** Wits + Occult Science

Occult Sciences is a category of skills which cover the various areas of metaphysical study found in the Eskatonic Order. Each "College" listed above (e.g., Astrology, Geomancy, etc.) must be bought as a separate Occult Science. The Occult Science "Alchemy" is already discussed in **Fading Suns.**

# Affliction

**Visionary** (1 pt): The character receives prophetic visions, often opaque and hard to understand. While Eskatonic mystics might think the character gifted, most other people think him mad or even possessed. The nature of the visions — and whether they have any meaning or are just the result of a mental disorder — are up to the gamemaster. They do not warn of imminent danger.

# Benefices

**Sanhedrin Commission** (3 pts): The character is a member of the Sanhedrin, and thus carries the clout of Eskatonic authority: the Inquisition will not question him for the possession of contraband goods, and members of the Eskatonic Order are obliged to cooperate with him in his investigations. Although Sanhedrin must still obey local jurisdictions, the Eskatonic Order will come to his aid if he has broken laws while performing his duty.

**Eskatonic Tertiary** (1 pt): This may not be taken by
me time with





the Eskatonics, and may even one day join their ranks. For now he does not possess any of their secrets, but he is versed in their basic beliefs and is welcome in Eskatonic communities.

# Theurgy

## Cypher

**(Level 2, Introvert + Observe, PG, perpetual, 1W)**

By means of this simple rite, an Eskatonic priest may magically transform a single page of into so much gibberish — words are written in unrecognizable alphabets, bizarre pictures take the place of paragraphs, illustrations are replaced by other words or pictures, etc. Only by another casting of this spell may the text be read again. This is a common way of preserving secrets from the unitiated outside the Order. Some Eskatonics allege that the gibberish produced by this spell is not gibberish at all — it is a magical tongue and pictoral vocabulary of the Empyreans, which mortal men and women are simply blind to.

Obviously any priest who knows this spell may unlock the text. Some cypher variants are rumored to exist — spells which can lock the text's cypher and encode it with certain words which must be invoked for the spell to be reversed, thus adding one more level of security to the concealed text.

## Burning Fist

**(Level 6, Faith + Vigor, PG, instant, 1W)**

Similar to the Level 6 Brother Battle ritual, "Smiting Hand," this rite draws forth the Holy Flame within and turns it to tangible power to strike down the forces of darkness. Victory dice from this rite may be added to the priest's fist or kick damage, in addition to normal combat damage. The Eskatonics believe it is sinful to use this rite

## Bharata zhoVeda Martial Actions Chart

| Martial Action | Lvl | Roll | Init | Goal | DMG | Effect |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pour the Water | 5 | Dx+Fight | -1 | -2 | N/A | Loss of bladder control; target can resist with a Wits + Vigor roll. |
| Ignite the Fuse | 6 | Dx+Fight | -2 | -1 | 4 | Intense pain |
| Shutter the Light | 7 | Dx+Fight | -1 | +4 | N/A | Unconsciousness; target can resist with Endurance + Stoic Mind |
| Open the Mind's Eye | 8 | Dx+Fight | -2 | -3 | 1 | Synaptic confusion |

against any but the unliving or those who have been tainted by the demonic, for the Pancreator weeps when His own might is turned against His flock.

## Martial Art: Bharata zhoVeda

Bharata zhoVeda is a relatively modern martial art only a few hundred years old, but its roots are millennia old: it was created as a synthesis of systems from Urth (specifically the Indian subcontinent) and Ur-Obun martial and bodyworking techniques. It is a free-flowing art which focuses on avoiding blows and turning an attack back onto the aggressor: kicks and punches tend to be close-range and undramatic, with great power hidden in subtle motion. Bharatists are skilled in ending a fight quickly — not with flair. Students of Bharata zhoVeda are versed in a variety of somatological techniques, and direct their attacks at prime meridians for often devastating effect.

Bharata is predominantly an "internal" art, and its true value is learned at greater levels of expertise — any Martial Arts action level 7 or above can be learned for one experience point less than the standard cost.

The following actions are based on blocking or rerouting the target's meridian energy. Pressure from even a single finger, applied correctly, can cause crippling pain and any number of effects.

**Pour the Water (Level 5):** A jabbing punch with three fingers to the target's bladder or kidneys designed to activate the body's bladder-voiding response. While it delivers no damage, it can cause great embarassment to the target, enough to perhaps startle or suprise him and place him on the defensive. This can only be successfully performed against a single opponent once per span.

**Ignite the Fuse (Level 6):** A well-placed press to one of the target's nerves, causing intense pain. The target suffers a -1 penalty on all rolls that turn per victory point the attacker scores on the goal roll.

**Shutter the Light (Level 7):** A massaging grasp to the neck to render the target unconscious for one turn per victory point on the goal roll.

**Open the Mind's Eye (Level 8):** A deliberate blow to the target's forehead, the location of the psychic third eye, to cause synaptic confusion. The target suffers a -1 penalty on all rolls per victory point the attacker scores on the goal roll. The effect lasts for an entire span.



# Burning Faith: Temple Avesti

## by Sam Inabinet

*The address supplied by my informant led me to a small factory-warehouse in the grimy back alleys of the garment district. An untended wooden door around the corner from the loading bay gave in after two stout kicks.*

*I stepped in past a comptroller's cage, silencing the occupant by granting him a clear view down the inner length of my flamegun's muzzle. "For the sake of your family and your eternal soul, please keep your hands away from the alarm," I intoned through my breather-mask.*

*Checking to be certain the loading area was clear, I stepped forward and shot a high arc of fire into the upper reaches of the structure, high enough to be seen by anyone in the warehouse. All around me, innocents (such though they be) looked up in blank animal panic and began to sprint for the exits.*

*As my warning fire sizzled on the maxicrete floor behind me, I moved into the manufacturing plant, where great antique belt printers chugged and hissed, slapping ugly designs onto cheap fabrics. Those workers nearest saw me and started to back away stupidly, but I needed to clear the building faster. Snatching up a canister of spray adhesive, I lobbed it down one lumbering belt into the shimmering haze of a flash dryer.*

*The blast did little more than rattle the heat duct above, but it emptied the factory before the rolling black plume had climbed to the ceiling girders. I spotted an office entrance and dashed in.*

*Sweeping through a crowded maze of cubicles, my bulky asbestite vestments sent pens and papers flying from desks. The place was dark, the staff gone for the evening, but a large door at the end of the hall ahead was lined with light. When I drew near I was blinded for an instant as the door swung open and a hulking bullet-headed form filled the frame. It muttered, "Trouble, Squire Gordo!"*

*"Then take care of it already, Carl!" came the reply from within.*

*The figure loomed toward me and I could make out the face. "Carlus Antonius Gilhooley!" I barked, and he stopped short upon hearing his proper name. "Is this what you want, Carlus? Is it worth it to you, to destroy yourself for that thing in there?" There was an uneasy silence while an oily wisp of Ka-reeking smoke coiled up between us. "Go home now, Carlus. Go home to your woman and your little ones. And try to find some honest work along the way. Enslave thyself no longer to these so-called ideals of Republican capitalism!"*

*Carlus' great shoulders shook with a grim chuckle. "I figgered the League'd bust us sooner'r later," he said. "S'funny, though. I din't 'spect the Temple Avesti..."*

*"Nobody expects the Temple Avesti, Carlus. Go now." I stepped aside to let him push past. "And I will be seeing you in confession next worship-day."*

*I waited until I heard him clear the building, then stepped into the office. Gordo G'herr sat behind an obscenely huge desk in the cramped room, raising a chubby finger accusatorially and parting his thick lips to hurl some crude underworldly threat. The threat never came, as I leveled my smoking muzzle at him and engulfed him in sweet purifying flame.*

*Despite my breather, I could smell the stench of frying fat that swamped the small room. Gordo's sizzling bulk slumped out of the broad leathern chair, his eyes rolling back in blank mute agony. His throat, stretched taut with a silent choked scream, began to undulate, wider and wider, then his jaw wrenched to one side, popping out of its joint as the object of my assault extended a few tendrils out of the mouth to heave its green gelatinous body free of Gordo's broken face.*

*The foul alien thing plopped wetly on the floor, scarcely able to support its own weight. It swung a limp tentacle forward to catch a desk leg and pull itself clear of the flames. I trapped its trailing appendages under my bootheel, feeling it squirm weakly as I emptied a vial of* aqua ignata *over it.*

*Then I torched the office, pausing in the doorway long enough to see the Symbiot thing blister and burst into a puddle of bubbling ooze.*

*Exiting via the warehouse, I noticed the crates of finished garments; short flimsy tunics of a clingy stretchy material, gaudily colored, of the type so often seen on serfs and children. I recalled the victims of the pestilence I had seen. Boils and pustules covered the trunk and shoulders, the exact areas such a tunic would cover. Was the clothing tainted? It could be tested, of course, but how many more would suffer until we were certain?*

*I looked around. The building was clear; the innocent would be spared injury.*

*The clothes were spun from some detestable synthetic material, and the crates took two or three shots before they would ignite properly. I found a variety of flammable liquids about the place, and dowsed as much of the warehouse's stock as I could. Better to be safe than sorry.*

No other branch of the Universal Church can claim to inspire such extreme reactions as the Temple Avesti. To most they are meddling busybodies, disregarding privacy and common courtesy in their relentless quest for hidden sins; to others, they are dangerous fanatics who threaten to burn down the hard-won Empire to light their way as they chase after shadows. But there are others, with different stories to tell. The Emperor Wars took their toll on all, but none more so than the peasants who selflessly served their lords, then received little or nothing in return. Or the prisoners of war, who languish yet in the dungeons of rival houses. War crime trials shall continue for decades, and a whole generation may pass on before ever seeing what they fought so hard for. Few are willing to take up the monumental task of pursuing justice, and none can pursue it with such diligence as the Avestites.

Public attitudes toward the Avesti are almost entirely centered around the pilgrims, those charged with carrying the Holy Flame throughout the Known Worlds, using it to light the way for the benighted or to purge evil from the wicked. While younger pilgrims can be myopic, overzealous and even cruel in their single-minded fervor, those that survive to a more mature age usually learn to temper their zeal, even to compromise when it will serve the greater good. Few make it this far, however.

# History

*... And it spreads from heart to heart, from soul to soul, uniting all creatures with the passion of faith....*

— The Fervitudes, III, 23

## The First Sparks

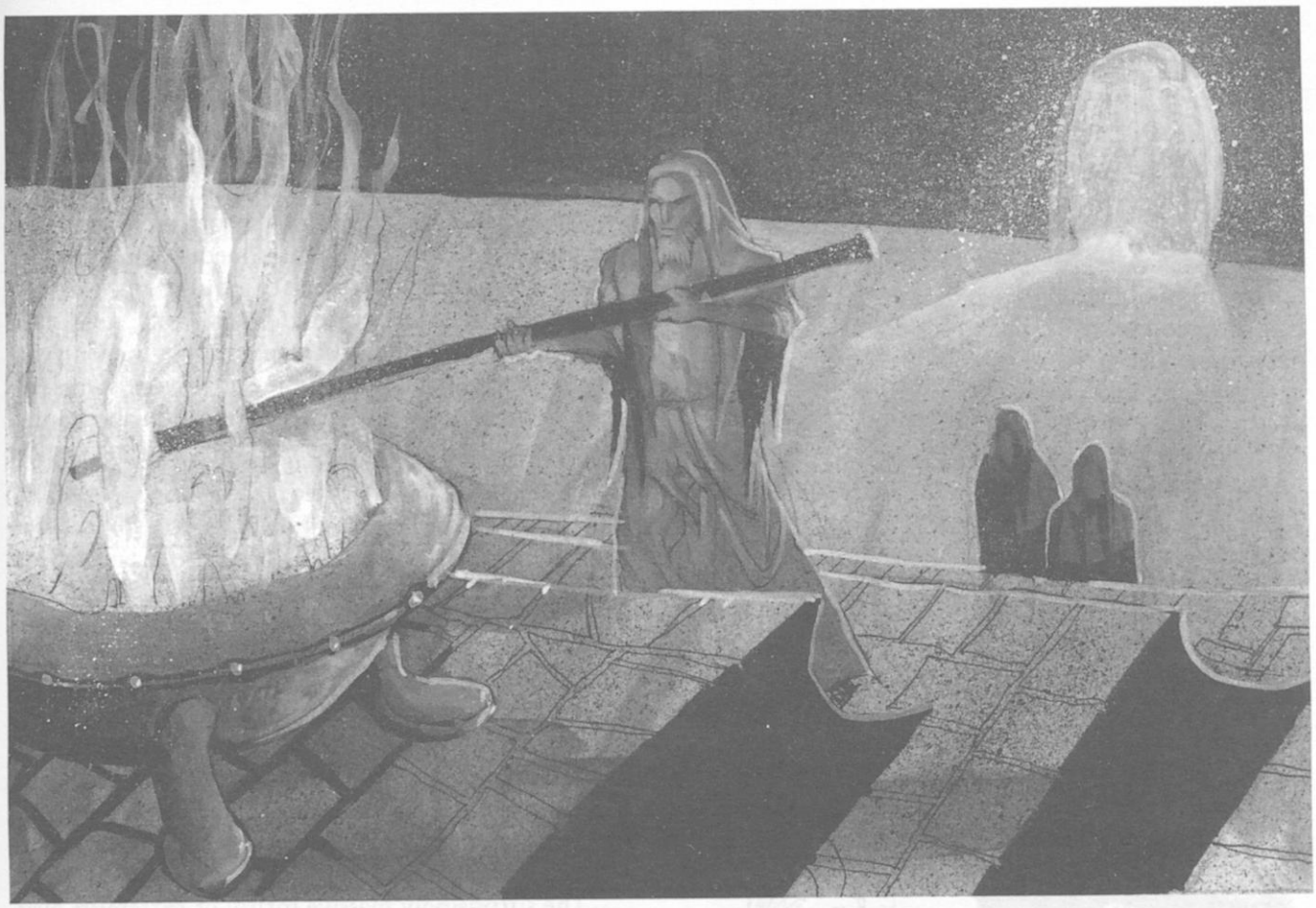
The first historic precedents of the Temple Avesti can be found in the Vestic bonfire, a midwinter celebration practiced among rural communities of the Diasporan period. The Vestic ritual in its earliest version was informal and spontaneous; a large fire was built in the village square upon the day of the winter solstice (or its nearest equivalent for more exotic star systems), and every man, woman and child in the village and surrounding areas would come together to eat, drink, sing and dance, sharing the communal warmth and light through the coldest and longest night of the year.

The word "Vestic" is generally accepted as being derived from the Old Middle Urthish suffix "-fest," which denotes a festival. Avestite scholars (a rare breed to be sure) claim that the same root occurs in the words "vestment" and "investiture," and cite a verb, "to avest," meaning to rid oneself of that which impedes spiritual progress. There is scant literary evidence to show that this was ever common usage anywhere other than the sect itself. Some convicted heretics and pagans have claimed that "Vestic" comes from the name of a very ancient Urthish deity associated with the hearth and homefire; whether this is so or not, no evidence has ever come to light to support this claim.

Within the span of the Prophet's own lifetime, the awakening which his teachings heralded in the human spirit could be felt even in the backroads communities where the Vestic fires burned. The Vestic ritual became more formalized and a deeper level of personal involvement was required from the participants. Everyone was expected to have something to throw into the fire — usually an item with symbolic sacrificial overtones. Villagers often burned irreparably damaged tech, reminders of bad times, embarrassing letters from ex-lovers or toys abandoned after the coming of age. The wealthy might make a show of generosity by consigning a needy debtor's IOUs to the flames. It is known that many bonfires consumed effigies of cruel nobles or heartless landlords. During prosperous times, items of value were sacrificed in thanksgiving.

As the influence of the Universal Church spread, rustic Vestism evolved to accommodate the new faith. The ceremony opened and closed with readings from the Omega Gospels, and occasionally participants would start speaking in tongues and bearing witness to the glory of the Pancreator. Then, at the dawn of the Fourth Millennium on the planet that would come to be known as Pyre, the first Vestic temple, or "Templa Vesti," was erected at the edge of the great Deserta Flamada, or Burning Desert. At the center of the temple stood a lamp which was lit from the embers of the previous winter's bonfire, and from which the following winter's bonfire would be kindled. The Templa was staffed by at least one ordained priest and a number of caretakers who volunteered or were elected from the village.

The Templa Vesti Pyrae was the site of many conversions and at least three well-documented miracles through the late Diasporan period. Village elders from nearby worlds made the pilgrimage to the Burning Desert so as to seek the counsel of the wise men who congregated to contemplate the flame. Through the Templa was formed coalitions of disparate rural provinces, which tithed a certain amount of each village's harvest to stockpiles on Pyre for use in lean times. In return, the Templa would prepare a missionary to wander the province offering to each village his services as minister, engineer,



doctor, veterinarian, arbiter, judge, policeman or any other duty fate might place in his path.

These early missionaries were hardy, rough-hewn women and men with pragmatic homespun notions of justice and fairness. The were often called upon by destitute victims without any other recourse to uphold ideals of law and order in peasant communities too far removed from courts and effective law enforcement. While some were overzealous, nearly to the point of terrorizing the communities they were intended to serve, many commanded such respect and influence among the common folk that on occasion even planetary nobility had to submit one of their own to Vestic justice or risk a costly global peasant uprising. On some worlds, "the prudence of a Vestic jurist" was a common byword. In time, templae based upon the Pyric model began to appear on nearby worlds.

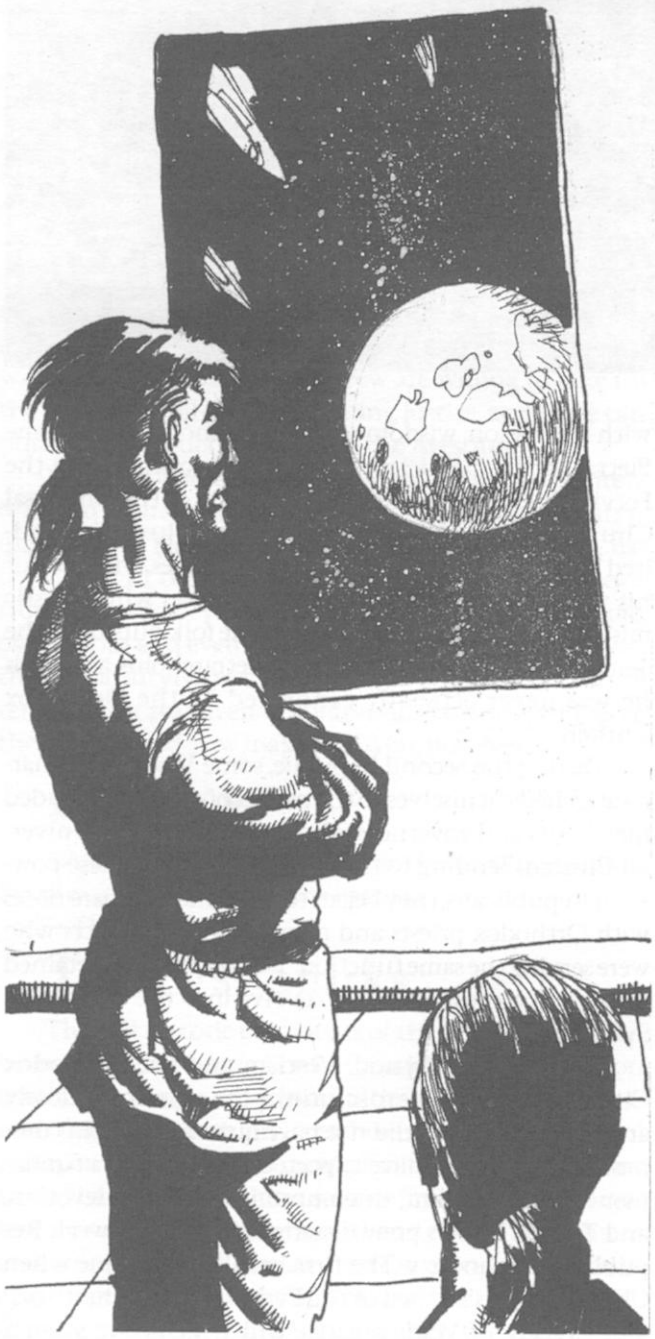
## The Flame Is Kindled

In the summer of 3500, the year usually given as the date of the founding of the Second Republic, strange lights were seen in the sky over Pyre's largest continent. Then, an unknown man wandered out of the Deserta, delirious with fever and covered with more burns than could be accounted for by mere exposure, even in the Burning Desert. With the Templa's care he was able to survive, and given his state, this in itself is considered a miracle. Even more miraculous is the way he revitalized the Vestic sect with his passion, wisdom and vision. Choosing the name Pietrarcholus, he dictated an epic poem known as the Fervitudes which has influenced much of the Universal Church outside of the Temple. Pietrarcholus is also credited with the performance of many miracles, and word of his wisdom was spread to all worlds upon which Vestic missionaries set foot. Even today, some folk outside of the Temple Avesti refer to him as Saint Pietrarcholus, although he was never officially canonized by the Orthodox Church.

During the Second Republic, some Vestic missionaries attached themselves to the parties of religious-minded merchants and governors who still honored the Universal Church. Tending to the spiritual needs of these powerful Republicans, they began to meet and compare notes with Orthodox priests and members of other sects who were serving the same function. This network of "retained ministers" was eventually to evolve into the Confessor's Synod.

Through the Synod, Vestism and the Orthodox Church were each able to scrutinize the other more closely, and found that they did not have quite as much in common as they might have expected. Vestism was a fundamentalist movement, uncompromising in its devotion, and Templa leaders grew dissatisfied with this weak Republican Orthodoxy. The first hard schism came when Church leaders learned of the Pyric Creed, a hitherto private element of Vestic practice which seemed to assert a





kind of moral superiority inherent in the Templa *Vesti* Pyrae, directly challenging the supreme spiritual authority of the Orthodox Church. When some Pyric extremists were excommunicated for heresy in 3816, Vestic members of the Confessor's Synod retaliated by ruining the careers of some respected Orthodox elders, breaking the sworn secrecy of the confessional booth to "leak" damaging personal secrets to the mass media. The Orthodox Church responded with threats of inquisition, excommunication and even execution for any Vestic missionary found teaching the Pyric Creed. Vestics in the Universal Church's Inquisitorial and Confessorial Synods were subject to increasing harassment, interrogation about internal Pyrean affairs and reiterated oaths of loyalty to the Universal Church.

## The Furnace of Faith

After the Fall, many Orthodox priests felt that the Doctrine of Universal Inheritance was too weak of a reaction to the rampant materialism of the Republic, with too little provision for enforcement. These puritans risked censure to openly attack old Republican enemies, merchants and technocrats, who were divided and weakened by the Fall. As this puritan movement swept more worlds, its most ardent adherents were chased off their own planets, living as renegades until they were granted sanctuary by Templa Vesti Pyrae.

The surprisingly massive influx of extremists overwhelmed the residents of the Templa, as shanty towns of puritan refugees crowded around Templa grounds and the more prominent among them involved themselves in Vestic politics. The old Templa was eventually abandoned in favor of a newer, larger structure deep in the Deserta Flamada. As more newcomers took over temple positions, the older ways were forgotten and even important names were lost or changed, as records and scriptures were transcribed by semiliterate puritans. Hence the Templa Vesti became the Temple Avesti.

The new Temple revived the old missionary program, but with a more aggressive agenda; to punish the abusers of power, wealth and technology. Dubbed "pilgrims," most were taught to follow the old missionary code of tolerance and fairness, but this was usually forgotten once they were out alone in the chaos that followed the Fall. Some pilgrims managed to ally themselves with the Inquisitorial Synod, which was in dire need of deputies to keep up with its vast and growing workload, but most ran wild without Orthodox sanction, even exposing corrupt members of the Church itself.

By 4235, increasing pilgrim attacks against nobles and rich merchants resulted in an unprecedented combined royal fleet arriving at Pyre equipped and eager for planetary obliteration in retaliation. This would have been the final chapter in Avesti history had not the Patriarch learned of the nobles' plan. While the Orthodox Church might be just as happy to see these fanatics get a taste of

their own much-vaunted justice, there was still a balance of power to be maintained and such an open attack on an arm of the Church Universal could tear the Known Worlds apart. The Archbishop of Urth was dispatched with a holy fleet large enough to make the conflagration more costly than the nobles were prepared for, and arrived just in time to force a standoff in the skies of Pyre.

The leader of the Temple, Archbishop Pontius Cciardi, entered into fervent negotiations to save his sect. Under pressure from Pyric zealots who preferred a martyr's death in flames, he was nevertheless able to concede that his pilgrims had indeed gone too far in their pursuit of justice. Silencing his internal opposition with stern reprimands and forcing them to recall certain relevant portions of the confessors' Redemptory Protocols, Cciardi convinced the leaders of the extreme factions that the enormity of their retributions constituted a sin against the Pancreator. If they did not repent, the Patriarch would have no choice under holy law but to leave them to the mercy of the vengeful nobles. "Recall the fate of the heretical Preceptors but two years ago," he told them. "Though they live now as hunted animals, that would be kind compared to what we now face. What then will history say of us? How shall our holy work be done if we are not here to do it?"

And so the Temple Avesti entered into a state of extreme penance, submitting itself to the authority of the Universal Church. The Temple and its pilgrims retained some degree of autonomy within parameters set by the Patriarch, but were required to heed the commands of the Patriarch and his bishops whenever they should call upon them. Hard-core Pyrists smoldered under the shame of submission, with little gratitude for the fact that they were even alive to do so.

## Burn, Witch, Burn

In the chaos which ensued after the assassination of Emperor Vladimir, amid the turmoil of the new regency and the gradual extinction of House Alecto, accusations of Antinomy became society's most common currency as a classical witch-craze swept the Known Worlds. Paranoia descended upon virtually every living soul, and every rivalry, from high electoral politicking down to peasant farmers disputing field boundaries, was punctuated with charges and counter-charges of demon-worship. The Inquisitorial Synod, whose policy had always been to let no such charge go unexamined, swelled with hastily recruited and often ill-considered deputies; the pilgrims of Temple Avesti stood ready as ever to offer their aid, but were hampered by the Grand Inquisitor, Orthodox Archbishop Geraltus, who seemed to fear the growing Avestite influence in the Universal Church.

The highest Church officials found that even they were not immune to the reverberations of Vladimir's civil war, which had toppled more than one noble house. In 4553, atrocity reared its hoary head in the very heart of *the* faith. While visiting the shrine of a fallen pre-Diasporan king on the northwestern continent of Holy Terra, Archbishop Geraltus fell to an assassin's bullets. Reeling from this outrage and seeking to protect the flock from the horror it caused, the Church cut off all communication and transport to and from the sacred planet until the killer could be brought to justice.

This came to pass sooner than anyone had expected, thanks to the wisdom and vigilance of one man — Bishop Argus of the Inquisitors. After only a few days of intense investigation, the bishop produced a suspect, one who had skulked in the fold of the faith itself. A scribe attached to Geraltus' office, one Brother Li Arvi who was native to Holy Terra, was dragged into the light before the all-seeing eye of the Pancreator and, in a trial which is still studied by inquisitorial students to this day, shown clearly to be not only the vile assassin, but also to have accomplished the evil through trafficking with foul intelligences from the Infernal realms. Bishop Argus was not only elevated to the rank of archbishop for his services, but was also the unopposed candidate for the Grand Inquisitor's seat. Within two decades he became known as Argus the Vigilant, and wrote what remains to this day the standard text on complete inquisitory practices.

## Shine On Brightly

Argus' career was an inspiration to many Avestites, who began to take a more active role in Church politics, especially the Inquisition, and by 4600 the majority of the Inquisitorial Synod was composed of Avestite members. The Temple was instrumental in drafting the list of proscribed technologies in 4660, and has had a hand in every subsequent revision of the list.

In 4900, the Symbiot War started, and within a couple years the Universal Church realized that the weapons it had allowed to be used up until that time were insufficient to meet this new threat effectively. To rectify this without breaking holy law, the Doctrine of Exemption Exceptional was proclaimed, granting permission for the use of normally prescribed technology against the enemies of humanity and the faith.

One article in the Doctrine, however, seems to have escaped the notice of its primary architect, Matriarch Aurelia. In her haste to get the Doctrine enacted, she overlooked a clause which empowers all members of the Avestite sect to carry and deploy flameguns as they deem fit, a clause which was probably only intended for inquisitors. While one seldom sees an Avestite confessor, a lowly monk or a high-ranking official using a flamegun, they are all theoretically permitted to do so.

It is perhaps because of this that the Temple was so effective in quelling the peasant uprisings and suppressing the sectarian schisms that were so commonplace in the early decades of the Emperor Wars. The Orthodox bishops, usually too reticent to enlist the aid of overzealous pilgrims in such matters, had little choice but to deploy Avestite enforcers during this tumultuous period.

Thus proving in the field their loyalty to both Church and Empire, the Temple Avesti currently enjoys a freedom of action exceeded only by their heyday, before Cciardi's submission to the Patriarch.

# Theology

*...And it shines from sphere to sphere, world upon world without end, awakening all that is with the light of creation....*

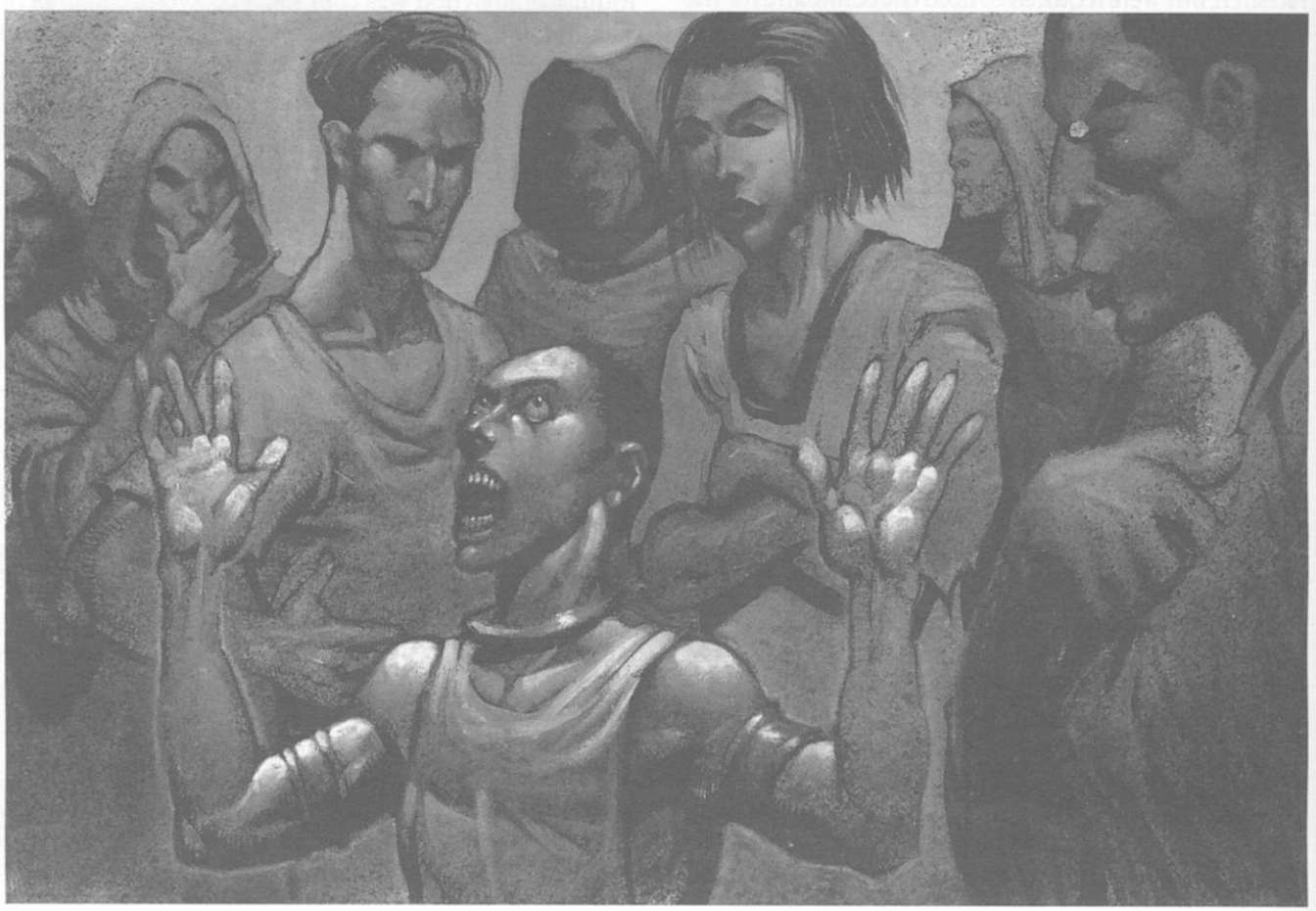
— The Fervitudes, I, 99

While the Temple Avesti honors the contemplation of the divine as much as other arms of the Church, learning the intricacies of divinity has never been their forte. A small committee of scholars meets irregularly in the library on Pyre to discuss theological matters in detail, but their primary purpose is not to quest for the light but to scrutinize the doctrinal pronouncements of other sects and orders for traces of sacrilege. This group has no particular name or status, and is incapable of making policy decisions; its members must undergo constant tests of faith, for the Temple understands that unbridled study can lure the insufficiently faithful into evil as easily as any worldly pursuit.

Theology for most Avestites is a simple matter: Good is above, Evil below, and one's rewards or punishments are determined by the direction one moves, whether by choice or circumstance. Avestite ethics primarily concern themselves with duty to the Faith; each individual is obligated to strive upwards by cultivating the virtues espoused by the Prophet, and through prayer and self-denial. Those who have achieved a higher station of goodness must take up the duty of aiding those below them, and of punishing those who willingly allow themselves to descend into wickedness.

On occasion, more esoteric lore must be consulted in the course of an investigation or inquisition. Antinomy and demonology are described in the Instructiones Inquisitorum, and information on psychism and alien artifacts is sometimes shared by the Eskatonic Order on a certifiable need-to-know basis. Once every few decades, however, some layman — usually a serf — claims to have been contacted by one of the bodiless powers of the Empyrean, and the Inquisition is required to determine the truthfulness of the claim. Affairs of this sort are very taxing on the Avestites involved; not only must they work more closely than usual with Orthodox and Eskatonic scholars, immersing themselves in the maddening intricacies of Empyrean studies (much of which had previously been judged heretical itself), but all who sit in judgment upon a matter such as this are only too keenly aware that an erroneous ruling will certainly end in eternal damnation.

Most Avestites are only marginally aware of the doctrine of the Chain of Emanation, and only the scholars and the upper echelons of the Temple have studied its details. Its main influence on Avestite thought can be



found in the Redemptory Protocols (see below). Other aspects of Orthodox doctrine are echoed in native Avestite literature, especially the Fervitudes; the first three sections of that work perfectly describe the Descent of Grace, while the final section lays the groundwork for the Luminous Return.

This kind of academic analysis of holiness is generally ignored or even shunned by most Avestites, especially the pilgrims, who find it a distraction or even a hindrance when decisions must be made quickly in the field of action. Few scholars are ever deemed to be of sufficient piety to take on the duty of the pilgrim, and consequently most pilgrims may be wholly ignorant of some of the more detailed tenets of the Universal Church.

Despite their seemingly innate abhorrence of scholasticism (the literacy rate among the Avesti is lower than any other group except for feral Vorox), Avestite literature has had a profound effect on both ecclesiastical thought and on society at large. The Avestite library on Pyre consists primarily of Inquisitory records, with most of the remainder being taken up with pilgrims' reports and a carefully preserved collection of Addenda to the Little Catechism (see below).

## The Omega Gospels

Although nominally accepted in their entirety, only a few literate Avestites have read the Gospels all the way through. Most pilgrims can only quote their favorite passages, usually the ones about the Holy Flame burning away sin. The Compassionate Teachings are ignored completely; the library's only copy, cracked open once in 4707 during the trial of a rogue Amalthean, can be found in the librarian's office, occupying a depression in the rough-hewn stone floor underneath the rear left leg of the librarian's desk.

## The Fervitudes of Pietrarcholus

When the man who would come to be known as Pietrarcholus lay in his great fever, he was prone to start muttering or howling or jabbering in strange tongues, torridly repeating incomprehensible formulae. A cantor in attendance was struck by the rhythm and resonance of these verbal fits, and committed them to memory for later dictation to a scribe. The text of this delirious rambling was studied, annotated and interpreted (often in Pietrarcholus' own hand), to finally be codified into an epic recitation recounting the descent of the Holy Flame into the material world.

Dubbed "The Fervitudes" by the Templa librarian Aeschylites, it consists of over one thousand free verse lines, following a pattern of scansion unique to a galley-slave worksong from the late-Diasporan frontier worlds that would later become the Vuldrok star-nations. The full text has never been accepted by the Orthodoxy, but certain sections of the Fervitudes are held in high esteem by other sects and orders. Fragmentary echoes of the Fervitudes' most oft-quoted lines can be found throughout the Known Worlds in loose doggerel translations (often misattributed), and most notably as a popular minstrel's standard.

The Fervitudes can be divided into four distinct sections of approximately equal length, each defining a stage of the Holy Flame's process of manifestation. The first line of the work reads, "There is a Flame (O Holy Flame!)..." Most editions repeat this line at the beginning of each section.

In the first following section every line starts "And it shines..." This is the mystical chapter, depicting the flame of Celestial Sun in the realm Empyrean, shining through the Chain of Emanation. This chapter contains the most commonly quoted lines, and is generally accepted by the Orthodoxy and others.

In the second section every line starts "And it warms..." This chapter traces the Holy Flame through the cosmological hierarchy, reflected from the stars to warm their worlds and nurture them to life. Some of the finest poetic appreciation of the natural world can be found in this section, and appreciative Eskatonic esotericists like to taunt Avestites with its superficial resemblance to some pantheistic heresies.

In the third section every line starts "And it spreads..." This chapter deals with social issues, showing the flame reflecting between people, burning away falsehood and injustice. Some lines from this section have been embraced by Sanctuary Aeon.

In the fourth section every line starts "And it consumes..." A psychological dimension is revealed in this chapter, with the flame of passion driving men to action, and burning away sin and negative thoughts or emotions. Much of the Confessor's Synod, even non-Avestite members, consider this a required study text.

## The Redemptory Protocols of the Confessors' Synod

Derived from the Blessitudes, the Protocols establish hierarchies of virtue and sin, and provide guidelines for penance. This tome is required study for all confessors, and is revised at least once every century. Cynics who are able to compare editions note that sin and penance seem to occupy a kind of sliding scale, with certain sins being deemed of a lesser degree of evil whenever their practice was exposed among high-ranking Church officials or nobles closely allied to the Church.

An appendix of examples and case studies was removed at the behest of some noble houses, most notably the Decados, because deep dark family secrets were therein revealed. Although all such early editions are reported destroyed, some copies have been secretly retained by inquisitors.

## Pyric Creed

First surfacing during the Second Republic, the Pyric Creed represents the fundamentalist attitude within the old Templa Vesti which would grow into the post-Repub-

## The Hierarchies of Virtue and Vice

**(According to the 4982 edition of the Redemptory Protocols)**

Equated with the Chain of Emanation by esotericists, the hierarchy of virtues can be considered a ladder which one climbs toward goodness. The virtue of Questing espoused by the Prophet was deemed too vague for formal judgment, and is interpreted to encompass the three highest virtues listed.

1. Faith
2. Piety
3. Devotion
4. Justice
5. Protection
6. Loyalty
7. Compassion
8. Wisdom
9. Discipline
10. Humility

The hierarchy of sins corresponds to the empty emanations called Qlippoth, with each vice drawing one closer to the source of all evil, Infernos Prime.

10. Pride
9. Sloth
8. Greed
7. Lust
6. Oathbreaking
5. Wrath
4. Envy
3. Blasphemy
2. Heresy
1. Antinomy

The Synod's edict of 4224 ruled that virtues and vices of equivalent rank do not cancel each other out, and that the practice of a higher-ranking virtue does not exempt one from the penance required for a lesser sin.

lican Avestite identity. Held in secret, even from other Avestites more sympathetic to the Orthodoxy, this creed was never written down and may have changed drastically as it was passed down orally through the ages. Variant versions of the creed may be to blame for bitter rivalries in internal Temple politics.

The basic assertions of the Pyric Creed are as follows:

- The lamp in the Templa Vesti Pyrae (now in the monastery in the Burning Desert) is the One True Reflection of Holy Flame, and meditation upon its light is consequently the closest one can approach to divinity in the material world.

- The sainthood of Pietrarcholus (which was never acknowledged by the Orthodox Church).

- The Fervitudes is a divinely inspired revelation of the Holy Flame and the Empyrean realm.

- All sentient creatures are members of the Universal Church and are thus subject to its authority, regardless of whether they acknowledge it themselves or are even aware of its existence.

## The Little Catechism of Constantius and Constultius (and Addenda)

The Little Catechism was created by Deacon Giacoma della Ciccolini the Proselytizer and was first published by the Templa Vesti Criticoro (the early Vestic temple on Criticorum) in 3443. The purpose of the Little Catechism was plainly stated in its subtitle: "Providing concise Moral Guidelines for proper Social Behavior and genuine Spiritual Fulfillment clearly Illuminated for the consideration of Children and Young Adults." The Little Catechism is most commonly presented to the children of religious families as soon as they are old enough to read and understand it.

Primarily aimed at children and the uneducated, the Little Catechism contained a bare minimum of text. Its guidelines were conveyed in two columns of paired illuminations with captions explaining the positive example of a child named Constantius and negative example of his friend Constultius. (e.g., "Constantius donates his entire allowance of one credit-chip to the Church; Constultius leaves a quarter-chip in the collection plate and spends the rest on sweet millirice bars." Or "Constantius reports all rumors of blasphemy to the local Templa; Constultius prefers not to get involved.") Due to della Ciccolini's own lack of formal education, the text of early editions of the Little Catechism was overly simplistic and riddled with typographical and grammatical errors; consequently, her moral exhortations often had the opposite of their desired effect when read by the literate, media-savvy children of the Second Republic.

In 3600, rapidly increasing changes in society necessitated the publication of several "Addenda" which addressed issues and situations more frequently encountered by young people in this newer, more cosmopolitan culture. By 3623, the Addenda were published on a regular quarterly schedule, every three Holy Terran months. After the Fall, Addenda only appeared at irregular intervals, with sometimes a whole decade passing between issues. The Addenda were hastily illustrated and sloppily printed on pulpy newsprint with antique pre-Diasporan printing presses. They were (and still are) distributed throughout the Known Worlds in such quantity that most copies were eventually used for insulation, kindling and wrapping fish.

## Instructiones Inquisitorum of Argus the Vigilant

Penned by the first Avestite to hold the office of Grand Inquisitor, this massive tome has remained the definitive text on how to conduct an inquisition, covering procedures, methods and techniques for investigations, apprehensions, confinement, treatment of prisoners, extraction of confessions, prosecuting styles, allowable defenses and effective sentencing. Argus' introduction is largely autobiographical, dwelling at length upon the murder of Archbishop Geraltus and the subsequent trial of Li Arvi, complete with excerpts from the court records.

A special appendix details the tenets of Antinomy, supplying telltale signs of its practice and an exhaustive demonological catalogue. Due to the extremely dangerous nature of this information, this appendix is specially constructed so that it may be sealed off from casual perusal by an iron lock. Those requiring this dark lore must petition one of the few bishops who hold the key to this lock for permission, and the text may only be read in the presence of said bishop.

# Canon

Rank and behavior within the Temple Avesti are the most rigid and controlled in the entire Universal Church. Avestites consider themselves the watchdogs of the public morality and endeavor to comport themselves as examples of supreme spiritual purity, save when extreme actions must be taken against evil.

## Rank

Avesti ranks are the same as their Orthodox counterparts, but, under Cciardi's terms of penitence, Avestite priests must heed the orders of Orthodox priests of equal or greater rank. An Avestite may refuse the order of a lower-ranking Orthodox priest, but may not countermand an order given to lesser Avesti, even those under his own command.

## Ordination

Acceptance into the Temple Avesti comes in two parts: an oral examination designed to determine the extent of the supplicant's capacity to distinguish right from wrong, and a relatively simple ordeal to test his devotion — usually a week of constant prayer in an unfurnished stone cell with only a thin straw mat to sleep on and a daily ration of a crust of bread and a cup of water.

After the Fall, until Cciardi's reforms, women were barred from the sect; since that time, however, few females have availed themselves of this career opportunity. The only female Avestite of note was the pilgrim Sister Nadia Kari, who suffered a martyr's death at the hands of local thugs shortly after busting up a selchakah ring on Cadavus in 4897.



# Bishop Argus' Closing Statements at the Trial of Li Arvi, from the Instructiones Inquisitorum

"...And so, in summation, it may be seen most clearly by yourselves, the august body of apostolic successors to the most holy Prophet of the Celestial Sun (may his name resound throughout all the spheres of Creation), that the wretched creature which cowers before the light of its deeds revealed and the judgment of its peers in the faith it so falsely professed, has damned itself by its own words in many instances throughout the course of this trial.

"Firstly, the so-called 'Brother' Li Arvi did, after having been in the service of the deceased, our own beloved Archbishop Geraltus (may the Pancreator receive him in mercy), for only a year, compose the exhibited examples of what we loosely refer to as 'poetry,' wherein he expressed his secret desire for carnal relation with the archbishop, and furthermore had the effrontery to defend these lascivious scribblings as an 'allegory of love for the Pancreator.' That the deceased was never known to respond to these unnatural advances is a matter of common record, and by this righteous and proper rejection do we establish the motive of the atrocity under examination here on this day.

"Secondly, we have the accursed weapon of murder itself, seen here to be one revolving pistol of the thirty-second caliber, found by my own investigators among the personal effects of the accused. While this alone may be sufficient for a conviction not only of common murder but of a blatant violation of the Inheritance of Universality as well, closer scrutiny in this case discloses a deeper degree of sacrilege; indeed, when presented with this evidence of his crime, the accused not only denied possessing the thing, but appeared genuinely ignorant of its workings and operation. This was our first clue as to his true nature, for it is known to all that only the demons which reside in the darkness of the Realms Infernal may grant capacities, knowledge or skills which the Antinomist may not normally possess, and then remove them when their purpose has been served.

"And may I remind this esteemed court, which may wish to deny that diabolism hath ever touched the soil of Holy Terra, of the three bodies found drifting down the Missippi River this very morn, clothed in Decados livery and having upon them the paraphernalia of Antinomian practice.

"Thirdly, we have the mute testimony of the deceased himself, wherein are revealed many aspects of thaumaturgical abomination. If Sister Claudia will display the chirurgeon's diagram upon the lantern-screen, I shall explain. Let the record show that no less than seven projectiles passed through the archbishop's cranial cavity in a span of no more than two seconds, in defiance of natural law which dictates that no more than three shots may be fired from such a weapon in that amount of time. The unnatural acceleration of time, that Universal Constant, necessary to accomplish this feat, is known to be a power conferred by thaumaturgic traffic with demons of relatively low rank. In addition it will be seen that the aforementioned weapon holds only six shots in its cylinder, showing us that an Antinomic perversion of the Rite of Fruitful Multiplication (as so often beneficently employed by our esteemed and beloved siblings of Sanctuary Aeon) was here used. Furthermore, let us note that of these seven shots, two appeared to be of the thirty-eighth caliber and entered from the southeast, two of the fortieth caliber entered from the northeast, and three of the tenth millimeter entered from the south-southwest. Here the sheer enormity of the accused's blasphemy threatens to overwhelm us as we not only recall that the rite of transformation required to change the size of these bullets is practiced only by such heretical factions as the Eskatonics, but also that the warping of space necessary to place these shots in this manner can be accomplished only by artifacts of the Preadamite jumpgate-builders (the acquisition of which is most unlawful), or by demons of middle ranking. In light of all this, it is almost superfluous to note that the position of the accused in the Library Tower, which affords an adequate overview of the shrine's plaza, greatly exceeds the twenty-meter effective range which the Pancreator in his infinite mercy accords such devices.

"Finally, as if any other damning testimony were necessary, we have the account of Li Arvi's own family, each of whom repeated under oath that the accused did, upon the evening of this heinous crime, appear in their own home and eat of their repast with them as if nothing of enormity were occurring on the other side of the world at that very moment. I need not remind the court that the violation of natural law known as bilocation can be conferred only by the greatest of Infernal powers.

"And so it remains only for the court to pronounce judgment upon this most deceitful and malicious specimen...."

## Advancement

Promotion rituals generally involve a difficult ordeal that tests the limits of the candidate's resolve, sometimes approaching the tortures reserved for sinners. The completion of an arduous mission is common among pilgrims, while monks and confessors often must practice prolonged fasting and extreme self-mortification. Progression through the upper ranks usually involves a literal trial by fire; deacons can be identified by the burns along their left forearms (or sometimes the right, if they managed to convince their superiors that left-handedness is not a sign of wickedness), and new bishops often learn a greater degree of humility when they first appear in public scorched and hairless.

## Behavior

**Ethics:** Avestite ethics are based upon the Redemptory Protocols, and are to be followed as strictly and as literally as possible. Punishment for ethical infractions are double that accorded to common sinners. Members are expected to police each other for lapses, and awareness of a fellow's sin is met with the same punishment as the sinner receives.

While it is generally assumed that none are completely without sin, pilgrims may be required to show proof when dealing out justice. Most pilgrims in remote areas can get away with acting on hearsay or circumstantial evidence, but if questioned by an Orthodox investigator they must have hard proof or an eyewitness testimony given under oath.

**Celibacy:** No Avestite is ever allowed to engage in any sexual activity of any sort. Even passing thoughts of questionable prurience must be purged with self-flagellation.

**Obedience:** Absolute obedience is required of all Avesti at all times in all matters. Occasional cases of insubordination to Orthodox superiors can always be traced back to vague or imprecise orders.

**Propriety:** All Avestites, regardless of rank, station or situation, are expected to comport themselves as exemplars of moral rectitude. Special dispensation may be given to those acting "undercover."

**Humility:** The Temple must never forget that it is still paying for the crimes of its predecessors, and all Avestites must abase themselves in some way when reminded of the glory of the Pancreator and his works.

**Dress:** While most Known Worlders identify Avestites solely by their flame-resistant asbestite robes and cowls, these are donned only when hunting down sinners (i.e., most of the time). Those below the rank of bishop wear simple brown tunics of homespun fabric and cassocks emblazoned with the Avesti symbol. Bishops and archbishops tend toward more elaborate garments of brilliant scarlet and crimson to call to mind the Holy Flame.

All Avestites, from the lowliest to the greatest, are required to wear some form of scrupulum at all times, creating a constant discomfort to facilitate their perpetual



penance. The word "scrupulum" refers to small stones kept in the shoe, a common type. (An Avestite who tries to avoid his full penance is said to be "holding his scrupula between his toes.") Other types include hairshirts, barb-tail girdles, starched burlap loincloths and an ingenious variety of piercings, clamps, twist-ties and plugs, as well burning or itching lotions which must be reapplied daily.

# Holy See

*...And it warms the wastes and the rocky barren places, making of them a crucible to test the Faithful....*

— The Fervitudes, II, 57

## Pyre

The homeworld of Temple Avesti just barely qualifies as a habitable planet, with over a third of its original terraforming engines choked into system failure by the ubiquitous dust of the great Burning Desert, or Deserta Flamada, which occupies most of the northern hemisphere. Scoured almost incessantly by howling sandstorms which can slice flesh from bone in minutes, the impassable Deserta surrounds the monastery which is the heart of the Avestite sect.

Communication with the monastery occurs mainly through carrier-bat, which takes an average of one week to reach an outer desert station. The safest method of travel to the monastery is via "dunecrawler," a slow but sturdy troop transport tank outfitted with a beetle-like ceramsteel carapace to protect it during its one-month trek through stone-gnawing winds. Once every 13 years, however, the faulty timers in Pyre's forgotten weather control satellites synchronize well enough to put a damper on the howling winds of the Deserta Flamada; for about seven months, caravans may journey to the monastery in relative safety. These caravans are the preferred mode of traversing the desert for devout Avestites, who consider the voyage a test for the faithful. While sandstorms rarely prove fatal in this season, heat and sunstroke can decimate a party. A caravaneer can also become more intimately acquainted with the indigenous fauna of Pyre, such as bugbats, cavern spiders, tumblemounds, needletongue zipstriders, dire mice and scarlet whipwinders, as well as what Second Republic planetologists estimated to be over two million distinct species of insectoids, including zapflies, megasquitoes, hindermites, nosewhigs and batbugs.

Carved into a crevice on the former site of Bat Head Peak (so named during the Diaspora for its distinct pointy-eared contours, since eroded away by desert winds), the Cathedra Avesti houses the original lamp from the old Templa, as well as the sect leaders' offices and quarters. Its outer corridors are lined with niches and shrines honoring martyrs to the Avestite cause, with rough-hewn catacombs leading down away to the library, the quartering cells and the Penitentium. Quarters for the rank and file are mostly communal barracks, with solitary cells to be found in the Penitentium, along with the mortification pits, cruciform scaffolds, flagellatory racks, gymnasium and training areas, as well as laundry and waste reclamation. Technology of any appreciable degree is nearly absent from the monastery, with the exceptions of the emergency squawker in the archbishop's office and the librarian's think machine.

Elsewhere in the Burning Desert can be found three underground caches, two containing hoarded grains and food, the other hiding a variety of exotic weapons. Each is carved deep into the side of a rocky outcropping, like the monastery. The site of the old "Templa Vesti" is now the village of Tarnatia, a major juncture between the monastic caravan route and the road to Pyre's only spaceport at Sanpietro.

## Other Lands

While the Avestites are not as populous as other arms of the Universal Church, they do try to maintain at least one small chancery on every one of the Known Worlds. Those who tend small chanceries pursue their duties as moral watchdogs as vigilantly as circumstances allow, but in truth such places function as little more than way-stations for visiting pilgrims, confessors and inquisitors.

Large Avestite monasteries can be found on Byzantium Secundus and Criticorum, and the Temple maintains a cathedral on Holy Terra. A large Avestite compound on Shaprut, headed by Canon Buchanan, is, for many Inquisitory forces, their last taste of civilization before embarking for Stigmata and the horrors of the Symbiot War. The Canon is also responsible for keeping an eye on House al-Malik, lest they should lapse into wickedness. A number of missions can be found on Cadavus tending to the destitute peoples of that world.

# Flock

Temple Avesti has very little real flock as such. Aside from the peasants cared for by Avestite missionaries, few regularly seek out the Avesti for spiritual guidance, preferring instead the more ubiquitous and accessible Orthodox Church. Many privately retained confessors for the nobility are recruited from the Temple Avesti, usually by exasperated parents seeking a stern and unyielding figure to discipline their wild and decadent heirs.

This is all largely academic to the Temple, which considers all sentients to be members of the Universal Church. Consequently, the salvation of every living soul in the universe is an Avestite concern, and every Avestite is empowered to drive them toward it in whatever manner she sees fit (within parameters dictated by the Patriarch, of course).

# Personages

*...And it consumes the brains of the wise, leaping from thought to thought, that wisdom may be a beacon to all in the night....*

— The Fervitudes, IV, 237

## Pietrarcholus

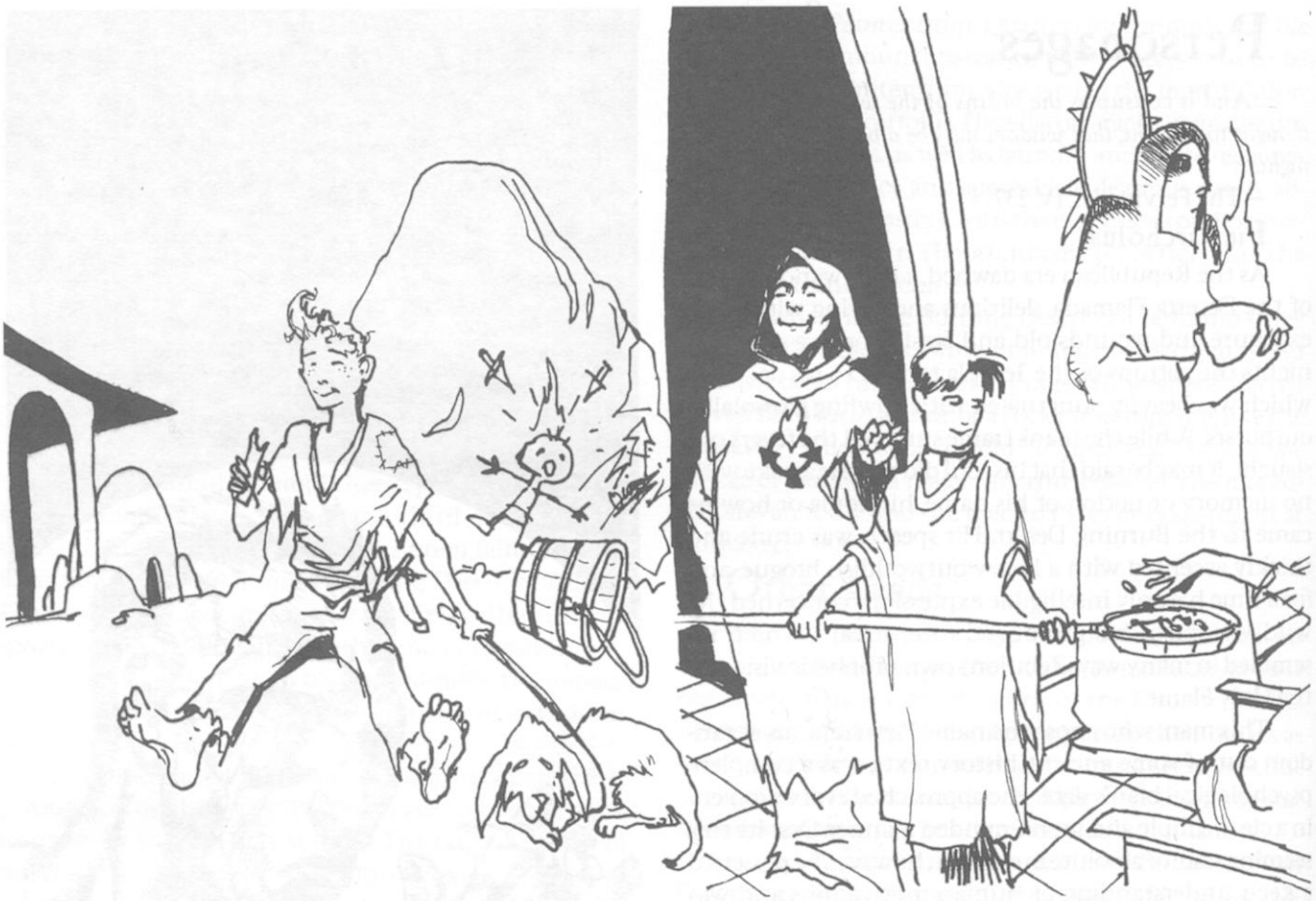
As the Republican era dawned, a man wandered out of the Deserta Flamada, delirious and raving with fever, exposure and wounds old and fresh. For five days and nights the patrons of the Templa tended to his delirium which was heavily punctuated with howling glossolalial outbursts. While the man's frame survived the fever's onslaught, it may be said that his soul did not. He awoke with no memory or notion of his name, his home or how he came to the Burning Desert. His speech was crude and thickly accented with a heavy outworldish brogue, and for a time his only intelligible expressions concerned the wild visions of his prolonged fever-dream, which resembled in many ways Zebulon's own prophetic vision of the Holy Flame.

This man, who chose the name Pietrarcholus at random out of some ancient history texts, was a complete psychological blank slate who approached every problem in a clear, simple and literal-minded manner. Despite this seeming state of absolute innocence, however, he possessed a keen understanding of human motivations and was capable of astounding insights into the darker shadowlands of the soul. The elders of the Templa sought out his counsel on many moral quandaries, and pilgrims fortunate enough to meet with him brought back to their homeworlds tales of "the oracle of Pyre." Pietrarcholus lived at the Templa for nearly a century, and came to be called "Saint" Pietrarcholus within his own lifetime. Legend states that he met his end while kneeling in prayer before the Templa's lamp; it is said that a blinding white flame enveloped his body, searing flesh cleanly from bone but somehow radiating no heat to leave the supplicants beside him untouched and his kneeling-stool without even a trace of charring. It is public record that his skeleton is interred upon the exact spot of his return to the Holy Flame.

In the twilight of the Second Republic, evidence came to light that the man known as Pietrarcholus was actually a late Diasporan era pirate and cutthroat, Pyotr "Black Pete" Jakovich, the Scourge of Nobles and Plunderer of Merchants. Born on a world which would later be part of Vuldrok space, he cut a bloody swathe of murder, pillage and rapine through the pre-Republican worlds, finally crash-landing in the Burning Desert.

When this information first came to light, the Templa Vesti tried to hide all evidence of "Pietrarcholus's" origins, and succeeded for several centuries after the Fall. By





Vladimir's time, though, the secret was out again, so the Avesti issued a proclamation stating that vile "Black Pete's" transformation into the saintly Pietrarcholus was evidence of the miraculous powers residing in the flame of Pyre's Temple lamp.

### Pontius Cciardi

The man responsible for the current penitent state of the Temple Avesti (and, consequently, its continued existence) was a freeman of Aylon whose desire for spiritual fulfillment drew him to the Avestite monastery on that world, which still held close to the old Vestic ideal. His wisdom and piety lead him up through the ranks despite the chaos that engulfed the Temple following the Fall.

Due to the inefficient communication that has always characterized the Avesti, Cciardi was unaware of the extremes to which Avestite pilgrims had taken his policy of bringing retribution to the merchants and nobles, whose mad ambitions had lifted humanity far above its allotted station then plunged it into turmoil. While he preached justice, those who followed him worked only for revenge, and it was not until a massive fleet stood poised to massacre his entire sect that he realized he had stoked the fires of faith too much until they raged out of control.

Most tend to see Cciardi's declaration of penance for the Temple as a purely political necessity, a simple choice between submission and destruction. But any who have read the edict he issued after the incident do not doubt his sincerity when he speaks of penance. Here was a man who truly understood that the best of intentions cannot excuse the most violent acts. His internal reform of monastic life, with its emphasis on routine self-mortification and flagellation, continues to this day as he instructed, lest the Holy Flame be fanned into infernal proportions once again.

### Argus the Vigilant

The first Avestite to hold the seat of Grand Inquisitor was born on Pyre to a poverty-stricken serf clan whose farmlands had been engulfed by an encroaching arm of the Deserta Flamada. After a childhood of little more than starvation and empty dreams of better times, Argus (then called by his given name of Dhenki) left his family and spent his adolescence as a guttersnipe in Sanpietro, eventually performing a variety of questionable services for the local crime boss, a disinherited Decados vassal, to keep coin in his pouch and bread in his belly.

Reaching the age of maturity, he petitioned the Temple Avesti for membership on seven different occasions under seven different names before he was finally accepted. There the hunger and desperate ambition that characterized his youth were transformed into a righteous striving for the light of the Celestial Sun, and he rose swiftly through the ranks of the Temple. At the tender age of 43, he became the youngest member of the Inquisitorial Synod.

Argus' death is perhaps the most tragic chapter in Avestite history. After a valiant career of hounding the spawn of hell back into their infernal pit, the demons claimed their revenge. Argus died in bed, surrounded only by his most trusted advisors, confidants and underlings, each of whom swore that they had seen a profusion of lacerations, gouges, bruises and abrasions appear spontaneously all over his body until his carcass was nigh unrecognizable.

Whenever Argus' life story is told, it is held up as a shining example to all Avestites, proving how one can, through faith, overcome all the adversities of birth and circumstance to rise to a high station by serving the Pancreator.

### "Constantius and Constultius"

The two "child stars" of the Little Catechism, while wholly fictitious characters, have endured since the early Second Republic and are so well known throughout inhabited space that, to all but the most jaded and cynical, they are just as "real" as the saints themselves are to most people. They have even appeared, thinly disguised, in popular secular entertainments. Alternately depicted as friends, rivals and even brothers, one aspect of their relationship has remained constant throughout their existence: Constantius is the exemplar of good values and behavior, and Constultius exemplifies the bad.

When confronted with a situation in which they are uncertain how to act, young children are taught to ask themselves, "What would Constantius do?" When made to face the results of their misdeeds, naughty little boys and girls often try pass the blame along to an ever-present imaginary playmate; "It wasn't me! Constultius did it!" A common form of schizophrenic religious mania involves perceptions of the two characters standing on the victim's shoulders, with Constantius whispering positive thoughts from the right shoulder while Constultius whispers negative ones from the left.

During the latter half of the Second Republic, the Templa Vesti became concerned that the message of the Little Catechism was not reaching enough young people, and Deacon Friedrich Virthume, della Ciccolini's successor, was granted a dispensation to adapt the Little Catechism and its Addenda to the medium of holo-animation, so popular with the children of the period. In 3797, Deacon Virthume closed a deal with the new holoscreen moguls Iohan Phelusi and Subotai Crick, hoping to gain a wider audience for the basic traditional values espoused by the Avestites.

The result was "Stan & Stultzy," a children's program about two best friends, the wise, virtuous Stan and the bumbling, morally vague Stultzy. As the show's popularity increased over the next century, so did the distribution of the Little Catechism, and old issues of the Addenda became prized collector's items. By 3871, Phelusi and Crick's audience research revealed that the program's rise in popularity coincided with the escalation of Stultzy's wildly destructive mischief. Stan's part in keeping the mayhem in check gradually diminished until 3885, when he was written out entirely and replaced by a character named Stig, a slyly sadistic tempter. It took the cloistered Vestics until the turn of the century to realize that something was wrong and terminate their arrangement with Phelusi and Crick.

Despite this rather embarrassing chapter in their history, these two characters endure in fable and folklore. An honest man who stays true to his word is said to "speak with the voice of Constantius." Any wrongdoing, whether accidental or malicious, is known as "pulling a Stultz," "stultzing up," or "stultzing off." Perhaps the strongest testament to their universal influence, paradoxically, is their appearance in the proscribed literature of the demimonde, the secretly sought-after collector's items known as "Cadavan Catechisms," which depict the two characters in varieties of unnatural congress. Possession of such an item is punishable even in Orthodox law.

# Roleplaying

## Playing an Avestite

Avestite characters always exhibit a strong, clearly defined sense of right and wrong, either based on their honest belief or a hypocritical facade hiding their own inner corruption. The holier-than-thou attitude could have been invented by the Temple, and can even be seen in dealings with other sects and orders. As a result, Avestites tend to rank somewhere between Ascorbites and Symbiots in popularity contests. This can limit the degree to which Avestite player characters get involved in the game.

What most people do not realize is that the pilgrims comprise only a relatively small portion of the Temple's total number. The most powerful members of the sect consort only with others of equal rank, and rarely leave the comfort of their cathedrals. The majority of Avestites are simple monks sequestered away in the monastery on Pyre. Only the toughest, most driven and, above all, purest of faith are allowed to roam the worlds as pilgrims.

Here are some additional stereotypes:

Powermonger: A high-ranking official, you travel the Known Worlds aboard an inquisitorial frigate to forge alliances, admonish the decadently wealthy, rouse or placate the rabble as necessary, or punish otherwise untouchable abusers of power.

Hard-boiled detective: A mature pilgrim, you have learned to compromise on superficial issues without yielding to true evil; you know your way through the backalleys of the underworld and pass over common corruption in pursuit of the major defilers of faith and humanity.

Confessorial information broker: Though your vows to the Synod expressly forbid it, you are not above revealing secrets learned in the confessional booth, either for personal gain or to assist in the capture of a murderer, rap-



ist or worse.

Stray Puppy: Part of a group of youthful monks attending your mentor on his pilgrimage to Holy Terra, you paused to drop a wing and a blessing into a beggar's bowl, then looked up to find yourself abandoned in the bustling Criticorum spaceport. Unlearned and inexperienced, you must now try to make your way alone to the cradle of humanity, armed only with a kindly heart, the best of intentions, the ability to endure incredible hardships and a rapidly shrinking handful of quarter-birds.

## Gamemastering Temple Avesti

Avestites make excellent stock villains, and are common hindrances to anyone whose daily plans include more than prayer and hard labor. On the other hand, adventure, like politics, can make for strange bedfellows, and having an ally who can bend the ear of the Inquisitorial Synod can sometimes be more beneficial than all the wealth and power in the Known Worlds. In either case, recall the old Urthish saying about playing with fire...

**Business as Usual:** A zealous pilgrim with Inquisitory ambitions gets wind of the player characters' shadier activities, and swears to make a name for herself at their expense. The players must prove their innocence/hide their guilt or pay the price of penance. In the unlikely event that the players have no nefarious entanglements, so what? Make something up that would be difficult to disprove.

**The Usual, as Business:** A zealous pilgrim with Inquisitory ambitions gets wind of the player characters' shadier activities, and decides that they are the perfect recruits to help assault a paramilitary stronghold of suspected Symbiots. A pilgrim on the take might be able to offer a tidy stack of firebirds to unemployed mercs, or may simply offer to put in a good word for them at their upcoming trial (see above).

**Vengeance is Mine:** One of the player characters learns that her favorite relative was immolated by a fanatical pilgrim. Now, not all Avestites can be held responsible for the action of a single one, but they all sure do look the same in those flame-retardant robes, don't they?

**The Seven Magnificent Player Characters:** A fearful community enlists the aid of the players when a tough, overzealous pilgrim comes to town.

**The Path of the Righteous Man:** A wise and prudent pilgrim enlists the aid of the players when traveling

through a curiously hostile community.

**A Perfect Record:** A turncoat from the Invisible Path decides that a lifetime of extreme Penitence on Pyre is preferable to sudden death (or worse), and begs, cajoles or mentally commands the players to get her there intact and stand by her when she petitions for acceptance. Meanwhile, her ex-comrades wish to maintain the Path's perfect record of no traitors, no defections, no "former members."

**Intervention Time:** Good old Whatzisface, a friend and ally of the player characters since way back when, has begun to act strangely, and hasn't been to mass in a long time. The rumors are piling up. Is it possession or Symbiosis? A growing Selchakah habit or the delayed effects of that bad shrieker trip during his reckless youth? At any rate, the Orthodox Church can't really be bothered, Brother Battle will not countenance weaklings, Sanctuary Aeon is unable to help him unless he wants to help himself, and nobody can decipher the advice offered by that Eskatonic priest. To whom can one turn...? (And who will be willing to wrap their finger around the flamegun's trigger when good old Whatzisface starts floating a meter off the ground, vomiting purple flames and reciting the Omega Gospels backward?)

# Traits and Equipment

## Blessings

Avestite player characters may buy "Blessing: Just" at higher levels.

Zealous (2 pts: +2 Endurance when dedicated to task)

## Curses

Avestite player characters may buy the Curse: Righteous at higher levels.

Hypocritical (+2 pts: -2 Introvert in prayer or self-examination; may need to be rolled successfully before casting rites with prayer components)

## Theurgy

### Padre Pontius Cciardi's Touch of Fire

**(Level 6, Extrovert + Remedy or Physick, LGP, touch, temporary, 1W)**

The Touch of Fire is essentially the same as the Body of Fire (below), but the flame only manifests in the theurge's hand and its effects are transferred to another person. Unfortunately, recipients must be secure in their faith to benefit from it; the target must successfully roll Faith opposed by his own Ego trait, or take burn damage instead of healing.

### Padre Pontius Cciardi's Body of Fire

**(Level 7, Faith + Vigor or Stoic Body, LP, temporary, 1W)**

This rite transforms the theurge's body into a mass of actual, living flame. Though magical in nature, this is a real flame which can be dangerous around flammable materials. Due to the rigorous concentration required to achieve this state, no other action may be taken for the duration of the rite except speech and movement at half the normal rate. The Body of Fire heals wound levels equal to the victory points for casting, and eliminates common ailments like lesser diseases and infections. More importantly, this rite negates Urge or Hubris effects for the duration. At the gamemaster's discretion, the Body of Fire may help protect against Symbiot infection and psychic and other occult attacks or domination.

# Equipment

## Aqua Ignata

A slightly diluted solution of Ka oil and other flammable substances, aqua ignata has been blessed by an Avestite bishop and consecrated to a holy task. A standard one-ounce vial of aqua ignata adds three dice of damage to a burning target and, like flamegun damage, can ignore shields and armor which is not sealed (like powered ceramsteel) or coated with flame retardant. (Damage dice which roll 1, 2, or 3 ignore armor or energy shields.) In addition, aqua ignata sticks to anything not coated with frictionless gel, and retains heat so that it continues to deliver heat damage for one turn after the flames have been extinguished (even underwater!)

A single vial of aqua ignata costs two Benefice points and is only dispensed by the Temple Avesti to its members. Possession by non-Avestites is punishable by imprisonment.

### Aqua Ignata Ballista

| Roll | Goal | DMG | RNG | Shots | Rate | Siz | Cost |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dx+Throw | - | 3 | 10/20 | 1 | 1 | S | 2 |



# Eternal Sanctuary: Sanctuary Aeon

by Rustin Quaide

*Colonel Koyla Valikov was a short, cruel man, with six toes on his left foot and a pock mocked face. Koyla held the rank of colonel but the functions of a general in the Decados security apparatus, the Jakovian Agency. Descended from a minor Decados family, he held enough noble blood to choose his field. He chose Intelligence, and excelled enough to gain the attention of Prince Hyram Decados. Sent to Malignatius with the Decados land forces to fight the Li Halan on that ice world, Koyla had personally dispatched three Decados generals for incompetence, shattering their skulls from behind with a blast from his Mitchau. 40 Ripper.*

*Now he lay in delirium in a makeshift Amalthean hospital, his left femur shattered and second degree burns on his chest, upper arms and neck. Outside, eternal winter raged. Inside, wounded and dying soldiers were brought to the small team of healers settled in the abandoned Li Halan keep.*

*A cool hand fell on his, a calming sensation. Again the soothing feminine voice came to him. "Wake up. Wake up. You must take food. Your white blood-cell count is low and your immunities need strengthening."*

*His eyes opened, squinting into the harsh light. There before him was his white robed angel, and the colonel smiled. Long red hair fell in curls down her shoulders and soft blue-gray eyes focused on him. The unadorned charm of a country woman, he thought. Like his wife Sarika.*

*"Airlia," he choked, his mouth dry.*

*"You are awake. Good."*

*"Yes, Snow Angel. Why am I sequestered separately from the men? I hear them, even in my sleep."*

*"They are mostly Li Halan soldiers."*

*"Did we win the battle?"*

*"No. We keep you from them for your own safety." Airlia brought up a small, covered bowl. "This will replenish your white blood cells," she said. Colonel Koyla seized the spoon, devouring the soup with loud noises. Wiping his sleeve, he looked at her. Couldn't anything shock these healers? He longed to yell, 'I'm a butcher. When I leave I'll have this hospital bombed into the cold earth, and your life's work will have been in vain.' Instead, he took her stoicism as a challenge.*

*"Soldiers. Enemy soldiers. I have nothing to fear from them. My own soldiers? I'd be dead. These Li Halan ambushed us. It was to be a mop-up operation. This frozen hell hole, Malignatius, it is practically ours."*

*"Rest, Koyla," Airlia said, stepping back.*

*"You know my name. How?"*

*"Men talk in their sleep, Koyla. You mentioned a name, Sarika, over and over."*

*Koyla sighed. "My wife, Amalthean. You do not know what she means to a man like me." Koyla's dark eyes burned into Airlia's.*

*She knew that he was speaking the truth, that he was a hard, merciless killer. Still, he had connected with her. This too must be rare for him, she thought. Such men trust no one.*

*"You know who I am and what I do, Airlia. You do not hate me? Admit it, you are a healer, and I spit on the life you call sacred." A vulgar desire to shock her returned, after his strange confession.*

*"I do not judge you, Koyla. I am an Amalthean Healer. But there is in you, I sense, a small place, that is not so dark, maybe where you hold memories of your wife. You see, losing any patient is a personal loss. It has been difficult here." Airlia smiled, despite herself. Confessions and intimate conversations were normal with patients. Still, Koyla differed from the wounded soldiers outside. They worshipped her, or longed for her love. Koyla did neither. He was in pain, and needed to boast, to affirm himself. Yet now his words gushed on, surprisingly tender.*

*"She would be about your height, Holy Mater. Black hair, like a summer night. Two fine brows, and brown, earth-brown eyes.*

*She would be pregnant, eight months. Have you seen her? She disappeared, and I took a contingent of my men into the snow to find her, against orders, and those Li Halan remnants attacked. You see, she is used to finer worlds, although but a peasant really, my little starling...."*

*Sleep took the killer Koyla and Airlia moved on about her duties. Airlia saved his life from certain death at the expense of her own energies. Koyla would never know. And others poured in, demanding her attention.*

*The next day she returned, injecting nanites into his left thigh. Koyla felt a tingling feeling at work in his leg, and she applied a paste over his burns.*

*Colonel Koyla rose. "Really, Snow Angel, you are too kind." He felt exposed, without his guards watching the healer, and wondered about her. What causes such people to serve? Superstitious religion? A simple peasant trust in helping others? He felt sick, and the moral question sunk into him, a heavy disquieting riddle.*

*"Your wife is here, Koyla, in this keep," Airlia said. "She arrived yesterday, frostbitten and delirious. We have tended to her, but... She gave birth to a daughter. We took the child and gave her nutrient shots. It was a difficult birth. We are trying to save the child. The cold your wife exposed herself to endangered the baby. And our hands are so full... Her left leg was disjointed; it required surgery, which I performed. The girl will have a scar on her thigh until the end of her days. Your wife is not well, Koyla. Her mind races in delirium, and she quotes passages from the Omega Gospel by rote."*

*"'Cleansed and blessed, O Pancreator, are those who turn their eye to thee from the horror about, to find thy comfort,'" Koyla said.*

*"Yes, colonel. That is what she says, over and over. It was dangerous to leave her alone, but more men arrived. There are too few of us, Koyla."*

*"She does not like my work. Sarika falls back to these childhood chants after we argue. She thinks it is monstrous, my job, and that I, by degrees, am becoming a monster. I tell her it is necessary. Hard but necessary. Children do not understand, but she stands by me, Amalthean. The only one." His voice nearly broke. "I will go to her."*

*"You are not ready. She is not ready."*

*"We are going, Amalthean."*

*Airlia supported him, and they climbed up steps into a crowded corridor, and then entered a room. There, with nylon cot rope fastened to a wooden beam, hung the body of a young woman. The Omega Gospels lay on the floor, dropped from her fingers. Brown eyes, the color of earth, condemned them both. From down the hall came the cry of Koyla's daughter, an infant tantrum drowning out the sound of the winds outside.*

# Introduction

*Colds get gray*
*Burns get white*
*Amalthea comes tonight*
*Bones get blue*
*Bones set right*
*Amalthea comes tonight*
— Ravenna children's song

The gray robes of novices, the blue of Prthivis and the white of Protos are familiar sights on the worlds of the fading suns. Sanctuary Aeon's moral and ethical dedication to healing is respected by every religious and political faction across the Known Worlds. More beloved by the poor than the Orthodoxy, the Church leaders grudgingly acknowledge the usefulness of the Amalthean sect. Some Orthodox leaders are glad that the Amalthean world of Artemis is only accessible by jumpgate from Holy Terra, making healing journeys pilgrimages of the soul. "Penitents must perform a holy pilgrimage to be healed," Patriarch Jacob said, expressing Orthodox feeling that suffering comes before healing.

Many sentients arrive on Artemis, blessing the ground where Amalthea walked. Sanctuary Aeon, overwhelmed by their numbers, sets to the daily task of healing. Although branches of Sanctuary Aeon, found on most worlds, cater to the poor, Artemis receives most pilgrims, and elements within the planetary population aid Sanctuary Aeon in managing them. Peasant superstitions attribute healing touches to the Archbishop and Ketcharch on Artemis. These beliefs are not without foundation in Amalthean history.

Amaltheans believe in the existence of SEFs, or Sentient Energy Fields, an energetic aura which surrounds and interacts with the physical body. Certain colors correspond to emotional/physical states, and by manipulating the SEFs, acceleration of healing or "rebalance" occurs. This practice, using vibratory energies, traces its origin to Amalthea herself. The subtle energies which compose SEFs are from subquantum levels, although this is not easily understood since the Fall of the Second Republic. Named Paramu by Amalthea, she held that all energy, spirit and consciousness originated and returned to the Pancreator.

SEFs are popularly called "Ghost-tinge" or "Shade-tint" by the majority of Known Worlders. Many peasants believe "Ghost-tinge" is a being's afterlife shade which Amaltheans draw on; by curing in the present, they shorten the future span of days. Even most Amaltheans don't fully understand this energy phenomenon. Still, SEFs remain a subjective science for the Amaltheans. Not officially proven by the great scientists of the Second Republic, it nonetheless works to diagnose illness. This set Sanctuary Aeon at odds with Second Republic scientists, while Amalthea's emphasis on ethics and morality placed her sect at odds with the Orthodoxy of Patriarch Palamedes. That Sanctuary Aeon has retained most of its




teachings and philosophy is perhaps the greatest miracle of its long history.

# History

*The finite mind cannot comprehend infinity, but for a brief moment it can be graced by its touch.*

— Viktor Domokos Erling

*Aruna was the Matretokos, the mother of the living goddess, who bore Amalthea Kecaritomene, blessed of all living.*

— Apocrypha of Amalthea

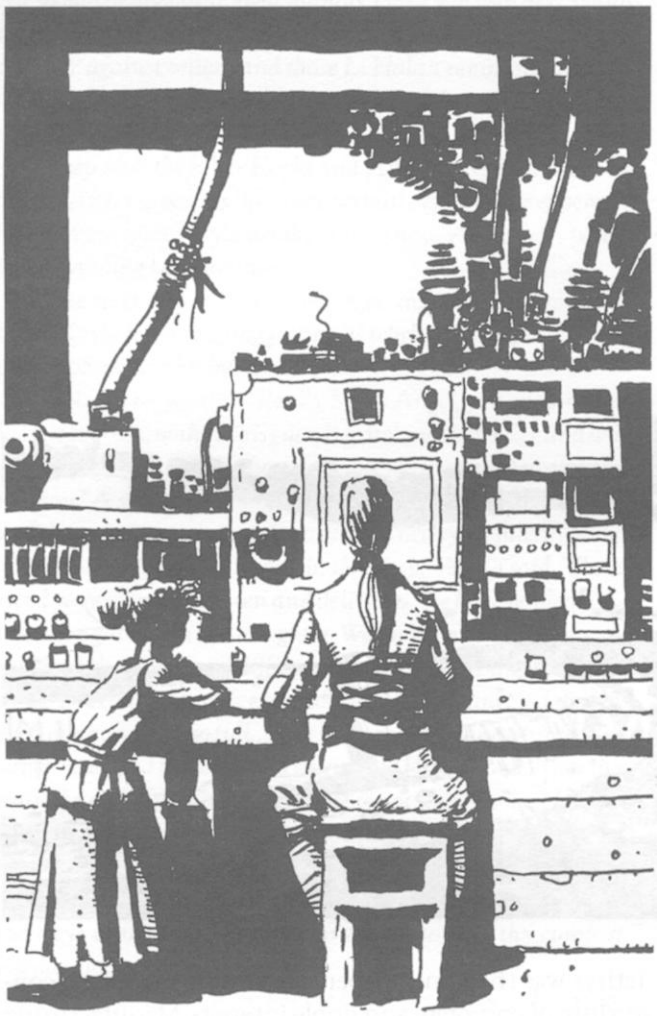
*In the seventh year of Timon's governorship of Tethys, Amalthea, daughter of Aruna, received her final calling, and began to heal in the countryside. When but a child of 10, she had vision of the Empyrean Angel, who said it was her destiny to heal worlds and lives. When she was 17, Viktor, her uncle, a doctor of probabilities, asked her to help him in his studies of matter origins through the study of vibrations. His devices broke upon her, and caused Amalthea to fall silent for three days, whence she had her second vision, of a universe which needed healing, and the dark, hurt places therein. Awaking, she said: "The universe must be healed" and left to her studies and then her healing. And disciples gathered about her, and began to call her Teacher. Her uncle's works fell to ruin, and became the haunting place of phantoms, yet word of Amalthea the Healer spread to other worlds.*

— Omega Gospels, Amalthea 3:1-5

Amalthea was the second daughter of Rikard Erling and Dr. Aruna Sahir, born on the planet of Tethys (2701). Tethys was then an independant world ruled by a consortium of corporate and noble interests. Manufacturing and agriculture made up most of the industry, and it was then a pleasant world, before finally strip-mined of most of its resources.

Amalthea's father was a veterinarian, herbalist and amateur anthropologist, whose writings attracted some attention in scientific circles. Her uncle, Dr.Viktor Domokos Erling, was a mathematician/scientist of great fame, and the founder of Pan-Physics, or P-Physics, as it was known in certain circles. Cosmology had largely replaced physics as a main course of study at the time, and Viktor Erling briefly revived the former field. A tall, thin man with jet-black hair, he was one of those phenomenal intellects which seemed to proliferate between the fall of the First Republic and rise of the Second. He left Terra and came to live with his brother and wife when Amalthea was 10, and stayed for seven years. He was a strange, aloof man, but not without charm. His influence on the young child was considerable.

Amalthea was a remarkable child, intelligent and beautiful, noted for the long white hair she had throughout her life. Amalthea often accompanied her mother to the medical center where she worked, and learned much by observing her. Dr. Aruna Sahir was a noted bone specialist, and an authority on synthetic flesh and biological cloning. Amalthea already displayed great compassion for all things, and observed that medical healing alleviated



fear and pain. She tended sick animals and plants with remarkable skill, gaining a reputation as a child healer among the local population.

At the age of 10, Amalthea became lost in the woods during a storm near her country home. The young girl was struck by a falling tree. Pinned beneath branches and bleeding, she heard a beautiful, unearthly voice cry: "Amalthea, I will guide you." A blue light settled over her, and her bleeding halted, and the angelic voice guided her home. Called the "Miracle on the Hill," it baffled her parents, who believed their child had hallucinated the incident, perhaps suffering from a minor concussion. The melodious voice had promised to make Amalthea a healer of bodies and souls. Her parents could not answer Amalthea's inquiries about what the nature of the "guiding voice" was. They acknowledged that several serious cuts and bruises were remarkably healed, but that was all.

Viktor Domokos Erling listened to his niece's incredible story and took her hand. "It is possible that you were touched by a force from outside the Metrocronos," he said. "The vibrational energies work at a higher frequency, so healing at this level becomes accelerated, according to our concepts of time passage."

"What is the Metrocronos?" Amalthea asked her uncle.

"Ah, Niece, merely a term I came up with, borrowing from ancient Greek, by which I mean to imply space/time."

Viktor Erling's theories on Pan Physics can be given only the most general overview here. Erling held that all finites run to absolutes, and that the absolute concept, one he called Nous, encompassed all finite definitions of the absolute, be they Ultimate Truth, Infinity, God, Platonic Forms, the Good, the Mindscape, etc. This he set down in his Maxim of Absolute Metaphysical Certainty, using set theory mathematics and symbology to break the Infinity Code, as he termed it. Absolutes, Dr.Erling liked to point out, are not knowable, or completely knowable, by finite understanding. By never knowing the Nous, we are free of the burden of mastering it, a stance some thought of as defeatist, or mirroring the work of earlier mathematicians/logicians such as Godel, Leal and Varuna.

Yet Erling went beyond these earlier thinkers in his pursuit of higher vibrational energies, a secret which he believed held the physical universe together. Beginning with studying the polarization of light, Erling glimpsed yet higher vibrations beyond the transverse wave motion of light vibrations. Wave motion caused a vibration about a mean position to take place. Discovering higher frequency "ghost vibrations," or G-Vibrations, Erling traced these to a higher plane. Erling believed that these originated in an ever-renewable source from beyond the space/time continuum.

He sought to tap this source, and built VIRA, or the Vibration Refraction Accelerator, to draw down this energy. Hearing Amalthea's story of her healing, he con-

cluded that a higher being, from beyond space/time, or the Metrocronos, had parted space/time like a curtain, healing her with the higher vibratory energies which he sought to discover. Believing that many religious mystical experiences could be thus explained, and thinking that some people were more prone to these experiences than others, he asked his niece to aid him.

Interestingly, Erling did not believe in free will, and thought that time was predetermined. "The past, present and future all exist as one beyond space/time, so all is predestined." Erling believed that, at the basic ontological level, as viewed from the fourth dimension, time does not exist — but a wave function does, which determines the spatial relationships of the cosmological universe, terminating in the Nous Point. Amalthea argued instead that sentients could make choices. But this, her uncle countered, was predetermined by their character.

"But what about being touched by beings from beyond space/time?" she asked, implying that these higher beings could implant free will not touched by space/time.

Erling smiled, and nodded. "You have a point," he said, chuckling to himself.

Amalthea did well in her studies, pursuing medicine, ethics and mathematics. She also aided her uncle in his research. When VIRA was complete, she volunteered for experiments dealing with the operation of the prototype. Small tests produced limited results: plant growth acceleration and swift ionic crystal growth. Industry took note of Erling's success, but showed only scant interest while continuing to fund him. Sometimes, odd visual images were produced, "ghost" shapes of strange alien races, long believed extinct.

Attempting to understand the vibrational waves, Amalthea looked directly into VIRA's converter storage unit while the operational drive was still on. The resulting shock sent her flying across the room. Knocked out by the initial explosion, she lay unconscious for three days. Amalthea later claimed that she had seen a being of energy, whom she called Ahnkelbion, who directed her to heal the universe. Ahnkelbion the Radiant opened her senses to encompass totality. In a second's flash she saw the universe, and felt the various organic and inorganic forms of pain, and beheld the necessary cures. Then, looking into the dark void between the stars, she felt vibrations of hurt and rage. Reaching forth, she called on the higher vibratory energies to heal the dark's pain. The dark reacted, pulsating rage at her. The resulting backlash woke her. "This universe must be healed!" she yelled, startling her parents. Amalthea did not speak of her vision for years afterward.

Aruna's daughter went on to gain a medical degree, and immediately set to work healing all she could. Saddened that medical ethics had fallen, she pursued the matter, finally concluding that humanity lacked an objective universal ethical system. Yet, with travel among the stars, there was a need for such a centralized ethical system. Amalthea began the forging of her own system, taken from the fallen fragments of the past. "Old wine cannot enter new wine skins," she said, "So I must flavor my new wine with the best sediment the past can offer." This paradigm shift focused her studies anew. From this, the Compassionate Ethics were born.

Rebellion erupted on Tethys, when the head of the security forces, Major Huang, attempted to seize the world in the name of Terra and the First Republic. A bloody three-year war ensued, in which reinforcement's from New Istanbul (Byzantium Secundus) finally won the day for the consortium loyalists. Amalthea began her healing then, setting up a crude tent near the northern battle zone. Although twice imprisoned and accused of being a spy, she won her freedom with the force of her arguments and her powerful charisma. She was acknowledged by both loyalists and rebels as "Amalthea the Healer."

She wed Mael Lewellyn, a philosophy teacher pursuing similar ethical problems to hers. Not much is known of him, but they met during the Tethys Rebellion and produced a daughter, Jivanta. After two years of marriage, Mael was killed in the siege of Nueva Madrid while running medical supplies. Amalthea never wed again. She had already attracted followers, and began to spread her ethical system, Leiposophy ("Leip" from Indo-European "life, stick"). Two of her earliest followers were Dr. Adrian Wells and Safa Binte Akram. Amalthea's deep compassion moved them to join her, sacrificing promising careers to heed the healer's call.

Amalthea had a high cure rate which she attributed to her meditations. At first, she entered a semi-trance state and diagnosed a patient's cure; later, she learned to call on this knowledge while in a conscious state. Amalthea's healing of the governor's wife from a skull fracture brought her much fame and wealth, allowing her to purchase sorely needed medical supplies to continue her healing work. During the war, she contemplated the future, and dedicated her life to healing, vowing to never slacken in her duties. Upon the conclusion of the war, she left Tethys for other worlds where her skills were needed.

Her uncle did not fare so well. Captured by the rebels, he was allowed to continue his research. Early errors in VIRA produced more ghostly images of alien races, until the lab and home beyond filled with unsettling sights. Viktor attempted communication with these strange shades, but only received conflicting messages in response. When his lab was bombed, he became a refugee, and the region was ever after called "Shade Hill," holy to the early Amaltheans, although accursed by the Orthodoxy. He continued his research on Sutek.

Except for the application of ionic crystal growth acceleration for industry, little came from his work. Rediscovered during the Second Republic, Erling's studies caused a scientific renaissance in many fields. During the New Dark Ages, Viktor Erling's applications were forgotten, save in minuscule form. Despairing in his own life-

time, after losing two colleagues to vibratory experimentation, he concluded that his life's work was for nothing. Belatedly endorsing his niece's ethical system, he came to aid her, remaining with her until his life's end. In Church lore he is remembered as a Doctor (often, erroneously, of Theology!), and became a rather comical, beloved figure, ever at his niece's side, head in the air while falling over his feet. Perhaps Viktor would have found the irony rather pleasant, and smiled knowingly at the expense of human memory.

## Zebulon the Prophet

*Paulus and Lextius carried Zebulon from the dwellings of men, into the desert, for they heard rumors of a miraculous healer there. For Zebulon battled the Demon Touch, and was lost to them. And Zebulon saw the Abyss, where Light is Not, and his spirit fell into the final despair as his body surrendered life. Yet with a will he arose, and they came near that region called Maltarak, where Amalthea's tent was pitched.*

*Then came Zebulon to Amalthea's tent, and he said unto her, "Heal me." And Zebulon was nigh Death. Within him the Demon Touch grappled, and the Prophet battled the cancerous touch, seeing only the Abyss, and hearing the Cry of Lost Nothingness. Amalthea called then on her power, and performed her greatest miracle, the Healing of the Prophet. The compassionate healer drew on her spirit, to add to his, and call him back from the Void.*

*And on the edge of the Abyss of Death, which stretches from this life to the next, world without end, Amalthea brought him back, whom others could not cure. For Amalthea walked in the Light, and was known by the Light. She cast her Light before the Demon Seed, and it withered. She cast her Light down the deep Abyss, and the nothingness broke to the sound of Life and Holy Purpose like unto the rushing of great waters. And for seven hours she poured forth her power, drawing Zebulon nigh onto this side of the abyss, but when the sun rose she said, "I am spent." But Zebulon stirred. And then Amalthea bled light into the Grail, in tears and the wounds she suffered, and offered it unto him. And Zebulon drank of the Light and was healed.*

*Rising, he looked unto Amalthea. But Amalthea said "Man, thou art healed already. They say thou art a preacher. Come, heal me with thy talk, for I am sore troubled of what is and was, and strive to create out of fragments."*

*And Zebulon said, "Let us talk of what is gone and what can be saved from ruins, for Religion long outlasts the fall of Civilization, and Belief survives when the Known crumbles." And they went out into the desert and spoke of many things. Yet at last Zebulon fell into sleep, for now natural weariness overcame him, and Amalthea asked Paulus and Lextius "Who is this man? For he should be dead. My work did but unleash a mighty torrent from him, a flood of Life."*

— Omega Gospels, Lextius 8:57-62

Arriving upon Grail, the Amaltheans heard tales of another healer, called the "Outlaw Preacher" by the local nobility. For four months the followers of Amalthea heard about this renegade priest while their teachers remained apart, going about their tasks. One night, the tent flap of



Amalthea's field hospital opened, and there before her stood Zebulon. "Heal me," the Prophet said.

Zebulon had suffered from the Dark Vision, a spiritual nihilism he encountered on the fringes of the frontier worlds. He had cured a peasant criminal by driving a demonic spirit from him, and his body bore the marks of the spiritual battle. None could cure him, and a price was set upon his capture. Hunted by the local nobility for tampering with the lord's property (the serf), Paulus and Lextius brought him to Amalthea. Amalthea went into a trance and healed him of his great weariness and scars, passing her cup to him. She bled and cried light (Luxia) into the cup, which healed the Prophet. Thus did the planet Grail get its name, from the act of ultimate compassion Amalthea rendered to Zebulon. While Zebulon came to Amalthea, she ended up following his path. Of all his followers, she challenged him the most, often debating ethics with him.

The Amaltheans state that she influenced him vastly on these matters. She retained her own followers and a belief system intact before she met Zebulon, although her own outlook changed by the encounter. It is said that she first began to feel the universe as an organism after meeting Zebulon, where before she had only known it intellectually. Amalthea wrote down many of his sayings and their conversations, and preserved them. The influence of the Prophet onto the Compassionate Sister (as he called her) was a pivotal event, as was her healing of him (depicted in Church artwork across the Known Worlds).

During the time of her discipleship, she performed the Seven Miracles of Amalthea (three in the presence and with the help of Zebulon), including the Fishwife's Cure, Raising the Ur-Ukar Chieftain, and Healing the Sathraist. Traveling with the other disciples, forming the core group about Zebulon, she learned of Zebulon's infusion of joy into grim necessity, and further understood his sayings about the dark, which she confirmed with her own experiences. Amalthea acknowledged him the greater teacher, which her more zealous followers disputed.

Zebulon taught her the Law of Nines for understanding psychological healing and inner spiritual growth so that she could objectively heal without becoming emotionally sympathetic in all medical situations. This was relayed in her own words, and merely hinted at in the Omega Gospels. When Zebulon went to visit the Vau, he drained the Cup of Passing with his followers, and gave it last to Amalthea, telling her, "Always give with the Cup of Healing, Sister, so as to visibly show the Pancreator's Love." The cup became the symbol of the Amaltheans.

After Zebulon's passing, the disciples remained together for a time but then went their own ways. No clear heir was designated, although Amalthea had organized followers. Amalthea traveled with Lextius and Maya to Terra, but she finally returned to her own following, infused with Zebulon's insights but crushed at his passing. Her uncle Viktor reassured her, stating that death was not a condition in space/time, and that Zebulon still lived. Amalthea pondered her next step.

In her dream's Ahnkelbion urged her to remove to Artemis. She did so, starting the Temple of Eternal Sanctuary there, which eventually became Sanctuary Aeon. A sister colony grew on Grail, headed by her follower, Adrian. This colony began the practice of Sanctissima, or the healing of other sentient races.

The local Artemis authorities accommodated Amalthea and her followers. Within Amalthea's lifetime, her teachings about Zebulon spread to many worlds. She began organizing new followers and disciples into an organized structure, teaching ethics, healing, moral philosophy and Zebulon's ideas to a growing number of recruits. They called her Avalokitesvara, after the bodhistattva who sees the world's sound and hear's the worlds suffering. Wise and beautiful to the end of her days, Amalthea saw her followers number into the thousands, vying with Palamedes' attempt to organize doctrine. "Amalthea should heal herself of her ambition, attempting to supplant Zebulon's teachings with her strange mixture," Palamedes wrote to an exasperated servant.

Amalthea saw no reason for rivalry, yet her teachings were a source of contention within the early Church. Sanctuary Aeon kept the best archives, and Amalthea recorded her talks with Zebulon, some of which in reduced form helped to shape the Omega Gospels. When she died, in 2903, her body burst into brilliant flame and was consumed in seconds. Her ashes fell on bare ground, where, ever after, the silvery blue Amalthean flowers grew. No tomb marks her resting place, and the faithful say she was taken up to Zebulon's side in the highest Empyrean.

## After Amalthea

Jivanta, Amalthea's daughter, was chosen as her mother's successor. She took the title Ketcharch, or Head of Sanctuary Aeon. Clashes with Palamedes' Orthodox Church continued, often with Amalthea's followers gaining the upper hand. The Compassionate Ethics, combined with Leiposophy, produced a benign universal system. Some splinter groups began declaring Amalthea the true Prophet (later an incarnation of the Universal Goddess), and argued that Zebulon was her disciple. There was a considerable influx of goddess animism into the early Amalthean sect, which emphasized the feminine energies (Dhechi) involved in healing and suffering. A few declared her the bride of Zebulon. These beliefs continued to enjoy an underground existence after animism's defeat by the Universal Church, and aspects of feminine mysticism were sanctified in Amalthean prayer and ritual.

Jivanta did what she could to discourage the more extreme belief forms. Yet as healers who tended to the poor and outcasts, Sanctuary Aeon was much loved among the common people, and popular folk beliefs attributed miraculous cures to their founder. Amalthea was held as Zebulon's equal by many, including some within the edu-

cated ranks. This was not actively discouraged by Sanctuary Aeon. Many believed Amalthea equally influenced Zebulon.

Jivanta was noted for stepping down from the title of Ketcharch, fearing that a hereditary priestess was unethical for Amalthea's successors, preferring that the title be chosen by merit. She recommended Nathania for the position, and this was affirmed. Jivanta went to do field work on Terra, becoming again a simple healer. Nathania herself was born on Terra, in the Arabian desert, and was the best healer of her age. In her reign as Ketcharch, the sect finally overcame its rivalry with the Orthodox Church, cementing the terms of their continued relationship. The Ukar War had proven the Orthodox Church triumphant, for many people chose Palamedes' authoritarian interpretation over Amalthea's ethics. "Palamedes was ever the noble, and cast the universe through the eyes of rank and hierarchy," Nathania said.

Nathania negotiated with Palamedes about Sanctuary Aeon's position in the Church. Palamedes sought to unite the splintered factions of the Church, and in his old age he accepted some concessions from Nathania. Nathania, a shrewd bargainer, retained much, including Sanctuary Aeon's teachings and structure, with the exception that an Archbishop must rule over the Ketcharch, and that the Amalthean order should fall in line with the Universal Church's denominations.

Reluctantly, Jivanta was called back to serve as the Archbishop of Artemis. Amalthea was given the title of first Archbishop/Ketcharch, although she was titled Ketcharch in her time. Soon, a number of archbishops appeared in the order. It was ever held that the Archbishop, or Primus, of Artemis is the highest authority within Sanctuary Aeon. The Archbishop of Grail is the second in authority, while the Ketcharch remains the highest spiritual (nonadministrative) authority. The Archbishop of Artemis has been referred to at times as the Little Matriarch or Patriarch, in deference to the Patriarch on Holy Terra.

## The Second Republic

Despite formerly joining the Universal Church, Sanctuary Aeon was left to run its own affairs. Soon, most worlds had hospitals and healing centers under the Grail symbol of the Amaltheans. Their headquarters on Artemis underwent rapid expansion, becoming Mataria Medgarten, the holy place of learning and healing. Much medical progress was made here, including advances in energy healing (kelbosophy or chiosophy), veterinary care, and holistic-shaman studies concerning the Shantor and Ur-Ukar. Sanctuary Aeon allowed aliens to enter their ranks as healers, and experts in alien linguistics and customs soon taught and studied at Mataria Medgarten. Some vibrational wave healing continued.

It should be noted that Sanctuary Aeon remained close to the Ven-Lohji, or Ur-Obun branch of the Church, arguing for its inclusion among the other orders. A noted leader of this time was Amphion, who studied Amalthea's Laws of Nine. Creating a joyous healing dance based off these studies, he was the founder of Shekina, or spiritual healing. In time he became Archbishop of Artemis.

During the Second Republic Sanctuary Aeon kept abreast of the latest medical technology. Yet many in this time became alienated from the hi-tech civilization about them, and the Ketcharchs of the order began the Pyskti, or mind healing, infusing it with Shekina to cure those suffering from nihilism. Pyskti incorporated elements of psychology and psychiatry, but was not psychic mind healing, as later peasants believed. Alarmed at the growing alienation from spiritual life and life itself, Sanctuary Aeon raised their concerns to the patriarchs. When one of their own, Allete, became Matriarch of the Universal Church, she responded with vigorous Church programs, attacking the soulessness of the mercantile philosophy of the Second Republic, which she termed Pan-Capitalism.

Ironically, it was during the Second Republic that Sanctuary Aeon almost became independent of the Church. The Church survived as a moral force, but many left its teachings for the technological wonders of the age. Sanctuary Aeon, due to large donations and popularity, became rich. Corruption set in, gradually at first. A division of sorts began, between the *bakhti* (wandering healers, often loosely associated with Sanctuary Aeon), and the *sants*, who devoted their lives to service to the poor. Generally, the sants had closer ties to Sanctuary Aeon's official policies.

Pacifism remained the official doctrine of Sanctuary Aeon, although Amalthea stated that it was not unethical to defend oneself. This would soon change.

## The New Dark Ages

When the noble houses overthrew the Second Republic, Sanctuary Aeon did not immediately suffer. For nearly 300 years, they continued to make medical progress. Only when the greater technological society completely collapsed did they fall back onto their own resources, safeguarding their medical knowledge as "healing miracles," taught as a sacred path. Sanctuary Aeon practiced strict neutrality during the wars of the nobility. Yet some planets, cut off after the Fall, returned to ravage the riches of the Known Worlds. These marauders respected no laws of medical sanctuary, and many Amaltheans met violent deaths. During this period of barbarian raids, Madost was elected Archbishop of Sanctuary Aeon (4290).

### Madost, Hammer of Corruption

Madost was a controversial leader, greatly hated in his lifetime. A stern disciplinarian, he saved the sect from Orthodox censor by cleaning up corruption on his native Ravenna. Madost had served on front line medical teams during military battles and bore himself like a captain. He declared that it was just for the healers to defend themselves. When the barbarians attempted to storm the Sanc-

tuary hospital on Delphi, they were met with withering fire and bloody battle. Madost understood well the age he had plunged into, a dangerous feudal era. Henceforth Sanctuary Aeon was armed.

There were those who disagreed with Madost. Allying with the bahkti and dissident Amaltheans, they elected Annalina of Shaprut as their leader. Removing to Shaprut, they produced a rival to the Amalthean leadership. For 15 years, the two groups argued, both courting the Orthodox leadership. Annalina produced clean, reasoned arguments, while Madost's tone was shrill and uncompromising. A harsh, stubborn, man, he won over the Orthodox leadership largely by his arguments that rebellion from authority set a bad example. Finally tiring of the splinter group, he hired assassins from the Decados. In 4310, they stormed Annalina's headquarters, killing the leadership and setting fire to their facilities. With their leaders destroyed, many rejoined Sanctuary Aeon. The Annalinists continued for a century as an underground movement, professing pacifism against Madost's militant reforms, before they were eventually welcomed back into Sanctuary Aeon.

Madost also fought the growing corruption within the Amaltheans. Since the Fall, many Amalthean leaders enriched themselves on donations, living like princes. Public confidence in the Amaltheans fell. Madost had many excommunicated, even having some killed; turning their fortunes over to the poor, he gained a good reputation in folk memory as "Hard Madost, Hammer of Corruption." He also wanted more Amaltheans to be active in the field, and began the practice of the "penance tax."

Later in life, Madost belatedly studied Amalthea's ethics, and decided that his methods were too harsh. Undergoing spiritual healing, he declared that he had violated Amalthea's code, due to an inner imbalance in his psyche. Stating that he was unfit for leadership, Madost turned his office over to Nastasiya, a former follower of Annalina. He lived out the remainder of his days ministering to the sick on Kish.

## Archbishop Istaqa and the Artemis Donation

Archbishop Yamuna Istaqa (4366-4450) was a controversial and scandalous figure. He became archbishop at the age of 27 due to his vast ethical and medical knowledge. He revived the study of nano-healing. A humorous man, he once came before wealthy donors naked, and startled visiting Orthodox bishops by wearing a coyote mask and performing ancient, pre-Zebulon cure ceremonies. He lived openly with his mistress, Nidawi, with whom he had many children. Istaqa hated dogmatism, and allowed his dog to drink from Amalthea's Grail (the cup she had received from Zebulon), or placed it before his bed as a chamber pot. Reviving the joyous philosophy left dormant since the Second Republic, he structured the various healing disciplines into different areas of study. This allowed



new disciples to choose their path. Twice he was called before Patriarch Adrian on charges of blasphemy, and both times persuaded Adrian to drop the excommunication charges. Adrian loved him but was confused by his strange antics, calling Istaqa "my much beloved wayward son."

Istaqa disagreed with the Church's stance on technology, and even hid Preceptors in the Amalthean Order. Largely through his hard bargaining with the College of Ethicals, "Merciful Technals" (technical equipment involved in healing) were not declared heretical, as long as only Sanctuary Aeon used them. The technological island of Artemis could no longer stand isolated from the regressive worlds around them. Slowly at first, the high-tech medical infrastructure began to dissolve. Istaqa realized this, and bought Sanctuary Aeon some time. But even his efforts could not hold back forever the encroaching darkness.

Istaqa's greatest accomplishment was healing Duke Kiril Chapaev from serious neuron damage. Kiril was the last of the Chapaev line, who had ruled Artemis since the Second Republic's collapse. Dying heirless, he willed the planet to Istaqa. The planet's population joyously agreed, and only a few minor gentry nobles grumbled. Istaqa willed the planet to Sanctuary Aeon on the condition that his bastard children be given land, money and titles. This was done.

Amalthean healers are often remembered long after Sanctuary Aeon's leaders are forgotten. Mother Mansi (4469-4578) was a famous healer throughout the Known Worlds, whose kindness gave her a reputation second only to Amalthea. A bahkti, she traveled up where needed. Her sayings and humorous insights were collected into the "Book of Mansi." Sister Amanda was another member of Sanctuary Aeon long recalled in folk memory; several miracles were attributed to her. She fasted against Patriarch Jacob's bull concerning the penance of sins on the nobility until he reworded it (4401). Justman Jake was another semilegendary figure, joining Captain Rastoff's Jumpway Men, a band of pirates who robbed from the wealthy and gave to the poor. He saved Captain Rastoff's life many times. This group of colorful figures was long remembered in song.

During the Barbarian Invasions, healers from Sanctuary Aeon were needed and were given accelerated training for wartime. When Vladimir began his unification of the Known Worlds, the Church backed him. There were penalties levied against worlds which resisted Vladimir's hegemony. Sanctuary Aeon was excluded, due to their ethical stance on healing all, no matter what faction they belonged to. Archbishop Aurora resisted Vladimir's demands to use Amalthean healers as spies. When Vladimir was assassinated, the wars began anew, and Sanctuary Aeon was stretched to its limits in personnel, resources and equipment.

# Recent History

It was said that the Dark Ages did not catch up with Sanctuary Aeon until 4300. After Vladimir's assassination, the shadows grew. Much of the sect's high-tech knowledge and their best healers were destroyed in the bitter wars that followed. A dogmatic system emerged. Archbishop Kirsten (4615-33) codified Istaqa's fields of study, and again reformed the syllabus, adding languages, Church history and defensive fighting skills to the Amalthean regimen. Rote learning became common. Those sent to Mataria Medgarten received excellent education, but it was tainted by the vague theological arguments of the times (Acolytes vs. Emanates).

While inferior to Second Republic medical studies, the sect's lore remained vastly superior to the Known Worlds current understanding. Despite this, Sanctuary Aeon mirrored the times. Innovations became fewer. For a period, Sanctuary Aeon fell in line with the Orthodoxy, until Archbishop Alfdisa (4889-4930) woke the sect. The influence of Grail grew, becoming the second largest center of Amalthean learning. Called Santa Amalthea, it has become more Orthodox since Alfdisa's day.

Alfdisa claimed descent from Amalthea herself, and studied in the archives of Sanctuary Aeon. Performing brilliant work in the field, she rose in the hierarchy to become bishop at the age of 28, and Archbishop at 33. At first a passive person, once the Symbiot Wars began, she discovered how unprepared Sanctuary Aeon and the Known Worlds were to deal with the threat. Hating the ignorance and dogma which had halted true learning, she intensified the disciplines, adding practical knowledge to theoretical rote. Starting a department to deal with Symbiot physiology, she was opposed by the Orthodoxy until the loses in the war persuaded them to glean what knowledge they could. Opening lines to the guilds, Alfdisa began medical and healing experiments designed to widen knowledge, including plant lore and veterinary sciences among the new disciplines. Alfdisa read Amalthea's writings on Zebulon, and concluded that the Church's stance against innovation was wrong. She urged Amaltheans to teach as well as heal. Combating the Patriarchs, she left a legacy of innovative learning. New things seemed possible, despite the horrible toll of the Symbiot and Emperor Wars.

Sanctuary Aeon grew during the Emperor Wars. Nobles, killed in the wars, often left their estates to the order, and individuals sickened by constant warfare turned to the study of healing as a balm for the soul. Orthodox leanings had been swept away by the new spirit of the revived Empire. The Symbiot and Emperor Wars had cut a swath in the ranks of theologians, scientists, nobles and guild members. What had gone before seemed remote to the survivors, who sensed that they lived in a different universe than the one their grandparents knew. New trends appeared, and gradually the veil of darkness lifted.

The study of Church history, ironically, lead to a renewed study of Amalthean history, and a new spirit of purpose infused the old order. Archbishop Juliska renewed the study of Amalthea's works and philosophy (4970), so that when Emperor Alexius ascended the Universal Throne, the Amaltheans again stood as innovative healers, proud of their traditions and differences from the mainline Church. Archbishop Sakhya, a student of Juliska, continues the message of healing to all sentient races.

# Theology

*The time of healing has not yet come, Amalthea. You are to begin the work, but remember, in the Pancreator's vision all things are healed already.*

*— Zebulon to Amalthea, Omega Gospels, Amalthea 45:2*

*And Zebulon heard Amalthea, and that her task was not only to heal the ills of the body but those things which darken and shadow the spirit, and he told her of hidden things that she may accomplish this task.*

— Amalthea 47:8

*Niece, of course the infinite could heal the finite. But at what point in our reckoning of space/time would this happen? And under what code would an intelligence beyond the Metrocronos decide to break into waves of vibrational energy to undergo an answer to an ethical prayer?*

— Viktor Domokos Erling

Amalthea's ethical and metaphysical system, which she imparted to her followers, are based upon four sources:

1. Her own studies before she met Zebulon, included in her Leiposophy (although she later restructured the work to include Zebulon's ethical teachings).

2. The teachings and writings of her uncle, Dr. Viktor Erling.

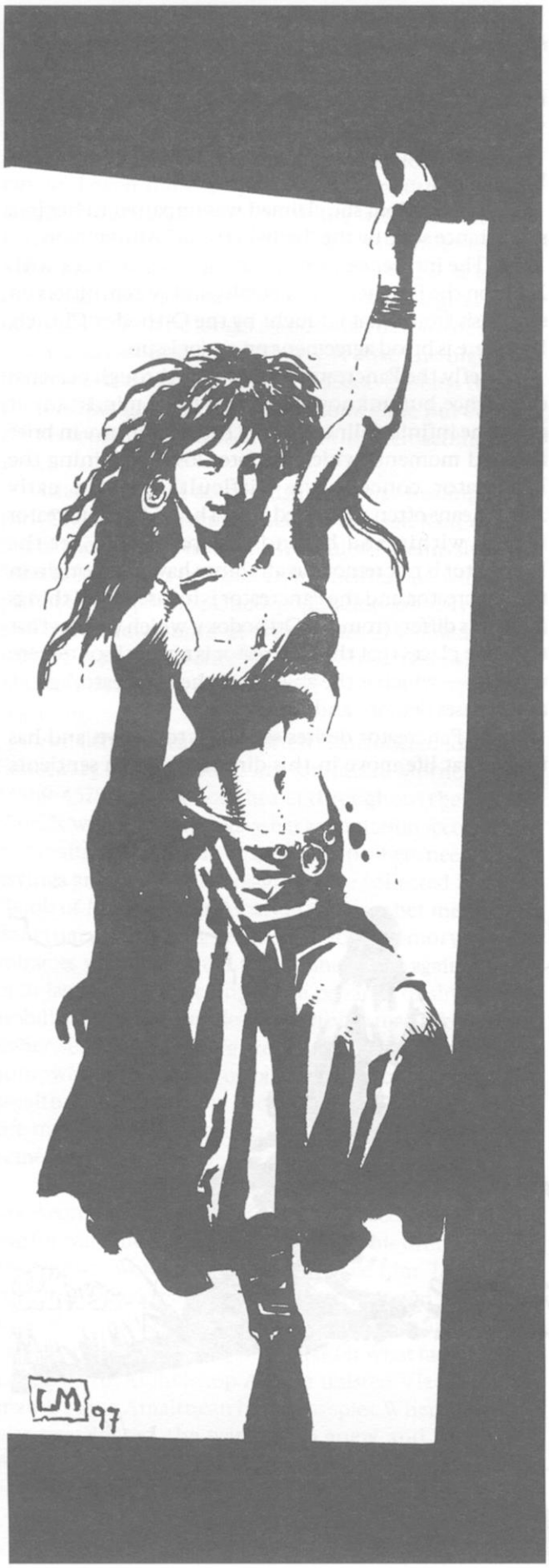
3. The wisdom she claimed was imparted to her in a semi-trance state by the "higher ethical," Ahnkelbion

4. The influence, gained through long debates, with Zebulon the Prophet. The metaphysical system differs on emphasis from what is taught by the Orthodox Church, but there is broad agreement on major issues.

Briefly, the Pancreator is knowable through personal experience, but unknowable in that finite minds cannot grasp the infinite "allness" of the Pancreator, save in brief inspired moments which are later lost. Explaining the Pancreator concept was difficult, and the early Amaltheans often shortened it to "The Is." The Pancreator is both within and beyond the space/time. Yet the Pancreator is not remote, as all things have their origin in the Pancreator, and the Pancreator is infused in all things (here this differs from the Orthodoxy, which teaches that there are places that the Pancreator is not — absolute zero nihilism — which is the absence of the Pancreator's good, and infuses demons and dark beings).

The Pancreator desires sentients to evolve, and has urged that life move in this direction. When sentients






awaken to their heritage, immortal souls also evolve, which suits the Pancreator's plan for creative participation in creation (souls are from the Pancreator, separated to experience and draw toward their original source). At a certain level in sentient evolution, supernatural fear and worship gives way to the worship of nature gods, and eventually, as culture rises, to some form of monotheism. Sin is the willful rejection by individual sentient beings of the spiritual light of the Pancreator. Sentients band together for survival, gradually forming society, which creates laws to regulate behavior. The laws evolve, as do notions of morality and justice.

Laws and religious codes combine to form ethical codes which hold society together. Since all sentients are spiritually (if not socially or economically) equal and beloved in the Pancreator's intent, healers have a social obligation, sacred to the Pancreator and themselves. Their task calls them to heal their fellow sentients from diseases, pain, physical and spiritual ailments, that the patient may recover to fulfil the Pancreator's intentions for them. Compassion comes from the Pancreator, and the compassion of the sentient is an echo of the vast Pancreator's compassion. For any sentient, the capability for fulfillment and spiritual evolution is always there. The healer must not judge the patient's spiritual state or standing in society. As the Pancreator sent Zebulon and others to aid sentient growth, so must healers aid those who are physically and spiritually injured.

Healers can ask for payment for their art, as they do need to survive. Outlandish claims for healing are unethical. If a sentient cannot pay, then the healer can demand a penance or healing act from them.

The relation of the sentient toward the Pancreator, the foundation for all sentient morality, is the acceptance of duty. Through the actualization of duty, of which healing is but one example, the sentient moves closer to the Pancreator. Resistance to duty is spiritual retardation. Withdrawal from the Pancreator's participatory creation moves the sentient nearer to cessation of existence (all things are recycled in creation, but the sentient's individual soul vanishes, to be given to other energies). Yet it is not always easy to participate. The Pancreator has created tensions that are hard to overcome, but allow for spiritual evolution through the task of creative, spiritual growth. Questing for the Pancreator leads to higher levels of spiritual creative existence.

Orthodox philosophy, also deriving from Zebulon, emphasizes more the role that the individual must take, downplaying the role of free choice. Amaltheans state that the individual possesses the freedom to reject creative spiritual growth. Also, while the Orthodox and Amaltheans are in broad agreement about soul disintegration, the Orthodox believe that the absence of the Pancreator is real, and that certain beings contain more absence then presence of the Pancreator. The Amaltheans state that even evil beings are infused with the Pancreator,

and can be spiritually healed. Some subscribe to the Orthodox view of demons whose shadows obscure the lights of grace. Others think demons are the shades of the first defilers, those sentients who first brought harm to another, breaking the unity of creation. A few believe that it is sentience which causes hate (for how can one be aware of love without its opposite?), and they join with Avestites in condemning learning and lore.

Others believe that the cause of suffering is a mystery. They know that suffering exists and they have an inexplicable sorrow and compassion for those who suffer. They care not for the reasons behind such things, they only know that hurt and pain must be relieved. For them, it is the only way toward the Pancreator. These healers go about their work of healing regardless of the great weight of war and violence around them. It is these few, enlightened Amaltheans who are the most like Amalthea herself.

In their preachings, Amaltheans emphasize compassion. Since we are all far from the light, we all suffer equally. The details of each person's suffering are important only insofar as knowledge of them may help the healer relieve the suffering, but all who suffer are equal in their need, regardless of degree. Suffering comes from separation from creation. Only love can unite us with creation again, no matter how temporary such communion is. There are different levels of existence, and our flawed world is but one of them. For the cycle of suffering to be brought to an end, others must be healed. Only when all beings take responsibility for their actions will all actions become those of love, not hate, breaking the cycle.

The Amaltheans, while viewing Zebulon as the Prophet, believe that he was a growing, spiritual being, and open to influence. Theologians of an Orthodox bent state that Zebulon was perfected, but had to slowly "wake" to his perfection. The emphasis is slight, but has had major consequences. Amaltheans see the Prophet's influence on Amalthea and hers upon him as a spiritual cross pollination. Orthodox thinkers state that the Prophet questioned Amalthea to allow her to grow; to them, Amalthea was the most spiritual adept and advanced of the disciples, but that was all. The Amaltheans state that she approached him on many levels, and that her teachings about him are closer to the truth than the Orthodox teachings.

The old arguments between sants and bahkti are forgotten. Recent contentions within Sanctuary Aeon concern ritual and healing knowledge. The ritualists, centered on Grail, see the sacred dances and meditations give way to medical experimentation, and have become somewhat conservative in defiance of the leadership on Artemis. The Artemis leadership claims that they have saved the more important sacred dances, but that innovation in healing is first. They claim that they are carrying out the spirit of Amalthea's teachings while their Grail brethren have fossilized it. In response, the Grail brethren state they keep Amalthea's spiritual exercises alive for the benefit of all.

Most Amaltheans remain committed pacifists, despite Madost's reforms. Sanctuary Aeon displays compassion for all living things, sentient or not. The definition includes non-life forms at times, for Amaltheans believe all material possesses life. Most Amaltheans are vegetarians; only a few partake of meat (and these ritually cleanse themselves before and after eating flesh). Specialized prayers for food preparation give thanks to the Pancreator.

## Amalthean Healing

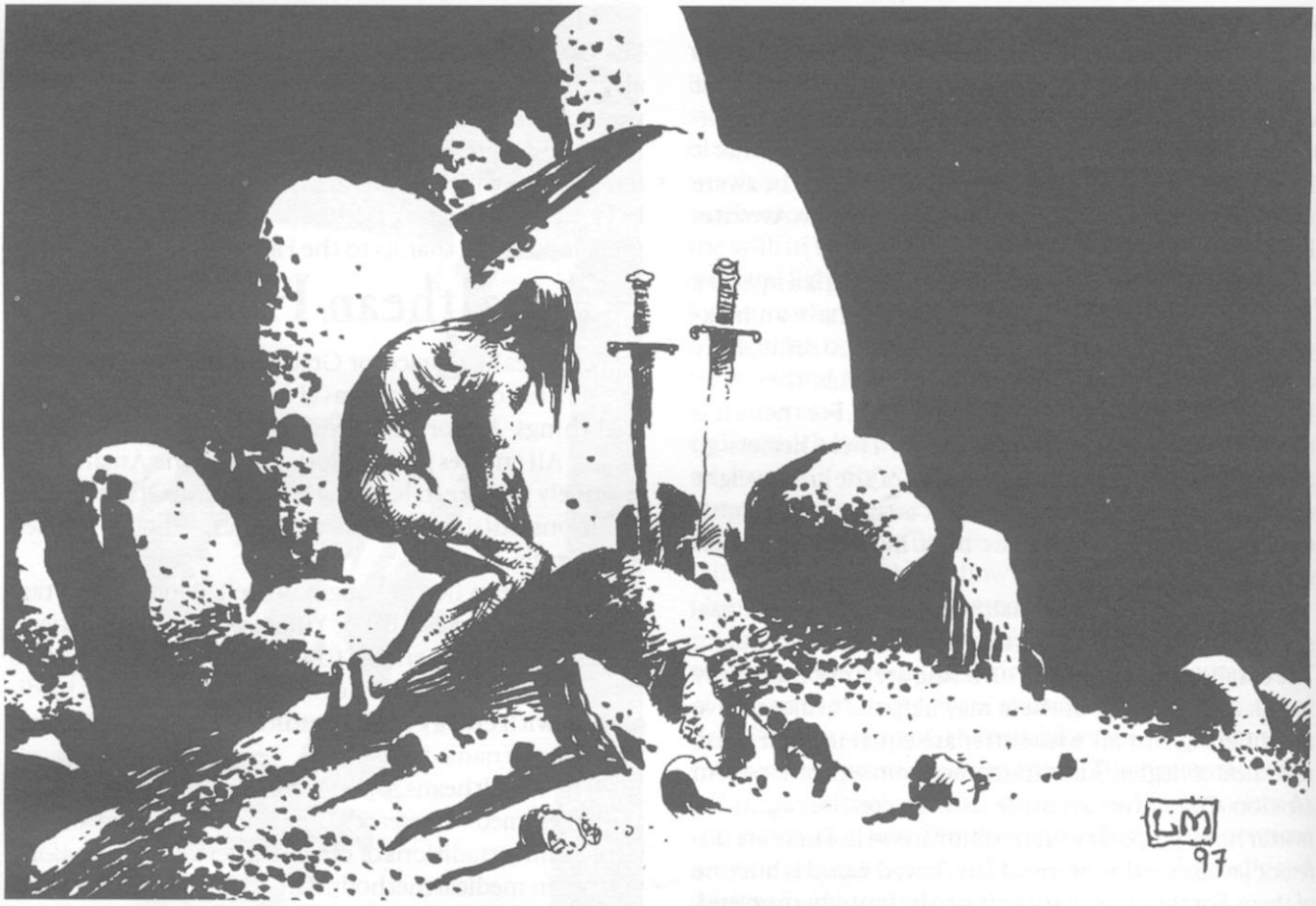
The Healing Grace, or Gracia Thalia, was the gift of the Pancreator to heal. It was given to all living and spiritual things. All forms of healing go back to the Gracia Thalia. All entities possess Gracia Thalia; the Amaltheans creatively partake in learning and using it. Other healing traditions outside Sanctuary Aeon are equally infused with Gracia Thalia.

Amalthean healing originally relied more upon tapping the life energies, SEFs or Yinchi, of the living sentient, working with such energy to allow the body's energies to reach equilibrium. Amalthea combined traditional medical care with energy healing, uniting the two disciplines into one she named *pranasham*.

The Amaltheans, upon removing to Artemis, built the largest medical research library in the Known Worlds. Here healing traditions of old Urth were preserved, along with alien medical methods. Amalthea also incorporated elements of theurgic healing, from powers revealed to all sentient's by the Prophet. Another method of healing Amalthea used was *devarsi*, a term she interpreted as "trance merging with a higher consciousness" who would direct the healer. This proved the hardest method to teach, and only sporadically would a gifted individual possess devarsi. It occasionally emerges and disappears in the history of Sanctuary Aeon, but there is hardly an organized tradition of it. Amalthea was a pacifist, and this was the way of Sanctuary Aeon until the time of Madost.

During the Second Republic, medical physics grew as a discipline. Psykti and Shekina, mind and spirit healing, emerged in this time. When the Second Republic collapsed, Sanctuary Aeon remained a haven of medical knowledge, and still made advances into the next centuries, when the collapse of the technical infrastructure finally affected the Amaltheans. Still, new areas of study emerged. Herbalists studied the healing properties of plants, and healers called kronia worked with the aged. The reforms of Madost and Istaqa renewed the arduous training methods, but even this was codified until the Symbiot Wars. Then, Alfdisa's renaissance began. Medical inquiry was again encouraged. When Alexius became Emperor, the Amaltheans had returned to pramasham, with a slight emphasis on medical healing. The more conservative Grail school remained with a synthesis of theurgy, Yinchi and medical healing.

Amaltheans are taught self defense and may carry




weapons into dangerous areas. The ethical code that arose during the New Dark Ages urges a defensive stance, but the individual must choose depending on circumstances. Still, operating on a wounded foe is part of their compassionate code. The differences between female and male energy, dhechi and monschi, are known to all Amaltheans.

# Canon

Initiates into Sanctuary Aeon are usually recommended by an existing member. A candidate is called a Yeustam. Candidates receive their tutorage from Witegas, or teachers of the sacred and healing traditions. Usually this includes study on Artemis, Grail or Kish, but instruction occurs at most sanctuaries. These studies compose an intense five-year program. Candidates begin as young as 16.

During the first two years, the students are referred to as Nementona, sacred branches. They learn basic healing, energy patterns, medical tech application, sacred rites and sanctuary history from a master. The students' rooms are small cells. Upon completion, the students pass through the Lupercalia, a rite of swords and cups before the full moon. The swords incarnate the doom of the sacred king (the passing of old knowledge), while drinks from the cups offer the first mystical merging with Amalthea's higher compassionate knowledge. This is a night ceremony. Now they are kavi, or wandering healers. For one year they assist an experienced healer in the field.

Returning to the sanctuary, the student plunges into specialized studies. These studies include Shehina (spiritual healing), Psykti (mind healing), Beata (healing of young), Cronia (care of the old), Sant (care for the poor), Sakti (childbirth), Regin (care for nobles), Aster (universal healing, a highly specialized field), Sulis (plant/herbalist), Dhuna (community healing), and Ambochi (love/emotional healing). Some take the title of their study, so Sakti Alinda would be "Alinda, the midwife." Alien care, diseases and animal care are also taught.

After these studies are done, they partake of the second communion, Principessa di Coppe, or Amalthea's Graceful Touch. They perform sacred dances, and drink from the Grail of Life, receiving their true hidden names from the Master Witega or Ketcharch. They now leave to serve Amalthea's Compassionate Calling.

After four years of healing they receive the honored title of Prthivi Mater (for woman healers') and Prthivi Pater (for male healers), and become novitiates of the order. Exceptional skills are further recognized with the title Protos (canon), and later, Master Doctor (deacon). All Amaltheans call each other "Sister" and "Brother" or "Priest" and "Priestess." Above the Master Doctor stands the priest-priestess, then bishop, archbishop, and the Ketcharch. The highest authority is the Archbishop of Artemis. The common

people refer to Amaltheans by their Orthodox titles more than their Amalthean ones. Thus, they would not call a canon a Protos, but another Amalthean might. The Orthodoxy does not refer to them by their Amalthean names, and does not encourage their usage.

The title of Ketcharch, the original leader of the Amaltheans, denotes their highest spiritual teacher, who is in charge of all mysteries and training. Amalthea's descendants often fill this post. It is more than ceremonial. The Ketcharch serves on Artemis, but there is a Ketcharcha ("Little Ketcharch") who serves at Santa Amalthea, the Amalthean school on Grail, who is appointed by the Ketcharch. Amalthea held both posts.

Hard work and merit catch the eyes of superiors. Many live their lives out as honored Prthivi Maters and Paters. Most do not seek political appointment, as it takes away from the calling. To rise, great knowledge of healing must be shown, as well as compassionate acts. The title of Protos is needed if one wants to become a teacher of others. Master Doctors are in charge of local Sanctuaries of healing, hospitals and med-stations, while a priest is in charge of numerous healing houses. A bishop has one or more dioceses under her control, while an Archbishop has leadership over a planet, but is surpassed by the Ketcharch in spiritual authority. The Archbishop of Artemis is answerable only to the Patriarch of the Universal Church. Those eager to rise seek less populated planets, where the sect is scarce. Powerful patrons within the sect and nobility can also help a career. Yet, paradoxically, those too eager to advance are watched and studied closely. Healing and compassion come before power.

Sanctuary Aeon celebrates Santa Amalthea Day (June 22, Holy Terra Calendar). On this day, Amaltheans drink of the healing waters, vowing to renew their compassionate commitment to Amalthea. The Amalthea flower, with silver and blue petals, is sacred to the Amaltheans. Oak and pine trees are also sacred to her. The Grail is the universal symbol of the Amaltheans, but staffs, ankhs (with two snakes entwined on the oval head), veils, nine-point interlaced patterns and falcons are also representative of the order.

Sanctuary Aeon is not democratically oriented, although greater representation is given within its ranks. It is, at best, a meritocracy, with rule from the top down. Novitiates do not have as much say as archbishops, although they are given more credence than in other sects. Some Amaltheans possess strong authoritarian leanings.

Women are equal with men in all things. Early on, this was not unusual, but as the New Dark Ages showed a favor toward patriarchal society, this drew attention. Amaltheans can marry, although the higher hierarchy tend not to. Marrying within the sect demands a two-year commitment before vows are taken.

Amalthea, in her "Blessitudes" and "Libre Zebulon," favors group decision making, but with guidance from experienced leaders. On local matters, all members participate at council. On higher matters, they await the word of their leaders. Sanctuary Aeon was much more democratic in outlook before the overthrow of the Second Republic. That vestiges of this tradition remain, despite outside opposition, speaks well of Amalthean traditions.

# Holy See

## Artemis

Artemis was colonized late in the Diaspora. Two earlier settlements failed, its colonists dead from a native virus which caused skeletosis, or "bone disease." A cure was eventually discovered and Artemis was settled by small colonies fleeing the corporate control of the First Republic. Beholden to IOPEC, they negotiated a settlement where they retained local administrative power. A swift rebellion later freed the world, which then organized into loose cantons.

The planet's indigenous animal life resembled a period similar to earth's Cenozoic, when mammals ruled. In the equatorial zones, remnants of large reptilian animals were found, who dominated the planet in a previous epoch. Plants similar to conifers and flowering angiosperms abounded. Unfortunately, the introduction of Terran plants and animals destroyed one third of all existing animal life. Transplanted Terran life also suffered, until both native and colonized life forms stabilized.

When Amalthea's follower, Sata Binte Akram, came to spread Amalthea's teachings, she met with a warm reception, for there were few doctors on the planet. Sata went from canton to canton, healing and spreading Amalthea's ethics. The Council of Demoplois, thanking her for her aid during a viral outbreak, voted to give her land once belonging to IOPEC. Here the Temple of Eternal Sanctuary was founded. Amalthea herself settled there, beginning Sanctuary Aeon. She saw the necessity for a central headquarters to service the rapidly spreading faith, and most of the population was influenced by her compassionate ethics, and remain so to this day.

When the Second Republic fell, Artemis remained democratic until two powerful local houses, Houses Chapaev and Kingston, seized control (4198). Democratic legal codes continued, though, causing social unrest. Strong resistance to noble law kept the sect's power weak, and there were many rebellions.

When the last Chapaev donated the planet to Archbishop Istaqa, the population rejoiced. Sanctuary Aeon renewed the democratic charters and councils, and lead the planet in High Council with representatives. Still, the democratic nature of Artemis is a far call from the Second Republic's definition. Cantons are run by Councils of Elders, composing the wealthier citizens, and above them, a legal code of Church Law keeps the peace. Despite the benign nature of these laws, they are strictly enforced, and the Planetary Defense Force ("The Guardians") falls under Church rule, not canton rule. Canton law changes slowly,

and change is seen by the locals as a gradual thing at best. There is a great belief in continuance and appeal to written codes. There is an authoritarian bent to the conservative councils, but compared to other worlds, it is a high example of self government.

Artemis has mining, and produces luminite and rainstone. Medical supplies, an offshoot from the Amalthean presence, are produced here. The standard of living is high, and the population still mainly confined to cantons in the northern hemisphere. There are "gentry" nobles and serfs on Artemis, and minor Hazat nobles have a few holdings. Compared to other worlds, the number of both is small. Every citizen pays a tithe to the Amaltheans, and the Amaltheans in return pay a tithe to the Patriarch. This tithe keeps Artemis under the protection of the Universal Church.

## Grail

On the planet where Amalthea healed Zebulon, the first Amalthean church took hold, lead by Amalthea's follower Adrian. Although a strong presence on the planet, the Amaltheans have never ruled the world. Their monastery is at Mount Siddik, and is called Santa Amalthea. It remains the second largest healing school. Disciples used to be required to go to Artemis to study, but after the New Dark Ages, when planetary travel became scarcer, Santa Amalthea was designated the second school. Formerly, it was a monastery for self-meditation and healing. Older Amalthean traditions prevail here, and the Grail Amaltheans are less political and more tied to the preservation of ancient traditions. They maintain excellent relations with the Keddah family, the minor noble house which rules Grail. Keddah genealogy shows marriage between some noted healers and their family.

## Other Sanctuaries

Amalthean training also takes place (in lesser form) on Kish, Midian, Holy Terra, Istakhr, Byzantium Secundus, Vera Cruz and Cadiz. Still, nine out of 10 students eventually go to Artemis. The first two years of training can be taught at any of the above centers.

Spots holy to the Amaltheans are found on Tethys (Amalthea's birthplace), Grail, Artemis and Holy Terra. Amalthea's birthplace on Tethys constitutes a pilgrimage site, as does her birthplace, maintained by the local brethren. Shade Hill (her residence for a time) is considered off limits by the Church, and Erling's reputation as a necromancer would be complete if not for his relationship to his niece.

# Flock

Amaltheans openly preach their sect's beliefs on Artemis and Grail. On worlds with large Amalthean hospices they preach within the hospices and hospitals. Wandering healers tell peasants their beliefs, stressing the Pancreator's love for them. Amaltheans preach from the Omega Gospels (on Grail and Artemis they also stress their sect's works as well), so their message differs from other sects and orders only by matter of degree. Emphasizing the Pancreator's love and creative participation within life, as well as a high ethical standard, their message is better received by peasants and thoughtful nobles than more common messages of fear and damnation.

Amaltheans appeal to the higher ethics of sentients. They preach to alien races and the unwanted. Some peasants, upon hearing the positive message, have "elected" Amaltheans their true priests, tired of the corruption and strict orthodoxy of the other branches. Throughout serf folklore Amaltheans are found as good figures, aiding lovers and healing the just. The only popular poem to mention a bad healer is Rasqa's epic "The Seventeen Pilgrims," wherein the greedy Botqa's works are turned right by Azansa, a healer "like unto Amalthea's twin/ who healed heart, soul and sin."

# Personages

## Eleanora Amarande

Poet, healer, architect, Eleanora was born near Benfranche, Ravenna, in 4290, and died in 4391 at Nours Cathedral, on Artemis. Eleanora studied art and architecture before entering Sanctuary Aeon at age 23. Mastering nano-tech, she perfected a Second Republic technique of pan-biogenetics, which saved innumerable lives during the Barbarian Invasions.

Turning from her scientific advances, she spent 10 years healing and traveling the Known Worlds. She helped Sir Jarim Windsor reunite with his peasant mistress, Desidre, and became associated in peasant mythology as the patron saint of young lovers. Eleanora discovered healing inherit in art and creativity, and taught this technique (orthoaristos) to the sick in spirit. Late in life she returned to architecture, combining spiritual and practical aesthetics to produce the beautiful Nours Cathedral on Artemis, which served as a hospital. She was the grandmother of Amorita, who wed Cardano Li Halan after he converted his family to the Church.

## Dr. Avantt ("The Ragman")

Popular across the Known Worlds is this thin, gaunt figure, dressed in colorful rags, who ministers to the injured and sick. Askom Avantt studied at Sanctuary Aeon and then became a wandering healer. Possessed of "Meidweid" or "Mad-wisdom," Dr.Avantt is an ambiguous figure. Laughing and crying at joys unseen by waking eyes, he is an expert healer, one of the finest in the Known Worlds. Beloved by the commoners for his colorful appearance and crazy mannerisms, Dr.Avantt cured many nobles in the Symbiot Wars with unconventional methods. He places sentients in penance for his aid and shows up unexpectedly where needed. Claiming to be in constant communication with angels, his only companion is his dog, Mercurio.

# Roleplaying

## Playing an Amalthean Healer

Amaltheans have strong ethical and religious reasons to save and heal all sentient life. This quality causes others to question their ethics, as a bloodthirsty tyrant and an injured holy woman receive the same amount of treatment. Simply put, all life is sacred to an Amalthean. Those who carry weapons in defense feel compassion for those they battle, and attempt to heal them. Theirs is often the hardest role in Sanctuary Aeon.

Here are some ideas for playing a sect member:

— A holy healer using unconventional methods; curing and helping others is the meaning of life.

— A driven healer, fanatic in the belief that Amaltheans are held down by the Orthodoxy. This healer believes in the renewed scientific experimentation which the Artemis sect endorses.

— A gun-toting Amalthean, a believer in self-defense. Loving adventure and easily bored, this priest signs on for risky quests to keep life stimulating.

— A traditionalist-bound Grail Amalthean. Believing that many healing traditions are vanishing, ignored in the sect's renewed drive for research, she/he explores the Known Worlds looking for old records and healing lore.

— A former Psykti, assigned to House Decados, who quit in disgust at using mind-healing methods on such decadent sentients. Desiring to simply heal (and cleanse), he is an addict and alcoholic, attempting to forget his failure among the Decados.

— An extreme pacifist who finds herself in dangerous situations. She believes she is being tested and tempted, and looks upon danger as a challenge to strengthen her ethical beliefs.

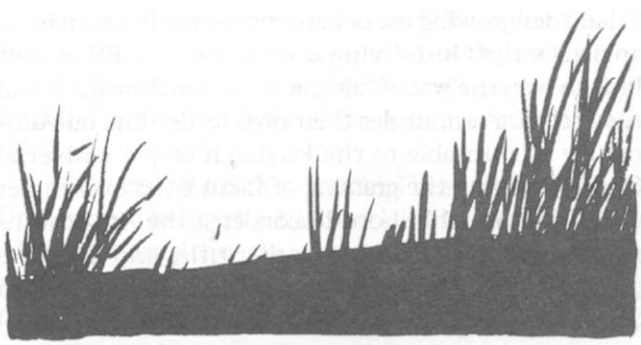
— A doctor studying Ur-Ukar healing methods, attempting to revive the orthoaristos healing of Eleanora Amarande.

## Gamesmastering Amaltheans

**Lives in the Balance:** An Amalthean doctor, Ayita Hinto, became lost on Nowhere. Sent to heal soldiers during the Symbiot Wars, she went to Nowhere to search of answers on the attempted healing of injured Symbiots, believing that compassion favors no one sentient race. Hinto disapeared into unknown territory, and the Amaltheans lost all contact with her. Secretly hiring the player characters, they believe that Hinto's knowledge of Symbiot biology (already the best in the Known Worlds) is invaluable for their records. Tales of a strange healer who now uses her power destructively reach the ears of characters. Hinto has had a vision, and believes that the entropic balance is off, that destruction must balance healing. She must be stopped.

**Medical Ethics:** Ketcharcha Anasunya of Grail sends a mercenary group to recover the Cup of Life and Death,



which Amalthea used to bring Miho the Fishwife back to life (one of the Seven Miracles). Last seen on Madoc by a Li Halan knight, the mercenary group hears rumors there of a body parts farm, where clones are frozen to provide replicant parts for high nobility. The farm is an ancient Second Republic satellite, orbiting a lifeless moon in the Madoc system. It is guarded by mercenaries and run by an ex-Engineer, Dr. Pathos. The use of clones for medical parts is immoral in Amalthean eyes. Unknown to the group, the satellite has outlived its usefulness, and a Li Halan-Decados team is on the way to destroy it, least any noble replicas escape.

**Give Me Shelter:** A spy from the Kurga Caliphate, mapping out Hazat defenses, was wounded. Claiming sanctuary on Artemis and undergoing healing, the Hazat pay the characters to get him out. The spy is housed in Mataria Medgarten. The Sanctuary, guarded by the Citizen Militia, is an obstacle.

# Traits

## Theurgy

### Read Ghost-Tinge

**(Level 4, Perception + Empathy, P, sight, temporary, 1W)**

Similar to the Knowing Heart ritual, this rite allows the Amalthean to read the SEF about the sentient's physical form. A green/blue energy field denotes health, gray denotes sickness, red psychological pain, and deep gray signals approaching death. Splotches of gray in an otherwise healthy SEF denotes the injured/sick portion of the body. Medical diagnoses can be made from this information (add the victory points on the casting roll to any Physick roll performed on the patient).

# Glossary of Amalthean Terms

Amalthea choose to create her Leiposoophy with terms usually derived from the Indian or Proto-Indo-European languages, in contrast to Palamedes, who decided to use Latin for the emerging Universal Church of the Celestial Sun. Amalthea was well aware of the historic usage of Latin by the prereflective monotheist religion based on the teachings of the Gaileaen, and sought to combat Palamedes' growing use of Latin by re-creating even more ancient scripts into living use. Historically, Palamedes' branch won the war of faith, and the Amaltheans found themselves a sect, under their own leadership, but ultimately accountable to the Patriarch of the Universal Church. Despite the grafting of Latin titles over earlier ones (bishop, archbishop, deacon, etc.), the Amaltheans maintained many of their earlier titles and concepts (Ketcharch, etc.). Amalthea also used ancient Greek and Chinese when it suited her, and was a much more knowledgeable scholar than Palamedes in the study of ancient languages.

Many of the terms of Pan-Physics also enter the Amalthean vocabulary. Since Pan-Physics was a creation of Amalthea's uncle, Dr.Viktor Domokos Erling, it is not surprising that her writings absorbed many of his teachings and concepts. Most of Pan-Physics was forgotten after the collapse of the Second Republic, and only the most-learned Amaltheans and engineers have an inkling of what Dr.Erling was attempting in his pursuit of the Nous Point through the harnessing of vibratory energies.

**Ahnkelbion:** The healing Empyrean Angel who told Amalthea to heal the universe, and who was in spiritual contact with her throughout her life.

**Amalthean Flowers:** Blue and white, six-petaled flowers, which sprang forth on the site of St. Amalthea's death. These plants are noted for their healing properties and are sacred to the Amaltheans.

**Ambochi:** Love and emotional healing, as taught by the Amaltheans. The field delves heavily into psychological and emotional healing techniques; those who follow this path are often misunderstood.

**Annalinists:** A splinter sect of Amaltheans who protested Archbishop Madost's decision to used armed defense against barbarian attacks, doing away with the honored philosophy of pacifism within Sanctuary Aeon (4291). Following Annalina of Shaprut, an Amalthean, their leadership was assassinated by Decados agents in Madost's pay. The Annalinists lingered on as a marginal force for a century before the few remnants were welcomed back into Sanctuary Aeon.

**Aster:** Universal healing, a highly specialized field in Amalthean studies. Few choose this field of study, although it was the hope of Amalthea that all sentients would one day understand this path.

**Avalokitesvara:** Early name given Amalthea by her followers, denoting the boddhistattva who sees the world's sound and hear's the world's suffering.

**Bakhti:** Wandering healers, loosely associated with Sanctuary Aeon, who later supported the Annalinists.

**Beata:** The healing of the young, a branch of Amalthean healing.

**Blessitudes:** Holy writings of Amalthea, where her spiritual and healing theories were set forth shortly before her death. This work contains her final thoughts on Leiposophy. Later notes added by her daughter, Jivanta, stress her rules for the emerging Amalthean order.

**Compassionate Ethics:** The teachings of Amalthea, later augmented by the teachings of Zebulon, and recorded in several books by Amalthea. She later combined the Compassionate Ethics with her Leiposophy, producing a stronger, more coherent system, which sought to unite the scattered colonies of humanity into one ethical system. Palamedes eventually achieved this goal with the Omega Gospels, yet not without a period of serious competition with Amalthea, and not without some compro-



mise to Sanctuary Aeon.

**Compassionate Sister:** Zebulon the Prophet's name for Amalthea.

**Cronia:** The healing of the aged, a branch of Amalthean study and knowledge.

**Cup of Passing:** See *Grail.*

**Devarsi:** Trance merging with a higher consciousness, a healing technique developed by Amalthea, yet only sporadically utilized in the order's long history.

**Dhechi:** Female energies involved in healing, brought into Sanctuary Aeon by followers of various pagan goddess sects.

**G-Vibrations:** "Ghost Vibrations," discovered beyond the transverse wave motion of light, by Dr. Viktor Domokos Erling.

**Ghost Tinge:** Name given by serf class to SEF energies after the fall of the Second Republic; the name has spread to all but the most educated. Peasant folklore believes that by using "Ghost Tinge" to heal a current ill, the healer has shortened the spirit's span of days, by borrowing spiritual power from the future.

**Gracia Thalia:** The Healing Grace, the Pancreator's gift to heal which infuses all things, according to Amalthean theology.

**Grail:** Symbol of the Amaltheans, taken from the grail used by Amalthea to heal Zebulon the prophet; also the planet Grail. The Cup of Passing is the cup the Prophet gave to Amalthea before he attempted to journey into Vau space, and the grail which later became the symbol of the Amalthean order. Amalthea's Grail is kept on Artemis by the Ketcharch. Miraculous powers are attributed to it.

**Healers:** Term denoting the current Amalthean leadership on Artemis, who place more value on medical experimentation and knowledge than on the sacred dances and healing meditations which have been carefully passed down through the generations. While they do not denegrate the healing exercises, they study only some of them, concentrating instead on medical expermentation. See *Ritualists.*

**Kavi:** Amalthean healers who have completed two years of study and who often aid experienced Amaltheans in the field for one year.

**Ketcharch:** Original leader of Sanctuary Aeon. After Palamedes initiated his reforms, the title became that of spiritual leader of the Amaltheans (while the Archbishop of Artemis became the highest Amalthean political leader). The Ketcharch dwells on Artemis. Amalthea was the first Ketcharch.

**Ketcharcha (Little Ketcharch):** The spiritual leader of Grail, second only to the Ketcharch in spiritual authority. Although Amalthea was named the first Ketcharcha, power was administered by her follower Dr. Adrian Wells, the second Ketcharcha of Grail.

**Laws of Nine:** Healing methodology taught by

Zebulon to Amalthea, although this is but one of the many applications inherit within the Laws of Nine.

**Leiposophy:** Amalthea's ethical-philosophical system which taught the Compassionate Ethics. Developed on Tethys, this system later evolved after her contact with Zebulon the Prophet.

**Libre Zebulon:** Often called the Record of Saint Amalthea, this book records Amalthea's conversations with Zebulon. Portions of it were later shortened to fit into the Omega Gospels. *Libre Zebulon* offers a less dogmatic view of Zebulon; the Orthodoxy has not condemned the work, but only allows it to be read "by the few," since, while it does not exactly contradict the Omega Gospels, it details areas of study which the Orthodoxy finds embarrassing (technology use, free will, exploration, etc.). This book defines the differences between the Amaltheans and the heirs of Palamedes' Church.

**Lupercalia:** A rite of swords and cups that await the completion of the first two years of healing study, when the student is mystically merged with Amalthea's higher compassionate knowledge.

**Luxia:** The light which Amalthea cried and bled into the grail which healed Zebulon the Prophet. In all Amalthean history, only four healers have bled or cried luxia, and these were the greatest healers of their order, beginning with Amalthea herself.

**Mataria Medgarten:** The great healing hospital, monastery and training center on Artemis, founded by Amalthea. The greatest medical knowledge of the Known Worlds is stored and practiced here. Originally called the Temple of Eternal Sanctuary.

**Merciful Technals:** Technical equipment involved in healing, not banned as heretical due to Archbishop Istaqa's influence in the College of Ethicals.

**Metrocronos:** Dr. Viktor Domokos Erling's term for space/time. The term was used in early Amalthean records.

**Nementona:** An Amalthean student within the first two years of his study; the term means "little branches."

**Nous Point:** The absolute concept in P-Physics, which cannot be grasped by the finite mind.

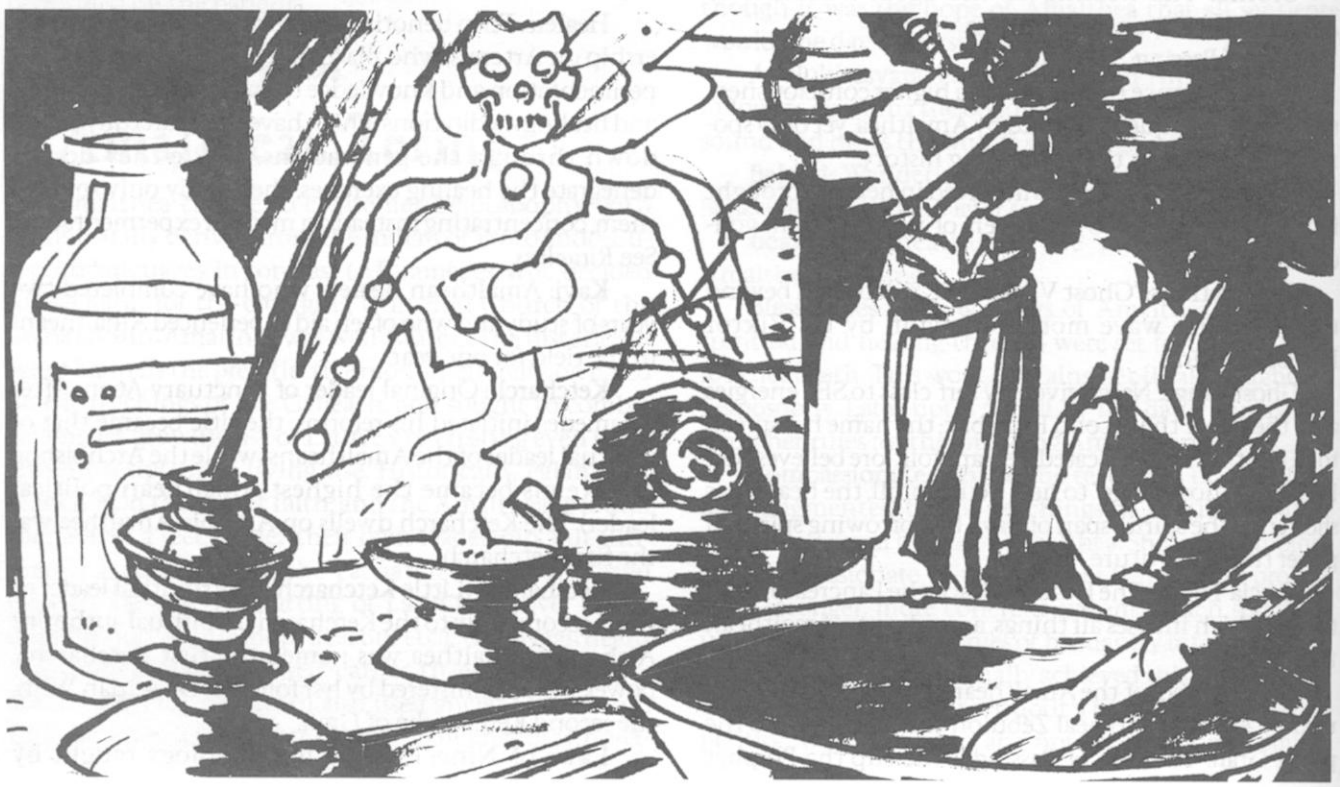
**Pan-Physics/P-Physics:** Field of speculative, theoretical science invented by Dr. Viktor Domokos Erling (Amalthea's uncle), which held that all finites run to absolutes, and that the Absolute encompassed all definitions of the absolute. Applying the theory to the study of vibratory energies, Erling had some success demonstrating his theories, which built upon the works of Godel, Leal and Varuna. There was, according to P-Physics, no free will, only a wave function which determines the spacial relationships of the cosmological universe, terminating in the Nous Point.

**Paramu:** The subtle vibratory energies, originating in the subquantum fields, which make up Sentient Energy Fields, a term first used by Amalthea. See *SEF.*

**Penance Tax:** A spiritual tax which Amalthean healers demand from those they heal, often in the form of a quest or good works.

**Principessa de Coppe:** Amalthean ritual at the end of training, where the candidates receive their true names and drink from the Grail of Life.

**Prthivi Mater:** Title given to a woman healer after completing her training. The tradition of the Prthivi title



goes back to Jivanta, Amalthea's daughter.

**Prthivi Pater:** Title given to a male healer after completing his training.

**Protos:** A Prthivi of exceptional skill.

**Pyskti:** A psychological healer, a role created within Sanctuary Aeon when nihilism threatened the mental health of many Second Republic citizens.

**Regin:** An Amalthean specialized study dealing with the care of nobles and the upper classes.

**Ritualists:** Term denoting the conservative Grail Amaltheans, who seek to preserve Amalthea's spiritual exercises, giving them priority over recent medical discoveries.

**Sakti:** Branch of Amalthean healing concerned with childbirth and care of infants.

**Sanctissima:** The healing practices for nonhuman sentient races, began in Amalthea's lifetime by her followers on Grail.

**Santa Amalthea Day:** June 22, Holy Terra calendar. Religious day of prayer and ceremony for Amaltheans, where they renew their compassionate commitment to Amalthea.

**Sants:** Healers who devoted their lives to the healing of the poor, generally closely allied with the Amalthean leadership.

**SEFs (Sentient Energy Fields):** The energetic aura which surrounds and interacts with the physical body, first named by Amalthea. Certain colors within the SEFs correspond to emotional/physical states. As a term, SEF was replaced after the fall of the Second Republic by Ghost-Tinge and Shade-Tint. This is a subjective science for the Amaltheans. Medical science does not fully understand how SEFs work, but the Amaltheans use it anyway.

**Seven Miracles of Amalthea:** The seven miracles Amalthea performed while a disciple of Zebulon the Prophet, the greatest of which was the healing of the Prophet, depicted in Church art across the Known Worlds.

**Shade Tint:** Common peasant term for SEFs.

**Shekina:** Spiritual healing techniques, developed from Amalthea's Laws of Nine by Amphion, a leader of the Amaltheans during the Second Republic.

**Sulis:** Branch of Amalthean healing dealing with plant and herbal medicines and remedies.

**Temple of Eternal Sanctuary:** The original name of Sanctuary Aeon, and the name of the first healing/training center, later called Mataria Medgarden.

**VIRA (Vibratory Refraction Accelerator):** Device invented by Dr. Erling to tap the source of higher vibrations (G-Vibrations) and convert them for industrial and biological use. These vibrations, drawn from a dimension beyond space/time, caused Amalthea's concussion. The VIRA prototype was perfected during the Second Republic, but subsequently much of the knowledge was lost, and the understanding of their application is little understood.

**Witega(s):** Healing teacher or teachers within Sanctuary Aeon.

**Yeustam:** Candidate for Amalthean healing training.

**Yinchi:** Life energies within every living sentient, thought to be different from SEFs in that these energies were tapped from within (although SEFs are interconnected with Yinchi energies).





# Outside the Fold: Other Sects

by Rustin Quaide

## Mendicant Monks (Hesychasts)

*"Talasian," said a voice beyond the cave, from out in the desert moonlight. "Come forth, Brother Talasian."*

*Brother Talasian wiped the sleep from his eyes, stumbling out of the cave. There before him stood a figure robed in immaculate white, guarded by huge shapes, a holy figure casting no shadow. A dream? A demonic temptation, such as tempted the early Holy Fathers of the Church? No, the bestial scent in the air, strong and musky, attested to the strange reality of the visage. An entourage guarded by Vorox. Talasian drew his worn brown robe about him, fingering his long gray beard, a habit he had developed during his time in the corridors of power.*

*"Ah, Brother Monk," said a figure standing beside the one in white, familiar but just beyond the borders of recognition. A bishop?*

*Brother Talasian breathed in deeply, inwardly calming himself. "How may I be of service?"*

*The white robed man stepped forward, passing the bishop. The armed Vorox parted before him. He was tall and severe looking, with august bearing. Brother Talasian recognized the features of Flavius Li Halan, Prince and leader of the Li Halan worlds. "Ah, son of Melissa," Talasian said. "And Bishop Xenos?"*

*"Yes," the bishop said. "You know why we are here."*

*"Of course, my lord and excellency," the monk said. "Princess Melissa bade me guard her records until the time that I am to deliver them to her son. It has been long since her great sacrifice and death at the Battle of Three Martyrs. As her confessor, I volunteered to go with her, but she forbade it and instead gave the notes into my keeping. Notes holding secrets of Church and house enemies."*

*"So I was told," Flavius said. "Her notes, I believe, concern vital information necessary to the survival of the Church and our house."*

*"I would not know, Prince," Brother Talasian said. "I was commanded to hide the records, not to read them. To that charge I have been faithful, by vow to Zebulon, the holy saints, and the Pancreator." Talasian felt a gentle tugging in his mind, and an implosion of slight color. Undoubtedly a psychic was in the entourage, seeking the truth of his words. Talasian could calm his mind, hide the knowledge, but he was faithful. He had nothing to fear.*

*Someone motioned the bishop, who nodded to Prince Flavius. "You speak true, Brother Talasian," Prince Flavius said. "Mother's impression and judgment of your character prove correct. You left her side to safeguard her secrets these long years in the Basquim desert." A hint of admiration briefly sparkled in the Prince's eyes. "Such loyalty I shall reward."*

*Brother Talasian went back into the cool air of his small cave, and felt with sensitive fingers for a small locked trunk. Bringing it out, he handed it to Prince Flavius. The Prince opened the lock with a word, and seeing his mother's unmistakable insignia on the papers, closed the lid.*

*"Expect a generous donation, Brother Talasian," Prince Flavius said. "I shall have a small monastery constructed for you on this spot." Then, with a wave of his hand, the large Vorox figures and human knights grouped about him, and moved off to his personal ship beyond the blue shadows of the dark dunes. Brother Talasian looked long into the direction of the east wind, awaiting the dawn, thinking of the miracles of faith.*

When the multitudes began embracing Zebulon's message, the leadership of the newly formed Universal

Church of the Celestial Sun was held by a small, if devout, core of believers, aristocratic in outlook if not in birth. The sudden infusion and expansion of the Church taxed, rather than aided, the entrenched ecclesiastics centered around the figure of the Patriarch. There were scant resources for the control and training of guardians of the faith. Ignorant lay people, with only limited understanding of the Omega Gospels, found themselves appointed bishops and archbishops in the rapidly expanding faith, causing an exasperated Archbishop Diocletian to utter, "We have taken Zebulon's message to the rude masses, and now these same masses dine with us, ignorant alike of manners and good breeding."

Yet not all converts coveted the trappings of ecclesiastical power. Some preferred the company of the wilderness, walled meditative retreats or carrying the word to distant frontier worlds, heedless of personal glory. Called hesychasts, or mendicant monks, often members of both sexes, these were often devout souls of poor birth, who zealously took vows of poverty and hardship to spread the Omega Gospels. Already in the time of the early Church, groups of these monks lived in communal monasteries, under vows of poverty and obedience, according to the rules set forth by St. Hombor, Zebulon's disciple. Odes to a life of prayer and contemplation, among numerous individuals of faith, living apart from the wider universe in communities of religious observation and meditation, are found in the Epistle of Hombor, which provides rules of conduct. This document was later thought to be a copy, or even forgery, the work of Sylvester of Midian, a follower of Palamedes, who wished to combine the eremitical life with the cenobitical.

Often these monks were ignorant of the politics and controversies which racked the Church hierarchy, preaching instead to the multitudes of the vision and miracles of Zebulon and his apostles. Spellbinding sermons, possessed of an elusive poetry not found in the dry documents and bulls of the remote Patriarchs, captivated audiences, converting a scattered humanity to the new unifying message of the Universal Church.

"They are alike blessed with the simple devotion to the word and spirit of the Omega Gospels," wrote Cardinal Constantine in his new cathedral on Midian in 3119. "These monks sometimes prefer fantastic things, every priest a king and so forth, but they have the singular fault of not concerning themselves with the current debates about faith present throughout the Higher Church. This lack of political and concentrative abilities to the attention needed by the faithful make them useless both as allies and enemies. They continue, in their ragged clothing, to preach the simpler truths to the simpler people, and are loved for it, while the cost of my robe causes controversy among the novices who attend to my divine personage. Indeed, their unique insights and interpretations of the Omega Gospels should be watched for signs of encroaching heresy. We have freely given Zebulon's gift to the simple as caretakers, but, as we all know, the Pancreator loves the simple, and blesses them beyond their due."

# History

Ecclesiastical history does not mention when the first hesychast rose from the spreading faith of the Universal Church to quietly begin the traditions which lasted down the generations of wandering pilgrims of the word. Even before Zebulon beheld his vision, the Known Worlds were filled with the odds and ends of earlier religious movements. Indeed, the debris of colonization left in its wake small sects and orders escaping clerical centralization or given new life on far frontier worlds. The monuments to these vanished neo-pagans, Old Christians, wandering Buddhists, Islamic seekers and carriers of a thousand sects and beliefs swiftly vanished or became absorbed by the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun. Nonetheless, some monks point out that Hombor the Beggar, Zebulon's disciple, was the first hesychast, founding a small monastery before he died. To this, the learned cleric Chi-Sun declared, "This is nonsense. Like Zebulon himself, the first hesychasts were drawn from previous religions, attracted to the new faith by Zebulon's message, but bringing with them traditions and practices far older."

Saint Amalthea the Healer was the first to concentrate the emerging followers of Zebulon into an organized movement, centered on Artemis. Patriarch Palamedes also gathered Zebulon's teachings and followers, eventually emerging as the dominant voice in the new Church. Granting a small fief of land to Sortos on estates belonging to House Alecto, he founded the first monastery of the new Church (legend has it that Hombor's was abandoned or lost, the stuff of romantic legend). "Some take Zebulon's message into the waste places, traveling alone," he declared. These were the first hesychasts of the new Church, bringing the Omega Gospels to the scattered worlds, risking life and limb to spread Zebulon's teachings. Yet it was not until the 28th century that the Hesychasts enter the historical records as a major force of faith.

Emerging triumphant in the Ukar War, the message of the Universal Church inflamed the passions, if not the common sense, of many new adherents. The eloquence of the "Desert Hermit," Saint Romulus, to the civilized centers, urged many to copy his example, give up the vanities of their rich or toiling existence, and follow him into the deserts of Kish. The following heavy rains and sudden mud slide which buried 4000 followers alive was declared a miracle of faith when Saint Romulus emerged from the deadly sediment alive, with two followers and a dog intact. Called "The Miracle of the Mud" by some (and "the thinning of the sheep" by various anti-Universalist wags), this act further drove new and devout Universalists into emulation of the fiery-eyed saint.

Romulus sat atop a cactus for 12 years, not speaking, while others worshiped below, bringing him meals and praising their local celibate ascetic. Soon every world had

its own "holy hermit," vying with brother and sister hermits in contests of self-denial and submission to the elements. St. Heather of Ravenna, who ate only pine needles and grubs for 27 years, and St. Evangelia of Malignatius, who sat naked on the ice-world, contemplating the Pancreator's love and beauty through the gift of ice and snow, further inspired the masses. When St. Ijunn of Istakhr declared clothing and hygiene a vanity, and lead 3000 sweating, naked followers into Samarkand to preach from the archbishop's newly constructed Notre Stella Cathedral, the Church decided that enough was enough.

Religious ecstasy and passion were fine, but reasonable limits had to be set. Archbishop Mali's prayers for rain to wash the squalid and sweating multitude was answered with a freak downpour, which drenched the crowd and sent them scattering. The miracle was seen as a victory for the Orthodox Church, and when Archbishop Mali draped St. Ijunn in a dry carpet, it was a sign that common sense, decency and normalcy had triumphed. Henceforth, hesychasts would be answerable to Church authority.

Archbishop Mali organized the "Charter of the Orders," a document which attempted to bring the hesychasts into line. Declaring that consolation with Orthodox bishops and archbishops was necessary, the document attempted to set rules of conduct and behavior for the many holy hermits wandering the Known Worlds. The document was endorsed by the Patriarch, and was highly successful in bringing order to the many burgeoning religious outbreaks centered around mendicant preachers. The "Charter of the Orders" also attempted to organize and set genuine rules for the various scattered monasteries and retreats of the Universal Church. To this end, it was successful, and the hesychast charter later formed the backbone of the Codex Monastery, the Book of Church Monasteries, an attempt by the Orthodoxy to have some order over the growing popularity of remote communities of the faithful.

The mendicant monks are more a category than an order, and while they have usually followed the given teachings of the Orthodoxy, some have influenced ecclesiastical and secular history. Sister Tracia's "Compassionate Universe" was a series of teachings which granted voice to inanimate things, as well an all nonsentient life forms, and was vastly influential in the "Life Ethics" Movement in the Second Republic. Father Vassily, himself a mendicant, became an Orthodox priest after meeting with her, and began his highly compassionate teachings. After the Fall of the Second Republic, Saint Calix saved a Hawkwood lord from the swords of the barbarian incursions with his charisma and courage in the face of death. Saint Calix's companion was the wolf, Lupo, and he established the Monastery of Eternal Light (later St. Hombor's) on Ravenna.

After the Fall, the hesychast movement again revived, and in the chaotic time after the assassination of Emperor Vladimir I, flourished, as many turned their eyes from



political answers to seek spiritual salvation. The era between Vladimir and Alexius, shifting in the wars of nobles, saw the rapid expansion of monasteries and membership in the loose confederation of hesychasts.

Brother Aris of Maelestron Monastery, in response to the chaotic times which plunged and fragmented the Known Worlds, wrote "Gift of the Pancreator," a book which calls for all of Zebulon's followers to take daily responsibility and loving servitude to the Pancreator to new heights. Influenced by his works, younger Orthodox priests have renewed their pledge to the Pancreator with a new zeal. The Orthodox hierarchy finds Brother Aris's works good fuel for the faithful, but they are a little concerned with the hold it has over many of their younger priests.

The words of Brother Obion concerning the questing spirit and technology have influenced Emperor Alexius's councils. Obion's Beautitudes urge humanity to go forth and explore the mysteries of the Pancreator's physical Universe. On Byzantium Secundus his words were the spark that gave birth to the Questing Knights, Emperor Alexius's new order of explorers. The Orthodoxy has not declared him heretical, due to the Emperor's favor, but they have strongly suggested that the enthusiasms of one monk have been a bit overstated and influential when the new Imperial Court really needs the wise, sure stewardship of the Orthodoxy leadership to debate technical and explorative issues.

## Theology

"The theology of the Hesychasts, calling forth the rapacious zealously of the Orthodox on the surface, reaches below to the calm still waters of our prereflective past," wrote Cardinal Constantine of Midian. Mendicant monks were never founders or debaters of the Omega Gospels or high Church councils, but rather enthusiastic spreaders of the word or hermits of the interior message of the Omega Gospels. Followers of the proscribed laws and dogmatic decisions of the Orthodox Church in religious matters, the hesychasts occasionally erupt with new interpretations and concepts which have shaken the Orthodoxy to the very core. Since the mendicant monks are hardly united in the broadest sense (save in certain concentrated monasteries), general beliefs among them are as varied as the individuals who hold them, but in three areas they have contributed to, and diverged from, general Church Orthodoxy. These are the Via Anima, Via Epistemic, and Via Corporeus, or Way of the Soul, Way of the Mind and Way of the Body.

Via Anima, the Way of the Soul, was first practiced as a series of spiritual exercises in St. Palamedes Monastery on Midian. Although the Universal Church took credit for the teachings and meditative techniques developed at the monastery, land and tax records indicate that the monastery was pre-reflective in origin, and given intact by Palamedes to the new Church. Originally the Monas-



tery of the Interdenominational Faiths (Christian, Muslim, Shinto, Buddhist, Hebrew and various newer faiths), certain spiritual practices, blending the traditions of humanity's earlier religions, were passed on from the older practitioners to the members of the new faith. Fasting, visionary and meditative exercises soon became the legacy of this monastery, and the monks found themselves the guardians of spiritual practices and knowledge. Via Anima is a contemplative path, designed for those who remove themselves from worldly concerns.

The Via Epistemic, or Way of the Mind, was developed by the desert monks on Kish. Eventually brought to St. Hombor's Monastery on Ravenna, it sought mental concentration and clarity. There are whispers of psychic abilities developed by followers of this path, but the monks maintain strict silence on this matter.

Via Corporeus, or Way of the Body, sought concentration over pain and added physical/spiritual exercises to their regimen. Able to endure great pain and hardship, their strange practices seem to defy the body's normal capabilities, producing bodily configurations of great endurance. This path is followed by the monks of Maelestron Monastery on Nowhere, yet has its origins in pre-reflective thought and tradition, as well as alien teachings.

Attempts have been made, with varying success, to combine the three paths into one, the Via Unitas.

## Holy See

Mendicant Monks are found on all the Known Worlds, but the largest concentrations are in the various monasteries. While numerous monasteries dot the worlds, the most well-known monasteries are on Midian (St. Palamedes Monastery), Nowhere (Maelestron Monastery) and Ravenna (St. Hombor's Monastery), although sizable ones also exist on Kish, Holy Terra, and Byzantium Secundus.

### St. Hombor's Monastery (Ravenna)

Saint Calix is credited with healing the blindness of Countess Valeria Sorja Hawkwood, who expressed surprise that her husband Count Michael had acquired during her blindness the assistance of a staff composed entirely of young women chosen for their aesthetic qualities. Banishing her husband's exquisite staff, the corpulent countess rewarded the pious monk with an old fortified estate on Mount Hapsburg, called Castle Plantagenet (4276). Count Michael Hawkwood agreed, on condition that the mendicant monk devote himself to the salvation of their souls instead of chaotic faith healings.

When the countess suffered serious sickness after devouring a liberal amount of her favorite confections, the pious Calix rushed to her side. Her husband grabbed him at the door, assuring the frenzied monk that his beloved wife was in the hands of the best medical authorities, and agreed to give the entire mountain to the monastery if he returned instantly to his pious monastic duties. Later that night the countess passed away, and Brother Calix held a candlelit vigil for her departed soul while the count's assistants brought back his former staff of ravishing young ladies.

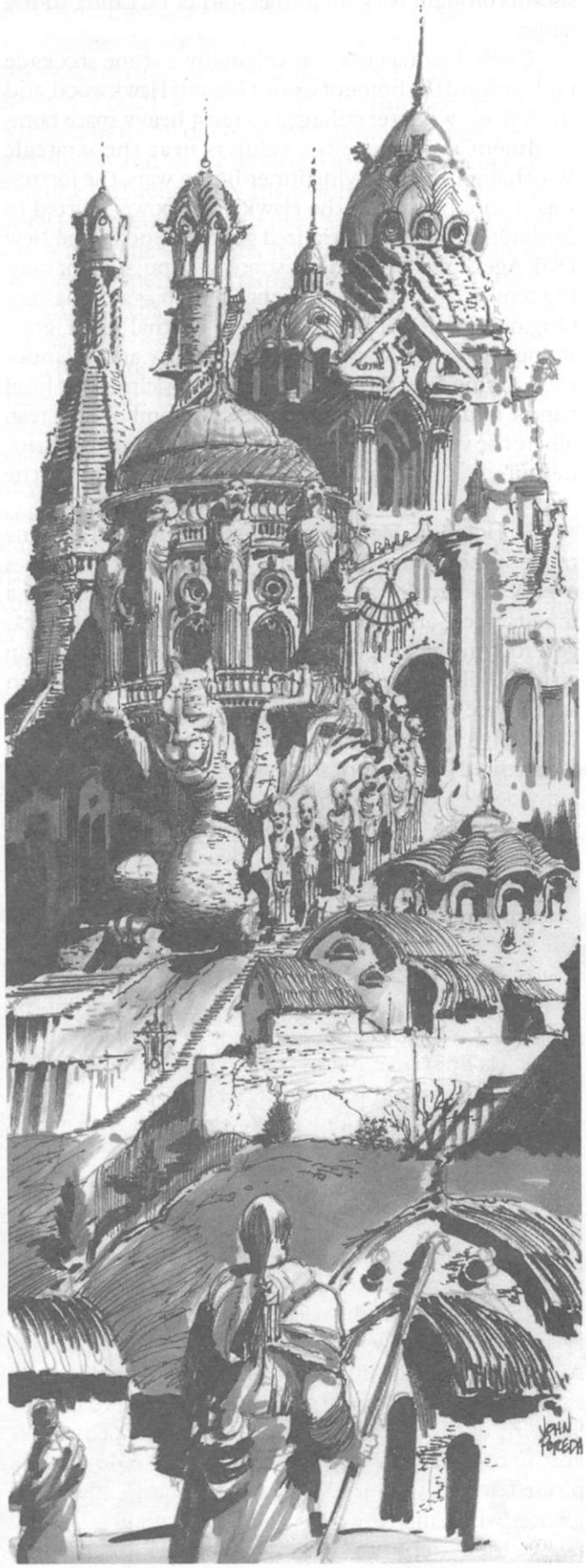
Castle Plantagenet was originally a stone stockade built around the home of Count Marcus Hawkwood, and the fortress was later enlarged to resist heavy space bombardment and house the soldiers near the strategic Wulfhelm Pass. Surviving inner-house wars, the fortress was abandoned when the Hawkwood power shifted to Sardonia and more centralized government. In the New Dark Ages it was far from any strategic population or mining centers, and was given to the Church as a monastery. Originally called the Monastery of Eternal Light, great stained-glass windows reflected in beauty and splendor the edifying lives of Zebulon and the Dsiciples, yet local rumor and folklore insisted that St. Hombor's Retreat, where the venerable Apostle died among a small group of hermits, was in a nearby cave. Hence, the name of the monastery changed over time.

St. Hombor's Monastery houses about 800 full time resident monks, both male and female. Tower buttresses oversee the fertile valley below, and the parapets have a limestone cap and corbeling. Bulbous towers and an octagon roof in the keep's center house the central worship area, with living quarters below the surface. Urth style in appearance, with gold-leaf roof, the main keep is protected by massive stone walls. The interior of the main keep is highlighted by the iconostasis, or altar screen. This screen is divided into three doors. The two end doors have icons and are opened to provide access to the sanctuary when the local bishop arrives on holy days. Religious banners adorn the interior and are used in Church processionals.

St. Hombor's Monastery is noted for wine production. The vineyards on the lower mountain produce the excellent "St. Hombor's Wine" known across the Known Worlds. Conifer forests cover the higher mountain, hugging the monastery walls. This monastery is noted for the practice of the Via Epistemic, originally brought by monks from Kish, Holy Terra and Byzantium Secundus. The concentrative powers of the monks are legendary.

### Maelestron Monastery (Nowhere)

The Maelestron Monastery is a 380-room stone Second Republic mansion that was built by Osumi Li Halan and his bride, Alexandria Decados, in the last days of the Second Republic. When Osumi died, Alexandria consulted a spiritual medium, who informed her that the vile sins of both families could only be abated by the constant building of their mansion. Having no master plan, Alexandria told the masons and carpenters to do as they pleased, which produced a sprawling, eclectic mansion-fortress, with a mixture of bric-a-brac, towers, ghastly statues, twisted archways, spiraling stairwells leading no-




where, maddening wind chimes, monstrous gargoyles, dizzying gardens and vertigo horizon lines.

Alexandria died when the overworked construction crew rebelled, and the land and mansion became a financial drain to the Decados. Finally Duke Mikhail gave it to Brother Paulus of the mendicant monks, for writing down the confessions of an al-Malik Duke known for his guarded secrecy. Brother Paulus accidentally gave the confessions to a drunken Decados spy, awaiting execution for incompetence. So pleased was Duke Mikhail with the priceless information that he personally rewarded the simple monk, and Paulus turned the ghastly mansion into a monastery, never dreaming why he was so handsomely rewarded.

Although expanded, the monastery houses 500 monks, known for their practice of Via Corporeus. Their bodily exercises and contortions, added to their eclectic monastery on Nowhere, produces their odd reputation, creating the rumor that they are not quite Orthodox in outlook. However, visiting Church dignitaries have found nothing wrong with their theology.

Excellent clothing is produced from their genetically-bred cotton, capable of being grown in the interior caverns under very little light, and rugs woven with wondrous skill depict scenes from the Omega Gospels, and are highly prized by the Church hierarchy. Seeing monks lying on hot coals or meditating suspended by one arm above the earth is not unusual. Martial Arts are taught here, called Fa-do.

## St. Palamedes Monastery (Midian)

The largest monastery in the Known Worlds, originally under the protection of House Alecto but now under the watchful guardianship of the Li Halan, this was the first monastery of the Universal Church (although built earlier as an interdenominational monastery of all faiths). Enlarged and enriched over the years (especially after the Li Halan conversion), the eight-sided Church of the Empyrean Flame sits amidst a walled, planned community of gardens, cloisters, guest houses, abbot quarters, kitchens, baths and storage areas.

The monks here are masters of agricultural methods, and produce fine vegetables, fruits, wines, and preserves for marketable consumption. The Library of St. Palamedes is one of the finest Church libraries, and Acting Archivist is a title of honor (Head Archivist, in a metaphysical sense, belongs from tradtion forever to St. Palamedes). Here is where the Via Anima way thrives, and in the vast records, there are still some pre-reflective religious/meditative works, kept under lock and key in the mysterious cell known only as "LL99" by the Acting Archivist.

St.Palamedes Monastery houses over 1000 souls, and extensive land holdings provide room for farming. This is the most tradition-bound monastery, and has some customs peculiar to it alone. Monks are taught spiritual medi-

tation techniques, prayer, and vocal/thought control. Several healing miracles, attributed to the monks of St.Palamedes, exist in the folklore of the Known Worlds. Spiritual sacrifice is practiced here, and the many monks are under a vow of silence for seven years, said to increase spiritual concentration.

In the Church of the Empyrean Flame, a piece of Zebulon's Shirt is on display. Healings and blessings are said to occur to those in proximity to the Prophet's holy article. When Cardano Li Halan converted, he sent many of his unrepentant relatives here, and it is rumored that a few of the strange secrets and beliefs of the preconversion Li Halan preside here in hidden writings and that a few secretive monks have formed a hidden brotherhood. A Li Halan/Avestite investigation in 4788 produced two such monks, who promptly repented and were hastened to the afterlife. The current abbot stresses that it is a thing of the past, for no one wants a return of the Avestites.

# Flock

Mendicant Monks preach to isolated communities, fellow travelers, and any within reach. Their message is usually simple: salvation is found through the Omega Gospels, and the sinner should turn to Zebulon's words and deeds as a guide on how to get closer to the Pancreator. They are not usually involved in current Church controversies, and their preaching styles differ from loving sermons to fire and brimstone damnation warnings.

Some monks have found power in isolated communities or in uncertain times, and mass peasant "revival" movements have followed the more charismatic hesychasts. Still, some gain similar numbers by stressing the Pancreator's love for all creation. Since the Emperor Wars, some Hesychasts have been busy stirring up serf communities or revivals, much to the concern of the Church. Still, a few high ecclesiastics see these as rivals for similar Incarnate movements, and encourage it, though often Mendicant Monks have grown drunk with power, including Brother Julian of Malignatius, who in 4996 claimed to be Zebulon returned, and was later given the position of fool in the local Decados court. Most mendicant monks, preach in a calm manner, and take their vows of poverty and loyalty to the Church seriously.

# Renowned Monks

## Brother Aris of Maelestron Monastery

Father of the Via Empyrean theological movement, the silver-haired, scholarly monk is quite aware of the controversies his work, "Gift of the Pancreator," has caused the Orthodoxy. Removed from St. Palamedes Monastery to Maelestron Monastery by Church Leaders seeking to halt easy access to the learned monk, Brother Aris merely continues in his theological and philosophical writings. Verbally combative, with an orator's streak of winning verbal matches, Brother Aris influenced an entire generation of younger Church members.

While his work is not heretical, it does call for a renewed commitment to the word of Zebulon and loving service to the Pancreator, which are higher tasks than mere temporal political power. Seen by some as a response to the threat of the Incarnates, Brother Aris's latest book is a highly allegorical fable, called the "Lion Star," where a group of animals, seeking "the message of the Great Creator," undergo conversations and ordeals which point to the correct and incorrect paths to the Pancreator's love.

## Brother Obion

A fat, balding man in his thirties, Brother Obion's Beatitudes call for a return to exploration of the stars. This message was taken up by Emperor Alexius's advisors, and was an inspiration for the creation of the Questing Knights. While the Orthodox leadership finds Brother Obion problematical at best, the intense, zealous monk does not know or understand what the controversy is about. His work, he insists, can be seen in Zebulon's words. Now protected at the Emperor's court, Brother Obion has become the mascot of the Questing Knights, and sees to their spiritual needs, even accompanying them on dangerous adventures. Much loved at court for his simplicity and sincerity, he is the very archetype of the holy fool. His luck, at least, has been miraculous.

# Roleplaying

## Playing a Monk

Every Hesychast is, in a sense, a spiritual quester. They take the Omega Gospels seriously, even though individual interpretations of them may vary. Most are sincere spreaders of the words, although the image of maddened hermits or lone monks blessing trees and singing beatitudes to birds is an exaggerated depiction of more extreme examples. Hesychast types to play could include

- A serious, scholarly monk, spreading Brother Aris's message to the masses.
- A zealous preacher, seeing her/his duty to battle the false faith of the Incarnates.
- A worldly, drinking Father Tuck type, not adverse to adventuring and living dangerously.
- A noble heir, given to a monastery at birth, unaware of her/his heritage.
- A monk who believes the Pancreator loves all creation, and is at odds with the Orthodoxy.
- A monk who was recruited as a spy by the Imperial Eye to keep an eye open to new discoveries.
- An insincere con man, hiding out in a monastery to escape creditors, who uses the holy cloth to get wine, riches, love and song.

## Gamesmastering Monks

Some game ideas centered around Hesychasts include:

**Rescue Mission:** The Church leadership wants Sister Avata pulled out of Incarnate-held territory. Her sermons inflamed the masses on Malignatius, but better Incarnate



orators swayed the mob against the Church, and her life was endangered. Normally the Church would not care about the fate of one hesychast, but Sister Avata is rumored to have been the one-time mistress of a powerful archbishop, and knows embarrassing secrets about the habits of the leadership.

**Find the Madman:** Certain powerful interests believe the Mad Monk of Nowhere knows the location of Predamite records. Going to Maelestron Monastery, they discover that this monk, once Brother Serjanus, left, taking several important holy images with him. Searching for Brother Serjanus on Nowhere proves an adventure in itself.

**Sanctuary:** A Decados agent, known as a great spy, has left the cloak-and-dagger life and is rumored to have joined St.Hombor's Monastery on Ravenna. The Decados and other factions want information from him. The characters are hired by a faction, but in finding the former Decados agent, they discover that someone has wiped his mind clean through hypnotism. 800 monks are suspect. Who holds the information?

# Traits

## Theurgy

### Calm of the Desert Fathers

**(Level 2, Introvert + Stoic Mind, sensory, temporary, 1W)**

The monk can project inner calm and clarity on himself/herself in times of danger or psychic probing. While within this state the monk can detect psychic probes, and can "hide" certain thoughts. Developed by followers of the Via Epistemic way. Unlike the Orthodox Ritual Faithful Heart, this shield cannot be cast by the theurge on another.

### Summoning the Empyrean Angel

**(Level 8, Faith + Focus, LGP, 1W)**

By contemplating the prayer "Angelus Pancreator nuntiavit Hombor" (the angel of the Pancreator declared unto Hombor), the monk summons to the world one of the "bodiless powers of the Empyrean," the gentle and compassionate intelligence called Bellus Angelos. Bellus Angelos attempts to solve dangerous situations through divine calming influence (granting +10 Calm), and works to create harmony in tense situations, drawing on the better side of a sentient's nature to work with others. Bellus Angelos appears as a beautiful woman, shimmering with numerous lights. Usually the angel does not appear in physical form, but quietly guides events.

# Incarnates

*Brother Erdico looked out into the vast night over Ravenna, where countless stars shimmered across the sky. A cool wind swept through the tops of the ancient oaks which hugged the St. Humbor Monastery. "It is horrible," he said, looking at his sole companion and friend, Brother Dian. "One by one they are going out, candles blown by a cold, cold wind."*

*Brother Dian sighed. He was the older of the two, and would miss his friend terribly. "Please reconsider," he said in his soft voice, knowing already that it was too late. This conversation had played out a thousand times between them, always as theoretical argument. Now it was fact.*

*"You are my faithful friend in Zebulon," Brother Erdico replied. "For four years, Brother Dian, you bore my confidences. My conscience is flawless. The Church no longer brings faith to the people. She takes, but gives nothing back. This is not Zebulon's spirit. Tomorrow, I join the Incarnates." Brother Erdico's eyes squinted into the night wind.*

*"True, our Church has problems," Dian's quiet voice picked up. "But what of our plans of reform from within? Our discussions, our investments? How can you leave her? Her proud history of martyrs, her mystical traditions, the seed which, planted and tended by Zebulon the Prophet, became the majestic tree of faith?"*

*"The tree rots from within," Brother Erdico replied. "Power, by its very nature, corrupts any spiritual message. I must follow where the Pancreator leads, to the words of the Omega Gospel, not the contrary canons and bulls of a stuffy palace."*

*"I would come, but I cannot desert my Mother," Brother Dian answered, choking. "True, she is corrupt, but still sheltering, and mysterious in her ways. I will not desert her. In 500 years, my friend, when these Incarnates taste power, what then? It isn't all black and white. There is much gray."*

*"There will always be Incarnates, or heirs, pure fighters for faith."*

*"And the bishop? He has forbidden our members to leave Church lands," Dian said, with a heavy emphasis on his words. In response, he heard his friend quietly utter a strange prayer. Then, Erdico grabbed his staff, and it burst into a shimmering blue light, casting shadows into the night garden. Erdico now held a blue sword in his hand.*

*"Goodbye, Brother Dian," Erdico said, briefly clasping his hand. Then he turned and walked into the shadows of the trees, away from the monastery. Tomorrow his new friends would find him, and he would thank them for their smuggled letters and rituals.*

*Behind, Brother Dian gazed long at the distant stars of night, and the wind grew colder. "Goodbye, Brother Erdico," he whispered. In response, the wind rustled through the leaves of the ancient oaks above the silent, still monastery dedicated to St. Humbor. A light went out in a distant doorway.*

Many religious movements arose during the New Dark Ages, challenging the hegemony of the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun and its undisputed influence across the Known Worlds. Some of these were the dying embers of older religions; a few were remnants of Second Republic ethical systems cloaked under religious pretext for protection. But the majority were offshoots from the Universal Church itself, taking hold over rural populations in periods of religious revival. While few nobles gave them heed, the Church crushed these heretical movements with militant fury. The Empyrean Saints, the Holy Muster and Elect of Zebulon were all destroyed by the resources of the Orthodoxy. Though wildly divergent in their beliefs, these "splinter" sects all held that the power of the Church hierarchy removed them from genuine spiritual concerns. One survivor movement, dwelling on the outskirts of population centers, was the Incarnates.

For a time the Church ruled supreme in belief and power. The Incarnates were driven to harsh worlds to perish or thrive by their own devices.Then, a century before the Emperor Wars, a few chinks in the Orthodoxy's armor began to appear. Higher tithes among the faithful supported the Patriarchal Fleet, and the excessive political concerns of the Church hierarchy left a spiritual vacuum in many regions. As early as 4892, the Orthodox theologian Hito raised an alarm to the College of Ethicals which was little heeded. Two new movements, the Stellarites and White Brotherhood, swiftly raised converts before they were crushed by the Church.

The Church increased its legalistic and obligational codes while ignoring the spirituality the peasants genuinely desired. When the world of Pandemonium was opened, it was discovered that offshoots of the Incarnates existed there. This alarmed the Orthodoxy, who sent missionaries to convert the wayward. They met with some success; due to the chaotic upheavals in the planet, a frightened populace looked upon them as potential saviors. But on the newly discovered Iver, there were yet more Incarnates — many of them in high positions of power. Their example encouraged the remaining Incarnate communities of the Known Worlds, who once again rose up to proclaim their beliefs.

## History

The real beginnings of the Incarnates go back to the era of the Second Republic, when technological wonders lessened the earlier grip of the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun. As an increasingly sophisticated population grew enraptured with technology and consumer comforts, the belief in religion declined, rapidly in metropolitan areas, less so in rural ones. Expanding scientific discoveries and exploration accelerated the decline in Church membership, and some historians estimate that only twenty percent of the population of the Second Republic were full Church members. The Republican ideals of the Second Republic, enacted in the legal codes, called for freedom of belief. Alongside the Universal Church, smaller religions flowered, including a last revival of sev-

eral ancient Urth religions, giving a pleasant, autumnal glow to their memory.

With secular and spiritual competition, the Church failed (until relatively late in the Second Republic) to present a united front. Her foundations and direction were in doubt. Several crises in the Church split its members between Orthodox and more "systematic" modern members, who pushed the Church into political dialogue and ethics, and away from dogma (Father Vassily being the most remembered in later ages). This lessening of dogmatic teaching was more prevalent in some areas, and a literate, educated population was encouraged to debate the Omega Gospels for themselves. When the Ten overthrew the Second Republic, many of these areas, holding to "enlightened" views of the Omega Gospels, resisted the Church's monolithic claim that she spoke for all believers. Gwynneth was one of these planets.

On Gwynneth several late Second Republic-era archbishops and priests had pushed religious dialogue into the political-intellectual sphere, calling for individual study of the Omega Gospels and conversation among the congregations. These traditions, called Eurygnosis ("all-embracing knowledge") by the Church, became deep rooted on Gywnneth, and when the New Dark Ages fell, the Eurygnostic priests resisted the increasing authority of the Church. Central to their belief was that a sentient's relationship to the Pancreator was a personal one which did not require the Church hierarchy as an intermediary. Sentients were "incarnates," a term taken from a sermon by Archbishop Nestor in 3899 meaning: "Spiritual souls ultimately derived from and responsible to the Pancreator." People calling themselves Incarnates on Gwynneth were present long before the official break with the Church (4212).

The Church, growing as knowledge faded, began to see itself as the only hope of sentient salvation, as the only true holy guardian of Zebulon's word. To many on Gwynneth, brought up with the idea that the Incarnate was answerable ultimately to the Pancreator, this idea was anathema to all they believed. Riots against Orthodox archbishops appointed by the Patriarch occurred on Gwynneth in 4079, 4115 and 4198. The increasingly growing sphere of Church power could not initially crush the individualistic tradition of the late Second Republic theological reformers, but a final rupture was inevitable.

## Father Zarek Mezentius, Scourge of Patriarchs

The future history of the Incarnates is forever tied to the person of Father Zarek Mezentius, the founder of the movement. Mezentius shaped the beliefs and form of the Incarnates, and earned the title "Scourge of Patriarchs." Born in Llanfyrth on Gwynneth in 4168 to a family of legal scholars, Zarek received an excellent legal education before joining the Orthodox priesthood. Trained by Eurygnostic-leaning Church members, Zarek left Gwynneth for further training. He was appalled how far the other worlds had fallen in learning and study of the Omega Gospels. He was further enraged at how much authority the Church usurped in matters of belief and faith, ordering the faithful to reject "modern" Omega Gospels for latinized editions.

Zarek and a number of his comrades (then ministering on Criticorum), interpreted this as theft of Zebulon's words. By controlling the language of the Omega Gospels, the Church was attempting to control spirituality. They believed that only the Pancreator's design, as given to Zebulon, guided spiritual matters and had authority over things seen and unseen, and not Orthodox politicians. In addition, the costs of policing the faith caused the Church to exact a "Faithful Tithe" across the Known Worlds. Local priests were given the authority to remove sins from large contributors.

"The Pancreator's Word cannot be purchased," Zarek thundered to the crowds on Criticorum. He wrote "The Sword of Faith," a response to the Orthodoxy's tithes. In this work, he urged for the "delatinization of the Gospels," even reverting the names of the disciples to their supposed original forms (Paulus to Paul, Lextius to Lucas, Mantius to Manchewitz, etc.). Receiving much attention, he took his word to the people. They greeted him as a savior from the crushing taxes and theological ignorance enforced by the Church. When the Archbishop of Criticorum next appeared in public (4193), he was greeted with tossed animal dung and curses. After an attempt on his life by an enraged street vendor, the Church acted. Zarek was declared a heretic and hunted by the local authorities.

Escaping to Gwynneth, Zarek and his followers began the Celestial Church of Divine Incarnation, or Incarnates. They stated they were attempting to return to the true spirit of Zebulon's message, before it became the dogmatic tool of power-hungry archbishops and patriarchs. Reading the Omega Gospels in the vernacular, they strove to use them as their main spiritual source. Some nobles, encouraged by the prospect of acquiring Church lands, joined. Eurygnostic priests and minor clergy were also drawn to the movement, sickened of the Church's increasing authoritarian teachings. Within 10 years there was an uprising on Gwynneth. The Church and upper nobility swiftly crushed it, and Zarek was left to starve in a hanging cage before the Hawkwood palace in Llanfyrth.

For 30 days, Zarek preached from the hanging cage, throwing excrement on Church officials and damning them thoroughly before dying. Archbishop Artos, upon hearing of his enemy's death, took the liberty of celebrating publicly. A young girl asked for his blessing. When he began the ritual, she pulled a knife and slit his throat. In the following seven months, four more assassinations of Gwynneth Orthodox figures followed. The Church clamped down harder, removing known Incarnates from the world by force. Some Incarnates fled to the isolation of the woods, joining pre-existing pagan communities there. Sympathetic Eurygnostic priests were weeded out.

Zarek's followers, the Incarnates, now outside the Church, spread to other worlds, gaining sizable footholds on Byzantium Secundus, Midian, Malignatius, Sutek and eventually to Grange (Pandemonium) and Iver, before those worlds were completely lost.

The Church began a war on all splinter sects, declaring a number of them heretical in 4233, including the Incarnates. Henceforth, the Incarnates' fortunes declined, but remnants of them survived on harsh, unsettled worlds. After Emperor Vladimir's assassination, they made a brief comeback in the person of Bishop Thurlow of Midian, their highest official (4591-4680). He wrote down a history of the movement entitled "Where There Is Light," and persuaded the al-Malik to let a small Incarnate community exist on Istakhr. The al-Malik, tired of Church plots against them for their supposed Republican leanings, allowed the Incarnates to settle in exchange for loyal service (and as a message to the Church). Yet Thurlow tired of slow compromise, and perished when he lead an ill-fated adventure to seize the cathedral of Madoc for the Incarnates.

By 4900, only scattered communities existed on Malignatius, Istakhr and Ravenna. The Li-Halan conversion had forced their largest population center on Midian to convert. Somehow, they survived on Malignatius, living in harsh conditions thought uninhabitable, and the local Li Halan (and later Decados) governors took scant notice of them, as long as taxes were paid.

## Annika's Renewal

The recent revival of the Incarnates as a serious moment has three sources: the increasing isolation of the Church from peasant life, the discovery of Incarnates on Iver and Pandemonium, and Annika Dominikas, the strongest Incarnate leader since Zarek. Annika was born on Vera Cruz to country gentry of wealth (4952). Swiftly mastering history, mathematics, rhetoric and legal theory, Annika startled her parents with her decision to be a priestess of the Orthodox sect. Ordained a priestess of the Orthodoxy, she went to teach on Midian.

During 4967-8, the Li Halan crushed a revival of the White Brotherhood on Midian. Annika questioned some survivors, now part of her rural flock, and heard their beliefs that the Patriarchy concerned itself more with wealth than souls. An old survivor of the White Brotherhood, Father Lucan, influenced her later thoughts concerning belief during this period. The White Brotherhood, she learned, was the last Midian underground movement of the vanished Incarnates, outlawed since Cardano Li Halan's conversion. Deciding to study Incarnate beliefs, she volunteered to go to the newly rediscovered world of Pandemonium, where Incarnates supposedly had more freedom (although the terraforming nightmares there were quickly changing that). The Pandemonium Incarnates, eking their living in the tumultuous badlands, were devout in their beliefs, and she found it hard to convert them to the Orthodox dogma. Impressed by their sincer-



ity of belief and knowledge of the Omega Gospels, Annika studied their theology. When she left Pandemonium for Istakhr she was a secret Incarnate.

She next preached on Istakhr, in the Marketplace. The Emperor Wars grew more tense during this time (4978), and the Church began raising money for its vast military. The Faithful Tithe was increased, and the Church hierarchy continued to bargain with various noble houses, often to the detriment of the faithful. Annika protested, publishing her work, "The Plea of the Incarnates," stressing that the Church's place was among the faithful, not among those of power. She was gathering followers, though, and her sermons, stressing the Omega Gospels over the corrupt clergy, became popular. The Istakhr Incarnates chose her as their leader.

Annika's sermons tripled the number of Incarnates in the Known Worlds. Her followers began educating and politicizing underground Incarnate parishes across the Known Worlds, waking them to their responsibility. Annika's later sermons urged war unrelenting against the Universal Church. The Patriarch and his followers were in league with the demons of darkness and ignorance, while the pure light of the Pancreator's revelations to Zebulon shone on the Incarnates.

This inflammatory rhetoric found fertile ground among the new converts, who had little tolerance for the Universal Church. By purifying the Known Worlds of the Church which corrupted Zebulon's holy teachings, the Incarnates would show the true path to faith. The darkened suns would be relit by faith and a correct teaching of the Omega Gospels, and a holy age would begin. The Incarnates used apocryphal language to stress the decaying moral vision of the Church at a time when the suns were darkening. While she did not directly state it, Annika implied that a renewal of faith would renew the life of the suns. This message brought many fearful serfs to the old religion, remade by her writings.

For three years, no action was taken against her. Finally, Patriarch Hezekiah responded with his Message of Clemency: "Little Annika, you cannot hope to saw off a twig from the vast tree that is the Church, and declare it the only true wood."

Annika stated that the wood was rotting, and that Zebulon's message now provided soil for a giant growth which prevented the light from reaching all sentients. She was taking the seed of Zebulon's message to the purer soil of faith. Annika left for Malignatius, a harsh world undergoing a fierce war, and nearly a fourth of her followers from Istakhr joined her on the ice world. Here was one of the oldest Incarnate communities, and the new refugees were welcome among them. Annika's fierce sermons caused an Incarnate revival in her wake, and everywhere she went she left secret Incarnate communities behind.

Arriving during the Decados-Li Halan war, her new followers set up communities amidst the wastes while her writings circulated the Known Worlds, gaining followers



on far-flung planets. Midian and Criticorum movements began. From Cadavus to Sutek, small communities of Incarnates sprang up, spreading the word. Finally, an angered Patriarch Hezekiah struck. What follows entered Incarnate lore, but cannot be proven.

Calling three Li Halan knights of proven loyalty and valor, he set them on the blood mission, absolving them of the sin of slaying the "unreflective" Annika. They arrived on Malignatius in secret. Grim and hardened, the three knights found her tending her makeshift church in the refugee community of Novjara. Lighting the candles, she turned to them. "I know why you have come," she said.

"We are death to the enemies of the Faith," Sir Amastro said.

Annika then asked for final prayer, which they granted her. She asked the Pancreator to forgive them, and they slew her as she stood. Her blood spilled onto the altar. Quietly, her assassins disapeared into the night, departing the war-torn world in secret.

The tale of Annika's martyrdom stirred the Known Worlds. This last courageous act attracted many more to the Incarnate camp. The Church denied responsibility for her murder, saying she was slain by one of her maddened followers, a former lover upset by her attentions lavished on a native Incarnate farm-lad. Her follower, Patre Involo took over the Incarnate leadership, although this move was contested by Incarnate bishops on Istakhr. Centered on Malignatius, ignored by the Decados nobles (often court exiles themselves, not immune to stirring up trouble), his words and Annika's writings provide the faith for many peasant communities.

Recently tension between the Incarnates and other new sects emerged. The Children of Zuran and the Incarnates, after a brief alliance against the Church, have turned against each other. Certain Li Halan and members of the Church hierarchy urge the Li Halan to take back the world, to destroy "the worm in the garden of faith" once and for all.

# Theology

*"Behold the light Incarnate!" Hombor exclaimed before the throng. "Behold the Man Incarnate."*

*But Zebulon admonished him, saying, "No, no, Hombor. Behold within the Light Incarnate, the gift of thy Creator to thee. Behold within all of you the Incarnate, and long for reunification with the Light Unending!" And the throng yelled, "Tell us! Tell us that we may find this light." And Zebulon said, "It is within you, above desires, the Incarnate, the light of thy soul lit by the Pancreator. Pray do not extinguish it by longing for darkness."*

— Horace 77:1-8, Omega Gospels

Incarnate theology comes from the Omega Gospels. The words of Zebulon are the true heart of the new faith. The true Church is invisible, known to the Pancreator, a harmony of souls, not a political organization. Incarnates believe that the Patriarch, beginning with Palamedes, altered the true teachings of Zebulon to suit political needs. Riches are the corruption of the spiritual soul, and a temptation. Church leaders should live simply among the flock, sharing their sorrows and joys. Every Incarnate (their term for a sentient, holding within its being "the Incarnate Spirit given by the Pancreator") has direct communion with the Pancreator.

A hierarchical system is not necessary to address the Pancreator. Trained priests and priestesses may help, but they do not hold power over the individual soul or consciousness. However, personal responsibility and hard work are necessary to foster this connection; without such rectitude, one's Incarnate Spirit may never reach the Pancreator through the darkness of sin. It is the Incarnates' responsibility, and his struggle, to continually strive to maintain his personal connection to the Pancreator.

Some factions of the Incarnates believe all outside authority is evil. Annika stated that authority, if it leaves the conscience of the believer to the believer, should be respected. This concession she gave to the Decados when large rebellions swept Malignatius.

Incarnates allow for no higher authority than bishop, and a council of bishops is needed to settle sect questions. This causes problems, for the three bishops of Iver, Istakhr and Malignatius each claim primacy. They single out the Avestites and Orthodoxy for their scorn, holding the Orthodox hierarchy as morally fallen, corrupted beings, lured by worldly goods and matter over spirit. While matter is not bad, when it holds sway over spirit it becomes an evil. Struggling to define itself against centuries of Church theology and philosophy, using no more than the Omega Gospels as a guide, the sect harkens to simplified explanations.

They ignore the great mystics of the Church, and have only a small mystical tradition to speak of (much derived from the Iver/Midian Incarnates). Some Incarnates, believing that the Pancreator knows all, believe salvation is preordained (Preordination Incarnates), but most hold that good works and faith are important (Faith Incarnates). Also, a few hold to the doctrine of reincarnation (Iver).

Fearing division between the Preordination Incarnates and Faith Incarnates, Involo has sought to unite them by fiery, fanatic attacks on the Universal Church. Several terrorist bombings of old cathedrals on Ravenna are believed to be the work of Incarnate fanatics. Involo declared the Patriarch "a demon feasting on the holy words of Zebulon," and has spread anti-Church literature across the Known Worlds. Involo's attempts to unite the scattered Incarnate communities has met with growing success, although the older communities distrust Annika and Involo's sudden call to radical methods. These communities have traditionally depended on the good will of powerful noble protection against larger Orthodox communities.

Despite differences of opinion, all the scattered branches of the Incarnates share the same basic theology,



which is based on the message of Zebulon. Zebulon stressed the reflective nature of all sentients, and the Incarnates state that no hierarchies are needed. Centuries of overlapping, burdensome Church law, codes and teachings have been removed for a fresh approach to personal faith.

Despite its differences with the parent Church, the Incarnates inherited some of its traditions. Aliens are not admitted readily into the Incarnates, although there is a stress on "familial community" with the Ur-Obun branch. The ancient prejudice against the Children of Zuran continues. If the Zuranists saw the true light of faith, they would convert. Attempts at conversion meet with little success, and isolated Zuranist and Incarnate communities have warred with each other.

The Incarnates, while sympathetic to the Amaltheans and many hesychasts, think that these orders and sects hide knowledge. Knowledge is for everyone. Study and knowledge are encouraged among Incarnate youth, to fulfill the Pancreator's promise in them. Interestingly, their devotion to work and duty has won them sympathy with some of the guilds. The al-Malik stopped their persecution of them, seeing that their honesty and ingenuity made them excellent tax gatherers and market enforcers. By stressing readings of the Omega Gospels, the Incarnates actively promote literacy among the serfs. Zebulon's words are for all, and the Pancreator's Celestic Community will rise from the enlightening spread of the Incarnates word and message.

Zarek Mezentius stressed the four noble truths, which were Right Understanding (of the Omega Gospels), Right Action (charity and productivity, and a move away from "the lower drives," i.e., egotistical wants and desires), Right Faith (in the Pancreator's faith in the individual's soul, also mystical insights from within) and Right Striving (efforts of the mind to avoid spiritually base paths which lead down the unreflected path). As noted, he did not draw on the rich Church mystical tradition.

Zarek's thoughts, published in "Letters to Lucan," are a cornerstone of revelation to the Incarnates. Zarek felt that reformers before him had pointed to the correct path, but powerful organizations, wrapped in ego gratification, opposed them. His meditation on "The Cycle Endless," written to Lucan two weeks before his capture and slow public death, point to a strange theological belief in the evolution of the soul through many "Celestic Cycles or Incarnations." Where this was leading remains a mystery, as his life was cut short before he fully explained or expanded upon this idea. A few veiled references were made to obscure passages in the Omega Gospels to support this thesis. The Iver Incarnates state that their belief in reincarnation came from these, while most of the Incarnates of the Known Worlds stress that only the Pancreator possesses the certainty of the soul's fate after death.

## Canon

Rising in the Incarnates begins with becoming a priest

or priestess. They may meditate away from their communities for a time, but they are encouraged to spread the word or preach to their communities. Learning is taught by an existing priest or priestess, titled master or mistress out of respect. A priest is called a Father or Mother. The Church Mothers and Fathers meet to select a bishop. On isolated worlds, the bishop maybe the leader of a small planetary Incarnate community. Already there are bishops on Malignatius, Midian, Istakhr, Vera Cruz, and Byzantium Secundus. Since bishop is the highest office allowed, a meeting of bishops decides sect matters. Incarnates believe in a small, direct church, without the cumbersome structure that the Universal Church has created. This move to keep the Incarnates small is both a source of strength and weakness. Iver Incarnates are relatively peaceful, and not as fanatic as others of their brethren, as they were the main church on their planet for centuries. They also, paradoxically, have a small bureaucracy.

Incarnates encourage the searching of Preadamite ruins, to bring old secret technologies to light. Although very different from Preceptors, they are not opposed to technology, declaring that it shows the Pancreator's trust in his Incarnates. The light of faith and knowledge are reflective of the Pancreator's vast love for all sentients. They give less emphasis than the Orthodoxy to bad spirits and demons, save for those references to them by Zebulon. Faith will overcome such bad spirits.

Incarnates honor apocryphal rhetoric and plain speaking over flattery and insincerity. Their speaking and writing styles are thus somewhat blunt and colorful: "Friend, why do you dance in the Patriarch's burning net of doom?" Contracts are read and honored, and business is seen as reflective of the Pancreator's treatment or "contract with the sentients." They are good businessmen, honoring industry and profit for religious reasons. Indeed, a plain legalistic style covers everything they do. Profit is not bad, as long as the work is honest and agreed upon before hand. Incarnate belief opens new attitudes toward business dealings, legal codes and scientific inquiry. Their search for light and truth leaves no stone untouched.

# Holy See

The majority of "Annika" Incarnates are on the world of Malignatius; the small settlement of New Sun is their center. It was here that the Incarnates gathered after Annika's assassination. A small college has been set up, with theological, legal and scientific training. Other factions abound on Malignatius, including many who are still Orthodox believers. Only the local Decados keep the Incarnate settlements safe. The new Incarnate arrivals have taken to the ice world with an overwhelming desire to civilize it.

A strong following exists in Samarkand on Istakhr. The al-Malik, after initial persecution, now use the Incarnates in their vast business/government apparatus; they do not mind the Incarnates provided they remain peaceful, productive citizens. The Orthodox Church wants them removed from Istakhr. Duke Hakim remains firm, but the Church's attacks against them grow more relentless.

On Midian they are a persecuted sect. A brutal suppression of an Incarnate rebellion slew their leaders, save for those who escaped into the wilds or in hiding. Many of these followers were from Annika's original flock when she was still with the Orthodox Church. Some Incarnates have left Midian for safer worlds. Communities of them exist on other planets, preaching their beliefs. The Church ignored them after Annika's death, and has weaned some souls back from them. If the Incarnates grow any larger, however, the Church will take action.

Iver is the most numerous planet of Incarnates. Here their initial fanaticism as a persecuted sect against the Orthodoxy ended when they won control over the planet. When the planet was isolated, Incarnate theology continued along peaceful lines. They do not see eye to eye with Incarnates of the Known Worlds, but both acknowledge their common roots in Zarek's teachings. The Incarnate love of knowledge is reflected on Iver, for the population has kept old technologies running longer than on other worlds. Persecuted Incarnates often seek Iver as a haven. Incarnate theology from Iver has evolved down peaceful paths, and an inclination to reincarnation is found among them. The Universal Church is attempting, with scant success, to convert the Iver Incarnates.

# Personages

## Bishop Lucan

**(formerly Father Lucan of the White Brotherhood)**

Bishop Lucan is an older man, of Midian peasant stock. His hands rough from a lifetime of work, his face kindly but powerful, Lucan joined the White Brotherhood revival in his youth. The White Brotherhood, a remnant of earlier Incarnate beliefs but more tinged with mysticism, taught a community of hidden saints who would go among the sentients, and free them from ignorance. Becoming a member of the order, he publicly recanted when the Church crushed it, and served seven years as a bonded servant to the Li Halan military.

Meeting Annika, he followed her, telling her of his beliefs and absorbing her arguments. He kept in contact with her after she left Midian. When her followers on Midian pressed her for a local leader, she suggested Lucan. He became the Bishop of Midian shortly before her assassination. The Li Halan cracked down on the Midian Incarnates, and Bishop Lucan is now in hiding, with a price on his head.

# Roleplaying

## Playing an Incarnate

There are many who are drawn to the Incarnate faith. Here are some types:

— An Incarnate priest who secretly wants reunion with the Universal Church, fearful of its power.

— A zealous preacher, calling all to the Incarnate faith before the suns extinguish, fanatic in the righteousness of his cause.

— A scholarly priestess, tracing Incarnate beliefs to the Omega Gospels, the eurygnostic and earlier prototypes. She is an explorer, even looking at Preadamite ruins for clues.

— A warrior priest, interested in gaining ancient and hi-tech weapons to preserve the struggling faith.

— A priestess who was close to Annika, and preaches the cycle of souls and reincarnation, not always agreed upon by all Incarnates.

— An isolated Iver bishop who believes that all sentients should belong to the new brotherhood.

— An older man, formerly an al-Malik soldier, who is a wealthy Incarnate on Istakhr and provides funds for the faith.

— A minor Decados noble turned Incarnate priest, who converted upon hearing Annika's word on Malignatius.

— A peaceful Iver Incarnate priestess, unused to the controversy the Incarnates have caused on other worlds.

## Gamesmastering Incarnates

Here are some story ideas:

**Forbidden Protocols:** The Patriarch's records, stolen from Holy Terra, are sought. Taken by a Patriarchal servant, a new convert to the Incarnates, the characters find themselves paid to recover the documents. The documents contain a Li Halan knight's report of Annika's last moments before death, as well as a plan to wipe out the small Incarnate community using biological warfare. Although this plan was voted down, the existence of such records proves embarrassing to the Church. Once published, it would discredit the Church further, although the Church would claim it as a propaganda hoax. The trail leads to Ravenna, where a wealthy noble (a secret Incarnate convert) prepares to print it. The characters must use either skill or battle to recover the documents, if they are of a mind to carry out their original intentions.

**Seeking Asylum:** An uprising in rural Midian is underway, lead by Bishop Lucan. If the players investigate, they come across an Incarnate uprising against a local corrupt priest and minor nobility. When the Li Halan military arrives, the characters are beseeched by the Incarnate faithful to take Bishop Lucan to safety on Iver. Hiding the bishop and getting him off world will prove hard, as the Li Halan secret police, the Hidden Martyrs, are on the trail.

**Sectarian Conflicts:** On Malignatius the characters find a small war going between the Incarnates and Children of Zuran. The Church does not mind, and the local Decados take a bemused look at such things. Both religions want the help of the characters, including those wanting to make peace. The local feud started when a Zuranist woman wed an Incarnate man in secret.

# Traits

## Suggested Traits

While individual Incarnates may belong to the guilds or other groups, those actively preaching their religion share certain characteristics.

**Characteristics:** Faith, Passion, Endurance

**Natural Skills:** Impress

**Learned Skills:** Read Urthish, Social (Debate, Leadership), Survival

**Blessings/Curses:** Unyielding (2 pts:+ 2 Endurance when persecuted)/ Righteous (+2 pts: -2 Calm when faith is questioned).

**Benefices:** Noble Ally (1 pt), Well-Traveled (3 pts)

## Theurgy Rites

### Words of the Prophet

**(Level 1, Faith + Focus, GP, prolonged, 1W)**

When reading aloud the words of Zebulon or pertinent passages from the Omega Gospels, the words have a deeper effect on the listeners then normal. Read to serfs, and highlighting those sections which give credence to Incarnate belief (the personal relationship between the Pancreator and the individual soul or Incarnate), this ritual reading helps spread the Incarnate word and make it intelligent and deeply significant to the audience.

### Clear Path

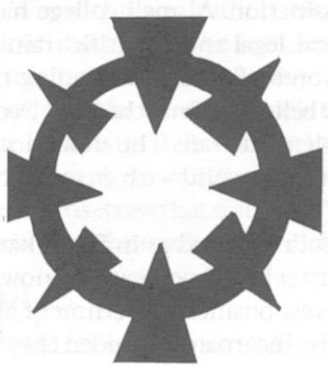
**(Level 2, Wits + Focus, P, 1W)**

This allows the Incarnates to see through a multitude of problems and come to a correct conclusion. It is useful when confronting Church authorities about their mission, as members of the Church try to put Incarnates into verbal theological traps. It is also useful when confronting an involved issue or problem in daily life. Similar to the Divine Revelation of the Eskatonic Order although used for more mundane reasons (usually).

### Sword of Righteousness

**(Level 7, Faith + Vigor, LG, instant, 1W)**

Picking up any weapon or hand tool, the object becomes the Righteous Sword, which acts exactly like a Flux Sword in all ways. This rite was long a secret of the now-vanished White Brotherhood. Bishop Lucan taught it to Annika during her stay on Midian.



# Children of Zuran

*Captain Hardwin lead his 15 survivors into the Zuranist encampment. Children ran before them, and men eyed them suspiciously. From the corner of his eye, Hardwin saw weapons being produced. Walking with a stoic's grace, knowing that a misstep would prove fatal, he said, "I come to see Matre Sutra, leader of the Brethren of the Star Zuranists."*

*A boy ran into a hastily constructed metal structure. Presently, an old woman, surrounded by armed men, emerged. "You do not look good, Li Halan," she said.*

*"We need shelter, good mother. We ask your succor. Malignatius is lost, and we are hunted by the Decados. After three years, we must leave this frozen hell."*

*"It is hard to be on the run, eh Hardwin? Hard to not know safety anywhere?" The old woman laughed. Then she looked at the captain. "I will help you," she said. "You saved my people from that general of yours, you stood for us when you were the power. Now I stand for you when the cycle turns. Zuran tells us 'Pity the foe who helps you, and give him succor.' You are lucky, Li Halan. You and the Decados, both Children of Beliel-Moloch." She spit the words out. "Now we will hide you, and get you off world. But become Zuranist or pay our Faith Tax."*

*"Faith tax?"*

*"I am the power now, Li Halan. You impose faith tax on honest Zuranists when your bosses ruled here. But Children of Zuran have faith enough, Hardwin, faith enough to preserve amidst those money worshiping patriarchs and mal jeffes. Now you pay the tax. You are the smaller, Zebulon's child, amidst your elder brother, the true Children of Zuran. Your medal there, the gold one Flavius presented you, it will do."*

*Captain Hardwin handed it over, and took an oath of secrecy. Then the Children of Zuran let them into their shelters, away from the uncertainties and cold, whipping winds of the Malignatius night.*

During the Diaspora, old religions, philosophies and beliefs were lost or underwent radical changes to fit the needs of the early space colonists. Many of these movements flashed briefly into the eye of history before disappearing, while others (New Style Muslims, Stellar Orthodox Christians, Pradhana Hindus) had a forcible influence, evolving to meet the new needs of humanity. Other sects rose, creating entirely new religions and orders by combining previous ones with the existential questions which faced the new colonists (the Knights of the Isosceles Triangle, the Red Hunters).

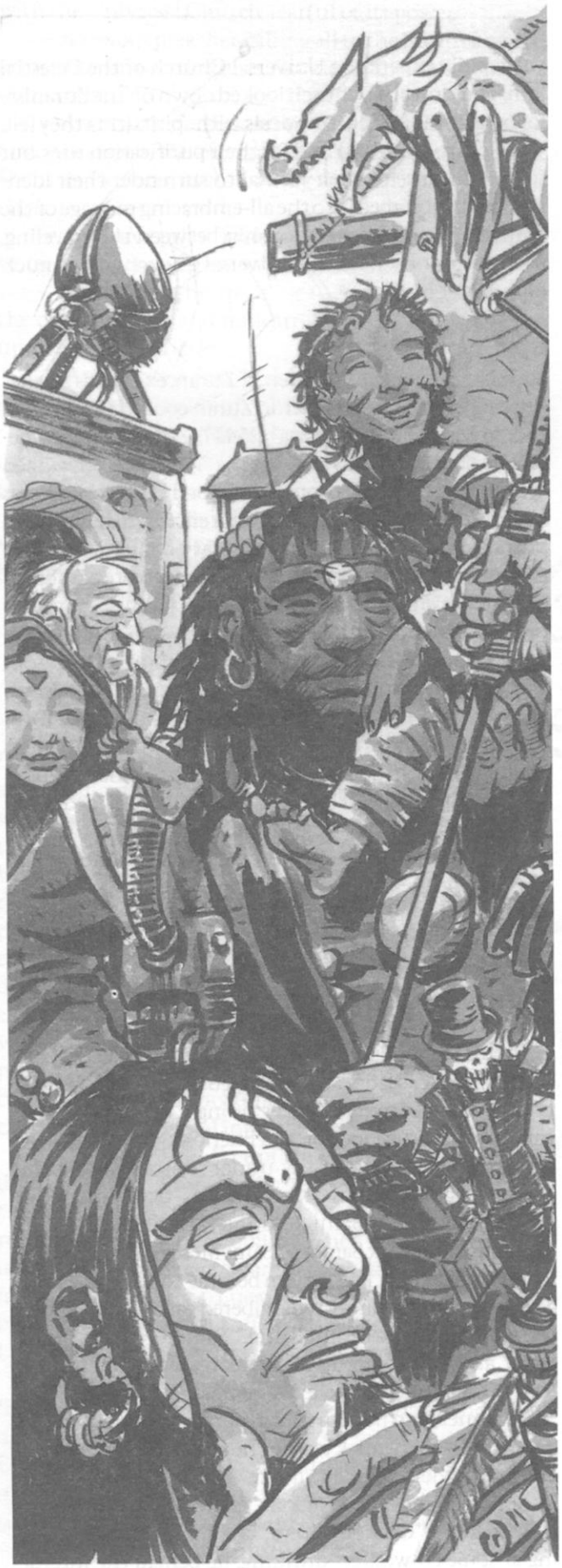
The Children of Zuran is the only one of these to survive. Combining folklore, spirit belief, and aspects of previous religions, it found voice in Manuel Porfirio Zuran's "Libro Esperanza." Establishing his religion before the birth of Zebulon, he is considered "pre-reflective" by the Universal Church, i.e., gifted with a relationship with the Pancreator but not fully comprehending the experience. Ironically, old Urth religious figures, and later Zebulon himself, became saints in the Zuranist religion. Barely sophisticated at its best, Zuranism faced the displeasure of the rapidly expanding Universal Church of the Celestial Sun. The Universal Church looked down on the Zuranists for bargaining and cutting deals with spirits (this, they felt, was close to animism), and for their purification rites, but mainly because of their refusal to surrender their identity and be absorbed into the all-embracing message of the Omega Gospels. The relationship between the traveling, rootless Zuranists and the Universal Church colors much of Zuranist history.

## History

Zuranity, or the Children of Zuran, existed as a belief system before Manuel Porfirio Zuran codified and added to it in his "Libro Esperanza" (2542?). Zuranity's roots begin in the Diaspora, among the Temporary Utilized Workforces, or TUW peoples. Life for TUW workers was harsh. Skilled and semiskilled workers, often drawn from prisons, were thrown into temporary construction and mining camps on new worlds by the corporate combines, of which IOPEC was the greatest. Torn from community roots, transported from camp to camp with a mixed cultural population, subject to low pay, disease, and poor working conditions, living in cheaply constructed "company towns," the makeshift workforces began to form their own communal beliefs. Ignored by the lawmakers and religions of their day, they fell back on their own resources. Three times, TUW camps attempted armed rebellion; three times, they were brutally crushed. Yet the comradeship among the workers proved a lasting bond. A community with religious overtones was born.

By 2450, there was a genuine religious system among the TUW. The early originators of the belief were forgotten, save for Jean Afrika Javier. It passed through communities, growing from many sources. TUW's called each other "brother" and "sister." Every adult was an "edion," with full voting rights. A "magistrex" was an elected community leader. Bad luck emanated from "Jeffe Dinero," pictured as a corporate leader riding a devil. Good luck came from "Mister God," or "Chi Buenos." Spirits were "loas," and existed democratically under "Mister God." Many Terran religious figures became "Saints" or ""Spirit Speakers," among them "Saint Buddha," "Saint Jesus," "Saint Muhammad," "Saint Samdei," "Saint Moses" "Saint Kali" and "Saint Confucius." This system became confusing, as dead TUW leaders and dimly remembered earth figures joined the saint list, such as "Saint Rumi," "Saint Roosevelt," "Saint Evita" and "Saint Coyote." Zuran reorganized much of this into a more coherent belief system.

Manuel Portfirio Zuran was born a fourth generation TUW (2498?). An quick learner, he received a job in IOPEC archives, where he read much. A quiet, serious youth, Zuran often fell into religious "trances." On Criticorum he beheld the "Grande Mireya," the Grand Miracle. Looking at some co-workers drinking, he beheld the interde-



pendency of everything, and beheld a spiritual universe upheld by the love of a sole Creator, whom he named Usen Dheu, or the "Vast Spirit." The alcohol his comrades drank represented the Divine Vida given freely to the ignorant thirst of sentients who could not see that the Creator was infused in everything. All could be drunk on the wine of Usen Dheu. Usen Dheu created spirits in the hope they would freely reunite with their source, and become vast creators.

Preaching his vision to the TUW, Zuran gained their leadership, and was called "Grande Presidente Zuran." A humble, honest man, Zuran was troubled that his message wouldn't reach everyone unaltered, so he codified TUW belief system with his vision. Transcribed by his wife, Delores, he created a coherent, religious system from many diverse sources. Titled "Libro Esperanza" it is the only holy work the Children of Zuran profess to possessing.

The message was simple. Everyone is important in the eyes of Usen Dheu, and no hierarchies exist before the Creator. Still, spirits are all attempting to return to him, and the Creator honors the hard work this takes. Those who suffer are rewarded, becoming creator-spirits themselves. Moses, Black Elk, Buddha, Christ and Muhammed were all earlier "messengers from Usen Dheu." State and corporate authority, by their very nature, lie and try to crush true spirituality, which is liberation. They are enslavers, and servants of Negro Diablo Dando, or Spirit of the Mistaken Way, more of a dark trickster judge than evil incarnate. Yet their way is a wrong path, lead by lying loas to ultimate soul death. The more material wealth a sentient possesses, the more they are chained to base desires, and cannot see the living spirit of the Creator.

Darkness and annihilation begins in souls when they willingly turn away from the creative source of Usen Dheu's love. Still, a democratic hierarchy could exist among the Children of Usen Dheu. Their leader was the Kesorix, elected by the Headmen (community leaders). Priests of Usen Dheu were hougun, foremen or presidents. Every adult was a "bishop" or "edion," while the rulers of the corporate/ state power structure were "Noche de Usen Dheu," or the "Night of God," those without light, later referred to as the "Sons of Beliel-Moloch." It was forbidden to swear loyalty to them. When Manuel Porfirio Zuran died, Zuranist communities existed in work camps on seven worlds.

When First Republic power was destroyed, many TUW's were freed in the confusing aftermath. Some found new slavery in corporate and noble generational contracts, while others escaped, forming small traveling communities, first lead by Zuran. Zuran suffered from imprisonment from corporate authorities, but once freed, lead his people across the Known Worlds. They became known as the Brethren of the Stars. Settling on Midian, Kish, and Grail, they throve in their isolated communities.

Zuran folklore claims that they carried Zebulon into

Amalthea's camp after he fell into despair on Grail. "Since you stole me from weariness and death, I grant that you may steal without sin," the Prophet told the Zuranists. This event is not recorded in the Omega Gospels or Amalthean records, yet survives in Zuranist folklore. Settling in small fringe communities, they were treated as vagabonds by the authorities.

Palamedes, the first Patriarch of the Universal Church, declared a cleansing against the Zuranists after his failure to convert them (2913). This resulted from the conversion of some Church members, including his cousin Beatrice, to Zuranist religion. Declaring them friendly to the Ur-Ukar, he condemned them (the Zuranists had no quarrel with the Ur-Ukar, whom the "State" was battling). The Zuranists were brutally driven off Midian and Grail, and Church members were forbidden to have dealings with them.

Yet the Zuranists were used to adversity, and survived. They had excellent mechanics and pilots within their ranks, and their struggling communities could move swiftly. Amazingly, elements of early Orthodox theology were inspired by Zuranist beliefs and theology. What Zuranist philosophy the Church carries is that left it by the Prophet, who was probably inspired by their syncretism. Zebulon never preached against them, and encountered some on Grail (the Sons of Zuran referred to in Amalthea 32:12). His only commentary was in favoring them over the ruling oligarchy on Grail, "...for even the Sons of Zuran have community, while your unity is a facade."

During the Second Republic the Zuranists continued their nomadic wanderings, occasionally prosecuted for real and imagined crimes. Many thought them a quaint, dying religion. Zuranist family community remained strong, however, and they throve, confounding social scientists and Republican theorists. "Fringe Communities and the Divesting of Zuranist Hegemonic Belief" was a noted work by Dr. Liisa Talo in this period. Talo's reputation suffered when she left her husband for Edion Esteban Smith-Chun, a charismatic Zuranist. Some social commentators stressed that Zuranity was a slave/laborer religion born out of class resentment, ignoring its elasticity and complexity.

Many Zuranists entered transportation fields at this time. From some of these workers came the brethren's spaceships, repaired and maintained for generations since. Other Zuranists settled on Posedonia, a water planet dotted with island archipelagos, similar to Madoc. Here they created permanent homes, and their theology became more sophisticated. However, a shift in the polar caps and the death of the interlocking planetary ecosystem forced the Zuranists to remove after 4100, and the jumpgate and world were later lost. Returning to a post-Republic humanity, they rejoined their wandering brethren. Rumors maintain that they discovered a Philosopher Stone that aided their journey. Legend has it that one of the Zuranists tribes still possesses it, which has lead some adventurous thieves to try to discover the artifact's exact location.

During the New Dark Ages, they again suffered the wrath of the Church and nobles. Forced to pay a "Prereflective and Defiance Tax," many were shut up in ghettos. The wandering ones sold their labor as "Free Mechanics" and "Transport Chiefs." The ghetto Zuranists became money lenders, construction workers and often mercenary guards, thieves and spies for local nobles. Wandering Zuranists were mechanics, healers, fortune-tellers, thieves, and mercenaries. All occupations were open to them because they were outside society.

Their religion nearly fell into animism, except among the People of the Old Law. Zuranists hid Preceptors in their ranks, and aided outcasts and others left to die. Escaped serfs, pirates and prisoners found acceptance in their community. They even possessed bases for a time, and a town on Malignatius, until the conversion of the Li Halan. Some nobles protected them (the al-Malik and Decados), and there is a sizable Zuranist community in the Istakhr Market. Their traveling camps became temporary safety zones from oppressive laws for those who joined these colorful, nomadic people.

Many times the Church attempted to wipe out the sect. Ghettos were forced to convert or be raised to the ground. Soon, aside from a few ghettoes on various worlds and the Istakhr Market, they were a persecuted, wandering people again. The Amaltheans allowed for a community to exist as a canton on Artemis.

Strong in their beliefs, and defiant to authority, the Zuranists are still found in makeshift camps on the fringes of the Known Worlds, still practicing their religion and customs.

## Tribes

There are seven Zuranist "tribes," all part of the Children of Zuran. They are the Red Star Zuranists, the Brethren of the Faithful, the Rashid Path Zuranists, the Sons of Fire, the Old Law Zuranists, the Severed Wolf Tribe and the Sundered Workers.

Most mercenaries come from the Severed Wolf Tribe, while the greatest engineers are from the Sundered Workers. The Brethren of the Faithful claim to be the oldest Zuranist tribe. Old Law Zuranists are the most tradition bound, while the Red Star Zuranists allow for polygamy, a tradition stretching back to TUW encampments. Within this tribe women and men both possess multiple spouses. The Rashid Path are the greatest thieves. The strange reputation of all Zuranists tribes mainly comes from the last two mentioned tribes. Sons of Fire Zuranists have a tradition of credit and trade, and have produced great pirates, spies and massengers. These are broad generalizations, but each tribe recognizes these differences. Still, their core beliefs are the same.

# Theology

TUW belief, later expanded by Zuran, states that sentient souls arise from Usen Dheu and enter different realms to spiritually evolve, until they eventually reunite with the Creator as creators themselves. Usen Dheu enjoys the "Santa Baile," the Dance of Creation, and sends his servants in disguise to help his chosen. The seven universes are filled with spirits. Some are higher spirits, who aid individuals, and are governed by Nine Laws; the Saints of Zuranity are such beings.

All sentients are equal in potential, and were originally all joyous beings, until some were drawn to matter, removing themselves from the Creator into flesh (Amoghas). Hierarchies began when the Sons of Beliel-Moloch started justifying their wealth and sensual enjoyment while ignoring the spiritual laws of compassion to other beings. Beliel-Moloch was a spirit who turned from Dheu to contemplate SELF, and fell into a regressive demonic state, refusing higher aspiration. There is no war between the two, but among sentients there is war between those of the One Way and Beliel-Moloch's children. The One Way or Old Way, Zuran stressed, was the ancient path to reunification with the Creator. A popular Zuranist saying is: "The dance leads away and towards Usen Dheu. At times, the Creator enters the carnival, masked and unknown."

Old Urth spiritual teachers were incorporated into the system, as were aspects of Ur-Obun and Ur-Ukar belief. Only one book, "Libro Esperanza," serves the Zuranist community, although a considerable amount of oral folklore shrouds it. Zuran elders contemplate the Twelve Steps of the Universal Tree, a metaphorical depiction of spiritual evolution. Wise Women (Blanca Matres) read fortunes through the 144 Fata Cards, which depict the Saints of Zuranity in 12 sets of governing powers. Potions, spells and charms are sold by them, each under the governing law of a spirit-power (Loagic).

Elements of the Universal Church have entered their system and become diffused into folklore. Zebulon has Saint status, as do Amalthea and Maya (whom they claim was a Zuranist). The Patriarchs, however, are seen as servants of the Sons of Beliel-Moloch, chainers of souls and Hiders of the Keys of Knowledge.

Zuranity at its highest is a spiritual religion answering the deep need of sentients for purpose; at its lowest, it seems an odd animistic religion controlled by petty spirits and spells. Zuranists actively preach, and all sentients are welcome within their ranks, after being admitted to a tribe.

Zuranists perform elaborate food preparation rituals, believing in the essential cleansing of food. These rituals forged their communities, while creating essential differences with the larger populations about them. Zuranists refuse to touch many "impure" foods (uncooked meats, certain animal flesh); alcohol is fine, however, if strict quality measures are met. Zuranists create excellent wines, liquors and ales, and their food is as safe as the food eaten in a noble's kitchen. Ritual defines them. Reinforced from childhood on, Zuranists possess a group identity while remaining separate from the majority populations about them.

Similarities between Zuranist and the early Universal Church are numerous. Both were founded by visionaries, and both stressed a Creator from whom all beings emanate. Palamedes converted a learned Zuranist, Tubal, and studied their book, remarking on the similarities. The concept of the Pantheistic Succession, stressed by Zebulon, whereby earlier religious/ethical teachers were valid, was already found in the system of Zuranity's Saints. Palamedes distrusted the democratic orientation of the Zuranists. As a noble, he interpreted the universe as a place of natural hierarchies, and it did not take long before the stubborn refusal of the TUW peoples to convert irritated the first Universal Patriarch. As it says in the Omega Gospels (Delphians 33.15-17): "When Meliva answered Palamedes, she said 'Why join you? We have our own book and prophet, and that is enough for us.' And Palamedes said 'Woman, thou hast cast your lot from the light. Now begone! Stubbornly thou hast scorned thy salvation. Now, I say verily, hard will it be for yours and thine.'"

During the Second Republic there were attempts to unite the two religions, or bring the Zuranists into the fold. These talks were discouraged when the Republic fell. "Really, the two religions are brothers," said Father Vassily during the Second Republic. "The elder ran off into a nomadic life while the younger prospered, inheriting the lands of their father. But they are brothers in faith." The toleration found by Father Vassily was not shared in the following epoch by the Universal Church hierarchy.

Zuranists practice birth baptism, communal sharing of bread and wine, and fasting during the 10th month of their calendar for seven days. All adult Zuranists are ordained "bishop" or "edion" at age 17. The ceremony is held at night, in a circle of 12 elders, who ask the initiate questions about faith and oral history. Zuranist behavior demands compassion among the seven Zuranist tribes, as well as to all sentients seeking their aid. Zuranists take in outcasts, adopting them into the tribe. Rising in Zuran society takes different forms:

1. Bravo: One's reputation increases after a daring personal fight, theft or deed.

2. Religion: Knowledge of Zuran's writings, the Universal Tree, and the tribal history and folklore.

3. Democratic Participation: Rising through the democratic councils until one becomes leader of a community. In times of extreme duress one can challenge the Kesorix or Alexandrix to a sword duel.

4. Specialized leadership: One can be a War Leader (General), Peace Leader (Angelo), Wise Man (Santa Elda), Wise Woman (Blanca Matre) or Hunt Leader (Wolf King). Leadership in all fields is open to both sexes (except Wise

Men and Wise Women). Lines are traced through the mother.

5. Skills: An engineer, weapon expert, navigator, pilot and healer are all honored in Zuran society for their practical knowledge. The ancient TUW work pride shaped aspects of their belief.

## Holy See

Zuranist encampments are found on Istakhr, Malignatius, Shaprut, Artemis, Ravenna and Midian. The only permanent (safe) dwellings are on Artemis, in the small Zuran community of Chiah Kether (settled by Old Law Zuranists), and in the Istakhr Market, where a Zuranist encampment (Rashid Path) is found in the Fonduq Zone. This community is tied to the local thieves' guild, and some hold positions of power within the guild. The other encampments are of a more transitory nature, often tent and ship "cities," ready to move on once the authorities decide to crack down on them.

History taught the Zuranists to be wary. The Hawkwoods and Li Halan expelled sizable Zuranist communities from their worlds in the past, and Church-encouraged Zuranist cleansings occurred on many worlds, including Byzantium Secundus. These cleansings wiped out whole communities in the New Dark Ages. Emperor Alexius repealed some of the more odious laws against them (the Prereflective Tax), but his power, still consolidating, seems remote to the Zuranists. Certain noble houses (the Decados, the al-Malik) used them as guards/intelligence gatherers, in exchange for community safety.

The encampments listed above are the major ones. Minor camps spring up and leave constantly. The Children of Zuran have no true home in the Known Worlds. Their legends mention a planet, Majid, beyond the Known Worlds, which they are destined to find and rule, ushering in the Arka, the Twelve Thousand Years of Glory.

## Personages

### General Zetoile Banda

Famous leader of the Severed Wolf tribe, which came to the aid of the Brethren of the Faithful on Byzantium Secundus. In 4580, the Archbishop focused popular discontent of the Faithful Tax onto the Zuranists. Mobs destroyed Zuranist communities, looting and killing. The policing authorities joined in. For six months, desperate Zuranists held out in their fortified neighborhoods within the Imperial City. General Zetoile Banda, disguising a small merchant fleet as Scraver ships, landed, providing arms and hardened fighters to the besieged Zuranists. This coup caught everyone by surprise. A powerful Cameton noble was slain and Cameton estates bombed. Taking the Zuranist survivors aboard his ships, Banda fought a swift retreat action against the security fleet. His brilliant tactics allowed the Zuranists to escape to Grail, where they set up a new community.






### Matre Sutra

Wise woman and leader of the Brethren of the Star tribe, located on Malignatius. Matre Sutra knows the history of her people, and is an excellent fortune teller and judge of character. Her word is law. The 90-year old matriarch saved her tribe from both the Decados and Li Halan military when they fought over the ice and tundra world. Selling information to both sides to insure her people's safety, Matre Sutra's shrewd bargaining earned her the hard respect of both noble houses. Surrounded by toughened fighters, her "cubs" (both grandchildren and two Vorox whom she saved), the iron matriarch is touched by loyalty, and will return a favor. Born on Ravenna, her tribe is contemplating leaving Malignatius due to pressure from the Incarnates.

### Harrod Ford Gallagan

Named after three Zuranist saints, Gallagan, a Son of Fire Zuranist, is a legendary smuggler. Wanted in the Hazat and al-Malik worlds, he shows up at unexpected places. Rumored to have saved Emperor Alexius during the Emperor Wars, he is a favorite of the guilds, poets, Zuranists and adventurers everywhere. A gallant, swashbuckling man, legend has made him into a figure of near mythological proportions, a process the sly, handsome Zuranist smuggler does nothing to quell. After saving the Emperor, stealing the Patriarch's mistress, and breaking Decados security codes, everything else seems possible.

# Roleplaying

## Playing a Zuranist

Zuranist beliefs alarm outsiders. Still, some Zuranists profess them loudly, while others keep them quiet, offering only guarded statements to outsiders about their religion and beliefs. Zuranists tend to be proud, preferring their wandering "free autonomous zones" (FAZ's) to settled life on the Known Worlds. Despite years of opposition from the Church and nobles, their spirits have not been crushed. Zuranists often mock others in a sly way, all the while professing ignorance: "I did not know this Bishop on Kish was so important. After all I am a bishop, and so is my brother Paulo here."

Some Zuranist character types are:

- A smuggler with a starship
- A deeply pious member of the Old Law tribe, earnestly seeking to convert others to Zuranism.
- A mercenary who served in the Emperor Wars, but retains Zuranist beliefs
- A former serf who ran away from a noble estate, enjoying the more democratic "free" life as a Zuranist, but who is being sought by her/his old masters
- A skilled thief who is also a Zuranist healer and fortune teller
- A Zuranist sick of the wandering life, thinking of conforming to the Universal Church
- A seller of "holy relics" from the Church of the Ce-

lestial Sun, making a brisk trade in false "healing" saint bones.

- An engineer looking for adventure and riches, willing to leave the Zuranists temporarily

- A "matchmaker" who deals in arranging love matches among the peasantry, a marriage broker.

## Gamesmastering Zuranists

**Dawn of the Dead:** During a terrible husk outbreak in the rural outback, the characters must ally with the local Zuranists to survive. Zuranist camps are well armed, and laser rifles and pistols emerge in times of crisis. The characters learn from the Zuranist camp that hardly any Zuranists have ever become zombies, and that they have certain signs and portents which keep the Husks away. The characters must convince the Zuranists to aid them in saving a besieged community, a town which has not been too friendly to the Zuranists in the past. The Zuranists claim that Zuran himself created such zombies, when he cursed ancient corporate executives to live spiritually in the next life as they had in this one.

**Shotgun Wedding:** A Hazat noble claims Zuranists kidnaped his daughter. Offering a reward, the characters chase the mobile Zuranist encampment. Discovering the encampment, they find that the daughter voluntarily joined them, to escape from a prearranged marriage. If she is captured by the characters, the Zuranists attempt to free her again. The Hazat noble vows to wipe out another Zuranist encampment unless his daughter is returned.

**Hard Time:** Imprisoned by local authorities under trumped up charges, the characters discover a Zuranist network among the prisoners. A noted Zuranist engineer plots an elaborate escape by smuggling the prisoners out during an Orthodox holy day, when security is more lax. Taking up with the Zuranists, the characters fight with them to escape and get off world.

# Traits

## Suggested Traits

These are suggestions for characters who are involved in the Zuranist religion on a deep level. A fighter or pilot may be a Zuranist without the religious learning one of their teachers would have. Zuranist religious teachers are found in all their occupations, but are titled Santa Eldas and Blanca Matres.

**Characteristics:** Faith, Calm, Dexterity

**Natural Skills:** Charm, Sneak, Observe

**Learned Skills:** Artisan, Alchemy, Tech Redemption, Survival

**Blessings:** Grease Monkey, Crack Driver/Pilot, Casanova

**Curses:** Bluster, Prideful

**Benefices:** Well Traveled

## Theurgy

**Note:** Only those involved in Zuranist religious training, a Santa Elda or Blanca Matre, can learn these.

### Sweeping Samdei

**(Level 2, Faith + Focus, LG, prolonged, 1W)**

A healing double cross must be placed on a person's body, or a home's door, to ward off zombies. A zombie avoids the sign, even if attacked by the person wearing it. Zuranists state that the sign is a spirit which reminds Husks that they once lived. It takes 10 minutes to place the symbol. Only Zuranists perform this rite, usually in exchange for money, clemency or aid. They treat this as a well-guarded ritual. They do not need rivals in the business of Husk cleansing.

### Golden Tongue of Zuran

**(Level 3, Passion + Impress, LP, touch, prolonged, 1W)**

Casting this rite temporarily influences one in authority to be favorably disposed to the Zuranists. Useful when dealing with police, soldiers, magistrates or others, it softens deeply held prejudices.

### Saint Coyote's Eyes

**(Level 6, Faith + Focus, LG, prolonged, 1W)**

Objects of value are made to appear like ordinary objects to others: a rare ruby appears like a piece of bread, a bundle of firebrands like hay, etc. Useful in Zuranist smuggling operations, the rite takes three turns and is chanted over the object while the sign of Saint Coyote's eye is drawn upon it.



# Appendix: Good Works

## Rising in the Hierarchy of Light

While the main goal of a priest is to perfect faith in himself and others, his position in the Church greatly colors the means by which he does this. In other words, priests seek advancement in rank just like members of more secular societies or guilds, whether as a sign of triumph over hurdles of belief or as a more political means to spread the word of the Pancreator (and perhaps collect some healthy tithes along the way...).

Rising in rank involves impressing one's superiors with one's loyalty, dependability, faith or popularity among the faithful. Unless the priest is a mendicant, she is tied to a particular cathedral or Holy See, and falls somewhere in its hierarchy of ranks (even priests who are part of a noble's entourage belong to some See, probably that on the noble family's homeworld).

A priest of canon rank or above may ordain an applicant up to any rank below his own, as long as the applicant skips no ranks in between (i.e., all priests must begin as novitiates and work up from there). A priest must heed the orders given by the higher-ranking priests within his See, although he does not have to comply with orders given by priests from other Sees (he must give them respect, however). All priests of all sects must follow the orders of the Patriarch, who is the supreme head of the Universal Church and the center of all Sees, and many must also reckon with the metropilae who oversee conglomerations of planets.

While each world usually has one major Holy See, there may be monasteries or groups of smaller Churches that are not affiliated with it, and thus subject to their own hierarchies.

For players, gaining rank for their characters means becoming aware of the movers and shakers in their cathedral and the entire See. These may not necessarily be the highest ranking priests — the old and wizened bishop whom everybody adores may simply be too senile to aid the character in his quest for greater ordination, while the lower-ranked deacon may know every plot whispered in the pews and catacombs.

For gamemasters, this means knowing the NPCs of note, those who can grant greater ordination to a player character and under what conditions they are likely to do so. Some priests are terribly conservative and rarely grant greater ordination, preferring to keep the same group of priests under them for their entire careers. Others are more liberal, and grant new ordinations on the condition that the recipient go forth to forge a new cathedral, spread the word with greater missionary work, or as a means to get a favored priest a position within a noble entourage (some nobles won't accept low-ranking priests).

Certainly, a cathedral's needs are the best determinate of a priest's chances: a growing region with new serfs coming in may need more priests to hold masses, or an Eskatonic novitiate may prove eerily central to important occult prophecies and thus come to the notice of his superiors.

Priests who are hampered in their quest for greater recognition (and thus greater responsibility) can petition to be placed elsewhere, within another cathedral or another See altogether. Such requests must be presented to a priest of equal or higher rank than the petitioner's own cathedral leader (the bishop of the desired cathedral or the archbishop of the desired See); these transfers are only granted if the individual shows some true merit and can add demonstrable value to his new home — or else gaining the priest will win the new post some political points against a rival.

Conversely, a cathedral or See can request a priest of special expertise from another See (or from the metropilae or Patriarch). Parishes that lack healers or scholars, or that suffer occult strangeness, might request an expert in such lore to come investigate or to be stationed at the new church. In addition, the offices of the Patriarch, the metropilae, and even many Sees, station certain priests in "troubleshooting" roles, whereby they are available to travel to places within the See or the Known Worlds on investigatory or missionary work, as representatives (or spies) for their offices.

While the Church is more unified than the royal houses, fractious politics can always get in the way of promotion. A priest who foils another See's plans to build a new cathedral near her own can raise the rival bishop's ire, and cause him to turn higher level priests' ears against her in Church convocations.

# Missionary Zeal

Each sect of the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun has different duties it feels are the most important for its holy mission. While some of these are rather universal per sect, regional parishes can have different views, depending on the local circumstances (an Antinomist-infected region will have even the Sanctuary Aeon priests concerned chiefly with sin and heresy). In general, each sect's main missions are:

**Orthodoxy:** Sermonize to the flock, tend to their spiritual needs, care for them, protect them from the worst excesses of the nobility. Seek new converts and be ever wary of schism.

**Brother Battle:** Gain and execute military contracts for the order. Defend the faithful (usually pilgrims), defend one's post, or seek out evil and destroy it.

**Eskatonic Order:** Study scriptures and lore, sermonize to all about the coming eskaton, root out occult phenomena and study it.

**Temple Avesti:** Beware sin in yourself and others. Sermonize against heresy. Root out sin and purge it.

**Sanctuary Aeon:** Heal the hurts of body and soul, make whole the wounds of Creation, offer compassion to all — even the sinful.

# Workers of the Fiefs Unite

Priests in charge of a flock or See have a moral and holy duty to defend the faithful from harm — including noble and guild excesses. Sometimes, this involves working the populace up into an impassioned strike — a refusal to work — or even to create a riot against the harsh masters in the castle.

Most priests are on their own when this happens, although some may be lucky enough to recruit a band of mercenaries to aid in defense in return for food. Well-connected priests can sometimes gain official permission from higher ups in the sect to invoke such civil disobedience. How well this succeeds usually depends on the power the sect wields with the local lords or with off-planet contacts. While the Orthodoxy rarely engages in such grass-roots rioting, it often wins such disputes and gains a surcease to the central problem (if not all the problems). The Amaltheans have garnered some successes through pure charisma, but other sects are rarely successful. At best, they attract the interests of the Orthodoxy, who lend a hand in return for more power in the region.

The retaliation a noble lord often brings against such disobedience is the chief reason strikes are so rare. Most nobles are merciless in their condemnation of what they consider criminal resistance, no matter the original cause for it, and bring military force to bear against the leaders of the opposition. House Hawkwood has the best record for good behavior in such instances, but it suffers the least such rebellions in the first place. While most believe the Decados are the worst offenders in their brutal retaliations, it is actually the Li Halan who are the most feared — when the mandate of heaven is broken, even if by the words of priests, the house responds poorly and often with massacres. For this reason, the Li Halan fiefs rarely witness peasant rebellions (except on Rampart, whose populace has not been properly schooled in the Li Halan ways).

The main limiter of noble violence, however, is the power of the Church — the higher up the sanction for the strike goes or the greater the moral outrage caused by noble retaliation, the more the house will suffer from Church indictment should it respond too harshly or with too little concession. Besides increased visits by the Inquisition, the recalcitrant noble may be threatened with excommunication — a death sentence on his rule, for even the most cowardly serfs fear to serve one whose soul is no longer protected by the Church (many houses will strip such a noble of rank and place another to rule the fief).

In such a way does the Church prove its vital role in the Known Worlds, as the shepherd of all souls, for in the end it is the Pancreator who rules over the universe, not a mortal noble.

The case against Merchant League and guild excess is different. The Church usually responds if too many of its flock have been badly ripped off by guild traders, impoverishing the community, or else the guild openly traffics in proscribed technology. Illegal factories or those which cause too much pollution to a region are often targeted by priests in sermons. If they are truly dangerous, or the priest is well-connected, those factories will be targeted by the Inquisition, or their guilds will suffer Church embargoes, where priests demand that their parishioners refuse to purchase goods from members of the guilty guild. In extreme cases, guild representatives are threatened with excommunication. While this is not as damaging to them as to a noble, it means their days of selling to the masses are over, and they must retire to administrative duties or take up exploration missions to distant places.

# Daily Rituals

Ministering to the people's spiritual needs is the core of a priest's duty. Listening to confessions, blessing crops or important affairs, performing marriages, presiding over births, deaths, rites of passage, etc. A priest is the linchpin of a community's connection to the wheel of the seasons and the cosmos. Without these everyday ceremonies, the chaos of the universe would engulf everyone's lives.

# Personal Prayers

There are important prayer times throughout the day, each associated with types of prayer (the Eskatonics compile voluminous tables of correspondence for these prayer hours). The main ones are as follows:

**Preces Matutinae (morning):** Morning prayer, or the Daybreak prayer, is a thanks to the Pancreator for the dawn light.

**Preces Vespertinae (evening):** Evening prayer is a thanks for the good works done that day and the fulfillment of labor.

**Preces Noctes (night):** Night prayer (or Before Bed Prayer) is a thanks for oneself and one's loved ones, and a plea to keep the soul safe in the absence of light.

**Hora Lupinum (Hour of the Wolf):** The predawn hours, most often viewed as 3:00 am to 4:00 am or 4:00 am to 5:00 am, are considered the worst for the safety of the soul. It is this time that thoughts of morbidity and despair can gain the most sway over the soul. Most people are asleep, and are thus protected, but monks often use this hour to pray for greater resolve in the face of night.

There are also numerous Preces Per Diem Persolvendae, or During the Day prayers, for a variety of reasons and purposes, varying from place to place and sect to sect.

# Seasonal Rites/Festivals/ Events

There are a number of rites, festivals or religious events that are practiced each season, although their exact date varies from planet to planet, tied to a world's unique astrological or lunar rhythms.

## Oration for the New Dawn (New Years)

This rite is performed at the moment the old year becomes the new — usually at or soon after the winter solstice. It is also called the "Return of Light," the "Lessening of the Dark," or the "Waning of Winter." This rite is especially popular on ice worlds like Malignatius, where the physical changes associated with its winter solstice and spring are barely noticeable, making its symbolic entry into a new dawn even more important to the faithful of that world.

## Ode to Fecundity (Spring)

This rite to welcome spring emphasizes the Pancreator's gift of life and growth each year. It has roots to ancient Urth and Diaspora-era fertility festivals (including some Gjarti rites), and in some places still retains its old associations with bodily (rather than spiritual) rebirth and resurrection or reincarnation.

## Canticle for Summer

At this time of maximum light, rites are made to emphasize joy and happiness — not the riotous partying often associated with spring, but a warm and content happiness earned through good works and hard labor. In many regions, it is a time when the cathedrals and parishes bring in large blocks of ice, to provide relief from oppressive heat, causing throngs to pack into the churches.

## Autumn Hymn

The rite of the harvest, a time for community and a sharing of both labor and yield. As the light begins to withdraw, it is time for all souls to contemplate the spiritual light that still shines, unseen by mortal eyes but illuminating the reflective soul.

# Universal Rites/Festivals/ Events

## Cosmos Carnival (late February-early March week)

A sort of Feast of Fools, descended from pagan rites such as Mardi Gras or Carnival. Serfs, freemen and even nobles throw caution to the wind and party hard for a week, often adopting elaborate masques and costumes to hide their identities and protect themselves from shame (or notoriety). This is the League's favorite holiday, for its merchants sell more booze, magic lantern holovids, and all sorts of toys during this week than any single other time of the year (even more than Lux Splendor, where handmade crafts are the most popular).

The Church long ago failed to stamp out this ever-popular festival. Instead, it adopted it and allows — for this week only — a more lax view of sin and even heresy. On some worlds, the Inquisition is forbidden from operating for this week (except against the most heinous crimes, like antinomy); its members are expected to join in the celebrations or retreat to a monastery. This rarely stops the more fanatic from acting against what they believe to be rampant immorality.

In the Kurga Caliphate, the first day of this festival is recognized as the birthday of Sata Natura.

## Urth Day (May 1st)

An ancient holiday commemorating humanity's cradle, this was popular among Diasporan colonists far from their ancestor's birthplace, although its origins are said to have begun in Urth's preinterstellar era as some sort of terraforming reform holiday. The Church has sanctified the day as a time to remember Holy Terra and humanity's long history on that orb. Some worlds extend this celebration to Urth's stellar neighbors, such as Mars (the alleged birthplace of the Prophet) and the jumpgate.

## First Jump (July 4th)

Originally a secular celebration, celebrating the day of the first manned trip through Urth's jumpgate in 2306 (the year following its discovery), this day was ordained as a Church holiday by Saint Palamedes in his effort to stamp out its Sathraist connotations. It is now mainly observed by the Charioteers and those who make their living among the stars.

## Saint Ramos Day/Colony Day (August 10th)

A holiday consecrating the trials and triumphs of Saint Ramos, a colonist of the early Diaspora who was adopted as a saint by the Second Republic Church even though he lived in prereflective times (before the Prophet). Ramos, a popular colonist rights activist, was martyred

before the guns of zaibatsu police. Colony Day was later declared by the Second Republic in memory of Ramos and all colonists.

League iconoclasts snicker at this holiday, claiming its origins begin as a zaibatsu loyalty ceremony forced onto corporate employees and transient workers, involving chanting company songs and clapping to a single beat. It was during one of these ceremonies that Ramos led his ill-fated revolt.

### Santa Flamma Dies (September 17th)

Rites celebrating the day the Prophet saw the Holy Flame and changed the course of human history. The second-most important holiday celebrated by the Church (the first being Lux Splendor, below), this is a time for prayer and thanks to the Pancreator for His grace, and a thanks to the Prophet and all his saints for carrying the Pancreator's message. Plays recreating this legendary moment and the gathering of the disciples take place across the Known Worlds on this day, and popular holovid movies about the Prophet are shown in magic lantern theaters in the larger cities.

### Mortos Diablos (October 31st)

The old Urth Day of the Dead and Halloween holidays were carried by Diaspora colonists and workers to new worlds, recreated on many different days throughout the universe, but most often in mid to late autumn, as winter creeps in.

During the Second Republic, Patriarch Orrin, recognizing that the pagan associations of this holiday had grown greater as humanity spread throughout the stars, tried to co-opt it as a Church holiday, a time wherein priests would perform rites to hold back the Dark and protect the souls of the faithful from the demons which rode freely that night. Called Mortos Diablos and enshrined on October 31st (the traditional old Urth Halloween), its rites became a tradition across the universe. Mortos Diablos was eventually co-opted in turn by a megacorp marketing firm as an excuse to party.

Nonetheless, the pagan associations remained and still do at the beginning of the 50th century. Even devout parishioners often sneak to the edge of town at night, seeking protection charms and amulets from wandering Zuranist bishops. Indeed, Zuranity, the religion of the itinerant Children of Zuran, is given a degree of respect at this time, for its followers seem to have real luck at holding bizarre Mortos Diablos misfortunes at bay.

### Dies Lamentum (December 23rd)

The Prophet's Wake, mourning his death in the jumpgate accident (2849) while on embassy to the Vau. Some parishioners take this day too seriously, performing mortifications on themselves in attempts to recreate the Prophet's stigmata (usually conceived as an immolation in flame). More reasonable worshippers reflect on Zebulon's life and works, holding Omega Gospel readings.



### Lux Splendor (December 25th)

The Radiance of Light, following the death of the Prophet, as his spirit cleansed the jumpgates and consecrated them against the Dark, making the stars safe for humanity. The most important holiday in the Orthodox canon, Lux Splendor represents the bounty of grace available to all beings, not just the special grace gifted to saints alone. During this time, the faithful are expected to give presents to their loved ones and friends, representing the reflection of light from each soul to every other soul throughout the universe, a reminder of the Prophet's parting gift.

Some claim that the date of the Prophet's death, and thus the successive Lux Splendor, is factually incorrect, and that it instead represents a time of worship in the Prophet's own prereflective religion.

## Theurgy

Theurgy is not a common discipline. In fact, for many of its practitioners, it is a solitary study, with effects only becoming apparent after years of meditation and prayer. Still, most are a direct outgrowth of worship, and especially from communal worship. A priest's first duty is to the Pancreator (via the Church), but his second one is to his flock. These rites reflect the different duties of the sects, and stem from true belief and worship.

### Blessed Confession (Orthodox)

**(Level 2, Extrovert + Empathy, L, sensory, prolonged, 1W)**

Confession is a sacrament, and it does more than just give the priesthood blackmail information on people. It is a cleansing process, designed to clear people from the sins of misdeeds and leave them open to the Pancreator's grace. A confessor may use this ritual on someone who has voluntarily confessed a sin. The sinner now gets a +2 to all goal numbers involved in preventing that same sin, +1 per victory point from the theurgy roll.

### Heaven's Axe (Brother Battle)

**(Level 7, Faith + Fight or Melee, PG, touch, instant, 2W)**

A Brother who invokes this asks the Pancreator to lend His hand to an attack. If the Brother Battle connects on his next attack, roll damage normally. A number of people up to the victory points on the roll +1 are effected, as well as the original target of the Brother's own attack. Thus, if three thugs attacked Sister Diana and she rolled a "7" for Heaven's Axe, she could strike one thug herself and the mystical force of her faith would strike two others. The one remaining hit from Heaven's Axe would be wasted.

### Dreams of Eternity (Eskatonic)

**(Level 5, Faith + Empathy, G, touch, special, 1W)**

By gently tapping someone's crown point chakra (the top of the head), the Eskatonic can put her in a meditative trance from which only the most jarring disturbance will release her. The subject of this rite must roll Passion + Observe to take any action for the duration of the trance. It lasts for a number of turns equal to the Eskatonic's victory points + 1. This is best performed on willing supplicants or unwary targets, upon whose heads the theurge can place his palm without arousing suspicion. The theurge must make a Dexterity + Fight roll to touch the head of an unwilling and resisting target, who can dodge the attempt. (The theurge does not suffer a multiple action penalty for performing this rite and making an attack roll in the same turn.)

### Blissful Ignorance (Temple Avesti)

**(Level 4, Faith + Impress, PGL, sight, temporary, 1W)**

Avestites have long sought ways to show people that learning is not only unnecessary but counter to the Good Life. This rite helps them demonstrate it. The Avestite can reduce any learned skill the target has by one per victory point. If this reduces the learned skill to 0, the target often cannot attempt to use that skill at all.

### Health of the Congregation (Sanctuary Aeon)

**(Level 5, Calm + Focus, PGL, sight, prolonged, 1W)**

A congregation draws its strength from the faith of its members. Health of the Congregation allows a priest to bolster all links in the chain of the community by bonding its members together to share in one another's suffering. A number of willing volunteers may divert the wounds of one another Congregation member to themselves in any combination. During the duration of the rite, each may take a number of Vitality damage points initially delivered to another member of the Congregation equal to his Faith score. Thus, if Scotan the Vorox and Father Haverson the Amalthean were linked to Sgt. Roc of the Muster, when Sgt. Roc gets hit by an assault rifle for five points of damage, Scotan and Haverson can elect to take some of this damage themselves; each can take up to their Faith in damage (1 for Scotan and 5 for Haverson).

This rite allows one congregationer plus one for every victory point to absorb damage for another. This damage is treated as normal damage of whatever type effected the target, be it fire, bullets, lasers, falling or whatever. (Mark this damage with an "F," to keep track of the total number a member's Faith allows.) Those linked by this rite elect to take damage, and do not have to take any damage that they do not choose to.

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