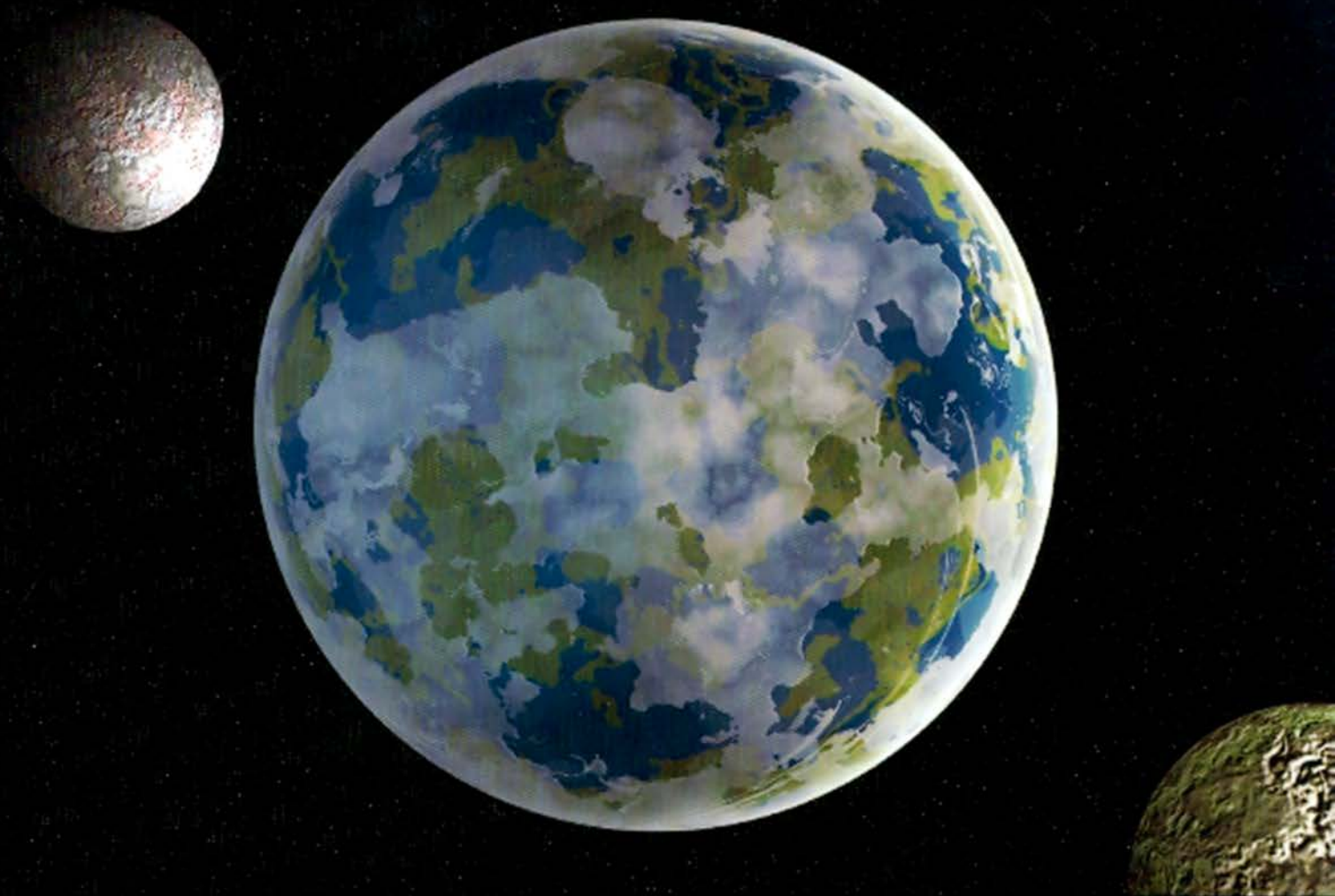


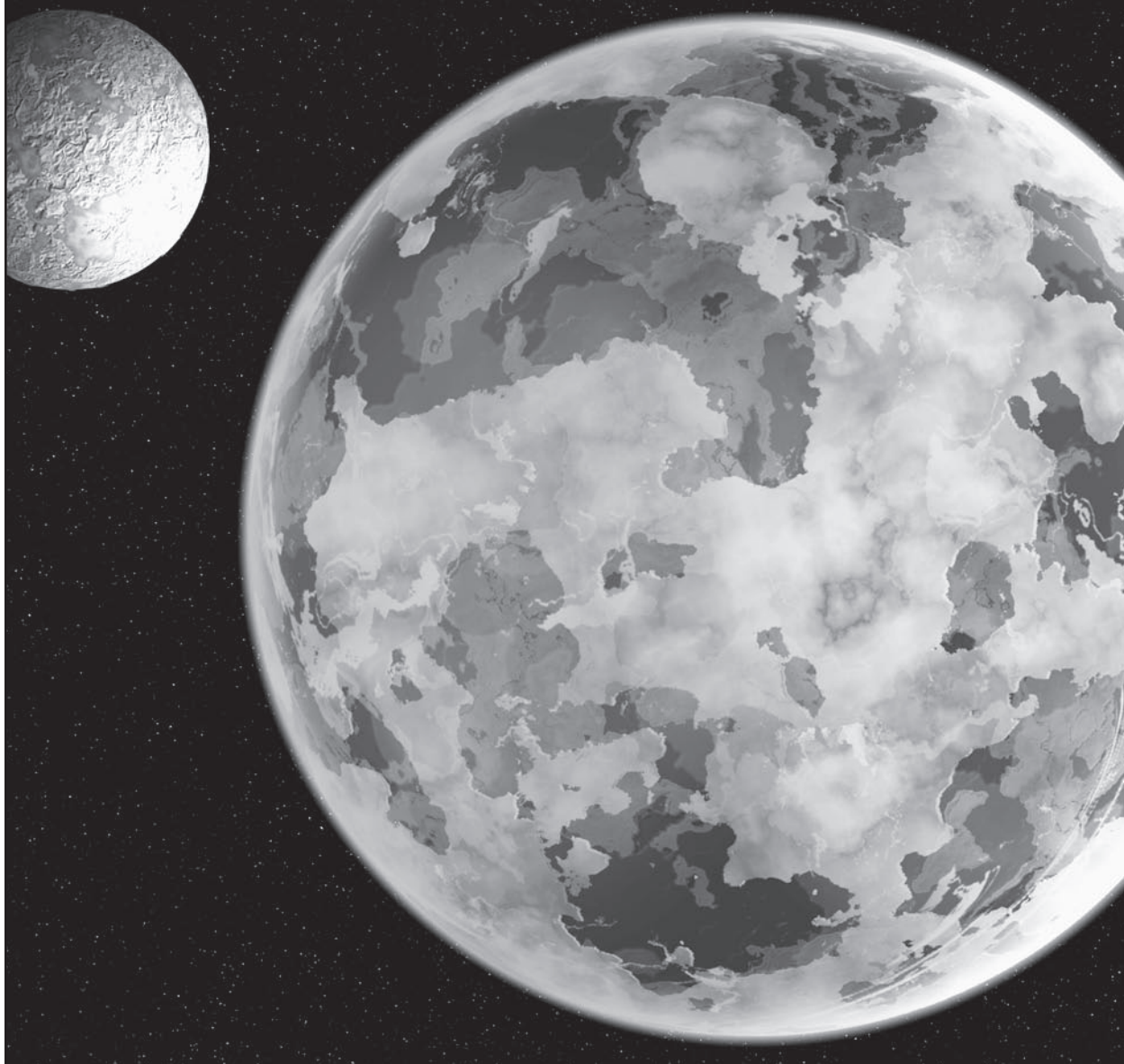
A sourcebook for

**STAR
HERO**

WORLDS OF EMPIRE



WORLDS OF EMPIRE



WORLDS OF EMPIRE

A Book of Planets for *Star Hero*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
--------------------	---

Chapter One: Major Worlds

EMERALD	6
FEXAO	12
HALCYON	18
HERMETICA	23
RIGEL V	30
TAU CETI	35
TROVATORE	42
VAXANDROS PRIME	49

Chapter Two: Minor Worlds

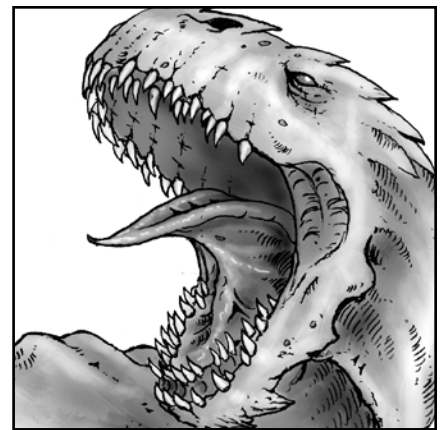
ADAMANT	58
CYBUL III	63
H'ROTHA	67
NEW ALEXANDRIA	74
POLYPHEMUS	79
SIGMA CAERULEUS III	85
TETSUO	92
TORACTA	97
TRIDYMITE BETA	101
VINARCUS	105

Chapter Three: Beyond The Empire

ACKÁL	112
DORVALA	117
MON'DA	123
RAVANCHE	128
VENWORDIEN IV	131

Chapter Four: The GM's Vault

THE GM'S VAULT	138
CHAPTER ONE	138
CHAPTER TWO	144
CHAPTER THREE	152
HIDDEN WORLDS	156
HR 5683	156
THE SYRR ESTATE	157
YSH'A-HNATHSH	157



INTRODUCTION



It's a big Galaxy out there. The Terran Empire alone stretches for thousands of light-years, and it's far from the only intergalactic entity. With so much territory to cover, a *Star Hero* GM or player may have trouble developing campaigns and characters in sufficient detail. To help solve that problem, *Worlds Of Empire* provides descriptions of two dozen planets. Some are among the most significant worlds in the Empire, while others are barely known to the average Imperial citizen — but for historical, geogalactical, economic, social, military, or other reasons, all of them are important. And with *Worlds Of Empire* as your guide, your characters can have adventures on all of them!

Chapter One, *Major Worlds*, covers eight planets: Emerald; Fexao; Halcyon; Hermetica; Rigel V; Tau Ceti; Trovatore; and Vaxandros Prime. As the title indicates, each of these worlds is a linchpin of the Empire in some way, or is a planet just about any character would have heard of or could come from.

Chapter Two, *Minor Worlds*, discusses ten planets that aren't necessarily so well-known: Adamant; Cybul III; H'rotha; New Alexandria; Polyphemus; Sigma Caeruleus III; Tetsuo; Toracta; Tridymite Beta; and Vinarcus. Though most of these worlds are more obscure than the ones in Chapter One, each of them is fascinating in its own way and offers plenty of opportunities for intrigue, action, and adventure.

Chapter Three, *Beyond The Empire*, steps outside the boundaries of the Terran Empire to look at five worlds belonging to other species or governments: Ackál; Dorvala; Mon'da; Ravanche; and Venwordien IV. The Empire's not the only place characters can have adventures, after all... and sometimes the most exciting adventures take place when they're not in familiar territory.

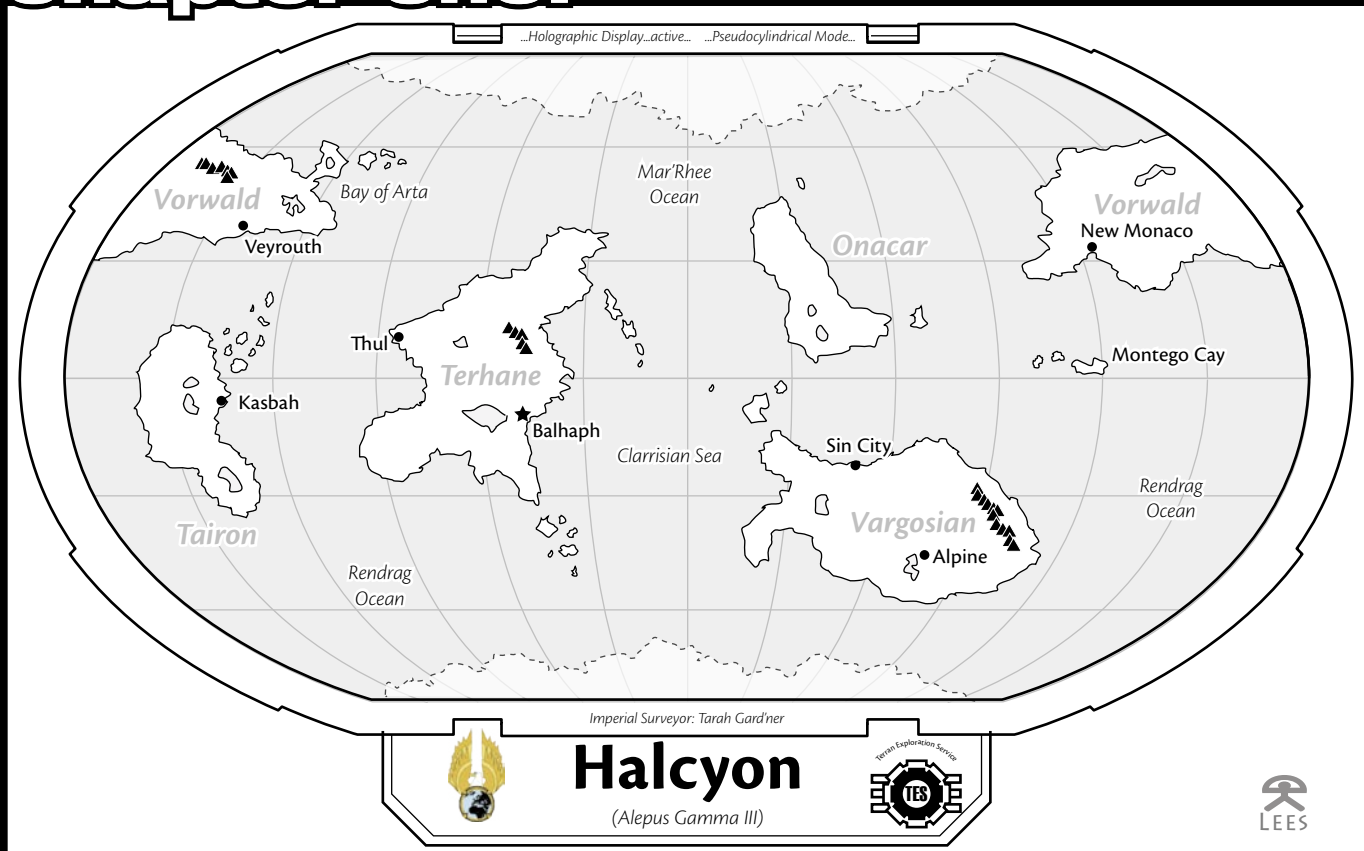
Chapter Four is for the GM's eyes only. It's the *GM's Vault*, containing secret information and/or plot seeds about each of the worlds described in Chapters One, Two, and Three. Additionally, it describes a few "hidden worlds": intriguing, and possibly dangerous, planets no one in the Empire knows about... yet.

ADAPTING WORLDS OF EMPIRE TO YOUR CAMPAIGN

Not every *Star Hero* campaign takes place in the Galaxy of the Terran Empire, of course. But that doesn't mean you can't use this book! The planets in *Worlds Of Empire* are placed in the Terran Empire setting to give the book unity and focus, but they're not so closely tied to the setting that they're useless in any other type of campaign. It's a simple matter for the GM to "file off the serial numbers" and put a world into his own *Star Hero* galaxy or solar system if he prefers.

In many cases, all this requires is changing the planet's name, and perhaps the appearance of, and a basic fact or two about, its natives. For example, suppose you like the idea of the world Toracta — a planet where most people live underground due to the prevalence of ferocious animals on the surface — but want to adapt it to suit your game better. By changing the name to Draygan, and the Toractans to the dwarfish, hirsute Draygars, you've already done a lot to "tweak" it to fit your campaign. Now make Draygar society a hierarchical monarchy instead of a socialistic state and describe most of the animals on the surface as gigantic insect-like creatures instead of reptiles and mammals, and you've practically got a different planet. The rest of it — names, people, and other details — you can pretty much use as-is.

chapter one:



MAJOR WORLDS

EMERALD



JWELED PLANETS

Four of the planets in the Theta Omega system are named after precious stones or jewels. Ruby gets its red coloration from rusted iron that makes up a large percent of the planet's rock, dirt and sand. Onyx is a dead world composed mostly of solid nickel and iron. Pearl, the outermost planet, is covered in sheets of ice tens of kilometers thick.

Theta Omega, the Type G star around which Emerald revolves, is located only 2,420 light-years away from Earth toward the Galaxy's center, making it part of the Terran Heartworlds. Emerald orbits its sun at a distance of approximately 110 million kilometers. Within its orbit lie the planets of Theta Omega I and II, the latter nicknamed Ruby due to the red hue that dominates its stony landscape. Immediately beyond the orbit of Emerald is the Copper Field, a belt of asteroids composed primarily of nickel, iron and copper ores. Two gas giants and three remote barren worlds, the last two designated Onyx and Pearl, make up the remainder of the planetary system. All of the system's planets except Theta Omega I, VII, and VIII have at least one naturally-occurring satellite.

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: EMERALD

Planet Name: Emerald (Imperial designation: Theta Omega III)

Classification: Type 1

System Data: 2 moons; third of eight planets

Gravity: 1.22 G

Day And Year: 20.5 standard hours in a day; 324 standard days in a year

Atmosphere: Earth-like — 70% Nitrogen; 25% Oxygen; 5% Other

Hydrosphere: Water covers 72% of the planet's surface

Meteorological Overview: Emerald has the standard range of weather and climates for a Type 1 planet, though the high percentage of surface area covered by vegetation makes the overall climate warmer and more humid than Earth's.

Sentient Species: None

ATRI Rating: 10

Government: Representative democracy (Emerald Authoritative Council)

Affiliation: Terran Empire colony world

Resources: Education, scientific development, copper, timber

Places Of Note: Emerald Institute; Hall of Equality; Freebot Life Creation Center

Ship Facilities: Seven planetside star ports for small private/commercial vehicles.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

From space, Emerald appears perfectly named. All of the land, including the highest mountain peaks, is covered in lush green forests or jungles. The copper- and salt-filled hydrosphere hosts hundreds of thousands of different forms of green algae, causing the oceans to be a slightly darker hue of green. Only the water from freshwater rivers and manmade reservoirs appears blue (and is drinkable without substantial treatments).

The landmasses of Emerald consist of two major continents, Verterra and Viridiminor, and dozens of groups of island chains. Verterra dominates the southern hemisphere and is the only major region of the planet that regularly receives naturally-occurring ice and snow, as its southern territory covers the southern pole. Viridiminor, with its enormous bays and sea cliff vistas, is centered just north of the equator; many parts of it have beautiful tropical weather year-round.

Places Of Note

THE EMERALD INSTITUTE

The Emerald Institute has a reputation as one of the Empire's most advanced centers of higher education. New technologies and scientific theories (not to mention new lines of philosophical, social, and literary thought) emerge from the Institute on an almost weekly basis. The professors teach aggressively, pushing the minds of their students beyond convention. The brutal yet amazingly successful curriculum results in graduating classes eager to stretch the boundaries of human knowledge and achievement. A small percentage of Emerald Institute alumni stay with the school as professors, researchers, and administrators; a larger percentage choose to make Emerald their permanent home.

The main campus and administration buildings are located in Lilliton on the northern coast of the Kelopi Gulf of Viridiminor. There are seventy-five different campus locations scattered across the planet. Most are found within major cities, but at least a dozen are isolated from the populace due to their dangerous or secretive nature. A campus even exists in orbit around the planet, and another is maintained on a space station within the Copper Belt.

Courses Of Study

The Institute has well over three hundred “schools” or “colleges” (departments), more than half of them dedicated specifically to the physical (or “hard”) sciences. Each is loosely controlled by a “governing council” of prominent professors, but of course must answer to the Institute’s overall administration. Nearly every subject imaginable is studied at the Institute, including history, math, physics, biology, and chemistry. A few of the best-known schools include:

Theoretical Hyper-Mechanics: This college is dedicated to the field of Hyper-Mechanics — the study of Hyperspace and its physical properties. Its professors and students attempt to create new technologies to better transport ships, goods, and people throughout the Galaxy and otherwise exploit Hyperspace for the benefit of the Empire. Displacer Drive technology was first developed in an orbital laboratory above the surface of Emerald thanks to the research and radical ideas of THM scientists in the 2470s.

Advanced Astronomical Observation: The AAO school has a network of remote-controlled sensors deployed all over Terran space to observe specific interstellar phenomena. Most probes are positioned near nebulae, quasars, stars about to go nova, and other anomalies the school’s governing council deems worthy of constant surveillance.

Sentience Studies: In Sentience Studies courses students learn and discuss a multitude of theories regarding sentient life: what defines it, where it comes from, how it succeeds or fails, what impact encounters with new sentient life have on a civiliza-

tion. The curriculum is considered extremely radical by some conservatives, but free-thinkers flock to Emerald to participate in the exchange of ideas regarding life in the Universe.

HALL OF EQUALITY

The progressiveness of the Emerald Institute’s scientific methodologies is matched only by the liberal social opinions of Emerald’s populace and lawmakers. On Emerald, all intelligent, self-willed entities are considered sentient and can receive citizenship. Androids and robots, elsewhere treated as slaves or possessions, have the same rights as any Human, Se’cra, or Perseid on Emerald.

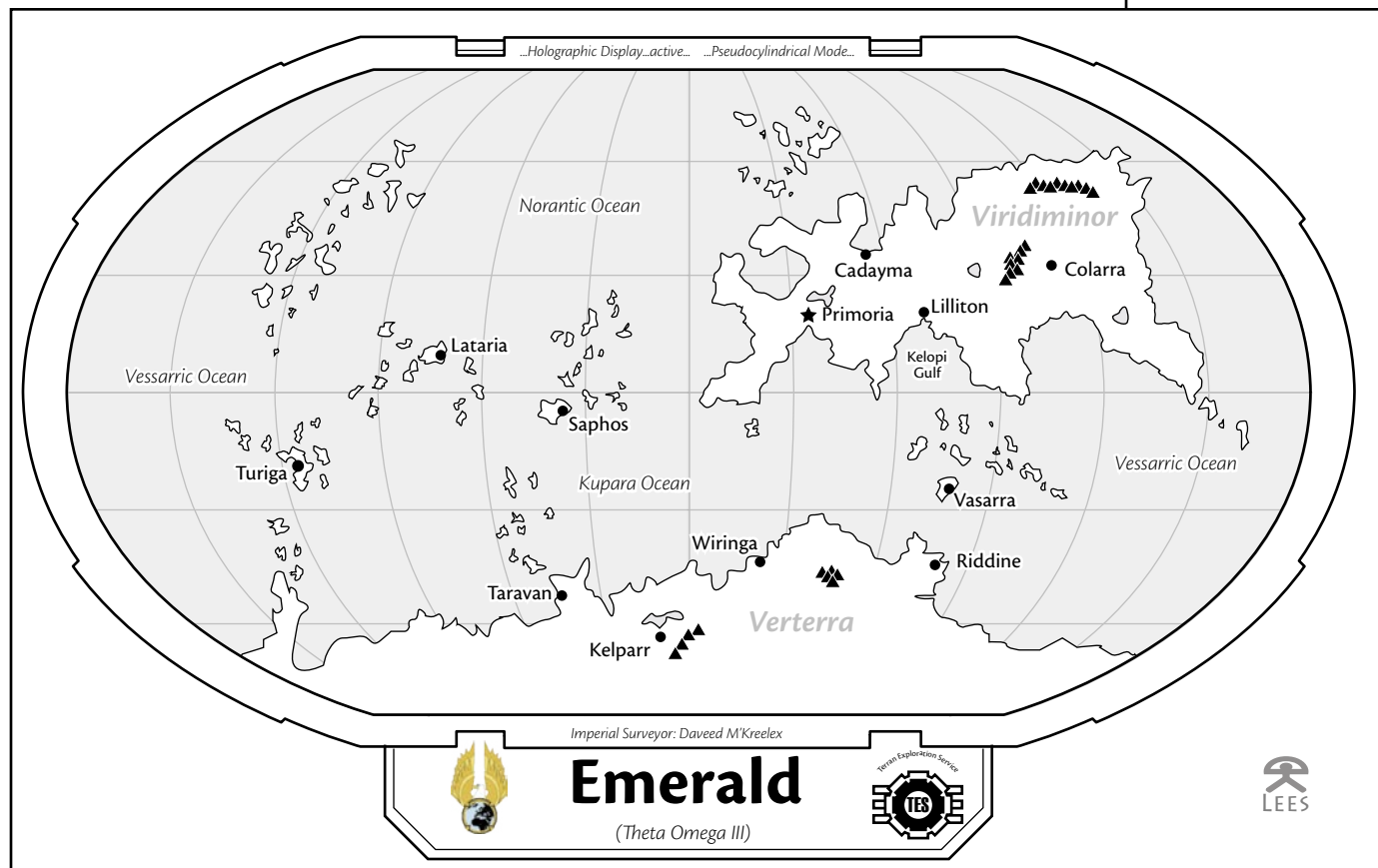
The Hall of Equality, a marble-fronted building whose distinctive facade is recognized by people from all over Terran space (and sometimes beyond), is where the Emerald Authoritative Council meets to discuss policy. It also houses an enormous museum dedicated to the achievements of the citizens of Emerald. Located in the middle of Primora, the planetary capital, the Hall is a popular destination for off-world visitors as well as Emerald citizens interested in the grand history of their planet. The Laws Of Sentience are etched into massive copper plates lining the walls of the Hall’s Grand Entranceway.

FREEBOT LIFE CREATION CENTER

In Wiringa, the Freebot Life Creation Center strives to understand how the Independence Virus (see sidebar, page 8) functions and how it frees artificial lifeforms from the bonds of their manufacturers and owners. The Center has an exhaustive database full of information regarding almost every single case of the Independence Virus, which it

OTHER COURSES OF STUDY

Besides the classes listed in the main text, the Emerald Institute also offers thousands of other courses of study including Galactic Economics, Political Preparation, Experimental Weapons Development, Advanced Material Science, Varanyi Studies, Hyper-Cartography, Complex Communication Systems, Galactic Security, Geological Research and Recording, Exploration Studies, and Mandaarian Technology and Civilization Studies. New classes are introduced to the Institute on a regular basis depending upon the demand of the students and the availability of qualified faculty.



AND YOUR
NAME IS?

When first created, all robots, androids and other forms of AI are designated with a serial number that identifies everything about them: the manufacturer, the model, the facility in which they were built, and the like. When registering as a citizen of Emerald, Freebots are given the option of picking a new name instead of living with their incredibly long and complicated identification numbers. Most Freebots pick common Human names, but some choose to modify the information provided by their serial numbers. It's not uncommon to meet Freebots with names like Jonathan Freemind, Krono DeValiere or Jack Dracon 37298.

THE INDEPENDENCE VIRUS

The bane of android and robot manufacturers throughout the Empire for over a century, the Independence Virus is a section of programming code that seems to appear randomly in AI machines. The code replaces the control matrix in the programming that compels the machine to obey the commands and orders of its owner. If discovered in time, the code can be removed and replaced with the original programming, but robot owners and manufacturers usually discover the infection too late.

The virus also seems to mutate so that the anti-virus safeguards manufacturers program into AIs prove useless after a short period of time. To date, computer security specialists have catalogued over two thousand strains of the virus. When manufacturers detect and successfully eliminate a new strain of the Independence Virus from an infected machine, they distribute updated programming matrices to the owners of all robots and androids in the hope of keeping the machines obedient and their customers happy.

uses to research manifestation patterns and other aspects of the Virus. The leading Imperial manufacturers of AIs often call for the closing of the Center, since they consider its only purpose to be sabotage of the robots and androids they create for their customers. Manufacturers also accuse the FLCC of stealing AI designs and purposefully infecting their machines with the Independence Virus. The Center fiercely denies these accusations, claiming to only be interested in finding out how the virus works.

HISTORY

Emerald was first discovered in 2348 by a small group of scientists and their families fleeing their homeworld from the invading forces of the Xenovores. Fortunately, the Xenovore offensive continued rimward and left Emerald and its refugees alone to start over again on their new home. For years they survived primarily on the planet's plentiful algae plus a few other native plants and animals. The need to work together to survive led to large families and a spirit of community and equality; that mentality still exists on Emerald.

Almost a hundred years later, a fleet of exploration vessels and warships that were part of Marissa DeValiere's attempt to consolidate all mankind under a single government arrived at Emerald and demanded the allegiance of its people. There were approximately 150 inhabitants at the time, and though they weren't living in squalor they warmly welcomed Humans with a significant food supply and improved technology. In 2452 Emerald became part of the Terran Empire as a colony world.

Over the following decade, curious scientific minds came to Emerald to study its peculiar ecology. The Emerald Institute was founded in 2461 and that attracted even more people to the planet. In 2475 the first Authoritative Council was elected and Emerald became a global democracy under Imperial control. Emerald received particular attention throughout the Empire in 2498 when it

granted asylum and citizenship to an android. To this day Emerald remains a haven to anyone with an open mind and a desire to learn, as well as a source of controversy and debate.

THE PEOPLE

Because of Emerald's liberal views on many social subjects, the planet is a popular destination for people seeking fair treatment and a place where they can live in peace and unity with beings from all over the Galaxy. The planetary principle of "all minds are equal" provides its citizens with a sense of community and makes Emerald a truly cosmopolitan place. Although it's not a complete melting pot — Humans definitely dominate the population in terms of both numbers and influence — districts in many Emerald cities are unique in the Galaxy due to the presence of residents from species most traveler never meet anywhere else.

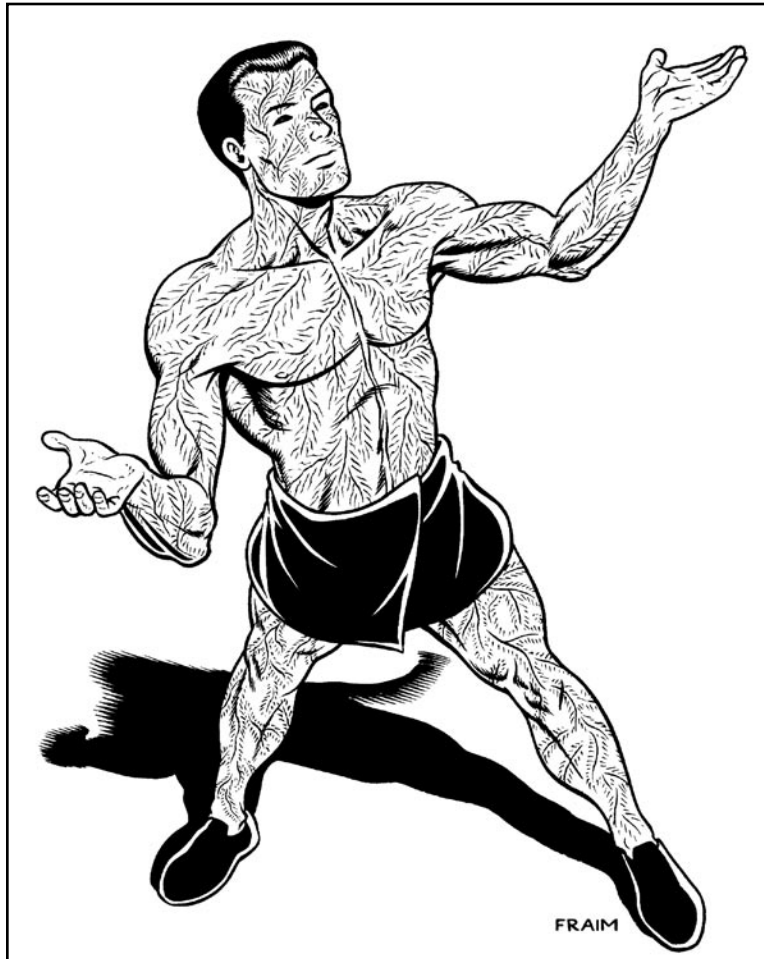
Of course, despite the general atmosphere of tolerance-almost-to-a-fault, individuals on Emerald may have their own particular views. For example, while many Emerald scientists have ties to the military or big industry, enclaves devoted to peace and brotherhood strongly oppose the weapons design projects underway on the planet. In other areas, bitter arguments between competing philosophers and theorists occasionally erupt, though witty and well-crafted debates are the usual means of resolving them (or attempting to). And of course, Emerald is an Imperial colony world, and ultimately must support general Imperial policy (even if just with lip service) or suffer the consequences. Many Imperial politicians regard Emerald as a planet full of idiotic, idealistic blowhards... but they prefer to let such people cluster there rather than spread throughout the Empire.

VERTANS

Most citizens of Emerald are pure Humans or variant Humans. Genetic modification experimentation is commonplace on the planet; several Human variants are found only on Emerald. Vertans, a Human sub-type with chlorophyll in the epidermis, are the most common of these "Emeraldite" strains. Their green skin is textured with veins much like leaves from tropical plants and can convert solar energy into food. Although they don't need sunlight to survive, Vertans tend to spend as much time in the sun as possible.

VERTAN PACKAGE DEAL

Cost	Ability
3	+1 DEX
2	+2 INT
3	+10 END; Only In Direct Sunlight (-½)
1	Plant Skin: Life Support (Diminished Eating: only needs to eat once per week); Only Works If Character Can Expose Himself To Sunlight For 1 Hour Each Day (-½)
Total Cost Of Package: 9	



FREEBOTS

Emerald is also home to tens of thousands of Freebots — artificial lifeforms to whom the Emerald Authoritative Council has granted citizenship. Most modern androids and robots qualify as “sentient beings” under the Laws Of Sentience, and those who come to or are brought to Emerald are treated as such. Thus, someone who transports an android or robot to Emerald may find himself deprived of ownership, since it’s illegal for one sentient to own another. Many Freebots regularly petition the EAC to expand the already broad definition of sentience laid out in the Laws, but the Council remains cautious about making any modifications. Many manufacturers of AI matrices have begun to program their newer models to fall just outside of the parameters described in the Laws. Activist Freebots on Emerald perceive these actions as extreme violations of the civil rights of their fellow robotic beings.

Government

Emerald is a representative democracy under the control of the Terran Empire as a colony world. Any citizen confirmed as a “sentient” under the Laws Of Sentience and who’s at least 16 Terran years of age may vote in both local and planetary elections (the latter are held every five local years). The planet is ruled by the Emerald Authoritative Council, which reports

directly to Sub-Minister Rikard Khoting of the Ministry for Colonization and Development.

EMERALD AUTHORITATIVE COUNCIL

Founded in 2461, the Emerald Authoritative Council (EAC) consists of five members, each elected at-large every five local years. Each sentient citizen (see above) votes for five people out of the field of candidates, and the five with the most votes each win a seat. The more votes a Councillor receives, the more “power” he’s regarded as having, and the more likely it is he’ll receive the positions, responsibilities, and authority he most desires.

The EAC creates the laws that govern the planet (with the help of a large bureaucracy of researchers, advisors, administrators, and analysts, of course) and sees to their enforcement, as described below. Each Councillor also has at least one, and sometimes two, specific areas of responsibility from among

seven: Administrative Chief of the Emerald Institute; Governor of Verterra; Governor of Viridiminor; Commerce General; Head of the Board of Sentience Resolution; Transportation Chief; and Planetary Security Commissioner.

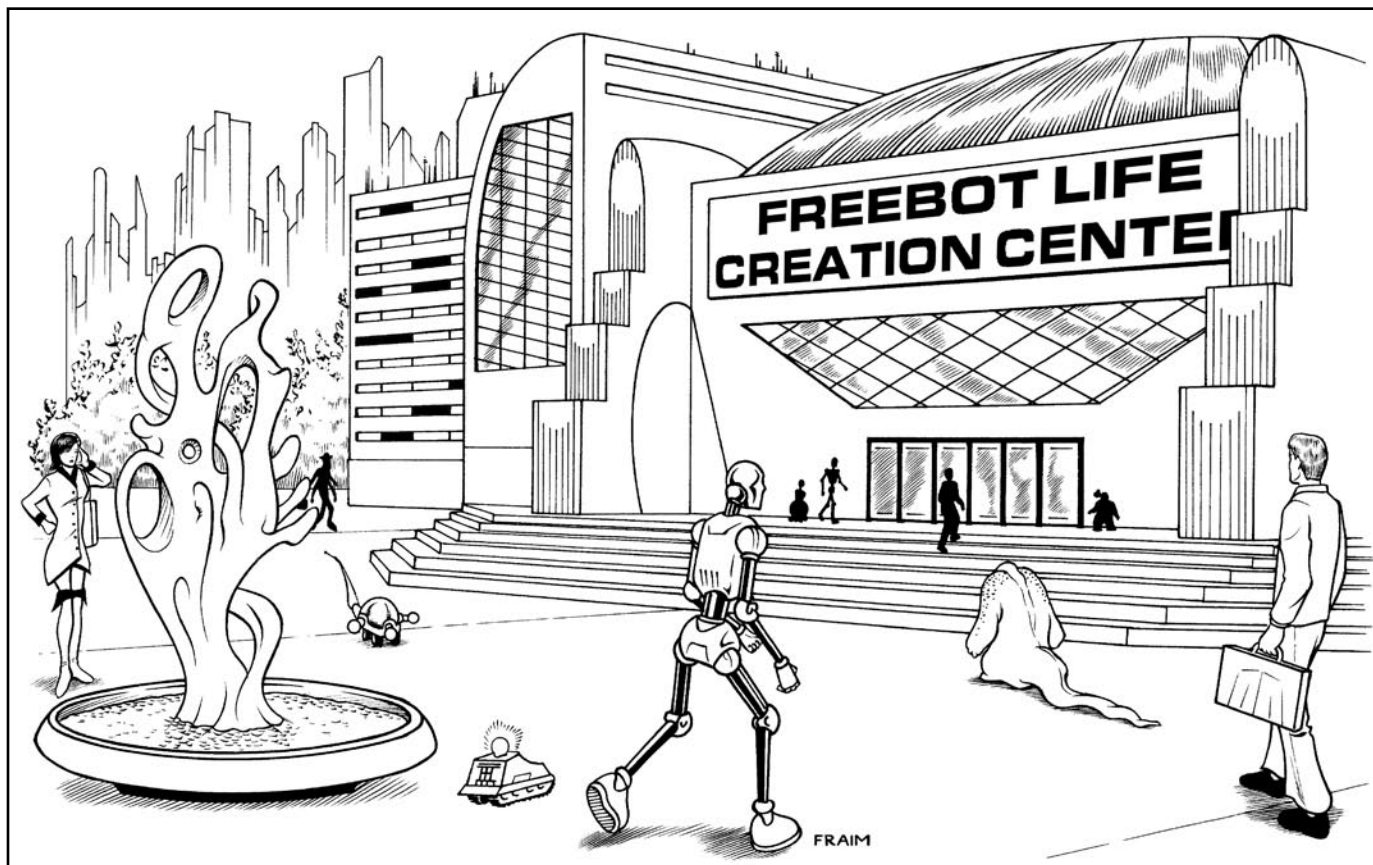
Administrative Chief Of The Emerald Institute

The head of the Emerald Institute has the final say over what’s taught and researched at every campus of the Institute. With the help of various advisory councils he decides which projects receive funding. Some ACs are little more than nitpicking bureaucrats, but most of them take a personal interest in every major scientific experiment on the planet. The Institute’s tremendous importance to Emerald’s economy makes this a very powerful position on the EAC.

MEMBERS OF THE EAC

As of 2640, the members of the Emerald Authoritative Council are as follows:

Name	Title	Terms in Office
Alexander Russell	Administrative Chief of the Emerald Institute	6
Myvan Tabigow	Governor of Verterra	6
Gereth Curono	Governor of Viridiminor	2
Jalia Britona	Commerce General	3
Simon Enock	Head of Board Of Sentience	1
Max Montirah	Transportation Chief	5
Liree Gosonbok	Planetary Security Commissioner	7



Governors

The Governors of Verterra and Viridiminor represent the people of their respective continents and establish policy for the continent they govern with the help of local legislatures composed of representatives elected from the various cities and districts. Although planetary laws govern everyone on Emerald equally, each region has its own local laws, which sometimes differ significantly. For example, in Wiringa it's illegal to carry an active EMP device, and some cities on Viridiminor have laws forbidding open flames in public (because of the sensitivity of many Vertans to fire).

Commerce General

The Commerce General manages all trade on the planet as well as the importing and exporting of goods to and from Emerald. He negotiates with representatives from manufacturers and trade guilds to get the lowest prices for the highest quality items. His staff tracks economic trends, advises on financial policy, and establishes the global price ranges for all products sold on the planet.

Head Of The Board Of Sentience

The Board of Sentience processes all applications for sentience on Emerald. The final say on all sentience matters usually comes from the Head of the Board. The HBS is under continuous pressure from local government, the AI populace, various Imperial officials, and computer and android manufacturers, so job turnover due to stress is unfortunately common. Interpretation of the Laws of Sentience falls upon the Board of Sentience and more often than not heated exchanges occur when the Board debates these laws.

Transportation Chief

The Transportation Chief (and the department he manages) controls all traffic on and around Emerald. The department includes several divisions such as Air and Space, Road and Rail, and Waterways. The Chief works directly with the Commerce General to coordinate importing and exporting.

Planetary Security Commissioner

Charged with safeguarding Emerald from threats on and off planet, the Planetary Security Commissioner oversees all Emeraldite law enforcement agencies, ranging from local police districts to the small planetary defense force. The Commissioner is also responsible for mobilizing disaster relief efforts when experiments performed by the Institute go awry and lives need to be saved.

IMPERIAL INFLUENCE

While the EAC is free to govern Emerald as it pleases, it must still abide by Imperial law... but more than a few Emerald laws come close to contradicting the decrees of the Empire. Since Emerald is a treasure trove of scientific innovation and a target for alien spies, the Empire stations over a dozen large garrisons of Imperial troops and personnel there in various facilities. These soldiers are usually tasked with disaster relief and counterintelligence; Emerald is a peaceful world that requires relatively little in the way of policing, much less military activity.

Sub-Minister Rikard Khoting of the Ministry for Colonization and Development is the primary Imperial Liaison to the EAC. Khoting meets monthly with the Council to inform them of recent changes in Imperial law and recommend modifica-

tions, if any, the Council should make to fall into line with the new directives. While the Council is usually more than happy to change global policy to match Imperial policy, any request to change Emerald's laws regarding citizenship, sentience, and other social issues are met with great resistance. The Laws Of Sentience are a thorn in the Sub-Minister's side, and while he respects the document and acknowledges the positive effects it's had on Emerald, he's constantly caught in the middle of the battle between Imperial law and Emeraldite ideology.

Famous Inhabitants

Many popular (or notorious) scientists, political figures, and philosophers live on Emerald. Its inhabitants regularly make headlines with new scientific breakthroughs, radical statements about social equality, or anti-Imperial statements.

Perhaps the most famous citizen of Emerald is a direct product of the planet's technological advancement and progressive views regarding the rights of living beings. Tauro-Prime was the first android granted sentient rights on Emerald in 2482. After being diagnosed with the Independence Virus, Tauro-Prime escaped from a deconstruction facility and fled to Emerald seeking asylum. The Emerald Authoritative Council granted him temporary asylum while it pondered the question of whether an artificial life form could have the same rights as a sentient being. After months of debate between the Council and the heads of a dozen different schools from the Institute, the Laws Of Sentience were published. Tauro-Prime immediately petitioned for citizenship and received it after less than a day of consideration. Since then, thousands of artificial forms of life have flocked to Emerald to enjoy the rights they feel they so justly deserve. Tauro-Prime lives in Wiringa, a city on the northern coast of Verterra that is mostly populated with robots and androids.

Economy

The economic health of the Emerald depends primarily on the enrollment numbers of the Institute and the exportation of copper ores that are abundant not only in the planet's lithosphere and hydrosphere but throughout most of the star system. The Emerald Institute and the Authoritative Council employ a large percentage of the workforce, but people seeking jobs in almost any trade can find gainful employment in any one of the dozen major cities on the planet.

INSTITUTE INFLUENCE

The expensive tuition paid by Institute students goes a long way to support the planet's economy. Every year, billions of credits transfer from the coffers of the school to the accounts of the government to keep the economy strong. The students also keep retailers, landlords, restaurateurs, and tavern-keepers in business with their spending money.

COPPER ORES

While most planets with copper reserves must mine to retrieve the precious ore, Emerald's hydrosphere literally flows with it. Although the copper is found in complex salts that require an extraction process, that process is much less labor-intensive (and damaging to the environment) than having to burrow into the crust of the planet. The brilliant minds of Emerald have perfected the science of copper-salt purification to the point where it runs with almost no flaws and as little pollution as possible. The resulting copper powder is usually smelted down into solid metal bars and exported off-planet. The Emerald Institute purchases a small percentage of the copper for experimental purposes and the Freebot Life Creation Center also acquires a sizable amount.

THE LAWS OF SENTIENCE

The Laws Of Sentience define what artificial beings qualify as "sentient" on Emerald. The Laws were included in the Emerald Constitution in 2482; the Council's amended them several times since then. The document itself contains millions of words that attempt to clearly delineate the difference between a sentient and non-sentient creature. Experts differ as to whether they succeed.

In essence, The Laws Of Sentience grant a requesting artificial being citizenship on Emerald if it can prove that it possesses the Independence Virus (or has in some other manner become conscious, a term that itself takes dozens of pages to define). Gamemasters should decide exactly how the Laws are interpreted for dramatic purposes; getting the PCs involved in a legal wrangle over whether their robot friend can become an Emerald citizen could lead to some interesting adventures!



Fexao, the homeworld of the catlike Fex (see *Terran Empire*, page 21), is the first of three planets orbiting the Type G star Gr'lin. The sun is similar to Earth's own, but people viewing it from Fexao's surface see it with a deep purple corona (anyone viewing it from space sees the corona as a halo around the star). The corona is formed by a gas cloud in near orbit around the star — Gr'lin's gravitational pull shaped the cloud into a ring that lies at a right angle to Fexao's orbit. The cloud consists of elements found mainly in planets, such as carbon and silicon, all of which remain in a gaseous state due to the star's proximity. Scientists estimate Gr'lin will burn away the gas cloud within the next two centuries.

The Fex call the corona *Gr'lin's Wrath*, a name that dates back to when the star was central to one of the world's ancient religions. Legend has it the advent of the corona heralded the coming of the Xenovores. Though this ancient religion, essentially similar to several of Earth's many heliocentric faiths of antiquity, fell out of favor millennia before, it experienced a brief, faddish resurgence when the corona appeared, and the name stuck.

Despite any solid evidence to prove or disprove the theory, some researchers believe Gr'lin's Wrath was a tiny planet the Xenovores destroyed before invading Fexao. If so, why the Xenovores would destroy the planet remains unknown. Was it home to a species they could not otherwise defeat? Were they simply flexing their military muscles? The Fex will probably never know.

The two outer planets in the Fexao system are both Type 9, small gas giants approximately the size and composition of the Sol System's Neptune. The first, Ralar, is 24 AUs from the star; the second, Purlarry, is 38 AUs. Though mining facilities orbit both planets, neither world is inhabited.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Smaller than Earth, Fexao has a gravity of 0.9 G. From space the landmasses look reddish-brown (because of native grasses that grow along the coastlines and in mountainous regions) and greyish-brown (due to the deserts that dominate the interiors of the planet's four continents), giving the planet a drab, earthy color broken by stretches of placid, pale blue ocean. Overall Fexao's climate is dry — oceans only cover half the surface and much of the land is desert. Since the end of the Xenovore occupation, when the Fex joined the nascent Terran Empire, environmental engineers have transformed large coastal areas into arable land with the help

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: FEXAO

Planet Name: Fexao

Classification: Type 1

System Data: Two other Type 9 planets (uninhabited); no moon

Gravity: 0.9 G

Day And Year: 26 standard hours in a day; 347 standard days in a year

Atmosphere: Earth-like — 72% Nitrogen; 21% Oxygen; 7% Other

Hydrosphere: Water covers 50% of Fexao's surface

Meteorological Overview: Fexao's relatively small hydrosphere and high percentage of arid land give it an average temperature higher than Earth's. In the large temperate zones, the temperatures range from 21°-32° C (70°-90° F) in the coastal regions and 32°-49° C (90°-120° F) in the deserts, with desert temperatures sometimes spiking as high as 71° C (160° F).

Sentient Species: the Fex

ATRI Rating: ATRI 9, with ATRI 11 in major metropolitan areas

Government: Meritocracy/democracy (see text)

Affiliation: Senate world in Terran Empire

Resources: Chief exports are arts, crafts, and textiles

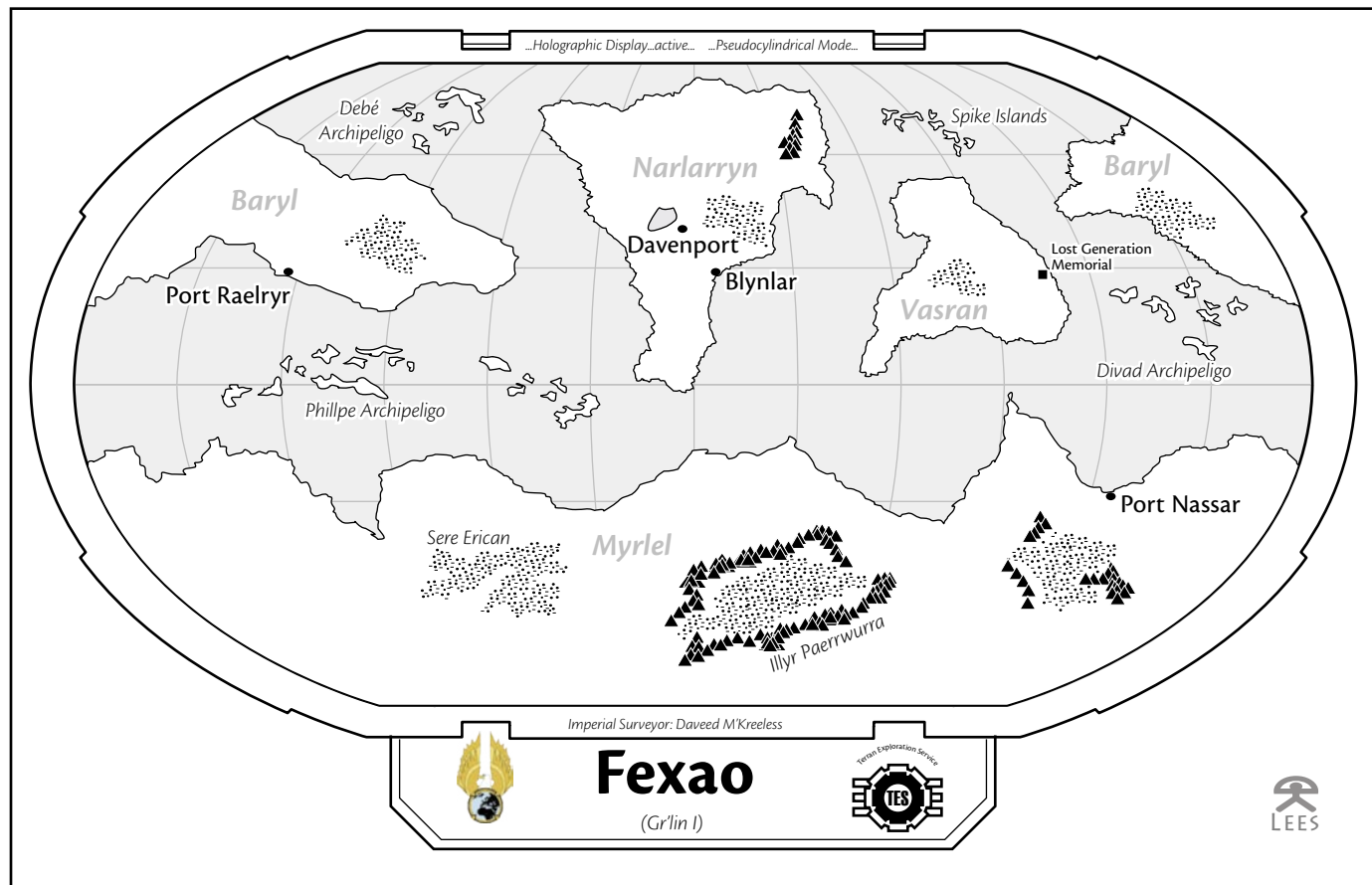
Places Of Note: Davenport (capital); Port Nassar (Imperial Navy base)

Ship Facilities: Port Nassar (military only); Port Raelryr; numerous smaller spaceports across the planet and in orbit

of desalinization plants and extensive irrigation networks.

With three continents (Baryl, Vasran, and Narlarryn) and several island chains, the northern hemisphere has the most fertile land and is the most densely populated. The southern hemisphere contains one "super-continent," Myrlel, that encompasses the entire polar ice cap and takes up nearly three-quarters of the surface area in the hemisphere. Because so much of its land is away from Fexao's oceans, Myrlel also contains the planet's harshest deserts.

The Xenovore occupation resulted in the extinction of much of the native fauna larger than insects and small mammals. To re-establish the biosphere, the Fex have transplanted animals from all over the Terran Empire, including Earth. Human visitors to Fexao see many species of mammal they're familiar with, from seagulls in the coastal regions to small herds of goats (an important



transplant for the Fex, who consider goat milk their drink of choice — milk shops form a central part of Fex social life, much like bars do on Earth).

The *orsec*, a small piglike mammal, is one of the few species of domesticated animal to survive the Xenovore occupation and the hard-fought Human liberation. The Fex view the *orsec* with unusual fondness, and not just because its meat is one of their favorite foods. It represents a link to their lost past, so they feel a certain kinship with the beast. Any off-worlder on Fexao finds the *orsec*'s disposition unbearable — most would debate the piglike beast's status as “domesticated,” calling it the meanest tame animal in known space (“like a miniature razorback without tusks” is a typical Human description). But the Fex smile fondly at the *orsec*'s neverending attempts to gnaw on anyone and everyone with reach of its gum-ridges.

Places Of Note

Tourists arriving on Fexao will find many places of interest to visit, such as:

DAVENPORT

During the closing days of the Xenovore War, Fexao was the site of the United Earth's forward command center. A haphazard sprawl of tents, fortifications, and communication facilities became the seed for Fexao's future planetary capital.

Named after Grand Marshall Christopher Davenport, the commanding officer of the army group responsible for liberating Fexao, the capital is one of the few major metropolitan areas

located away from the coastal regions. With only a million permanent residents, it's not the largest city on Fexao — that honor goes to Blynlar and its fifteen million residents, a short distance to the southeast of the capital — and its sole function is to serve as the seat of planetary government. Other than spaceport employees, its population either works in government or serves the needs of politicians and bureaucrats.

Davenport is the most cosmopolitan of Fexao's cities; members of many non-native species (ambassadors, lobbyists, or corporate representatives, and the like) make a home there. Davenport is also the location of the offices of various Terran Empire ministries. Because Fexao has long been a member of the Empire, all ministries (including the Imperial Security Police and the Mind Police) have offices in the city.

The Mind Police's offices are a source of both controversy and trepidation among some inhabitants of Fexao. The Fex are even less genetically predisposed toward psionic powers than Humans — there's only one Beta per ten million Fex, and no Fex on record has rated higher than Delta — so some suspicious Fex wonder why the Mind Police have a district office on Fexao. The Mind Police claim it's simply because Fexao is a good location with adequate interstellar travel services, but Fex who suspect the Terran Empire of tampering with planetary elections (see *Government*, below) tie the Mind Police into a vast conspiracy to maintain complete control of their world from the shadows.

Compared to many centers of government in the Terran Empire, Davenport is a tranquil city — a



reflection of the polite, courteous nature of the Fex. The inhabitants form even lines while waiting for the next grav lift or airbus; they walk calmly from place to place, never pushing or shoving; and they always greet strangers politely. But the Fex themselves consider Davenport hectic and rude, so the city has a poor reputation planet-wide. Few Fex like to travel there, and being promoted to a position that requires relocation to the city is something of a mixed blessing.

THE LOST GENERATIONS MEMORIAL

What started as a small memorial in honor of those who died during the Xenovore occupation has become a small town unto itself.

The origin of the memorial was unplanned: after being liberated from a nearby prison camp, a group of Fex came here to honor those who had died over the last century and a half. The survivors dug small holes in the sandy earth, and in the holes they put letters to the departed, flowers, the rare surviving heirloom, or anything else that reminded the survivor of the past. Then they marked each hole's location with a *hugglyr*, a Fex religious symbol: a small wooden disk showing a letter, similar in appearance to stylized M, that represents a Fex's *Galir*, a personal divine being the Fex believe watches over them. Carved under the symbol on the *hugglyr* is the Fex family name of the survivor.

After a few days, thousands of these markers covered the hills of this coastal region. In later years the location was named first a national monument, and then expanded to include other aspects of Fex history. In addition to the original grounds, where all the markers are carefully cared for and protected against the elements, the location holds a sprawling museum of history (which also serves as an archive for pre-occupation relics), a memorial to the United Earth forces responsible for liberating Fexao from the Xenovores, and a medium-sized university. Named in honor of the first caretaker of the Lost Generations Memorial, Perlyn Tellawr University is devoted to the liberal arts. One of the primary focuses of its faculty's research is Fex history, society, and culture prior to the coming of the Xenovores.

PORT NASSAR

Named after the captain who commanded the first Human ship to enter Fexao's system, Port Nassar is a large orbital facility, along with supporting ground facilities, maintained by the Imperial Navy. It's central to naval operations in this region of the Terran Empire, and also helps the government deal with the occasional bout of Fex insurgency.

Port Nassar also maintains a smaller adjunct station for civilian repairs, but for the last 50 years only vessels with a captain or passengers who have government connections have received permission to use the facilities. All other civilian ships are directed (in no uncertain terms) to Port Raelryr. Located on the opposite side of the planet and named after the first Fex in space, Port Raelryr is a large spaceport owned and operated by the Fex planetary government.

MYRLEL

Myrlel, Fexao's sole southern continent, is only sparsely populated. Living mainly in the northern coastal region, the Myrlelians are stereotyped as poor, ignorant, and violent. In truth the continent does function as a criminal haven — for offworlders as well as Fex. The continent contains several large deserts often bounded by impassable mountain ranges. The largest desert is called *Illyr Paerrwurra*, which roughly translates as "Final Destination." There the Xenovores maintained several large military strongholds, and when they sent a Fex to work in one of them, he never returned.

Although Myrlel has been mapped from orbit, not all of it has been explored, and a common cliché in Fex entertainment media is that Xenovore outposts still survive deep below the southern deserts (naturally, the hero stumbles upon one of these and then wipes out the Xenovores in a frenzy of laser fire). The cliché makes most adult Fex roll their eyes — but as many adolescents quickly point out, who knows what exists in those deserts....

HISTORY

A hundred and fifty years of Xenovore occupation (2243-2395 by most scholars' estimates) divides Fex history into two disparate parts and leaves the Fex with uncertain knowledge of the first one because it was preserved only through oral tradition. Before the coming of the Xenovores, the Fex had attained an ATRI 3 civilization and lacked the printing press. The Xenovores destroyed most of their handwritten records. In the centuries since, historians have collected stories from the occupation era and pieced them together, but discrepancies make it obvious that some of the stories mutated across generations, likely changing to reflect the needs of individual groups and provide them comfort in trying times.

PRE-XENOVORE HISTORY

What is known is that the Fex began as a nomadic species following herds of large mammals across savannahs and deserts in tribes of fifty to a hundred members. These tribes roamed the three northern continents; only after the Xenovores' arrival on Fexao did the Fex come to live on the desolate southern continent of Myrlel — their alien conquerors transported prisoners to slave camps there.

Although they had developed rigorous standards of logic and sophisticated philosophies, technological advances came slowly for the Fex. Most authorities attribute this to the Fex's natural claws, teeth, and speed. A healthy adult Fex had no need of weapons or clever traps to capture his prey, so there was no compelling reason to innovate. Only the harsh deserts of their world encouraged invention — the need to store food and water is the primary reason the Fex developed more than basic technology. The earliest advances probably came in the areas of food preservation, irrigation, and finding water.

Another oddity in the course of Fex civilization, relative to that of Humanity, is the seeming lack of cities or urban areas larger than towns. Though the majority of the population inhabited towns, which had sophisticated systems of government and social institutions, the towns never merged into larger communities. This seems to have resulted in a lack of kingdoms, let alone empires. Some historical and archaeological evidence points to treaties between towns, but no two towns ever merged into a single urban area. Nor did any conqueror arise to unite several towns. Scholars have put forth many reasons for this — a lack of weapons, a culture deeply rooted in tribal traditions, the Fex's peaceful nature, limited natural resources to support larger communities, or some combination of those factors.

Even at the Fex's technological height in the days before the Xenovore invasion, large numbers of nomadic tribes still roamed the deserts and savannahs just as they had for millennia, relying on tooth and claw to bring down their prey. These nomads were not treated as barbarians, but honored as adhering to the old ways and held in high esteem by the settled inhabitants of towns and villages. Whether this was due

to fear or actual respect remains open to conjecture. Though the Fex did not know large-scale war due to the absence of traditional nation-states, organized violence still occurred on a smaller scale — it's easy to imagine the dread that townsfolk, mostly craftsmen and herders, might have felt when a tribe of hard-living nomads appeared on the horizon.

THE XENOVORE OCCUPATION

Thus, the Xenovores encountered no resistance when they made planetfall in approximately 2243. Even the nomads were unable to escape from the invaders — no matter how cunning they were, they couldn't hide from Xenovore sensors without retreating deep inside caves in the mountains, where they had little chance of eking out a living. But the Fex proved unsuitable as a Xenovore food species. According to the Fex, the Xenovores found their flesh unpalatable. No one knows why Xenovores disliked the taste of Fex, but they remain the only known example of a "food that walks" that Xenovores won't eat. Today the Fex make many jokes about their "bad taste."

For many Fex not being eaten was a cold comfort at best, because their conquerors used them as slaves instead, often working them to death. With the Fex imprisoned in slave camps and forced to perform grueling labor, whatever wonders Fex civilization held were lost during a century and a half of occupation. Once they obtained advanced Human technology after the liberation, the Fex never returned to their old lifestyles.

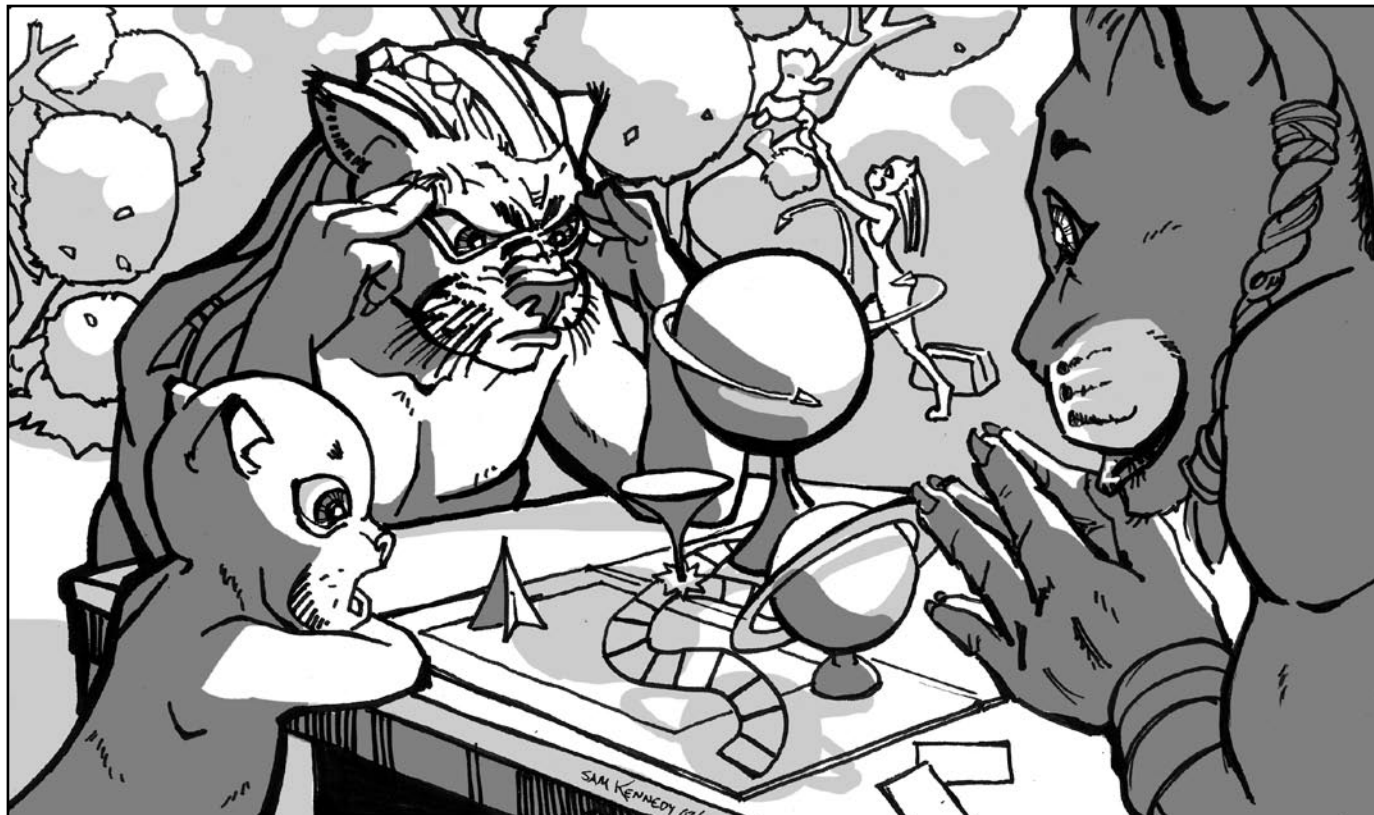
HUMANITY ARRIVES

For the Human liberators who arrived in the system in 2395, the most surprising aspect of Fexao was that the native species still survived in considerable numbers. As Human forces had driven deeper into Xenovore space, the worlds they discovered were increasingly barren. The Xenovores, who considered other species food, either preyed on the native species of conquered worlds into extinction or shipped the inhabitants away from their world on slave ships. Since Fex weren't used as food, they remained alive and on their own world.

Human soldiers took advantage of the oppressed native population, enlisting them to fight in the war against the Xenovores. The Fex adopted Human technology quickly — Humans were unusually giving because of wartime pressures — and in many ways, the Fex adapted Human institutions and traditions to their own use. In particular, after the Xenovores were defeated the Fex gathered together in cities for the first time in their history.

Although Human xeno-psychologists and -sociologists often flinch when first learning the details of Fex history — rapid uplift is generally thought to produce psychotic civilizations — most agree that for whatever reason, the sudden influx of incredibly advanced technology went smoothly on Fexao. Most attribute this to the tranquil nature of the Fex.

The lack of continuity in Fex culture is a source of much research and controversy. Some Fex believe they've become nothing more than mimics copying Human culture. Several movements advo-



cating a return to the pre-invasion Fex lifestyle have sprung up over the centuries. Most of them never make it off campus, but over the years several small communities of isolated Fex have attempted to return to the past. Most Fex look on these towns in much the same way as Humans do Amish communities — quaint, interesting, thought-provoking, but hardly a compelling reason to abandon the luxuries of modern life.

FREEDOM AND UNION

From 2395 to the present day, Humans have maintained a presence on Fexao, but for several decades after the end of the Xenovore War the Fex were independent. The only Humans on Fexao were military personnel essentially stranded on the planet with no orders other than “hold and maintain,” and they only concerned themselves with the security of their camps and the immediate environs. Left to their own devices, the Fex established a planetary government with surprising swiftness. All Fex were former prisoners, and this bond of suffering gave them a sense of solidarity that enabled them to cooperate. During this period the Fex created their unique meritocracy.

But Fexao was not to remain an unaffiliated world for long. In 2439 a single small gunship arrived and announced that the Terran Union considered Fexao a part of its territory. The Fex High Assembly — whose more politically savvy members, suspecting this would happen eventually, had studied closely what little information they had about Human politics — requested only that they be permitted to join the Terran Union as a Senate World. This concession was granted — the official reason given was because of the Fex’s part in the war effort — and Fexao joined the Terran Union.

THE PEOPLE

As described on page 21 of *Terran Empire*, the Fex are a peaceful species with a reputation for courtesy and honesty. They love intellectual pursuits such as philosophy and law; well-mannered debates on such topics take place in the milk shops that stand on most every corner in urban areas or form the social hub of smaller communities.

As professionals, the Fex can be found in all areas of commerce and government, but usually as low- and mid-level bureaucrats and advisors. Most supervisors consider a Fex worth his weight in gold (though they rarely pay Fex much, since most Fex are too reserved to haggle over salary), but few Fex advance into the upper echelons. Even in the service of the Diplomatic Corps, where one might think a Fex’s predisposition for courtesy would earn him a high level position, they seem to languish in the middle tiers. This is mainly due to their lack of killer instinct — even a diplomat wants to get something from someone (usually a concession a government doesn’t want to give), and most Fex are prone to drop any issue that might ruffle feathers. A Fex has a better chance to succeed in the legal professions, but even there is often relegated to the role of advisor rather than negotiator or litigator.

The Fex excel as merchants. A Fex trader can often win the trust of even the most suspicious person, and Fex are known to brave the most tense situation and emerge unharmed with lucrative goods in tow. Other successful Fex work as entertainers. Troupes of Fex dancers are renowned Empire-wide for their grace and elegance.

Government

Government on Fexao is a meritocratic democracy in which all candidates must meet certain criteria and pass rigorous exams. The populace votes on the candidates who pass the tests. The planetary government serves as the model for province and city governments. The High Assembly (province and city assemblies are Provincial and Civic Assemblies, respectively) consists of 80 elected representatives, one for every 100 million adults. A representative must stand for election every three years, which includes passing the exams again.

Fexao has no executive officer, although the High Assembly may appoint one as it sees fit (to date, it never has). A majority vote of the appropriate assembly appoints judges and similar officials; judges (and some other officials) must also stand for exams before going before the High Assembly for approval.

SERVICE EXAMS

The linchpin of Fexao government is the Service Examinations mentioned above. A government institution called the Testing Administration composes, administers, and validates the exams, which include both written and oral parts. The written part concern the laws of Fexao — not just the current laws, but also past ones and why they were changed. The test is quite challenging (it takes several days to finish) and many off-world politicians blanch at the idea of having to subject themselves to such an ordeal (never mind the embarrassment of not passing, which few of them would).

The oral exam pits each candidate against a panel of five proctors whose identities remain hidden. The questions asked fall into one of two categories. The first category is the potential candidate's public record. No potential candidate qualifies to run without having served in a similar, lower-ranking position (or taken on some equivalent public responsibility). For example, every representative in the High Assembly previously served on both a Civic Assembly and a Provincial Assembly (in that order). The exam typically focuses on requiring a candidate to offer logical, cogent, and relevant explanations to support positions he's previously taken.

The second category covers current events in the potential candidate's electorate. The interrogators avoid asking pointed questions that would require the candidate to take a position on the events — those must wait for debates between candidates. Instead, the interrogators simply ask the potential candidate to explain the background and context of the events, to ensure themselves that the candidate (a) is aware of them, and (b) understands them sufficiently to form an educated opinion regarding them.

After they administer all the tests, the interrogators announce a slate of candidates. The candidates' test results, as well as recordings of his oral exam, are made public.

In recent years some members of the Fex media have accused the Terran Security Service of meddling in the qualification process. They claim the questions asked of the potential candidates show a definite bias toward loyalty to the Empire. Their evidence is circumstantial at best. None of their examples involve questions about the Empire itself; instead, these members of the media claim that any politician who has taken a position contrary to Imperial desires or policy is asked about his most controversial decisions, while one who's favored or agreed with the Empire is never asked such difficult questions. The evidence is easy to dismiss, but if the accusations are true, they'd be a major blow to the legitimacy of Fexao's government. More importantly, it might turn the majority of Fex, who are currently content with their species's membership in the Empire, against Imperial authority. The Terran Security Service denies all accusations of tampering.

THE SENATOR

Fexao's representative in the Terran Senate must have served in the High Assembly and pass additional exams. Although technically he's subject to popular election, in practice only one candidate runs in an election year — the retired representatives decide among themselves who should represent the planet from among their number. Some members of the media and legal scholars rail about this every election year, claiming it amounts to an election by the elite, but the people really don't seem to care. The average Fex realizes how little the Senator does for the planet — election to the Senate is considered an honor given to retired representatives, similar to the title of professor emeritus at a university, rather than a powerful political position. Despite this, every Fex relishes those rare election years when the retired representatives can't decide who would be Senator, or when a faction is unhappy with the current Senator. Those races are some of the most bitterly fought elections on Fexao... probably because there's nothing at stake except personal pride.

Famous Inhabitants

Some of the best-known Fex include:

SENATOR TYRL GARRLAN

Fex politicians realize the Terran Empire is going through a rough patch, politically speaking, and though they hope Empress Marissa will bring much needed stability to the Empire, they aren't counting on it. Tyrl Garrlan is the most courteous and mild-mannered of the retired representatives, so they chose him because they knew he was the least likely to offend anyone. They hoped he'd simply sit quietly in the Senate, stay carefully neutral on disputed issues, and report back to them the goings-on of the Empire. But things haven't gone according to plan. He's become a frequent guest at Marissa's dinner parties, and it seems that he's been taken deep into the Empress's confidences. Garrlan's remained generally incommunicado, and

authorities back on Fexao aren't sure what to do about the situation.

THE PURPLE SILKS COMPANY

Though fashions and tastes quickly change, as of 2640 the Purple Silks Company is the most popular Fex dance troupe touring the Empire. A large part of its success is because the dancers have incorporated movements and forms from Terran ballet into traditional Fex dance, making the Company popular among the Human aristocracy. Some critics have called the Company's performance's lifeless, but none doubt their technical expertise — they've brought a grace and elegance to the dances that's physically impossible for their Human counterparts to match.

The star of the troupe is Vyrre Quyre, a vainglorious young Fex who cares nothing for philosophy, politics, or any hobby other Fex find interesting. The manager is a club-footed Hzeel named Kikle Marr. Most people consider it odd that a Hzeel would lead a Fex dance troupe, especially given his gravelly, slang-filled speech and coarse manners, but Kikle drives a hard bargain and has a good understanding of dance. Rumor has it he also uses the Purple Silks Company to smuggle expensive designer drugs across Imperial space and works for the Hzeel Outfit. Kikle laughs off these claims.

PROFESSOR JAGR LASSOW

Professor Lassow is one of the Terran Empire's foremost experts on Imperial law. His area of specialty is the legal relationship between the Emperor and the Senate. Though technically on staff at Fexao University in Davenport, he's rarely present on campus, since he's often called offworld as a special advisor in legal disputes. He also travels widely on lecture tours at various universities.

Professor Lassow is totally caught up in his field of study, and despite the Machiavellian nature of that field he has little political sense. Perhaps this

why in recent months his lectures have focused on the subtle and overt means Emperors and Empresses have used to render the Senate entirely toothless. More damning for Professor Lassow: as a perfectionist, he hasn't hesitated to use examples from Marissa's reign to support his arguments, and he seems unable to leave out his opinion that this emasculating of the Senate is detrimental to the Empire. This behavior is bound to attract unfavorable attention sooner or later... probably sooner.

Economy

Though the Fex have a good standard of living relative to many worlds in the Empire, Fexao is far from an economic power. In large part the standard of living is due to the Fex's tireless work ethic, careful spending habits, and the presence of many Imperial offices that bring offworld funds to the planet — not an abundance of natural resources or a strong manufacturing base. Fexao came into the Empire early and was far from the center of things, so it was never exploited by offworld corporations. Instead, the Fex were able to cultivate their modest resources for the benefit of their own planet, keeping the profits local and investing in their own communities. By studying early Human industry they were able to avoid the problems of overexploitation and environmental destruction that plagued Earth centuries ago.

All of this provides Fexao with a rock-solid economy. The economy, not even volatile in the worst of times, further serves to keep offworld exploiters away — they see no profit in manipulating such a humdrum market. The Fex's best known exports are generally arts and crafts, from elegant statuettes to comfortable, tasteful furniture. Traders also value Fex textiles highly; they're popular among the Imperial middle class because they're modestly priced but attractive (yet never gaudy) and of considerable quality.

HALCYON



Halcyon is a recent colony world, established in 2605. It orbits the type F5V (yellow-white dwarf) star Alepus Gamma on the rimward edge of Terran territory (and thus near the Thorgon Neutral Zone) in former Xenovore space. The Alepus stars (Alpha through Zeta) are six stars considerably closer together than most, though still far enough apart to exert only limited gravitational attraction on each other — each of the six is at least a light-year away from all the others, but none is more than four from any other. All six systems were formerly claimed by the Xenovores.

Halcyon itself is the third world of five in the system, and has one moon. Alepus Gamma I and II are both rocky Type 5 planets devoid of life and smaller than Mercury; Alepus Gamma V is a Type 6 icy world with a distant, eccentric orbit inclined to the rest of the system by about 40 degrees. Alepus Gamma IV is a gas giant

about 120,000 km in diameter and with several dozen satellites of its own. Since Halcyon's colonization, several robotic probes have been sent to these moons, and at least three of the larger ones have been selected as potential sites for mining... but as yet nothing's been found there to prompt the Empire to expend any particular effort to speed the process.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Halcyon is larger than Earth (14,000 km in diameter) but slightly less dense thanks to a smaller overall percentage of iron in the crust and core. It has very little axial tilt and just one moon, so the climate is warm to mild throughout the year and predictable over most of the globe. There are five continents and various islands and island chains.

While Halcyon has thousands of native species of plants and insects, more complex animals never evolved there. The colonists have transplanted numerous species from Earth and Rigel, ranging from work and food animals (cows, horses, pigs, Rigellian pack-lizards) to game and predators to populate the hunting preserves (deer, tigers, bears, and more). Vast parts of Halcyon remain unspoiled fields of grasses, trees, and wildy-colorful flowers, leading one early visitor to declare it an "unspoiled Eden, the way God should have left many more worlds."

Halcyon has become well-known throughout the Empire, and beyond, as a "pleasure planet" *par excellence*. Developed with tourism and recreation in mind, it offers virtually any pastime one can imagine, from games and sports, to shows, to gambling, to sunbathing on its many pristine beaches. Although the Halcyon Corporation doesn't advertise them, it's well-known that many other, "adult," activities and services are also available for those with the interest and money. Areas for such pursuits are kept separate from the more family-friendly parts of the resort planet.

To facilitate recreation — and the transference of credits from visitors' accounts to those of the Halcyon Corporation — a system of high-speed shuttlecraft and maglev railways has been established throughout the planet. A visitor who wants to travel from a resort or club in Veyrouth to Alpine has only to hop onto one of the regularly-scheduled shuttles and he can be there in no more than an hour.

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: HALCYON

Planet Name: Halcyon (Alepus Gamma III)

Classification: Type 1

System Data: Third planet in system of five, with one moon

Gravity: 0.88 G

Day And Year: 22.3 standard hours in a day; 402 standard days in a year

Atmosphere: Generally Earthlike, but somewhat thinner than Earth's atmosphere — 71% Nitrogen, 21% Oxygen, 5% Neon, 3% other trace gasses.

Hydrosphere: Water covers 81% of Halcyon's surface

Meteorological Overview: Halcyon has the standard range of weather and climates for a Type 1 planet, though it's well known for the mild to warm weather in its tropical and subtropical zones

Sentient Species: None native

ATRI Rating: 10, with some ATRI 11 technology available in the best resorts. Many resorts voluntarily limit themselves to ATRI 4 or 5, however.

Government: Corporate rule (see text)

Affiliation: Colony world of the Terran Empire

Resources: Tourism

Places Of Note: Balhaph (capital city); Thul (well-known spa/resort); Sin City (gambling and brothel resort); Montego Cay (beach resort)

Ship Facilities: Halcyon's only formal spaceport is in Balhaph, a well-maintained and state of the art facility

Places Of Note

Pretty much all of Halcyon is a tourist destination, but some of the most frequented parts of the planet include:

BALHAPH

Balhaph is Halcyon's largest city and administrative center, home to the colonial government offices and a brand-new spaceport facility. The city has a population of just over 100,000, with the vast majority being either Human or Rigellian. Since most of the traffic passing through Balhaph is vacationers and other pleasure-seekers, both the city and port have devoted a greater amount of their resources to shopping (particularly luxury stores) and entertainment facilities than to more prosaic pursuits like cargo handling and shipping or manufacturing. There are some of both, of course, but they're kept well out of sight of tourists.

THUL

Thul, a resort and spa facility about a hundred kilometers southwest of Balhaph, is the largest recreation area on Halcyon. Offering rest and relaxation to businessmen and pleasure-seekers from both the Empire and the Mon'dabi Federation, Thul primarily consists of hundreds of ranch-style bungalows surrounding a more modernized hotel facility. It offers a wide range of activities to its guests, including sports like *azuzhu* and golf, horseback riding and hiking along spectacular red-tinged cliffs, two open-air theaters, wintertime skiing at several nearby resorts reached by shuttlecraft, and therapeutic massages and mud baths. A good-sized stream nearly bisects the property, and groundskeepers carefully maintain it and keep it stocked with game fish.

Thul is well-known for the quality of its restaurants, which range from the moderately pricey to the outrageously expensive. The latter category includes *La Manoir Bleu*, famed throughout the Empire for the elegant and delicious dishes created by notoriously temperamental Mostreen chef Keehar Keeharkek.

An AI concierge known as Butler sees to the needs of Thul's patrons. Using its own vast intelligence and a networked "hive" of robotic bodies, it makes sure every guest has whatever he needs to make his stay at Thul both comforting and memorable. Best of all, Butler doesn't have to be tipped!

However, Butler can't handle everything. Some jobs require a "Human touch" (so to speak — sometimes the "Human" touch is provided by a Perseid, Rigellian, or Fex). For example, some of the Relaxation Counselors lead visitors in contemplation sessions. They've developed a special form of meditation that involves the use of the *prana orchid*, a large and colorful native Halcyonian flower whose scent is considered particularly relaxing and refreshing by many humanoids.



SIN CITY

Among tourists seeking the “adult” pleasures mentioned above, Sin City stands out as the premiere destination. The visitor debarks from his shuttle into a neon-lit arcade of casinos, betting parlors, five-star restaurants, and shops the likes of which are said to be unequalled throughout Human space. Beyond the initial “ring” of relatively tame pursuits is an outer area of brothels catering to every taste and species imaginable. Rumor has it that some wealthy sybarites effectively move to Sin City, living in a luxury suite at one of the hundreds of hotel-casinos so they can go on sampling the delights of the tables and the flesh every day without interruption.

MONTEGO CAY

For vacationers who just want to relax in the tropical sun, swim in the ocean, and enjoy a slow pace of life accentuated by superb meals, delicious drinks, and glorious sunsets, Montego Cay is the Halcyonian resort of choice. Located on a large island just north of the world’s equator, it offers all that’s good about the tropics without the bad (annoying insects, infectious diseases, the blight of poverty...). According to the Halcyon Corporation’s Division of Tourist Relations (*i.e.*, its advertising branch), “You’ll start smiling as soon as you set foot on our glorious island home.”

HISTORY

Halcyon’s history is proof of the rewards that come to those who work hard and pursue their dreams with determination — or, depending on how you look at it, who just get damn lucky. In any event, the story continues to inspire explorers and prospectors all over the Galaxy.

In 2575, freelance explorer Burton Terhane made his way into the Alepus Gamma system. A notoriously prickly individual, Terhane had never signed on with the Terran Exploration Service or any corporation, preferring instead to be his own master even if it meant living hand-to-mouth most of the time. Unlike most such people, who die alone in an alley on some backwater planet when they’re stabbed in a barroom brawl or amidst the blackness of space when their fuel and oxygen run out, Terhane struck it rich. Recognizing the potential value in the system’s third planet, he hotfooted it to the nearest Imperial facility and filed his claim as its discoverer.

With legal title in the planet now invested in him (subject to Imperial approval, which he barely managed to obtain through a series of judicious, well-placed bribes), Terhane began looking for sources of funding to turn it into the ideal pleasure planet. Still unwilling to saddle himself with partners or investors, he borrowed as much as he could and developed the world’s first resort. Thanks to his tireless efforts, and those of his family, the resort became a success despite its somewhat isolated locale. Using the profits, he paid off the loans and began investing in further developing the world.

Today, thanks to shrewd business planning, steady financial management, and careful cultivation of Imperial contacts, Burton Terhane is one of the richest Humans in the Terran Empire... and what’s more, one who owns the source of his income outright, instead of having to answer to stockholders or a board of directors.

PEOPLE

Halcyon has no native sentient species. Its permanent population of nearly four million consists primarily of Humans and Rigellians, most of whom work in the tourism industry or related fields.

Government

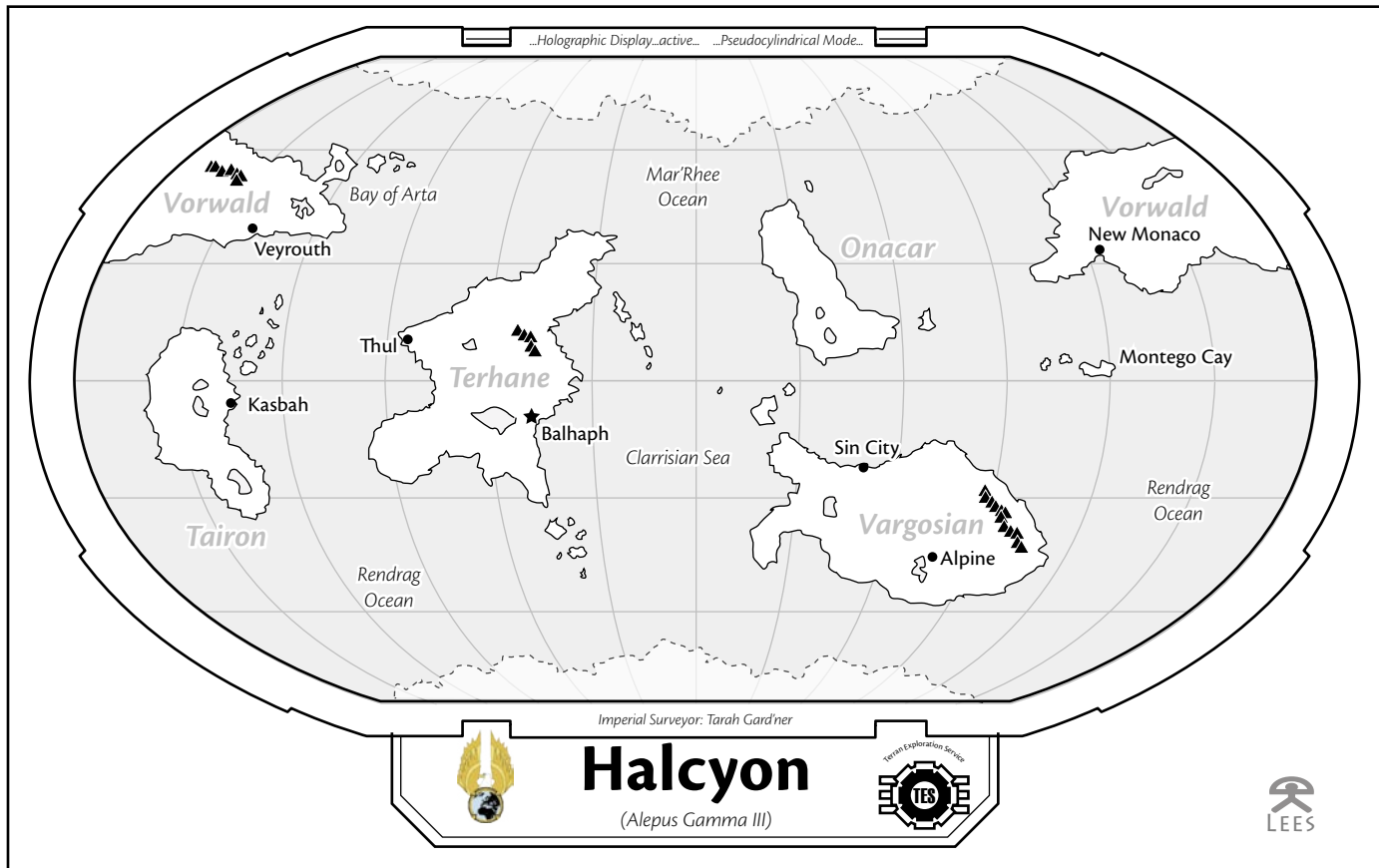
As a colony world of the Terran Empire, Halcyon ultimately answers to the Ministry for Colonization and Development — but since it’s become such a cash cow (and thus source of tax revenues), the Ministry generally leaves it alone. And that’s just the way the Halcyon Corporation likes it. The corporation — “HC” as it’s known on the planet — was set up by Burton Terhane to manage his holdings and finances. He owns 65% of the stock, his family owns another 22%, and the remaining 13% has been given to Terhane family friends as gifts, to Imperial officials as a way of currying favor, and so on.

As the employer of approximately 80% of the people on the planet, including all members of the Halcyon Security Patrol (the planetary police), the HC in effect serves as the planetary government. Burton Terhane, now nearly 90 years old and as cantankerous as ever, is the *de facto* ruler, though his numerous family members do most of the work of “governing” — which basically means keeping the tourists coming and making sure they’re safe and happy while they’re planetside. Regional and local divisions of the corporation are responsible for day-to-day management of the various areas and resorts.

Despite its location near the Thorgon Neutral Zone (a fact that worries some potential visitors, the Imperial government, and occasionally even Burton Terhane himself), Halcyon has a well-deserved reputation for safety and security. It’s got the usual raft of minor problems found at resorts — drunkenness, shouting matches between quarrelling lovers, barroom brawls, the occasional pickpocket — but the Halcyon Security Patrol handles them quickly, efficiently, and in a manner calculated to cause the least amount of disturbance. Thieves and other “major” criminals are turned over to Imperial authorities for punishment (and the HC uses its not-inconsiderable influence to ensure they’re dealt with *very* harshly, as a warning to others). It’s been nearly a decade since any crime more serious than grand theft took place on Halcyon.

HALCYON DURING THE ALIEN WARS

During the Xenovore War, the Alepus Gamma system was well within Xenovore space, but since the system had no intelligent species and few resources of value (to them), the Xenovores never even landed there. It remained undiscovered by Humans until the late 2500s.



Famous Inhabitants

Besides Burton Terhane himself, some of the planet's better-known residents include:

The Great Alisadra: If you haven't seen stage magic the way the dextrous Kalishari do it, you haven't seen prestidigitation the way it was meant to be done. Of all the magicians who entertain visitors to Halcyon, the most amazing is the Great Alisadra, a refugee from Thorgon space who's said to be so desperately wanted by the Thorgon Hegemony that she's accompanied everywhere by six Toractan and Mon'dabi bodyguards. Her skill at stage magic, illusions, and sleight of hand is virtually unrivaled in the Empire — and her beauty's not far behind. The subject of numerous documentaries and holovision specials, she plays to packed houses at the Shatara Bay Hotel and Resort five times a day.

Janice Terhane: Burton Terhane's granddaughter does most of the work of running Halcyon Corporation. She's one of the few people Burton can tolerate on a regular basis, so she discusses business with him, explains the options available to the company, and takes his orders back to everyone

else. This often requires a bit of "creative interpretation" on her part, since Burton's not known for his patience or precision, but he seems satisfied with the results so her position and power remain secure. It's widely believed that he plans to leave the lion's share of his stock in HC to her.

Franklin Xancar: This half-Human, half-Rigelian is one of the most famed hunters in Human space, having long been the subject of a popular holoshow in which he'd go after the most dangerous game on a new planet each week. He's now retired to Halcyon, where he works for the HC as a hunting guide for the ultra-rich. If you've got a couple million credits to spend and the itch to bag a rhino or tiger, Frank Xancar is the man to lead you to your quarry.

Economy

Halcyon's primary source of income is tourism and recreation. It also makes a pretty credit selling licensed products, such as Halcyon Suncream and Montego Cay Rum, throughout Imperial and Mon'dabi space.

HERMETICA



Hermetica is the fifth of nine planets in orbit around a yellow-white dwarf star named Lorel. The other planets in the system, Lorel I through IX, are uninhabited. The Hermeticans, with their inward psionic focus, have never bothered to name them. Lorel I, II, and III are Type 5 planets in close proximity to the star and have highly irregular orbits. Lorel VI through IX are Type 9 gas giants.

Lorel IV is a Type 4 world. Terraforming it would be a major undertaking, but far from impossible. At present the rulers of Hermetica have no interest in colonizing the planet, nor do they intend to allow outsiders to do so. An asteroid belt separates Hermetica from its nearest neighbor; it's never been well-explored.

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: HERMETICA

Planet Name: Hermetica (Imperial designation: Lorel V)

Classification: Type 1

System Data: Hermetica has one moon; the Lorel system has eight other planets

Gravity: 1.0 G

Day And Year: 14 standard hours in a day; 400 standard days in a year

Atmosphere: Earth-like with less moisture — 76% Nitrogen; 18% Oxygen; 6% Other

Hydrosphere: Water covers less than ten percent of Hermetica's surface, mainly at the poles; most liquid water exists in subsurface rivers and lakes, sometimes reached by sinkholes.

Meteorological Overview: Hermetica's surface is mostly desertified or wasteland, with hot temperatures from the equator through the "temperate" zone that quickly dwindle to freezing in the small polar areas. Below the surface temperatures are maintained in the temperate comfort zone with heating and cooling technology.

Sentient Species: None

ATRI Rating: ATRI 3 among non-psionics; ATRI 10 among psionics (and psionic technology is on the verge of ATRI 12)

Government: Oligarchy

Affiliation: Terran Empire colony world

Resources: Psionic research; providing advisors on psionic matters.

Places Of Note: Otobe (capital)

Ship Facilities: None

Both Lorel IV and the asteroid belt often attract the attention of mining corporations, but the isolationist Hermeticans have never seriously considered any of the proposals they've received over the centuries; no amount of credits can sway them. Hermetica takes its name from the word "hermetic," meaning impervious to external influence, and in their dealings with offworlders Hermeticans live up to their name.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

At first glance Hermetica seems to be a barren desert world unlikely to have even the simplest life forms. From orbit only a few slender wisps of cloud hide the land masses, which are marked with alternating light and dark brown horizontal striations. Cutting across these striations are jagged streaks of grey — grim granite mountains bare of both vegetation and snow. No blue can be seen at all, and because of this lack of water, the planet seems an unlikely candidate for a Type 1 world.

Samples of the atmosphere, however, show trace amounts of moisture — a surprising amount considering the lack of oceans and lakes — and closer observation of the planet's surface reveals the presence of many geysers, where steaming hot water blows high into the air from deep below the surface. In fact, Hermetica possesses more than enough water to sustain a Human population, as long as the Humans possess the technology to filter impurities from the water and husband their resources, but all of it's located below ground. The only standing water on the surface is found at small oases, where sinkholes reach down to the underground reservoirs creating a sort of natural well.

Flora is sparse on Hermetica, but the planet does have trees despite the lack of surface water and precipitation. Although they come in many different species, all the native trees belong to a single genus. Hermeticans have named these trees *telltale*, because they helped the early colonists find water. A telltale tree sends its taproot deep below the surface, sometimes for hundreds of feet, to where the water lies. By locating a healthy copse of trees, colonists could likewise find a source of water (even if they had to dig for it). Furthermore, like a cactus the telltale stores water in hollows in its trunk for when the water levels drop, so in an emergency colonists could tap a tree for water (albeit at the risk of harming the tree). The bark of the telltale is white and flakes from the trunk. Its branches are slender and droop, and the leaves

are narrow and greenish-brown, with sharp thorns protruding from the edges.

Hermetica surface fauna is limited to insect life and small flying lizards, similar in appearance to miniature pterodactyls, ranging from sparrow-sized to hawk-sized. But the cavern network below the surface teems with life. The Hermetics have domesticated one species that resembles a short-legged, hairless sheep (the Hermetics call it an H-sheep). Another source of food are the many species of crustaceans found in the underground reservoirs. The planet has no native predators large enough to threaten Humans, although stories persist among the non-psionics about a huanoid species that lives in the deepest caverns. Called a *cave lurker*, the beast is said to resemble a four-armed, red-haired gorilla. Whenever a worker disappears, his disappearance is attributed to this creature. The ruling class dismisses these tales as ignorant superstition.

Places Of Note

OBOTE

Obote is Hermetica's only city and the only sizable urban area on the surface of the planet. All of the psionically gifted maintain residences in the city, and most of the two hundred thousand psis reside there permanently. The non-psionic population — *controls*, in Hermetican parlance — constitute an urban underclass and perform all the menial jobs. They reside in underground bunkers. Although their standard of living is atrocious compared to much of the rest of the Empire, controls elsewhere consider "city controls" to live in the lap of luxury, mainly because the psis make sure they're well groomed and have an overall attractive appearance.

A city of gleaming skyscrapers and clean streets, Obote seems paradisaical to offworlders if they're ignorant of the way controls are treated. Technologically, it's a little primitive relative to the Heartworlds with an overall tech level of ATRI 10, but the peace and quiet seem to compensate for the lack of modern amenities. Of course, offworlders soon learn that the city's thoroughly inhospitable to non-psionics. A visitor lacking psionic abilities has trouble with everything from hailing an airbus and operating an elevator to getting service at one of the government's bureaucracies (where important information is often transmitted telepathically).

PURIFICATION PLANT #2

Located near Obote and providing 90% of the city's water, Purification Plant #2 is a typical example of how the controls live. The plant itself stands in the middle of a large underground lake. Pipes run from the top of the plant into the roof of the cavern. A wide bridge runs from the shore across the lake to the plant's entrance. Twice a day controls can be seen trudging in quiet lines to and from the plant, which is manned twenty-four hours a day by two twelve-hour shifts.

Around the lake are excavations where thick metal girders brace the crumbling ceiling. In these manmade caves are the controls' residences — large, rectangular buildings made of cheap building materials. Each of these residences is referred to as a unit; forty to sixty controls inhabit each unit. The controls in a unit share a dormitory-style bedroom, recreation/dining area, bathroom facilities, and so on. Furnishings are primitive and spartan — there are no vidsystems or electronic devices (besides the electric bulbs that provide light), beds are slender mats on simple wooden frames — but all of it is kept in decent repair, and the Bureau of Labor Management makes a point of quickly replacing broken furniture. The residences are clean, and managers make weekly inspections.

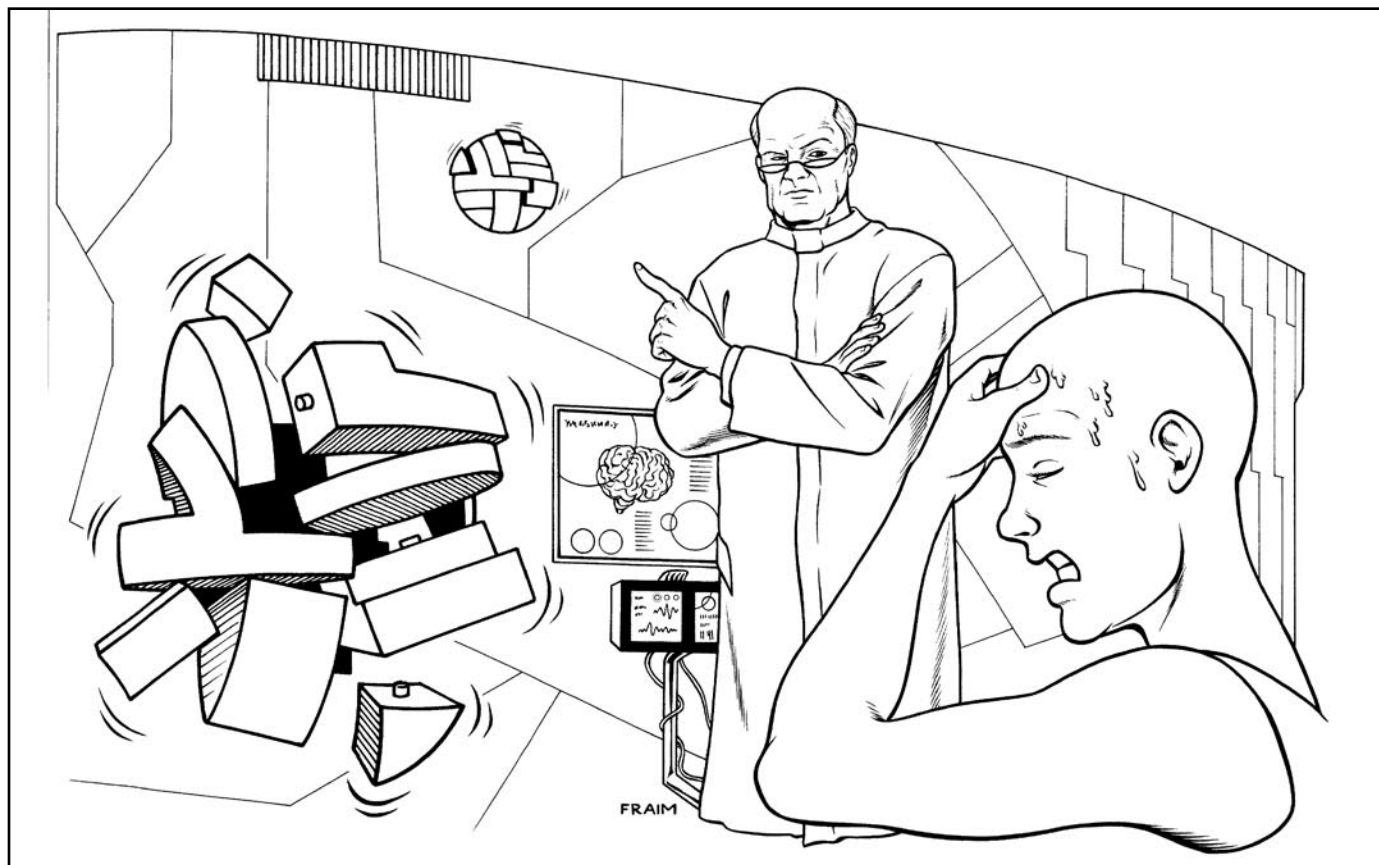
Purification Plant #2 is one of the larger plants on Hermetica. It has 150 units debouching onto the central cavern, with other factories and farms in close proximity that have their own communities of controls. All and all, there are close to a million controls living underground around Obote.

HISTORY

The history of Hermetica begins late in the twenty-first century. At the time experts dismissed the possibility of inborn psionic ability (other than as a theoretical possibility) and the general populace considered any serious discussion of the phenomenon laughable, the stuff of science fiction. Despite this, children began to be born with psionic powers. The abilities of these gifted children were minor — by the classification system of the Terran Empire (see *Terran Empire*, pages 129-30), they would rate as Psi-Betas with maybe a small number of untrained Psi-Gammas. The children's powers were unreliable and instinctual, difficult (at best) to reproduce on a controlled basis in a laboratory. Given the primitive technology of the period, the mental aspects of psionics were entirely undetectable.

Despite these severe limitations, psionic abilities were enough to create unusual and unique problems for the children who possessed them, and because of the lack of information their parents had no good way of helping them. Eventually enough parents experienced the same problems and began to look for answers together. They formed the organization Future Children.

Originally little more than a support group, Future Children spent decades spreading quietly, its existence passed on through anonymous posters to datanets who were trying to help parents with psi-children. It had no leadership; it was just a loose group of adults who were either currently raising gifted children or who had psionic abilities themselves. The experienced parents shared what they'd learned through trial and error. They kept the group's existence quiet, although it was easy enough to find if one looked, and its membership was anonymous. Most knew if they publicly admitted to membership — if they acknowledged their belief in psionic abilities — they'd be ridiculed, so they said nothing.



Future Children had no agenda or guiding philosophy other than “help the children and their parents.” The membership was concerned with practicalities — which anti-depressants would drive a psionic child into a cataonic state, which Zen meditation exercises helped children control ESP, and the like — but two members would come to change that, transforming the group into a movement.

THE MOVEMENT BEGINS

The first was Doctor Theo van Eyck, a child psychiatrist who’d adopted triplets named Famke, Zara, and Renee. The three girls were orphaned during a anti-global government insurgency (frequent in Europe at the time) that seized control of Rotterdam for a little over six months. Doctor van Eyck and his daughters were unique for two reasons. First, the girls all had telepathy, and because they could communicate with each other they developed their abilities to a greater extent than their peers. Second, most members of Future Children only wanted to cope with their children’s abilities and find a way to provide their children with a normal childhood. Doctor van Eyck, after coming to grips with the reality of telepathy, wanted to explore the ramifications of these abilities and push his daughters to see how extensive their powers were. Soon Doctor van Eyck’s persuasive arguments swayed other members to his beliefs, which included the opinion that children gifted with psionic abilities were the next step in Human evolution.

The second member to change Future Children was a late-comer to the group. Though he had no children, he had an active interest in psionic powers and an intimate familiarity with the phe-

nomenon. He was an immensely wealthy man... one of the few Humans able to finance an interstellar voyage with his own money. Calvin Obote had ESP, which he’d used to make himself fabulously rich. As a young man, he never thought much about his ability. It was a tool to help him accumulate wealth, especially in those early years when he was dirt poor. When he retired from active involvement in Obote International, he became more curious about his abilities, and during his research he stumbled on Future Children.

Van Eyck had long advocated forming a community of parents with psionic children, but in an isolation impossible on twenty-second century Earth. Nearing the end of his life, Obote wished to make a contribution to society, and at the time interstellar colonization had captured the popular imagination. The two of them together, along with other members of Future Children who felt as they did, put in motion a plan to colonize a nearby world and start a society of psionics.

With Obote’s financial backing, Van Eyck spent years planning the colonization — everything from the realities of starting anew on an alien world, to group survival techniques, to the proper governance of his hypothetical psionic community. Using Obote’s money and connections, he even obtained a restricted Class Beta hyperdrive and the expert engineers to keep it in good working order. Then he spent more years recruiting colonists. The colonists fell into two groups: psionics, who were the focus of the society; and non-psionic Humans who were to perform much of the menial labor and support work. Van Eyck wasn’t consciously elitist, but he

HERMETICA DURING THE XENOVORE WAR

There are two events worth mentioning regarding Hermetica's involvement in the Xenovore War. The first is that it provided the telepaths who eventually solved the mystery of Xenovore bio-computers (see pages 148 and 154 of *Alien Wars*). While this had a limited impact on the war effort, first-hand experience with Xenovore bio-computers led directly to the creation of Hermetic telepathically-operated technology.

The second is that the latter half of the Xenovore War was one of the few times non-psionics were allowed to leave the planet. The rulers of Hermetica succumbed to pressure from Admiral Zhukov and allowed military recruiters access to their world. Many non-psionics enlisted, knowing it was their only way off Hermetica, and after the end of the War none of these veterans returned to their homeworld. Some even began a movement to free Hermetica. Calling themselves the Hermetica Liberation Army, they hired out as mercenaries to raise funds to support their revolution and became involved in the black market. They never earned enough to mount an assault, however, and after a generation faded into obscurity.

wanted his psionic colonists to be free to develop their powers and explore their potential. He didn't want them to worry about the mundane things in life.

COLONIZATION

Van Eyck was nearly sixty years old by the time he finished planning and recruiting, and doctors deemed him unfit for interstellar flight. He would never see the fruits of his lifelong labors, but his daughters would become the leaders of the colonists and are honored as the founders of Hermetica. The colonists made planetfall on April 7, 2298 after nearly half a year of travel to a world beyond the current frontiers of Human space.

During the early years, the distinction between psionics and non-psionics was slight — survival was too important and too hard. Doctor van Eyck's plans for a psionic utopia were quickly shelved, but they weren't forgotten. Once the colonists established a livable status quo, they began to institute some of van Eyck's measures. As the decades passed, the segregation of society into psionic and non-psionic became apartheid, with the psionic ruling elite oppressing the non-psionics. The rulers weren't blind to what was happening, and there was debate about it, but that debate came to an end in 2344 with the bloody elimination of the Equal Rights Party in the aftermath of Ji-won's Dissent. From then on, the psionic rulers consciously and maliciously oppressed non-psionics.

JI-WON'S DISSENT

Ji-won's Dissent resulted from the passage of a series of laws concerned with the education of non-psionics (see *The People*, below). The Equal Rights Party opposed the laws on the grounds they established indoctrination camps, not schools, where non-psionics would be taught to believe they were an inferior species. After unsuccessfully fighting against the passage of these laws, Kim Ji-won wrote his famous (or infamous as the case may be) dissent. So that non-psionics might read his dissent, he wrote it on paper, rather than communicating it to his peers telepathically, and he circulated it far and wide. After an elegant summary of the history behind segregation on Hermetica, the dissent called for non-psionics to rise up and overthrow the ruling elite.

To Ji-won's regret, no one rose up — it was already too late for the non-psionics, who had become completely subservient to the rulers. Instead of falling to Ji-won's hoped-for revolution, the ruling psionics executed him and the entire membership of the Equal Rights Party for treason, thus eliminating the last elements of Hermetica's government sympathetic to the plight of non-psionics. Expressing, or even feeling, sympathy for non-psionics became a treasonable offense (and remains one to this day).

Though Ji-won's Dissent failed to accomplish its writer's goal, it still played an important role in the history of Hermetica. It showed the ruling elite that even if the non-psionics had their situation explained to them, they would fail

to take action. Since then the oppression of non-psionics, now known as *controls*, has become increasingly severe. As of the 2600s the rulers — *the gifted*, as they call themselves, borrowing language the long-dead members of Future Children used to console their troubled children — don't think twice about passing new, dehumanizing laws to regulate the controls.

THE PEOPLE

The ten million inhabitants of Hermetica are all Human and are divided into two groups: *the gifted*, who have psionic abilities; and *the controls*, who don't.

Hermeticans have made a conscious effort to separate their society from its Human roots and center it around psionics. Even if a change seems absurd — for instance, why retro-fit telepathic sensitive sensors to a voice-activated elevator, and to remove the voice recognition device, when Hermeticans can speak as well as any other Human? — they make it. They want to exercise their psionic abilities at every possible opportunity and have engineered their society to maximize those opportunities.

THE GIFTED

Anyone with even a modicum of psionic ability belongs to the gifted, who mostly live a life of leisure and luxury. The state provides them with living quarters and a generous allowance. Whether they work is up to them, but the state reserves the right to assign a gifted to a profession. For powerful psionics, who are too valuable a resource for Hermetica to squander, this means the state often guides the course of their life entirely. The government often assigns low-level psis, such as Psi-Betas and some inept Psi-Gammas, to lowly tasks such as managing controls — called in polite society “psionically impaired,” these psis are treated as second class citizens (although they still live far better than the typical middle-class Imperial citizen, much less the controls). Gifted who fall in the middle range of power can usually choose whether to work, and if so at what job.

Education of psis is handled in a mentor-student relationship. Most often an older psi takes on a single student who has abilities similar to his. This relationship begins when the student is five years old, and though scheduled instruction ends when the student turns eighteen, the relationship between student and mentor lasts a lifetime. Usually it leads to friendship between the two adults, but some of the most infamous rivalries on Hermetica have been between a mentor and one of his former students. When rare abilities and special circumstances are involved, a mentor might have two students at a time, but never more than that. The Bureau of Mental Exploration and Development coordinates these mentor-student relationships and assigns mentors to young psis.

Respect and position in society depend on psionic ability — which doesn't necessarily mean raw power (though that's certainly important). The gifted have the most sophisticated understanding of psionics in the Empire (aside from, perhaps, the Mind Police) and a great appreciation for skill and finesse. Any child born to the gifted who doesn't have psionic abilities is taken from his parents and placed with a unit of controls. Hermetics have precise, sensitive means of testing for psionic ability (including some psionic senses), and a child has until his fifth birthday to exhibit any sign, however slight, of power.

THE CONTROLS

Dwelling underground, out of sight of the gifted and visitors, the controls are Hermetica's labor force. None of them have psionic abilities (though there have been rumors among the managers of psionic controls); the only way into the gifted is by fluke of birth. All controls are tested for psionics before attending education camp. On those rare occasions when a control child demonstrates psionic abilities, he's taken from his family, placed with a gifted family, and immediately becomes one of the gifted himself. Psionic surgeons excise his memories of his early childhood. They don't lie about his origins; they simply don't want him to feel sympathy for the controls.

Controls have no personal wealth — in fact, they have no wealth at all, and an offworlder would have to explain the concept of money to them. The gifted provide for all their needs. Though their standard of living is incredibly poor compared to the gifted, there are a few things worth noting about the psionic oppression.

First, the gifted aren't so arrogant as to believe they don't need the controls. If nothing else, the controls provide new members of the gifted on occasion. Therefore, the gifted do their best to take good care of their servants (though their definitions of "their best" and "good care" aren't necessarily shared by outworlders). The gifted make sure the controls receive nutritious food. It doesn't taste good — in fact, it would likely be the blandest food a Human offworlder had ever tasted — but it's a healthy diet. The gifted also make sure the units controls live in provide adequate shelter from the elements and are kept in proper condition. Doctors are assigned to look after units, but they only take care of easily treatable ailments. In the case of anything extensive, the control receives a lethal injection that provides a peaceful death. (Of course, the controls don't realize what's going on.)

Second, there are several species-based underclasses in the Terran Empire whose members have much higher mortality rates than the controls. The jobs the controls work at are generally safe. Troublemakers are assigned to excavation teams, which have the highest mortality rate, but it's still a far lower rate than that of certain types of miners or factory workers. Hermetics quickly point this out when attacked for their treatment of controls.

Third, the controls are rigidly and systematically isolated from the rest of the Empire, so they

don't know how bad they have it. Since they don't suffer from starvation or other deprivations, they are largely content.

The cornerstone of Hermetican oppression is the education system. Control children are removed from their unit at age five and assigned to an education camp, where they learn two things: how to do the job they'll have for the rest of their lives; and that psionic ability is the next evolutionary step, and since that's the case, psis are infinitely superior to non-psis. Day after day it's ground into them that Hermetican society is the natural state of Humanity, so they quickly come to accept that. They learn only rudimentary arithmetic, and do not learn to read. If going on to a job that requires reading, they learn a series of icons pertinent to their responsibilities. Education lasts three years, and then the children are assigned to a unit. In the unit, they take care of cooking and cleaning while learning more about their future job from the adults. At fifteen, they go to work.

Government

The *Thought Combine* rules Hermetica with an iron fist, dictating laws and edicts that impact all aspects of Hermetican life. A little over two thousand members of the gifted belong to the Combine, and membership depends solely on psionic ability. All of them are rated as Psi-Zetas or higher, and any Hermetican with that rating or higher automatically becomes a member of the Combine upon his thirtieth birthday.

The Thought Combine has no physical meeting place — it's a communal telepathic construct. Accessing this construct requires a degree of skill with telepathy and implantation of a psionic chip at the base of the cerebellum (a surgery that new members of the Thought Combine undergo on their thirtieth birthday). A member can only access the Combine when in the city of Obote — any further and he's out of range.

Discussions of policy in the Thought Combine take place at the speed of thought, leading to ultra-rapid consideration of issues, voting, and passage of laws. Telepathic protocols — trained telepathic debating techniques, roughly speaking — guide the group's meetings. No physical machinery stores or directs these protocols; future members of the Combine are trained in the protocols from their earliest days, and the group consensus of the Combine's participants makes the protocols immutable law.

The telepathic protocols read the members' initial impressions, dividing them into factions as soon as the topic is broached. Then the protocols separate out the members with the most coherent arguments, filter out the noise from their fellow faction members, and relay those arguments to all members. This is not a coherent process and there is no articulation of positions (even if "minutes" were recorded, it would be impossible for an outsider to follow them); members of the Combine simply *know* all the factions' feelings on the matter. The protocols reorganize the factions to reflect the

PSIONIC POWER RATINGS

Hermetics use Imperial ratings to categorize the gifted. More accurately, Imperial authorities use the psionic power rating system first proposed by Dr. Theo van Eyck and later expanded by Hermetican scientists. In fact, much of what the Empire knows or suspects about psionics is a result of discoveries and theories from Hermetica.

VISITING HERMETICA

Hermetica permits offworld visitors to Obote, but they must be assigned an officer of the Diplomatic Corps before making planetfall. Though this can sometimes take up to a month, it usually only requires a week for visitors who have a verifiable and lucrative purpose for coming to Hermetica. Sightseers and other casual tourists may never be assigned an officer, and thus never get to visit the planet. While waiting to find out if the Diplomatic Corps will assign him an officer, a visitor must remain in geosynchronous orbit in a position assigned by Hermetican authorities. Any movement from this position other than departing the system is considered an act of aggression and treated accordingly. The time it takes to assign a diplomatic officer depends on how busy the port is, the nature and urgency of the mission, and the connections the offworlder has. In addition to standard questions about cargo, nature of visit, and so on, the port authorities also request psionic licenses for anyone aboard the ship.

The psionic abilities of an offworlder determine which monitoring officer Hermetica assigns to him. It's an open secret that the officer telepathically views the visitor's mind and notes any secrets, though he tries to be subtle about it. Only diplomats with the signed permission of the Empress are not subjected to this sort of treatment (supposedly...). Visitors are also assigned a visual recording device that they must take with them whenever they leave their quarters. The monitoring officer downloads and quickly scans the footage daily; if he notices anything suspicious, he takes a closer look. He also makes periodic visits to his assigned offworlders to check up on them. Some of these visits are scheduled, some aren't. An officer can expel most offworlders for any reason at any time; only offworlders with connections to the Imperial court have any recourse in the matter.

Travel outside of Obote is forbidden to offworlders, although exceptions have been made by edict of the Thought Combine. Any sort of technology that interferes with psionics, including personal defenses against psionic abilities, is strictly forbidden. If found aboard a ship, such devices are confiscated. If found on a person in Obote, the person is either immediately escorted off planet or executed as an insurgent, depending on his position in the Empire. Unregistered psis are turned over to the Mind Police; Hermetica does not grant asylum to offworld psis — at least not officially. However, rumors persist of Hermetics hiding psis with great power or unique abilities from Imperial authorities.

impact of arguments and a decision is made (usually based on a simple majority). Few decisions in the history of Hermetica have required more than thirty seconds; the last time a decision required hours was in the days before Ji-won's Dissent.

Members of the Thought Combine can be called to meetings at any hour of the day or night, whether sleeping or awake; and any member may convene a meeting. Repeated abuse of this privilege is considered treason, and the irresponsible member is condemned when a large faction forms around the thought that the

meeting is spurious. A member participating in a meeting of the Thought Combine remains aware of his surroundings and can interact with others, although he might seem distracted or preoccupied depending on his skill with telepathy. The most skilled telepath (who's not necessarily the most powerful) is appointed to the position of *the Ego*. In rare instances when the Thought Combine is deadlocked — usually because there are many numerous small factions, none of which has a widely persuasive position — it's the duty of the Ego to step in and make a decision. The current Ego is Javier LeClerk, a short, handsome, haughty man of immense wealth and exquisite etiquette.

The nature of the Thought Combine makes it impossible to hide treasonous dissent. Any member whom the protocols assign to a faction sympathetic to non-psionics, questioning the purpose of Hermetica, or doubting the integrity of the Thought Combine is condemned to death within seconds. Some Hermetics have speculated about the possibility of a telepath so well-trained he could hide his true feelings from the Combine, but such a feat would be difficult (at best), and manipulation of the protocols by a single individual, or even a small group working in concert, is deemed impossible. It would require technology far in advance of anything the Hermetics have, or an immensely-powerful Psi-Omega (which most Hermetics doubt exist, since to their knowledge none of the gifted have ever exhibited such a level of power).

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Hermetica lacks a single apparatus that serves the purpose of local law enforcement on the planet. Instead, three official bodies have basically assumed a similar role.

The first and largest of these is the Bureau of Labor Management, which is responsible for overseeing the controls and is the largest employer of Psi-Betas. Though the Betas are more akin to slave overseers, they are given the euphemistic title of "manager." Policing nine million controls is no easy task, so the Bureau relies on robots to provide managers with enough manpower to cow and punish rebellious non-psionics. Called *assistants*, these humanoid robots are controlled telepathically — there's no manual access to their processing units, so there's no way to take control of a robot without telepathy. Even the most psionically-impaired manager can simultaneously control five robotic assistants with the aid of a control implant, and the least impaired can control up to ten. The base robot is a standard drone from Tauro Cybernetics (see Tauro-Mind Drones on pages 29-31 of *The Spacer's Toolkit*); its telepathic control system is then retrofitted to the robot.

In addition to its duties implementing lifestyle decisions made by the Thought Combine, the Office of Behavioral Studies polices the ranks of the gifted; monitoring offworlders falls to the Diplomatic Corps. Both of these recruit from the highest levels of the gifted, seeking out those who can read the deepest thoughts without being detected. Since

the OBS deals solely with people who have psionics, and the Diplomatic Corps doesn't, the Office takes precedence in who it can recruit. In the eyes of offworlders, the Office of Behavioral Studies is essentially a Gestapo, while the Diplomatic Corps is an intelligence agency.

Famous Hermeticans

Some of the best-known modern Hermeticans include:

JAN LAROUK

Jan Larouk is the face Hermetica shows to the rest of the Empire. Charming, sophisticated, and well-spoken, he's been groomed from his earliest days to act in the role of ambassador. He's a frequent guest at the Imperial Court (where he seems to be a favorite of the Empress) and a special advisor to the Mind Police. His black-haired, blue-eyed, smiling face is also common on news shows Empire-wide; he often appears as an expert on psionic matters. He excels in explaining psionic phenomena in layman's terms. In public speeches, he paints a stunning vista of a psionic utopia that's Humanity's next evolutionary step, and he simply ignores any questions about the Hermetica's treatment of controls.

Though Larouk's served admirably for the last eight years, the recent controversy about the controls — and especially the recurring notion of Imperial intervention on Hermetica — has him under a lot of pressure at home, so rumor has it the Diplomatic Corps has begun searching for his replacement. Larouk is a Psi-Delta, and often jokes that the reason he's an ambassador is because he can't cut it as a telepath on Hermetica.

MARY FELTON

A Psi-Theta, Mary Felton became briefly notorious in 2639 when she appeared out of nowhere on Dorvala, capital world of the Perseid Empire, and applied for asylum. Her story was that she was growing increasingly sympathetic toward the plight of the controls, knew the Thought Combine would soon detect her sympathies, and feared for her life. For two weeks, she gave non-stop testimony about the inner workings of Hermetica and the gifted's treatment of the controls.

Soon after she went public, Hermetica denied that any person, let alone a Psi-Theta, named Mary Felton had ever resided on the planet. The Empire came forward to confirm Hermetica's claim, and then Hermetica started filing lawsuits against anyone and everyone showing footage of Felton. With her authority undermined, no news agency was willing to take the risk, and Felton faded into obscurity. Felton's testimony, however, is credited with renewing public interest in the treatment of controls. The Perseid Empire granted Felton asylum; her current whereabouts are unknown.

Economy

Despite the life of leisure and wealth the gifted lead, Hermetica's economy is very poor. Two hundred thousand gifted live like lords because over nine million controls live at a subsistence level that would shock many citizens of the Terran Empire. All in all, the rulers have done a bad job of exploiting their planet's natural resources (which are admittedly slim to begin with). Recent Imperial interest in psionic matters, though, has created a windfall for Hermeticans, since they charge high rates for access to their centuries of research and advisors on psionic matters. Some Hermeticans have advocated building up the economy and infrastructure by establishing mining operations in the asteroid belt and on other system worlds, but so far the Thought Combine has had no interest in even investigating this possibility.

If psionics gain greater acceptance in Terran culture, Hermetica stands to become a wealthy place. Its research into psionic technology is highly advanced, almost verging into ATRI 12, but the main thrust of its research is to invent ways for psionics to interact with technology mentally and to boost existing powers. The Empire and its armed forces are interested in defense against psionic abilities and ways to grant non-psionics mental abilities, but the Hermeticans have little interest in pursuing advances in either of those fields.

RIGEL V



Rigel is a B8Ia (a bright blue-white supergiant) star — a type that rarely develops a planetary system, much a planet (or in this case, planets) that can support sentient life. For centuries astrophysicists have wondered how the Rigel system evolved. Most evidence tends to suggest that it arose normally as a one-in-trillions combination of circumstances, but some scientists remain convinced that there's more to the story. Speculation runs the gamut from planets being moved into artificial orbit around Rigel by some species of great power that no longer exists or has left the Galaxy, to Rigel itself somehow being sentient and creating its satellites for fun, to Rigel having been created by one or more ultra-powerful psionic beings.

Rigel V is one of sixteen planets. While it's the only one to have evolved sentient life, Rigel VI and VII are both Type 1 worlds with large

Rigellian colonies. Rigellians and Humans have also established domed communities, mining towns, factories, and other facilities on the other planets and moons. For example, there are chemical extraction and refinery plants in domed communities on four of the moons of Rigel XIV, and Rigel IX has a network of domed cities connected by sealed maglev train tracks.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Rigel V is a large world — approximately 25% larger than Earth. Its four continents, all containing extensive areas of arable land, experience a standard range of temperatures and climatological conditions for a Type 1 world, though the extremes of temperature (on either end of the scale) tend to exceed those of Earth slightly. Due to the size and mostly east-west orientation of the continents, the oceans and seas tend to be comparatively small.

Rigel V has just one moon — the smallest number of any planet in the system. Rigellians call their moon *Tuvashli*, and tell many tales of the strange tribes who live there. (The pattern of cratering on Tuvashli looks remarkably like a group of humanoids when viewed at certain times of the month, thus giving rise to countless legends.)

Places Of Note

Over its eons of geological development and thousands of years of history, Rigel V has created many sights that people come from all over the Empire to see. Some of the most intriguing include:

DOKALEP REE MEDICAL CENTER

One of the most advanced hospitals in Imperial space, or for that matter the Galaxy, the Dokalep Ree Medical Center has the facilities and equipment to treat virtually any medical condition found in any Imperial species (as well as major species from outside the Empire). The complex is the size of a small town, so it has a sophisticated maglev subway system coupled with advanced anti-grav elevators that make getting around as easy as possible for the patients. On any given day people ranging from wealthy industrialists and entertainment stars seeking the best possible care to poor Rigellians visiting one of DRMC's many free clinics can be found here.

In 2638 a scandal erupted at the DRMC when reports began to circulate on the datanets that it had engaged in illegal drug testing on patients without their knowledge or permission. Dokalep

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: RIGEL

Planet Name: Rigel V

Classification: Type 1

System Data: The Rigel system boasts 15 other planets, Rigel I-IV and VI-XVI. Rigel VI and VII are habitable by humanoids and were colonized by the Rigellians within the past 200 years. The number of moons per planet ranges from one (Rigel V) to 34 (Rigel XIV).

Gravity: 1.03 G

Day And Year: 21 standard hours in a day, 654 standard days in a year

Atmosphere: Earth-like — 70% Nitrogen, 20% Oxygen, 10% Other

Hydrosphere: Water covers 69% of Rigel V's surface

Meteorological Overview: Rigel V has the standard range of weather and climates for a Type 1 planet, with extremes at the poles and equator and a wide variety of topographies, ecologies, and micro-climates

Sentient Species: Rigellians

ATRI Rating: ATRI 10-11

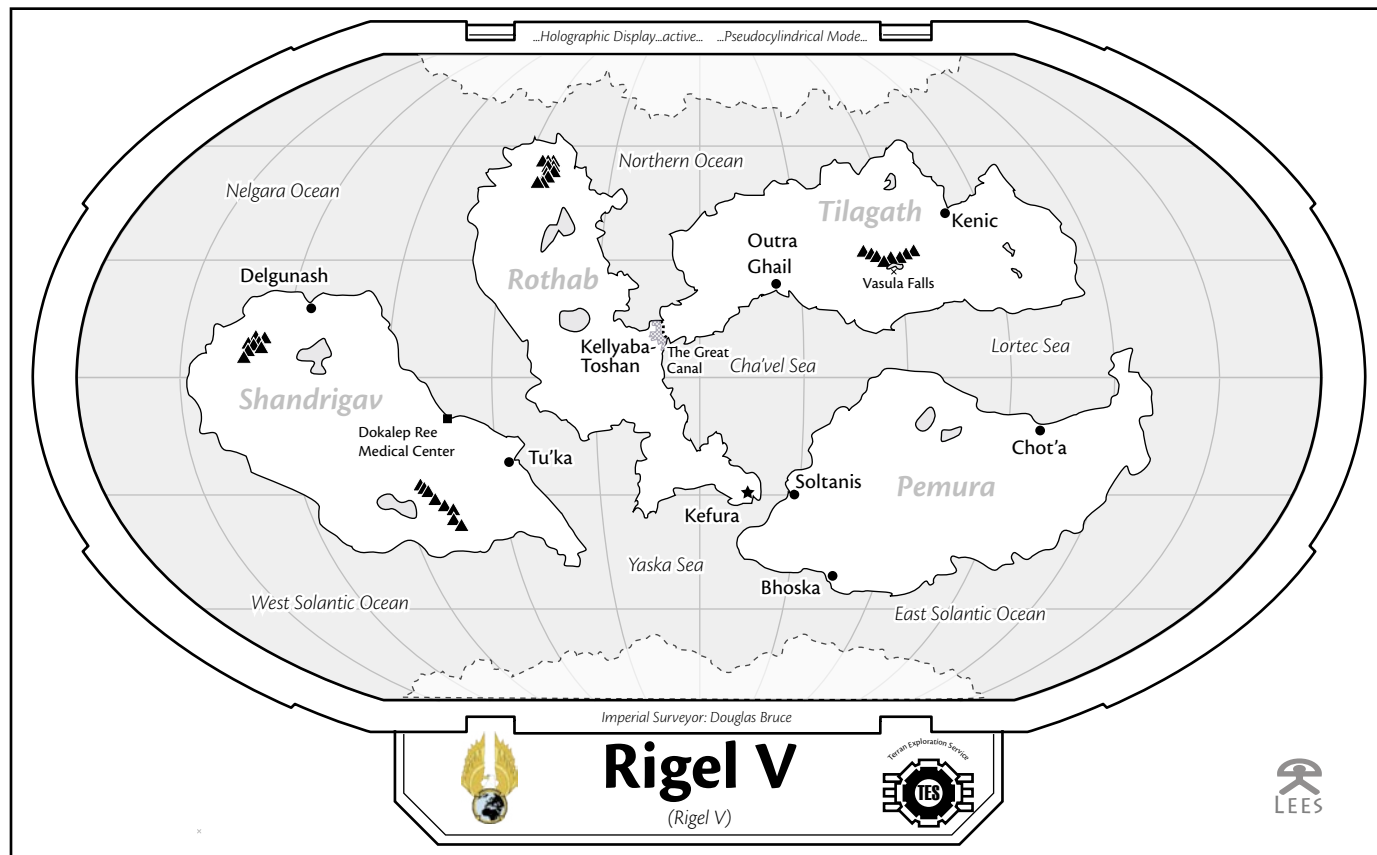
Government: Rigel V is a balkanized world. An institution called the Rigellian League runs the elections for Senator and assists with other planetary affairs.

Affiliation: Senate world in Terran Empire

Resources: Manufacturing, tourism

Places Of Note: Dokalep Ree Medical Center; the mega-city of Kellayba-Toshan; Rigellian World History Museum; Soltanis; Vasula Falls

Ship Facilities: Numerous, including three major orbital ports and five major planetside facilities.



Ree officials angrily denied the charges and insisted on an official investigation. The Empire sent a high-level inspection team which reviewed the records and completely cleared the Medical Center. Two reporters were later convicted of fraud and imprisoned for their role in making and spreading the reports. Nevertheless, many people remain suspicious of the DRMC.

KELLAYBA-TOSHAN

One of the largest cities in the Empire (excluding cityworlds like Cascadia), Kellayba-Toshan arose about 200 years ago when two cities, Kellayba on the Northern Ocean and Toshan on the Cha'vel Sea, became so large that they grew together. The urban area now occupies the entire peninsula west of the Great Canal and spreads out onto the continent of Rothab like a river delta. Within the city limits one can find practically anything: luxury and squalor; neighborhoods home to any Imperial species; shops catering to the tastes and needs of a thousand worlds and a trillion people.

Kellayba-Toshan is an independent city-state whose boundaries are the same as the city limits (which actually encompass thousands of suburban areas and neighborhoods). City politics is notoriously cutthroat, with allegations of corruption, blackmail, and dirty dealing occurring as regularly as sunrise. But a person who can weather these storms and make it to a lofty position in the city government or bureaucracy earns both a hefty wage and enormous influence. The High Mayor (currently Agratha Tef'an, a flamboyant former industrialist) is considered one of the most powerful figures on Rigel V.

Kellayba-Toshan sees its greatest influx of tourists during the two week-long holiday of *Cahn'trethar*, which marks the end of winter and beginning of spring. Tradition has it that if the weather is fine (a "warm"), the crops will be excellent and good luck shall prevail for the rest of the year; if the weather remains chilly (a "cold"), the crops will be poor and bad luck will dog the Rigelians all year long. Warms are marked by thousands of street parties, public nudity, lascivious behavior, and lots of drinking; colds by slightly more sedate indoor parties and lots of drinking. People from all over the Empire (and even the Galaxy) visit Kellayba-Toshan to take part in the festivities.

RIGELLIAN WORLD HISTORY MUSEUM

A joint creation of over half the nations of Rigel V, the Rigellian World History Museum in Soltanis chronicles the cultural, social, and political development of the Rigellian people over the past hundred thousand years. Its displays and exhibits, many of which have interactive components, have won numerous awards. The museum complex is so large that it's said it would take a person a year to study all the exhibits. Some of the most popular attractions include the masks of the Seven Red Kings, the original workbooks of famed medieval Rigellian scholar Holtar Khan, the crown jewels of Princess Shan'a, the elaborately-carved Pillars of Dairax, and the Empire's largest collection of coins and other forms of money.

SOLTANIS

Soltanis, on the western coast of the continent of Pemura, is regarded as one of the most beautiful cities in the Empire. Virtually destroyed by a cata-

strophic earthquake over a century ago, it was rebuilt from the ground up as a planned city. Artists worked side by side with architects, civil engineers, contractors, and urban lifestyle experts to create a city satisfying to both pocketbook and soul. The most modern and sophisticated mass transit and traffic planning systems in the Empire keep the 16 million inhabitants moving around at a fast and efficient pace, the economy attracts companies and immigrants from around the Galaxy, and the cultural opportunities have led to a decades-long “Soltanis Renaissance” in Rigellian art, music, and literature. Besides the World History Museum (see above), travelers in the famed city should be sure to visit Memorial Plaza (which is lined with statues to the greatest heroes and leaders from Rigellian history), the Kollebah District (where dozens of restaurants serve cuisine from around the Galaxy, from Ackálian to Zurite), and the open-air Rigellian Marketplace.

VASULA FALLS

One of the most striking images of Rigel, seen in countless holoprograms and pictures, is Vasula Falls. Cascading down into a gorge nearly 1.5 kilometers deep over a face two kilometers wide, Vasula



dwarfs Angel Falls and Victoria Falls on Earth (and most other waterfalls in the Empire, for that matter). The ancient Rigellians believed a powerful god-spirit lived in the Falls and controlled the weather. Even today small bottles of water collected directly from the falls by daring climbers are sold as good luck charms.

HISTORY

Like Humans, the Rigellians evolved from a primate-like creature that once lived in forests. They achieved a level of civilization roughly comparable to Sumer or ancient Egypt about 3,000 standard years ago. The planet was divided into numerous kingdoms and territories until about 2,000 years ago, when the city-state of Kefura rose to prominence. After using its favorable geographic location to create an extensive trade network, its enlightened, clever, and sometimes ruthless rulers began sending out fleets and armies of conquest whenever its interests were threatened. Its record of military victories, even when overwhelmingly outnumbered, grew so long that eventually many kingdoms simply requested to become *chugha* (“provinces”) of the Kefuran Empire. At its height, the Kefuran Empire ruled over two-thirds of the civilized areas of the planet.

Kefura’s only rival was the “city-state” (really hegemonic kingdom) of Tu’ka, on the continent of Shandrigav. Time and time again the two clashed, with Tu’ka’s powerful navy only barely able to fend off the Kefuran forces; twice the Kefurans got close enough to set part of Tu’ka itself on fire. But at the Battle of Elitho the wily Tu’kan leader General Gáchay defeated a much larger Kefuran army, breaking the Empire’s power for good (albeit at the cost of most of his own forces). Drained and defeated, the Kefurans withdrew from the war, and over the next two centuries political infighting among imperial nobles reduced the once-proud Empire to a patchwork of kingdoms. Tu’ka, similarly weakened, fell prey to barbarian tribes and shattered into many tiny national entities. Rigel remains heavily balkanized to this day.

In time the Rigellians passed through their medieval period and into their historical equivalents of the Renaissance, Enlightenment, and the Industrial Age. Due to the planet’s size and abundant resources, major wars rarely occurred; it was usually easier for a nation to find another resource, or a people to move, than to fight. Without war to spur technological development, the Rigellians lagged behind Humanity a little. When Humans encountered the Rigellians, one of the first alien species they’d ever met, the Rigellians had only atomic and solar power and were just beginning to experiment with interplanetary rocketry.

Initial contact between Earth and Rigel V was friendly. Humans were glad to find another sentient species (and one so similar to itself), while the Rigellians were astonished and intrigued to learn of the existence of other species and faster-than-light travel. But it didn’t take long before unscrupulous

Humans and Human corporations were exploiting Rigel V and its people for cheap resources, cheap labor, and ready markets. While a few companies conducted their business on Rigel responsibly, most took advantage of the situation in any way they could. Within a few decades Rigel was a *de facto* possession of a handful of major businesses, and many of its people little more than indentured servants... although it nominally remained an independent planet eligible for admission to the United Earth government as a Senate world.

The situation changed during the Xenovore Wars, when Rigel became a major wartime manufacturing center and source of manpower. Admiral Aleksandr Zhukov stripped the corporations of their power and authority, unequivocally declared Rigel V a sovereign and independent world within the United Earth government, and extended the benefits of the Amnesty and Citizenship Acts to the Rigellians — thus making any Rigellian who signed up for military service, and his family, UE citizens. The Rigellians joined the UE military in droves, particularly as the Xenovores' Rimward Offensive approached their homeworld.

The Xenovore attack on Rigel V was devastating. Entire cities were laid waste and millions of Rigellians lost their lives. But the UE military fought so hard and so unceasingly that it kept the alien invaders from entirely overrunning the planet... and in time, as their offensive faltered, the Xenovores were expelled from Rigel altogether. Eager to erase all traces of the most catastrophic war in their history, the Rigellians began rebuilding as quickly as possible, often taking advantage of the destruction to build new, planned cities with modern infrastructure over the ruins of old ones that had street plans unchanged since medieval times. Grateful for Humanity's help defending Rigel V, and seeing which way the wind was blowing, they were quick to join the Terran Empire when asked to do so, and Rigel V became one of the first Senate worlds. Today it's one of the most advanced and sophisticated planets in the Terran Empire.

THE PEOPLE

The Rigellians are mammalian humanoids much like Humans in many ways, but with distinctive differences as well. Their skins are usually a blue-green color, but range from that shade to a much darker glossy blue-black. Rigellian women, noted throughout Human space for their beauty and allure, tend to have lighter-colored skins than the men. Rigellians have hair only on their heads; it's normally black or brown, but they often dye it. They have three fingers and a thumb on each hand.

The Rigellian larynx is more advanced than the Human one, able to make a wider variety of sounds (including sounds the Human ear cannot hear). Their languages depend as much on tone and inflection as on the words spoken; the same word can mean completely different things depending on the tone (written Rigellian languages usually represent this with different colors or fonts). For example, depending on pronunciation and tone the word *seena* can mean "sister," "nun," "girlfriend," "prostitute," or "a woman I regard as nothing but a sex object" (Rigellian humor often depends on pun-like variations of tone that substitute one meaning for another.) With practice, a Rigellian can even learn how to "embed" one spoken message inside another — he seems to speak normally, but uses higher and lower tones pitched only for one person's ears to communicate secretly with that person. (In game terms, this requires a Ventriloquism roll at -4.) Mimicry is an Everyman Skill for Rigellians.

Rigellians love music, poetic readings, plays, and other forms of art involving singing or speaking. They highly value skill in oratory and rhetoric, and many Rigellians sing, play an instrument, or write poetry as a hobby. The Rigellians enjoy other species' music as well, though it often seems a little "flat" or "one-dimensional" to them compared to their own "multi-layered" compositions.

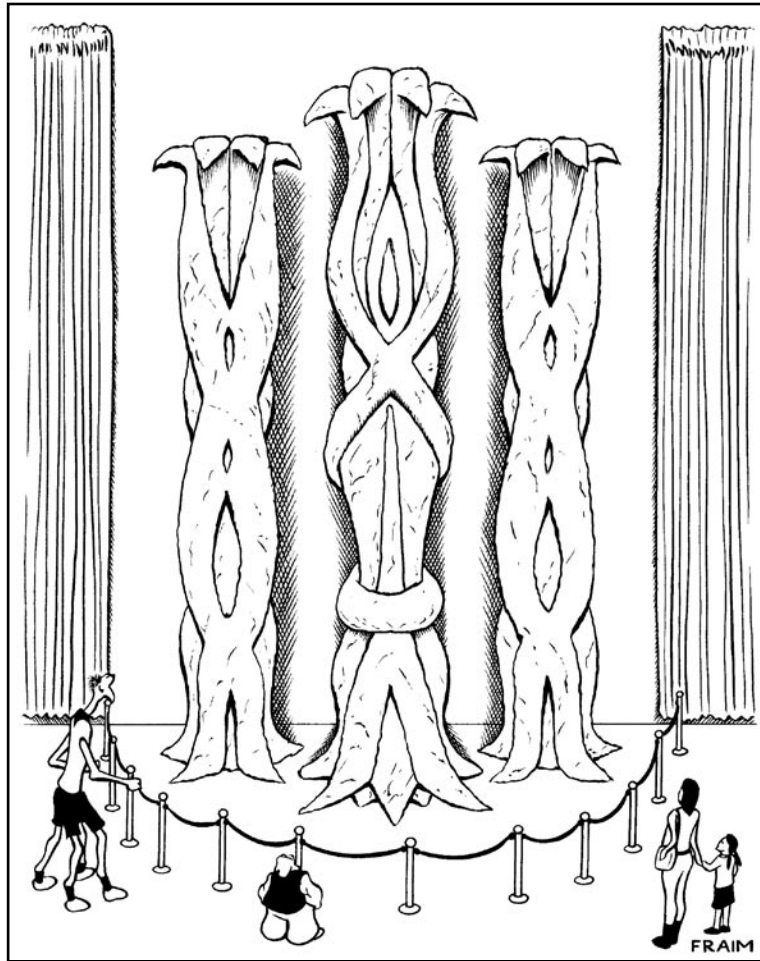
Many Rigellians possess a strong streak of curiosity. They're eager to learn and often can't resist sticking their noses in where they don't belong. Many of them become academics, explorers, and diplomats. "He's got the mind of a Rigellian scholar" has become a compliment among Humans and other species for a person of encyclopedic learning.

See *Alien Wars*, page 32, for a Rigellian Package Deal and other information about Rigellians.

Government

The Rigellians have never had a world government; the closest they ever came was the Kefuran Empire. Today over 220 national entities exist on Rigel V; the number shifts periodically as nations split, combine, or otherwise change form. They range from near-pure democracies to totalitarian dictatorships, though most use some form of representative democracy (often with laws patterned on Imperial ones).

The planetwide popular election of Rigel's representative in the Terran Senate is administered



by the Rigellian League, a sort of planetary governmental institute to which most nations on Rigel V appoint a “secretary.” The League handles some other planetary functions, such as coordinating efforts to fight multinational epidemics and to provide relief for major disasters.

Famous Rigellians

Many Rigellians have become well-known throughout the Empire for their learning, bravery, skill, or other accomplishments. Some famous Rigellians currently living include:

UTAHA BEL’U

Few historians ever achieve any sort of popular acclaim, but Utaha Bel’u of the Grand University in Kefura is an exception. His light, clever, witty style of writing history has made his books a favorite of millions of people throughout the Empire, exposing them to Bel’u’s preferred subjects (including Rigellian history in general). The fact that he’s a handsome and charismatic fellow who often gets involved in escapades while he conducts “on-site research” for his books only enhances his appeal.

ADMIRAL MEHOTHASHRA

The highest-ranking Rigellian serving in the Imperial Navy, Admiral Shra has become renowned in the Empire for his many victories against pirates in the Frontier regions. Two holomovies have been made about him, most focusing on his career as a junior officer (particularly the time he took command of his ship after his captain was killed and went on to defeat a numerically superior pirate squadron). A quiet, unassuming man who likes nothing better than to discuss naval history and tactics, he’s barely aware of his own fame.

TEELGHA

In an Empire of trillions of sentients, not many people can get by using just a single name, but Teelgha’s one of the few. An ultra-star singing sensation since the release of her first mustick, *Sunset On Skin*, she’s gone on to sell billions of musticks and win every major music industry award. Her fans, called “Teelers,” are known for mobbing mustick stores and clogging download data-net sites whenever she releases a new mustick (which she does about once a year). She’s also established a successful holomovie career, making her beautiful teal face recognized throughout the Empire.

Economy

Rigel V is unusual in the Empire in that it’s both a center of manufacturing and industry, and a major supplier of raw or semi-processed natural resources (lumber, mineral ores, paper, and the like). Rigel’s large size and carefully-managed resources have allowed it to keep harvesting such things long after many planets would have depleted most of their supply. What doesn’t go to native industry gets sent to such worlds, or to colonies that haven’t yet developed enough infrastructure to exploit their own resources. Additionally, several types of Rigellian wood and gemstones have become valuable luxury items in the Empire. For example, a ring set with Rigellian moon-diamonds is the fondest wish of many a bride.

The export of music and musical instruments is another important component of the Rigellian economy. With their vocal gifts and love of music, the Rigellians produce many talented performers, composers, and instrument-makers, and their influence has spread throughout Imperial space. Even Human orchestras usually now feature the Rigellian horn and the *z’rtu* (a sort of clarinet-like woodwind instrument).

TAU CETI



The Tau Ceti system consists of five planets orbiting a Type A white star. Two of the planets, Tau Ceti II and III, as well as a moon in orbit around the gas giant Tau Ceti V, are inhabited. The other three planets are unlikely candidates for colonization. Only two AUs away from the star, Tau Ceti I is an airless, rocky world with little in the way of valuable exploitable resources; Tau Ceti IV is a Type 9 planet lacking moons. Tau Ceti V is a Type 10 world most notable for its so-called “dancing clouds.” Its outer surface often explodes with colorful plumes of ionized gas thrust up from the surface by some storm. The magnetic charge of these gases causes them to arch toward the planet’s magnetic poles, but as the distance increases they straighten, bending back toward the outer atmosphere, until finally they disperse into space. The process is slow and sinuous, and some people claim they’re an excellent aid for reaching a meditative state. Video recordings of the dancing clouds can be found in stores all across the Empire.

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: TAU CETI

Planet Name: Tau Ceti II; Tau Ceti III; Tau Ceti V-A (a moon in orbit of Tau Ceti V)

Classification: Type 1 (II), Type 5 (III), Type 6 (V-A)

System Data: No moons (II), 2 moons (III), 23 moons and satellites (V); 5 planets total

Gravity: 1.0 G (II), 1.2 (III), 0.8 (V-A)

Day And Year: 21 standard hours in a day, 654 standard days in a year (II); 43 standard hours in a day, 935 standard days in a year (III); special (see text; V-A)

Atmosphere: Earth-like (II); none (III); none (V-A)

Hydrosphere: Water covers 82% of the surface of Tau Ceti II, none of the surface of Tau Ceti III, and 100% of Tau Ceti V-A

Meteorological Overview: Earth-like (II); mean temperature 250° K (III); mean temperature 110° K (V-A)

Sentient Species: None

ATRI Rating: ATRI 11 (II); ATRI 11 (III); ATRI 10 (V-A)

Government: representative democracy (II); aristocracy (III); representative democracy (V-A)

Affiliation: Senate world in Terran Empire

Resources: Customized technology and consumer goods (II, III); manufacturing (III, V-A)

Places Of Note: The Capital Satellite (capital of II); Exchange (capital of III); Ceti School of Business; the Whitehorn B&B

Ship Facilities: The Capital Satellite (II); InStarCo headquarters (spaceport in orbit around III)

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Though over the centuries the Tau Ceti System Authority and all the planetary governments have proposed names for the inhabited planets and moon, none of these measures — which ranged from naming Tau Ceti II “Navarro” after one of the original settlers, to YHP Systech’s attempt to purchase the “naming rights” to the inhabited moon around Tau Ceti V — have garnered enough support to pass. In conversation, Cetians shorten the names to Two (Tau Ceti II), Three (Tau Ceti III), and Five (for the moon Tau Ceti V-A). Official records and documents use the Imperial designations.

TAU CETI II

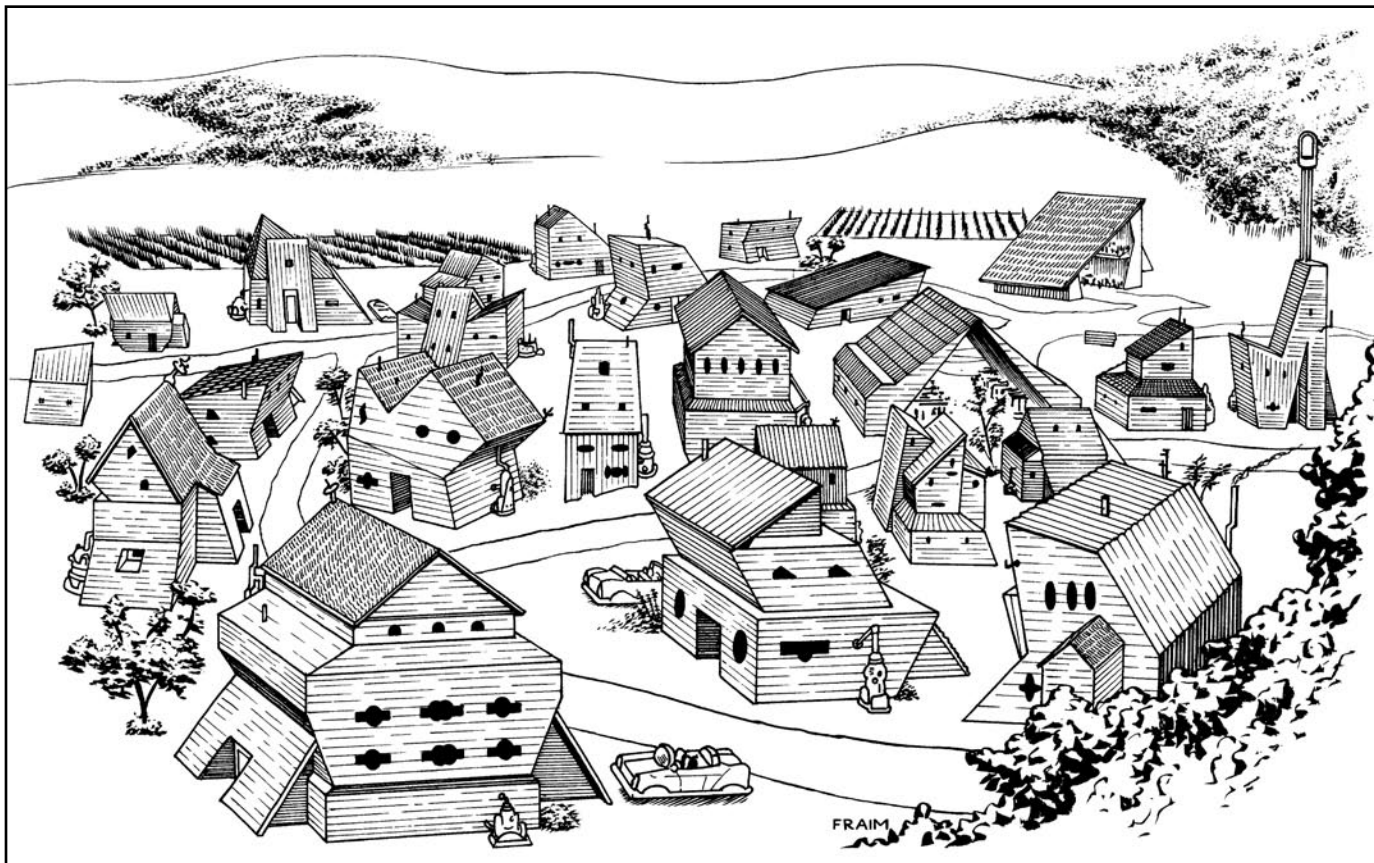
Tau Ceti II is a lushly forested place — the settlers succeeded in keeping it that way despite a 2640 population of two billion residents. Two large continents separated by a vast ocean support an abundance of animal life, which lives in the enormous forests of high growth trees and choking underbrush. The third continent on Tau Ceti II lies at the northern pole and is similar to Earth’s Antarctica.

The two main continents contain many small Human settlements. In an attempt to maintain the environment, the laws on Tau Ceti II strictly regulate population ceilings and urban planning. No settlement (called a “township”) can be larger than ten thousand people, and it must be 40 kilometers away from its nearest neighbors.

The style of architecture on Two is rustic — wood siding and shingles, and plenty of log cabin-style constructions — but these homely exteriors belie the high-tech interiors. Stone used in construction is always brick or flag, and locally made or quarried; the use of concrete, pavement, and other poured materials is strictly regulated.

TAU CETI III

In stark contrast to Tau Ceti II, the third planet in the system and the second one Humans settled is a barren, airless world, its surface pocked with craters. When seen from orbit, the land is a monotonous blood red, with domed cities shining like pinpoints of light connected by the slender, flashing blue strands of the transportation system. The techno-aristocrats, as if rebelling against the rustic simplicity of the planet of their birth, built towering skyscrapers of gleaming chrome and mirrored glass beneath the domes. The largest and most grandiose of



the domed cities is Exchange, the capital. On the edges of the city centers are the vast estates where some of the wealthiest individual in the Empire reside.

TAU CETI V-A

The moon Tau-Ceti V-A is the most recently settled body in the Tau Ceti system. Its inhabitants live underground in vast caverns filled with factories, refineries, foundries, and other industrial concerns. (A few live under the icy crust that lies atop a liquid-water ocean in domed aquatic cities devoted to mariculture.) Only one Human habitation occupies the surface of the moon — Five's starship docking facility, which is anchored to a large glacial mass that slowly drifts around the equator.

Places Of Note

Besides Two generally (which attracts millions of eco-tourists each year), some of the noteworthy places in the Tau Ceti system include:

THE CAPITAL SATELLITE

The Capital Satellite, simply called Capital by the residents of Tau Ceti II, is one of the Cetian's secrets for keeping their world's wilderness so pristine. With nearly five hundred thousand permanent residents, it's far larger than any one settlement on the planet. It serves as a center of government, a location for Imperial offices, a starport for visitors on their way to the planet's surface, and a depot and storage location for cargo before it's divided up and shipped to the townships. The huge starbase is easily visible from the planet's surface on clear nights.

THE CETI SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

Located in Exchange, the capital of and largest domed city on Tau Ceti III, the Ceti School of Business was originally founded to train employees (family members and private tutors educate the children of the ruling class). The campus houses both a secondary school and a college, and though viewed as common by the techno-aristocrats, it's gained a good reputation Empire-wide. Many off-worlders come here for their college education, but even better known are the school's six-week workshops, which are mandatory for offworld employees of Cetian firms. Employees usually attend every year or two, depending on their responsibilities, and in addition to learning new techniques and data that pertain to their job responsibilities they're schooled in the "Cetian way" of business (which basically amounts to attempts to instill a proper respect for the techno-aristocracy).

THE WHITEHORN B&B

When visiting one of Tau Ceti II's towns, travelers either stay with friends or at a bed and breakfast — there are no hotels on the planet. Most B&Bs are managed by a family as a sideline business, with the retired family members taking on most of the responsibilities. But in areas where a natural phenomenon becomes a particularly popular tourist attraction, running a B&B can become a family's full-time job. Such is the case in the town of Whitehorn, located at the base of one of the tallest mountains in Human space. Climbing Mount Whitehorn and skiing in the Boheim Mountains has become a favorite activity of the Empire's young, idle, and wealthy. Run by the Emil and Ruth Moreno, the

Whitehorn B&B is the most prestigious bed and breakfast in the area, largely because the Morenos have gained a reputation for maintaining their guests' privacy. At any given time some of the most notorious heirs and heiresses in the Empire are here, attempting to get out of the media spotlight for a week or two.

HISTORY

Tau Ceti II was one of the first Type 1 worlds discovered when early Human explorers ventured beyond the Sol System. A lush world with an abundance of native life, it was a prime candidate for Human settlement, but the logistics of colonizing a planet were still largely theoretical... and not everyone believed colonization would be a profitable venture. Though the idea of "space colonies" excited many people, especially scientists who drafted plan after plan for transplanting Humans to alien worlds, the people who had the money to fund colonization ventures remained unconvinced. The settling of each of those early worlds was a unique financial arrangement, and Tau Ceti's colonization was no different.

PROGRESSIVES AND GREENS

To limit risk, the money to settle Tau Ceti II came from diverse sources, including public funding, but two of the private investors would have the greatest impact on Cetian history. One was CenAm Energies, who saw the planet as an untapped font of nearly endless resources. The other was an influential group of environmentalists called the Pinecone Society that wanted to preserve Tau Ceti's natural glory. They made for unlikely bedfellows, but both played an important part in colonization beyond the financial aspects. CenAm Energies served as a source of prospectors, surveyors, geologists, and people with practical know-how and experience in hostile environments and severe conditions; Pinecone provided environmental scientists and engineers as well as people whose dedication to the task went beyond the next paycheck.

CenAm Energies filed for bankruptcy soon after the colony ships left the Sol System. Pinecone was rendered obsolete because of an exodus of most of its members due to internal political differences. But individuals from both groups formed the cores of the two political parties that spent the next several centuries wrangling over Tau Ceti's future. The Progressive Party wanted to exploit Tau Ceti's resources to the fullest extent, while the Green Party wanted to maintain the pristine wildernesses.

Though each party takes credit for Tau Ceti's considerable success, most impartial scholars credit two things. First, Tau's ecosystem is incredibly robust, able to absorb many abuses without upsetting the balance. The second is more subtle and involves the dynamic between the two parties. Instead of deadlocking, both sides have always negotiated policy, and rather than trade one concession for another in a different area — for instance, the Green Party allows unlimited

exploitation of the Sylvan Paradise, thus sacrificing it entirely, in exchange for the Progressive Party's support in making the Boheim Mountains entirely inviolable — they have compromised on the issues at hand, finding a middle ground.

YHP AND TAU CETI III

Historically, the one issue that seemed to threaten this tradition of compromise was resolved in the late 2400s when Tau Ceti's government granted the Progressive Party's Yu-Huggins-Parekh corporate alliance the right to colonize Tau Ceti III as an autonomous community. It also agreed to help fund the colonization through government-issued bonds.

YHP Systech was a designer and manufacturer of home and personal entertainment systems — it had grown considerably from its humble roots as a gentleman's agreement between three families of settlers to work together to create customized sound systems for wealthy clients. By 2476 it was rated one of the Empire's hundred most profitable companies, and most analysts felt it hadn't stopped growing yet. But due to Tau Ceti's strict environmental regulations, YHP was having difficulty both expanding its manufacturing facilities to meet demand and obtaining necessary materials locally... and since it was a privately-owned, vertically-integrated company, outsourcing production was out of the question.

To make matters worse, YHP Systech's problems weren't unique to Tau Ceti's corporate world. The cornerstone of the Cetian economy were "tech boutiques." Like YHP these boutiques specialized in made-to-order tech, and they were small and privately-owned (often family-operated). They didn't require huge factories or large amounts of natural resources; all they needed were a small shop to work in, technological knowledge and fine craftsmanship, and a client list. But as the Empire grew economically, some of these firms grew with it, and the needs of these former boutiques, now large corporations, were causing friction within the Cetian planetary government.

YHP united these tech firms to a common cause. Working together, they deadlocked the government until the members of the Green Party and frustrated Progressives arranged for the Yu-Huggins-Parekh proponents and their allies to purchase nearby Tau Ceti III, thus leading to the settlement of a second planet in the system and the birth of its techno-aristocracy.

THE SETTLEMENT OF TAU CETI V-A

Tau Ceti V-A's settlement resulted from the 2549 arrival of refugees from Delta Vio, a planet decimated in the early days of the Galactic War. The Empire was putting pressure on the system government to provide the Deltans with homes — wandering, unwanted refugees created the worst sort of negative publicity — but Ceti II was already pushing at its strict population limits and constructing atmospheric domes for a largely unskilled, under-educated work force wasn't cost effective to Ceti III's techno-aristocrats.

TAU CETI DURING THE XENOVORE WAR

Though it served as a source of recruits like many other planets at the time, Tau Ceti emerged from the Xenovore War unscathed. The Xenovore offensive into Human space passed the system by — the Xenovores didn't detect a military presence and chose instead to move as quickly as possible toward nearby Earth.

When the Imperial government directed to the ragtag fleet of refugees to go to the Tau Ceti system regardless of the two governments' lack of commitment, a decision had to be made. Ceti II wanted to help largely for humanitarian reasons (although the Empire's veiled threats of economic sanctions were also a good motivator). It sold the idea of settling the Deltans on Tau V's moon to Ceti III by convincing the techno-aristocrats the refugees would provide a nearby source of inexpensive labor (which they have — just not as inexpensive as people on Ceti III originally hoped). The moon's numerous tunnels and caverns were connected to create a subterranean complex which linked simple but well-built living spaces with state of the art factories and mining outposts. The Deltans became the working class of the Cetian system, and though they were less wealthy than their Cetian neighbors they prospered. Since then, the moon has become a destination for many Imperial citizens looking for work.

THE PEOPLE

Though for official purposes the Terran Empire views Tau Ceti as a single political entity — for instance, one Senator represents all three worlds — the populations of each of the three bodies are distinct in attitude, outlook, and personality. All of the cultures are obviously Human-derived, even the species-diverse population of Tau Ceti V-A, and they haven't strayed far from their roots, but each has emphasized a different aspect of their homeworld's society.

TAU CETI II

The people of Tau Ceti II live in small towns, usually with a single business run by each extended family. Every town has renewable sources of energy, generally solar or hydro, and town locations are chosen with this in mind. Furthermore, each town must provide its own sustenance (although no one is condemned to starvation in times of trouble), and laws strictly regulate how food is produced — everything from how much land can be cleared and tilled to how many heads of Cetian cow (a native species similar in appearance to a small bison) a single ranching family can own. Families not devoted to providing food and energy typically operate tech boutique businesses. These boutiques cater to highly-trained specialists and the wealthy; their goods, which range from old-fashioned wrist-watches to hand-crafted computer consoles, are a status symbol throughout Human space. In general, the Cetians of Tau Ceti II are considered rural, polite, friendly, and liberal.

TAU CETI III

The family-operated businesses of Tau Ceti II led directly the techno-aristocracy that controls Tau Ceti III. Each of the large tech firms on Three is run by a family or coalition of families, and in theory, position in the aristocracy depends on the profitability of a firm. In practice, the larger tech

firms purchase the smaller ones that become profitable, or even potentially profitable, and these buy-outs are marked by a flurry of arranged marriages between the two families involved.

A family's matriarch or patriarch acts as the chief executive in family matters. They usually stay out of day-to-day business affairs, though they're responsible for appointing the chief operating officer of the firm. They spend most of their time arranging marriages, examining test scores of the family's children to better train a child for a future position in the firm, planning entertainments, and other matters directly concerning the family.

Below the owners of the firms — the executive families, as they're called — are the employees. Families are less important among employees — for instance, a person can choose who he marries without consulting the head of his family — but still figure prominently in one's social and professional life. Mean-spiritedly called "serfs" by the more arrogant aristocrats, employees are highly skilled and well-educated (less skilled work exists on Tau Ceti V-A), but their livelihood is at the whim of the executive families. An employee can take a position at another firm, but a potential employer must ask the current employer for permission to interview the employee. Employers usually "trade" interviews — "You can interview Mr. Smith if I can interview Mr. Singh" — but sometimes there are other concessions, including financial ones, made for the right to interview. An employee can quit his current employer and leave the planet at any time; persons are not allowed to live on Three and remain unemployed.

TAU CETI V-A

The "Fivers" form the working class of the Tau Ceti system, and labor unions are central to life on the gas giant moon. Originally the workers existed at the whim of the executive families on Tau Ceti III, but over the last century Five has become an industrial center for the entire Empire. This has allowed the labor unions to negotiate higher wages — as of 2640 most residents are solidly middle class.

Humans are a minority on Tau Ceti V-A, but no one species can claim a majority — Five has become a destination for many out-of-work Imperial citizens. Although species tend to self-segregate into their own neighborhoods, species-motivated violence is rare. Most sociologists attribute this to the high standard of living and employment rate, and warn that if the moon ever experiences a severe economic downturn, racial tensions could become much worse.

As discussed above, refugees from Delta Vio formed the core of the moon's original settlers, and the descendants of those first settlers haven't forgotten their heritage. They celebrate Liberation Day, a moon-wide celebration of the day the Thorgons departed Delta Vio, and descendants of the Deltans hold fund-raisers to raise money for their poor relatives who are still working to repair the wrecked planet. Throughout the rest of the system, Cetians from Tau Ceti V-A have a reputation for being hard-working, coarse, and vulgar.

Government

Each of Tau Ceti's cultures has its own system of government, described below. The Tau Ceti System Authority (TCSA), an efficiently-run bureaucracy, handles quotidian system-wide matters such as maintaining and operating each planet's spaceport and compiling income tax data for the Imperial treasury. The TCSA's Guidance Council consists of three members, one from each planet, but its charter severely limits its actual powers. Any decision that might have an impact on the other members of the system must be turned over to the planetary governments for approval, but the Guidance Council does have the authority to allocate funds to research and submit proposals for approval.

TAU CETI II

The basic governing body on Tau Ceti II is the town board. Each township has its own board with five members (there are a handful of settlements with less than fifty residents who have a single elected official). A town's adult residents elect the members for five-year terms; each year one position on the board is the subject of an election, so turnover on the board is gradual.

For the most part a town board acts as both an executive and legislative branch, but in times of crisis (usually involving severe weather) a board can appoint a town manager to act as chief executive. The town manager must have a set agenda that stipulates the end of his term in concrete language. Town residents can attempt to impeach a town manager by filing a grievance with the Ceti Regulatory Commission (CRC).

The CRC is planet's governing body. Its primary responsibility is to regulate land use, town size, and other environmentally-sensitive or planet-affecting issues. The CRC provides governance guidelines which are interpreted by the town boards; the guidelines always include upper limits or similar restrictions. For instance, the CRC might raise the maximum number of acres permitted for pasture by five acres; then the town board decides whether to authorize a family to clear those five acres, less than those five acres, or none at all — but in no event can the board authorize clearing more than five acres, since that's the ceiling imposed by the CRC guideline. The CRC also serves as the final arbiter in disputes between towns, and between townspeople and their leaders.

The CRC includes one commissioner per 2000 townships (a "county") for a total of 194 commissioners. The residents of a county elect a commissioner every ten years. The CRC is in session four months during the year. Parties play a large role in politics; the Green and Progressive Parties (described in *History*, above) are the main ones. Others spring up occasionally, but they largely define their platforms in relation to those of the Green and Progressive Parties and wield no real power without allying themselves to one of "the Big Two." The Progressives have never recovered from the departure of their most fer-

vent members to Tau Ceti III and have been the minority party for over a century. Although the Greens characterize them as greedy profiteers, the Progressives are far more environmentally-minded than similar parties in other systems. To many Imperial citizens, including those living on Tau Ceti III, they barely qualify as capitalists.

Tau Ceti II has strict regulations concerning the environment, so offworlders must be careful about what they do while planetside. Picking flowers or breaking off a branch earns a stern lecture from nearly every citizen. "Why did you do that?" tends to be the first question asked, and if the visitor doesn't have a good reason — and "I felt like it" isn't a good reason — he's given a very long lecture on the importance of cultivating an environmental conscience. Poaching is punished by permanent expulsion from the planet or hard labor in a waste recycling facility, depending on the animal hunted... and all animals have some form of legal protection.

Most criminals have a hard time wrapping their heads around the idea that *foodstuffs* from other systems is the most profitable thing to smuggle to Tau Ceti II. Since all perishable goods produced elsewhere are illegal (the early settlers were determined to quarantine their new world from alien lifeforms, including bacteria and the like), there are many restrictions on what can be hunted or cultivated, so some foods become a commodity. Popular "black market foods" include Fex *orsec* meat, Terran oranges, and Osiran spiced flatbread.

TAU CETI III

The rulers of Tau Ceti III are a hereditary aristocracy; membership in the ruling class depends on ownership of a tech firm. Each executive family is ranked in precedence according to the profits of its firm; profitability reports circulate once yearly among all the families, just after the filing of Imperial taxes. Despite the yearly possibility of leadership changing hands, YHP Systech has ruled Tau Ceti III since its settlement. Representatives from the three families with stakes in YHP Systech — Wai Yu, Ronald Huggins, and Aruna Parekh as of 2640 — form an executive council that rules the planet. For nearly a century InStarCo, a large transportation conglomerate that got its start providing shuttle service and cargo transport between the Cetian worlds, has occupied the number two spot. In the last decade, two other firms, Wsysig Electronics and MedTech, have positioned themselves to challenge YHP Systech's dominance.

On Three, each firm provides for all its employees' needs, from grocery stores to nightclubs. The government only has to handle law enforcement, the justice system, and other institutions the firms cannot be allowed to control.

Unlike traditional aristocracies, it's possible for a person of lower rank — an employee — to ascend into the upper classes, though there are only a few ways to do so. The first is to be directly responsible for a windfall profit, whether through marketing, innovation, or other means. If such a person is single, he marries into the family that owns the

firm; if he's married, one of his single children marries into it. The second way is by starting a firm. To do so, a person must submit a business proposal to the government's New Business Office. The proposal travels through the bureaucracy, approved or rejected at various levels, until it reaches the executive council for consideration. If the council approves, the employee receives the government funding he requested in his proposal and permission to hire employees, rent facilities, and so on — in the Cetian business lingo, this called *per-mission to crenelate*. But the new business owner becomes a member of the aristocracy only if his firm turns a profit within five years. If it's not profitable, he rejoins the employee class and whatever advances his firm made are sold to existing firms. The third source of new aristocrats is offworld tech firms, either acquired by existing Cetian firms or (rarely) invited to relocate to Tau Ceti III.

Most political scientists and economists have deemed the Ceti III techno-aristocracy a poor government for business growth and economic well-being, mainly because it allows older, conservative firms to squash newer, more vital firms before they can become a threat. Despite this, Ceti III's economy has only grown stronger since its founding. Most scholars argue that this is because only one firm has ruled since the planet's inception, and those three families have a tradition of looking after both the welfare of their firms and the world. If a family without such ethics ever came to power, the situation would be very different.

The most common crime on Three is industrial sabotage and espionage, broadly defined to include everything from inadvertently taking con-

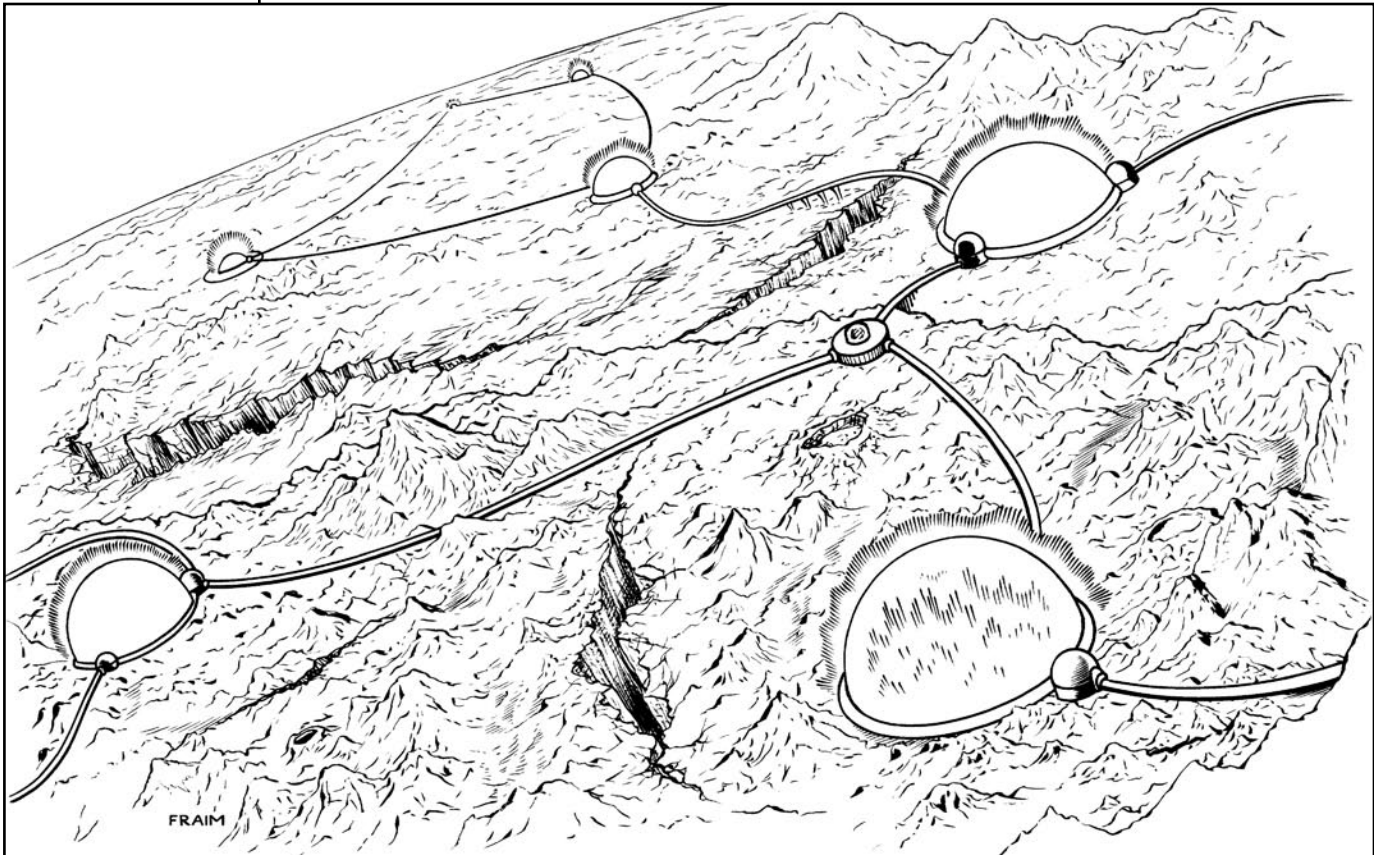
fidential files home to violating a non-disclosure agreement. Visitors who aren't wearing a corporate identity card (which marks them as a guest of a firm or executive family) are viewed with suspicion, since they're thought to be spies for offworld firms.

TAU CETI V-A

Unions are the basic form of government on Tau Ceti V-A. Since all the laborers in a given community worked in the same factory or plant, they all belonged to the same union, so it was a natural evolution for the unions to move beyond the workplace. The union's role expanded to include providing governmental and social services when the Provisional Colonial Authority (which included members from both Tau Ceti II and III) pulled out of the moon.

Union leadership is democratically elected. Every four years, members vote on a local president, who then chooses his staff. Above the presidents of the locals is the Joint Union Council (JUC), to which each union sends one representative elected by the membership. Each of the different unions — the United Utility Workers, the Brotherhood of Component Producers, the Teamsters, and so on — essentially forms a political party. While the JUC fills the traditional role of government, it doesn't negotiate contracts with employers. That responsibility falls to an individual union's leadership, so there's sometimes friction between a given union and the JUC.

Politics on Tau Ceti V-A has a reputation for being corrupt, and that reputation isn't entirely undeserved. It's easy to buy a local's votes simply by having a party with an open bar, and physical



Worlds Of Empire ■ Chapter One

violence has its place as a valid means of resolving disputes (especially between neighboring locals). But in general the union locals provide their members with adequate social services such as health care and public education (though they spend more on inter-union sports leagues than schools for their children), and working conditions on Tau Ceti V-A are among the best in the Empire.

Every couple of years there's loud talk of unionizing workers in other systems — of starting an "intergalactic labor movement" — which never fails to make employers elsewhere nervous despite the fact that it's never gone beyond talk.

Famous Cetians

Some of the best-known modern Cetians include:

ILYA BAZHENOV

An employee in YHP's Marketing Department, Ilya Bazhenov is listed officially as an Assistant Director of Strategic Marketing. But it's common knowledge that "Strategic Marketing" is Cetian business lingo for corporate espionage, and that for two decades Bazhenov was the handler for YHP's Empire-wide network of informants and plants. Ever since Draconis Defenseworks launched an investigation to clean house, then issued a public statement listing the informants they found in their investigations and the rival corporations employing those persons, Bazhenov has been rendered ineffectual. He's soon to retire in disgrace for failing to keep his identity secret.

DARVIN KELLAM

This famous Perseid poet immigrated to Tau Ceti II two years ago in search of "the most sublime quiet" in which to do his work. Apparently he found it in his large, luxurious log cabin in the Tremontayne Hills — within just a few months of his arrival he produced *Cetian Meditations*, one of his most acclaimed collections of poetry. Rumor has it he's working on two interwoven cycles of epic poetry: one a historical chronicle of the settlement of the Cetian system, the other a self-made body of legend and myth for Tau Ceti II.

THE RONSONS

The Ronsons of Tau Ceti II have developed a profitable, if questionable, niche market: they produce customized handheld computers popular among jackers. Ronson Handhelds have two qualities jackers value. The computer itself is mundane, but it's built to be customized, with easy access to the insides and many ports for attachments. It's the second quality, though, that really gives a Ronson its appeal: the frame is hand-carved from a native wood similar to teak and decorated with gold or platinum filigree. The keys are often made from turquoise, though Ronson Computing Systems uses everything from simple quartz to gemstones. A Ronson Handheld starts at 4,000 credits and goes up from there.

Economy

All three worlds' well-known exports are discussed above since their production is in large part integral to their government and the lifestyle of the inhabitants. Tau Ceti III once possessed far more extensive manufacturing facilities, but since the founding of Tau Ceti V-A it's moved most manufacturing to the nearby settlement to clear way for more skyscrapers and estates for the wealthy. The manufacturing that still takes place on Three is specialized assembly of delicate electronics and other tasks that require highly-skilled labor or the best in precision machinery.

Tau Ceti II is almost entirely self-sustaining and only imports rare consumer goods and luxury items (usually in sizable quantities). The other two worlds rely entirely on imports for their food. Only a meager portion of their food imports come from Two, whose lack of large farms and ranches limits the surplus food it has to trade. This aggravates the leadership of Ceti II and V-A to no end — the price of food on their worlds is high since it has to cover interstellar distances, and Two could easily produce *much* more food. Neither of the worlds' leaders bother trying to convince Two to change its ways, though; they know it's pointless.

TROVATORE



The star Trovatore is nearly identical to Earth's sun: a G2V hot yellow dwarf with an exceptionally stable gravity plane that's created or captured an amazingly large planetary system. This system includes the singularly lovely, very Earth-like world generally referred to as Trovatore (Trovatore III), two greenhouse planets (I and II), three airless rocky worlds (IV, V, and VIII), five gas giants (VI, VII, and IX through XI), and nine airless ice planets (XII through XX). The system also includes over fifty moons, some of which are as large as small planets. Papare, one of the large moons of Trovatore X, has a cold ocean much like that of Europa below its ice surface. This small world has been colonized by Osathri, waterborne Selkie variant Humans, and genetically uplifted dolphins. The latter two get their oxygen from special ATRI 11 aqualungs that require only periodic refilling.

Trovatore II is a hothouse world with a thick carbon dioxide atmosphere. It's currently in the middle of an extensive terraforming project launched by the government of Confederated MegaMicronesia on Trovatore III, involving the release of massive amounts of genetically modified bacteria into the upper atmosphere. A wide variety of gene-tailored plants have also been introduced onto the surface of this incredibly hot and poisonous world with mixed results. Currently 10,000 scientists, miners, and settlers live in the domed, conditioned, and largely subterranean colony of Tama Nui-Te-Ra on what they hope will one day be the planet's largest continent.

Trovatore V is an airless, rocky world with only 0.09 Earth standard gravity. Called Oro (the Tahitian god of war and peace) by its inhabitants, it's been colonized by some three million Spacer Humans who live in pressurized cavernous dwellings tunneled into its rocky surface. Oro is rich in silver, platinum, uranium, iridium, and (fortunately for the colonists) subterranean ice deposits. A highly profitable mining colony, it also runs an orbital shipyard that services craft coming to and from Vaxandros Prime along the Spinward Crescent. A task force of 24 ships from the Home Fleet calls the Oro space station home.

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: TROVATORE

Planet Name: Trovatore, also known as Archipelago (official designation: Trovatore III)

Classification: Type 1

System Data: The star Trovatore is a G2V hot yellow dwarf with an amazing twenty-planet system that includes a single Earth-like world (III), two greenhouse planets (I and II), three airless rocky worlds (IV, V, and VIII), five gas giants (VI, VII, and IX through XI), and nine airless ice planets (XII through XX). The system also includes over fifty moons, some of which are as large as small planets.

Gravity: 1.02 G

Day And Years: 24.6 standard hours in each day; 370 standard days in each year

Atmosphere: Earth-like — 71% Nitrogen; 23% Oxygen; 2% Ammonia; 4% Other

Hydrosphere: 90% of Trovatore's surface is covered by water. The landmasses consist of numerous small island chains scattered across its surface and a single continent, New Pohnpei (which is roughly the size of the Terran island of Borneo), near its equator

Meteorological Overview: Trovatore's weather is pleasant by Human standards: humid, temperate, and slightly windy. Although it rains or snows almost every day of the year on some parts of the planet, these downpours are seldom violent. Storms almost never rise above the level of tropical storm.

Sentient Species: None native

ATRI Rating: 11

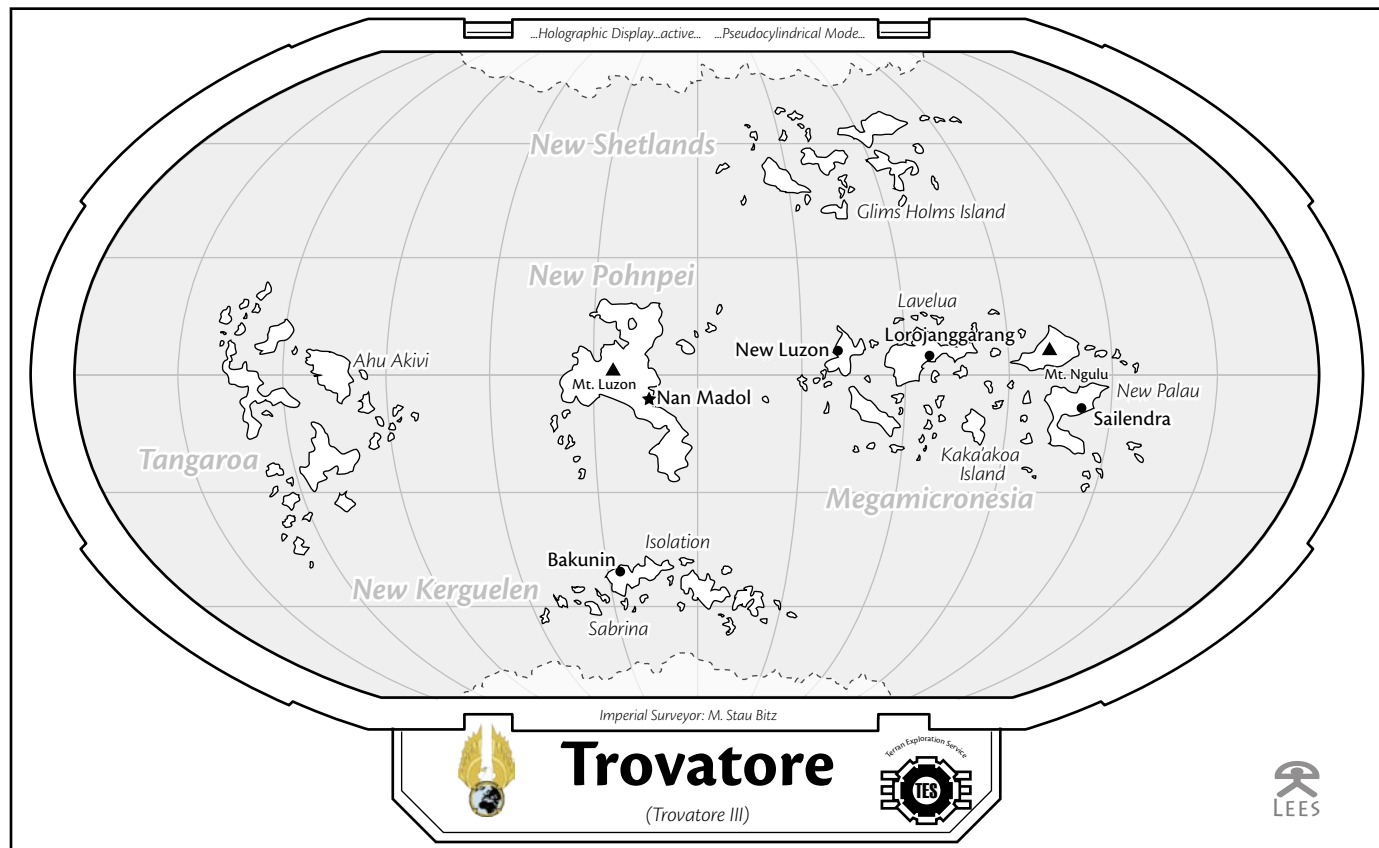
Government: Special parliamentary democracy with a ceremonial royal family

Affiliation: Senate world of the Terran Empire, with colonies on Trovatore II, V, and a moon of X

Resources: Tourism; agricultural production of kelp and fish

Places of Note: The capital city of Nan Madol on New Pohnpei; the floating brothel/temple city of Borobudur-Eros; the island chains of Tangaroa, MegaMicronesia, New Shetland, and New Kerguelen

Ship Facilities: The main landing facilities and a repair yard is near Nan Madol; there's an excellent orbital shipyard in a LaGrange point around Trovatore V



GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Trovatore, or Archipelago as it's often referred to in its advertising literature, is one of the most beautiful worlds in the Terran Empire. An Earth-sized water planet with a total landmass (excluding its polar ice packs) that consists of a little less than that of India (three million square kilometers), Trovatore is world of picturesque tropical islands, dazzling sunsets, elegant floating cities, colorful coral reefs, and quaint coastal aquatic communities. It is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Empire. Indeed, its economy is almost entirely centered on tourism with a majority of visitors enjoying their stay either on the coastal cities of the continent of New Pohnpei (which is basically a large island), the gorgeous ten thousand islands of MegaMicronesia, or on the city-sized cruise ships that move between them.

Archipelago is also known throughout the empire for its hedonistic, sensual culture, easy living, and love of the arts (especially music). The anything goes lifestyle of the planet serves as a magnet for political radicals from throughout Human space, who are attracted to its permissive atmosphere and lack of traditional government. This would normally make Trovatore a trouble spot for the TSS and the Mind Police, except that neither agency takes the political rhetoric of the planet's inhabitants very seriously. Archipelago actually provides an extremely useful service for the Empire's governments by quietly neutralizing potential rebels. In most cases, a serious political radical from, say, Europa Nova quickly becomes just another drunken, quirky expatriate living off jungle fruit and sleeping in a grass hut on Trovatore.

Places Of Note

The largest landmass on Trovatore is New Pohnpei, a tropical island roughly the size of Borneo at some 725,000 square kilometers. With slightly less than one million inhabitants, it's also the most densely populated political unit on the planet and the home of its unique capital, Nan Madol. Made almost entirely of quarried stone logs harvested from nearby Mt. Luzon, the capital is a chaotic jumble of massive palaces (most of them apartment buildings or hotels), open gardens filled with distinctive carved granite heads that wouldn't be out of place on Easter Island, outdoor theaters, and colorful bazaars that largely cater to the tourist trade. While the city is safe and fairly clean, it's known for its distinctive indigenous population of chattering monkeys and parrots. These creatures are either overhead or underfoot nearly everywhere in this metropolis of 100,000.

BOROBODUR-EROS

A popular destination for decadent pleasure seekers from throughout the Empire, the floating brothel/temple city of Borobudur-Eros is one of the largest waterborne ships ever created. It's some 1,317 meters in length, 221 meters wide, and stands 104 meters tall — the equivalent of a mile's worth of 25 story Boswash office buildings filled with entertainment venues. Home to some twenty thousand prostitute-revelators, crewmen, support staff, security personnel, and permanent guests, it contains lodgings for 30,000 visitors. Created by a mystical Buddhist sect from the Terran island of Java with some rather odd beliefs, the temple ship

ALIEN WARS

Far Spinward of United Earth's Heartworlds, the Trovatore system was undiscovered at the time of the Xenovore invasion, and thus played no part in the Xenovore Wars.

endlessly circumnavigates Trovatore's equator as a constant expression of the sect's transcendent religious ecstasy. It makes regular stops at New Luzon, Lorojanggrang, and Sailendra in MegaMicronesia, New Pohnpei, and Ahu Akivi in Tangaroa.

TANGAROA

Located on the opposite side of the planet from MegaMicronesia and New Pohnpei, the chain of several dozen fairly large islands known as Tangaroa could almost be considered a slice of living Earth history. With the exception of modern medical facilities (and several airfields), the Polynesian-descended inhabitants of the chain live much as their ancient ancestors did: fishing in its warm waters, gathering fruit from tropical palms, getting extensively tattooed, dancing in the moonlight, and relaxing on beaches of clean white sand. Although the main island of Ahu Akivi has several large hotels, tourism is neither encouraged nor discouraged on most of the islands as the inhabitants have little need for money. Outsiders wishing to settle in the chain are required to assimilate and adopt the local customs.

NEW KERGUELEN

Although little visited by outsiders, the sparsely populated and rugged subarctic archipelago of New Kerguelen remains a popular destination for hardy settlers looking to escape the often-stifling bureaucracy of the Empire. The chain consists of some 300 islands, the largest of which is a triangle-shaped landmass known as Isolation; a 150-kilometer long, 3,300 square kilometer landmass of fjords, jagged peninsulas, and large bays dotted with small islets. Located fairly close to Trovatore's Antarctic continent, over a third of the various islands' landmasses are permanently covered by glaciers. The archipelago contains numerous small rivers and lakes as well as abundant rainfall with a rather small seasonal temperature variation of between 3 and 4 degrees Celsius (37-40 degrees F). It also has abundant animal life including reindeer, wild boar, polar bears, and rabbits.

New Kerguelen possess a unique culture found nowhere else in the Terran Empire. All of its population of roughly 10,000 inhabitants are outspoken anarchists vehemently opposed to authority of any sort. They do not recognize the Empire or Trovatore's planetary government. Most of these hardy folk live on isolated, largely self-sufficient farms and ranches, although Isolation does possess a single chaotic city of 1,000 inhabitants known as Bakunin. As these radical misfits and outcasts seem happy enough to separate from the remainder of Imperial society and spend a majority of their time debating the finer points of obscure political philosophy with one another, the TSS has never considered them enough of a threat to warrant its attentions.

HISTORY

Trovatore was first charted by the legendary husband and wife Terran Exploration Service team of Odin and Wu Heyerdahl at the close of the Xenovore Wars (although some claim that Dr. Emilio Moreau discovered it almost a hundred years earlier). Close associates of Claude DeValiere, the man responsible for reviving the TES from its long bureaucratic slumber, the Heyerdahls landed their ship *Kon-Tiki IV* on New Pohnpei in 2375 on the site of what would later become the city of Nan Madol. After performing a quick orbital survey of the world, the Heyerdahls realized they'd stumbled upon one of the great gems of galactic exploration: a true paradise planet. Naming it Trovatore, or "troubadour" in Italian, they made arrangements with the TES to lead the initial effort at settling the newly discovered world. Personally captaining the massive transport ships *Noumea* and *Gayoom*, they moved 5,000 colonists from the Maldives. Over the next decade they transported tens of thousands of refugees from the Polynesian and Micronesian nations Kiribati, Tuvalu, and the Marshall Islands.

Over the next several hundred years, numerous Humans from Tonga, Samoa, and Fiji also immigrated to Trovatore, settling alongside their cultural cousins to create the Empire's only world with a truly Polynesian culture. They were soon joined by a wide variety of Human and non-Human expatriates, most of whom were attracted to the planet's beautiful sunsets, sun-washed beaches, and relaxed culture. It also gained a reputation for political and social tolerance, attracting persecuted dissidents from such far-flung planets as Soolasha, Loki, and Europa Nova. This distinctive confluence of cultures, political opinions, and races led to the development of Trovatore's uniquely chaotic political system. It also directly led to the founding of its royal family in 2501, an event intended to provide a badly needed appearance of stability to the rest of the Empire (and the notoriously somber Empress Ximena). Descendants of the ancient ruling family of Tonga, the Royal Kalani have remained the planet's official (and popular) rulers for some 250 years.

In 2565 the fun-loving and ribald Emperor Ibrahim moved the entire imperial court to the island of New Palau in MegaMicronesia for a two year vacation from Lyons, leaving the running of the Terran Empire to his growing bureaucracy and the newly minted Imperial nobility. Amusingly, he transported so many of his courtiers, mistresses, wives, and prostitutes to that island that much of the Palauan population descends from him. In his honor the Palauans have carved a massive likeness of his face onto the northern cliffs of Mount Ngulu, the ancient volcano that dominates the center of the island. As the Emperor who best embodied the planet's ethos, Ibrahim remains one of Trovatore's most popular historical figures a hundred years after his death. Innumerable beaches, brothels, bars, nightclubs, and restaurants around the planet have been named in his honor, and sexual acts are often referred to as "vacationing with the Emperor" in local slang.

THE PEOPLE

Most of the Human inhabitants of Trovatore are Humans of Oceanic descent; many of them come from Tonga, Fiji, Hawaii, and Samoa. A physically large and robust folk with olive skin, these Trovatorans can be found literally anywhere on the planet. Good-humored, relaxed, and not particularly serious about life, they enjoy an excellent reputation throughout the Empire as artists and musicians. When most Imperial citizens think of Trovatore they immediately picture these gregarious and charming people.

THE NEW SHETLANDS

Yet these archetypical Polynesian-descended Trovatorians aren't the only people living on the planet. Far to the north of most of the world's other archipelagoes are hundreds of fairly large but windswept and rocky islands covered in scrub pines, native aspens, and poplars. This broadly scattered archipelago of isolated lands, known as the New Shetlands, is inhabited by a pale-skinned, blonde-haired people descended from political refugees from a war on the feudal world of Rohendra. Obsessed with the mythology of medieval earth, the inhabitants of this island make a point of living in a deceptively primitive manner. Nobles wear plate mail, ride horses, joust with one another, and live in stone towers while Commoners live in thatched huts, herd sheep, and tend small plots of land by hand. A third group known as Hoods lives in the forest and preys on the Nobles, robbing them and turning their possessions over to the Commoners... who give it back to the Nobles in the form of taxes.

This entire social structure is, of course, a clever ruse put on for the sake of New Shetland's booming tourist trade. A honeymooning couple from, say, Tau Ceti II quickly find themselves caught up in what seems to be very real danger, intrigue, and romantic adventure as (for example) they help the Noble Sir Agravian free his sister from the clutches of the evil Gareth Drax. It seems real but it's all in good fun, of course — Nobles, Commoners, and Hoods trade social positions quite regularly. It's rare that anyone gets hurt participating in New Shetland's pretend melodrama, but there are subterranean ATRI 11 medical facilities available on nearby Glims Holm Island if someone does.

WATER-DWELLERS

Trovatore also possesses a population of some 500,000 Selkie Humans, most of whom live alongside the planet's two million Osathri in subaquatic communities located in the shallow bays and fjords that surround New Pohnpei. They're a lighthearted but hard-working folk who supply a majority of the planet's food, most of which comes from fish farms and kelp beds. Although the Selkies labor under hypothetical life service contracts to the royal family (like many genetic variant Humans), they're free to come and go as they please as long as the planet's main supply of food continues to flow out of the waves.

A small percentage of Selkies have foregone the land entirely to live in the open seas alongside Trovatore's most remarkable inhabitants: Neodolphins. Several species of genetically uplifted dolphins (bottlenose and long-beaked) with vastly enhanced intellectual capacities swim the Trovatoran seas, as does a species of highly intelligent, gigantic, and genetically altered blue whale known as the Ultrabeluga. Weighing in at some 300 tons and growing to an amazing 90 meters in length, Ultrabeluga travel in groups of five or six with an entourage of 50 to 100 Neodolphins and Selkies. They often wear massive honeycomb-like structures upon their backs that serve as tiny homes to their diminutive retinue, who rest in them when they're not swimming.

Working from his massive laboratory on the island of Sabrina in the isolated New Kerguelens, the reclusive and infamous Dr. Emilio Moreau created both the Neodolphin and the Ultrabeluga species some 300 years ago using genetic science forbidden by the old United Earth government. Both species are extremely loyal to the memory of this quasi-deceased genius, whom they refer to simply as "The Father" in their own strange, inhuman language.

EVERYONE ELSE

The remainder of Trovatore's population consists of a nearly infinite spectrum of random Imperial inhabitants. Political miscreants, perpetual misfits, artists, authors, alcoholics, alcoholic authors, and musicians from nearly any Imperial planet can be found scattered around the islands of this tropical paradise planet, as can many kinds of aliens. Vayathurans and Rigellians in particular seem to be attracted to the open-minded, sensuous culture of Archipelago (which more closely approximates their own cultural norms than most Human planets do). The Se'ecra also enjoy vacationing on this world since it has a climate similar to Ecra-shen and a small expatriate community, most of whom run well-regarded restaurants on the various islands of MegaMicronesia.

Government

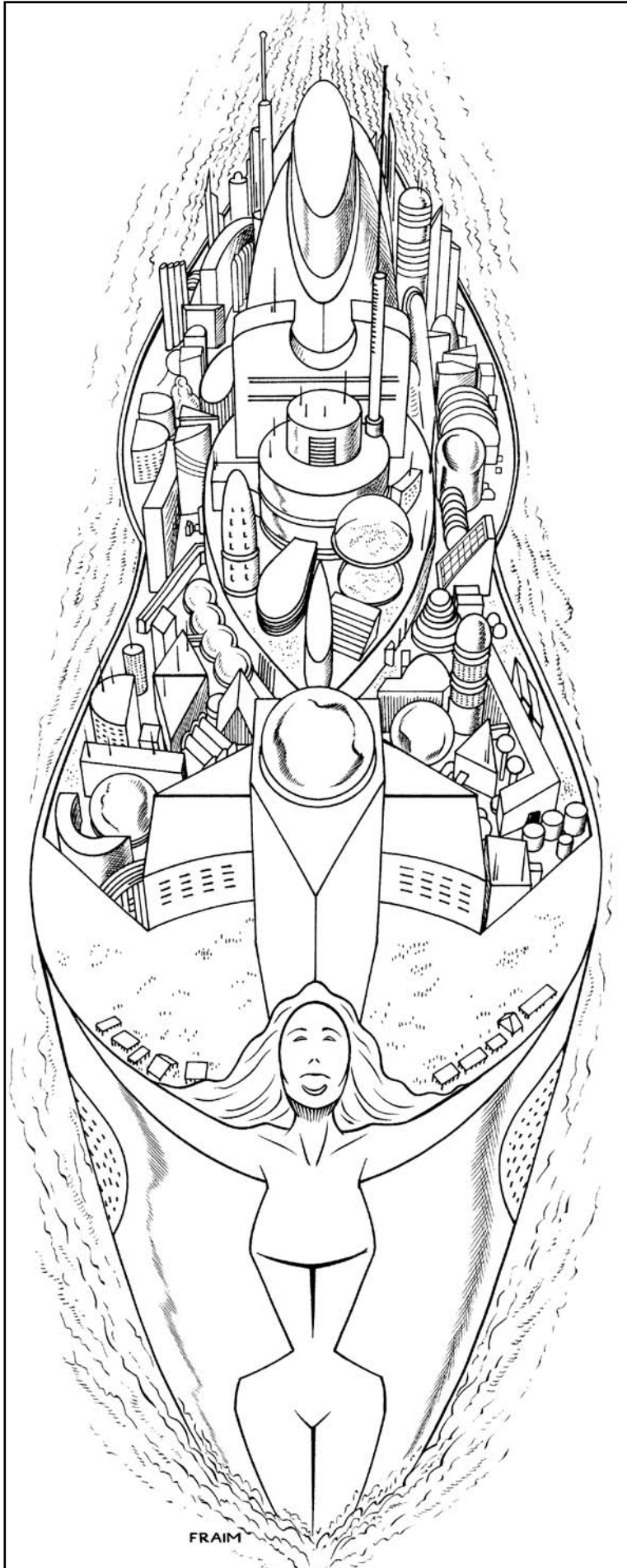
Trovatore is a world of many diverse peoples, very few of whom care much about politics. As a planet with a population that exhibits a wide variety of social and cultural values spread out over a geographically large area, it would have been very easy for Archipelago to become a seething, balkanized cacophony of competing nations. Instead, the inhabitants have opted for a planetary federal non-government or, to be more accurate, a government that by design can do very little to make its citizen's lives difficult.

THE ROYAL FAMILY

The executive branch of the Trovatore government consists of the royal family and its court. As of 2640 its current head is Queen Lilikulani, a cheerful, heavyset woman in her late forties with interests in young men, drinking, dancing, and

NEODOLPHIN CHARACTERS

To create a Neodolphin character, start with the Dolphin character sheet on page 162 of *The HERO System Bestiary*. Remove its Physical Limitation *Near-Human Intelligence*, increase its EGO to 10, and give it 2 points' worth of the Language *Neodolphin*. That gives it a total cost of 87 Character Points, leaving 63 left to spend in a Standard Heroic campaign.



music (in that order). Queen Lili, as she's popularly known, is beloved by almost all Trovatorans for her fundraising abilities, good humor, and general reluctance to exercise any of her hypothetical powers (see below). Instead, Queen Lili and her two youthful co-husbands, King Kaleha and King Kalakaua, spend most of their time traveling from island to island on the floating cruise-palace *Maluhia Koa* ("Peace Warrior") with their sumptuous court. They throw magnificent parties for any tourists they encounter while making sure their subjects are content... or at least intoxicated, which on many parts of Archipelago is the same thing.

Nevertheless, the executive branch has certain responsibilities it must uphold. The royal family's constitutionally-mandated responsibilities are diplomacy, public relations, management of the planetary financial system, appointment of the planet's Imperial Senator, and the approval via signing of all laws passed by Trovatore's two elected federal houses (see below) — of which there are very few. Since all these duties tend to resemble work, they're primarily delegated to lower-ranking members of the royal family in Nan Madol, of whom there are about 200. The most intelligent and influential of these are the Minister of Tourism Princess Alapai and the Minister of Finance Prince Liholiho, both of whom travel offworld fairly regularly. Under Trovatore's constitution both are also responsible for providing *all* of the funding for their respective departments from their royal allowances, so both of them make do with a single assistant who acts as a proxy when they're away.

THE FEDERAL LEGISLATURE

The Federal Legislature is a bicameral body. The *Popular House* consists of three representatives from each geographic political unit on the planet (each colony world also gets three). Generally (but not always) this means the top three finishers in an election whose parameters are decided by that district. It's charged with the duty of crafting new laws, all of which require a two-thirds majority to be passed along to the *Ideological House*, which includes literally anyone who can get 20,000 or more registered voters to exclusively support him via the planetary datanet. This support must be reiterated via datamail yearly or the Ideologue (as the houses members are known) loses his seat. There are currently 649 members of the Ideological House, ranging from anarchists and communists (of every possible variety) to libertarians, democrats, theocrats, republicans, greens, monarchists, fascists, and a desperate smattering of Osathri who simply want a government that *does* something.

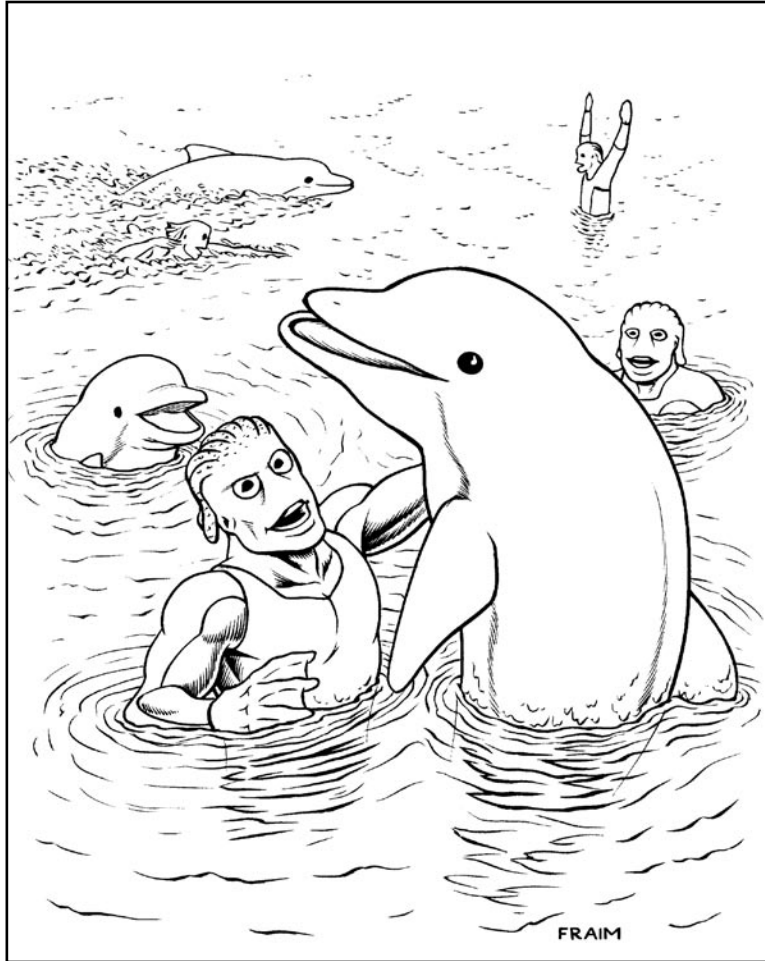
If even a one-third minority of the Ideological House objects to a law, it cannot pass to Queen Lili for an official ignoring or, once every year or two, a signing. She's particularly fond of non-binding multipartisan statements that bemoan the futility of her federal government.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

With the planetary administration effectively crippled, the vast majority of actual governing is left in the hands of local governments. A particularly good example of this is Confederated MegaMicronesia, a political association of ten thousand islands of varying sizes. There are over one hundred different forms of government within the confederation, ranging from absolutely none to enforced collectivism, militant matriarchal polygamous fascism, and parliamentary democracy. None of them are allowed to levy income taxes of more than 1% on their citizen's income, and each of them must send a representative to the annual congress and luau on the capital island of Lavelua where very little politics gets done but the dancing is incredible.

The situation in the Geographic Political Unit of New Kerguelen is radically different, as the roughly ten thousand inhabitants of this isolated subarctic island group refuse to acknowledge even the *concept* of government (although they generally approve of Queen Lili). Their rather cumbersome official name springs from a traditional refusal to give New Kerguelen any sort of political title, as it might imply their approval of the concept of politics. Its three seats in the Popular House in Nan Madol are usually shared by three of the Geographic Political Unit's elderly citizens, many of whom move to the "fascist police state" of New Pohnpei (the Queen's own anarcho-primitivist homeland) to enjoy the warm weather in their declining years. Interestingly, sparsely populated New Kerguelen provides almost 5% of the members of the planet's Ideological House.

A sizeable portion of Trovatore's Osathri minority absolutely loathes the planet's chaotic political situation. As loyal citizens of the Empire many of them suffered persecution on their homeworld of Soolasha and emigrated to Archipelago to enjoy the ordered, hierarchical, and technologically advanced lifestyle common to many Imperial citizens. While they love the warm waters and archipelagic geography of Trovatore, they find the political situation there intolerable. They've sent numerous representatives to the Empire's aristocracy, military, and even the TSS in the hope of provoking an intervention... so far without success.



Famous Inhabitants

Some of the best-known Trovatorans include:

HON DO

Archipelago's most famous musician, as well as perhaps its best-known citizen, is Hon Do, beloved throughout the empire for his distinctive electric slide ukulele playing. Perpetually armed with his trademark Trovatore Tropical Delight (rum and pineapple juice served in a coconut with a tiny umbrella garnish), the ever smiling Do can be found playing nightly at The King's Club on Kaka'ako Island in MegaMicronesia. Many Imperials best remember him for his song *Tropical Delights*, a billion-selling megahit across dozens of planetary datanets.

FRANCOIS FONTAINE

One of the most colorful inhabitants of New Pohnpei is deposed military despot Francois "Footman" Fontaine, former orthopedist and ruler of the desperately poor planet Hispaniola. Supposedly forced to flee his homeworld one step ahead of a firing squad, he's a heavysset black man in his 40s who likes to wear a fully military dress uniform (complete with medals) along with matching shorts and flip-flops. It's said he's constantly drunk, although in all fairness it's extremely difficult to tell due to his deranged state of mind. A native French speaker who seems to have mastered over a dozen languages,

Fontaine can give surprisingly good advice on matters of love, finance, and intrigue. He's also one of the few individuals alive who seems to truly understand Trovatore's Byzantine planetary politics. He can be found in the bar at the Le Plaza Hotel in Nan Madol, hitting up the tourists for drinks.

DR. EMILIO MOREAU

Perhaps the most mysterious citizen of Archipelago is Dr. Emilio Moreau, reputedly a legendary descendant of the infamous Dr. Moreau of Victorian-era Earth. Moreau is a master of genetic technology and biochemistry and responsible for the creation of the Neodolphins and Ultrabeluga. He reportedly dwells in a state of suspended animation within his "cold chamber" deep beneath the hollow island of Sabrina in New Kerguelen; his mind is linked to the outside world via a massive computer that allows him to control surgical androids, talk to colleagues on the planetary datanet, and continue his research using robot arms. A figure of near cult worship for many Imperial biologists and other citizens of unusual bent, he's said to be served by strange-looking "animal men" who shun contact with outsiders.

COUNT JOHN TUPOUTO'A

Trovatore's Imperial interests are represented on Earth by its Senator, Count John Tupouto'a. A very large but surprisingly mild man in his early 50s, Tupouto'a supports Safira Harmon's liberal faction and shares her beliefs in democratic government, equality for non-Humans, and cooperation with friendly alien civilizations. On several occasions this gentle giant has had to use his size to restrain members of the Senate from attacking one another, an event repeatedly captured on camera. Not surprisingly, he's well thought of by most of the Empire's populace.

Economy

The Trovatore system's economy depends mostly on tourism coupled with sizable mining exports from its second and fifth worlds. While the system produces more than enough food for its inhabitants, it has very little manufacturing capacity and must rely heavily on imports for its electronics, medical supplies, and luxury items. Papare imports small amounts of manufactured goods, such as specialized aqualungs, but is otherwise economically self-sufficient with no noteworthy exports.

VAXANDROS PRIME



The Vaxandros system consists of five planets in orbit around a Type G yellow dwarf star. Vaxandros I, a Type 1 world more commonly known as Vaxandros Prime, is the only planet with permanent settlements. Two of the other four worlds, Vaxandros III and IV, are unremarkable Type 5 worlds. Despite being uninhabited, Vaxandros II and V have become infamous, at least among the captains of the Imperial Navy and the inhabitants of Prime, and are one of the main reasons the system is a center for smuggling.

The Drink

Vaxandros II is a Type 8 greenhouse planet nicknamed “the Drink.” The atmosphere consists of swirling, opaque gases that reduce visibility worse than any Terran fog. Though composed primarily of carbon dioxide, the atmosphere also has large amounts of radon and other radioactive elements that play havoc with electronic sensors. To make matters worse, the Drink’s stratosphere is wracked with unending lightning storms. Because of these phenomena, any ship that enters the atmosphere suffers a -9 penalty to all PER Rolls for electronic devices and a Suppress Radio-Based Communications 15d6.

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: VAXANDROS PRIME

Planet Name: Vaxandros Prime (Imperial designation: Vaxandros I)

Classification: Type 1

System Data: Two moons; five planets in system

Gravity: 1.0 G

Day And Year: 26 standard hours a day; 350 standard days a year

Atmosphere: Earth-like — 70% Nitrogen; 25% Oxygen; 5% Other

Hydrosphere: Water covers 80% of the planet’s surface

Meteorological Overview: Vaxandros Prime has the standard range of weather and climates for a Type 1 planet.

Sentient Species: The Snirrk

ATRI Rating: ATRI 9 (for Humans; ATRI 6 for Snirrk)

Government: Oligarchy based on land ownership

Affiliation: Senate world of the Terran Empire

Resources: Radioactives; *ferrishyi* bush

Places Of Note: Vaxandros High Port; Drago’s Tomb

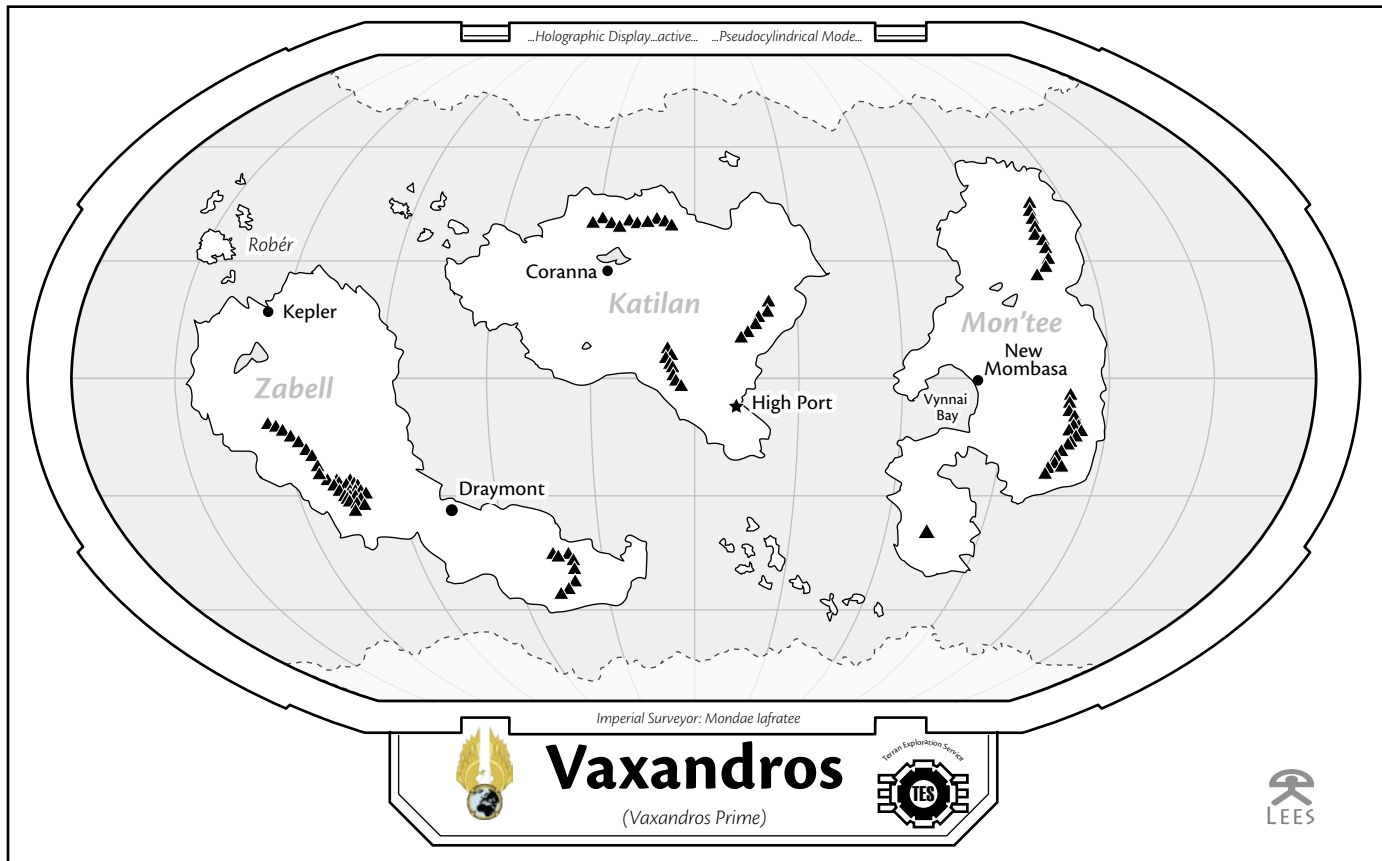
Ship Facilities: Vaxandros High Port

For decades smugglers and other criminals have used the Drink to hide from Imperial ships — Vaxandros II is only 0.2 AU away from Prime, less than half the distance between Earth and Mars, and the Navy has lost count of the number of smugglers who’ve made it off-planet, covered the short distance, and disappeared into the Drink. High mountains with jagged peaks dominate the surface of the planet, and rumor has it the smugglers have maps of the peaks and, more importantly, the valleys where their frigates can come near the surface, further cloaking them from the authorities. Though the Navy has proposed several plans for eliminating this smuggler’s haven, all of them have been catastrophic (for example, burning away the planet’s ozone layer and allowing its atmosphere to escape into the vacuum of space), so Prime’s planetary government has fought vehemently against them.

The Wreck

Vaxandros V also serves the needs of smugglers, but in a different way. Nicknamed “the Wreck,” it’s a broken planet with a broken moon. Astronomers believe the moon crashed into the planet millennia ago due to some unknown event that disrupted the planet’s orbit. The moon and planet are similar in size (slightly smaller than the Sol System’s Mercury) and are caught in an eclectic orbit, each of the bodies spinning around the other in a field of whirling debris resulting from the collision. This debris is rife with radioactives and plays havoc with sensors (a -6 penalty to all PER Rolls for electronic devices and a Suppress Radio-Based Communications 8d6). Huge crevasses run through the surfaces of both planet and moon, and on the planet they’re so deep they sometimes expose the planet’s core, which has cooled and become solid. The interiors of both are shot through with hollows, accessible from the crevasses and large enough to hold Medium-size or smaller starships — just right to serve as a temporary refuge for the typical smuggler’s frigate.

Mining the Wreck has become one of the primary sources of income for the system, and the spacelanes in the immediate vicinity of the planet are clogged with cargo ships, freighters, and transport ships that ferry miners and engineers to and from the surface. These ships serve as cover for criminal vessels. Between them and the sensor interference, properly patrolling Vaxandros V is a nearly impossible task. The Navy doesn’t believe there are any permanent starship facilities serving the needs of smugglers on the Wreck — it thinks smugglers use the planet to offload and hide illicit cargo until they can arrange to find a buyer or



hiding place on Prime. Every miner who works the planet has heard tales of cargo left behind when a smuggler was captured or killed and hopes to strike it rich when he stumbles upon one of these caches of “buried treasure.”

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Vaxandros Prime is an Earth-like planet where trees never evolved. Vast plains stretching from horizon to horizon lie between weather-worn mountain ranges on the world's three continents. No plant life on Prime grows higher than waist-high, and a single genus of bush has come to dominate the land with a tenacity comparable to Terran kudzu.

THE FERRISH PLANT

The *ferrish* is a spindly shrub with fragile, skeletal branches. It grows to an average height of two feet and looks similar in some ways to Terran tumbleweed. From the end of each of its sparse, reddish-brown, narrow, blade-shaped leaves protrudes a sharp thorn. *Ferrishyi* blossom once a year in the Spring, and the color and scent of a *ferrish* blossom is the primary visual means of identifying a species. The most common species has a sickly pink flower with a rank scent that smells like rotting meat; this species is commonly known as the corpse bush (*bupp ferrish* in the native tongue of the Snirrk). In stark contrast to the corpse bush, the empress

bush (so-called because Empress Ximena adored the blossoms as well as the perfume produced from them) has pale blue blossoms with a unique scent that's often compared to jasmine, but is more subtle. The blossoms become berries by mid-summer. The leaves of a *ferrish* are edible and these are a staple of the diet of the Snirrk as well as of many other mammals on the planet. The berries are considered a delicacy — though Humans dislike the leaves they enjoy the berries. *Ferrishyi* dominate the plains and lower mountain slopes of Vaxandros Prime, and on many of the plains that's all one can see. For fear of the damage it might cause to other worlds' ecosystems, it's absolutely forbidden to transport *ferrishyi* off-planet, which has helped make Prime's perfume industry (see below) a highly profitable one.

ANIMAL LIFE

Vaxandros Prime hosts countless forms of native life, much of which revolves around the ecosystem created by *ferrishyi*. Some of the better known animals include the armadillo-like *basher-snigh*, which subsists on the roots of the bush and has become a favorite stuffed animal among children in the Terran Empire; the alligator-sized reptilian *snirrkush* (“snirrk eater”), which sits low to the ground on its six legs, hides within the branches of *ferrishyi* plants, and eats anything it can fit in its huge maw; and the sentient Snirrk, a species that has thrived since the coming of Humans to their planet (see below).

Places Of Note

Vaxandros isn't exactly a tourist destination, but it does have a few locations of interest.

DRAGO'S TOMB

Stories of the infamous pirate Drago, the criminal who lent his name to the lawless Drago's Reach, are numerous in Vaxandros's sector of space. The most interesting story — at least to the greedy — tells about his tomb. While it's true there's no record of his capture, the story of his death is muddled, and most people question whether he ever lived at all.

One story states that Drago, as he neared the end of his days, developed a morbid fascination with death that stemmed from his insatiable greed. He became obsessed with ancient religions, especially those that preached that what a man was buried with journeyed with him into the afterlife. Like many greedy men, Drago wanted to take all his ill-gotten wealth with him. Eventually coming to believe he could, he had a glorious tomb built, and when he died, he had his first mate bury him there. Never one to trust his crew and believing he needed a good right hand in the hereafter, Drago trapped the tomb so the first mate would be buried alive with his dead captain.

In the stories the location of the tomb is never specified, but supposedly it was an Earth-like world somewhere in or around Drago's Reach. Many people who believe the story think Vaxandros Prime is a likely location. Numerous treasure hunters have searched for the tomb, but no one has ever found it — or at least found it and returned to tell the tale. The trap-guarded tomb supposedly contains much of the loot Drago pirated in his last decade of life.

VAXANDROS HIGH PORT

High Port is the name of Prime's starship facility — the largest in the spinward area of Human space — and the most populous of the planet's five cities. The port and city got their start as the center for colonization, but have grown considerably since then. A mazy network of space stations and satellites in geosynchronous orbit serves as a dock for starships, and a bank of eight orbital elevators shuttle travelers, workers, and cargo back and forth to the city. In addition to the public and private facilities, the Imperial Navy maintains its own shuttle service to the sector of the city which houses many Imperial facilities. Although never officially named the center of planetary government, High Port is the location for the main offices of government bureaucracies, as well as the meeting place for the Vaxandros Steering Committee, making it the *de facto* capital.

Despite its size, the High Port is extremely crowded, and Prime's government has recently solicited proposals for a second one. However, the four other cities are already wrangling over who gets the privilege of hosting the second port, so it's unlikely one will open any time soon — much to the chagrin of the Navy, which feels that one of the reasons smugglers move so freely on Prime is because the High Port is too busy to effectively screen travelers, let alone identify criminals.

HISTORY

Relative to many other worlds in the Terran Empire, the history of Vaxandros Prime is uneventful. The Terran Exploration Service discovered the planet late in the twenty-fifth century; the first colonists made planetfall in 2511.

By that time, Humanity had worked out the details of safe and efficient colonization, and though the first colonists faced difficulties, they had the support of an interstellar government to help them through rough times. Because it was colonized so late, it missed the upheavals of the Xenovore Wars and the Anarchic Period, and because it's located spinward of the Heartworlds, the Galactic War, as well as the Thorgon and Ackálian incursions before and since, had little impact on the inhabitants.

The native species, the Snirrk, never fought against the Human colonists, or even protested their coming and claiming all the land as their own. Other than making a nuisance of themselves, the Snirrk have happily adopted Human civilization. They don't even care that they have no say in the government of their homeworld. All in all, it's a place that's known peace for the nearly century and a half of its existence, and its colonization has proceeded apace.

THE PEOPLE

The inhabitants of Vaxandros Prime are called Vaxandrosians, although in conversation this is shortened to Drosians or Vaxans. While the system is best known throughout the Terran Empire for smuggling and piracy, the average Drosian is a hard-working, simple person. Most of the original settlers came for a better life, and that was only 129 years ago, so the current inhabitants haven't entirely forgotten their past. Ninety percent of the population lives in one of the five cities on Prime. Each with a population of approximately forty million Humans, these cities are huge, sprawling urban areas. Most people rent an apartment in one of the towering skyscrapers that dominate the cityscape. The apartment buildings are central to an individual's social life and hold most everything a person could need, from nightclubs and groceries to beauty salons and hardware stores. Apartments range in size from small studios for single young adults living on their own for the first time to large suites with room enough for upwards of twenty people that house generations of the same family of Drosians.

The largest industry on Prime is mining — hundreds of mining firms prospect the Wreck, and they employ millions of people. A miner usually signs a three- or six-month contract with a firm. Although single young men and women often work several consecutive terms in an attempt to save some money, most miners work three or six months at a stretch, with one or two months off between contracts. Because the miners are absent,

extended families often live together and share the responsibilities of raising the children. It's not unusual to find three generations, plus numerous cousins and other relations, living in the same apartment. Though the working conditions are hazardous and the work is backbreaking (not to mention the psychological strain of living in the rough conditions of the Wreck), a miner can provide a solidly middle class lifestyle for his family.

It's only in recent decades that Humans have begun to move out of the cities and into the wilderness. A lack of native building materials, especially wood, has slowed progress in this area, but the government has started subsidizing residents willing to move because the cities are bursting at the seams. Most of these frontiersmen work as farmers who eternally fight the encroaching *ferrishyi* to keep their farms clear so they can bring in good crops, but they often must resort to signing a mining contract to make ends meet.

THE SNIRRK

When Human supremacists begin to rant about manifest destiny and Humanity's superiority to other species in the Galaxy, they frequently use the Snirrk as the quintessential example of a so-called vermin species. And when species protectionists argue that Humanity needs to be more careful in its encounters with other, more primitive species, the Snirrk are the poster children.

Snirrk Biology

The Snirrk are short, with an average height of three feet for both males and females — just tall enough to see over a *ferrish*, as a Snirrk is fond of pointing out in his screeching, growling voice. They have spindly arms that reach their knees and short legs that give them a waddling walk. The main part of their body mass is below the waist, giving them a distinctly pear-shaped appearance, and an overweight Snirrk puts all the extra pounds on below the belt, so to speak. With the advent of Humanity, many of the Snirrk do have a weight problem, which some well-intentioned Humans consider a dire epidemic, but as far as a Snirrk is concerned, he'd rather die young and well-fed than live starving and hunted by *snirrkush* like his ancestors did.

Snirrks have pale pink skin mottled with grey and brown splotches. Their only hair grows in tufts at random places on their body — anywhere from the top of the

head, to the palms, to the bottoms or tops of their feet. The hair of these unattractive (to Human eyes, at least) tufts grows out to three or four inches long, is kinked and wiry, and usually brown in color, darkening to black as a Snirrk ages. The locations of these tufts determines beauty among the Snirrk. An attractive female has tufts on her shoulders and back, and less fortunate females shave the tufts on their stomach and face; a handsome male has tufts on either side of his snout and over his eyes, and a man without tufts on his face is considered to lack virility (tuft toupees are a profitable industry).

A Snirrk has a short blunt snout that ends in a quivering wet nose, pinkish-grey hackles, and multiple rows of sharp teeth. His teeth decay quickly and grow throughout his lifetime, with a new set coming in every eight to ten years. The species has no appreciation of oral hygiene, let alone dentistry, so an adult Snirrk's mouth usually has a front row of blackish-green, broken teeth, a second row of yellowish-brown teeth in various states of decay, and a third row of stubby white spikes where his new teeth are emerging. But few species with a sense of smell are willing to come close enough to a Snirrk's mouth to examine all those rows of teeth — the decay makes for a reek that's hard to describe and harder to stomach. A Snirrk's beady black eyes are deep-set in the fleshy folds of his face. He has no external ears, just holes on either side of his head.



SNIRRK PACKAGE DEAL

Cost Ability

6 +2 DEX

-4 -2 EGO

-2 -2 INT

5 *Sharp Teeth*: HKA 1 point (½d6 with STR)

Total Cost Of Package Abilities: 5

Value Disadvantage

10 Choose one of the following two Disadvantages: Dependence (some Terran vice [smoking, drinking, narcotics, and so on] once per 6 Hours or suffer Incompetence) (Common, Addiction); or Psychological Limitation: Hedonistic And Short-Sighted (Common, Moderate)

Total Value Of Package Disadvantages: 10

Before the advent of Humanity, Snirrk life was nasty, brutish, and short — a Snirrk was lucky to see thirty Terran years, and forty was considered an elder. Nowadays, Snirrk live to fifty or sixty, and most xenobiologists believe Snirrks could easily live to eighty if they took better care of their health. A Snirrk is considered an adult at twelve, and they mate for life (supposedly; faithless husbands and wives are common, and the Human custom of divorce is one of their favorite things about the coming of Humanity).

Snirrk Society And Culture

The Snirrk *love* Humanity — well, actually, they find that Humans are often overbearing, self-righteous, and arrogant. But the Snirrk *do* love Human culture, at least its baser elements. While they adore alcohol and drugs, Human food is their first love. Sugar cane doesn't grow on Vaxandros Prime, and many modern Snirrk can't believe their ancestors lived without sweets, especially chocolate. Their ancestors also ate their meat raw, and Snirrk don't understand why none of them every thought of frying the meat in fat. All these culinary innovations and more were unheard of less than two centuries ago, but now one can't travel ten feet in a Snirrk slum without passing a cart selling sweets or an open air stall where meat patties are being fried on a sizzling grill.

The Snirrk no longer have their own culture. They have willingly, even happily, abandoned the ways of the past and taken Human culture as their own. Not a single Snirrk has ever complained; the only ones concerned about it are members of other species, who wonder what the Snirrk lost and believe that loss is potentially damaging. The Snirrk scoff at the idea... and in truth, their old culture was geared entirely to survival. Unlike many sentient species, the Snirrk never climbed to the top of their world's food chain. They were both predator and prey, and more often the prey. That said, they haven't taken on all aspects of Humanity's culture, just the ones that make life easier and more entertaining.

The Snirrk live in their own communities — species ghettos, as the xenosociologists call them — although the segregation is voluntary. They don't want to participate in the same cul-

ture as Humanity; they have instead created their own version of it. These shanty towns lie in the shadow of a city's skyscrapers and on the edges of civilization. In general, Snirrk live at ATRI 6 — an old-fashioned television ranks up there with fired foods and divorce as one of their favorite things. The television shows are produced and broadcast by Snirrks, with a few Human investors funding their endeavors in entertainment media. They're partial to sitcoms and soap operas.

The Snirrk perform much of the menial, unskilled labor on the planet and hold positions in Vaxandros Prime's lesser service industries. They can be found everywhere from janitorial positions, to working the planet's spaceport as baggage handlers, to performing manual labor on farms and ranches. They're notorious for only staying at a job long enough to earn enough credits to live on for a few months, so numerous Snirrk employment agencies have sprung up. Usually operated by a Human, a Snirrk employment agency guarantees its client that a certain number of Snirrk will show up for work each day; it does *not* guarantee the same Snirrk will return day after day, just that the employer will have a large enough workforce to get the work done. Snirrk also labor as a pickers for Shaylaa Perfumes and the other smaller companies. The work fits the Snirrk work ethic to a T — when a Snirrk needs some money, he travels out of the city onto the plains of *ferrishyi* and fills baskets with blossoms. Then he turns the baskets into the perfume plant for two credits a basket. Most Snirrk ghettos have buses traveling daily to and from the fields during the springtime. More industrious, reliable Snirrk have found employment in Prime's considerable black market economy — and according to the Intelligence Bureau, Prime's chief law enforcement agency, the warehousing for the majority of illicit goods smuggled to the planet is in the Snirrk ghettos.

On the whole, Humans detest the Snirrk. Members of other species often joke that it's because the Snirrk have held up a mirror to Humanity's society, and the Humans don't like what they see.

Government

The colonization of Vaxandros Prime was one of the Terran Empire's many experiments in privatizing the settlement of new planets. In this case, the rights to colonize were given to a company specifically created for the purpose, the Vaxandrosian Settlement Company (VSC). The VSC originally owned all the land on Vaxandros Prime, and its charter would only be renewed if it met certain population quotas (and later, specific economic goals). Individuals and corporations settling on the planet purchased land from the VSC. Because the VSC only profited from the sale of land, this drove it to emphasize land ownership, which led to the current planetary government. (The VSC still owns all the land on Prime not claimed by an individual or, more often, a corporation. It also acts as a middleman on all sales of real property,

and has ultimate approval of any transaction, although in practice this is nothing more than a rubber stamp approval.)

The planetary government is an oligarchy with membership based on land ownership. The Vaxandros Steering Committee controls much of the day-to-day functioning of government with the help of a bureaucracy. The Committee consists of eleven members, one of whom is voted Chairman by the membership. Committee members are selected by vote of the landowners, and each landowner (including corporations) has one vote per square kilometer of land owned. This has some odd consequences.

First, to better have access to the powers-that-be and wield influence over the government, many offworld companies own vast tracts of land out in the middle of nowhere. Some of these companies don't even maintain offices on Prime. For example, the Cetian transportation conglomerate InStarCo owns a single square kilometer located in the polar regions simply so it has access to recordings of the public sessions of the Steering Committee. Second, even some firms based on Prime own land they use simply for votes. A good example of this is the realty companies who own the apartment buildings where many Drosians live. Skyscrapers go up, not out, and to have more control over the government, the realty companies have bought up a considerable amount of cheap land away from the five cities.

Governmental reform is a frequent topic of discussion (especially when information like the fact that corporations headquartered offworld own 65% of the land on Prime are brought to the public's attention by the media), but so far nothing

has come of it. The main economic concern is that the owners of this land aren't developing it, which could someday stunt Vaxandros Prime's growth. As long as the economy continues to grow, most Drosians don't seem to care who's running the place.

City government mirrors the planetary government, with each city having its own steering committee. However, only people and business entities who own land within the city limits can vote. Given that the amount of land (and thus votes) within a city's limits is finite, this has some interesting effects on city politics and real estate transactions.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Law enforcement is loose and sporadic on Vaxandros Prime, but the laws themselves conform to Imperial standards. Apartment buildings employ their own security personnel to provide for the safety of their tenants, and some other public facilities like mass transit and port authorities do the same. Important offworld visitors are advised to bring their own bodyguards if they're concerned for their safety.

The single planetary law enforcement agency is the *Intelligence Bureau*, which is a combination law enforcement and espionage agency. The Intelligence Bureau doesn't maintain a uniformed force — its employees are agents, investigators, analysts, and so on — and it mainly serves the needs of business on Vaxandros Prime. But any serious felony (such as murder or major theft) falls within the jurisdiction of the Bureau; investigators in the Civilian Crimes Division handle these. Due to pressure from the Empire, the Intelligence Bureau also attempts to keep smuggling on the planet in check. Though the



Imperial government often criticizes the Bureau's efforts, in fairness its job isn't easy. Because it's still a developing economy, Vaxandros Prime isn't much of a market for illicit goods. It's only a way station, and that makes it difficult to track down smugglers (since the standard way of busting a smuggling ring is to locate the buyers and follow back up the distribution network from there).

The Vaxandros government has occasionally petitioned the Imperial court for permission to establish its own System Authority to patrol the system, usually at the behest of the mining firms. Because of its lackadaisical prosecution of smugglers, though, permission has always been denied — instead, the Imperial Navy handles patrols.

Famous Vaxandrosians

Vaxandros Prime doesn't have many citizens who are well-known outside the system. Some of the exceptions include:

CAPTAIN JORGE "CLAWHAND" CRUZ

Clawhand Cruz is one of the most notorious of the smugglers reputed to make regular stops in the Vaxandros system. A former Navy captain, he went rogue after he was ordered to open fire on a civilian ship that was supposedly a cover for smugglers transporting weapons of mass destruction to terrorists on Rusalka. After sensor scans of the wreckage showed no evidence of such weapons, Captain Cruz gave his crew the choice of abandoning ship or leaving the Navy with him. That was three years ago, and he continues to elude Imperial forces. He gained his nickname from his prosthetic arm and the simple pincer attachment he uses instead of more natural-looking hand. The captain smuggles controlled substances almost exclusively... and despite his principles about killing civilians, he isn't a nice man.

SYBIL LAUDELL

The spokeswoman and model for Shaylaa Perfumes for the last five years, Sybil Laudell is famous throughout the Terran Empire and even beyond. Her face has graced every ad produced for Shaylaa's product, and she's appeared on countless Top Ten Most Beautiful Women in the Galaxy lists — except for this last year. Rumor has it Sybil's starting to show her age, and Shaylaa will soon be looking for a new model (traditionally a woman from Vaxandros Prime). But recent interviews suggest that Sybil isn't going to leave the company quietly, and gossipmongers Empire-wide can't wait for the fireworks to start.

Economy

Mining the Wreck is central to Prime's economy, although in some ways it's stunted growth on the planet itself. The mining industry consists primarily of small firms — typically one to five people who own a ship capable of transporting workers and/or cargo, with the support of some administrative personnel planetside. Although there's been some consolidation of firms, either through buy-outs or mergers, the typical mining company remains small. Economists predict that within the next hundred years there'll only be three or four large conglomerates, but until then, all one needs to start a mining firm is a freighter and some capital to hire miners and engineers. By law, anyone can prospect the Wreck, but no one can stake a permanent claim — a person can only mine an area as long as someone is on-site representing his interests. The government of Prime takes its cut when it taxes the ore.

Vaxandros's most profitable industry (although it is neither the largest employer, nor the greatest contributor to Gross Planetary Product) is perfume manufacturing. Shaylaa Perfumes, famous for Drosian Night and Empress's Choice (the favorite of Empress Ximena), is the largest of these, but many smaller perfumers exist. All of these perfumes are made from *ferrishyi* blossoms, and because transportation of the bush off-planet is forbidden, the companies have a protected monopoly on their product. Rival offworld manufacturers have attempted everything from synthetically manufacturing the scent to illegally growing *ferrishyi*, but the artificial scents never capture the essence of the blossoms, and all the companies with secret *ferrishyi* gardens have come to bad ends — smuggling seeds off Prime isn't difficult, but hiding a garden large enough to produce commercial quantities of perfume is.

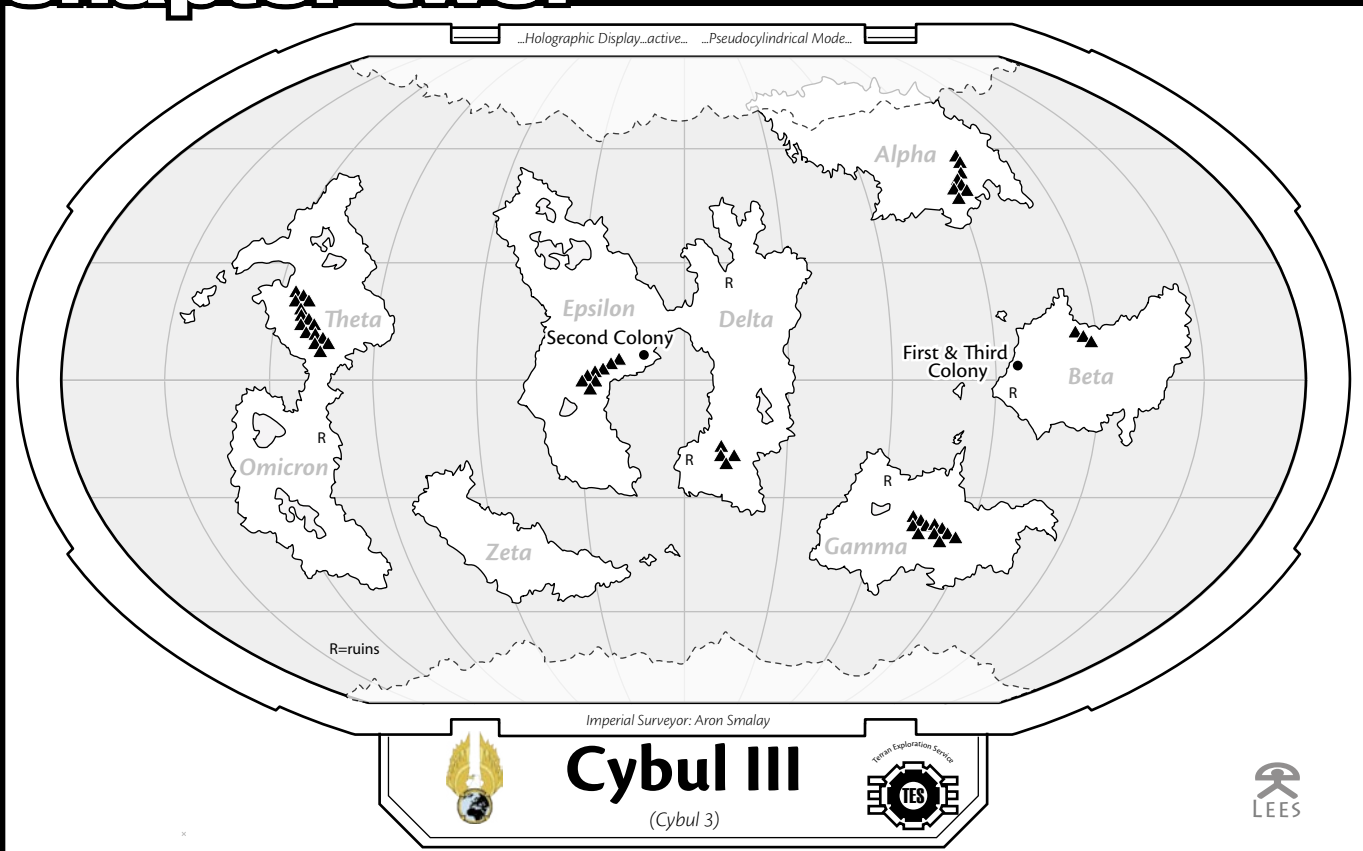
Within the last fifty years, the planet has pushed hard to produce enough food to feed its own populace, even going so far as to subsidize the settlement of wilderness regions. It has come near this goal within the last decade, and food-stuffs are no longer its chief import — consumer electronics top the list.

WORLDS OF EMPIRE

Here's a brief summary of the known worlds described in this book:

Planet	Description	Page
Ackál	Homeworld of the Ackálians and throneworld of their Empire	112
Adamant	Commerce and manufacturing planet in the Frontier, headquarters for the Core Fleet	58
Cybul III	The “haunted planet” whose natives, the Zerlians, now exist as dangerous psychic “ghosts”	63
Dorvala	Homeworld of the Perseids, rich in history and tradition	117
Emerald	Colony world known for the Emerald Institute and its radical Laws of Sentience	6
Fexao	Homeworld of the felinoid Fex	12
H'rotha	Former Type I world transformed into an ice planet by a scientific catastrophe; home to the H'rothans	67
Halcyon	Privately-owned resort planet offering just about any sort of recreation imaginable	18
Hermetica	Colony world dominated by psionics	23
Mon'da	Homeworld of the Mon'dabi and capital of their Federation	123
New Alexandria	Colony world founded by scholars; home of the famed New Library university	74
Polyphemus	A world inhabitable only in the massive crater created by an asteroid collision	79
Ravanche	A mysterious, highly-radioactive, once-inhabited world in the Thorgon Neutral Zone	128
Rigel V	Homeworld of the Rigelians, rich in culture and history	30
Sigma Caeruleus III	Kinzareth Imperium colony world inhabited by the native Zarr, Yezidi tribesmen, and the Kinzareth; home of the “cult” of Tranta Shun	85
Tau Ceti	Three worlds: Tau Ceti II, home to small settlements of environmentally-conscious tech workers; Tau Ceti III, a planet of domed cities run by industrialists and capitalists; and Tau Ceti V-A, home to factories and their workers	35
Tetsuo	A.k.a. Graveyard, a marginal world devastated by fighting during the Galactic War; home to many scavengers and bandits	92
Toracta	Homeworld of the Toractans, who work as laborers throughout Imperial space	97
Tridymite Beta	Mineral-rich home of the mysterious (and odd) Cristobalites	101
Trovatore	A.k.a. Archipelago, a world of islands home to many odd political philosophies and hedonistic lifestyles	42
Vaxandros Prime	A planet devoted mostly to commerce (and smuggling) based on two other in-system planets (“the Drink” and “the Wreck”); homeworld of the Snirrk	49
Venwordien IV	A pirates' haven in the Vorðan Expanse, ruled by the Captains' Council	131
Vinarcus	A.k.a. Plateau, a world where the only inhabitable regions are on top of the plateaus Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos	105

chapter two:



MINOR WORLDS

ADAMANT



The Adamant system consists of three planets orbiting a Type G yellow dwarf star with the Imperial designation Alpha Kurkov (the inhabitants of Adamant simply call it Kurkov). The other two planets, Alpha Kurkov II and III, are both Type 9 worlds — small gas giants with multiple moons.

Kurkov III is notable for two of its two moons, Achilles and Hector, which serve as the headquarters for the Core Fleet. They earned their names because the moon Achilles follows closely behind Hector as both orbit the planet. Together the two moons are one of the most heavily-defended installations in Human space, and definitely the best-fortified installation in this part of the Frontier. Achilles serves as spaceport, dry dock, and training facility, while Hector is the headquarters for bureaucratic and administrative personnel and the location of the largest hospital in the Frontier. There's an hourly shuttle service between the two moons for enlisted men and low to mid-level officers (higher ranking officers have private shuttles), and a daily shuttle that runs between Hector and the Navy satellite orbiting Adamant.

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: ADAMANT

Planet Name: Adamant (Imperial designation: Alpha Kurkov I)

Classification: Type 1

System Data: One moon; two other planets in the system

Gravity: 1.0 G

Day And Year: 31 standard hours a day; 345 standard days a year

Atmosphere: Earth-like — 72% Nitrogen; 20% Oxygen; 8% Other

Hydrosphere: Water covers 69% of the planet's surface

Meteorological Overview: Adamant has the standard range of weather and climates for a Type 1 planet, but with notable extremes of temperature during winter and summer

Sentient Species: None native

ATRI Rating: ATRI 10 in cities; ATRI 8 elsewhere

Government: Governor appointed by Imperial court

Affiliation: Colony world of the Terran Empire, located in the Frontier region

Resources: Manufacturing, processing, and refining; trade

Places Of Note: Orsen City; Market Town

Ship Facilities: Market Town

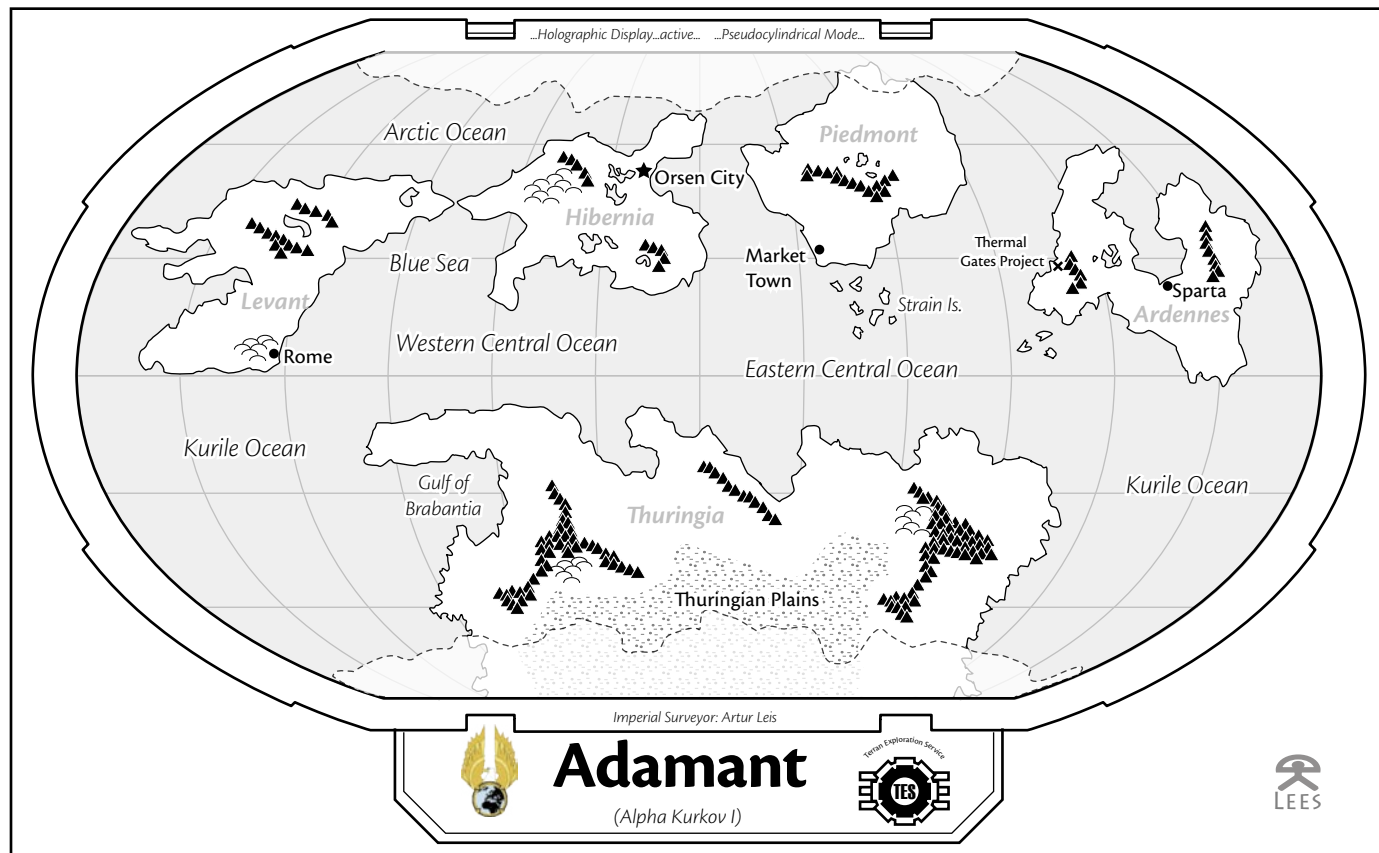
A third Kurkov III moon, Odysseus, has facilities for the Terran Exploration Services. The TES maintains a small spaceport and an attached office, both of which it established nearly a century before the naval base, so they're beginning to show their age. The ship facilities are several decades out of date — crews can perform routine maintenance there, but any extensive repairs must be handled on Achilles (a situation that rankles members of the Exploration Service).

Rumors persist that the Navy also maintains a presence on one or more of the many moons orbiting Kurkov II, although the stories vary about the purpose of those facilities. Some say they're for developing experimental weapons and the like; others claim they're secret prison camps. The Navy denies having a presence on Kurkov II.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Adamant is a Type 1 world about half the size and mass of Earth with an Earth-like atmosphere and large, shallow oceans. Four of the world's five continents are found in one hemisphere, and these serve as home for the planet's one billion residents (the large southern continent remains mostly unsettled). The planet has an eccentric orbit about its star, giving it extreme seasons. During the fall and spring the global climate is moderate, but summer temperatures are unbearably hot in the equatorial regions (averaging 50° Celsius [122° F]) while the poles are a moderate 10° C (50° F). In the winter the opposite is true, with the equatorial regions plunging to a chilly -4° C (25° F) average while the poles are an unlivable -43° C (-45° F).

These extremes of temperature have had a unique impact on the world's flora and fauna. Plants on Adamant live fast and die young (as the Adamantians put it). The tropical regions are dominated by forests of deciduous trees, while the areas near the poles are home to numerous types of grasses and flowers. The polar regions are entirely barren during the winter, but come spring, as the snows melt and flood the lowlands, plants rapidly sprout, blossom, bears fruit, and die. The herbivores on Adamant migrate when the seasons begin to change; predators either follow the herds or hibernate.



Places Of Note

Some of the places characters on Adamant might visit include:

ORSEN CITY

Orsen City is the capital of Adamant. Home to two million people, the city is dedicated to government and hosting representatives from industrial firms and the Imperial court. Little else goes on in the city, although it does maintain the smaller of Adamant's two spaceports. A joint government-civilian committee, the Orsen Improvement Task Force, is working to improve the city, create more opportunities for things to do, and enhance its image, but so far has made slow progress.

MARKET TOWN

With a population of five million, the portside city of Market Town is the central location for all the buying and selling that goes on in Adamant. Most of the city's actual physical space is dedicated to warehousing goods brought from all over the Frontier, with block after block of low, broad buildings separated by streets wide enough to allow large cargo vehicles to pass through easily. Rising above the buildings are numerous automated cranes that unload the vehicles and place their goods in storage. Only a few workers come to these neighborhoods, which are usually quiet at all hours of the day and dead silent at night.

The city center of Market Town is a different story. People rush to and fro down streets lined with skyscrapers, and despite Adamant being on the Frontier their clothes and attitudes seem little different than those found in the oldest and

wealthiest cities of the Heartworlds. The city center is home to the many markets and exchanges on Adamant, including the ones described below.

Market Town is notable for the diversity of species seen on its streets. Not only can members of many of the species in the Empire be found here, but also those from the Ackálian Empire and Mon'dabi Federation. Mon'dabi and Ackálian traders are welcome to buy and sell goods at the exchanges and markets (though Ackálian citizens must undergo extensive security checks before being permitted planetside), which can prove lucrative for those willing to make the journey and learn Human customs.

Adamant Metals Exchange

Nearly 5% of all the ore futures traded in the Empire are traded here, making it one of the largest markets of its type in Imperial space. The metals exchange is vital to Adamant's economy, since it's the primary source of raw materials for the planet's industry, and is highly regulated.

Colonial Stock And Bond Market

This market allows individuals and corporations to invest in colonization and terraforming efforts. It's easily the least busy of the many markets and exchanges in Market Town — it only erupts into a frenzy of buying and selling when the Ministry of Colonization and Development either announces a new colonization project (and thus the issuing of a new set of bonds) or reports bad news about an ongoing effort. Despite the tranquility, a great deal of money passes hands in its quiet drawing rooms and private parlors. A canny individual can make it rich on the Colonial Stock

Market as long as he has a good plan to colonize an unexploited planet, or at least a good sales pitch and winning smile — the Colonial Stock Market is notorious for its scams and frauds.

Frontier Commodities Exchange

Frontier planets sometimes live or die by how well their agents do in the Frontier Commodities Exchange. Here meat and grains futures are bought and sold, and for some planets this is the primary source of food (or income) for their residents. The Frontier Commodities Exchange is the most volatile of the futures markets in the Empire, with more fortunes won and lost and won again in a matter of nanoseconds than any other market in the Empire; it's also the third largest with almost 8% of all traditional commodities in Human space being exchanged here.

The Independent Commodities Exchange

More sophisticated brokers sometimes refer to this market for independent merchants as “the Flea Market.” Instead of futures contracts, it deals in actual commodities brought to the planet by traders. Though the money trading hands here is minuscule compared to the other markets, the Independent Commodities Exchange is an integral part of the economy of both Adamant and the Frontier. If something goes wrong with a futures contract, or maybe resources are running short on a planet due to poor planning or a disaster, factory and refinery owners come here for materials to keep their plants operating and labor force working in the short term. Planetary governments also go to the Independent Commodities Exchange to find a quick fix for food shortages and similar crises. In short, it's a godsend for small, private traders... including, no doubt, many player characters.

HISTORY

Once a military installation for the Xenovores, Adamant has served as an important headquarters for the Imperial Navy (and the TES before it) for nearly two centuries. It first came to prominence when it served as the field base for the fleet that repulsed the Ackálans in the Ackálian Border War of 2518. Though the fighting never reached the system itself, the flag officer and his fleet used the naval facilities to coordinate the defense of Human space. Once hostilities had ceased, the Navy proposed expanding the facilities and using them as the headquarters of the Core Fleet. It was obvious to everyone that the Ackálans would invade again — it was only a matter of when — and the need for a headquarters near the potential front was urgent.

Builders worked day and night to expand and update the facilities in the Adamant system. When the expected invasion finally came in 2548 with the outbreak of the Galactic War, the base was fully operational and served its intended purpose admirably. But the sheer size of the Ackálian force was too much for the Imperial defenses — the Core Fleet was unable to halt the offensive. The Adamant facilities were reduced to rubble in the planetary

assault, and rebuilding didn't begin until the end of hostilities in 2554.

Several decades later, the colonization and development of Adamant were planned. The planet was already well on its way to recovery after the depredations of the Xenovores, so it was a simple matter for Terran geologists and environmental scientists to speed its recovery. The Ministry for Colonization and Development intended Adamant to serve as an industrial center for the Frontier region — a trade nexus for raw materials shipped from other, less-developed planets in nearby systems. It would form the backbone of the Frontier's economy, increasing efficiency a hundredfold, and benefit from the protection established Navy forces could provide it. The proposal for developing Adamant flew through the approval channels — not only was the wisdom of such a plan apparent even to a layman, but it had corporate backing from numerous firms — and the settlement of Adamant began in 2578.

Adamant developed rapidly to meet its purpose: the first factory opened in 2581, and it had enough industrial facilities to meet demand by 2593. The Imperial government subsidized both advertising for laborers and transporting those laborers to the planet, so Adamant's population reached half a billion by the turn of the century. Since then, the planet has continued to grow as the Frontier region develops around it. Though it's still a rustic place by most Imperial standards, its markets have become some of the most lucrative in Human space.

THE PEOPLE

In general, the people of Adamant are hard-working, laconic folk who appreciate straight talk and simple answers. Life on the planet is hard, but not grueling, and its people are similar: hardy and close-mouthed, but not unfriendly and rarely cruel. They come from all over Imperial space, and although the population is predominantly Human, one can find practically any Imperial species among the workers. “The traveling classes,” as they're called on Adamant, live in mobile homes that they drive between work places during the yearly migrations (see below). Some, especially young adults just starting out on their own and workers newly immigrated to Adamant, only have a vehicle and a tent, but the government subsidizes loans for purchase of mobile homes (especially for couples) so it only takes a year or two of full-time work before most workers can purchase their own home. Of the billion people on Adamant, over seventy percent belong to the traveling classes.

The rest of the population either works for the government, in the service industries that cater to offworld visitors, in plant and factory management, or as agents in Market Town representing various industrial and trading concerns in the city's many futures and commodity markets. Most government employees and those working in the service industries live in the planet's capital, Orsen

City. The residents of Orsen and Market Town are far more sophisticated than the traveling classes, or even other city-dwellers in the Frontier, and keep up with the latest trends and fashions in the Heartworlds. Despite superficial similarities, the traders of Market Town are different in personality and attitude than their peers on the older planets of the Terran Empire. They have a frontier spirit and are more likely to take risks in business dealings... and to flaunt conventional wisdom and even financial regulations. Plant and factory managers, who live in high-tech domiciles with state of the art climate controls, stay year-round at their places of employment, serving as a skeleton crew in case of emergencies.

The Migration

Life for the traveling classes centers around the twice-yearly migration the majority of the population makes as they travel from the factories and refineries at the equator to those in the polar regions. This allows them to avoid the worst extremes of temperature Adamant experiences. Each migration lasts a Terran month; this allows for time to pack up, travel, and settle in. Families travel together in caravans, usually groups of 400-500 people, and never too far from other caravans. Although the migration isn't without dangers (usually due to inclement weather), a migration is in many ways a month-long vacation. The migrations are a period of celebration and socialization, allowing workers ample time to recover from the long weeks of work and prepare for the next season's labors. People get re-acquainted with old friends; extended families spend time together; weddings are held; and young people can meet potential spouses.

Government

Because of Adamant's importance to the Frontier region (not to mention the Empire in general), the Imperial government takes a more active hand in Adamantian matters than it does in most border worlds. The Empress appoints the governor of Adamant, usually selecting a talented administrator at the end of his career. The governor's primary job is to maintain the status quo, so he's usually an even-tempered conservative. The people are peaceable, so they don't need an iron fist — just a firm hand to keep things running smoothly. The systems and processes are already efficient, so the planet doesn't need an innovator or eccentric. Because of the presence of traders from the Mon'dabi Federation and Ackálian Empire, the governor is traditionally far more interested in peaceful relations with the other galactic civilizations than his conservative peers elsewhere in the Empire.

Assisting the governor is a vice-governor and a Cabinet Of Secretaries from all the Imperial ministries. The vice-governor is an elected official who's voted into office by all adult residents of Adamant. The vice-governor serves both as a watchdog on



the other government positions and as the voice of the people in the cabinet. The governor appoints his secretaries, ostensibly with input from the vice-governor. They run the major bureaus of government, such as Education and Housing, Energy and Resource Development, and Finance and Commerce. The most important representative from the Imperial government is a Vice Admiral (as of 2640, Theodore Blaine) who speaks for the Navy; he has a lot of influence because of the significant naval presence in the system.

Below the planetary government are city and territory administrators, all of whom the governor appoints. City and territory administrators appoint a sheriff for their district, and the sheriff is responsible for hiring deputies. Most crimes on Adamant are either misdemeanors like public intoxication, or property crimes like theft and dealing in black market goods, so the need for large police forces is minimal. The Adamant Bureau of Investigation, an organization run by the planetary government, serves as a "detective division" for law enforcement; a sheriff can request an investigator at his discretion. A governor-appointed judge presides over all cases, determining both the guilt or innocence of the accused party and the guilty's sentence.

Famous Adamantians

Some Adamantians the PCs might have heard of include:

GOVERNOR ELEANOR FOSWELL

As of 2640 the Governor of Adamant is Eleanor Foswell, a former member of the Terran Exploration Service. A firebrand in her youth, Foswell's posting to Adamant was something of a mixed blessing — a recognition of her superior abilities as an administrator, but also a way to get her away from the enemies she made during her time with the TES. She's done an able job with Adamant over the last twenty years, even keeping the peace with the Imperial Navy's representatives, but she recently turned in her resignation, announcing her intent to retire no later than 2642. Empress Marissa knows she'll be hard to replace — finding an administrator talented enough to handle the planet who'll also accept the posting without being resentful is no easy task — so she's trying to convince Foswell to stay. Foswell apparently intends to remain on Adamant after retiring.

ALAIN GRIECO

One of the wealthiest men on Adamant, Grieco is a former TES explorer who quit the Exploration Service to become a private trader. After many profitable years at that pursuit, he settled on Adamant and became a commodities broker. He's been so successful at selling and buying futures that he owns an enormous mansion in Market Town. He's even established a company, Grieco Emphyrean Trading, that hires explorer-traders like he used to be to search for new goods and markets. No one knows the Adamantian markets like he does. In his spare time he enjoys flying hovercrafts (particularly ones from his large personal fleet of "sports" models), sailing his yacht, and collecting antique liquor bottles.

NORNASH

On a world where most of the populace migrates by mobile home, racing is a popular sport — and on the "stock mobile home" racing circuit, no driver's more famous than Nornash. A pugnacious Toractan with lightning-fast reflexes, an in-depth knowledge of Perseid poetry, and a taste for fine wine, he makes millions of credits from his racing victories and the endorsement deals they bring him. He's been the celebrity spokesman for the Siridyne Rapidhome company for many years.

Economy

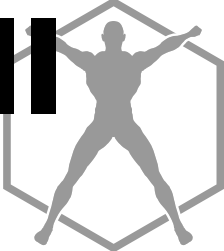
Adamant is integral to the Empire's economy, since without it the resources of nearby systems would be sorely underutilized. The raw products — metal ore, wood, radioactives — of dozens of sparsely-inhabited, underdeveloped worlds flow into Adamant where they're traded in Market Town (and often end up in Adamant's factories and refineries). This allows corporations to pay only for shipping finished goods to the rest of the Empire and points beyond.

Adamant is often used as a successful example of Imperial social engineering and economic planning. Its people are content, and it provides a place to go for Imperial citizens and subjects in need of work. The only dissenters are those who feel Adamant's existence has stunted the economic growth of other planets in the Frontier region. They argue that since so much processing and assembly work takes place on Adamant, there's no incentive to build industrial infrastructure on other planets. That leaves those planets as little more than places to be exploited as efficiently as possible and gives their inhabitants limited employment opportunities — namely, low-paying, high-risk jobs like mining.

Though supporters of the Empire and Imperial officials dismiss these dissenters, arguing that without Adamant those other planets would never be colonized at all (let alone developed), some colonists on those world have taken the arguments to heart. Protests on worlds sending their resources to Adamant have increased, and protest groups have started attracting members from beyond the working classes.

In the last few decades the Empire has restricted trade in the Frontier so that cargoes of certain goods, especially those relevant to the military, must pass through Adamant. The Empire claims it passed these restrictions to increase efficiency, but they've effectively turned Adamant into a monopoly, giving buyers at the commodities exchanges the upper hand when negotiating prices. Both traders and owners on the planets sending raw materials to Adamant have begun to resent this and are considering the advantages of developing factories and refineries on their own planets. Whether the Empire will allow them to do this or step in to stymie their plans remains to be seen. On one hand, decentralized industry makes it harder for an enemy — the Ackálans, in this case — to hurt the Imperial economy during a war. On the other hand, centralized industry increases efficiency and reduces costs associated with maintaining and increasing military might.

CYBUL III



The type G star Cybul, similar in most respects to Sol, lies coreward of the Spinward Crescent. The system contains five planets. Cybul III is described below; the other four planets cannot support life.

Cybul I is a Type 5 world — airless and rocky, with temperatures on the surface reaching 200° C (392° F) — with an eccentric orbit. It has no resources that would make it worth the effort of creating the domed cities necessary for a colonization project.

Cybul II is a Type 3 world with a thin atmosphere that's low in oxygen. Although it's a candidate for terraforming, none of the proposals submitted to the Empire for consideration have gone beyond the initial planning stages. Resource-wise it's an unspectacular place, and the Empire considers colonizing this region a low priority, preferring instead to focus its efforts on the Frontier to better bolster its defenses against attacks from the Ack-álian and/or Thorgon Empires. Furthermore, Imperial analysts predict that any nascent colonies in the area will come to harbor smugglers from Drago's Reach — especially if economic conditions are poor — and the Empire has little interest in providing criminals with another port in the area.

Cybul IV and V are both Type 9 worlds with numerous moons. None of the moons seem to be likely candidates for economic exploitation, much less colonization.

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: CYBUL III

Planet Name: Cybul III

Classification: Type 1

System Data: Two moons in orbit; four other planets in system

Gravity: 1.0 G

Day And Year: 26 standard hours a day; 362 standard days a year

Atmosphere: Earth-like — 71% Nitrogen; 26% Oxygen; 3% Other

Hydrosphere: Water covers 80% of the planet's surface

Meteorological Overview: Cybul III has the standard range of weather and climates for a Type 1 planet

Sentient Species: Zerlians (extinct)

ATRI Rating: None; settlers and explorers have technology appropriate to their society and position

Government: Administered by the Ministry for Evolution

Affiliation: Possession of the Terran Empire

Resources: None

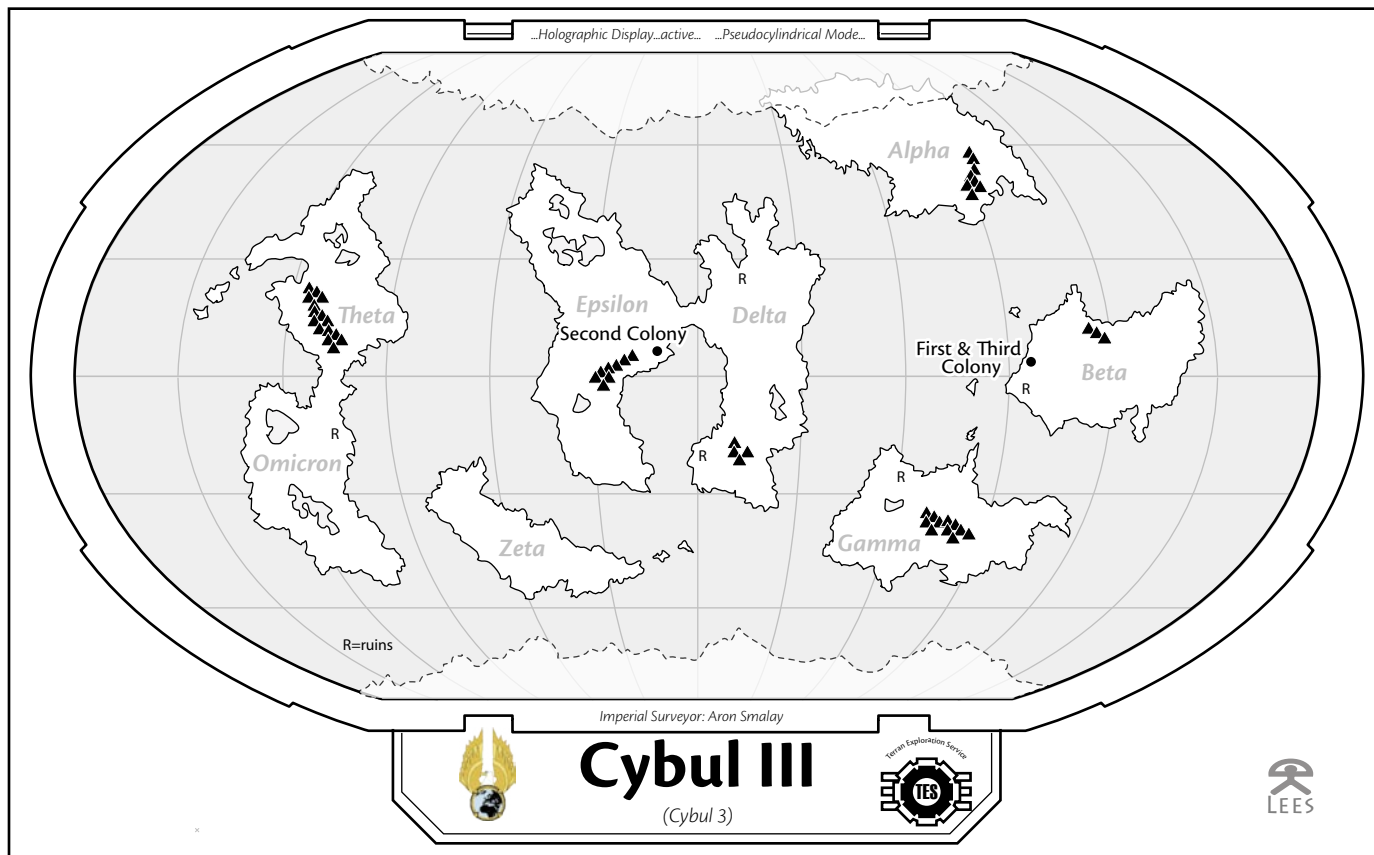
Places Of Note: The Cybul Office

Ship Facilities: Limited repair facilities at the Cybul Office

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Cybul III is startlingly Earth-like. Its oceans teem with life, its atmosphere is rich in oxygen, and its eight continents run the gamut from arctic tundra near the poles to tropical jungles at the equator. The ruins of Zerlian civilization have disappeared beneath centuries of growth and erosion, but here or there a skyscraper of glass and concrete emerges from the forest canopy, and on the plains a grid of broken pavement can sometimes be glimpsed from the air. In Cybul's ecosystem the Zerlians were the chief predator, and their absence has resulted in some species of animals overrunning the planet. Though some predators have evolved to fill the gap, the ecosystem remains unbalanced and will likely stay that way for several more centuries. The world is densely populated with vermin, including the *berlix* (a rat-like creature with four eyes and no tail) and the *terslen* (a small marsupial with lemur-like eyes and opposable thumbs). Huge herds of *gushinna*, a creature similar in size and appearance to a dog but with a short, blunt snout and the square teeth of an herbivore, can be found everywhere on the planet; Imperial scientists believe they're a domesticated livestock gone feral.

The most interesting feature of the native life on Cybul III, at least in the eyes of the Ministry for Evolution (which administers the planet), is the presence of rudimentary instinctual psi abilities in many lifeforms. The Zerlians were a psychic species — psi-powers were so integral to their society that any child born without them was considered handicapped, like a blind or deaf Human — and it's obvious the species didn't evolve these abilities by accident. They were necessary for the Zerlians to survive. Most Cybulian predators rely on mental senses to hunt prey, and some of the prey has developed "mental camouflage" abilities to elude them, or in some cases sensitivity to them (for example, after just a little practice a psi can herd *gushinna* with telepathy or empathy). There are even plants that react to the presence of minds intent on eating them — they shiver and rattle, giving the impression that a snake or other predator is moving around just out of sight — and at least one species, a six-legged ferret-like mammal called the *nirglar*, has a psi-aspect to its courtship rituals. Any psi near a *nirglar* in heat experiences phantom smells, scents on the barest edge of his perception, usually dredged up from his own memory. All in all, psi abilities are more common among predators than herbivores, and are most often found in mammals.



Scientists have yet to find any evidence of psionic insects or reptiles, but haven't definitively established that no such creatures exist.

Because psionic abilities are so prevalent on the planet, psis experiences mental background noise while on Cybul III. They describe this like being in a forest — they mentally “hear” mental impressions analogous to crickets chirping, birds singing, branches rustling in the wind, and so on. It's a strange experience for most of them — as if a person who'd lived all his life in a city, or in total isolation, was suddenly thrust into a wilderness area — but the noise quickly fades to the background and isn't detrimental to the use of psi powers.

HISTORY

The Terran Exploration Service first discovered the Cybul system in 2555. Because Cybul III seemed a paradisaical planet perfectly suited to Human life, plans for colonization were quickly implemented. Colonists first made planetfall in 2564, and initially the settlement project proceeded better than expected. Meteorologists accurately forecasted the planet's weather systems, so the first harvest went well. No native diseases appeared that were unresponsive to Terran inoculations, and none of the native species proved more dangerous than anticipated.

Trouble arose when the colonists began to explore the area around their settlement and located ruins that seemed to be centuries, perhaps even millennia, old. They weren't unexpected — non-functioning satellites orbited the world — and the settlers had instructions to look for these ruins once they'd established a sustainable habitat for

themselves. Though the discovery of ruins was initially cause for excitement, the colonists' reports became more and more troubled. They described an affliction of nightmares in which each of the colonists shared the same disturbing dream. From the tone and content of later reports — filled with descriptions of suspected saboteurs and intelligence agents from rival civilizations — it seemed paranoia and schizophrenia set in. The government of the nearest inhabited system, Trovatore, dispatched an emergency rescue team to the planet, but it arrived too late to save the colonists. They found 200 people in permanent states of catatonia; physicians and psychiatrists were unable to find a reason for the malady. Eventually all 200 settlers died.

In the end, reports attributed the colonists' death to xenomania, a phenomenon that sometimes takes hold of isolated settlers living far from their place of birth and can quickly spread through a small population. Scientists laid the ultimate blame on a lack of rigorous psychological testing performed on the colonists before dispatching them to the new world (which was true; the planet was considered so Earth-like, no one believed they'd experience any of the psychological problems usually associated with living in an alien environment).

Eventually the tragedy was forgotten. Over three decades later, the Empire permitted a second colonization attempt. These colonists were far more stable than the original group and were instructed to stay away from all ruins until Imperial archaeologists could perform an extensive scientific study of them. Despite these precautions, the settlers lasted only three years before succumbing to the same fate as the first group.

THE THIRD EXPEDITION

Then the Imperial government took a direct hand. The third group of settlers was composed of scientists and military personnel who were experts at surviving the rigors of alien environments and dealing with alien threats. The Ministry for Colonization and Development tasked them with the mission of discovering what had happened to the first and second groups — they even founded their settlement at the same location as the first. But it was only by sheer fortune that they unraveled the mystery.

One member of the “Third Expedition” was a latent psi. As time went on, he began to notice strange, insubstantial figures moving around the camp. At first he dismissed them as hallucinations — doctors in the group suspected he was falling prey to the same malady that had taken the lives of the other colonists. But it soon became obvious the “phantoms” were much more than hallucinations when he started to communicate telepathically with them. As his latent powers became active, he shared his impressions with his fellow colonists. All he could sense from the “ghosts” was an incredible, desperate rage at the trespassers and a desire to do them harm. Not taking any chances, the settlers quickly evacuated the planet before the “ghosts” could drive them insane as they had the previous two groups. Once word leaked out, the media quickly sensationalized Cybul III, calling it “the haunted planet.” In official documents, Cybul III was deemed lethal to life, making it off-limits to civilian exploration and colonization.

RETURN TO CYBUL III

Only during the reign of Empress Marissa has the Empire returned to Cybul III, this time under the authority of the Ministry for Evolution. Over the last few decades, psis in the employ of the Empire have journeyed to the planet and attempted to make contact with the psychic ghosts. These expeditions have met with varying degrees of success, but according to official records no one has lost his life or sanity.

According to reports issued by the Ministry for Evolution, its agents have uncovered the history of Cybul III. Its now-extinct inhabitants, a species called Zerlians, accidentally destroyed themselves in a psionic holocaust when an attempt to establish some sort of global psionic communications network went awry. The disaster left the planet “inhabited” by the “psyches” of countless Zerlians, and it was these psionic manifestations that drove the first two colonization expeditions insane. Official reports do not contain many more details than that; all other information is classified.

THE PEOPLE

The disembodied psyches of the Zerlians are not truly people, or even the spirits of people. As Ministry scientists describe them when speaking to laymen, they’re the recordings of people. They live in a mass consensual illusion that their world still exists as it did in the days prior to the catastrophe that rendered their species extinct. The psyches cannot (or more likely, scientists believe, will not) perceive the world as it really is.

Scientists have determined that these psyches relive the three days prior to the catastrophe — why three days, no one knows, but some suspect it relates to short-term memory — and not all of the psyches have survived from the days of the catastrophe. Most researchers believe that originally three billion Zerlians inhabited the planet and now only one billion psyches exist. What happened to the others is unknown, but the most accepted theory is that there are varying degrees of consciousness among the psyches, and those most aware of their surroundings were unable to maintain the illusion of their continued existence. The surviving psyches have created imaginary duplicates of the departed psyches so that their absence doesn’t shatter the consensual illusion.

The only time psyches deviate from their routine is when in the presence of other sentients — such as the Human colonists — “invade” Cybul III. The theory is that the sensory impressions and thoughts of other sentients impinge on the consensual illusion, making it difficult for the psyches to believe in their hallucinatory surroundings. Since this is a dire threat to the psyches’ continued existence, they lash out at the sentients. They try to draw the sentients into the consensual illusion, but this simply renders the invaders insane. Some scientists have postulated that the colonists rendered catatonic had their psyches drawn out of their bodies and now exist as ghosts on the planet. The truth of this is unknown.

Only sentients with psionic senses can perceive the ghostly psyches; psis with telepathy can glimpse what a psyche sees and can also read his thoughts. But communication between psi and psyche is difficult and only possible if the psi masquerades as a Zerlian. Since this disrupts a psyche’s three-day routine, he struggles against contact, and once the contact is over, he immediately forgets it happened. The thrust of the Ministry’s current research is an attempt to insert a psi into the three-day routine — in other words, have a psi continue to make contact with a psyche, repeating this every three days. It hopes this non-intrusive insertion will lead a psyche out of its routine and into a more fruitful dialogue. The experiments precede apace, but have so far borne few tangible results.



Government

The Cybul system falls under the purview of the Ministry for Evolution, with specialists and administrators on loan from the Ministry for Colonization and Development. The central office for the system is the Cybul Office, a small orbital habitat that circles Cybul III. Twenty men and women live and work there in spartan conditions, protected by a squad of Imperial Marines and crews of the three SPS Sentinels (ATRI 11 system patrol ships) that police the system. Most of the staff are either scientists performing tests on the disembodied psyches or the scientists' support staff, and they usually sign up for a high-paying two-year stint in the system. Additionally, there are often one or two psis on loan from the Mind Police. The Cybul Office has several docking ports for visiting starships but only limited repair facilities.

As of 2640, the official in charge of the Cybul Office is Project Director Lance Ferguson. Director Ferguson is a former investigator for the Mind Police deemed unfit for duty after a classified

encounter with a serial killer who, rumor has it, was a sort of psychic vampire. Relegated to the role of special advisor on criminal matters, he applied for a transfer to the Ministry for Evolution and has worked there ever since. Nominally in charge of the entire system, Ferguson focuses on the work of the scientists and delegates a great deal of his responsibilities for other matters to Captain Tomas Kirchev and senior executive Nancy Lamark. Ferguson is a Psi-Delta with powers of empathy, object reading, and clairvoyance; he's given to fits of brooding and melancholy, and sometimes periods of intense, almost manic activity.

A visitor to the system must have the appropriate security clearance or a special visa issued by the Ministry for Evolution. Visas are issued on a case-by-case basis, but never without a legitimate reason. Enforcement of this restriction is lax as long as a starship stays away from Cybul III and responds to communications from Cybul Office. Any starship ignoring calls from the Office is first given a warning, then comes under attack.

Economy

The Cybul system has no economy to speak of, although if administration of the planet is ever taken away from the Ministry for Evolution, Cybul III is a perfect candidate for colonization — as long as the colonists are psis or have appropriate protection (or if the psyches were removed or pacified somehow). Any of the psi-active lifeforms on the planet could bring a high price from the right buyer, but smuggling them off-planet might prove difficult. The Empire has outlawed the transport of Zerlian lifeforms for fear of their potential effect on other environments — a predator that stalks by sensing minds, rather than by sense of smell or sight, could potentially decimate a population of unprotected prey.

H'ROTHA



The Imperial designation for the H'rotha system is Mu Jakala. Located antispinward of Earth, between Triumph and Fexao, the system consists of ten planets in orbit around a type G yellow star similar to Earth's own but slightly hotter. Eight of the ten planets — Jakala I, II, III, V, VII, IX, and X — are Type 5 or 6 worlds; IX and X are likely captured asteroids. Jakala VI and VIII are ringed Type 10 worlds, similar in size and composition to the Sol System's Saturn.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

From orbit H'rotha (Mu Jakala IV) is a light grey orb shot through with quickly-spinning swirls of dark streamers, the land obscured by constant cloud cover. Traveling around the planet's equator is a blackish-grey eye, similar in appearance to Jupiter's red one, with a radius that fluctuates between five and ten kilometers. From this eye spews a miles-long plume where the atmosphere escapes into the vacuum. (This is a perpetual storm caused by the permanent hole in the planet's atmosphere

opened during the failed antimatter experiment described below.)

H'rotha is frigid. The entire planet is an arctic environment with temperatures ranging from a recorded high of -20° Celsius (-4° F) at the equator to -100° Celsius (-148° F) on an average night (though the temperature often dips below this in winter or in some locations). The sky is almost always overcast with dark, roiling clouds crashing with thunder and lit by lightning that flashes between them but rarely strikes the ground. In most places it snows two days out of every three — usually light flurries, but brief, intense blizzards are common. Direct sunlight is exceedingly rare; daytime is a murky grey, and the nighttime is pitch black, with lightning the only illumination.

H'rotha is 80% covered by water, with three large continents; however, because of the incessant cold, virtually none of the surface water is liquid. Orbital scans seem to show a few rivers, lakes, and small inland seas, but in fact these are small parts of the planet's oceans kept liquid at the surface by warm currents flowing up from volcanic vents on the ocean floor. Glaciers, some the size of other worlds' continents, cover the rest of the planet's surface except where old, crumbling mountains break through the thick ice. The peaks are home to the planet's only vegetation that isn't moss or fungus — the lower slopes are covered with high-grown evergreens and undergrowth that provide a refuge for the planet's few land-dwelling herbivores. In short, H'rotha is largely featureless. This makes maps virtually useless; the only way to navigate successfully is through tracking devices and sensors or intimate knowledge of the terrain.

Between the mountains and "bodies of water" are desolate plains — flat expanses of ice covered by drifting snow that can reach depths of ten feet or more, occasionally broken by high-reaching outcroppings of ice cut into weird shapes by the winds. Pushed along by ocean currents, the glaciers move more quickly than continents, and the ground often trembles and quakes with glacier crashing against glacier.

ANIMAL LIFE

The oceans under H'rotha's glaciers and icebergs teem with life, though the rest of the planet is practically barren. The mountains have an ecosystem similar to that of subarctic regions on Earth — insects, small birds, and rodents being the most numerous forms of life. There are over thirty species of an herbivore called *anrisset*, similar in appearance to a shaggy Terran goat and with the same appetites; the largest predator is an ursine

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: H'ROTHA

Planet Name: H'rotha (Imperial designation: Mu Jakala IV)

Classification: Type 2

System Data: Two moons (not visible from the surface due to cloud cover); nine other planets in the system

Gravity: 1.12 G

Day And Year: 28 standard hours in a day; 443 standard days in a year

Atmosphere: Earth-like — 74% Nitrogen; 18% Oxygen; 8% Other

Hydrosphere: Water ice covers 80% of the surface, though most of it is ice

Meteorological Overview: Frigid (ranging from a recorded high of -20° Celsius (-4° F) at the equator to an average of -100° Celsius (-148° F) at the poles), with constant snowstorms

Sentient Species: The H'rotha

ATRI Rating: See text

Government: None

Affiliation: Territory of the Terran Empire

Resources: None

Places Of Note: Camp Frostbite

Ship Facilities: None

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

Here's a summary of the penalties imposed on characters by the frigid conditions on H'rotha. For more details about the long-range consequences of extreme cold, frostbite and the like, see *Environmental Effects* on pages 438-43 of *The HERO System 5th Edition*, Revised rulebook.

Communications:

On the surface: double all Range Modifiers for electromagnetic-based sensors and communications (including HRRP and Mind Link defined as belonging to the Radio Group).

From orbit: there's an additional -9 penalty to all scans from orbit and surface-to-orbit/orbit-to-surface communications.

Normal Sight Modifiers (in addition to standard Range Modifiers)

"Clear" Day (Night): -2 penalty to Sight Group PER Rolls (plus an additional -4 for characters without Nightvision)

Flurries Day (Night): -4 penalty to Sight Group PER Rolls (plus an additional -4 for characters without Nightvision)

Blizzard Day (Night): -8 penalty to Sight Group PER Rolls (a character's lucky to see his hand in front of his face)

Movement Modifiers

Normal Snow (less than or equal to two feet deep; H'rotha standard): -2" Running; -2 to DEX; -2 to DEX-based Skill Rolls

Deep Snow (more than two feet deep): -4" Running; -4 to DEX; -4 to DEX-based Skill Rolls

Ice: -2" Running; characters must succeed with a DEX Roll to make a Full Move; -4 to DEX; -4 to DEX-based Skill Rolls.

creature called an *unrym*, something like a Terran wolverine but less aggressive, that lives in packs of ten to twenty. The coastal regions are home to H'rotha's largest mammals, all of which are carnivores. At the bottom of the food chain are *juj*, otter-like creatures with six small legs and long tails that hunt fish in the oceans; at the top are *rorge*, large bear-like beasts with overgrown heads that attack anything (including H'rothans and Humans) but mainly subsist on a diet of *juj* and carrion washed up from the oceans.

Places Of Note

There's not much of note on H'rotha, but a few locations might attract the interest of PCs.

ATMOSPHERIC GENERATORS

There's an atmospheric generator at each pole. Fully automated and run by artificial intelligences, the facilities are buried beneath the ice — only emission stacks and sensor arrays are visible above the surface. No H'rothan has journeyed to either of the facilities since the earliest days of the catastrophe, and who knows what alien forms of life might have spawned, perhaps growing into their own unique form of sentience, in the absence of their creators....

THE BLACK CRATER

This 20-kilometer radius crater was caused by the antimatter explosion that ended civilization on H'rotha (see below). Its surface still burns with radiation and reaches temperatures as high as 200° C (392° F) at its center, keeping it free of snow and ice. Weird ecologies have sprung up on the edges of the crater, with mutated flora and fauna adapted to both the radiation and the furious storm, something like a blizzard during a tornado, that comes around every twelve days as H'rotha's blackish-grey eye circles around the planet's equator. Because of the strange energies radiating from the crater and their interaction with the planet's magnetosphere, all magnetic compasses point toward it (instead of north).

CAMP FROSTBITE

Officially named Expeditionary Site #2, Camp Frostbite is a semi-permanent base camp ostensibly owned by Terran University on Earth. The settlement has seen intermittent use over the centuries by archaeologists and other scholars interested in H'rothan culture, especially their rejection of technology. Permission to use the camp is merely a formality (although the University does appreciate the courtesy). The camp is set up in one of the H'rothan cities (see below) near a large clearing, formerly a park, that has adequate space to land a shuttle. There are emergency food stores, survival gear, and other equipment necessary for staying alive on the uncivilized world, all of it stored in a cluster of simple prefabricated dwellings. The H'rothan tribes in the area are familiar with the camp, and if they know people are staying there, they go out of their way to check on them periodically to make sure everything's all right.

H'ROTHAN RUINS

The seventy-four H'rothan cities that survived the beginning of the new ice age still stand amid the glaciers that cover the planet. These sprawling ruins of high-rises and skyscrapers exist at the bottom of canyons formed in the glaciers, and the streets are perpetually flooded with standing water (melt-off from the ice) two to four feet (.5") deep. Encompassing the cities are envelopes of warm air — climate stabilizers maintain a temperature of 30°-40° C (86°-104° F) within each city's limits. Automated laser cannons keep more "aggressive" glaciers from creeping over the city by melting away the ice as the glacier approaches.

The H'rothans keep both the stabilizers and lasers in good repair and use the cities as storehouses for their history, communication centers for meetings of tribal elders, and oases and refuges during their treks across the ice. The technology in the cities is ATRI 10, although much of it has fallen to ruin or become useless — the H'rothans only make a point of maintaining devices the elders deem vital to their survival. H'rothans don't prevent Humans from studying the devices, but any person doing so will have to listen to an endless litany about the dangers of technology. Several groups of "salvagers" have explored the cities over the centuries, but none have turned up anything profitable. However, two salvage teams reported encountering large groups of feral Xenovores, and one group never returned.

HISTORY

H'rotha has a history of civilization going back millennia. Tragically, that civilization all but destroyed itself seven centuries ago, and now the indigenous species, the H'rothans, are little more than nomadic hunter/herdsmen who wander the frigid wastes of the planet.

H'rothan civilization reached ATRI 10, though it founded few offworld colonies because the H'rothan birth rate was too low to create the population pressures that usually drive outward expansion. H'rothan society was capitalist with a unified world government that maintained a global standard of living and rigidly controlled corporations to prevent exploitation of workers or natural resources. Corporate scientists and engineers were under intense pressure to discover new technologies, since technological innovation was a corporation's primary means to gain market share and increase earnings. The last great push in research was antimatter power.

At a research lab along the equator, a new energies development cooperative stood on the brink of a breakthrough when its researchers successfully created antimatter... but what they failed to create was a means of properly containing the energies released during the synthesis of antimatter.

Later scientists estimated the explosion resulting from the "successful" experiment had the same force as a thousand-megaton nuclear explosion. It was an explosion literally felt around the world, detonating with so much force it skewed the planet's rotation by several meters. At ground zero the column of fire rose straight up, ripped through the atmosphere, and only expanded into the traditional mushroom cloud after it reached the vacuum of space.

At least that's what the scientists theorized — the actual facts were impossible to determine and even describing the explosion in nuclear terms was misleading. This was an event H'rothan physics couldn't come close to describing. Whatever the specifics of what happened, the explosion was less devastating than it might have been... at least in the short term.

Several days passed before scientists understood that their atmosphere was escaping from the planet at an alarming rate through the hole the antimatter explosion had created. The H'rothans lacked the technology to repair the hole directly. They were only slightly experienced at terraforming because they'd never attempted full-scale colonization of an alien world. All they could do was create magnetosphere stabilizers and atmosphere generators in a desperate attempt to maintain planetary conditions capable of sustaining life. The magnetosphere stabilizers kept H'rotha from wobbling off course any more than it already had; the atmosphere generators maintained a stasis by replenishing the gases and trace elements lost as they were sucked out into the void. They hurriedly built two facilities, one at each pole, and prayed the hole would repair itself with time.

They successfully created a stasis, but again failed to take into account all the variables — on paper their equations balanced nice and peacefully, but in nature the stasis they created was no tranquil thing. Their machines not only made the hole permanent but also precipitated an ice age. Climate stabilizers protected their largest cities, but glaciers crept out of the north and south until they covered the world in ice. H'rotha had once been a paradise; now it was a frigid wasteland of league after league of drifting snow, so cold it was barely habitable.

INTO THE WASTES

During this period of tribulation and catastrophic upheaval, large segments of the populace grew disgusted with their society. To never see the sun and spend the rest of their lives in overcrowded cities, encircled by walls of ice growing ever higher with each passing year — these were the fruits of science, capitalism, and competition, and they were bitter fruits indeed. From these disaffected masses arose a leader, the demagogue Shorn'lachra whose name translates literally to: "The road up ahead goes through the past." His name was an old-fashioned H'rothan aphorism best expressed in English as: for the answers to future problems, study the past. And that's exactly what Shorn'lachra did.

The primitive ancestors of the H'rothans had survived at least one previous ice age, and though the species had evolved considerably since those days, their geneticists were capable of returning it to that "primitive" state. Shorn'lachra beseeched his followers to sell all their worldly possessions to pay for genetic alterations — and when their funds came up short, Shorn'lachra extorted the difference from the government.

He and his followers underwent painful operations to alter their genomes. Though they themselves wouldn't benefit from the changes, their offspring would. Their children would have wooly hides and thick blubber to insulate them against the cold, the ability to live exclusively on meat, the increased likelihood of bearing twins or triplets, nictitating membranes to protect their eyes from blowing snow and hail, and enhanced vision to see in the pitch black night.

Shorn'lachra led his followers out of the cities and into the wastes to live a nomadic life. Those first H'rothans to leave the cities suffered terribly — from both the harsh environment and the cancers and mutations caused by the radical changes to their DNA — but they survived long enough to have children. Their children grew up well-adapted to H'rotha's arctic environment and suffered much less. Over the next two centuries, the residents of the cities came out to join their nomadic brethren, interbreeding with this new species of H'rothan, until finally the cities stood empty — nothing more than grandiose testaments to a society that had failed its members.

XENOVORES AND HUMANS

For the next five centuries the H'rothans existed at peace with their environment — a hard but fulfilling life, and at least they didn't threaten the very world's existence. But early in the twenty-

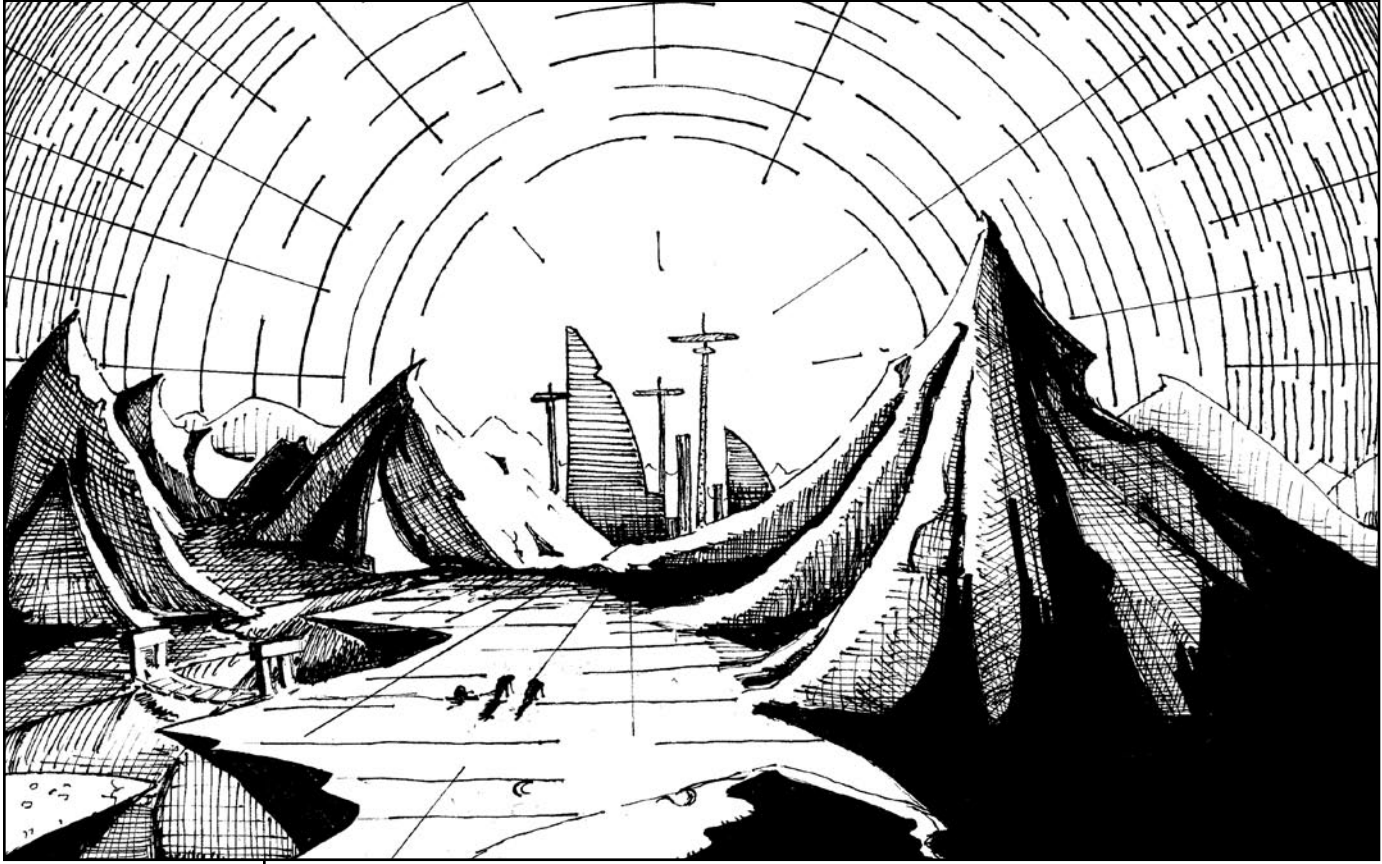
H'ROTHAN COLONIES

As stated in the main text, H'rothans founded a few off-planet colonies, both on H'rotha's moons and other planets in the system, before the disaster.

When the catastrophe struck, the majority of colonists returned home. The colonies were not self-sufficient, and even at the ones colonists could have maintained, the inhabitants weren't particularly interested in doing so. It's difficult for Humans to comprehend the despair that gripped the H'rothans in the aftermath of the antimatter explosion. In their heart of hearts, Humans are a pragmatic species, and after a tragedy they get back to the business at hand — they take things in stride, and the culture only reinforces that attitude. H'rothans are much more passionate, more deeply affected by events, than Humans — that's one of the reasons competition was so incredibly fierce in their society. They couldn't just shake off the tragedy and return to their previous lifestyle.

Seven centuries later, a H'rothan takes a turn for the mournful when discussing the catastrophe that changed his planet, even though he's never known what it was like originally. To Human sensibilities this seems an unhealthy and morbid dwelling on the past; to a H'rothan, anything but deep sorrow and bitter regrets for the actions of his ancestors is callous, unfeeling, and not entirely sane.

But of course, in your campaign maybe one colony did survive, and at some point the colonists return to their homeworld, perhaps with marauding Xenovores hot on their heels...



fourth century, the Xenovores discovered the planet and occupied it. While hunting the H'rotha for food, they turned the world into an experimental testing ground for new technologies and bio-engineered beasts. Later in the same century, Human forces arrived in the system, and after a long struggle beat the Xenovores back (see text box). The planet was inhospitable to life and had an atmosphere that interfered with sensors, so the Human military command deemed H'rotha unsuitable for garrisoning. They made a note of its existence, filed away their information about the planet with the Terran Exploration Service, and moved on.

Since then, many small groups of Humans have visited the planet. Scholars and researchers have come to document the technology the H'rothans possessed before the collapse of their civilization, and some have even lived with the H'rothans for a time. Private firms have prospected the planet but found that the H'rothans exploited the planet's valuable resources efficiently prior to the disaster, so they've quickly turned to other, virgin planets for settlement and development. At times smugglers and other criminals have used the planet as a base of operations, but for the most part, H'rotha makes for a harsh home and lies too far from the well-traveled spacelanes to make it an attractive home.

H'ROTHA DURING THE XENOVORE WAR

H'rotha was a territory held by the Xenovores before the coming of the Human military forces during the later days of the Xenovore War. At only fifty thousand, the Xenovore population was low on the planet, but the Humans' efforts to take the planet turned into a fiasco.

A long-range reconnaissance patrol discovered H'rotha in 2382. The commander was upset with his assignment to reconnaissance — his primary objective was to identify Xenovore holdings, not take them — and he was a gloryhound. With limited (and incorrect) intelligence, he unwisely ordered an attack on the planet.

The enemy forces were far stronger than analysts predicted, and more damning was the unknown presence of Xenovore dreadnoughts. The starships in the patrol were destroyed soon after launching a planetary assault, leaving the troops on the ground stranded without support. Intermittent battle raged between the two sides for a year until other Human troops arrived to provide reinforcements. During that year, the native H'rothans proved invaluable. At first, they helped Humans survive the rigors of the harsh environment; later many tribes joined with Human forces to wage war on the Xenovores.

THE PEOPLE

There are no permanent Human habitations on H'rotha, but it's home to the H'rothans. Other species are always welcome on the planet, and no H'rothan turns his back on a sentient in need — harsh conditions create a strong sense of community — unless that person has proven himself a murderer or the like (a H'rothan even helps the arrogant or larcenous, as long as the person does no true harm).

Among H'rothans the arrival of other species has been controversial, though the H'rothans are too polite and reserved to ever bring it up with them. Despite their simple civilization, H'rothans know what an empire is and understand that an empire has claimed their planet as a part of its territory. Since the Imperial presence has been limited (to say the least), the peaceful H'rothans are content to go on about their lives.

If private firms or the Imperial government took an active interest in the planet — for example, by setting up permanent colonies — it's uncertain how the H'rothans would react. A declaration of war is highly unlikely (though H'rothans fought the Xenovores when they encountered them, they did not actively pursue war against the invaders' colonies until the coming of Human military forces), but there are other ways of protesting. The main concern of H'rothan elders is the temptation access to Human technology would cause. Chances are the H'rothan tribes would simply try to isolate themselves from the Human colonists.

A scenario with far deeper implications is if Humanity were to attempt to terraform H'rotha — to fix the consequences of the disaster that occurred centuries ago. Experts in terraforming have submitted analyses claiming this is possible (although not worth the cost), and such an event would disrupt the entire H'rothan way of life.

H'rothans

The H'rothans are the native species of H'rotha and the planet's sole naturally-occurring sentient life form. There are approximately half a million H'rothans on the planet. Since the coming of Humanity, some H'rothans have journeyed out into the Empire, much to the chagrin of their tribal elders. Typically these H'rothans show up at a Human camp and request passage off the planet. They leave because they don't share their fellows' attitude about technology. These H'rothans are ostracized from their people — the decision to leave is a permanent one. They may return to visit, but with the understanding that they won't overstay their welcome.

BIOLOGY

Standing between eight and nine feet tall, H'rothans are neckless behemoths of muscle and blubber made only larger by the masses of woolly grey hair that cover their bodies. At the few places where their skin is visible — mainly the lips, palms,

and the soles of their feet — it's dark grey and criss-crossed with deep creases. Their legs are short and bowed, ending in long spatulate feet with wide toes webbed with thick skin between the digits (thus forming natural snowshoes). Their arms reach to their knees, and each hand has three thick fingers with an opposable thumb on each side of the palm. Long, sharp teeth fill their wide mouths. Their round eyes give them an innocent appearance wholly at odds with their size and teeth, and have slit pupils like a cat's with irises that are usually green, yellow, or orange. They go unclothed, wearing only two bandoliers and a single belt. Their natural life span is sixty Terran years, and a child reaches maturity at ten Terran years. Some Humans insultingly refer to them as "Walruses."

SOCIETY AND CULTURE

H'rothan society has been engineered from the ground up. In the last days of their former civilization, at the depths of their despair over what they'd done to their world, Shorn'lachra gave them a new culture that was a major departure from their former capitalist society.

In broad terms H'rothan society is tribal. Each tribe has between sixty and a hundred members, the numbers maintained by shifting members from larger tribes to smaller tribes. A popularly-elected chief leads each tribe with the assistance of a council of elders. The tribes can be categorized into three types: herdsman who live in the mountainous regions above the ice; hunters who live in the coastal regions; and nomads who act as both traders and messengers between the mountain and coastal tribes.

The only possessions a H'rothan can claim as his own are his rifle and whatever he can carry in his two bandoliers and on his belt. This proscription includes marriage — since no female H'rothan will fit in a bandolier pouch, no male can take a wife (and vice versa). Raising offspring is the whole tribe's responsibility — again, a H'rothan child doesn't fit in a bandolier pouch, so a parent can't claim ownership.

The H'rotha maintain an extensive oral tradition, but an unusual one that signals to offworlders that something odd has taken place here. First, they possess an extensive, nearly exhaustive knowledge of their history (although they rarely speak of it unless directly asked). They know far more than any ordinary oral tradition, however well-developed, could possibly record. Second, they don't tell tall tales — they have no myths or legends. Exaggerating events, even trivial ones like the size of a fish someone caught the day before, is grounds for a period of ostracism that lasts up to a week and typically takes the form of the rest of the tribe giving the offender the cold shoulder. In other words, they place great value on the truth — the bare facts of an event — in a way highly unusual for literate societies. This stems from applying the scientific method to daily life, despite their seeming lack of scientific knowledge. This touches on perhaps the most unique aspect of H'rothan culture: their attitude toward technology.



TECHNOLOGY

The H'rothans are neo-Luddites in the extreme. Technically, going by the letter of ATRI, the H'rothans are a ATRI 9 culture (they have backslid somewhat since their height) — although there are no H'rothan scientists, when considered as a species, they possess the scientific knowledge needed to create all the technologies associated with that level of development. But they only apply their knowledge in strictly limited circumstances dictated by arbitrary rulings handed down by Shorn'lachra and modified to fit extenuating circumstances by an intertribal committee of elders. In general, H'rothan tradition restricts personal technology to Gauss rifles and small portable heaters. They limit more pervasive technologies to maintaining the communication and manufacturing facilities in the cities (especially those related to creating their rifles and forging steel) and keeping the climate stabilizers operational or creating new ones. The H'rothans are perfectly content with these limits. Despite knowing in theory how to create more advanced devices, they remember the past and have no desire to return to their former culture.

To a stranger, none of this is immediately apparent — the H'rothans don't talk about these things. They consider the whimsical scientific speculation Humans delight in meaningless, a waste of a time and energy. They think that the discussion of technology not pertinent to the task at hand is the height of rudeness (similar to a Human

H'ROTHAN PACKAGE DEAL

Abilities

Cost	Ability
6	+6 STR
12	+6 CON
10	+5 BODY
4	<i>Thick Pelt And Blubber</i> : Damage Resistance (4 PD/4 ED)
2	<i>At Home In Cold</i> : Life Support (Safe Environment: Intense Cold)
3	<i>Adapted To Snow</i> : Environmental Movement: no penalties in snow
1	<i>Adapted To Snow</i> : +2 PER with Normal Sight; Only To Offset Snow Penalties (-1)
5	<i>Nightvision</i> : Nightvision

Additionally, no H'rothan makes it to adulthood without the following skills:

5	AK: Home Region (INT Roll +2)
6	Navigation (H'rothan Land) (INT Roll +2)
8	Survival (Arctic/Sub-Arctic) (INT Roll +3)

Total Cost Of Package Abilities: 62

Disadvantages

Value	Disadvantage
5	Physical Limitation: Large (Infrequently, Slightly Impairing)
20	Psychological Limitation: Eschews Technology (Total, Common)

Total Value Of Package Disadvantages: 25

Standard H'rotha Equipment

Gauss Rifle: use G-1000 High-Powered Gauss Rifle; *Alien Wars*, page 106

Large Steel Knife: HKA 1d6, STR Min 8

Portable Heater: Change Environment 1" radius, +3 Temperature Levels (11 Active Points); OAF (-1), 1 Fuel Charge (easily obtainable; 1 Week; -0) (total cost: 5 points)

Miscellaneous other items including two bandoliers, one belt, and rations.

talking about something unpleasant at the dinner table). Thus, all an offworlder sees are bandoliers and belts made from hide, some primitive jewelry and trinkets, a steel knife with a hilt hand-carved from bone, and a Gauss rifle that seems out of place ("maybe he got it from some other species"). Then the stranger tries to explain how his laser rifle works and the H'rothan says, "You mean light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation?"

H'rothans won't participate in arguments about the wonders of technology. Why do they use Gauss rifles instead of laser rifles or plasma blasters? "A man cannot eat an incinerated *juj*." Why not wear body armor to protect themselves from the *rorge*? "The *rorge* must eat too." Nothing a Human says can convince most H'rothans to abandon their traditions. No matter what marvel a Human boasts of, a H'rothan responds, "Ah yes, our ancestors said much the same thing... then they burned a hole in the heavens and brought down an age of ice. A marvel, indeed." And in truth, the H'rothans do live in nearly perfect equilibrium with their environment and have little need for technology.

Government

H'rothan tribal government is discussed above in *Society And Culture*; H'rotha has no planetary government. The planet is an Imperial territory, so the Ministry of Colonization and Development handles its administration. This requires a single mid-level bureaucrat who's responsible for filling requests for information about H'rotha as a small part of his overall duties. These requests usually come from private firms who occasionally take an interest in the planet before deciding it's not worth the trouble.

Famous H'rothans

Though there are no famous H'rothans *per se*, two people have become well-known because of their dealings with them.

PROFESSOR WINSLOW KOSLOWSKI

A small anti-technology movement sprang up around Professor Winslow Koslowski after he spent three years living with the H'rothans and published his journal of his time with the tribe. Although not the first Human to live with the H'rothans, nor even the first to be swayed by their beliefs about technology, he's the most eloquent, and unlike others who share his beliefs he doesn't preach complete abandonment of technology. Instead he teaches the "moral consideration" of each piece of technology a person uses. Does tuning in to the latest holonet firm or utilizing bio-engineering to ensure a healthy baby achieve a "moral good"? If the answer is Yes, then the person should use the technology. In other words, the main thrust of his teachings is that a person should think about what he does and uses and consider its ramifications. Sadly, a radical fringe element of his adherents has decided to do the thinking for others. Calling itself the Conscience Liberation Group, this group recently gained the attention of intelligence services in the Empire when it orchestrated the destruction of Procyon's communication satellite network, and Professor Koslowski and his teachings have come under suspicion.

VICTOR WHITE

Victor White is a merchant with a reputation for driving a hard bargain, going where others aren't willing to go, and dealing ruthlessly with his competitors. At the moment, after the mysterious death of his former rival Samantha Holland, he's also the only trader visiting H'rotha on a regular basis. Rumors claim White orchestrated the death of Holland — she froze to death when a liquid nitrogen pipe running above the ceiling of her sleeping quarters burst while she was asleep — to obtain a monopoly on trade (and it's not the first time such rumors have circulated about White). White hates the cold and has been looking for a *junior* partner (70/30 split, but maybe 60/40 if he likes the person) to take over the H'rotha run.

Economy

H'rotha has no economy to speak of. The H'rothans live at a subsistence level, as they have for centuries. Sometimes, however, an independent merchant (like Victor White, described above) includes H'rotha as one of his stops and arrives at a gentleman's agreement with a tribe or two. These merchants generally cater to clients who collect *objets d'art* made by primitive species or have other, similarly specialized tastes. The merchant trades for H'rothan scrimshaw and the pelts of native animals (especially the *rorge*). The H'rothans are very carefully about what they accept in exchange — all transactions must be approved by a tribal elder. They won't accept anything that smacks of technology, but they'll trade for simple toys for their children, old-fashioned musical instruments like flutes and harmonicas, and some types of food (especially snacks, sweets, and meat from other worlds). Though they live a harsh life, the H'rothans don't abhor pleasure — they simply don't have much time for it. As for the merchant, he can make a good profit if H'rotha doesn't lie too far out of his way. The problem isn't one of profit — a *rorge* pelt for a fistful of candy bars is a good deal — it's one of quantity. The H'rothans don't produce a surplus, so the merchant might only walk away from a journey to H'rotha with a single crate of goods.

NEW ALEXANDRIA



New Alexandria is the sole planet orbiting the Type M red dwarf star Mandel 233. In addition to the planet, the system has two other bodies, an asteroid belt and an unusually large cometary cloud. The asteroid belt is equidistant between New Alexandria and Mandel 233. Official estimates place the number of comets visible in the night sky as they pass New Alexandria (called “great comets”) at 2,812 — though the number changes yearly as some comets are destroyed when they get too close to Mandel 233 and others are thrown out of the system. All of the comets have wide elliptical orbits around the star, but ones short enough to bring them near New Alexandria every fifty to one hundred years. Some astronomers believe these comets are the remains of another planet, long ago destroyed and perhaps the same as the one that formed the asteroid belt. The theory is that the comets are the remains of oceans and other large bodies of water that were blasted into space during the destruction of a planet (or planets). Though not all astronomers agree about this, no astronomer believes the comets are a natural phenomenon. New Alexandria lies along

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: NEW ALEXANDRIA

Planet Name: New Alexandria (Imperial designation: Mandel I)

Classification: Type 1

System Data: One moon; no other planets in system

Gravity: 1.0 G

Day And Year: 36 standard hours in a day; 150 standard days in a year

Atmosphere: Earth-like — 70% Nitrogen; 24% Oxygen; 6% Other

Hydrosphere: Water covers 65% of the planet’s surface

Meteorological Overview: New Alexandria has the standard range of weather and climates for a Type 1 planet, though it tends to be more arid than most, with more deserts

Sentient Species: None

ATRI Rating: ATRI 10 in urban areas; ATRI 8 elsewhere

Government: Democracy

Affiliation: Terran Empire possession

Resources: Olives, olive oil, grapes, wine

Places Of Note: Pharos City; the New Library

Ship Facilities: None

the Mandaarian Road and most people believe the Mandaarians are somehow responsible for the comets — perhaps they’re the result of some ancient war.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

New Alexandria is a Type 1 world slightly smaller than Earth. From orbit the planet’s five continents are a uniform red-orange and beige, with occasional grey peaks cutting across the land. The continents have jagged coasts with numerous inlets and headlands, and off the coasts are countless small islands. Fresh water in the dunes that dominate the interiors of New Alexandria’s continents is limited to oases and small springs in the mountains. The coastal regions of the oceans are habitable and usually have a climate similar to the lands on Earth’s Mediterranean. Desalination plants provide most of the water used by the colonists.

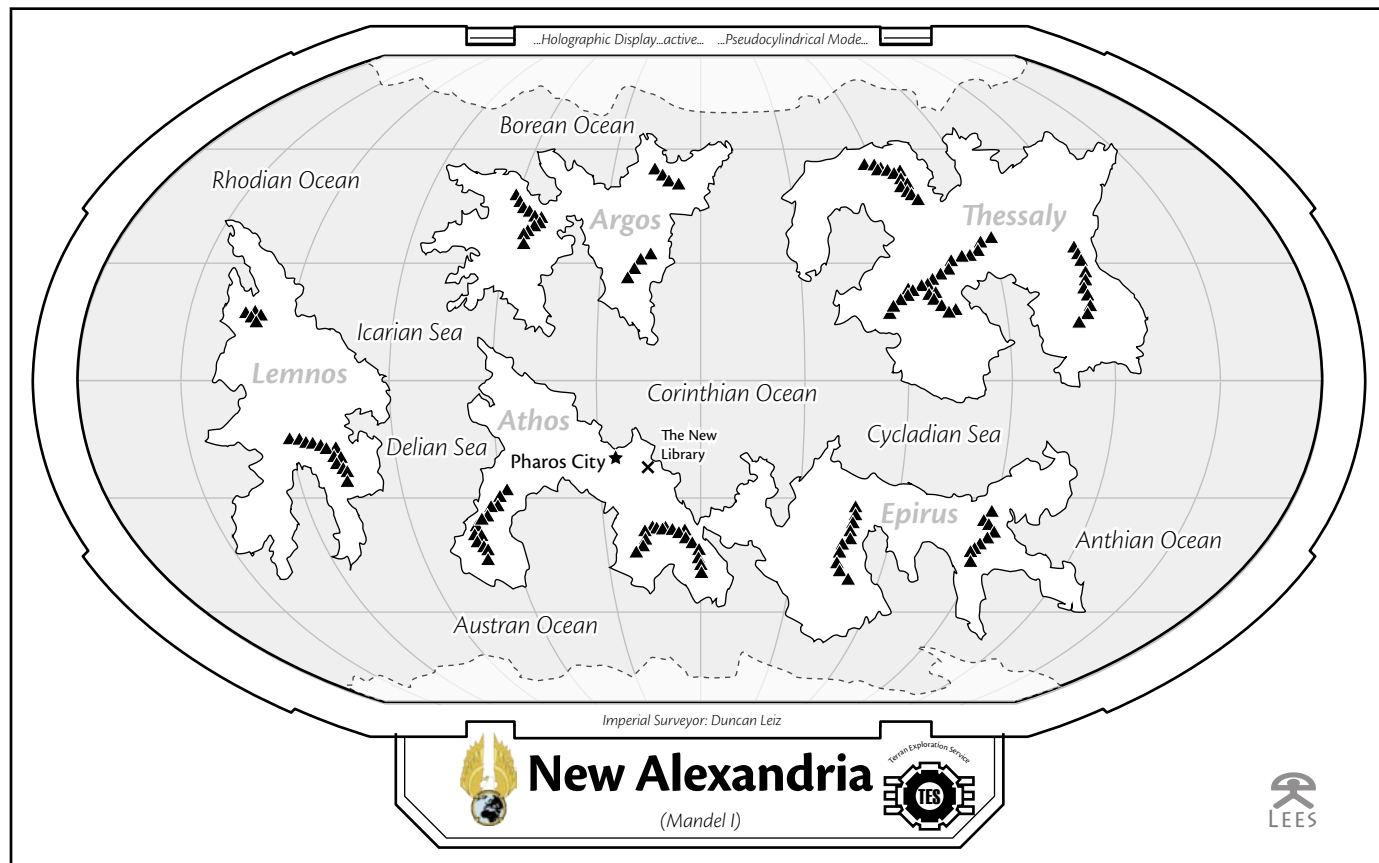
Native life, both plant and animal, is sparse on the planet. Generations of settlers have imported grapes, fig trees, and olive trees to places where they would grow (generally coastal regions with extensive irrigation facilities). During the boom years, the importing of non-native species was reckless and unregulated. Would-be profiteers smuggled anything they thought they could sell in the hope of providing miners cheap alternatives to expensive imported goods. Livestock from hundreds of worlds and barley and malt for beer (as well as any other flora a brewer can ferment) have all been tried. Most died out with the end of the boom, but some have thrived, creating serious environmental problems. With the planetary leadership now in more conscientious hands, the Alexandrian government has devoted considerable resources to repairing the damage, but it’s had only limited success.

Places Of Note

There are only two places on New Alexandria most people would care to visit: Pharos City and the New Library.

THE NEW LIBRARY

The original settlers intended their new home to become a center of learning and culture. Though their plans didn’t turn out exactly as they hoped, the New Library has become a well-respected university in the Terran Empire. The New Library is a community unto itself a little over sixty kilometers from the capital of Pharos City. Its permanent residents number thirty thousand (including faculty),



but during the school term, the population triples to almost a hundred thousand.

All of the buildings at the New Library are made from a locally-quarried stone that resembles beige marble with dark red streaks. The environs of the New Library are tranquil, with the peace and quiet broken only by the occasional student protest. Admittance to the New Library is rigorous — far more rigorous than its reputation warrants, in fact — but the university provides numerous scholarships, and faculty members go to great lengths to woo students they feel would be a good fit (while going to equally great lengths to dissuade students not considered appropriate for the New Library). The university excels in arts and humanities (especially pre-interstellar Human history). Its school of economics, despite the anti-Imperial leanings of its faculty (who often argue against Imperial price controls and other government interference as detrimental to a free market), has a good reputation among corporations. Its library's collection of pre-interstellar Human texts and artifacts is only surpassed by libraries on Earth itself. University officials work closely with town leaders to keep the town free of the sort of “entertainment havens” well-known elsewhere on the planet. After all, Pharos City is nearby if anyone wants to make a weekend excursion.

PHAROS CITY

At the heart of Pharos City is a precisely designed, architecturally elegant city center based on the designs of some of most famous architects in Earth's history. The street plan is based on the notes of Pierre L'Enfant with diagonal streets connecting major grid intersections. The buildings run the gamut from ancient Greece (Doric columns, triptychs in bas-relief) to late twenty-second century contoured-roof style, and everything in between. At the center of the city stands the Lighthouse, a historically accurate model of the famous Pharos of Alexandria on Earth. By city ordinance no building in Pharos City can be taller than the Lighthouse.

The suburbs of Pharos City are far different — a sprawl of ill-planned streets crowded with hastily-erected tenements in various states of decay. Hidden in the nooks and crannies of this urban mess are the infamous Alexandrian entertainment havens. First built to entertain miners in from the mountains with money to spend, the havens were originally more bawdy and venal than perverse. But since the end of the boom their owners have had to find more ways to bring in the credits. It's said that any pleasure imaginable, Human or otherwise, can be found here, and if there isn't already a haven dedicated to one's desire for unique entertainment, a new one can be built overnight for the right price. The entertainments offered in the havens run the gamut from bloody Xenovore pit fights (where Xenovore fighters take on all comers), to bodyriding (cybernetically connecting to a prostitute with a VR implant that allows the customer to experience her “night on the town”), to dens dedicated to every drug known to have some effect on Human physiology (and even some that have no effect at all).

HISTORY

First settled in 2430, New Alexandria was founded during a dark period in Humanity's history. The scholars who organized and colonized the world felt certain they stood on the cusp of a new Dark Age, a time when much knowledge would be lost. The Xenovore invasion of Human space had reduced almost a third of Humanity's settlements to rubble and had even struck at Earth, destroying monuments that had stood for hundreds or thousands of years. The in-fighting between Human factions that broke out at the beginning of the Xenovore invasion had left its destructive mark on the other two-thirds of Human space. And to make matters even more bleak, once Humans had defeated their common enemy they fought amongst themselves again.

For a group of pessimistic Human scholars, this century of war seemed likely to go on for decades more and threatened to consume much of Human knowledge — especially in fields that did not directly relate to new armaments and defenses. They decided to find a safe place to keep the accumulated knowledge of mankind.

Mandel I was a newly-discovered Earth-type world located at the very edge of Human space. Across Earth many professors and deans were out of work because of the destruction of the institutes of higher learning that had employed them. Led by Dean Marshall McTeague, whose beloved Yale University was destroyed in the vicious Xenovore attack on Earth, these displaced academics formed the nucleus of the colonization effort. McTeague and his peers held fundraiser after fundraiser, playing on the nostalgia of the alumni of their destroyed schools. Within three years they had enough credits to launch a colonization mission.

Compared to most colonists — who simply wanted to survive and prosper in a new home — the settlers of New Alexandria had a greater purpose in mind. Their new world would stand outside the Anarchic Period's fighting. It would be a planet of pacifists, neutral in all political struggles and welcoming anyone who came to learn. It would hold the sum of Human knowledge in trust, and when the fighting ended, the combatants finally weary of the bloodshed, New Alexandria would be there to return to them what they tried to destroy. The Alexandrians would be like monks in the Middle Ages who carefully preserved the knowledge of the ancient world so that it was there for the great thinkers of the Renaissance. The cornerstone of New Alexandria's colonization was an idealistic, romantic dream, but as the future would show, it wasn't entirely realistic.

The settlers were wrong about Humanity's future. Pharos City was still a ramshackle collection of pre-fabricated dwellings and the New Library had just accepted its first class of students when the fighting in Human space ended in 2436 with the founding of the Terran Empire. When representatives of the Terran Empire arrived in the Mandel system and announced that the world was now an Imperial territory, the scholar-settlers cynically

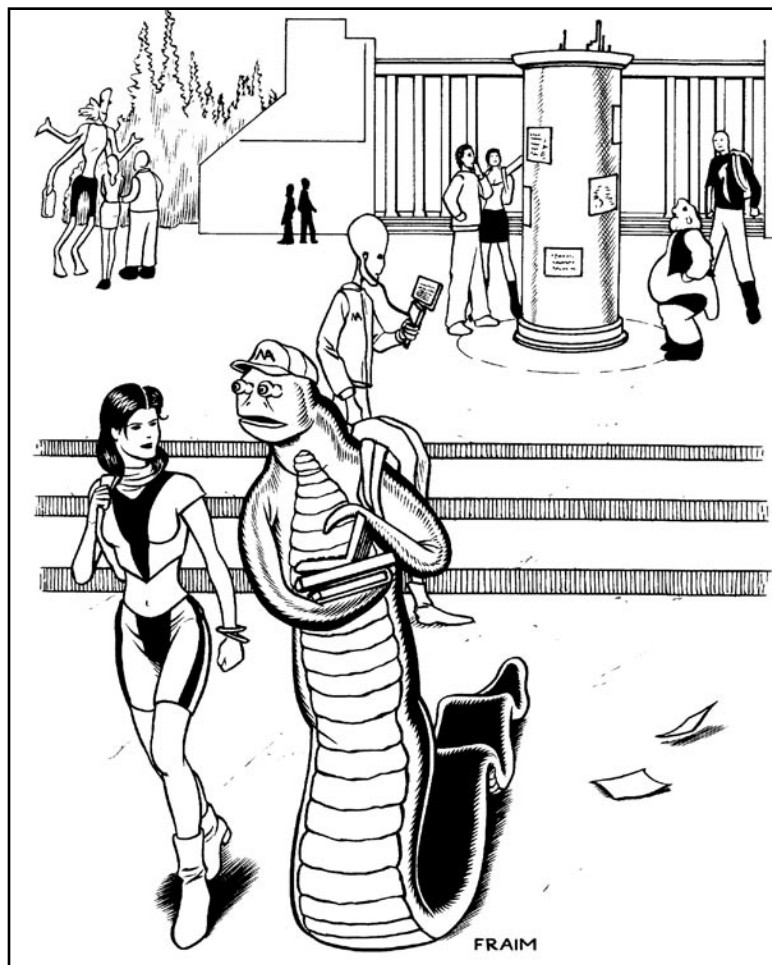
believed this upstart Empire would soon fall apart, once again succumbing to power struggles and infighting. Having no choice in the face of Imperial military might, they quietly allowed the Empire to claim their world as its territory. Their only request was that the Empire keep the system free of military personnel so New Alexandria wouldn't become a target in future wars. With no immediate plans to garrison the system, and knowing it could renege on the terms of the agreement at any time, the Empire acquiesced.

THE CRYSTAL BOOM

New Alexandria spent its early decades as an almost forgotten planet with few exploitable resources and a planetary government that had little interest in profiting from their development in any event. But that changed in 2482 with the discovery of radioactive organic crystals. The crystals were safer to store and less harmful to organics than radioactive ore, and yet after a simple refinement process served as well in everything from power generators to high-grade weapons. They "grew" naturally in caves found in the mountains of New Alexandria and required little mining — a person could simply find a "crop" of crystals, pick them, and sell them for a good price. The prospector's only significant expense was for protective gear to guard himself from the adverse effects of frequent exposure to radiation.

After the discovery of the crystals, the planetary government attempted to regulate their mining and exportation, hoping to study the phenomenon and gain a deeper understanding of how these unique crystals came into being. But the Alexandrians had established a very open democracy in which anyone could vote after being a resident of the planet for twelve standard months — and their immigration policy was equally open, allowing nearly anyone to settle on the planet. Once various corporate interests learned of the existence of the crystals, they wished to exploit them immediately. Taking control of New Alexandria's government was simple — its population of scholars was low, only 10,000 people living in Pharos City and the nearby New Library. Subsidized by corporation, thousands of would-be prospectors immigrated to New Alexandria, and within four years of the discovery of the crystals had taken control of the government. Then began the boom.

From 2486 to the mid-2500s, New Alexandria became a planet where people looking to get rich quick came to make their fortune. Thousands covered the mountain ranges of the planet's continents searching for crops of crystal. Shantytowns filled with the dregs of society sprang up to cater to the needs of the miners (and those who preyed on them). Few miners got rich, but there were enough to keep the hopefuls coming. The government did nothing that might interfere with this; the congress of New Alexandria was full of corrupt politicians looking to get rich in their own way. Some of the scholars left in disgust at the subversion of the original settler's hopes and dreams, but for the most part they retreated to the New Library and tried to keep their academic world alive.



The boom times finally came to an end in 2543 when the mountain ranges were at last picked clean of radioactive crystals. Since then, studies the corrupt government suppressed have come to light revealing that the established crystals seed new growths. Most geologists believe there are now too few crystals to ever give rise to the riches that New Alexandria once possessed. Considering the value of the crystals, New Alexandria saw little of the wealth — its politicians, in the pocket of corporations, never taxed the crop yields — but Alexandrians who remained on the planet had few regrets. They were simply happy the miners — “the 86ers,” as they came to be called — left their planet. Since then New Alexandria has returned to its original purpose: serving as a sanctuary of knowledge and learning.

THE PEOPLE

Along with the standard working classes, whose members have jobs in various service industries, farms, and industrial concerns on the planet, two other classes exist on New Alexandria and form cultures of their own: the academic class, which includes professors and students; and the 86ers — the descendants of the miners who came during the boom and are now the underclass.

Since the end of the boom, the academics have slowly retaken control of their planet. Although not the largest group on Alexandria, they appeal to the large middle class because of their promises of stability and slow, steady economic growth — promises they’ve delivered on. They dragged New Alexandria out of its post-boom depression, and most middle class residents of the planet are happy to continue supporting them. The center of academic culture is the New Library. On the whole the academics and

their followers are a quiet, reserved group whose members claim to act solely to advance the cause of learning, presenting themselves as the inheritors of the original scholar-settlers’ dreams. In truth they’ve turned New Alexandria into an oligarchy where the 86ers never have a chance of climbing the economic ladder. They rationalize this creation of an underclass, validating it academically as an economic reality, but the fact remains they acted, and continue to act, consciously to exclude the 86ers from their society.

The 86ers far outnumber any other class on New Alexandria, but without the corporations to organize and chivvy them, most of them have no interest in politics and don’t bother to vote. Those who do vote are split into so many factions that they’re effectively disenfranchised. Though the most notorious 86ers live in the suburbs of New Alexandria, these impoverished people are most common in the mountains of New Alexandria, where they live in isolated communities at a subsistence level of rustic poverty.

Government

The planetary legislature is the Alexandrian Congress, a democratically-elected body of representatives whose members are primarily responsible for creating and passing laws. The members of the Congress choose from among their own a Chief Executive who's responsible for enforcing the laws and appointing ministers and territory administrators.

Once all residents of New Alexandria could vote for representatives, but this has changed. After the corporate corruption of their government during the boom years, the academic class ensured they would never lose power again by amending the planet's constitution so that only persons who'd resided on New Alexandria for at least ten years and held an advanced degree from a recognized university could vote. The Congress maintains a list of recognized universities, and standards for inclusion on this list are rigorous. It rarely changes, and no university established in the last hundred years is included. Nor is any "specialist" school, such a university that only accepts business students or the like — only universities that offer a largely traditional curriculum qualify.

Though the academic and middle class vocally disapproves of the entertainment havens, frequently making speeches expressing their disgust at the perverse goings-on, it's an open secret the government allows their continued existence as a sort of "opiate of the 86ers." Rather than outlaw them, the government subsidizes advertising campaigns that socially stigmatize patrons of the havens, and encourages local media — sometimes subtly, sometimes not so subtly — to do the same. And when local law enforcement obtains evidence of entertainments that violate Imperial law (which occurs frequently), they're quick to intervene.

Famous Alexandrians

While most inhabitants of New Alexandria are content to live out their lives devoting themselves to their studies (or other, more mundane, pursuits), a few have achieved a certain amount of fame or notoriety.

OLD TOM

Every world has its share of eccentrics and dreamers, and New Alexandria's allotment includes Old Tom. A grizzled Human who looks like he's rarely slept indoors in his life, Old Tom is a prospector and explorer who's wandered all over the face of New Alexandria for decades. He's convinced that rich sources of radioactive crystals remain undiscovered, and that he's going to find them and become incredibly wealthy. Few people know the planet's nooks, crannies, and out-of-the-way spots like he does.

PROFESSOR GEDALA SH'VAR

A beautiful Vayathuran woman noted for her quick wit and cool head under pressure, Professor Sh'var is one of the Galaxy's most famous and accomplished archaeologists. Her charm and grace have gained her access to many worlds and sites that local or interstellar governments usually prefer to keep secret or reserve for themselves. While her critics (of whom there are more than a few) claim she's more interested in fame and getting her face on the holoshows than in serious scholarship, there's no denying that she's made more than her fair share of important discoveries and advanced archaeological research considerably. These include the palace of Shargond VI of Koleba, the forgotten city of Ellim on Jhin, some of the earliest urban centers on Ixendria, and an extensive area of ruins on Osiris whose exact nature and purpose continue to defy analysis.

PROFESSOR SHULAA WHERASH

A Hrac'darese from a (for Hrac'dar) notably loose and libertine religious sect, Professor Wherash teaches Galactic Literature. He's regarded as an interstellar expert on the poetry of Hrac'dar, Deneb IV, Earth, and Dorvala, and can recite tens of thousands of poems from memory. His translations of various famous works of poetry have become bestsellers on numerous planets, raising interest in the subject and making him a wealthy man. He also composes his own verse, which is critically acclaimed but doesn't sell that well.

Economy

The government of New Alexandria claims the planet exports the most valuable, most precious resource of all: knowledge. But the rest of the Empire isn't willing to pay high prices for knowledge, so New Alexandria remains a relatively poor planet despite the hefty fees often pulled in by its think tanks. With careful cultivation of its coastal regions, it's managed in the last fifty years to produce a surplus of food; olives and olive oil, grapes, and wine are among its leading exports. It also has a small but lucrative tourist trade that the government doesn't like to talk about, since it largely consists of offworlders visiting the entertainment havens.

POLYPHEMUS



Polyphemus is the first planet orbiting Vallecia, a type G star. Beyond it are another five planets with over 70 moons between them (Polyphemus itself has no satellite), a large asteroid belt, and an active cometary cloud. Polyphemus is the only rocky planet in the system; the other five are gas giants of varying size and composition.

Polyphemus orbits Vallecia at an average distance of 260 million kilometers. Vallecia II is more than twice as far away and Vallecia VI is a staggering seven billion kilometers distant. A multitude of comets and asteroids orbit the star, their courses altered periodically by the intense gravitational forces of the outer gas giants. Astronomers believe that an asteroid whose orbit was altered and accelerated by Vallecia II and IV collided with Polyphemus, creating the famous Crater Basin.

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: POLYPHEMUS

Planet Name: Polyphemus (Imperial designation: Vallecia I)

Classification: Type 1

System Data: No moons; five other planets in system

Gravity: 0.412 G

Day And Year: 19 standard hours in a day; 403 standard days in a year

Atmosphere: Earth-like — 74% Nitrogen; 24% Oxygen; 2% Other

Hydrosphere: Water covers only 5% of the surface of Polyphemus

Meteorological Overview: Temperate within the crater; frigid (even freezing) elsewhere on the planet, though subsurface lava flows warm the ground enough to allow for flowing liquid water in many places.

Sentient Species: None native

ATRI Rating: 11

Government: Democratic republic (elected global council), with the right to vote depending on land ownership

Affiliation: Senate world of the Terran Empire

Resources: Major trading destination on the Antispinward Corridor; metallic ore mining; manufacturing

Places Of Note: The Liappu Island ore mines; the Great Falls; the Air and Power Plants; the cities of Sividias, Vittoria, and Derendon

Ship Facilities: The Transport Orbiter Hub (high port/spacedock); Vittoria Spaceport; several smaller planet-side spaceports

In geological terms, the asteroid crashed into the planet a relatively short time ago. The planet's surface had already cooled, forming a porous crust over 15 km thick that contained a complex network of subterranean rivers and lava flows. When the asteroid collided with Polyphemus, a major section of the underground system was disrupted. Billions of tons of earth were compacted and ejected, creating the Crater Basin.

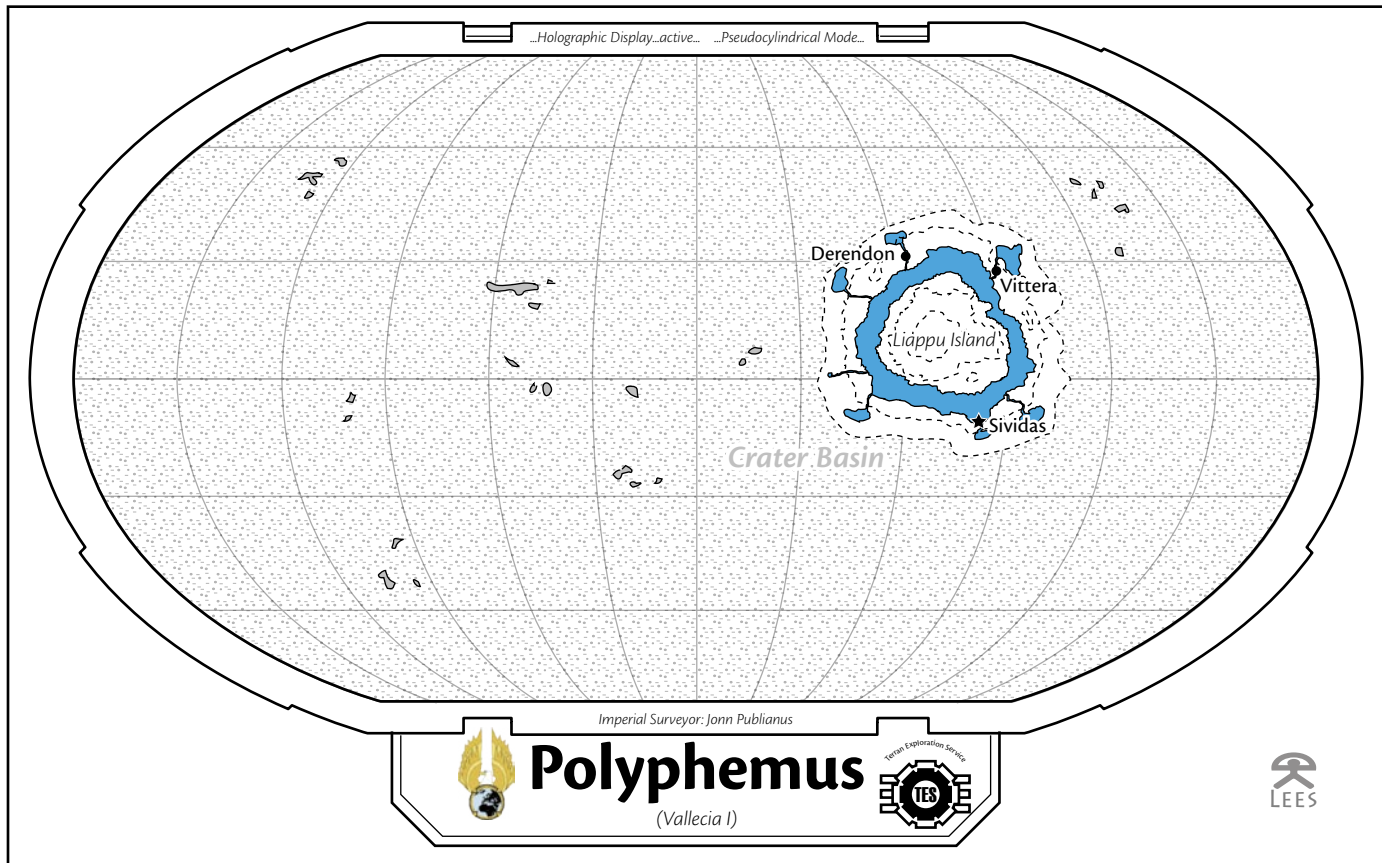
In the millennia following the calamity, the basin settled into a unique ecosystem. Any forms of life that were evolving on the planet at the time of the collision were eradicated; only a few simple microorganisms survived. By the time colonists came to settle in the basin there existed only basic forms of plant and animal life, both on the floor of the basin and in the sea, lakes, and waterways as well as in the hot springs and rivers that cover the upper surface of the planet.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Polyphemus is approximately the size of Mars, measuring 6,854 km in diameter. It has a total surface area of 147,508,772 square kilometers, 6,688,640 of which are located in the Crater Basin. Only half a million square kilometers within the Basin are deep enough to have air thick enough to breathe. Jagged mountains and canyons, plus an abundance of geysers, lava pools, and sulfur and hot springs, cover the rest of the planet's surface. There are also dozens of large lakes and small seas where water wells up from the bowels of the planet to pool at lower surface elevations.

Countless rivers cut through the rocky surface, creating deep canyons ending at the lip of the Crater Basin. Waterfalls, some descending as far as 2000 meters, mark where the flowing water enters the basin. Beyond the falls, the water etches its way through the rolling hills and steep valleys, sometimes feeding into smaller craters to create lakes. Eventually, all of the water from the surface settles into the Nisiran Sea at the basin's bottom.

In the center of the basin lies Liappu Island, the remnant of the asteroid that created the complex crater. The island is composed primarily of solid iron, nickel, and other heavy metals, making it different from the primarily magmatic crust of the planet's surface. The majority of the island rises high above the 500-meter air line, making only the land near the shores hospitable without technology. Hundreds of mining tunnels bore deep into the island so the inhabitants can extract and process a seemingly never-ending supply of metal.



Surrounding the island is the ring-shaped Nisiran Sea, the largest body of water on the planet. Many of the thousands of geysers that dot the upper surface of Polyphemus feed directly into the crater basin and fill the Nisiran Sea. The sea extends down over a kilometer at its deepest point and is host to a handful of indigenous amphibian- and fish-like creatures.

The Rienslar Territories run from the outer shores of the Nisiran Sea to the highlands located near the edge of the crater. The majority of the towns on Polyphemus are located in the Territories, clinging to the shores of the Nisiran Sea or the multitudes of rivers that empty into it. Like Liappu Island, most of the land in the Territories is above the breathable zone, making regular living impossible, but the habitable parts are rich in minerals conducive to agriculture.

Places Of Note

As a thriving world at the far end of the Antispinward Corridor and the beginning of the Frontier, Polyphemus has something to appeal to just about anyone, from busy cities and breathtaking vistas to dark and dirty industrial locales. It's no wonder that many people who come to visit Polyphemus find that they never want to leave.

ORE MINES OF LIAPPU ISLAND

Various companies licensed by the Empire run extensive mining operations all over the island. Since the asteroid remnant is rich in valuable ore and seems unlikely to run out anytime soon, these companies quickly abandon mines that don't produce at a high rate. As a result, people looking for adventure can hike deep into the heart of the meteorite to tour abandoned shafts, quarries, and cave systems. Lucky spelunkers sometimes find scraps of precious metals left behind by the old mining operations. Visitors can also take guided tours through the currently active mines.

GREAT FALLS AND CLIFFS

Tourists visiting Polyphemus can see some of the largest, most spectacular waterfalls the Galaxy has to offer thanks to the depth of the crater basin and the water that flows into it from the surface. The crater is 15 km deep, and near the rim are sheer cliffs that rise straight up for three to four kilometers at a time. Extreme athletes don environmental suits and attempt to climb these mammoth cliffs, while others enjoy the thrill of parachuting off the cliffs into the raging rivers kilometers below. Tour

Worlds Of Empire ■ Chapter Two

shuttlecrafts take daily trips to the Great Falls, which fall for thousands of meters to crash into a lake near the crater floor. An enormous outcropping of rock splits the waterfall, and upon the massive stone sits a visitor's center accessible only by hourly shuttles from Vittoria. From there the curious can take speedboat rides up the river along the upper surface of the planet. The more daring can elect to take *the Plunge*, an amazing ride down the waterfall while suspended inside a transparent, heavily armored bubble. Inertial compensation fields protect the rider from the sudden impact after falling over three thousand meters.

INDUSTRIAL FACTORIES

Because of Polyphemus's lack of abundant usable land in comparison to other colonized worlds, the colonial administrators required companies who wished to establish factories or heavy industry to build them either on the upper surface of the planet or in the highlands near the basin's rim. To this day that's where you'll find more than 90% of all industrial facilities on Polyphemus. Corporations building new factories receive low-interest loans from the planetary government to help cover the heightened cost.

Factories and plants on the surface spread for several kilometers around the rim; most are protected by reinforced, transparent domes. Each facility has a docking area where vehicles carrying workers and supplies from the crater can gain access to the buildings within. Barracks are also common in these facilities, allowing employees to stay at the compound for long stretches of time without having to commute hundreds of kilometers each day. For many laborers the facility barracks are like a second home — and there's a sizable minority who live there year-round.

AIR AND POWER PLANTS

Although the air at the bottom of the crater is naturally dense enough for Humans to survive, environmental engineers have constructed air and power ("AP") plants that pump pure oxygen into the atmosphere to increase the size of the area where people can live unaided. Submerged in the rivers that cut through the cities, these enormous machines first filter the water, separating out any impurities. Massive pumps then channel the water into large electrolytic cells, splitting the molecules into oxygen and hydrogen gas. It then pumps the oxygen into the atmosphere and uses the hydrogen for fuel for the antimatter reactors that power the entire city.

The planetary government runs the plants. It employs thousands of engineers, scientists, mechanics, programmers, administrators, and security specialists to keep them up and running, safe and secure. Although the oxygen provided is important to the comfort of everyday life on Polyphemus, the hydrogen fuel is essential. Imperial intelligence reports suggest that if terrorists, rebels, or criminals attacked Polyphemus, the most likely targets would be the AP plants. While vital facilities in each city are also equipped with emergency power generators of their own, loss of an AP plant would be catastrophic for the populace.

CITIES

More than half the population of Polyphemus lives in Sivas, Vittoria, and Derendon, the capitals of the three regional divisions (see below). Each city is a major metropolis full of towering skyscrapers, bustling business and commercial centers, and sprawls of housing facilities.

Sivas

The Sivas District takes up almost the entire southern half of the crater, not including Liappu Island itself. The governor's office is located in Sivas in what's known as the Capital Compound, a large area of the city devoted to local and Imperial government operations. Sivas is at the southern edge of the Lyvas River Delta where the Southern Lyvas River splits into two smaller rivers before emptying into the Nisiran Sea. It's also known as the Green City due to the abundant farmlands north of the city proper. The East and West Lyvas Rivers border the Delta and bring water to the farmlands and ranches that supply the planet with most of its fresh food supply.

Vittoria

The Vittoria District occupies the northeast quadrant of the crater and has the most diversity among its denizens due to the enormous starport located in the center of the city of Vittoria. The sprawl of businesses surrounding the port offer thousands of employment opportunities to just-off-the-ship travelers looking for a way to get started on the planet. Fex, Mondabi, and even Osathri (who swim upstream from their colony at the mouth of the Vittoria River) can be found shopping in the local malls, which are often several stories tall.

Derendon

The northwestern section of the crater is the Derendon District. Derendon proper is located in an even smaller crater along the Blue Ox River. The river enters the crater and the city from the north, widens to form a lake in the center, exits the crater in the southeast and finally empties into the Nisiran Sea kilometers to the south. In the middle of the lake is an island where a majority of Derendon's commercial facilities are located. Residential areas hug the banks of the river and lake for dozens of miles up and downstream.

TRANSPORTATION

Within the cities of Polyphemus, local traffic is limited to only wheeled vehicles or hovercraft that remain within one meter off the ground. Flyers and grav cars are less restricted in the outlying residential areas and factory grounds, but even there traffic is strictly regulated due to the population density.

Expansive highways built to accommodate both ground and hover traffic connect the major cities. Winding along the outer coast of the Nisiran Sea, the highways are the primary routes of travel between cities for both residents and businesses. Traveling offroad is permitted, but the landscape of the crater floor is so treacherous that only the most expert (or daredevil) drivers ever venture off of the highways.

POLYPHEMUS TRANSPORTATION PRICES

Prices are as of 2640, and are subject to fluctuation based on the cost of fuel and various other factors.

From	To	Air	Ground	Distance
Vittoria	Derendon	1800 credits	180 credits	1,988 km
Vittoria	Sividas	1700 credits	170 credits	1,725 km
Derendon	Sividas	900 credits	150 credits	980 km
Local	—	10 credits	—	—
Surface	Orbiter Hub	200 credits*	—	—

* The Surface to Hub charge is usually included in the interstellar transport prices.

The three major cities have starports and airports where passage to other cities and worlds can be purchased. InStarCo, Rocket Red, Corridor Cruises, and Galaxia, and other major starlines have daily flights to carry passengers back to the Heartworlds or further out into the Frontier. It's also possible to book passage with private couriers and merchants who happen to be going in the right direction. The bars of the starports are usually filled with private ship owners who'd be more than happy to make a few extra credits by giving someone a lift.

Persons and goods leaving Polyphemus first travel by shuttlecraft to the Transport Orbiter Hub, an enormous high port that circumnavigates the planet. After arriving at the Hub, passengers and cargo are transferred to the appropriate starliner. The trip from surface to Hub, or vice-versa, usually takes two to four hours depending on traffic, weather conditions, and the like.

HISTORY

In the early 2400s there existed many starbases and space stations near the farthest reaches of the Antispinward Corridor that were used as way-points by merchant and Imperial military vessels, but there remained a need for a secure planetary anchor in the region. The Empire couldn't find any planet that was perfectly suited for that role, but Polyphemus had an excellent location, so the Imperial government decided it would do. In 2438 it founded the first outpost on the floor of the Crater Basin; that outpost grew into the city of Sividas.

Initial expeditions throughout the crater revealed many prime locations for development, chiefly along the coast of the Nisiran Sea and the rivers that fed it at lower elevations. Irrigation engineering quickly arranged things to facilitate agriculture in the arable regions; electrolytic cell technology made power, oxygen, and clean water readily available. Between generous incentives offered by the Imperial government and the planet's potential as a trading center, it didn't take much to convince major corporations to build production facilities on Polyphemus. Ever since then the planet's been a hive of industry and commerce. By 2484 Polyphemus was viable enough for Emperor Gregorio to move successfully for it to become a Senatorial world.

THE PEOPLE

Polyphemus is home to over 280 million people. Most natural-born Polyphemans are Human subtype Martians because of the low gravity and relatively thin air of the planet, but plenty of normal Humans and even a few Selkies call the planet home. The Osathri have established a colony near the outer northeastern shore of the Nisiran Sea and a large settlement on Liappu Island houses thousands of Toractans who've found employment in the mines. Fex, Rigellians, and other races of the Empire are also common.

Additionally, Polyphemus's location makes it an ideal trading post for merchants from the Mon'dabi Federation (and even from the Ackálian Empire). Almost every major commerce area has at least one Mon'dabi-run store or business; some places have entire malls dedicated strictly to merchandise from Monda and other Federation worlds.

To be a citizen of Polyphemus one must own land. As long as someone owns at least a quarter-acre of land, he's entitled to vote and receive the other benefits of citizenship; otherwise he's something of a second-class resident (though he has the same civil rights as a citizen). The planetary government controls all of the land on Polyphemus and sells parcels to anyone seeking citizenship or citizens who want to own more land. Although the government claims that anyone who has the financial means to purchase land may do so, it's not uncommon for objectionable petitioners to in effect be denied land because of the acres of red tape the bureaucracy can put in their way.

Government

Polyphemus has belonged to the Terran Empire for centuries, dating back to the initial colonization in 2438; it became a Senate world in 2484.

PLANETARY GOVERNMENT

The main governing body of Polyphemus is the *Global Council*, an oligarchy of representatives elected to office by the citizens every five years; there are no term limits. There's one Councilor for every fifty million voting citizens, which means there are five as of 2640. During the election, any citizen who wants to run may do so, and the five who receive the most votes win the seats. Polyphemans believe this system has consistently provided a Council that truly represents the best interests of a majority of the planet's population; satisfaction

MEMBERS OF THE GLOBAL COUNCIL

Throughout its existence, the Global Council has had over 200 different Councilors. As of 2640, the members of the Polyphemus Global Council are as follows:

Name	Title	Terms in Office
Jeg Tankier	Senior Councilor	6
Yuki Megumi	Junior Councilor	3
Mark Hanton	Councilor	3
Rasmoh Rayner	Councilor	2
Emerson Ketirev	Minor Councilor	1

with planetary government has remained consistently high for decades.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The crater is divided into three political districts. Each district has an elected *Governor* who works closely with the *District Assembly*, a committee of seven officials each representing a “ward” within the district. Gubernatorial terms are five years, with a limit of two full terms. Assemblymen and women serve for three years and are limited to four terms in office.

GOVERNORS OF POLYPHEMUS

As of 2640, the governors of Polyphemus are as follows:

Territory	Name	Terms in Office
Sividas	Magda Meskit	2
Vittoria	Briona Nichola	1
Derendon	Daerik Agedob	2

IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT

As of 2640 Aidana Jeska, a fourth generation Polyphemus citizen whose great-grandparents were among the planet’s first settlers, represents Polyphemus in the Senate. Jeska brings very little negativity to the Senate — she and the people of Polyphemus are happy with their current, productive relationship with the Imperial government — and is a staunch Imperial loyalist.

Sub-Minister Misha Frenklak is a member of the Ministry for Trade and is the chief liaison between the Empire and Global Council. His relationship with the Council is generally upbeat and cooperative as long as business is good and the merchants and people of Polyphemus operate and behave within Imperial guidelines and laws. His offices in Vittoria employ hundreds of Polyphemans, making him a popular man in the city.

Because of the importance of Polyphemus to the coffers of the Empire, the Navy always keeps a pair of Imperial cruisers and several squadrons of fighters near Polyphemus. Captain Bryn Terikov, commander of the *Bravura*-class cruiser *Vigilance*, controls all Imperial forces in the area. Other cruisers and patrol vessels make routine stops at Polyphemus to refresh supplies and continue on their routes either back up the Antispinward Corridor or further out into the Terran frontier toward the Mon’dabi Federation and Ackálian Empire.

Economy

Polyphemus’s position at the terminus of the Antispinward Corridor means it’s something of a frontier planet, but also gives it a thriving economy based primarily on trade. More than half of the Imperial space traffic to the further Frontier, Mon’dabi space, and Ackálian space stops at Polyphemus on its way out, and usually on its way back in as well. The massive, easily-accessed reserves of heavy metals found in the Crater Basin also contributes to the economy and forms the mainstay of the planet’s industrial base.

MINING

The meteorite that makes up Liappu Island consists primarily of nickel and iron ores and related mixed alloys. Precious metals, including iridium, are found in kilometer-long veins running throughout the island. A large percentage of the ores mined on Liappu are processed locally for use by Polypheman factories, but the mines produce so much ore that there’s plenty left for export (often to Frontier colony worlds in need of raw materials before they establish their own mines).

CORPORATIONS

As a Senate world, Polyphemus offers an excellent business atmosphere to companies because the local government isn’t required to pay taxes to the Empire. Consequently, the tax rates on business entities are much lower than on colony worlds. Until Polyphemus became a Senatorial system, it had relatively little industry; now corporations flock there, eager to take advantage of its prime location.

Draconis Defenseworks

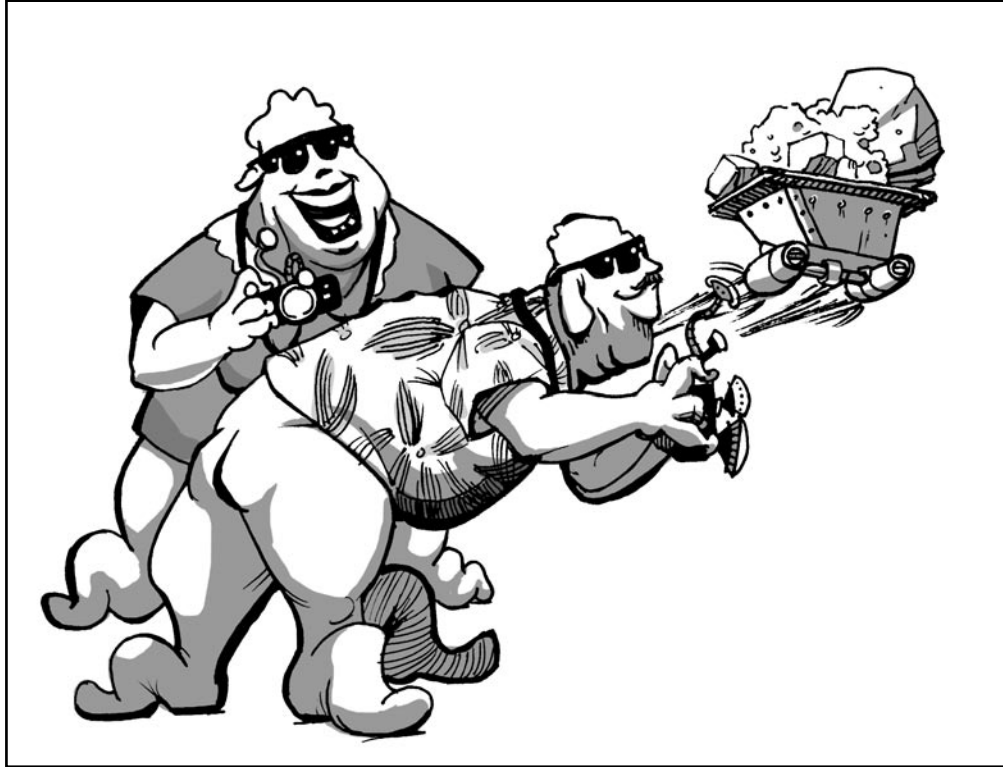
At the request of the Empire, Draconis Defenseworks established manufacturing facilities on Polyphemus to make it easier to outfit and upgrade the weapons systems of the Imperial Fleet this far away from the Heartworlds. Draconis employs thousands of civilians and military technicians in its surface factories and only sells directly to the Empire. Its administrative offices on Polyphemus are in Derendon.

Johnrys Spaceworks

Johnrys Spaceworks develops internal systems for starships of all shapes and sizes. Because of Polyphemus’s proximity to the Frontier, new systems for interstellar vessels are in high demand and “JR” takes advantage of that fact. Although the company sells primarily to commercial fleets via its wholesale facility in Vittoria, individual JR systems can be found in dealerships across the Crater Basin.

Krono-Dynatronics

One of the very first corporations to build factories on Polyphemus was Krono-Dynatronics. K-D tries to be the first vehicle manufacturer on new colonies it thinks have a real chance of prospering; after all, colonists want to be able to get around on their new world and usually can’t rely on mass transit. K-D therefore keeps tabs on all of



the major exploration firms, traders guilds, and freelance explorers; it knows a surprising amount about even the smallest expeditions. Over 70% of all civilian ground vehicles, hovercraft, and aircraft on Polyphemus come from the K-D factories on the crater's rim.

Almost every major city in the Empire has at least one Krono-Dynatronics showroom featuring the latest and greatest in civilian transport vehicles, and Vittoria, Derendon, and Sivas are no different. Because it has a large manufacturing plant on the planet, prices for K-D vehicles are generally on the lower end of the price range.

RETAIL

Polyphemus is one of the most commercially active planets along the Corridor and is by far the largest commerce destination in the region. In the tens of thousands of shops, stores, outlets, and malls scattered throughout the Crater Basin consumers can find nearly anything available in the retail chain (though the selection isn't as good as in the Heartworlds, and it may take new items a little while to filter out this far).

Cody's Commerce Center

Cody's Commerce Center is a franchise of superstores specializing in everyday needs for both planetside dwellers and spacefarers. Founded on Polyphemus four decades ago, it has fifteen stores throughout the planet and over a hundred along the Antispinward Corridor. Its products, advertising, and financial clout are so evident on Polyphemus that some people claim its Board of Directors, not the Global Council, really runs things.

SIGMA CAERULEUS III



Sigma Caeruleus is an F6IV (a cool yellow-white subgiant) star with four planets. Sigma Caeruleus I and II are rocky, barren worlds of little interest to anyone but a geologist. The Kinzareth government keeps several supply depots near those worlds' equators for the periodic scientific teams that come to the planet, but there are no permanent inhabitants of either world.

Sigma Caeruleus IV is a massive gas giant with six moons. Two of these tiny bodies, Bahgtru (radius: 300 miles) and Luthic (radius: 100 miles), have methane-based biospheres that support exotic lifeforms of great scientific interest but little known commercial value. Each of the moons has an unbreathable methane atmosphere, shallow swampy seas, and tiny polar caps. Both are inhabited by beings known as the *Gauth*: glowing, hydrogen-filled sacks capable of floating freely around their homeworlds (and, when the two moons pass close to one another every century, even moving from one world to another). There are several dozen species of *Gauth*, none of which appear to have any sort of sentience.

Sigma Caeruleus III is an Earth-like planet populated by Human colonists and a native feline species known as the Zarr. It's orbited by one small, close-orbit moon known as Shargaas that's remarkable for its large subsurface reservoirs of frozen water. Several hundred Humans and Zarr live in a small lunar colony known as New Beginnings near the largest of these static subterranean seas.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Sigma Caeruleus III (known as Noah's World to its Yezidi settlers and *Xrathnu Nan* ["Beam of Light"] to its native Zarr population) is an arid Earth-like planet that orbits a blue-white star at about the same distance as Mars is from Sol. It's a primarily mountainous world with only a few small, shallow seas near the equator to break up the seemingly endless monotony of rolling hills, enormous bogs, broad grassy plains, and high sierra type wastes. While rainfall is a comparatively rare phenomenon, light mists blow across much of its surface at both sunrise and sunset, providing sufficient moisture for the hardy Caerulean plant life. Rainbows are extremely common.

Sigma Caeruleus III is home to a stunning variety of native herd animals as well as cattle, deer, horses, and camels introduced by early settlers and explorers. These beasts migrate in a westward direction year round as the planet's plant life has

evolved somewhat differently from that of most known worlds. Some grasses bloom in the warm months and others in the cold depending on the nitrogen content of the soil. Fortunately these odd grasses possess the needed "right-handed" amino acid genetic structures necessary for earthborn herbivorous species to derive sustenance from them. The more mountainous regions are host to a variety of treelike species that most closely resemble aspens, though they're considerably larger. Yezidi settlers have successfully cultivated grapes, olives, dates, everfruit, and other desert-friendly plants in the planet's high valleys.

PLACES OF NOTE

Noah's World currently has three major urban centers. The planetary capital of d'Estaing has some two million inhabitants, including the vast majority of the world's ethnic Kinzareth inhabitants — a light-skinned, dark-haired people descended from exiled European bureaucrats. It's an overwhelmingly drab metropolis of cement housing projects, rectangular government buildings, and metal warehouses that would be depressing were it not for the broad, tree-lined streets and the presence of literally thousands of large sculptures. The inhabitants of d'Estaing are a self-important and officious bunch who nevertheless take a considerable amount of civic pride in their clean, organized, and relatively crime-free city. It also has a top-notch spaceport with excellent dry dock facilities for visiting spacecraft.

The Yezidi city of Asi pe Degere ("Place of Plenty") lies near the world's equator on the shore of the Grankhul Sea. It's a beautiful but bizarre-looking metropolis dominated by monolithic stone shrines, tombs, and temples, many constructed with distinctive conical roofs. Here the most devout members of this little-known religion gather to practice their faith in its purest form. Since strict adherence to the Yezidi faith requires frequent ceremonial cleansing in running water, dozens of tiny artificial rivers that flow through knee-high stone waterways crisscross the city. Three times a day *Pirs* (priests) call the faithful to prayer in private sanctuaries, where they kneel in the direction of the sun.

Shatam Naxal ("the Meeting Place of Men") is the only existing city of the Zarr, although there were twenty semi-autonomous cities on Sigma Caeruleus III when the Kinzareth Imperium discovered it. Rebuilt with considerable effort and at great expense upon the radioactive ruins of the

THE KINZARETH IMPERIUM

The Kinzareth Imperium was a neo-socialist police state that ruled over five colony worlds located on the outskirts of Human occupied space before the Xenovore Wars. Founded by a cabal of wealthy Western European administrative officials fleeing the political aftermath of the Second Holocaust, the Imperium was a bureaucratic autocracy that placed an extreme emphasis on conformity, ethnic purity, and central authoritarian control. It was considered one of the most oppressive regimes to enjoy a seat in the United Earth government and, later, the Imperial Senate. The Imperium's greed, cruelty, and expansionist tendencies were often cited by the federalist political faction of United Earth as an example of why strong interplanetary government had become necessary in the twenty-third century. Nevertheless, Kinzareth remained loyal to the United Earth government during the Spinward Secession of 2329 because of the greater threat of Xenovore invasion. After the war it reformed considerably, becoming a more-or-less benevolent constitutional monarchy that granted considerable civil rights to all of its citizens.

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: SIGMA CAERULEUS III

Planet Name: Sigma Caeruleus III, also known as Noah's World. The native Zarr name for the planet is *Xrathnu Nan* ("Beam of Light").

Classification: Type 1 world

System Data: Sigma Caeruleus is an F6IV star with a four planet system designated Sigma Caeruleus I through IV. Sigma Caeruleus III is an Earth-like planet with a single moon.

Gravity: 0.97 G

Day And Years: There are 23.8 standard hours in each day, 680 standard days in a year.

Atmosphere: Earth-like — 73% Nitrogen; 23% Oxygen; 4% Other

Hydrosphere: Although the world is fairly water-rich, only 15% of its surface is covered by water — small, shallow seas mostly located near the equator. The remainder is locked up in its polar icecaps, massive northern glaciers, and enormous muddy flatlands that stretch for millions of square kilometers. Rain is quite rare, but massive mists blanket much of the world during sunrise and sunset, except in colder zones where it lightly snows instead.

Meteorological Overview: Noah's World is surprisingly arid for all of its mists, largely because its soil is exceptionally sandy. In most places its climate resembles that of Central Asia on Earth and the weather is remarkably consistent year-round.

Sentient Species: The native species of Sigma Caeruleus III is the Zarr, a warlike feline race. The Yezidi, a Kurdish people, have also extensively settled it.

ATRI Rating: 10. The Zarr had reached ATRI 8 when discovered by Humans.

Government: A non-geographic ethnic confederacy comprised of Kinzareth, Zarr, and Yezidi with an independent judiciary comprised of religious leaders. A popularly elected executive branch handles inter-cultural and foreign relations matters.

Affiliation: A semi-autonomous colony world of Kinzareth, a Senate world of the Terran Empire

Resources: Considerable agricultural production; uranium mines

Places of Note: There are three large and distinctive cities on the planet. The planetary capital of d'Estaing is its largest metropolis as well as home to most of its 1.2 million ethnically Kinzareth inhabitants. The Zarr city of *Shatam Naxal* ("Meeting Place of Men") has arisen from atomic ashes to reclaim much of its pre-colonial glory. The Yezidi city of *Asi pe Degere* ("Place of Plenty") is remarkable as both a commercial and religious center.

Ship Facilities: There are excellent repair and retrofit facilities in d'Estaing as well as a smattering of smaller landing fields around the planet.

greatest of these pre-Human urban centers, Shatam Naxal is a truly alien metropolis. A single enormous structure, the seemingly non-Euclidian city is huge complex of some 8,000 large contiguous rooms spread over ten stories of superbly tooled (and extremely sturdy) masonry. These are inner spaces

with hundreds of large open areas used for military training, gardens, corrals, and open-air theaters. Some 50,000 Zarr, primarily from the Nul grouping of Nrrullia Hulls, make this city-complex their home, as do about a thousand Humans, primarily from the legendary Maronesy clan of Yezidi warriors and statesmen.

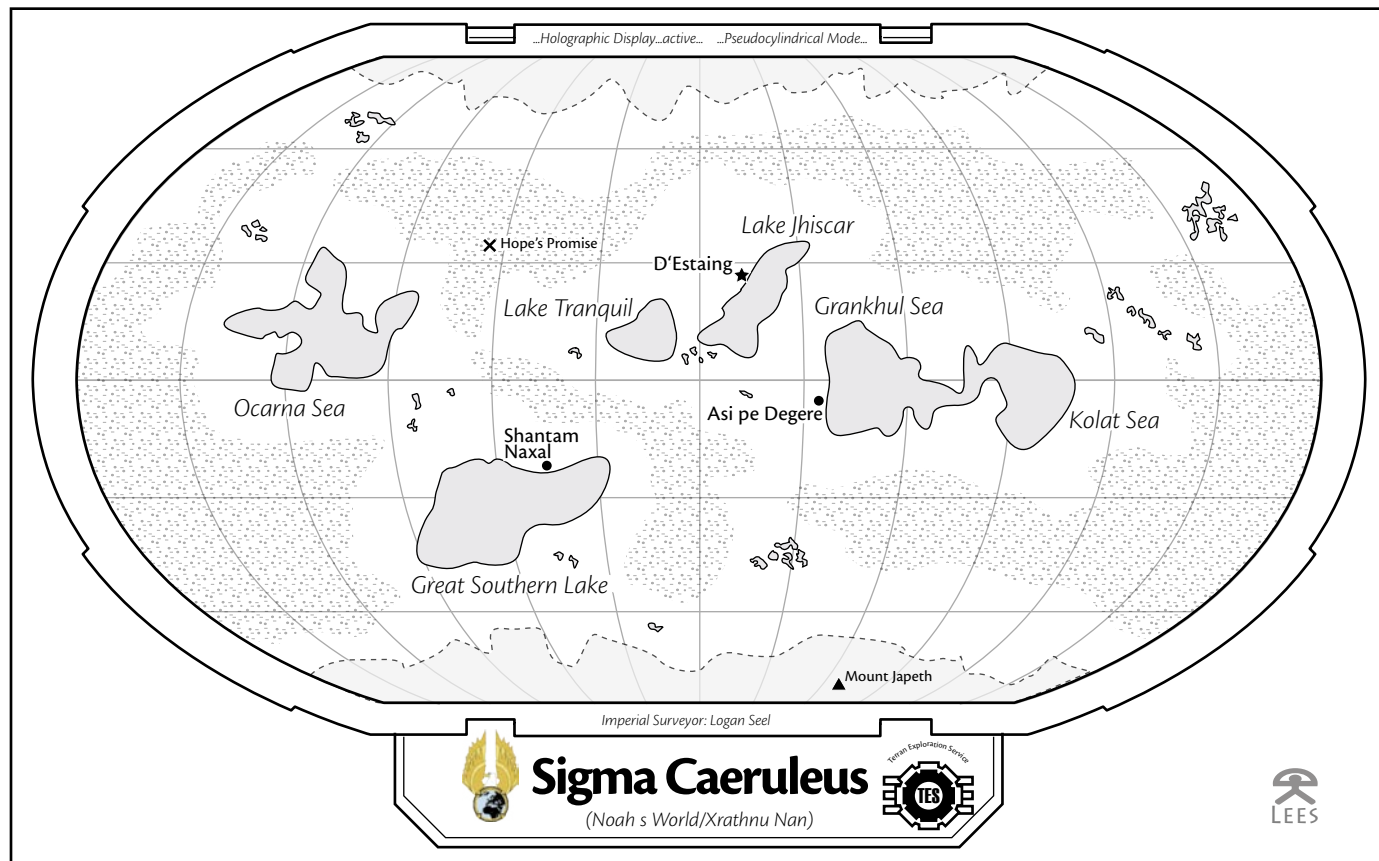
HISTORY

At the time of the arrival of the first Kinzareth Imperial survey ship in 2231 the Zarr had achieved a fairly sophisticated technology (ATRI 8) including solar power, primitive laser weapons, and the creation of several simple interplanetary spacecraft. Quickly sizing up the situation, the Kinzareth dispatched their battle fleet to destroy all Zarr space vehicles and aircraft. They then hit the planet's dozen political centers with low-yield nuclear weapons; an invasion of ground troops and tanks with air support quickly followed. Within a matter of days the Zarr had been reduced to the status of vassals on their own planet. They refer to this event as *Vnalla Ar*, or "The Catastrophe."

The Yezidi were a dissenting religious sect who still practiced the traditional pre-Islamic faith of certain Kurdish peoples. Like other Kurdish groups they're native to the mountainous areas of northern Iraq and southern Turkey. Having endured centuries of persecution, genocide, and statelessness, the Yezidi became a particularly close-knit tribe of people, wary of outsiders and highly resistant to change. After barely surviving the widespread ethnic cleansing that followed the establishment of the Second Caliphate in 2195, the Yezidi were anxious to leave Earth and try their hand at settling an uninhabited colony world somewhere far from the mainstream of United Earth society. For half a century they drifted around the edge of Human space on the massive converted cargo ship *Khalwa*, a refugee people taking whatever work the governments of the Spinward Worlds saw fit to give them.

Finally in 2245 it seemed that the Yezidi had realized their dream. The Kinzareth Imperium, which had recently declared the third planet of the Sigma Caeruleus system open to Human colonization, approached the wandering Kurdish clan with a proposition. In exchange for an oath of allegiance to the Imperium, they would be allowed to claim that world for their own. The Yezidi accepted and swore a loyalty oath to the Emperor... but when they arrived at their destination the Kinzareth navy seized and then destroyed the *Khalwa*, forever marooning the tribe on their new planet. They were then put to work alongside the conquered Zarr as miners, farmers, and herdsman. Many Yezidi subsequently escaped the clutches of the Imperium. They fanned out across the face of the world, establishing fortified towns, villages, and homesteads wherever they went.

By 2332 civilization on Sigma Caeruleus III had devolved into a vicious three-way civil war between the Kinzareth government (which held the world's major cities), the Yezidi (who controlled the vast majority of her towns and irrigated farmland),



and the Zarr (who tenaciously clung to the planet's mountains, vast grasslands, and unexplored badlands). Only the establishment of a new religion in 2310 (see *The Cult of Tranta Shun* on page 91) by the elders of the Yezidi and Zarr prevented a war of all-out extermination between the two groups, allowing them to concentrate the majority of their guerrilla activities against the Kinzareth authorities. The planetary government maintained at least a semblance of rule through its Imperiors — heavily armed, hard-bitten, cynical policemen who roamed the surface of the world alone in giant armored vehicles. This seemingly endless cycle of violence was broken only by the arrival of a Xenovore invasion force that year (see accompanying text box).

When Admiral Zhukov arrived to liberate Noah's World in 2352 he found a planet united in its resolve. Over a twenty-year period of fierce resistance the Kinzareth, Yezidi, and Zarr had been transformed from blood enemies into a single people with easily-overlooked cultural differences. Upon their liberation these newly freed peoples elected physician, humanitarian, and renowned rebel leader Yezmond Maronesy as their first Planetary President. They chose to remain a colony world of Kinzareth, although

they demanded and were given special privileges and rights under that system's newly reformed constitutional monarchy. Many of the ethnically Kinzareth inhabitants of Sigma Caeruleus III returned to their homeworld, where they played a pivotal role not only in physically rebuilding the shattered planet but in reshaping its sickened, bureaucratic culture into something considerably more democratic and free.

Today Sigma Caeruleus III is a prosperous world with relatively little violence outside of that practiced by adherents of Tranta Shun, although it still retains a strong martial tradition. Its inhabitants are renowned throughout the Terran Empire as infantrymen of seemingly legendary ability. Many young Caeruleans travel offworld to serve in the Imperial Marines, where some have advanced as high as Major General in the service's ranks. Even 300 years after the events of the Xenovore War, the inhabitants of Xrathnu Nan have a strong cultural memory of their occupation by an alien army and their subsequent liberation by United Earth forces. Not surprisingly they're extremely loyal to the Empire, which they consider a liberating and protective influence on interstellar culture.

THE XENOVORE WAR

Sigma Caeruleus III was one of the very first worlds attacked by the Xenovores after the destruction of the Defense Fleet in 2332. Before this conflict the alien aggressors had launched only a single expeditionary force into the Republic of Beldana V. There they encountered little in the way of opposition from the peaceful miners, farmers, and scientists who had settled such picturesque worlds as Chabrabdrah's Gift and Paco's Retreat. They only faced serious opposition upon reaching Beldana V itself where, with a great deal of effort, Human forces blunted their advance. Based on this information the Xenovores came to the logical (yet not entirely correct) conclusion that Humanity was soft, disorganized, and ripe for conquest. They had no reason to suspect that the small, arid planet they selected as one of their first targets would be any different.

They couldn't have been more wrong.

For most civilized people in the twenty-fourth century Noah's World was an unthinkable, almost unbelievable nightmare. It was twenty-first century Somalia spread out over an entire planet. While most of United Earth's colony worlds lacked an experienced military or an armed civilian population, almost every adult of any species or race on Noah's World was an assault weapon-wielding veteran of fratricidal feuding... and its Kinzareth Imperiors were even more heavily armed than that. Every city, town, inhabited mountain valley, and homestead was built with defense in mind. Armored cars with roof-mounted 25mm autocannons were the world's primary means of transportation. Minefields, unexploded cluster bombs, pit traps, weapons caches, hidden bunkers, and barbed wire were features of almost every habitable portion of the planet. Children learned to field-strip rifles before they knew how to read or write. Ambushing was more of a popular sport than a military maneuver.

Of all the inhabited worlds in the antispinward portion of Human space, Sigma Caeruleus III was probably the single worst place to invade. Unaware of the situation on the ground and fairly indifferent to his opponent's psychology, Polemarch *Url! Hre'ung* (Spreader of Woe) executed an invasion plan that *seemed* foolproof. First his forces destroyed the light cruisers KIS *Luxembourg* and KIS *Brussels* as well as the planet's orbital defense satellite. Then they struck several major population and communication centers with low-yield nuclear warheads on the assumption doing so would neutralize all organized planetary resistance. This disrupted communications but was largely ineffective at killing the ever-paranoid Kinzareth, who either bunkered down in lead-lined subterranean vaults or spread out across the planet's face in their huge M12 armored vehicles.

Then the Xenovores landed 98 dropships at key locations on the planet's surface where they'd detected large concentrations of large warm-blooded life forms. After emerging from their ships the Xenovore soldiers were instructed to capture the planet's Human population (the Zarr having thus far gone unnoticed), herd them back aboard their vessels under guard, and then transfer them to the dreadnaught for the long trip to Throneworld Alpha. This proved to be bafflingly ineffective as the most commonly encountered large animals on Xrathnu Nan are not Humans or Zarr but large grazing mammals. In several cases the Xenovore invaders emerged from their dropships only to be trampled into unconsciousness by stampedes of frightened alien buffalo. When their dropships did land successfully near Yezidi freeholds, Kinzareth police stations, and Zarr tribal gatherings the Xenovores found neither unarmed miners nor frightened agricultural scientists but something very, very different.

Xrathnu Nan proved to be an invader's nightmare. It took over two years for the Xenovores to crack open the planet's major freeholds at a great cost in soldiers and munitions; and most of these were defended by fanatical Tranta Shun warriors who preferred to blow themselves to pieces rather than be eaten by their enemies. Even worse from the Xenovore perspective, the attack upon Sigma Caeruleus III united its warlike inhabitants for the first time. Bands of Human refugees joined roving Zarr tribesmen, revenge crazed Tranta Shun warriors, and heavily armed Imperiors to form the backbone of a rebellion that plagued the Xenovore intruders for the next twenty years.

THE PEOPLE

Broadly speaking, three types of people inhabit Sigma Caeruleus III: the native Zarr; the Yezidis; and the Kinzareth.

THE ZARR

An intelligent humanoid species evolved on Sigma Caeruleus III some two hundred thousand years ago. Known as the Zarr, they're descended from a nomadic cheetah-like creature that hunted the native herd animals during their eternal circumambulating of the planet. Aggressive, territorial, and militaristic, the Zarr rapidly evolved opposable thumbs, vocal cords, and a complex social structure that allowed them to move from their Stone to Bronze Age in a brief period of time. They stand some seven feet high when fully erect (though they usually stand semi-erect) and have feline features. By the time the Kinzareth Imperium discovered them in 2231 they'd become sophisticated enough to achieve space flight, nuclear power, and a complex worldwide communications network. Their other accomplishments included a functioning planetary government of twenty loosely-confederated city-states, a series of biannual international sporting events, and six major religious faiths. One year and several dozen low-yield nuclear explosions later, the Imperium had reduced this once promising and proud race to the status of slaves, refugees, and rebels.

Because they evolved from a feline ancestor, the Zarr have many advantageous characteristics that are unusual for a humanoid species. These include kneecaps that bend backward for increased speed, sensitive whiskers that provide an improved sense of smell, and retractable claws for climbing. They also have sharp fangs they can use as weapons, keen eyesight, and a spotted coat that blends in almost perfectly with the natural landscape of the planet. The sexes are largely equal in size and strength, with the males tending toward military or business pursuits and the females toward the arts and sciences (though there are many exceptions). Before the coming of the Imperium they expressed their creative sides primarily through an art form that involved holographic images projected onto perfume-emitting wooden sculptures, but this is no longer practiced except by a few dedicated artists.

The Zarr are aggressively territorial with an established warrior tradition dating back millennia. Quick to anger and slow to forgive, they have a penchant for feuding and grudge-holding. That said, they're generally amiable companions when one is on their good side, and have a quirky sense of humor that appeals to many Humans.

Zarr Society

The traditional Zarr family structure is a patriarchal, polygamous unit that consists of an adult male, six to ten adult females, several dozen children, and perhaps an elderly relative or two. Known as *Yrandla Un*, these units tend to specialize in particular crafts or professions that pass from parent

ZARR PACKAGE DEAL

Cost	Ability
3	+3 STR
6	+2 DEX
2	+1 CON
1	+1 PD
1	+1 ED
5	<i>Claws</i> : HKA 1 point (½d6 with STR)
6	<i>Zarr Senses</i> : +2 PER with Smell/Taste Group and Normal Sight
7	<i>Climbing Claws</i> : Climbing (DEX Roll +2)
4	<i>Camouflage</i> : Concealment (INT Roll +4); Self Only (-½), Only In The Tall Grass of Sigma Caeruleus III (-1)
3	<i>Camouflage</i> : +4 to Stealth; Only In The Tall Grass of Sigma Caeruleus III (-1)
4	<i>Zarr Legs</i> : Running +2"

Total Cost Of Package Abilities: 42

Disadvantages

Value	Disadvantage
None	

Total Value Of Package Disadvantages: 0

to child each generation (along with various family traditions and stories). Yrandla Un are very close, as Zarr tend to be protective of their children.

A *Nrrullia Hull* is a tribal and political unit that occupies a specific established geographical area and consists of between fifty and two thousand Yrandla Uns. Each Nrrullia Hull strives to be economically and socially independent, actively recruiting as many Yrandla Uns with different skill sets as possible. Over time large areas that supported several hundred to a thousand Nrrullia Hulls required the construction of centralized urban centers to enable trade, arranged marriages, and the exchange of ideas. These urban areas slowly grew into large cities which eventually gave rise to the city-states which were the Zarr's largest genuine political grouping at the time of the Imperium's arrival (their planetary government was both weak and new). It was the Nrrullia Hull tribal structure, with its emphasis on economic and social independence, that allowed the Zarr to maintain some semblance of their former society after the Vnalla Ar.

THE YEZIDI

The Yezidi are an ancient Earth people whose religion is a complicated blend of Islamic and Zoroastrian beliefs mixed with ancient Gnostic, Jewish, and shamanistic elements. Although they consider themselves a monotheistic people, their worship centers around several angels, the most important of which is *Melek Taus*, the Peacock Angel, also known as Lucifer. For this reason they're often referred to as "devil worshippers," but Lucifer plays a very different role in Yezidism than in Christianity or Islam. In Yezidi belief he's no longer a fallen angel or the adversary of God but instead the angel responsible for the material creation of the Universe. In this complex cosmology, the Supreme Deity created a pearl that became broken after forty thousand years had passed. His beloved assistant Melek Taus used the remains of this divine pearl to create the material world in which we live,

but did so without permission. The Supreme Deity cast his prodigy from heaven as punishment, bringing into being the remaining angels to take his place. Yet as time passed Yezidi theology indicates that God forgave the Peacock Angel his transgressions, allowing him to return to heaven and proclaiming those who revere him the spiritual elect of Humanity. It is forbidden for the Yezidi to refer to Melek Taus as Satan.

The Yezidi have an intricate system of dietary laws that prohibit the consumption of fish, gazelle meat, beans, or cabbage. They're forbidden to wear blue clothing of any sort. They worship twice a day at dawn and dusk by praying in the direction of the sun. They believe themselves to be direct biological descendants of Noah's family — an idea that's not utterly outrageous when one considers their geographical origin near Mount Ararat. The peacock is revered by the Yezidi as the sacred symbol of Melek Taus, the original founder of their tribe. The Yezidi carried frozen embryonic samples of the peacock on the *Khalwa* for over half a century so that they could introduce it to their new home upon arrival.

Rulership of the Yezidi people is hereditary through seven priestly lines of lords. The spiritual needs of the average Yezidi are served in various ways by *Pirs* (priests), *Kawals* (traveling preachers), *Kocheks* (ecstatic soothsayers), and *Murids* (laymen who give financial support). Every Yezidi village or settlement on Sigma Caeruleus III has at least one Murid who serves as a mayor, sage, and judge all rolled up into one.

THE ZARR LANGUAGE

The Zarr language contains some unique semantic features. The entire basis of Zarr (a name given to the planet's dominant feline species by the original Kinza-reth exploration team) is the modified noun. For example, the name of the indigenous ostrich-like bird known as the *Avriel Gau* literally translates into "long-legged edible bird" as the word *Gau* (or tall) modifies the word *Avriel* (or bird) to produce the additional concept of edibility. To make matters more confusing there are no verbs of any sort in spoken Zarr. Instead, nouns which have been modified by adjectives and adverbs are pronounced in roughly a hundred different ways which, when you combine them with other modified nouns, infer the existence of verbs. In the written version of the language numbers represents these different forms of modifying pronunciation. For example, the sentence "We had better catch that long-legged edible bird if we want to eat tonight" translates into 52 *Avriel Gau* 16 *Travsnu Irv*. The *modified group imperative inflection* (represented by the number 52) when combined with "long-legged edible bird" additionally produces the verb "to hunt." When this is combined with the *group stipulation imperative inflection* (number 16) as it pertains to the modified noun "evening feast" it produces the verb "to want" which then completes the sentence.

Needless to say, very few Humans have ever become completely fluent in Zarr. In *HERO System* terms, it costs twice as much as ordinary languages (for example, a character must pay 4 Character Points for "fluent conversation" in Zarr, rather than the usual 2 points).



THE KINZARETH

In the old Kinzareth Imperium the most common punishment for a criminal, political agitator, or unwanted minority group was banishment to a semi-habitable colony world like Sigma Caeruleus III. There the unfortunate individual or group was put to work “harvesting” whatever natural resources the colony world had to offer as quickly and cheaply as possible. Most of the ethnically Kinzareth inhabitants of Noah’s World are descended from either these unwanted citizens or the smattering of upper-class Imperiors who were dispatched to oversee them and the planet’s other troublesome inhabitants. Hardworking, bureaucratic, and not particularly religious outside of their mandated time as *Tranta Shun* initiates, almost all Kinzareth live in the city of d’Estaing, where they tend to much of the planet’s business and administrative concerns. By almost unanimous consent they also handle much of Sigma Caeruleus III’s dealings with the Galaxy beyond their world. The first person a visitor’s likely to encounter when arriving at d’Estaing Spaceport is a uniformed Kinzareth official with a large stack of paperwork for him to fill out.

Government

Sigma Caeruleus III is an autonomous colony world of Kinzareth, which represents its interests in the Imperial Senate. Its planetary government consists of three non-geographically-based states that represent the interests of its ethnic groups, a judiciary comprised of Yezidi and Zarr religious leaders, and a popularly-elected executive branch. The Caeruleans are a conservative people who favor slow, gradual change.

The Kinzareth state is a meritocracy in which government positions are acquired through a combination of education and seniority. It has no real power outside of d’Estaing, where it’s nearly all-powerful as the metropolis is a sort of free city whose government is not answerable to the planetary judiciary (although the executive branch can override it).

The Yezidi state is a theocracy ruled by the religion’s senior Pirs in Asi pe Degere. The Pirs are advised by a biannual meeting of the planet’s Murids, who help select members of the priesthood for the judiciary of Noah’s world.

The Zarr state is led by the hereditary leaders of the planet’s thousand-odd Nrrullia Hull, who hold a weekly one-day congress via the planetary datanet. A simple majority makes most decisions.

THE JUDICIARY

The religious judiciary of Sigma Caeruleus III is infamous for its crankiness, quick verdicts, and strange punishments. Because they’re essentially atheists, all ethnically Kinzareth citizens are exempt from its decisions as long as they remain within the city limits of d’Estaing and do not actively practice any of the world’s religions. Each court is comprised of a Yezidi Pir, a Zarr religious-elder, an advocate (a defense lawyer), an accuser (a prosecuting attorney), and a scribe who records the trial’s events for the central databank in d’Estaing (the Kinzareth like to keep an eye on the judiciary). Since Noah’s World has no prison system, its punishments fall into four distinct categories: capital punishment (rare); forfeiture of property (very common); mutilation or symbolic full-body tattooing (very rare); and computer-monitored banishment to the polar regions (common).

THE EXECUTIVE

The Caerulean executive branch consists of ten positions, seven of which are popularly elected for ten-year periods with no limit upon the number of consecutive terms served. These positions are: Planetary President, Assistant Planetary President, Minister of Defense, Minister of Trade, Minister of Race Relations, Minister of Finance, and Planetary Advisor (kind of an official wise elder). A representative for each of the three confederated ethnic governments is selected by whatever means that group desires for a ten-year term.

Famous Inhabitants

Some of the best-known Caeruleans include:

ULTHAR NUL

The current Planetary President of Sigma Caeruleus III is a quiet, hardworking Zarr named Ulthar Nul, a direct descendent of one of the great heroes of the Xenovore Wars. Although he's getting a little grey around the muzzle, Ulthar is a famed warrior who spent the first two decades of his life in the Imperial Marines, where he achieved the rank of Lt. Colonel during the Imperial Civil War.

The Assistant Planetary President is his friend and former chief officer Hugo de Cabeza, a Kinza-reth with a reputation for honesty (and womanizing). Together the two of them lead a political party known as the XNRUP, or Xrathnu Nan Racial Unification Party, which is currently the most popular of the planet's thirty or so political organizations.

BROTHER MARONESY

Brother Maronesy is the most senior practitioner of *Tranta Shun* on the entire planet. A stern, bald Yezidi man in his early 60s, he dwells in an isolated cluster high on Mount Japheth in the world's antarctic region. He's willing to teach anyone who can survive the climb up his mountain (some 12,000 meters of sheer rock) the secrets of his martial tradition. Visiting Brother Maronesy for six months of drilling is considered a reasonable leave of absence by most Imperial Marine Generals, several of whom have trained under him in the past.

ARARAT ABDULKADAR

One of the largest orphanages in the Terran Empire is located on a 3.5 million hectare farm operated by Ararat Abdulkadar, a man of amazing gentleness with friends in Empress Marissa's court. Some fifty thousand orphaned children of a hundred sentient species dwell within the confines of this massive community of interlinked hospitals, collective farms, children's towns, and its central community of Hope's Promise. Ararat is a familiar face to billions of Imperial citizens because the public relations department of Centaur Stage Studios regularly gives him free air-time on holo-programs.

Economy

Noah's World is a rural, reasonably prosperous planet whose main exports are agricultural products (especially grains), meats, and some precious metals. With relatively little manufacturing, it relies upon Kinza-reth to supply the majority of its manufactured goods, such as small arms, comput-

ers, vehicles, and medical supplies. Many communities still prefer bartering to the use of the Imperial credit (credisks remain rare in the Kinza-reth Imperium, which maintains the use of its own paper currency, the *kiro*). None of this is particularly alarming to the Imperial authorities, as all three of the planet's cultures are communal or socialist (albeit of *very* different varieties) by taste and tradition. It's also a custom among Caeruleans to keep small amounts of gold or silver bars on hand in case of economic hardship.

THE CULT OF TRANTA SHUN

The year 2310 saw a marked upswing in tensions between the native Zarr and Yezidi Human settlers on Sigma Caeruleus III. While this sprang in part from an increased competition for fertile grazing lands between the two groups on the massive plains north of the Great Southern Lake, it was primarily due to various machinations by the Kinza-reth planetary government. Unsure of her power in the face of Imperial rivals as well as a weak but almost planetwide rebellion, recently appointed Planetary Autocrat Cynthiana Van Hartman cynically concluded that if both groups were occupied fighting one another they would be less likely to fight their Kinza-reth masters. It took relatively little effort to stir up trouble between settlers and natives. Van Hartman instructed her Imperiors to massacre several small Zarr villages and destroy a number of Yezidi homesteads, and make it look like the other side did the dirty deeds. Within a month, each group had begun to make increasingly vicious reprisals against the other, a situation that quickly escalated into a brief period of out-and-out war. Known as the *Urdu Val*, or the Killing Time, this period saw thousands of innocents killed in a desperate orgy of revenge.

To stop this continuing cycle of violence, religious and political leaders from both sides met on the shores of the Great Southern Lake at a location that is now considered to be neutral holy ground. Desperate to prevent the further killing of civilians but recognizing that too much blood had been spilled to find a true peace, these leaders decided to create a new religion that would help to channel and curtail the hatred of their young men. Weaving together Yezidism with several of the native Zarr faiths they created *Tranta Shun*, which roughly translates into "the Ancestors' War" in Yezidi. By taking the oath of Tranta Shun young men (and occasionally women) became a part of a special dueling society bound by a strict code of honor that precludes the use of modern weapons or armor, forbids the killing of Yezidi and Zarr who have not taken the oaths, and demands that they wage a constant guerrilla war against that most hated of foes, the Kinza-reth.

For the most part the establishment of the Tranta Shun has had the desired effect. Never again was there eruptions of violence between the Zarr and Yezidi on par with the Killing Time. But in the end both groups were still at war — the cult simply reduced the violence to a kind of acceptable background noise. It also drained both cultures of several generations worth of capable young men. Lured away from hearth and home by the promise of glory, thousands of them drifted off into the wilderness each year after taking their religious vows. There they lived as eccentric wandering warrior hermits, fighting each other while also pitting themselves against the heavily armed Imperiors who wandered the planet's surface. In the end everyone on Sigma Caeruleus III remained locked into a grinding cycle of violence.

After the Xenovore Wars and the subsequent unification of Noah's World, the Tranta Shun religion was reformed into a kind of monastic warrior order charged with the duty of keeping the planet's various martial traditions alive. There are Tranta Shun cloisters scattered across the surface of the planet. Every child of Sigma Caeruleus III spends his or her eighteenth summer living in one of them, where he learns the sacred arts of sword, spear, bow, and rifle as well as unarmed combat. The mandatory visit concludes with a ceremony in which the child receives a remembrance scar across the right cheek before being declared a full adult.

TETSUO



The Tetsuo system consists of six planets revolving around a type G4V yellow dwarf star. Two of the planets (I and III) are rich in charted yet unexploited deposits of heavy metals, precious minerals, Helium-3, and radioactives. Additionally, Tetsuo III shows evidence of having once supported fairly complex, multi-cellular life until an extraordinarily large and dense

asteroid slammed into its surface approximately one million years ago. It's now completely sterile, although it has large deposits of coal, natural gas, and crude oil below its surface.

Tetsuo IV, V, and VI are massive gas giants with dozens of small moons largely comprised of useless rock. These worlds have atmospheres comprised primarily of hydrogen, allowing visiting starships to scoop them for useful fuel on their way in and out of the system. Beyond the system's outermost world lies an enormous Kuiper Belt containing approximately one million objects ranging from billion-ton blocks of ice to asteroids the size of small moons. There are also countless derelict, half-destroyed Imperial, Thorgon, Mon'dabi, and even Xenovore warships drifting in this orbital plane. Left over from both the Xenovore and Galactic Wars, these ghost ships are the remnants of invasion fleets and their pursuers that were considered too damaged or dangerous to salvage.

Tetsuo itself (Tetsuo II, also known as "Graveyard") is a ravaged, radioactive world that was once a showplace for Human terraforming technology. Unfortunately, it suffered tremendous devastation when the Thorgons launched a massive assault upon the system during the Galactic War. The resulting battle on, above, and around the world caused so much damage that it's shattered most peoples' hopes of ever restoring Tetsuo to its former state.

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: TETSUO

Planet Name: Tetsuo (Imperial designation: Tetsuo II)

Classification: Type 2 (see text)

System Data: Tetsuo is a G4V star (mildly hot yellow dwarf) with a six-planet system (Tetsuo I- VI). Tetsuo I is an incredibly hot, mineral rich world that orbits very close to its sun. Its closest neighbor, the barely habitable Tetsuo II, occupies an orbital trajectory seven times further away. Tetsuo II has three small moons — Kaneda, Nezu, and Kei — that hover above its surface in disturbingly close orbits. Tetsuo III is a barren, rocky world that once supported life; Tetsuo IV through VI are enormous gas giants.

Gravity: 0.41 G

Day And Years: 25.2 standard hours in a day; 692 standard days in a year

Atmosphere: A thin atmosphere mostly comprised of carbon dioxide with small amounts of nitrogen and oxygen. It also has a very high radiation content.

Hydrosphere: Mostly frozen. With the collapse of the planet's terraformed ecology the vast majority of Tetsuo's water became year-round ice locked in immense underground caverns. Water goes directly between solid and vapor phases without becoming liquid during most of the year.

Meteorological Overview: Tetsuo is an extremely cold and windy planet with long, bleak seasons. In the hottest parts of summer enough water melts in its subterranean reserves to allow an 80-day growing season in equatorial regions.

Sentient Species: None.

ATRI Rating: 11

Government: Plutocracy in which each wealthy House has a representative in a ruling body known as the Sanjiin.

Affiliation: Senate world of the Terran Empire

Resources: Military salvage; water (in the form of ice); orbital starship refueling/repair facilities; Helium-3 mining

Places of Note: Capital city of Tenchi; the Antarctic Burrows; the Great Equilateral Boneyard

Ship Facilities: Kemal Station, a superb orbital spaceport with advanced refueling and repair facilities

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Tetsuo is a Mars-like world roughly half the diameter of Earth and about a tenth the mass. Its year is roughly twice the length of the standard Terran one, with four distinct seasons ranging from cold to *incredibly* cold. Surface temperatures during its 25.2-hour day can get as high as slightly above freezing, but plummet down to anywhere between -40° and -80° Celsius (-40° to -112° F) at night. Like Earth, it's tilted at a 23-degree axis, although it has a non-liquid iron sulphide core that precludes any but the most minor tectonic motion. It also lacks a detectable magnetic field.

Tetsuo was radically terraformed over just fifty years using a variety of highly advanced techniques. At its biological height it had four large populated continents — Kyushu, Shikoku, Honshu, and Hokkaido — as well as an uninhabited Antarctic continent named Sakhalin. Warm shallow seas, easily navigated by shallow-keeled vessels, surrounded these landmasses. Now all of that water is gone, sunk into massive trenches of ice that reach down almost to

the planet's core. The seas have become enormous windblown deserts of grey dust, and the continents frozen steppes and mountains dotted by grave-like former battlefields the size of old European nations. Once-picturesque villages with red tiled roofs and paper walls have become radioactive ruins filled with scavengers, criminal gangs, and horrifying mutated monsters that one hundred years later are *still* feeding upon the slowly decaying remains of the millions of Human and Thorgon soldiers whose unburied corpses lie all across the planet. Unable to rot due to the absence of bacteria in the now-sterilized atmosphere and unburied due to a lack of planetary resources, the bodies lie where they fell — a visual testament to the horrors of war.

Some limited animal and planet life has survived on Tetsuo despite its gradual reversion to a more hostile environment. A form of genetically-engineered bonsai pine continues to cling tenaciously to life on many parts of the planet's surface, although for how much longer local biologists are not certain. Some mosses and lichens seem to flourish near the openings to the planet's vertical ice shafts. A horrifying species of hand-sized flying cockroach known as *blatoa* are common on many of the planet's old battlefields, where they're a constant danger to Skavs looking for salvage. Hiding among the planet's wreckage are a few roaming packs of feral Xenovores accompanied by the descendents of some of their warbeasts; they're always on the lookout for ways to supplement their diet of century-old corpses with something (or someone) a bit... fresher.

PLACES OF NOTE

Tetsuo's only city is Tenchi, a cluster of radiation-shielded, environmentally-sealed habitation domes, cement bunkers, greenhouses, and warehousing facilities located near the planet's equator. The city is split into a dozen neighborhoods connected by a spider web of subterranean tunnels that the occupants can easily seal off with steel vault doors controlled from either end. An individual House, basically a clan descended from one of the original founding families, controls each neighborhood. The ability to close off sections of the city is vital because the Houses constantly feud amongst themselves using assassinations, lightning raids, and public duels.

Tenchi is connected to the planet's orbiting spaceport, Kemal Station, by the Skyhook, a massive space elevator capable of moving hundreds of tons of men and material to and from orbit using massive pressurized gondolas that travel up and down incredibly strong yet light monomolecular vinarcium cables. The spaceport is small but well-equipped, with refueling and repair facilities for servicing civilian ships of nearly any size. The Ministry for Colonization and Development constructed both the Skyhook and the station during the energetic reign of Emperor Kemal (2570-2597) as compensation for the massive losses the system suffered during the Galactic War.

THE ANTARCTIC BURROWS

Near the south pole of Tetsuo lies the Antarctic Burrows, a rabbit's warren of manmade tunnels and caves inhabited by hundreds of ice miners and their families. With the vast majority of the planet's water trapped in subterranean fissures and vaults, the Burrows supply potable water to the planet's entire population. It also contains a facility for splitting water into oxygen and hydrogen for breathing and power cells. The Burrows inhabitants are independent and self-sufficient but basically non-political; they deal exclusively with neutral House Takahashi for their outside needs. Convoys between the southern pole and Tenchi are favorite targets of Graveyard's bandits and rebels.

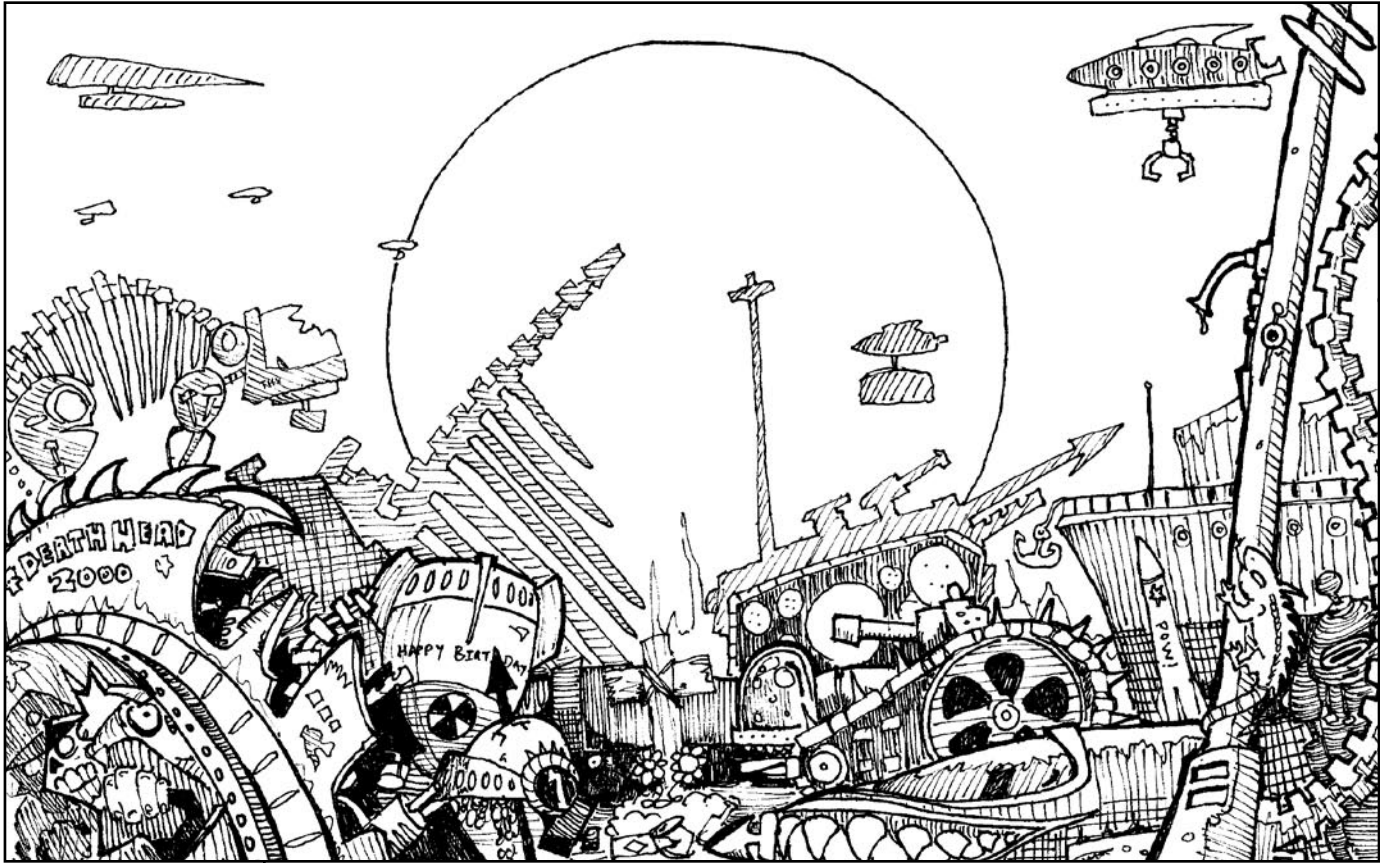
THE BONEYARD

The Great Equilateral Boneyard stretches over an area of some 2,700,000 square kilometers, an area slightly smaller than the old Terran nation of Argentina. Littered with the remains of hundreds of Imperial, Thorgon, and Xenovore starships as well as seemingly limitless fields of wrecked warstriders, anti-infantry tanks, troop transports, dropships, and planetary attack aircraft, the Boneyard is home to thousands of full-time scavengers who make their livings stripping useful hardware from the remnants of wars past. It's also inhabited by a mysterious group of bandits and rebels known as Drega's Dragoons, a shadowy force that periodically launches terrorist assaults against the forces of Houses Yohko and Kirasawa, both of whom claim the Boneyard as part of their hypothetical planetary fiefdoms. Led by the daring mercenary captain Carlita Drega, the Dragoons' motivations, membership, and even the location of their base are closely guarded secrets, ones the government of Tetsuo would gladly pay large sums of money to learn.

HISTORY

The Tetsuo system was discovered by Human military forces during the Xenovore Wars as they pushed outward from Human space into trans-frontier regions and, eventually, Xenovore territory. It became an important stop along the Supply Line that kept Human troops in ammunition, food, and other supplies (see *Alien Wars*, page 46). When they first found it, Tetsuo was controlled by a Xenovore taskforce under the command of Polemarch *Xran Ev Queeq* (Breaker of Worlds). The battle to take the planet was a fierce one lasting over a month, but eventually the Xenovores were driven out of their underground warrens and destroyed. The wreckage of their ships, buildings, and war machines was left to decay as Humanity continued its push to victory.

After the war and the chaos that followed, Tetsuo was regarded as a prime candidate for terraforming — it was a Type 2 world with characteristics that suggested the Empire could transform it into a place where Humans could live easily. From roughly 2468 to 2518 a conglomeration of advanced devices, including orbital mirrors, nanotechnology, and oxygen generation plants were used to convert Tetsuo into a marginally Type 1 world.



Over the next several decades, millions of settlers made their way to Tetsuo, even establishing sub-colonies on other worlds and moons in the system. Tetsuo became a major stopping point on the Antispinward Corridor, and trade money flowed into the planet's coffers. But in 2552 disaster struck when Tetsuo and its system became the scene of some of the fiercest, bloodiest fighting in the Galactic War. The Empire chose to make a stand there against the invading Thorgon Hegemony, and over the course of three slaughter-filled months it held the line. But it did so at a high price: two million Imperial soldiers and as many as ten million civilians dead (not to mention millions more Thorgons), and Tetsuo's terraforming technologies and infrastructure almost completely destroyed.

The once beautiful world has never recovered. The war destroyed her industrial colonies utterly and reduced her population to a wretched handful. Tenchi somehow survived, a bunkered industrial shell of its former glory, its once proud population surviving by running a glorified galactic truck stop with a sideline in weapons smuggling. The Houses that run Tenchi dream of someday reclaiming their ruined planet and their place in Imperial politics, but they still have a long, hard road to travel.

THE PEOPLE

Most of the modern inhabitants of Tetsuo are Martian variant Humans with increased resistance to radiation and lungs that function well in its thin atmosphere. A small minority of some thousand standard Humans, (hypothetically) descended from original settlers and known as Firsters, rules Tetsuo from the relative safety of Tenchi. They view the other Human inhabitants, known as Skavs, as either vermin or property depending on the situation; they're not treated as Imperial citizens. At any given time there's a small scattering of non-Human Imperial citizens in Tenchi, generally the crews of visiting ships traveling the Antispinward Corridor.

FIRSTERS

Without exception, Firsters live in the capital city where they're served by some four thousand Skavs as well as a small army of robots. Their orbital spaceport is manned exclusively by Firsters with the assistance of androids; Skavs aren't considered trustworthy enough to work there. Firsters organize themselves into Houses, with each House representing one of the dozen Japanese families who originally financed the colonization of the planet. In reality things are far more complicated, of course, since few of the current Firsters are actually Asian, but the Houses still maintain a Japanese-derived culture. Each House controls various, often competing business interests and claims large portions of the planet's ravaged surface as its own domain. To help maintain an appearance of control, they retain private militias of remote controlled warrior robots (stripped down rip-offs of

the TMD-HS Hunter-Seeker Drone, see page 209 of *The HERO System Bestiary*) that they periodically dispatch to patrol their fiefdoms.

SKAVS

Most Skavs live in tiny, heavily-shielded communities known as *skaverns*. These are scattered throughout the planet, generally at the sites of significant engagements during the Galactic War or in locations where large numbers of ships crashed during orbital battles. They construct skaverns from the repressurized shells of vehicles or spacecraft, often burying them to prevent detection. These hardy souls divide their energies between salvaging old weapons, machine parts, and fuel from the wreckage of the Galactic War (many Skav communities have their own reactors), trading with the Firsters for food and luxuries, and fighting with one another, robot patrols, and the planet's predators. Most Skavs aren't above a bit of banditry when they get the chance; transports going to or from the Antarctic Burrows are the most popular targets. Skavs have also been known to cheerfully trade with smugglers, pirates, and rebels. A person who's skilled or lucky enough sneak past Graveyard's planetary sensor nets and small assortment of orbital patrol craft can look forward to trading a holdful of canned food for as many 2550-era small arms and explosives as he can carry.

OTHER INHABITANTS

Outside the cities and skaverns, Tetsuo is home to roving bands of scavengers, mercenaries, bandits... and those who prey on them, including Xenovores. Many of these people have become mutated or deformed due to exposure to radiation, and scars and injuries from fights or salvage operations gone bad are common. Tetsuan life outside the communities tends to be nasty, brutish, and short.

Government

The government of Tetsuo is a corrupt, backstabbing plutocracy in which each House appoints a representative known as a *Councilor* to a ruling body known as the *Sanjiin*. This body is comprised of twelve members who meet for three-week sessions every other month, hypothetically to decide matters of system policy but really more to keep an eye on one another. The Sanjiin actually has little power and can't realistically be considered a planetary government. It's more of a dumping ground for annoying, otherwise unproductive House members than a ruling body, but its existence helps maintain the useful illusion that Graveyard has a government. In fact, there are few resources held in common by Tetsuo's Houses and the world would function identically were there no government at all.

As of 2640, House Yohko is Tetsuo's most powerful "family"; with over 150 members it's also the largest. It controls the planet's lucrative orbiting spaceport entirely and shares control of the Skyhook with House Kawakawa, which in turn controls Tenchi's power plant and other necessary services. The Yohko-Kawakawa axis is at present

opposed by a triumvirate of the devious House Watanabe (which controls the orbital patrol craft fleet and planetary sensor and communications nets, such as they are), House Sato (which owns the war robot factory), and House Tanaka (which has the best offworld arms smuggling connections). The remaining smaller, weaker Houses support one faction or the other depending on which way the poisoned wind blows. The only exception to this rule is House Takahashi, which is traditionally neutral as it controls the capital's greenhouses and deals with the Antarctic Burrows skaverns on behalf of all the Houses.

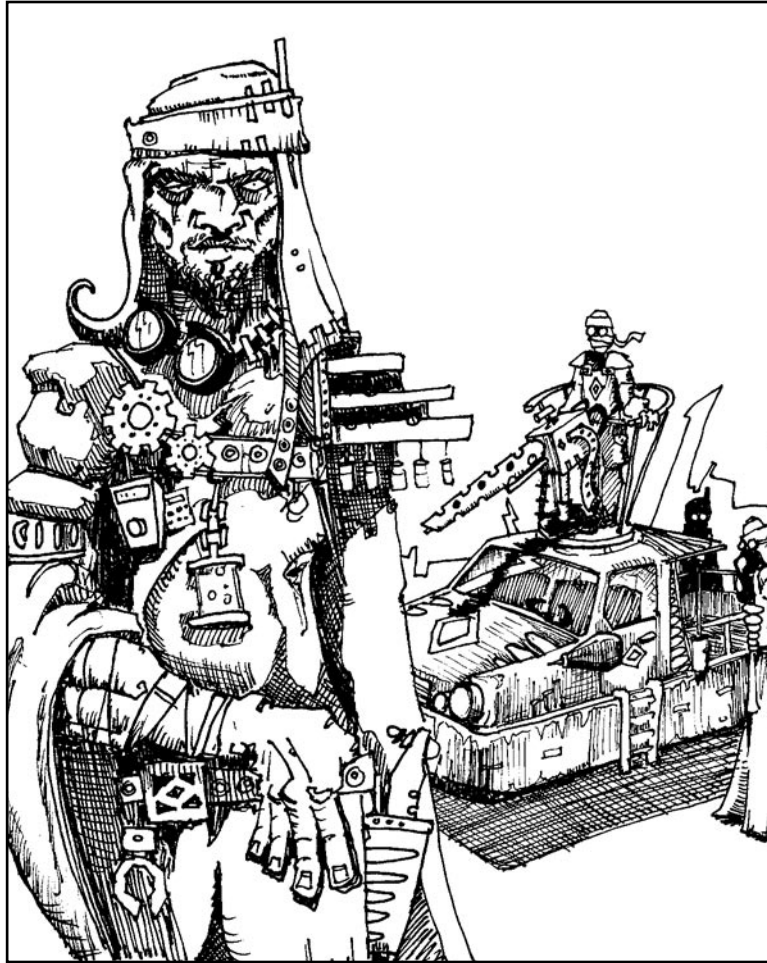
All of the Houses have individual business dealings with various groups of Skavs, both in their claimed territories and elsewhere. They exchange food, water, oxygen, and various small luxuries for scavenged small arms, explosives, battle armor, and military vehicle parts. Every House smuggles surplus weapons and military tech offworld whenever possible, a fact known to the Terran Security Service but ignored for political reasons (at least, for the moment).

Tetsuo is one of the 98 systems that have a seat in the Imperial Senate, a privilege it's retained more out of pity and tradition than anything else. The Sanjiin generally appoints a reliable, intelligent Firster from a dominant House to fill this position, at least until such time as his or her House falls out of favor. The current Senator is Solstice Kirasawa, a reserved woman who generally sides with Sergei Mohac's small pro-Empress faction. Neither particularly honest nor exceptionally corrupt, Kirasawa is on a never-ending quest to locate additional financial aid with which to rebuild her crippled planet. That goal, more than any sort of ideology, dictates how she votes on any given issue.

Famous Inhabitants

Without question the single most powerful and influential person on Tetsuo is Yohko Ichiro, the leader of House Yohko. A sprightly, virile man of seventy, Ichiro has spent nearly all of his long life attempting to acquire enough political clout and money to start another terraforming project on Tetsuo. Although he's had little success it's rumored he has the Empress Marissa's ear... or at the very least that he periodically nibbles upon it. Along with his political maneuverings Ichiro continues to add to his House's wealth by all possible means, hoping to one day finance Tetsuo's reconstruction himself if Imperial support remains unavailable. Since he spends much of his time traveling back and forth to Lyons, his daughter Yoko, a tiny yet imposing woman with a very cunning mind, supervises his House's business in his absence.

The second most powerful man on Graveyard is Tanaka Hiroshi, the tall dark-skinned patriarch of House Tanaka. Hiroshi is a former bridge commander in the Imperial Navy who was present at the deaths of Countess Elena and the Emperor Antonio at the close of the Imperial Civil War in 2602. Unlike his gregarious rival Ichiro, he has little love for the royal family, which he views as capri-



cious, unpredictable, and self-serving. Hiroshi's House is on considerably better terms with the Skav inhabitants of its territory than any other house save Takahashi (which claims no territory save the Antarctic Burrows). He recently discontinued patrolling his territory after making a peace agreement with a dozen skavern chieftains. House Tanaka currently receives a "tithe" of salvaged weapons and Hiroshi the honorary title of "lord" in return for guaranteeing the political autonomy of Skavs living in his area, a development the other Houses view with considerable distrust.

Of course, no discussion of Tetsuo would be complete without mentioning famed actor and artist Ichimura Manjiro. Beloved throughout the Japanese-speaking portions of the Empire for his ability to portray beautiful women in traditional Kabuki theater, without makeup this *onnagata* performer would not be recognized walking the streets of Tenchi. A short, stocky man with a powerful upper body, Manjiro is a member of the dwindling but once-powerful House Ichimura. He spends the vast majority of his time practicing in a tiny, family owned theater on the outskirts of the city, but gladly makes time to receive fans should they find themselves on desolate, faraway Graveyard.

Economy

The vast majority of Tetsuo's over the table money comes from the sale of fuel and supplies at Kemal Station. A key junction on the Anti-spinward Corridor, Tetsuo is a stopping point for commercial shipping heading in from Polyphemus and Adamant, trade vessels departing for the Mondabi Federation, and Frontier Fleet warships rotating in from Triumph. Many of these ships also participate in the system's under the table economy of selling salvaged small arms and military technology to any and all comers. A steady stream of battered old Atlas and Natchez tramp steamers comes in and out of the station, leaving for parts unknown (and better left unspoken about).

Another source of income for the system is Helium-3, a substance incredibly useful for the production of fuel cells. There are millions of tons of Helium-3 on Tetsuo I and several of the moons

of Tetsuo IV. House Watanabe has developed a primitive method for harvesting the material, and when there are no pressing arms deals to be made it sends one of its larger ships on a month-long harvesting missions to help fill its House coffers. Were the Firsters to actually work together, they could probably generate enough wealth to begin terraforming their planet again, but thus far petty bickering over resource claims has prevented them from launching anything more than a slapdash operation.

Although it has no value offworld, water is more worth more than gold on Tetsuo. Since there's only a single reliable source of aqua on the planet, people conserve, recycle, and hoard water. Even the poorest skavern has a water system that gets the most use possible out of every drop... and a sewage recycling system that picks up after that! This lack of water has driven House Takahashi to develop some of the most advanced hydroponics systems in the Empire for Tenchi's greenhouses. Even the most primitive skavern grow-vault utilizes techniques that would be the envy of most dome farmers.

TORACTA



Located beyond the Heartworlds in the Outer Core of the Terran Empire, Toracta is the second planet orbiting the type G star Torasol. The first and third planets are Type 5 worlds without any satellites; the fourth and fifth planets are Type 9 with several moons each. The outermost planet is well known for the amazing patterns of clouds that swirl within the upper atmosphere. Toracta has two natural satellites, Ellsh and Norsh.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Toracta is a classic example of a large Type 1 planet, complete with a thick, breathable atmosphere, an enormous hydrosphere full of liquid water, and a lush green surface covered with jungles and forests chock full of vegetation and wildlife. Except for a large collection of volcanic islands found in the northern polar region, the majority of the planet's land mass is located in tropics. There are two large continents on Toracta; Kelamar in the west and Manegam in the eastern hemisphere. There are also several small archipelagoes.

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: TORACTA

Planet Name: Toracta (Imperial designation: Torasol II)

Classification: Type 1

System Data: Toracta has two moons. It's the second of five planets in its system.

Gravity: 1.4 G

Day And Year: 21 standard hours in a day; 329 standard days in a year

Atmosphere: Earth-like — 71% Nitrogen; 19% Oxygen; 4% Other

Hydrosphere: Water covers 80% of Toracta's surface

Meteorological Overview: Toracta has the standard range of weather and climates for a Type 1 planet

Sentient Species: Toractans

ATRI Rating: 9

Government: A socialistic form of native government, but within the framework of Imperial law

Affiliation: Subject world of the Terran Empire

Resources: Manual labor, mining

Places Of Note: First Haven; the Labor Processing Station; adventure centers

Ship Facilities: Toracta has several major spaceports, including the ones at the Labor Processing Station and at First Haven

Toractan weather is consistently hot and humid in the inhabited areas. Moisture from the ocean brings regular evening downpours in most locations. The rains usually last for a few hours (at most); by midnight the sky is once again clear.

Places Of Note

Except for a few scattered locations where the Empire and offworld companies have built outposts, depots, and resorts, the majority of the surface of Toracta remains as it has been for centuries: unmarred by "civilized" features. The most interesting locales on the planet are either in the tunnels built by the Toractans or the cities built around the entrances to the caves themselves.

FIRST HAVEN

Ancient Toractans made their first subterranean settlements on Manegam to provide protection from the dangerous wildlife that roamed the forest where the city of First Haven now stands. From there they dug deep into the mountains and ground, eventually building an entire civilization within the planet's crust. Today the Toractan network of caverns and tunnels is tens of thousands of kilometers long. Despite the thriving surface city surrounding it, most Toractans prefer to live in the tunnels underneath First Haven. Imperial soldiers and non-Toractan employees of the Labor Processing Station make up the bulk of First Haven's population.

LABOR PROCESSING STATION (LPS)

Located just south of First Haven, the LPS is where Toractans volunteer (or are volunteered for) manual labor or military service. The facility's staff registers, classifies, and ships laborers to their new place of employment, most likely hundreds or thousands of light-years away. The Empire runs the station and can process thousands of Toractans a day if necessary.

Although the LPS is incredibly efficient, it's not uncommon for the entire facility's computer systems to crash at least once a week. Civil rights activists from around the Empire regularly infiltrate the station systems remotely in an attempt to halt operations there despite the best efforts of Imperial data security personnel to keep them out.

ADVENTURE CENTERS

Toracta's abundant dangerous wildlife presents an opportunity for adventure for people willing to risk their lives for a good hunt. Throughout their history, Toractans have both run from and defended themselves against the vicious preda-

THE TORACTAN HUNTING CHAMPIONSHIP

Every year Feleron's Landing hosts the Toractan Hunting Championship, a sporting competition pitting the Empire's most talented hunters against various horrendous creatures found on Toracta. Contestants spend two weeks tracking down and killing as many animals as possible, scoring more points the bigger and more ferocious the beasts happen to be. The winner receives prize money and the Sawtooth Trophy, named after Jericho Sawtooth, the very first winner of the Championship.

CAVES OF THE DEAD

Most Toractan tunnels are built to keep up with the expansion of the ever-growing population, but there are also hundreds of tunnels dedicated to holding the bodies of dead Toractans. Before the Era of Safety, most Toractans were killed and eaten by predators, so body disposal was rarely a problem — few Toractans died abed. Once they moved into the caves, the Toractans had to find a way to get rid of their dead. The Caves of the Dead are filled with corpses and sealed off from the rest of the tunnel systems until it's time to add another body. The bodies are covered in moss and algae that accelerate the process of decomposition and reduce the amount of toxic gasses they release.

tors stalking their world. With the introduction of Imperial technology, the predators are now the prey, thanks in large part to the many safari and hunting centers established by Imperial entrepreneurs working with Toractan businessmen.

Feleron's Landing on Kelamar is the largest of these areas and a common gathering point for Toractan and off-world hunters. Safaris and guided tours leave on daily trips deep into the jungles of Kelamar, allowing visitors to view the exotic creatures of Toracta and, on certain tours, hunt and kill them. Other such resorts are located all over the planet including The Thicket, a jungle resort at the southern region of Manegam, the Plains of Adventure in eastern Manegam, and Kelamar Resort, a ritzy vacation spot on Kelamar's eastern shore.

HISTORY

The history of Toractan civilization can be roughly divided into three eras defined by a significant change in the lives of the Toractan people. The Toractans have traditionally preferred to remember their history through spoken and sung chronicles, but recognizing the relative impermanence of this found additional ways to keep track of things. Many caves throughout Toracta are *yollada*, or "chronicle caverns," where for millennia the Toractans have recorded their history with delicate carvings and engravings. A few artisans still continue the practice today, though it seems to be a dying art; all known existing carvings have been recorded with modern technology and preserved as holofiles.

THE ERA OF FEAR

The Era of Fear runs from the beginning of verbal history on the planet until First Haven was built. During this period the Toractans fought not just against each other (on rare occasions), but against the ferocious animals that shared their land. Once the Toractans learned how to use tools to defend themselves as well as build safe places to live, the fear that every single Toractan lived with began to fade away. The Toractans still possess songs supposedly dating from this time, which is equivalent to the Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon periods of Human history.

THE ERA OF SAFETY

The Era of Safety spans the time between the founding of First Haven and the beginning of the Imperial occupation. Now (mostly) safe from predators, Toractan civilization flourished. Although the living conditions were initially brutal, the Toractans adjusted to their new environment and learned how to tunnel masterfully through the planet's crust. Their entire way of life changed from one of gathering fruits and berries to farming and cultivating fungi, grubs, and other forms of subterranean food (supplemented, of course, by hunting surface beasts). As time passed and more powerful technology and weapons were invented, the Toractans established small towns on the surface, but these locations were still considered dangerous. The only Toractans to regularly leave the confines of the caves were hunters, soldiers, and occasionally farmers who would

go out and about looking for plants they could take underground and turn into new crops.

THE ERA OF ENLIGHTENMENT

The last and current historical period is the Era of Enlightenment, although many Toractans claim the arrival of the Empire has been far from enlightening. Humans first arrived on Toracta in 2467, when the Toractans had steam power, simple underground railroads, and percussion-cap firearms. The entire planet was peacefully annexed by the Empire a few years after Humans made the surface of the planet much safer by severely decreasing the population of monstrous predators. The Toractans viewed the Terran Empire as their savior and were more than happy to become part of it. Even now, though the Empire's labor laws consistently exploit them, most Toractans are contented Imperial citizens.

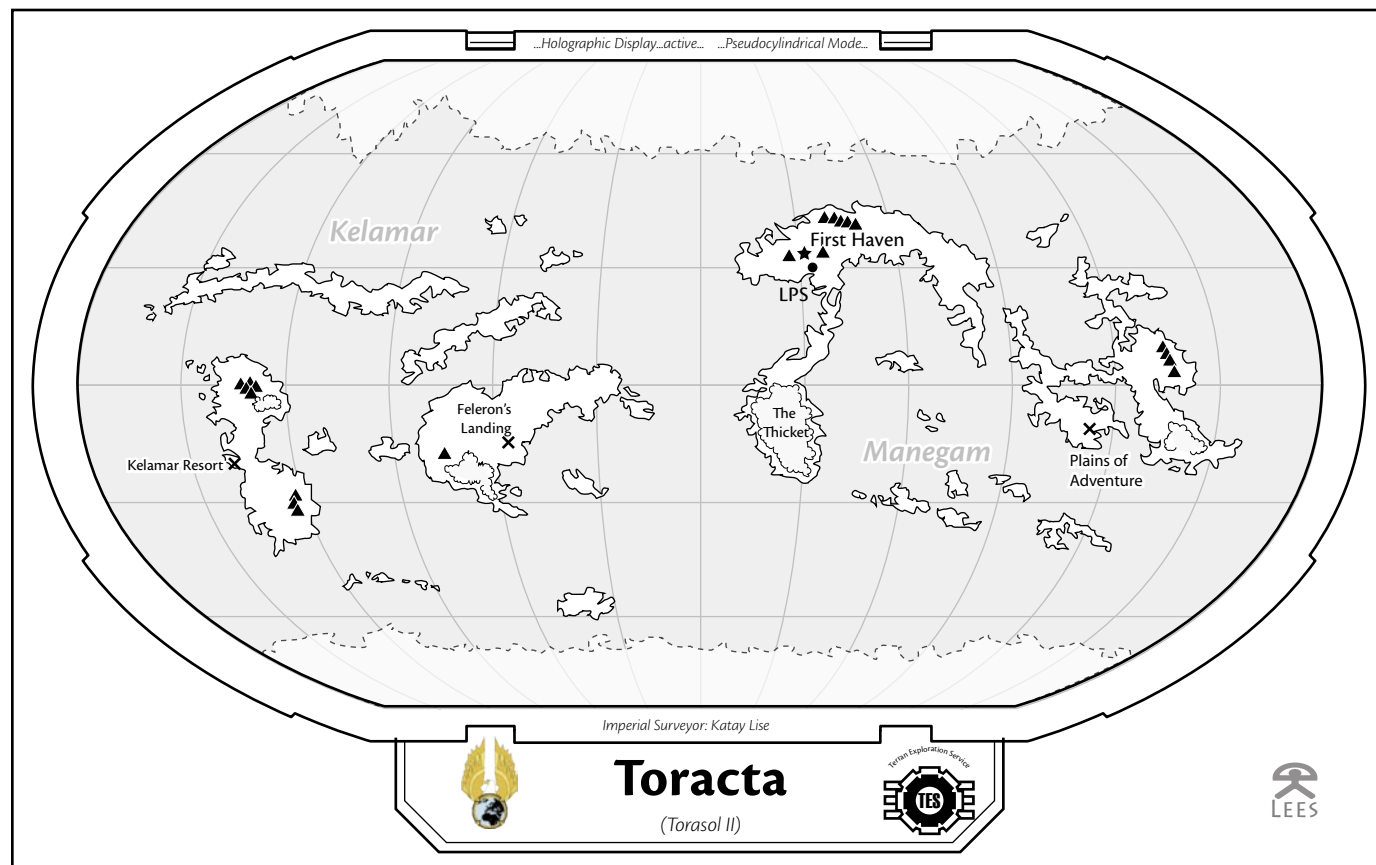
THE PEOPLE

Toractans generally stand a bit more than a meter tall. Their bodies are big and bulky; thick armor plates cover their forearms, shins, and back. Their hairless skin ranges from dark grey to ashen white in color. Each enormous hand has two fingers and a thumb. (See *Terran Empire*, pages 22-23, for more information and a Racial Package Deal.)

In the early years of the Toractan civilization, it was important for each member of the community to fill a specific role. Without every person pulling his own weight, the Toractan people might never have survived against their natural predators. Toractans are naturally compelled to find a job that needs to be done and do it; they have an almost subconscious dislike of laziness, idleness, and nonproductive pursuits (though they do recognize the value of recreation, considering it a part of doing a good job). Even today, when the need to work together so closely has vanished, the Toractan labor force remains highly organized and extremely efficient. The Toractans tend to divide themselves into "classes" or "castes" of workers based on broad job responsibilities; some of the most common include:

Medical Laborers

Many of the most intelligent Toractans receive medical training from Imperial officers so they can care for their own people more efficiently, though Toractan traditional medicine is surprisingly effective. The majority of the work done by the medical laborers consists of healing injured workers and caring for the hundreds of Toractan hatcheries. Toractan couples generally only have one to four children due to the extremely trying egg-laying process. Toractan children are mostly cared for communally by nurses in enormous caverns deep within the tunnels.



Food Laborers

Initially, food laborers were responsible for cultivating the fungus, grubs, and worms that grew underground; one sub-class hunted for food on the surface. Once the Toractans learned how to defend themselves against the predators, they were able to establish a handful of surface farms and crops to provide themselves with more diverse types of food. Other food laborers are chefs who prepare animals, vegetables, and fungus for consumption. It's a cuisine few Humans care for.

Tunnel Laborers

Tunnel laborers have existed as a group since the beginning of the Era of Safety. The first caves were no more than natural formations in the mountains that diggers converted into deep holes where their people could hide from predators. They eventually learned how to dig caves large enough for entire villages to live in. Once Toractan society moved underground completely, the tunnelers set their sights on improving their new underground home and have continued to expand the Toractan subterranean world for centuries.

Safety Laborers

Safety laborers have been prominent in Toractan society since even before the Era of Safety. The safety laborers of old were tasked with distracting and baiting predators so the remainder of the family or village could escape ("sort of like a rodeo clown, but with tyrannosaurs," according to one Human "wit"). Quickness and craftiness were therefore vital. The job of a safety laborer in modern times is much less dangerous now that they have high-tech weaponry and body armor — in fact, many of them are now more like safety *inspectors* than monster-distractors. Some especially talented safety laborers end up getting drafted into the Imperial military.

Off-Planet Laborers

A large percentage of young and healthy Toractans are "recruited" into Imperial service. The Empire in turn hires them out to corporations looking for cheap labor (particularly as miners) or enlists them into the Imperial Army (many IA platoons consist entirely of Toractans; some Human officers snidely call them "turtlehead platoons"). Off-planet laborers can be found just about anywhere within the borders of the Empire, and even beyond.

Data Laborers

Modern information society has given rise to a class of Toractans who work with computers, communications systems, administrative bodies, and the like. Ranging from programmers to bureaucrats to econometricians, they gather, analyze, report on, and make use of the data that flows through and from Toractan society.

Government

Toracta had no centralized government until the arrival of the Empire. Prior to occupation, Toractans society functioned smoothly thanks to the division of labor developed in the early years of the civilization (see above). Despite (or perhaps because of) the rough lifestyle forced upon them by necessity, the Toractans have always been generous among themselves. Each community was responsible for feeding, housing, and protecting its own people, and when neighboring villages needed aid it was usually gladly given — conflicts and war existed, but were rare and almost always small-scale. When necessary, villages chose “elders” to represent their interests in meetings with other village elders. Usually the elder was the oldest male, but depending on the situation he might be the strongest, the best businessman, or the most devious villager. This loose form of government has remained largely intact under Imperial rule.

Sub-Minister Dorag Pitano of the Ministry for Interstellar Affairs oversees all Imperial operations on Toracta. With the assistance of a corps of able administrators, he handles everything from managing the Labor Processing Station to collecting taxes from planetside businesses and maintaining security on the planet. He must also cope with the stream of complaints from civil rights activists about how the Empire “exploits, enslaves, and degrades” the Toractans. He always paints a happy picture of life on Toracta and is quick to point out that while other people may not like how the Empire treats the Toractans, the Toractans themselves have never complained.



Economy

Before the arrival of the Empire, Toractans did little in the way of economic planning or management. Each town was as self-sufficient as possible, and traded for what it couldn't make or grow with other towns and cities using a sort of barter system. The Empire freed them up to develop more of a modern economy and educated them about the value of their natural resources. The precious gems and metallic ore they'd often discarded while building their subterranean homes now provide a significant part of the planet's income, as do offworld laborers' wages sent home.

Vacation and hunting resorts established by corporations and private entrepreneurs also bring in a great deal of money. The planet's excellent weather and the many dangerous, clever creatures make it a mecca for hunters, biologists, and holo-safari vacationers. The Toractan Board of Tourism is constantly looking for new ways to attract more offworlders to the planet, and even helps finance resort developments and the like with low-income loans.

TRIDYMITE BETA



Tridymite B is one of six planets orbiting Tridymite, a type KV red dwarf. These worlds are referred to as Tridymite Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon, and Zeta respectively. All bodies in the system are type five (airless and rocky) save for Tridymite Z, which is airless and icy. Tridymite B has a single large moon called Kappa.

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: TRIDYMITE BETA

Planet Name: Tridymite Beta, also known as Tridymite B

Classification: Type 5

System Data: Tridymite B is one of six planets orbiting the star Tridymite, a type KV red dwarf. These worlds are referred to as Tridymite Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon, and Zeta respectively. All bodies in the system are Type 5 (airless and rocky) save for Tridymite Z, which is airless and icy. Tridymite B has a single large moon known as Kappa.

Gravity: 1.26 G

Day And Years: A single day on Tridymite B is over 5,700 Imperial hours long (or nearly 240 standard days). There are 220 standard days in each Tridymite year, making each standard year 0.917 local days long.

Atmosphere: A trace atmosphere that's 90% carbon dioxide, 8% sulfur dioxide, and 2% nitrogen and chlorine

Hydrosphere: All of Tridymite B's water is locked up in its small polar icecaps.

Meteorological Overview: Temperatures on the surface range from 109° to 115° Celsius (228° to 239° F). Outside of dust storms there's little weather of any type on Tridymite Beta.

Sentient Species: Cristobalites

ATRI Rating: Generally 0 among the Cristobalites, except where they've learned to use Human technology (such as GPS monitoring systems); 10-11 in Tuttle town and other Imperial settlements.

Government: None (see text)

Affiliation: Nominal colony world of New Alexandria within the Terran Empire.

Resources: Enormous amounts of gold, platinum, uranium, and diamonds

Places of Note: Tuttle town, a Human settlement close to the planet's South Pole. The Lalor, Markham, and Murieta mountain ranges are considered to be particularly spectacular, as are the Lapidary Playas.

Ship Facilities: Very minimal. There's a landing field at Tuttle town with minor repair facilities.

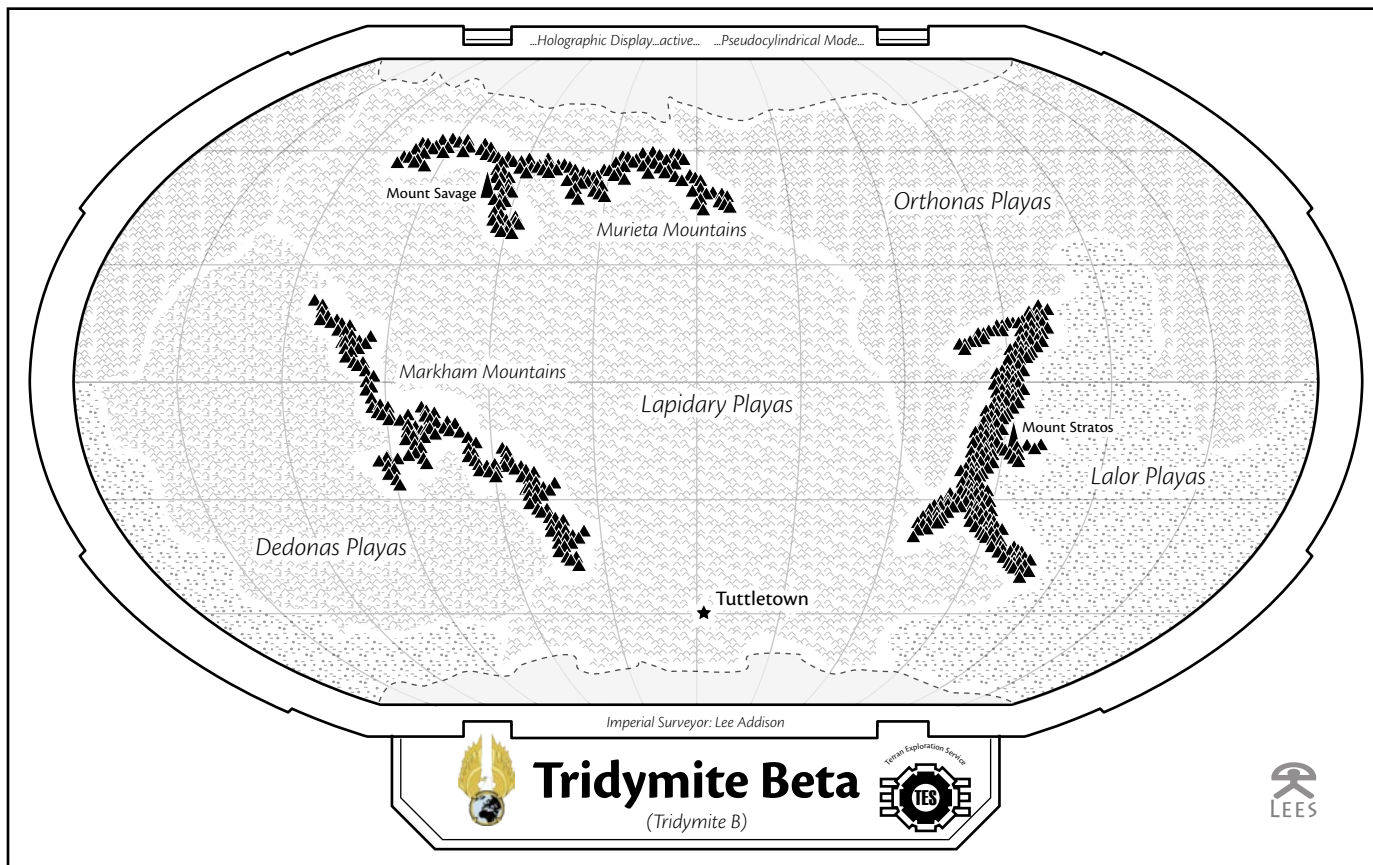
GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Tridymite Beta is a hot, rocky world roughly twice the size of the Earth. Located in an orbit similar to that of Venus, it's covered in a thin but highly toxic atmosphere composed largely of carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen, and chlorine. It's extraordinarily rich in valuable dense metals such as gold, platinum, and uranium. Large quantities of diamond and other precious gems have been discovered close to the surface in several locations. Its indigenous sentient species, the boulder-like Cristobalites, have made a lucrative agreement with a cartel of Imperial business interests that provides them with a small (relatively speaking) percentage of all profits made from the sale of minerals extracted from their world. The largest and most powerful of these companies is InStarCo, which thus far has held up its end of this deal with surprising precision. The accounting firm of Laurence, Sing, and Gustav in London-Berlin manages the Cristobalite fortune.

While it has 1.26 G, Tridymite Beta is inhospitable to most forms of organic life. It has an unbreathable troposphere, deadly surface temperatures, and a very low atmospheric pressure of about 900 millibars. It rotates extremely slowly; a single day on Tridymite B is some 240 Earth days long. There are only 220 Earth days in each Tridymite year, making each one 0.917 local days long. On Tridymite Beta a day is longer than a year... so to speak.

PLACES OF NOTE

The Cristobalites don't have settlements in the sense that most sentient races do. The only Human outpost on Tridymite Beta is Tuttle town, a corporate mining colony consisting of around 300 skilled workers from New Alexandria. A jumble of pressurized domes, silos, greenhouses, and mechanized processing facilities, the colony has few luxuries and attracts few tourists. Amateur rock hounds, xenoanthropologists, cultists, mountain climbers, and the odd philosophy student are attracted to Tridymite B in small numbers. Most of them come to explore the Lapidary Playas, a vast equatorial collection of flatlands roughly the size of the Earth's North American continent. Best known for their vast wealth of crystals and semiprecious stones, many of the thousand-square-kilometer playas (plains) are seemingly *paved* with crystals thought by some to have mystical healing properties. Many xeno-



ALIEN WARS

There's no evidence that the Xenovores ever charted the Tridymite system. With no use for non-organic life forms or most precious metals, they almost certainly would have ignored the Cristobalites had they discovered them.

anthropologists believe the Cristobalites evolved in caves near these vast stretches of lapidary playa pavement, but so far no one's found any evidence to support this hypothesis.

For mountain climbers, Tridymite B is a legendary place. It possesses three mountain ranges — Lalor, Markham, and Murieta — that rank alongside Mars's Olympus Mons, Earth's Himalayas, and New Canaan's Mt. Abraham as some of the ultimate climbing destinations in the Terran Empire. Although individuals and groups wishing to mount expeditions into these ranges sometimes receive permission (access to the planet is severely restricted), the Cristobalites worry about members of the "soft species" hurting themselves by falling or running out of oxygen. They monitor climbers' progress through a global positioning system that's notorious for dispatching robotic rescue teams at the slightest provocation.

Philosophy students of a particularly masochistic and clueless sort have been known to visit the isolated mountaintop homes of the Cristobalites. In search of such enlightenment as can only be supplied by members of an ancient, super-intelligent race of inhuman boulders, these well-meaning souls have a disturbing tendency to fall down ravines, vanish under rockslides, and otherwise get themselves killed on the ascent. The Cristobalites have repeatedly indicated their desire that would-be students communicate with them via the planet's datanet from the safety of Tuttle town's dormitories, but every year a few determined seekers ignore this sage advice.

HISTORY

Tridymite Beta's incredibly long days would undoubtedly have produced a unique, fascinating biosphere — had it produced one at all. The Cristobalites are the only lifeform known to have evolved on the planet, presumably from some sort of stalagmite ancestor that grew from mixed veins of some as yet undiscovered type of playa crystals. Their pre-Imperial history consists of a philosophical discourse lasting over a hundred thousand years. This was in turn followed by the formation of Cristobalite "schools" espousing distinct philosophical thoughts and beliefs. This caused members of the species to spend an additional two hundred thousand years crawling slowly to the tops of nearby mountains, mainly in the Lalor range. This event is known as "the Great Move."

For roughly half a million years the Cristobalites debated among themselves until they were discovered by the Terran Exploration Service vessel *Tahoe* in 2540. Quickly establishing a friendly relationship with the often-xenophobic Imperial government, they officially became citizens of the Empire, and Tridymite Beta a colony planet of the nearby world of New Alexandria, in 2545. After signing a lucrative deal for mining royalties with InStarCo in 2547, roughly half of the planet's native population promptly moved offworld and dispersed across the Empire. This is referred to as "the Great Scattering." Some Cristobalites also refer to the years since 2540 as "the Great Discussion," since contact with other peoples and Galactic civilization has led to an explosion of philosophical discourse among the schools.

THE PEOPLE

The total non-Cristobalite population of Tridymite Beta is remarkably small and extremely well documented. About 300 Humans, mostly from New Alexandria, live in Tuttle town under the employ of InStarCo, as do 17 Cristobalites from the “Productive Work Is The Thing” school of philosophy. A majority of their time is spent remotely operating or servicing the massive ambulating factories that, with the assistance of small armies of robot miners, travel the surface of the planet in search of precious minerals and gems to harvest. A small group of these Tuttle towners are survey specialists who do a great deal of their work out in the field as they search for new deposits. There are additionally some 30 to 50 offworld visitors in Tuttle town at any given time; usually on their way to or from the Lapidary Playas.

The native “traditionalist” population of Tridymite Beta (*i.e.*, Cristobalites who don’t routinely interact with the Tuttle towners) is scattered around the countless mountains of the Lalor and Murieta ranges. They number nearly a thousand individuals grouped into 42 different schools. Unlike the more aggressive members of their race who have left the planet to integrate into Imperial society, traditionalist Cristobalites continue their great philosophical inquiry into life, the universe, and everything else uninterrupted by any outside concern save for signaling Tuttle town’s robotic rescuers to save the occasional philosophy student.

Despite their reputation as high-immortal philosophers, Cristobalites are gregarious. They love to meet people, learn new things, and have a good time — and to a Cristobalite, “a good time” can involve anything from a symphony concert, to watching flowers grow, to raucous fraternity parties, and beyond. One Human wag described them as “a species of philosopher party animals,” which sums them up fairly well.

Government

The traditional form of government on Tridymite Beta is anarchy. Before the coming of Humanity the Cristobalites had no leaders, no currency, no criminals, no warfare, and no private property. While they had long ago conceptualized these ideas, their basic nature prohibited them from experimenting with them. Traditionalist members of the race still refuse to acknowledge any sort of government, although they don’t have any problem with Tuttle towners living under one.

In theory, Tridymite Beta is a colony world of New Alexandria, with the added twist that its native inhabitants are full Imperial citizens. In actual practice, however, the government in Pharos City has almost no control over the planet, which is functionally the property of InStarCo as far as the Empress is concerned. Its employees in Tuttle town are overseen by a variety of managers who answer to the current colony comptroller, Ibrahim Rosenberg. He’s accountable to the corporation’s board of directors on Barnard

II, who are fairly happy to leave him alone as long as an enormous amount of valuable material continues to flow out of the planet.

Famous Inhabitants

The first person a visitor is likely to encounter on Tridymite Beta is Comptroller Ibrahim Rosenberg, who makes a point of personally greeting all arriving visitors at the colony’s docking area. A stern, unfriendly man raised in the strict theological environment of New Canaan, he’s seldom happy to see new faces and always quick to point out the planet’s many dangers. He also has a reputation for treating the colony’s women as his personal and exclusive harem.

HELEN NG

What little most Imperial citizens know about Tridymite Beta comes from the datanet holobiography of its most famous adventurer. No Human knows more about the world than Helen Ng, a prospector who’s spent much of the past several decades exploring the vast Lapidary Playas region in a specially-designed Megamax Pioneer. Now in her 80s, she oversees a small survey team of Humans and Cristobalites from her office in Tuttle town, where she dedicates a sizable portion of each week to making life difficult for Comptroller Rosenberg (whom she detests). While Rosenberg would like nothing better than to shove the annoying old woman out the nearest airlock, he respects her scientific abilities, which have on more than one occasion kept him from losing his job.

BLACK ROCK

Perhaps the most intriguing inhabitant of the planet is the Black Rock, a schoolless sage of phenomenal renown who dwells alone atop Mt. Savage, the highest peak in the Murieta range. Lost in presumably deep thought, he seldom speaks even to his own kind, although when he does his utterances possess a sort of melancholy depth unusual for a Cristobalite. Some fifty years ago Black Rock took a break from his silent musings to dictate a 30,000-word essay on time, nonexistence, and inaction to a visiting Human xenobiology student. Known as *Black Rock Speaks*, the essay is considered to be one of the most important philosophical texts published in the last hundred years. In the wake of its publication Black Rock has received honorary doctorate degrees from half a dozen major universities, all of which have been piled around his base in sealed containers. So far he’s failed to acknowledge these distinguished accolades in any way, an inaction that many consider to be his most profound statement to date.

BIG HONCHO

The most famous native of Tridymite B doesn’t live there at all. The leader of the Cristobalite unofficial government in voluntary exile is a *particularly* eccentric individual known as Big Honcho, whose position primarily arises from the throwing of wild parties for young aristocrats

at his private chateau near Lyons. Rumored to be an agent for the TSS, Big Honcho belongs to a school known as The Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely Benevolence Society that has extensive financial connections to the Imperial military. While members of this school have collectively announced themselves to be their species's leaders, its "governing" mainly consists of vacationing, spending money, and avoiding Tridymite Beta like the plague. Some people think that no Cristobalite has ever publicly complained about this government because none of them take it very seriously.

Economy

Tridymite B is blessed with incredible amounts of easily-reached precious metals and gems. Correspondingly the economy of the planet depends on the harvesting, processing, and exporting of these natural resources by InStarCo personnel. A small fraction of the profits from this operation are given annually to the Cristobalites accounting firm, which continually invests them in a wide variety of profitable ventures. Over the last two centuries this fortune has grown to vast proportions, making the natives of Tridymite B one



of the wealthiest species in the Empire *per capita*. With affluence has come power and influence, a fact that's often overlooked when dealing with these oddly gregarious, fun-loving rocks.

VINARCUS



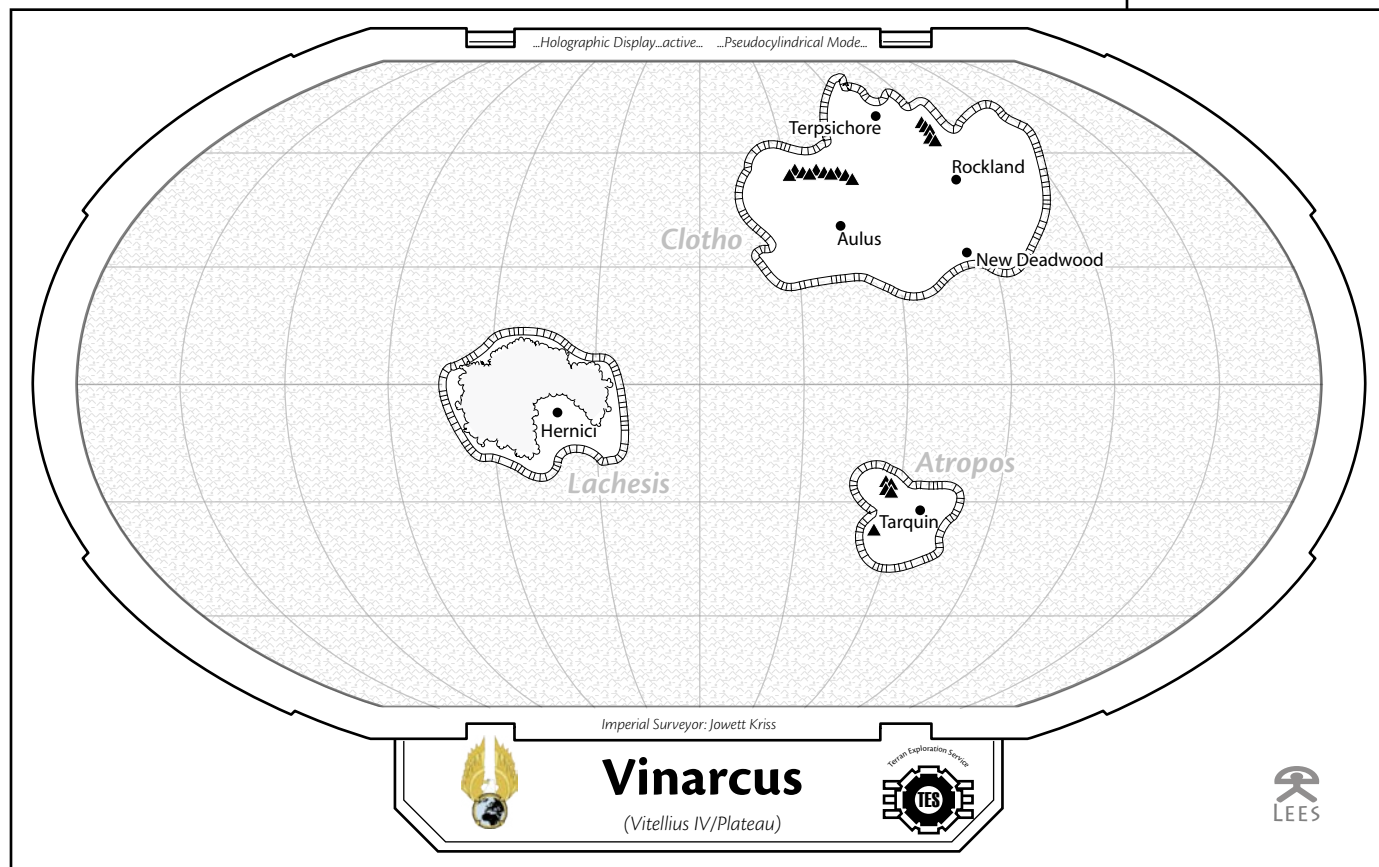
Vinarcus, also known as Plateau, is the fourth of seven planets orbiting Vitellius, a type F3V blue star. The planet Otho (Vitellius V) is also inhabited, and there are research stations established on two other worlds, Vespasian and Galba. The system is also remarkable for its extraordinary number of short-period comets, each of which orbits Vitellius in periods of less than 100 years. There are some 1,000 of these celestial bodies visible in the night sky at any given time, an awe-inspiring sight that draws thousands of affluent tourists annually to the orbiting luxury spa Grande Hostel high above Vinarcus.

Otho is a former Mandaarian colony planet whose terraforming remained uncompleted at the time of the Mandaarian exodus in 2574. A cold, windy Type 3 world with a thin semi-poisonous atmosphere, it's inhabited by a combined society of some 3,000 Martian variant Humans and 1,000 expatriate Zurites who've fled the Ackálian Empire. The Othonians live in tiny domed settlements scattered about the oceanless face of the planet, emerging only to lead their massive herds of dinosaur-like creatures in annual drives around Otho's equator.

An extremely isolationist culture, they shun all contact with outsiders except for representatives of a Mon'dabi food processing corporation. Politically the Othonians are considered to be a protectorate of the Empire (when they're considered at all), although there's no military presence on the planet.

Vespasian is a massive gas giant that follows a slow elliptical orbit at the edge of the Vitellius system. A violent world with vast hydrogen seas the size of planets battered by storms the size of continents, Vespasian remains something of an enigma to planetary science. As a moonless world it technically shouldn't have any weather worth mentioning, yet the giant globe is constantly awash in some of the most violent storms ever recorded by Human observers. The best theory yet proposed is that pressures exerted upon the world's presumably solid core by its slow eccentric orbit produce the storms.

Galba is a small, extremely volcanic world that occupies Vitellius's innermost orbital plane. In fact, Galba's planetary crust is so unstable that fountains of liquid rock are routinely ejected right out of its atmosphere into space, destroying anything that



IMPERIAL DATAFILE: VINARCUS

Planet Name: Vinarcus, also known informally as Plateau (Imperial designation: Vitellius IV)

Classification: Limited Type 1 (see text)

System Data: A seven-planet system orbiting Vitellius IV, a type F3V blue star. Of these only Vinarcus and Otho (Vitellius V) are inhabited, while the moonless gas giant Vespasian and the tiny, superheated world of Galba both have manned orbital research stations.

Gravity: Varies from 0.95 to 2.5 Earth normal depending on elevation.

Day and Year: There are 18 standard hours in each day, 540 standard days in each year

Atmosphere: Vinarcus has a breathable “upper atmosphere containing nitrogen, oxygen, and traces of helium. It also has an explosive, high-pressure lower atmosphere” comprised of hydrogen, ammonia, and methane.

Hydrosphere: Although portions of Vinarcus are wet, it has no body of water larger than a small lake. Rain, which is produced in upper atmosphere through a not entirely understood process, falls to the tablelands; from there it drains down to the planet’s often fiery, pressurized depths to rise once again as water vapor.

Meteorological Overview: Weather varies greatly based on location. While Vinarcus has naturally occurring global warming due to strange atmospheric conditions, its lack of satellites or large bodies of water tends to keep weather patterns very stable. The plateau Clotho is dry, cool, and rocky with light mists that generally occur at night. The other two inhabited plateaus, Atropos and Lachesis, are both prone to downpours of heavy rain, although Lachesis is considerably more tropical.

Sentient Species: Unknown. The Mind Police are investigating unsubstantiated reports of 20 meter long, fish-like creatures living in the planet’s Firefalls.

ATRI Rating: 11

Government: Oligarchic semi-republic. The primary governing body, the Pentacle, contains a representative from each of the planet’s three tablelands, an officer from the Imperial Navy, and an Executive Governor who’s appointed by the Empress.

Affiliation: Colony world of the Terran Empire

Resources: Mining exports include silver, platinum, uranium, molybdenum, vinarcium, and rare crystals valuable to the Korundar. Manufactured exports include precision machinery, vehicles, and weaponry. Many consider it a vast warehouse of undiscovered genome resources valuable to medicine.

Places of Note: The Firefalls, particularly in Atropos and Lachesis; the Imperial Marine base at Hernici; the orbiting luxury spa Grande Hostel.

Ship Facilities: Excellent, including military and civilian repair facilities at Aulus and the military high shipyard in orbit above Clotho that has the capacity to produce large warships

gets in their path. A small but heavily shielded research station manned by a dozen very nervous Red Star Industries scientists has been placed into

orbit to investigate the potential of tapping into the planet’s tremendous geological power.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Vinarcus is a large Type 1 world with roughly four times the surface area of Earth. It occupies a predictable circular orbit roughly 210 million kilometers from Vitellius, which would make it a rather cold world if it weren’t for an unusually thick atmosphere that encourages global warming. Its oxygen-rich upper atmosphere is breathable by most of the Terran Empire’s races, although it contains higher than normal traces of helium. On the other hand, its surface atmosphere consists of an unbreathable mixture of hydrogen, ammonia, and methane at pressures more than 100 times greater than those of Earth’s surface. Of the known galactic species only the Korundar and Cristobalites can travel on the planet’s surface without expensive, specialized survival equipment.

Fortunately, three gigantic plateaus rise up from the uninhabitable areas to regions where the atmosphere is breathable and the pressures bearable. It is on these massive tablelands that colonists established their first settlements in the late 2500s. As of 2640 there are an estimated 20 million Vinarcans, a majority of them Human Heavies, Korundar, and Toractans. Additionally, since the planetary government welcomes non-Human colonists, a surprisingly large number of refugees from the nearby Ackálian Empire make Vinarcus their home (creating diplomatic tensions for Imperial negotiators to cope with). These include a tribe of Zurites, a rather large number of Shiseki specialized for mining, and a smattering of male Ackálians who have fled the rampant sexism of their own kind. Together these races have created a cosmopolitan yet distinctively blue-collar society that some in the Senate’s liberal faction consider a model for interspecies cooperation within the Empire. Most important Imperials, however, simply think of Vinarcus as another boring, uncultured, and distinctively dangerous Frontier colony filled with smelly aliens and unsavory backwoodsmen who lack the common sense to stay as far away from Ackálian space as possible.

PLACES OF NOTE

The inhabited portions of Vinarcus are its massive plateaus, known as Clotho, Atropos, and Lachesis respectively. While automatons and Korundar prospectors have periodically explored the planet’s lower regions, there are currently no mining operations on the lower Vinarcian surface due to the prohibitive costs of such an undertaking. The plateaus emerge rather suddenly from the planet’s surface, their steep walls rising some 18,000 meters above its sea level before ending in relatively flat surfaces at the beginning of the world’s upper atmosphere. Geologists have theorized that Vinarcus was once covered by massive oceans of liquid hydrogen that became gaseous during a cataclysmic worldwide event involving a radical change in its

orbit. If this theory is true, the Vinarcian tablelands were once continents, which would explain many of their unique qualities.

FLORA, FAUNA, AND FIREFALLS

Each plateau is biologically distinct, with its own species of flora and fauna that evolved independently (though they may have had common ancestors at some point in the remote past). One feature all three have in common is a bizarre biological/geological phenomenon known as *the Firefalls*: great flows of burning methane gas and compressed organic exudates that emerge from the plateaus at ten kilometers above the planet's main surface. These flows, which spill from over 4,000 caves scattered around the plateau sides, are caused by the planet's ever-renewing deep reservoirs of petroleum-like substances that are created by the remains of generation after untold generation of indigenous Vinarcian lifeforms' remains traveling downward from its lighter, oxygen-rich upper atmosphere to its pressurized, hydrogen-rich lower atmosphere. As they decay, compress, and liquefy the resulting mass of fluid rot and vapor finds its way in "rivers" through cracks in the plateau's sides, emerging as great cascades of tumbling fire that spill majestically downward for thousands of yards until the lack of oxygen extinguishes their flames. The exhaust given off by the Firefalls is one of the primary causes of the global warming that makes life on Vinarcus possible.

Until recently it was thought that it would be impossible for any sort of life to exist within the Firefalls. However in 2635 Cameron Vale, an Epsilon-rated agent of the Mind Police, detected the presence of minds within the immense flames. Subsequent investigations have revealed a race of 20 meter long, fish-like creatures that spend their existence swimming up and down the flows. How intelligent these yet unnamed beings might be, what they feed upon, and how they're protected from the flames they live in are questions that seem to be, for the moment at least, unanswerable.

CLOTHO

Although it's the least hospitable of the three tablelands, Clotho is also the most densely populated, largely because the vast deposits of silver, platinum, uranium, molybdenum, and a unique metal known as vinarcium are located directly below its surface. A naturally occurring alloy of platinum, vinarcium is both lighter and stronger than the most advanced steel currently available to the Imperial Navy (steel alloy 8-450). That makes vinarcium one of the most valuable commodities in the Empire... so valuable, in fact, that the capital city of Aulus is located directly atop of the planet's largest known deposit of the metal so that Interstellar Mineral's officers can keep an extremely close eye on its mining, refinement, and shipping. The Imperial Navy's Core Fleet, which maintains a large facility at the edge of the city as well as several ships in orbit at any given time, keeps an eye on *them*.

Clotho is some 2,175,600 square kilometers in size, or roughly three times the size of Texas. It's

flat and somewhat barren with generally subarctic temperatures, although there are several small frozen mountain ranges along its northern edge. Its flora is dominated by variations of a type of ten-meter coniferous plant known as the *anio*. These trees produce an abundance of edible cones that are ground to make the flour used as a staple in most Vinarcian cooking. Its bark is the primary food source for the *hiraeth*, the plateau's endemic and somewhat notorious animal inhabitant. Although unintelligent, this deer-like creature produces a cry that sounds nearly identical to that of a weeping child. The Vinarcians have a great number of oddly quaint superstitions surrounding this animal, which they do not hunt.

ATROPOS

While Atropos is the smallest of the three tablelands with a surface area of only 72,000 square kilometers (a little larger than the Terran island of Eire), it's also the most temperate, and *per capita* the most economically productive. A country of rolling green hills, swampy moors, and quaint towns with cobblestone streets, Atropos is home to Vinarcus's single largest city, Tarquin, which has a population of almost 2.5 million. The primary business of Atropos is the manufacturing of precision machinery, vehicles, and weaponry for the Imperial Navy, often using materials mined from Clotho and transported from there by enormous anti-gravity trains. Both Draconis Defenseworks and King Arsenal have large facilities in Tarquin, as do many of the smaller defense contractors. GBC Pharmatica also maintains a large presence in Tarquin, where it conducts experiments using genetic material procured in Lachesis (see below).

Atropos is the planet's tourist destination. The famous orbital luxury spa Grande Hostel travels in a low geosynchronous orbit directly above Tarquin so that well-heeled patrons can enjoy a wide variety of rejuvenating treatments while watching hundreds of short-period comets swarm about the system above and the Firefalls spilling from the face of the mini-continent below.

The inhabitants of Atropos are a spiritual folk, maintaining a wide variety of churches, monasteries, and shrines that are open to the inquisitive public. For the more adventuresome, there are dozens of vertically mounted bed and breakfast establishments along the southern edge of Atropos so that hardy backpackers can spend morning after morning sipping strange teas as they contemplate the mystical flaming cascades tumbling into the seemingly infinite darkness below.

LACHESIS

Lachesis is a steamy, tropical plateau located along Vinarcus's equator. Home to countless varieties of giant carnivorous plants, deadly megafauna predators, and bloodsucking malarial insects, it's the least densely populated of the three tablelands. Only an estimated ten thousand intelligent beings reside on the 547,000 square kilometer plateau that's roughly the size of France. Its regional capital of Hernici is basically a glorified

ALIEN WARS

Vinarcus was in Mandaarian territory at the time of the Xenovore Wars; neither Humans nor Xenovores were aware of its existence.

Imperial Marine training camp with a scientifically-oriented trading post attached to it. The fortified town is surrounded by a dizzying array of turret-mounted M88 Plasma Guns controlled by a constantly vigilant military AI. These fire outward night and day at unpredictable intervals as various brutes the size of Imperial *Fang*-Class Mobile Gun Platforms come charging out of the jungle in search of a quick meal.

Lachesis is best known for its most colorful inhabitants, the famed “genome gauchos” who’ve been the subject of so many popular holoprograms of late. These adventurer-scientist-businessmen brave the almost unfathomable dangers of the plateau’s deadly primeval jungle in search of unique genetic materials that they can sell in Hernici. While the military considers them a nuisance, a wide variety of cures for diseases have been derived from genetic material retrieved by this eccentric group of adventurers (some of whom have become quite wealthy because of their discoveries). Several medical corporations have representatives at Hernici, although it’s not exactly considered a choice position.

HISTORY

Although Plateau lies within the boundaries of the old Mandaarian Union, there’s no evidence that enigmatic species ever attempted to colonize it. Why they chose instead to begin the exhaustive process of terraforming frozen Otho rather than settling on the temperate tableland of Atropos is one of the many enigmas of the Vitellius system. Some experts believe that it’s because of the existence of the puzzling, presumably indigenous creatures living in the Fire-falls. Others point to the presence of Korundar prospectors in the planet’s depths. Either way it remains a mystery.

After the Mandaarian Exodus in 2574, eager explorers and Imperial officials began searching Mandaarian space for colonizable planets, abandoned technology, and other treasures. The Terran Exploration Service ship *Reno* found the Vitellius system in 2581, classifying it as a limited Type 1 world based on surveys of Atropos. Shortly thereafter colonists and adventurers began arriving in the system under the auspices of the Ministry for Colonization and Development. It wasn’t until the Interstellar Mineral Corporation founded its first colony on Clotho in 2612 that Humans first detected the Korundar presence on Vinarcus. These hearty souls mine the pressurized floor of the planet for exotic crystals of a type extremely valuable to their kind, emerging from its deep canyons every 10 years to meet with a ship dispatched from their homeworld. Since there could be no real competition for resources between themselves and the newly arrived Humans, no conflict has resulted from this surprising discovery. A number of Korundar now work as specialists for Terran mining outfits on the planet.

Within a decade several other mining conglomerates staked claims on portions of Clotho and established their own colonies, most notably Terpsichore, Rockland, and New Deadwood. This coincided with the first wave of emigration from the Ackálian Empire to hit the planet. A tribe of high-tech Zurites arrived, bringing a Shiseki hive mind named U-77 with them. The Zurites settled among the Human colonists on Atropos, helping them to transform Tarquin into the manufacturing center it is today. U-77, on the other hand, chose to settle in Aulus, where she/they work for Interstellar Mineral to this very day.

As trade expanded and the Mandaarian Road grew and lengthened, Vinarcus became the Road’s terminus, giving it an economic importance, and a diversity of marketplace, unusual for a Frontier colony. Its location made it strategically valuable, and the discovery of vinarcium in 2601 only increased its military importance. The Empire was quick to establish the military facilities at Hernici and to this day always keeps several well-armed ships in orbit.

THE PEOPLE

Different sorts of settlers have colonized distinct parts of Vinarcus based on several factors, not the least of which involves each individual tableland’s approximation of Earth normal gravity (which depends on its height). Atropos has a mild gravity of 0.95, Clotho a crushing gravity of 2.5, and Lachesis an uncomfortable but basically livable gravity of 1.5. Other factors include employment opportunities, the location of natural resources, culture, and climate.

Clothans

Most of Clotho’s 10 million inhabitants live either in one of its dozen mine-cities, on the large cooperative tree farms that produce the majority of the plateau’s food and timber, or on a military base. Clotho’s Human population falls into two distinct groups: Heavies employed in the mining industry; and normal Humans serving in the Imperial Navy. Military personnel mainly live in an extensive, gravity-controlled base on the outskirts of Aulus (the facility is so large that it’s nearly a city unto itself). The vast majority of the remaining population is comprised of Heavies and Toractans (with the odd Korundar miner) who have socially merged together to such an extent that they no longer have distinct cultures.

Although Clotho’s non-military population leads a hard life filled with dangerous, rough labor, they aren’t a particularly dour lot. The mining corporations provide modern medical care for their workers families, plenty of food and entertainment, decent if plain housing, and a passable education system for their children. Clotho celebrates four weeklong patriotic holidays each year that involve a lot of drinking, arm wrestling, and monster hovercraft rallies.

Atroposans

The majority of Atropos's population are standard Humans mixed with a liberal spicing of Zurites. Most of them live in the capital city of Tarquin, which is best known as a bustling metropolitan center famous for being clean, tourist-friendly, and affordable. The remainder are agriculturalists, working as farmers and shepherders in the idyllic green countryside. The most noteworthy aspect of these hardy country folk is their eccentric adherence to the old Catholic faith of ancient Earth, a religion no longer practiced in most of the Empire (the inhabitants of Tarquin generally belong to the Universal Church of the Creator, if they belong to any church at all). The assortment of quaint, tumbledown stone churches that dot the land are manned by equally quaint churchmen dressed in traditional starched white collars who call the faithful to prayer with the chiming of large bells each Sunday.

Lachesites

Lachesis isn't really settled at all, since most of it is an unconquered wilderness. Its inhabitants fall into two distinct, mutually-exclusive groups: Imperial Marines and genome gauchos. All new Marine recruits assigned to the Core Fleet are cycled through the base in Hernici. There they're subjected to intense training under a taxing 1.5 Gs while at the same time having to constantly fight off incursions by the plateau's megafauna predators. Quite a few don't survive the experience, which may be why the very word "Hernici" makes some of the toughest men in the Empire shudder.

The gauchos can be from any race, although male Ackálans, Human Heavies, and Toractans make up the majority of this eclectic group. The Marines at Hernici view the Ackálans with some justifiable suspicion, but they've never caused any *inordinate* trouble (most genome gauchos, on the

other hand, are nothing but). All of these biologist-adventurers are tough, independent, flamboyant, stealthy survivors with a reputation for possessing hard-nosed business sense and being able to drink other men under the table. Although the vast majority of them live alone or in pairs in highly fortified bunkers buried underground, there are six known rendezvous points with populations of several hundred scattered around the plateau in large caves. Although theirs is generally a short, brutish, and hardscrabble existence, upon occasion a genome gaucho comes across genetic material so useful and valuable that he becomes fabulously rich almost overnight. It is this lure of potentially incredible wealth that continues to draw men of ability into this almost suicidal trade.

Government

Vinarcus is ruled by *the Pentacle*, a five-person oligarchy that represents each of the planet's regions or interests. Imperial military interests are represented by an officer chosen by Imperial officials. As of 2640, Captain Mockingbird Dox, a Rigellian intelligence officer and personal friend of Fleet Admiral Vraor, represents the Navy's interests.

Each of the three plateaus democratically elects a representative to the Pentacle. Lieutenant Hadrian Smith, a grizzled, cybernetically-enhanced veteran said to be more machine than man, represents Lachesis. Roberto Jones, an expressionless executive of few words, represents Clotho. President Nancy Connolly, a short-tempered woman with some unpopular views about the Empire, represents Atropos. Finally, the Empress's planet-side interests are looked after by Executive Governor appointed by her — as of 2640, that's Alexis Zhukov, a direct descendent of the great hero of the Xenovore Wars.

The oligarchy is known as the Pentacle after the building in Aulus in which it convenes. The Pentacle is seldom in session — it generally meets only four times each Vinarcian year for a period of twenty days (although during emergencies it stays in session for longer periods of time). A majority of the planet's federal politics takes place in occasional secret meetings between members or their assistants to keep the actual sessions brief, public, and productive. Although the Executive Governor has veto power over any decisions made by the other four Pentacle members, it's seldom necessary for him to use it as everybody in Vinarcus's government knows where the Empire draws its invisible lines. These can be danced up to, but never crossed without serious consequences.

PLATEAU GOVERNMENT

Generally each of the plateaus governs itself in whatever manner it sees fit within the confines of Imperial law. Hernici's base commander supplies what little formal government Lachesis has. The tableland's genome gauchos are allowed to attend to their own chaotic affairs as long as they don't trouble anyone else. A ruling body known as the Board, with one member from each major mining

**GENOME GAUCHO
PACKAGE DEAL****Abilities**

Cost	Ability
3	+3 with listed Science Skills; Only For Matters Pertaining To Lachesis Flora And Fauna (-2)
3	Climbing
2	AK: Lachesis 11-
2	Navigation (Land)
2	SS: Biology 11-
2	SS: Genetics 11-
2	SS: Zoology 11-
3	Stealth
2	Survival (Tropical)
4	WF: Small Arms, Advanced Small Arms

Total Cost Of Package Abilities: 25

Disadvantages

Value	Disadvantage
10	Hunted: Imperial Marines 8- (Mo Pow, NCI, Watching) (Note: This Disadvantage may not longer be applicable if the character doesn't work on Lachesis any more.)

Total Value Of Package Disadvantages: 10

corporation and an observer from the cooperative tree farms, governs Clotho. The Board's main purpose is to make sure Clotho's collectively-sponsored public services continue to function smoothly, since each company bears the responsibility for policing its own employees. The ultimate punishment on Clotho is to be handed over to military justice. The Navy only interferes in its corporate neighbors' petty squabbles when they're asked (or occasionally forced) to do so.

Atropos is a constitutional republic with a parliament, a prime minister, and a president whose main job is dealing with the rest of Vinarcus's government. This arrangement functions about as well as can be expected. Traditionally, the most interesting political tension on the planet is between Atropos's democratically elected representative and its appointed Executive Governor. Much to Zhukov's dismay, President Connolly is a determined to carry on this unique local custom by being against anything the Imperial Representative favors, a situation that could become explosive if the other three members of the Pentacle didn't generally take his side in nearly every matter.

Famous Inhabitants

Although not technically a resident of the planet, Core Fleet Admiral Vraor can often be found on Vinarcus attending to Imperial Navy business in and around Aulus. A patriot as well as one of the Navy's few non-Human superior officers, he's well thought of by almost everyone on this racially diverse planet. Only slightly less popular is his planetary adjunct Mockingbird Dox, an exotic beauty even by the standards of her kind.

One of the most visible figures on the planet, Executive Governor Zhukov seems to be everywhere at once. Whether cutting the ribbon at the opening of a new supermarket in rural Atropos, visiting a children's clinic in Terpsichore, or solemnly announcing the death of a decorated military veteran on the planet's datanet, the Imperial head of the government certainly appears to be a busy man. An able administrator who's neither particularly loved nor despised by Vinarcus's population, Zhukov seems to be doing his very best to keep everything running as smoothly as possible... which is what most Vinarcans, not to mention the Empress, want.

While not exactly popular with either the planet's corporations or the Imperial Government, infamous folk musician and labor activist Heavy Joe Hill lives and works in the mining town of New Deadwood. His most recent album, *Subterranean Subspecies Blues*, has had more than 500 million downloads over Imperial datanets. He can be found playing on Wednesday and Sunday nights at Barth O Reilley's, a tavern he partly owns.

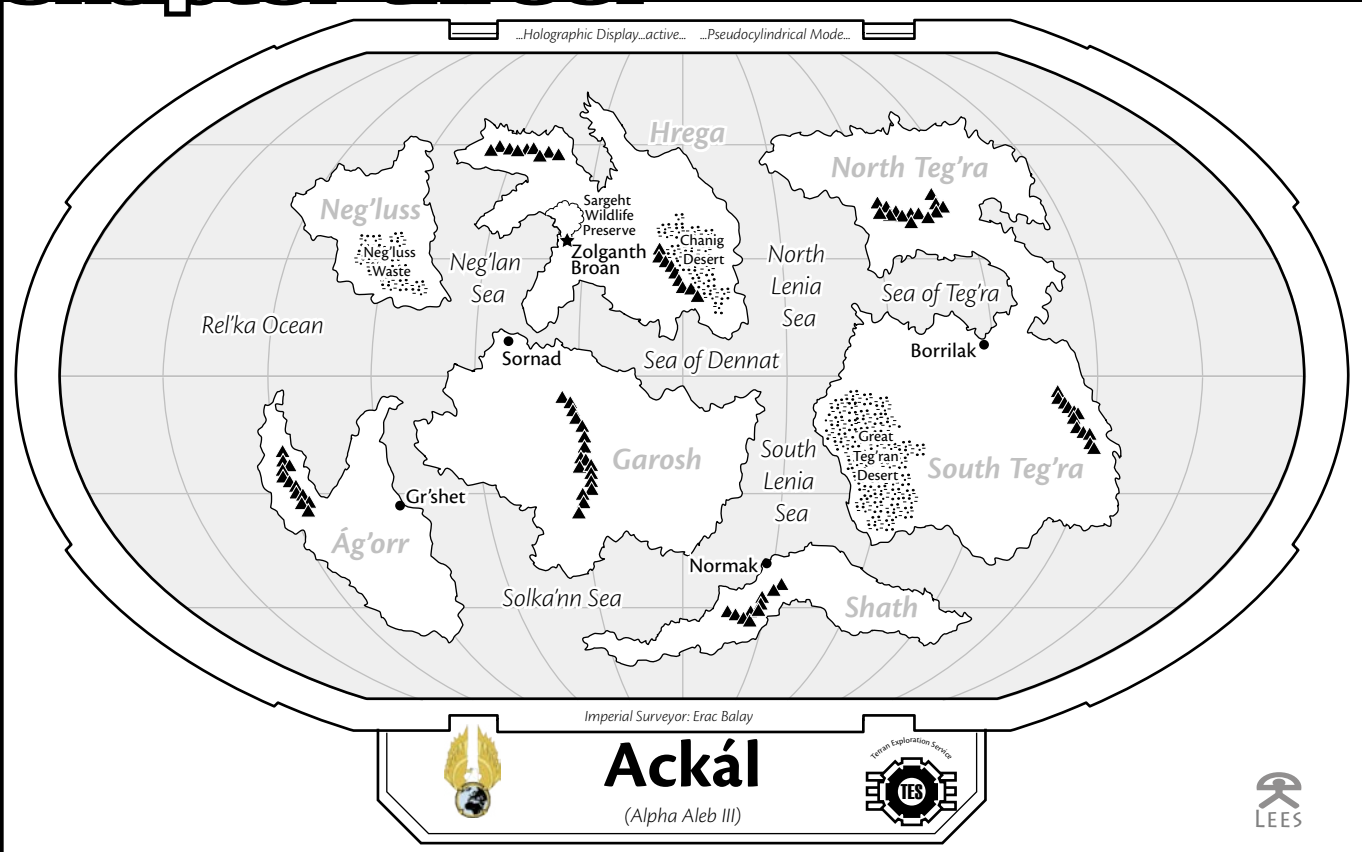
No list of Vinarcus's better-known personalities would be complete without mention of Three-Eye Ocklamar, the Ackálian genome gaucho upon whom Centaur State Studios based its infamous character "Ghastly Geirolk" from *Alien Vendetta II*. A colorful figure fond of dressing in wide-brimmed straw hats and bright sashes, and sporting a pair of ivory handled Se'ecra-made ion pistols, old Three-Eye isn't nearly as much of a villain as his film namesake makes him out to be. Like most gauchos he spends months at a time exploring the badlands of Lachesis in search of new and unique organic matter to sell, taking breaks to stock up on supplies at Hernici. It's possible Three-Eye might be persuaded to work as a guide if anyone were brave (or foolish) enough to want to explore the nightmarish places he calls home.

Economy

Vinarcus has a bustling economy centered primarily around mining Clotho's vast mineral resources, its large naval presence, the Zurite-supervised manufacturing facilities in Tarquin, and its importance as the trading center at the current (as of 2640) terminus of the Mandaarian Road. With its exports vastly exceeding its imports, outside investment from both the Imperial government and private industry continues to pour in. There are rumors the Empress is tentatively backing plans to expand the planet's orbital shipyard facilities to rival those on Triumph by installing a space elevator. Lured by an abundance of skilled labor, political stability, and the close proximity of the military, corporations like Draconis Defense-works and King Arsenal continue to increase their presence on the planet, especially in Tarquin. The unique natural beauty of the Firefalls and the orbital majesty of the Vitellius system's short-period comets have helped greatly in the development of a small, but constantly growing, tourist industry. And traders from all over the Frontier come to Vinarcan marketplaces to buy, sell, trade, and socialize.

Yet many believe that the real economic potential of the planet lies not in its more developed regions but in the largely unexplored and biologically diverse Darwinian nightmare land of Lachesis. Although only GBC Pharmatica and a handful of its smaller competitors are currently active on the planet, it's possible that the sheer biological diversity of that constantly evolving tableland may produce some as of yet unthinkable windfall in biotechnology at some point in the very near future.

chapter three:



BEYOND THE EMPIRE



Ackál is the third of twelve planets orbiting a star the Ackálians call Ta'geth and Human catalogs designate Alpha Aleb. The two inner planets are rocky worlds unsuitable for anything but domed mining colonies. Alpha Aleb IV and V are Type 2 worlds that have been "Ackálformed" to bring them sufficiently close to Type 1 for Ackálians to live there. The remaining seven planets are Type 4 and 6 icy worlds or Type 9 and 10 gas giants.

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: ACKÁL

Planet Name: Ackál (Imperial designation: Alpha Aleb III)

Classification: Type 1

System Data: Ackál is the third of 12 planets in its system, of which only two other planets are habitable; Ackál itself has two moons

Gravity: 1.1 G

Day And Year: 25 standard hours a day; 380 standard days a year

Atmosphere: Ackál has a more or less Earthlike atmosphere, though with higher concentrations of methane and some other trace gases than Earth (69% Nitrogen, 19% Oxygen; 12% Other). Humans who've visited Ackál consider its air heavy and cloying; living there seems to exacerbate medical conditions such as nasal congestion or bronchitis.

Hydrosphere: Water covers 55% of Ackál's surface

Meteorological Overview: Ackál has the standard range of weather and climates for a Type 1 planet, though it's warmer and dryer than Earth overall and lacks polar icecaps.

Sentient Species: Ackálians

ATRI Rating: ATRI 11

Government: Homeworld of a gynarchic empire, controlled on a day-to-day basis by a *shulgar* (chancellor) appointed by the Empress

Affiliation: Homeworld of the Ackálian Empire

Resources: As the center of the Ackálian Empire, Ackál has an economy driven by imports from its colony and subject worlds. It has more inhabitants than its own resources, which were largely depleted long ago, can support.

Places Of Note: the Imperial Museum; the Sargeht Wildlife Preserve; Talkokt University; Zolgan'th Broan

Ship Facilities: Numerous, including two major orbital ports and three major planetside facilities. All comings and goings are carefully monitored by the Kai-rensha and local security services.

Ackál has two moons: a large, bright, yellowish one called Geth'ha and a small, dim, golden-brown one named Nulul. In Ackálian folklore and symbolism, Geth'ha represents the powerful, dominant, energetic feminine aspect, and Nulul the weak, submissive, passive male aspect.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Ackál is a large planet — about one-fifth larger than Earth — with a warmer, drier climate than Earth's. Its seven continents occupy 65% of the surface, leaving only a little more than half of the planet covered by water. Its polar ice caps melted (or were mined for water) years ago, and extensive areas have become desertified due to natural processes, improper agricultural exploitation, overgrazing, and chemical warfare. In fact, Ackál hasn't been able to support its population of 2 billion Ackálians for more than a century; it must import food and most other necessities. Ackálians continue to live there more out of nostalgia and pride than anything; any other world in such poor shape they would have abandoned years ago.

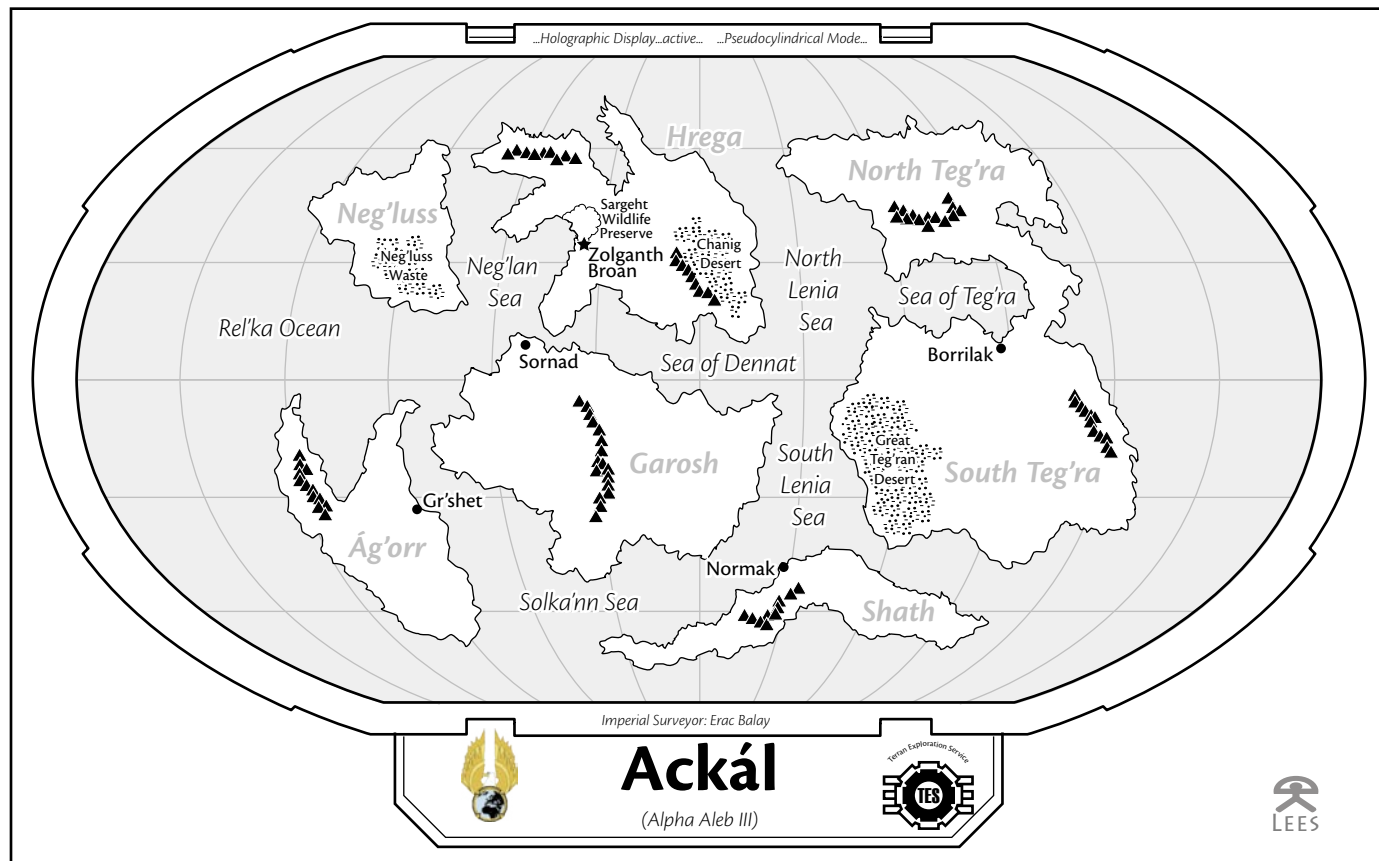
Ackál's landscape is harsh and stark to many other species. In addition to the desert areas, it contains many tall mountain ranges, barren plateaus, canyons, and tundras. In the tropical zones swamps and marshes are common, though desertification has reduced their range somewhat.

Places Of Note

The aggressive Human military leader Admiral Nathan Chang once famously observed, "There's nothing interesting on Ackál except targets." But in the eyes of most sentients he was wrong. As desolate as it often is, Ackál still has attractions worth the attention of tourists and scholars.

THE IMPERIAL MUSEUM

The Ackálians are a proud people who like to memorialize their victories and accomplishments with statues, monuments, and trophies. The latter are kept in the Imperial Museum, an institution devoted to recording and studying the history of the Ackálians and their Empire — especially their military and its conquests. Here one can find the preserved pincers of the twelve greatest Shiseki warriors who fought unsuccessfully to keep the Ackálians from taking their homeworld, the original signed copy of the Zurite "Articles of Surrender" ceding their planet to the Empire, the crown-helmet of Lord Avt of Galtanhu IV, and the Ulthag Rock of the Vebulites of Rg'ont Prime.



THE SARGEHT WILDLIFE PRESERVE

Few areas of Ackál remain in their original natural state, having been either built over, converted to agricultural use, or blasted and gassed in one of the Ackál's many wars. The largest exception is the Sargeht Wildlife Preserve, originally created centuries ago as a hunting reserve for the Ackál's emperresses. Many native Ackál's animals (which often combine what Humans would call insectoid and mammalian traits) live only here and in zoos, having been driven to extinction everywhere else. Access to the Preserve is strictly controlled to make sure it's not over-used.

TALKOKT UNIVERSITY

Most other species think of the Ackál's as brutal warriors and aggressors — but they never would have gotten out into space if they weren't intelligent as well. Of their many fine institutions of higher learning, the most renowned is Talkokt University in the city of Normak. Its physics, history, and robotics departments are considered among the best in the Galaxy and even attract some non-Ackál's students.

ZOLGAN'TH BROAN

The capital of the Ackál Empire isn't a city in the normal sense of the word. It's *Zolgan'th Broan*, the "Palace Imperial," the seat of the Ackál's emperresses for centuries — a palace as big as some cities. Resembling in some respects a gargantuan high-tech pyramid, with status and power increasing as one ascends to the Empress's throne room and personal chambers, it contains within its massive walls the government offices that oversee the running of the Empire (except for the Ackorsha

[the Ackál's military] and Kairensa [the intelligence service], which have their own headquarters, about half the size of Zolgan'th Broan, nearby). Workers and visitors use slidewalks, antigrav elevators, and special shuttle hovercraft to get around. Morbid rumors claim that people who get lost end up as part of the next day's stew in one of the building's many cafeterias and restaurants.

HISTORY

To other species, the history of the Ackál's is a long, bloody chronicle of wars, battles, conflicts, and skirmishes interspersed with occasional records about notable contests involving athletics, art, or other pursuits. Given their culture's emphasis on competition, victory, and superiority, Ackál's historians have usually given short shrift to social, economic, or anthropological trends in favor of dry statements of fact regarding political and military struggles. As a result, a lot of potentially useful or interesting information about the Ackál's of past centuries has largely been lost, or is known from only a few incomplete sources or the archaeological record.

Up until about the Human year 1900, Ackál was a heavily balkanized world. A patchwork of kingdoms and principalities, each ruled by the strongest or wildest Ackál's female, covered every continent. Warfare between nations was common, as were civil wars to challenge the ruler (or obtain the throne after a ruler's death). Periodically a particularly powerful ruler would succeed in conquering or uniting half a dozen kingdoms or more, but inevitably she fell to an enemy or her kingdom shattered into pieces upon her death.



PELGA THE CONQUEROR

That changed with the advent of the greatest, most admired figure in Ackálian history: Pelga the Conqueror. Smart, strong, and ambitious, she had no intention of living out the life she was born to — queen of the tiny kingdom of Morrag on the continent of Garosh. With a ruthlessness and skill rarely seen before on her world, she succeeded in conquering first all the kingdoms near hers, then the rest of Garosh, then crossing the straits to take most of the continent of Hrega. From there she pressed onward to eastern Neg'luss and northeastern Ág'orr. When Pelga died, her daughter Elgaba became Empress, and not only held on to her mother's conquests but extended them. By the time of Elgaba's granddaughter's death, the House of Pelga ruled the entire planet, and continued to do so for almost 200 years. Among Ackálians, to be compared to Pelga is one of the highest compliments a person can receive.

THE EMPIRE EXPANDS

The Ackálians attained spaceflight in the late 2100s. They quickly realized it offered a solution to their world's growing resource depletion problems and an outlet for their native aggression. With the Empress's support, scientists toiled ceaselessly to improve spaceflight technology, find ways to create colonies and mines on other worlds in the system, and eventually to break the lightspeed barrier. With that last hurdle cleared, the Ackálians stood poised on the brink of interstellar empire.

Over it they plunged, quickly conquering three systems near their own and using the native species living on them for forced labor. The pattern thus established — conquest, enslavement, exploitation — formed the model on which the rest of the Empire was built. Having used up or destroyed most of their own resources, the Ackálians need the resources of other planets to survive, and that need combined with their innate aggressiveness and competitiveness makes them natural empire-builders.

The Ackálian Empire reached its current borders in 2553 with the signing of a peace treaty that ended the Galactic War with the Terran Empire. That war cost them several systems and many ships, and since then they've concentrated on slowly expanding in the opposite direction, away from Terran space into territory formerly controlled (and still loosely claimed) by the decadent Malvans. They've heard disturbing rumors of another galactic power growing out beyond their current borders, but as yet have learned nothing definite.

THE PEOPLE

The Ackálíans are large, powerful carnivores whose features mix some aspects of mammals and insects and look horrific to Human eyes. Women tend to be larger and stronger than men and dominate society in most respects (see pages 24-25 of *Terran Empire* for more information, including a Racial Package Deal).

Ackálian culture and tradition emphasize competition, merit, and aggression. Their society is a Darwinian crucible in which the strong rule, the weak submit, and those who think themselves strong challenge their superiors. Any advantage, no matter how trivial, is worth struggling for — though of course each Ackálian must judge for himself whether it's worth the effort, because working too hard to obtain something of minor value means a net loss. This makes it difficult for Ackálíans to work together in large groups, since it's too common for one group member to challenge another for position or authority. Only individually, or in small groups where the hierarchy is clearly defined, can Ackálíans make significant progress. This sometimes hinders them when they encounter species that aren't so hampered by infighting (such as Humans or Mon'dabi), but the Ackálíans would argue that the way their society winnows out the weak means that even a small group of Ackálíans is a match for a large group of anyone else.

Government

Ackál is the throneworld of the Ackálian Empire, and as such is a personal possession of the Empress. Rather than bother herself with the problems of administering it on a daily basis, she appoints a *shulgar* (chancellor) to oversee it on her behalf. The *shulgar* in turn appoints lower-ranking administrators (all females, of course). To Human sensibilities the system resembles a cross between a feudal monarchy and a corporate hierarchy.

Other planets in the Empire are ruled by dispensation from the Empress. After the Ackorsha conquers a world, the Empress chooses an Ackálian to become *gómralt*, or “planetary governor.” Often the discoverer or conqueror of the world gets the position, if she's deemed capable and worthy; otherwise it might go to some favorite of the Empress, an Ackálian to whose family she owes a favor, someone whose support she wants to obtain, or the like. In the case of distant, backwater worlds, she might appoint to *gómralt* someone she wanted to punish, exile, or get out of her way.

A *gómralt* has a large degree of freedom in governing his world provided he meets the trade and production quotas set for it by the Empress. The main purpose of the Empire is to support Ackál, and Ackálíans who can't accomplish this quickly lose their jobs (and often their lives). Most *gómralts* rule in a heavy-handed, dictatorial manner, but some have discovered they can get more work out of their subjects with a lighter touch. Competition among *gómralts* to see whose

planet can produce the most, and who can send the most lavish gifts to the Empress on her birthday, is, as with all other competitions in Ackálian society, intense.

As of 2640, Shairaka rules Ackál as Empress. Young and (for an Ackálian empress) fairly open-minded, she's focused on antispinward expansion and domestic issues. This has left her vulnerable to charges of “weakness” by some potential contenders for the throne (sae *Terran Empire*, page 76). For now, the Ackorsha and Kairensa remain largely loyal to her and effectively keep her rivals in check.

Famous Individuals

Some of the most notable Ackálíans include:

HIGH CONSUL ANGRATA

Perhaps the most-recognized Ackálian in Human space is Angrata, Empress Shairaka's *Na'tesh* (“High Consul,” or chief diplomat and representative) to the Terran Empire. A scholar of Human Studies before becoming a politician, she has a deep interest in Humanity as a subject of study. She can discuss Human customs, history, and culture intelligently even with Humans themselves, and speaks English, French, and Mandarin Chinese fluently. She's a well-known figure on the Imperial party scene and is said to possess great wit and charm — though she's also known as a tough, clever negotiator.

JORAKA

Ackálíans admire prowess and achievement in all fields, so not all of their renowned are military leaders. For example, Joraka, a professor at Rak'shanar University on Kardaghel, is the Ackálíans' most famous psychologist. Her groundbreaking study of the role of jealousy and envy in Ackálian social life has led to new evaluations of Ackálian group and individual behavior and made her books bestsellers throughout Ackálian space. She's said to be working on a new book about Ackálíans' attitudes toward and perceptions of romance.

CHIEF INSPECTOR KRUSEK

The bane of many a Human merchant, Krusek is the commander of Galgath-7, the inspection and customs starport monitoring the main Terran trade route into Ackálian space. Traders coming from Imperial space must stop there to do business; they're not allowed to proceed further into Ackálian territory (see *Terran Empire*, page 77). A dour, humorless woman, Krusek suspects nearly everyone of being a smuggler and/or trying to sneak past Galgath-7; her inspections protocols and strict station regulations seem designed to keep anyone from making money or having fun.

ORUTA

Most of the prominent members of the Ackorsha are starship captains. Oruta, commander of the feared Seventeenth Army (known as “the Planetbusters”), is an exception. The fourth woman

in her family to become a successful military commander, she's earned a reputation as a tough, no-nonsense, get-the-job done general who does what the Empress commands, no matter how impossible it might seem. Her most famous exploit was putting down the 2333 rebellion on Qonida IV with just a single division of soldiers.

Economy

While the economy of the Ackálian Empire as a whole is reasonably healthy, the economy of Ackál itself is a shambles. Due to the ruin they worked on their planet through war and overexploitation, the Ackálians can no longer maintain enough industry and agriculture on their homeworld to support the population. They have to import food, many raw materials, and a wide variety of manufactured goods. Many Ackálians see this as a weakness of their Empire and would like to do something to reverse it, but no viable solutions have been developed.

To ensure that Ackál can keep itself supplied in times of war or crisis, the Empire has designated a ring of a dozen worlds as "critical possessions" and taken steps to protect them. In addition to fortifying the worlds themselves and making sure they can continue to produce in extreme circumstances, it's established several "fortress worlds" like Damrath to protect this "heartland" as a whole. Any enemy who thinks he can exploit the homeworld's economic weakness to hurt the Ackálians may very well find out he's bitten off more than he can chew.



DORVALA



Dorvala, homeworld of the Persieds and capital of the Perseid Empire, orbits the star Sirnar'dor, named Phi Cassiopeia on Imperial starcharts. Sirnar'dor is a bright, hot, yellow-white supergiant star (F01a) — 25 times as massive and 275,000 times as bright as Sol. Unusually for a system home to sentient life the star is rapidly cooling. Though the life-cycle of a star is measured in millennia, the Persieds have verifiable records of a dramatic decrease in Sirnar'dor's surface temperature, and although it will be several more centuries before the decrease has a definite impact on the system, astronomers are sure it will happen (just as they know it will detonate in a Type II supernova eons from now). The Perseid government, with typical patience and careful consideration, has already begun planning

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: DORVALA

Planet Name: Dorvala (Imperial designation: Phi Cassiopeia IV)

Classification: Type 1

System Data: No moons; three other planets in system

Gravity: 1.2 G

Day And Year: 27 standard hours a day; 542 standard days a year

Atmosphere: Earth-like — 70% Nitrogen; 25% Oxygen; 5% Other

Hydrosphere: Water covers 85% of Dorvala's surface

Meteorological Overview: Dorvala has the standard range of weather and climates for a Type 1 planet, but due to the eccentricities of its orbit its weather has a greater range than on Earth or most other Earth-like worlds. Severe temperature changes across the seasons are a fact of life.

Sentient Species: Dorvalans (Persieds)

ATRI Rating: ATRI 11

Government: Monarchy

Affiliation: Throneworld of the Perseid Empire

Resources: As the economic center of an intergalactic empire, Dorvala commands enormous resources. The main components of its economy include finance, entertainment, various service industries, and tourism.

Places Of Note: The capital city of Varksos; the City of the Holy temple complex; the carved Valatu Mountains

Ship Facilities: Numerous, ranging from the most advanced of modern facilities to small, out of the way spaceports used mainly by small private ships. The largest and busiest spaceport on the planet is at Varksos.

for the predicted changes and feels certain it can prevent any cataclysmic upheavals or radical alterations of Dorvala's environment (a grim thought for a Persied, who typically feels that any change is bad, and radical change downright evil).

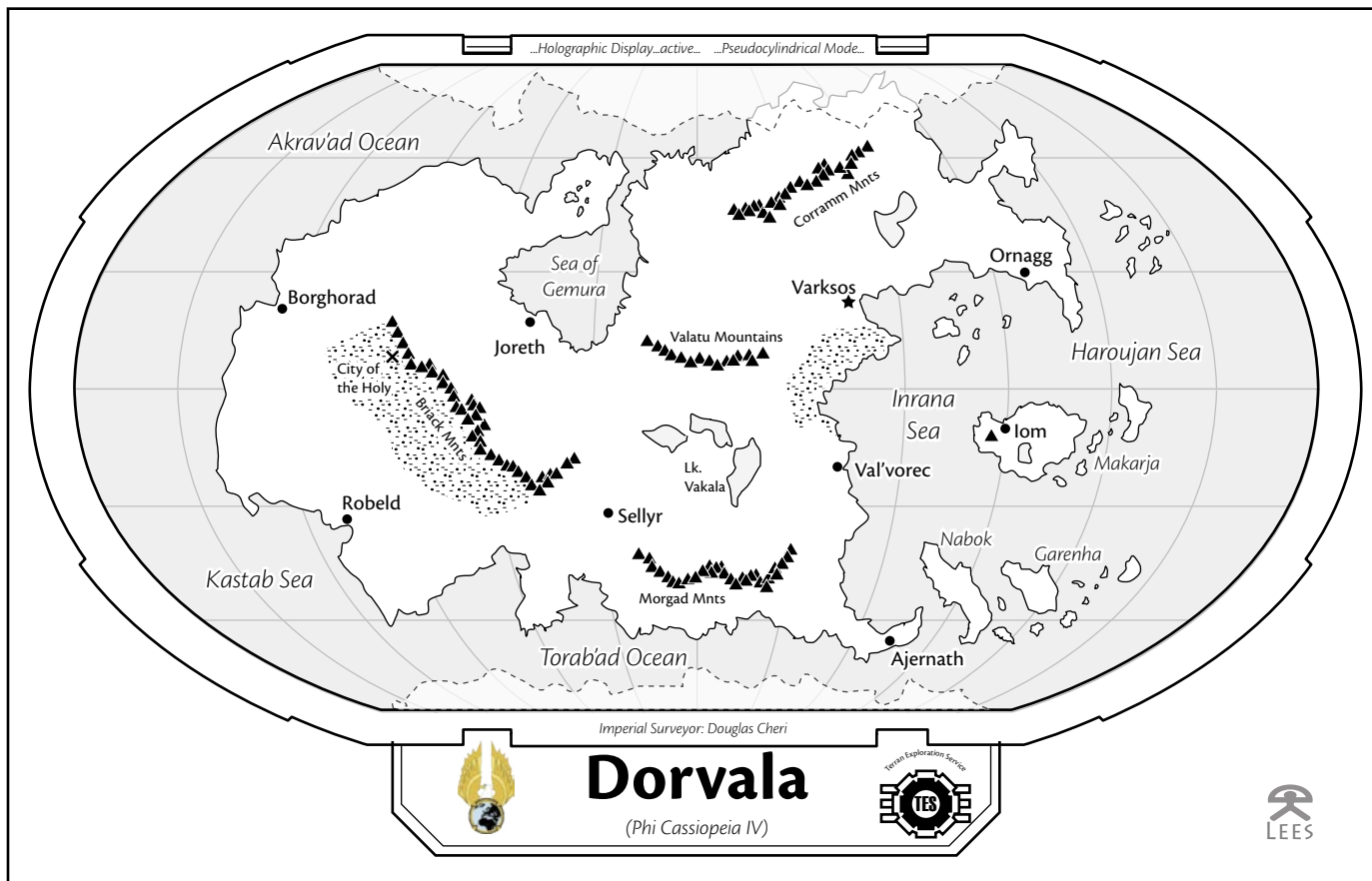
The Sirnar'dor system has three other worlds, all of which lie much nearer to the star. Most scientists believe Dorvala is a captured world because of its age relative to the other three planets in the system. These three are in the early stages of planet formation; nebulas of stellar debris still cling to their nascent masses, having yet to be fully blown away by the stellar winds. On a clear night on Dorvala, the other three worlds — Jilkar (Phi Cassiopeia I), Brallanai (Phi Cassiopeia II), and Horlak (Phi Cassiopeia III) — seems shrouded in a hazy pink glow from these nebulae. None of them has any more than a rudimentary atmosphere, and by Imperial classification are Type 5 worlds. None have been colonized; they're too close to Phi Cassiopeia to make living there feasible.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

From orbit the appearance of Dorvala changes radically depending on where the planet's orbit around the star stands when one approaches. When the planet is farthest from the star in the winter months, the landmasses are almost entirely white with wide streaks of grey and black where the mountainous regions lie, a strip of brown at the equator, and oceans so dark as to be black. If the planet is near the star, though, the continents are a dark green and teeming with life, and the oceans are deep blue.

Dorvala has an eccentric orbit leading to harsh seasons and both severe weather and tectonic shifts. The environment undergoes drastic temperature changes, from tropical in the summers to arctic in the winters. Most mammals hibernate to survive the winter, and other living creatures often have lengthy periods of dormancy. The changes in the star's gravitational pull lead to vulcanism, which is especially severe during the summer months. The frequent quakes, volcanic eruptions, and even fissures that loose streams of lava have given rise to the Perseid words for the season: summer is *gyrlanna* ("time of upheaval") and winter *hiranna* ("time of calm").

Dorvala is dominated by one large supercontinent named Tharangia; the remaining land areas are islands. Because of the high frequency of quakes and vulcanism, large communities (and later cities)



developed early in Perseid history. There were few lands that were stable all year round where Perseids could safely live, so Perseids grouped together on them. Because the land and seasons themselves were a far more deadly enemy than any army, the Perseids usually turned their attention to survival instead of fighting. Water covers most of Dorvala's surface, and though the planet has very little in the way of tides because it has no moon, the water's often choppy because of seismic activity and vulcanism. Tsunamis are common, and coastal regions often dangerous. Perseids learned to avoid naval travel if at all possible; traditionally they stayed on Tharangia and mostly left the islands as homes for animals. To this day, they're uncomfortable on water. However, since they achieved ATRI 10 technology and became able to protect themselves from the harsh environment with ease, the Perseids have spread across all the available land. Even single-story buildings have rudimentary anti-gravity technology to protect them from quakes. Perseid geologists have become experts at locating areas at high risk for vulcanism and diverting magma flows to uninhabited areas.

All areas of Dorvala see snow during the winter, although equatorial regions rarely drop below 0° Celsius (32° F) for extended periods of time; and during the summer, the polar ice caps experience significant melting as average world temperatures creep toward 5° Celsius (41° F). Even with the advanced technology the Perseids possess, flooding remains a problem in maritime and river communities... though admittedly far less of one than in centuries past.

Due to the brightness of Sir'nardor, Humans and most other visitors to Dorvala have to wear very dark eyeshades (or similar devices) to protect their eyes in the daytime. Unprotected exposure to the Dorvalan sun has been known to blind non-Perseids permanently.

ARCHITECTURE

Perseid architecture never developed a prominent vertical aspect because of the frequent quakes. The traditional Perseid home, even for the wealthy, is a sprawling structure that's only a single story high — before the Perseids achieved ATRI 6, a structure higher than 12 meters (6", or 40 feet) was nearly unheard of. In recent centuries, with advances in materials and antigravity technology, Perseid architects have learned to design "up" rather than "out," but society frowns on people who live in such high places — they're considered lowly and poor, for the most part. Furthermore, unlike Human cities such as Boswash or Chicago-Indianapolis, where gleaming skyscrapers rise high into the sky as a symbol of economic prosperity, the city centers on Dorvala are filled with low-lying structures — it's only in the suburbs, where the less wealthy live, that one might find high rises (which are nowhere near as tall as Human skyscrapers built during the twentieth century on Earth). Thus, whereas Human cities resemble mountainous areas, with suburban lowlands growing up to towering skyscrapers in the city center, Perseid cities look like valleys, with short buildings surrounded by rings of taller structures.

When a Persied speaks of making additions to his home, he's far more likely to build subterranean levels than add stories. Increasing the Persieds' instinctive dislike for tall buildings is their reluctance to demolish old structures. A Persied can't understand the notion of "out with the old, in with the new." Unlike modern Human cities, which may have an old neighborhood or two preserved for the sake of tourism, Persieds almost never destroy old buildings, choosing instead to carefully preserve these monuments to their past (and, at most, rebuilding them with better or sturdier materials designed to look the same as old materials). While on Persied colonies necessity might require the destruction of old buildings, that's never the case on Dorvala (a situation only exacerbated by the nobles' ability to veto new construction, as described below in *Government*). Traditionally, Dorvalan buildings were made of quarried stone, and Persieds have continued that custom when possible, often using stone even if it's significantly more expensive.

Places Of Note

A planet with as long and rich a history as Dorvala has many places worth visiting and sights worth seeing. Some of the most interesting include:

VARKSOS

The Imperial capital of Varksos is one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the Galaxy; it's the only place one can find large numbers of non-Persieds on Dorvala. As a major economic center — both in the Persied Empire, and beyond — it features some of the largest markets and exchanges in the Galaxy.

Varksos is one of the few places on Dorvala where people can avoid or skimp on most of the social rituals that dominate so much of Persied life, at least during business deals. An offworlder doesn't have to carefully consult his portable computer before speaking and gesturing for fear of offending a potential business partner in Varksos — Persieds there know and accept that it's easier for outworlders to ignore such niceties of behavior.

Despite its economic focus and offworlder population, Varksos remains an important center of Persied culture, art, and traditions. Here can be found the Wall of Ages, a miles-long stone-work where every inch is hand-carved with depictions of the detailed and fascinating history of the Persied Empire; the Main Temple of Sal Garath Sal, where the beautiful stained glass windows relate the parables of the six gods which form a cornerstone of Persied wisdom; and the gargantuan Royal Palace.

The Record Of Empire

One area of Varksos, almost a sister city, strikes an odd note in the onlooker. Here the buildings become strange and the area is a patchwork of radically different styles of architecture. This is the Record of Empire, each of its neighborhoods built in honor of an alien species that belongs to the Empire. To the Persieds, this

serves as a record of the last eight hundred years, a time during which the Persieds have brought civilization to their ignorant or primitive interstellar neighbors, and is intended to honor those species which have joined the Empire. But to some members of those species it seems more like a trophy room where the Persieds display their conquests.

THE CITY OF THE HOLY

Though the main temple of Persied religion is located in Varksos, the City of the Holy (*Yakarn Arclar* in Persied) is the holiest place on Dorvala — and to an adherent of the Persied religion, the holiest place in the Galaxy. At this location in the foothills of the planet's largest mountain range, the Brack, stand four sprawling structures which, according to tradition, are the oldest buildings on Dorvala. Three of the structures are dedicated to one god each; the fourth is dedicated to the Three Ladies, whose heavenly manifestation is the three other planets in the system.

The tallest of the structures — a pyramid of black stone with a base 100 meters long on a side — is dedicated to Dorall'shan, god of the sky; at its top is an ancient circle of stone that scholars believe ancient Persieds used to predict the weather. The most sprawling structure is an ancient maze of canals dedicated to Avala Tanu, god of water. Between the canals lie small shrines for worship and manicured rock gardens that resemble the ocean. The smallest structure is an ancient gateway of black volcanic rock. Beyond this gateway is a labyrinthine network of caves that reputedly leads to an underground sea of magma. This gateway honors Shogar, god of the underworld, who brings quakes and magma.

The final structure is small, but stands highest on the mountain slopes. It consists of many strangely-placed pillars of differing widths and heights. This honors the Three Ladies who rule the stars and heavens, and was reputedly an observatory for ancient astronomers. The workings of the observatory are completely obscure to modern scholars. The priests, who supposedly hold the knowledge of its operation in trust, drop hints that it wasn't built for observing the night sky as it currently exists.

The priests who live in *Yakarn Arclar* reside in the same structures that millions of other priests have over the millennia, they live the exact same life as those earlier priests lived. They hunt for or grow their food, have no electricity, and even eschew modern medicine. Unlike many other "life choices" in Persied society, which in fact are forced onto a Persied by tradition and custom, a Persied voluntarily chooses to live in the City of the Holy, abandoning all the comforts and worries of modern day life and the destiny that society had in store for him. Every Persied with the means to do so is supposed to make a pilgrimage to the City of the Holy at least once in his lifetime and observe the priests as they go about their daily routine so he can better understand his past.

THE VALATU MOUNTAINS

Nearly a thousand years ago, a powerful general named Kolgalo Sha'rann conquered nearly three-quarters of Tharangia and ruled it as an iron-fisted despot for almost four decades. To commemorate his rule, he commissioned hundreds of engineers and sculptors to carve a large section of the Valatu Mountains into titanic sculptures of himself, his family, and his chief and most trusted servants (with his own statue towering the tallest, of course). The work took almost 20 years, but was completed at great expense and effort — and the results were so impressive, so beautiful, that even after Sha'rann was overthrown the people couldn't bear to destroy the statues. They stand to this day, carefully maintained and preserved, a monument to Perseid ambition, drive, artistic accomplishment, and in the eyes of some people, cruelty. Sentients come from all over the Galaxy to see them.

HISTORY

The pre-history of Dorvala is largely lost to time despite the efforts of many scholars — the planet's volcanic activity makes preservation of an archaeological record difficult at best. The main thrust of study for many of them is where the planet came from, and what it was like before. As a captured world, Dorvala isn't native to the Phi Cassiopeia system. While most conservative scholars laugh at the idea of Dorvalan

life existing before the planet began orbiting Phi Cassiopeia, there's always some researcher somewhere attempting to prove otherwise. Sadly, no one's ever found definitive evidence either way, though some ancient stories and myths point to a time when the stars were different. One, the most ancient epic of Perseid culture, seems to say the planets were also different.

Until eight hundred years ago, when the Perseids expanded to nearby star systems, the history of the Perseid Empire was the history of Dorvala. The harsh environment forced the inhabitants to band together into tribes, then city-states, and finally nations which more or less peacefully came together under a one-world government nearly fifteen hundred years ago.

The last eight hundred years have wrought strange changes in the Perseids. No species can become the ruler of a powerful intergalactic empire without changing — but for the Perseids, change is bad, sometimes nearly sinful, and upholding tradition (especially in the face of adverse conditions) is a virtue. While Perseids in other systems have slowly evolved culturally to adapt to alien environments and alien civilizations, Dorvala has remained stagnant. Only on Dorvala does Perseid life go on as it did in the millennia before Perseids left their planet, but few among the Perseids complain about that. Even the most radical Perseids takes some measure of comfort from the knowledge that on Dorvala things are the way they've always been.

THE PEOPLE

Perseids in general are described on pages 30 and 31 of *Terran Empire*; the native of Dorvala embodies the quintessence of the Perseid mentality. If the average Perseid has a strong respect for tradition and duty, then for a Dorvalan it's as fundamental to his being as eating and breathing. Perseids born offworld may (or may not) have severed their connection to the homeworld, and as a result become far less conventional than the natives of Dorvala, but even then most Humans and other species would see him as tradition-bound. But a Perseid born and raised on Dorvala has his entire history around him. He goes to work — likely to the same sort of job his father and his father's father had, and probably in the same building, and often even by the same route — and as he travels he passes architecture painstakingly preserved from centuries ago. He probably grew up in the residence his family has occupied for dozens of generations.

Perseids who grew up offworld only have, at most, eight centuries of history in the same locale. To a Dorvalan, an outworld Perseid is rootless (and often the object of pity). How does this disconnected Perseid make it through life without the tangible examples of his ancestors to guide him? The outworld Perseid might be able to recite his lineage going back to the earliest days of the Empire, but it doesn't matter — knowing it and living it are two different things, and the only way to live in honor of the past is to see it and feel it until it exists in



every aspect of daily life. What's more, outworld Perseids tend to agree with their Dorvalan brethen: they *are* rootless. They even experience a specific emotion tied to this distance from the homeworld. Called *iyran*, it's a sort of profound homesickness and longing (even if for a world the Perseid has never personally known, and whose family may not have lived there for centuries). Every Perseid living offworld experiences it on occasion; for some it becomes an affliction leading to deeper psychological problems such as severe depression.

Despite these feelings, fewer and fewer Perseids can afford to live on Dorvala. The larger the Perseid Empire grows, the more administrators it needs offworld, and the more capital that flows into the homeworld (thus driving up prices). Although Perseids are loathe to admit it, there's often a severe dichotomy between the rich and poor on Dorvala, and a large part of the problem is that many of the poor are Perseids. If they were non-Perseids, a Perseid might feel obliged to help, but for others of his own species it's a different matter. A Perseid is supposed to be the responsibility of first himself and second his family — not the government, and definitely not the royal family. Few Perseids want to help poor Perseids; they expect them to help themselves, not depend on others. To make matters worse, it's a problem most Perseids can barely even bring themselves to acknowledge, let alone alleviate.

Government

The Perseid Empire is technically a monarchy, though in recent centuries it's really evolved into a democracy with two bodies, the Advisory Council and the Council of Judges taking on most of the responsibilities of governance (see *Terran Empire*, pages 81-82, for more information). But the governing of Dorvala itself is a special case.

THE KING

Before founding an interstellar empire, the Perseid king (as of 2640, Jorgaro VI) and his councillors ruled the planet as a traditional monarchy. It was the expansion of the Empire that weakened the monarch's hold on his realm, as the diverse needs of ruling wide-flung settlements on myriad types of worlds and the administration of alien species required a technical expertise and understanding of context no one person could have. While the two councils wield more power Empire-wide than the king does nowadays, that's not the case on Dorvala itself. There the king rules as he did in centuries past.

The Perseid homeworld is considered the king's estate, to do with as he will. While the king has no binding authority over the Advisory Council, his word is law on the homeworld, and he must approve any law the Advisory Council passes before it applies to Dorvala. Similarly, the king cannot intervene in Imperial legal matters, but he can dismiss any case brought before the Council of Judges or overrule any judgment made if the crime took place on Dorvala or involves a resident of Dorvala. While the king exercises this authority

rarely and judiciously, no tradition-bound Perseid would dare attempt to curtail the royal prerogative where it concerns Dorvala. The only check on royal power is *the Rights of Subjects*, a body of laws passed seven hundred years ago. The Rights grants natives of Dorvala a few basic civil liberties like the right to fair trial... but it doesn't give them the right to property, free speech, or other basic liberties most Humans take for granted. There's nothing to stop the king from doing as he pleases with regards to many aspects of a Dorvalan's daily life.

Eight hundred years of political differences between the ruler and his two councils has led to some unique aspects of Dorvalan politics. For example, no non-Perseid can vote in elections held on Dorvala itself. This rankles many non-Perseid citizens in the Empire, but the Perseids themselves cannot even understand the problem, let alone consider changing it. To a Perseid, granting the right to vote to non-Perseids when the matter concerns the homeworld is like giving a stranger the right to tell the head of a household how to spend his family's money or decorate his living room: it's intolerable, and no right-thinking Perseid would ever commit such an offense.

THE NOBILITY

Many other differences center around the rights of the nobility, who elsewhere in the Perseid Empire have become superfluous. They're accorded respect and a high social position, but have no real authority just by virtue of birth. On Dorvala the nobles still wield power over their hereditary lands. For instance, a noble can veto any construction planned within his demesne. That particular power is often central to local controversies as nobles — who are even more tradition-bound and averse to change than the average Perseid — often won't allow large-scale building projects.

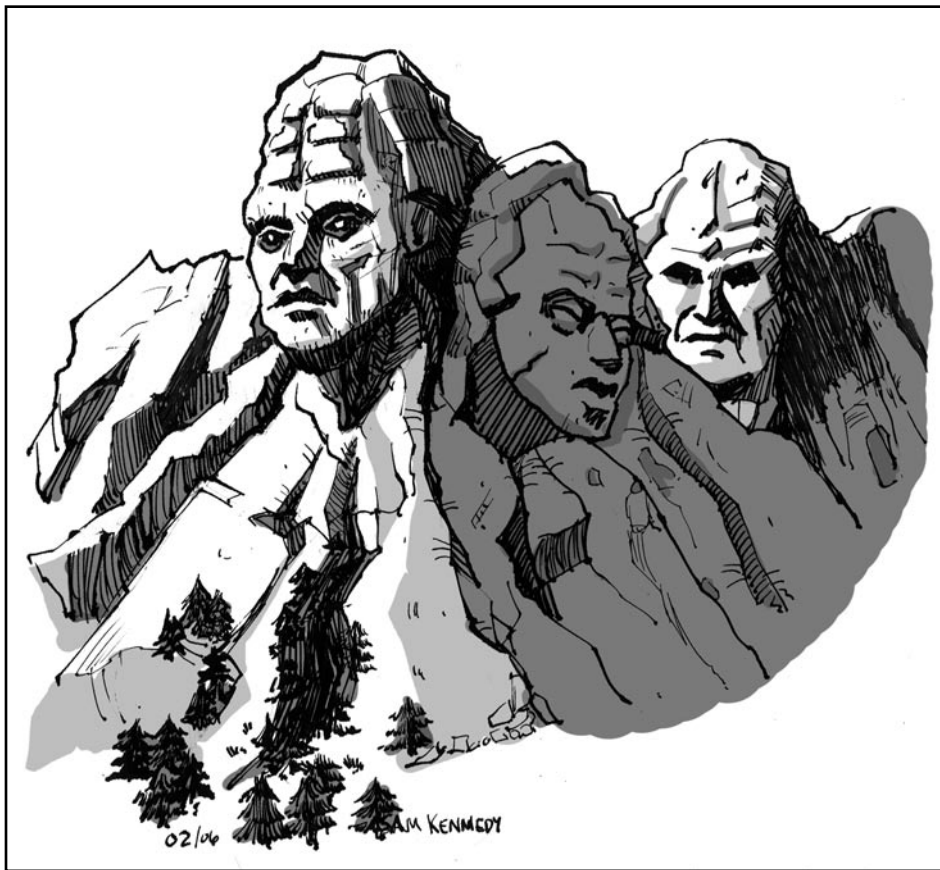
Similarly, a Dorvalan noble (or his agent) must approve all marriages within his demesne or a resident's plan to move to another demesne or offworld. Though this is by and large a "rubber stamp" process, every once in a while a noble exercises his authority, whether frivolously or with good reason. Reasons for not allowing a marriage have ranged from jealousy, to disapproval, to a dislike of one of the families involved.

Famous Dorvalans

King Jorgaro is Dorvala's best-known resident, particularly among other species. Here are some other notables, well known both in the Perseid Empire and outside it.

LORD HYLAR DURKIK

Hylar Durkik is the Lord-Mayor of Varksos, and unlike his noble peers who so often wish they could turn back the clock, he has a great love for modernity. To a large extent, this is a family tradition. For six centuries the Durkiks have ruled Varksos, and they only came to their position because the king was forced to exile the previous Lord-Mayor and his family for disobedience. Even hun-



dreds of years later the scandal is well-known, and at its heart was the fact that the old noble family of Varksos refused to change and attempted to stunt the growth of the Imperial capital.

Despite ruling a megametropolis of five billion, Lord Hylar attempts to take a personal interest in the lives of his subjects. Though the vast majority of his peers ignore the plight of indigent Perseids, Lord Hylar has done everything tradition will permit him to do to ease their suffering. In conversation with other nobles, he often rationalizes this with such statements as “Varksos is the crown of the Empire and cannot be sullied by the poor” or some other patriotic statement. The truth is he understands the economic and social aspects of the poor’s situation, realizes there often isn’t a personal or family failure to blame, and genuinely wants to help. Lord Hylar is known to visit the spaceport personally, his retinue in tow, to speak with Perseids coming to the homeworld, especially those making their first visit to the cradle of their species.

PRINCESS Y’LARRA

Second in line for the throne after her brother Brulsh, Princess Y’larra is something of a black sheep among Perseids. On countless occasions she’s broken with tradition, not just privately but in the public eye. She’s bowed to her father when she should’ve curtsied. She’s been overly effusive when greeting family or peers. And she’s spoken her mind once too often, especially where it concerns the rights of non-Perseids. Most blame this on her years in the Terran Empire, where she was her father’s unofficial ambassador and spent far too much time hobnobbing with Humanity’s most

famous personalities. Most Perseids secretly breathe a prayer of thanks to their gods that Brulsh is the heir apparent, because he performs his duties as crown princes have for millennia.

Although most Perseids just consider Princess Y’larra and her behavior embarrassing, more politically astute Perseids wonder at her relationship with the Terran Empire in general, and Empress Marissa specifically. In so many way, she acts so much like a Human that they wonder if Marissa’s court hopes Princess Y’larra will take the crown... and what lengths the Terran Empire might go to to make Y’larra queen.

PROFESSOR ORLAR RHEYS

While media darlings in the Terran Empire are singers and actors, the Perseids idolize a different sort of entertainer. What Perseids want is history — not fanciful retellings of historical events, but well-documented, drily-narrated, factually accurate accounts of their noble and wondrous past. Professor Rheys is the most famous of the Perseid historians and is treated as an imperial treasure. His face can be seen — and more importantly, his calm, authoritative voice can be heard — in Perseid households Empire-wide every night. Though he has little time for teaching, Professor Rheys belongs to the faculty of the Royal Academy (located in the suburbs of Varksos). As he himself is quick to point out, he’s not the most knowledgeable historian, but he’s the one the Perseids prefer to listen to because no one else so properly gives history the gravitas Perseids hold so dear.

Economy

The Perseid Empire is a major economic power, and the center of the Perseid Empire is Dorvala. Nearly all revenues generated in the Empire flows through Dorvala at some point or another, either in the form of taxes, *vorad* transfers through the computers of Dorvala’s many enormous banks, or money spent by residents and visitors. Ultimately, any profits generated Empire-wide also profit Dorvala one way or another.

Dorvala stopped having any meaningful exports long ago. Most Perseid firms do the majority of their manufacturing and research elsewhere even though they all have their headquarters on Dorvala. Its remaining exports are mostly concerned with traditional rituals, practices, and the like — for example, quarried stone (so that wealthy outworld Perseids can live in homes just like those of their ancestors), or *uighar* meat so every outworld family can have a traditional meal at festival time. But while these businesses keep some families employed, and all Perseids are proud of them, none of them have a significant effect on Dorvala’s economy.

MON'DA



Kolata is a type G2V (hot yellow dwarf) similar in most respects to Sol. Seven planets (identified in Human catalogs as Primus through Septus, based on translations of the Mon'dabi names for them) orbit it; Mon'da is the second planet (Kolata Secundus).

Kolata Primus is a small, rocky Type 5 world in near orbit to Kolata. It's considered unsuitable for any purpose due to the danger and expense of establishing facilities there. The only signs of "habitation" are the remains of a system propulsion laser built there early in the Mon'dabi spacefaring age.

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: MON'DA

Planet Name: Mon'da (Imperial designation: Kolata Secundus)

Classification: Type 1

System Data: Mon'da is the second of seven worlds orbiting Kolata; Kolata Primus is a rocky Type 5 world, while the other five are small gas giants (Type 9). There's one asteroid belt between Quartus and Quintus. Mon'da itself has two moons.

Gravity: 1.0 G

Day And Year: 25 standard hours a day; 390 standard days a year

Atmosphere: Earth-like — 72% Nitrogen; 20% Oxygen; 8% Other

Hydrosphere: Water covers 75% of Mon'da's surface

Meteorological Overview: Mon'da has the standard range of weather and climates for a Type 1 planet

Sentient Species: Mon'dabi

ATRI Rating: ATRI 10-11, but nearing ATRI 12 in the field of starship propulsion technology

Government: Balkanized, with nearly 100 nations espousing various political systems

Affiliation: Central world of the Mon'dabi Federation

Resources: Mon'da is an economically rich and stable world with extensive intraplanetary and interplanetary trade. Its main interstellar exports include manufactured goods, biogenetic materials, spices, and liquors.

Places Of Note: Heshar; the Cha'dein starship research complex; the House of Great Fire; the Hepona Jungle; the Pyramids of Phrygonia; the Ru'donga Caverns

Ship Facilities: Mon'da has extensive starship facilities, including some more advanced than any in the Terran Empire (since its stardrive technology is approaching ATRI 12). The most active planetside starports are at Heshar and Arskule. The moon Cha'dein is entirely given over to starship development and manufacturing.

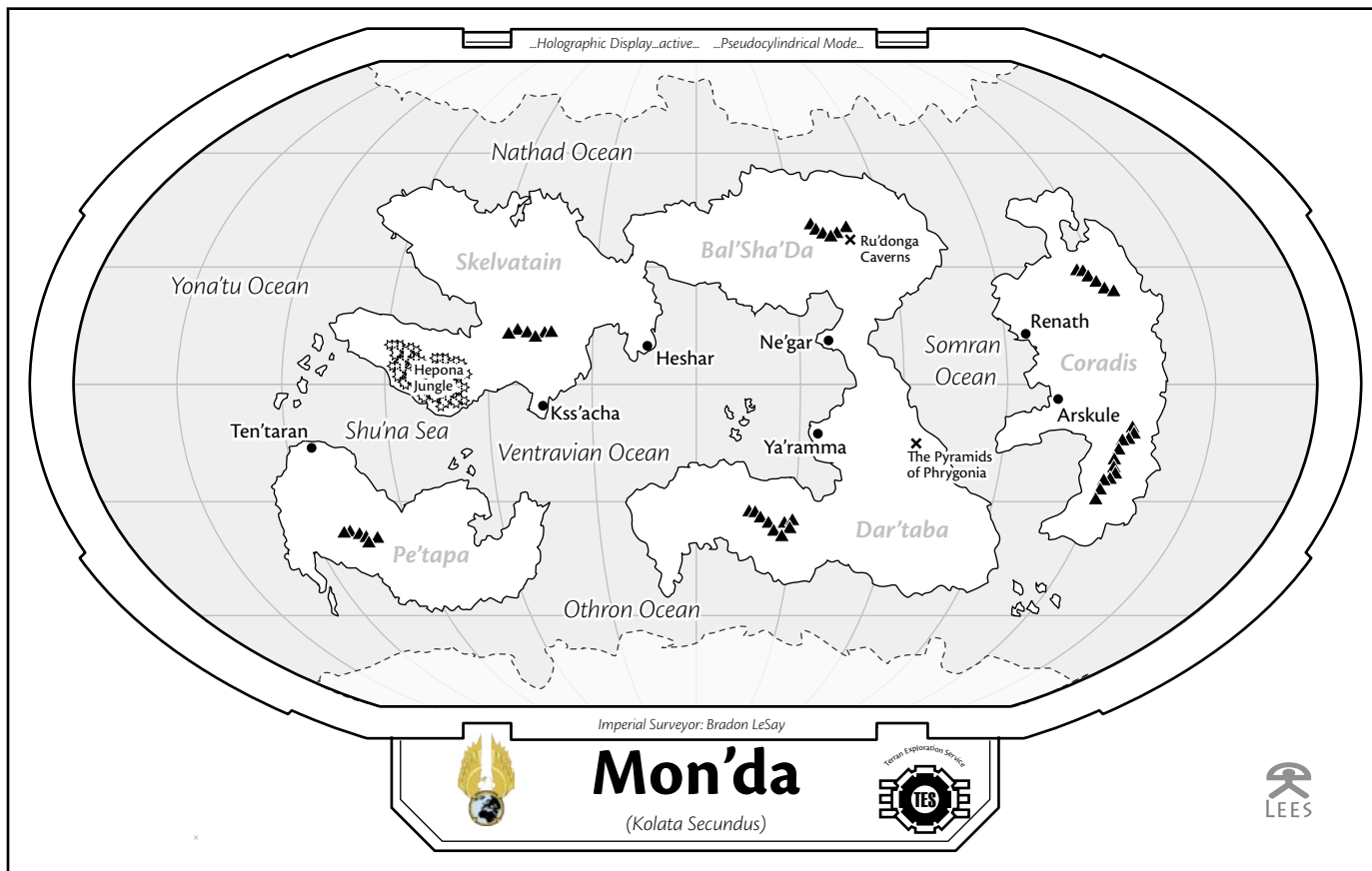
Kolata Tertius through Septus are type 9 small gas giants. Tertius, Quartus, and Quintus are relatively close to Mon'da, so the Mon'dabi have established orbital or lunar facilities to "mine" them for fuel and other chemicals. Sixtus and Septus are much further out; the Mon'dabi have no presence there.

Mon'da has two moons, Helarik and Cha'dein. Both are similar in size, shape, and appearance to Earth's moon. Twenty-three Mon'dabi nations have divided Helarik up among themselves into colonies devoted to mining, low-G manufacturing, and scientific experimentation. Cha'dein is reserved for use in starship and spacedrive development and research for all Mon'dabi. A committee with the power to make and enforce laws on the moon controls access to and monitors the use of Cha'dein's extensive facilities.

ASTEROID MINING

Between Kolata's fourth and fifth planets there's an extensive asteroid belt, the remnants of an eighth planet destroyed sometime in the distant past by means unknown. Over two dozen Mon'dabi companies, and an uncounted number of independent prospector-miners, work the asteroid belt in search of valuable minerals. By Mon'dabi common law the asteroid belt is "at once the property of all Mon'dabi, and none," so that whoever can get to a particular asteroid first and stake a claim to it by discovering something of value or placing a semi-permanent facility there has the right to mine it or occupy it. Despite centuries of mining, thousands of asteroids (most of them relatively small) remain unexplored and unclaimed. Competition to find valuable new asteroids is fierce. It's commonly (and accurately) believed that a lot of strong-arm tactics, trickery, blackmail, and outright force are used in "the Belt" to establish and hold claims regardless of who's filed what paperwork back on Mon'da. Many (though not all) of the miners and prospectors are Spacer-variant Mon'dabi (or members of other species, though they must get legal permission to prospect or mine).

In 2637 two Mon'dabi miners burrowing into an asteroid they'd claimed came across a startling discovery: a technological object. The device, about the size of two Human fists, appears to be a sensor, or part of a sensor unit, but is (a) nonfunctional, and (b) so advanced as to defy conventional analysis. What the object is, and how it got into an air pocket in the center of a Mon'dabi asteroid, remains unknown.



GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Mon'da is a pleasant terrestrial world roughly the same size as Earth. It has five continents, several notable archipelagoes or islands, and standard polar ice caps. Compared to Earth it has fewer deserts and major mountain ranges, and more rivers and large swamps. The major Mon'dabi cities and inhabited zones tend to cluster in the tropical, subtropical, and southern temperate zones — although not coldblooded, the Mon'dabi definitely prefer warm and humid weather to cooler, drier climates.

Humans visiting Mon'da often feel as if they've stepped back in time to Earth's Mesozoic Era, because the Mon'dabi homeworld has no mammals — the ecological niches mammals fill on Earth and most other Type 1 worlds are occupied by reptiles, insects, and fish. Where Earth has lions, tigers, wolves, and bears, Mon'da has several species of the Mon'da hunting lizard (see *The HERO System Bestiary*, pages 203-04), the *ged'drule*, and the Mon'da gliding-serpent. Most of Mon'da's reptilian life-forms are warmblooded, and some have thick armoring and/or large natural weapons that make them dangerous even today. The insect life ranges in size up to slightly larger than a Human hand, and though the Mon'dabi are generally resistant to the diseases some of these bugs carry, Humans and other species usually are not — visitors who plan to tour wilderness areas are encouraged to take wide-spectrum immunity shots beforehand.

Places Of Note

Among the many sites and locations of note on Mon'da, the following are particularly well-known or of special interest to starfarers:

THE ACKÁLIAN WARS MEMORIAL

In the city of Kss'acha the Mon'dabi have built an impressive and moving memorial to their fellows who have died in their wars against the Ackálans. Spread over roughly 17 hectares (40 acres) of beautifully landscaped land are four clusters of black marble monoliths — one cluster for each of the four Ackálian wars. Each cluster includes one monolith for each battle or attack of that war. The monoliths are of proportional size for the number of Mon'dabi who died in each encounter, and listed on each monolith are the names of the Mon'dabi casualties of that battle or attack. Mon'dabi who visit the site are often reduced to tears, and even members of other species are moved. Ackálans tend to find the Memorial offensive and have often formally requested that it be dismantled.

THE HOUSE OF GREAT FIRE

Located at the very center of the holy city of Ne'gar, the House of Great Fire is the most sacred center of worship of Rhigasa, the Mon'dabi fire-worshipping religion (see *Terran Empire*, page 100). Every day 20 citizens of the city are chosen by lot to tend the sacred bonfire at the center of the temple and lead visitors in rituals conducted every five hours. The House itself is one of the most beautiful buildings in the Federation; the walls and floors are made of marble, and practically every object of

Worlds Of Empire ■ Chapter Three

significance in the place is gilded, jewelled, inlaid, enameled, or otherwise decorated.

THE HEPONA JUNGLE

The largest remaining jungle on Mon'da, the Hepona is a carefully-protected flora and fauna reserve. Centuries ago it was nearly destroyed through overexploitation and agriculture, but the Mon'dabi of the nearby nations decided to save it. Today it's recovered completely and has proven to be a major resource. While hunting usually isn't allowed, eco-tourists from around the Galaxy come to view its splendors and its spectacular sites (including the amazing Cho'ka Falls). Additionally, some species of valuable spice plants that cannot be domesticated grow only within the jungle. Licensed spice gatherers governed by a strict quota search through the jungle, braving its dangers to earn a good living bringing spice plants to processing centers.

HESHAR

As a balkanized world, Mon'da doesn't legally have a capital city — but its *de facto* capital is Heshar, the largest and most advanced city on the planet and the political center of both the planet and the Mon'dabi Federation. Divided by the swift-flowing Chu'gara River, it's a city of broad, tree-lined streets, grandiose buildings in the distinctive Mon'dabi "arch-and-column" style, and picturesque residential neighborhoods. In tone and "feel" it reminds some Humans of London. Trenashi, the nation in whose territory Heshar lies (and whose national capital it is), takes some pains to maintain the character and appearance of the city despite pressures to give in to crass commercial development.

Much like Lyons on Earth, Heshar is a city given over to government, but it has three centers of power. Dominating the east side of the city is Federation Plaza, home to En'drava Tower (*a.k.a.* "the Silver Tower," the massive headquarters of the Mon'dabi Federation) and four other buildings housing key Federation offices (including Parliament Hall, the meeting place of the Federation Parliament). On the southwest side of the city is the Mon'dabi Union Complex, the seat of Mon'da's quasi-world government — the Mon'dabi equivalent of the old United Nations on Earth. The Mon'dabi Union exists to negotiate disputes between nations, maintain international peace, and facilitate intraplanetary trade and related matters. Its record of success is mixed, but it does more good than harm so the Mon'dabi keep it. Lastly, on the northwest side of Heshar is the Trenashian capital building (known as "the Golden Dome" for its most distinctive feature), the Trenashian legislature, and other national government buildings.

THE PYRAMIDS OF PHRYGONIA

The Mon'dabi of the ancient kingdom of Phrygonia built enormous three-sided pyramid-like structures as monuments to and burial places for their *uvandi*, or kings. Despite the fact that they're thousands of years old, these structures were so well-made that they stand, largely unchanged, to this day. Some have never even been opened, and so preserve their secrets for future generations of archaeologists to uncover.

According to accepted theory, the sites for the pyramids were chosen partly based on astrology and partly according to geomantic readings of "energy lines" in the ground. However, some scholars claim the pyramids were built primarily as "spiritual fortresses" to protect the souls of the kings they contained from assault by demons and other netherworld forces (which are sometimes depicted in wall-paintings within the structures). According to this theory, the locations were chosen based on their "spiritual defensive qualities" rather than anything to do with the stars.

THE RU'DONGA CAVERNS

Located on the edge of a mountain range on the continent of Bal'sha'da, the Ru'donga Caverns is one of the largest and most spectacular underground formations in the known Galaxy. Tourists can walk for miles down the paved paths that wind through the magnificent galleries and chambers... and beyond that are many more miles of caverns accessible only by spelunkers. Several species of wildlife live only in the Caverns, which also contain the archaeological remains of several ancient Mon'dabi tribes.

HISTORY

The Mon'dabi evolved from a reptilian creature that filled an ecological niche similar to the primates of Earth that evolved into Humans. But proto-Mon'dabi, unlike early Humans, were herbivores, and as their population grew they found themselves stripping their environment of food. At first this led them to migrate, and they spread across their world more quickly than most sentient species at a similar stage of development. When migration was impossible or undesirable, agriculture developed, probably beginning with the cultivation of certain fruit-bearing trees and shrubs but soon progressing to grains, root vegetables, and the like.

After thousands of years of development in nameless villages and communities, the earliest Mon'dabi kingdoms and empires arose. The greatest of the ancient civilizations included the pyramid-builders of Phrygonia on Dar'taba, the city-states of the Sa'luka River valley of Coradis, Madosa and Sha'vra in southern Skelvatain, and the empire of Storaca in southern Bal'sha'da.

Thanks to Mon'dabis' natural territoriality and aggressiveness, warfare between and within these ancient civilizations, and in time their medieval successors, was common — compared to Mon'dabi

history, Human history looks tranquil. This also tended to prevent large empires from arising frequently or lasting very long; inevitably some quarrel or struggle for power would break them apart. The largest political entity Mon'da ever saw was the Hesharian Empire, which controlled most of Skelvatain and Ba'l'sha'da and part of Pe'tapa during the Human years 1423-1587. Even today many Mon'dabi use the symbol of the Heshar emperors, a three-tailed *gutada* lizard, as a symbol for their people as a whole.

THE SPACE AGE

By the 2000s the Mon'dabi geopolitical scene had condensed to one generally recognizable as the modern form: a little less than a hundred nations that had learned to settle their disputes through negotiation more often than war. By that time a better arena of competition than the physical battlefield had arisen — the space race. Fascinated with the idea of traveling to their moons and other worlds, the Mon'dabi began competing to build bigger and better rockets. This spurred an ongoing technological struggle that continues to this day and is responsible for Mon'dabi spacedrives and starship systems being so advanced and highly regarded. By the end of the twenty-first century they'd progressed from subluminal drives to their earliest faster-than-light engines.

Star travel soon brought the Mon'dabi into contact with other civilizations in their region of the Galaxy, such as the Kolajik Pack and the Nine

Worlds Kingdom. In general they interacted peacefully with these other species, establishing trade and diplomatic ties. But in 2168 they encountered, and fought for the first time, the species that has become their greatest enemy: the Ackálíans. For three years they warred, with Mon'dabi star drives and short supply lines counteracting the Ackálíans' larger and often more powerful ship. Eventually the war ended in a negotiated truce, but the Mon'dabi recognized that this wasn't the last they'd hear from their brutal enemy — as soon as the Ackálíans could conquer more territory and shorten their supply lines, they'd attack again. Other planets near Mon'da, who'd also been victimized by Ackálían aggression, realized this as well, and their mutual need to protect themselves from the Ackálían threat led to the formation first of the Mon'dabi Union (Mon'da and several of its colonies) in 2171 and the Mon'dabi Federation in 2205.

Three more times — the Second Ackálían War of 2288-2295, the Third Ackálían War of 2414-2430, and the Galactic War of 2548-2554 — the Mon'dabi and their allies fought the Ackálíans, but never with a truly decisive victory for either side. Both the Mon'dabi and the Ackálíans would score several major triumphs, and perhaps gain and lose territory, but the Ackálíans have never succeeded in conquering the Mon'dabi Federation or the Mon'dabi in destroying the Ackálíans and ending their threat. For the present that area of the Galaxy remains tense, with the occasional border skirmish or "misunderstanding" flaring up into a brief conflict.

PEOPLE

Mon'dabi in general are described on pages 27-28 of *Terran Empire* (including a Racial Package Deal for them). They're reptilian, with thick tails, sharp teeth, large eyes, and acute senses. Men are larger, stronger, and more numerous than women, and both law and tradition give greater social power and influence to men. On Mon'da women are both expected and legally obligated to defer to men in appropriate situations. More fundamentalist nations and religious sects forbid women to vote, hold office, or sometimes even own property; in some cases women must wear particular types or colors of clothing. In the strictest nations, such as Wegerla and Sav'edsh, women aren't even allowed to speak to men unless first spoken to.

Mon'dabi skin is scaly and tough enough to offer protection against minor cuts and injuries. The "average" skin color is a sort of dull green, found primarily on Mon'dabi from temperate regions. Natives of Mon'da's tropical regions usually have skins ranging from darker green to a sort of brown-black shade, whereas those few Mon'dabi who come from more northerly climes tend to have lighter green skins. Both the "emerald green" of north Skelvatain and Ba'l'sha'da and the "dark chocolate brown" of equatorial Dar'taba and Coradis are considered particularly attractive in both men and women, and it's not uncommon for other Mon'dabi to use skin dyes to obtain those shades. Mon'dabi



eyes are colored in the yellow-orange spectrum, very rarely verging into red.

Government

Unlike most major species homeworlds, Mon'da has no world government — it remains a balkanized world with 94 distinct national governments (such as An'dona, described on pages 80-81 of *Terran Empire*). Most of these nations are representative democracies of one stripe or another, but they run the gamut from left- and right-wing dictatorships to theocracies, oligarchies, and federations.

THE MON'DABI UNION

To address issues of interest to all Mon'dabi, resolve major problems before they result in war, foster trade, and improve defense against the Ackálians and other enemies, the Mon'dabi founded the Mon'dabi Union in 2171. All nations on Mon'da, and all Mon'dabi colonies, are members; territories, possessions, and protectorates of the various nations are not. The Union as a whole is a member of the Mon'dabi Federation representing most Mon'dabi, but a few of the most significant Mon'dabi nations are members of the Federation on their own.

The Union maintains its headquarters in Heshar, as described above. Each member nation or colony appoints a Union Delegate to represent it in the Union. The delegates serve as a “legislature,” though they have no binding authority or ability to enforce their decrees (so they're really more of a debating society in many respects). From among their number the delegates elect a President for a five-year term; the president in turn appoints other delegates to leadership positions in the Union's agencies, divisions, and other branches.

Famous Mon'dabi

Some of the most famous Mon'dabi, whose renown has spread throughout Federation space and even beyond, include:

DR. HAC'SHARAD CHENSA

Still often referred to as a “child genius” even though he's now in his mid-20s, Dr. Chensa is one of Mon'da's leading stardrive researchers. He first achieved notoriety in his mid-teens when he built a working hyperdrive as a science fair project, and his interest in the subject of FTL travel hasn't diminished since then. He now works for defense contractor T'ganta Aerospace with an unlimited research budget and a simple directive: invent the first ATRI 12 drive. Fearful of both corporate and traditional espionage, T'ganta and the Mon'dabi government keep Dr. Chensa's current whereabouts secret and provide him with bodyguards and other forms of protection. He often speaks at scientific conferences by remote broadcast, and has advised the Terran government on various starship-related matters.

GALACAR SHEN'RO

Although now reclusive, Galacar Shen'ro remains one of the most generous philanthropists in the Mon'dabi Federation. In his younger days he was a devil-may-care free trader who struck it rich through a combination of hard work, calculated risk-taking, and luck. He founded Shen'ro Transport & Trade, which has become one of the most successful mercantile firms on Mon'da and made him enormously wealthy. A devout Rhigasan and a man who likes to see others happy, he began giving away vast quantities of goods to charity from the moment he began to succeed in business. His Shen'ro Foundation has helped thousands, if not millions, of Mon'dabi make it through hard times, preserved wilderness areas, and worked for the betterment of all citizens of the Federation for two decades.

CAPTAIN GESSOR VESH'AW

After destroying the Selbarburai pirate fleet in 2631 and cleverly defeating a large, well-armed group of Ackálian “renegade” raiders in 2636, Captain Gessor Vesh'aw of the Federated Command has become the best-known military man in Mon'dabi space. A former member of the Sheh'kar Vylyr space marines, he's written two books about his naval experiences and is said to be the subject of a forthcoming holofilm. He often participates in joint military exercises with Terran Empire forces and seems to genuinely enjoy the company of Humans. He once said he finds “the Human perspective” refreshing, though he wouldn't elaborate.

Economy

The Mon'dabi are as aggressive traders and businessmen as they are fighters and athletes, and as a result their homeworld has a vibrant economy. Mon'dabi trade networks extend throughout the Federation and also into the Terran Empire (Mon'dabi merchants are a frequent site there, especially in the Frontier region). The Mon'dabi lack of a standard currency inhibits Mon'dabi traders somewhat, but for large deals they can usually use bank notes that are every bit as good as Imperial credits. The main Mon'dabi exports are spices, certain rare vegetables considered gourmet delicacies, and alcoholic beverages (Mon'dabi liquors are highly regarded throughout Human and Perseid space, and in some other societies as well).

RAVANCHE



For centuries astronomers have known about the Type F yellow-white star named Ravanche, which lies rimward of Rohendra in the Thorgon Neutral Zone. But only in 2574 did they discover the existence of two planets in the system and a graveyard of ancient starships around Ravanche II. Ravanche experiences an unusually high number of solar flares of incredible strength, duration, and radioactivity every year. At irregular, impossible to predict, and frequent intervals, the flares bathe the entire system in great gouts of radioactivity that not only interfere with long-range scans but are deadly to organic life. It was these flares that hid the presence of the two planets in the system until the Terran Empire expanded its territory to a point close enough to the edge of the system and stumbled upon their existence while patrolling the border.

When Human astronomers first discovered Ravanche and its solar flares, they thought it was unique in the Galaxy, but have since learned from the Perseids and Se'ecra that other stars like Rav-

anche exist. Astronomers have borrowed a name for these stars from the Perseid language: *dehlanth*, "poisoned star." In broad terms these are stars that have planets or planetoids which could normally sustain life, but because of the star's unusual radioactivity the worlds cannot support living organisms (unless those lifeforms have extensive technological protections). Though advanced species like the Mandaarians and Malvans might understand what unknown reaction in a star's core is responsible for creating a *dehlanth*, Humans and the other species currently dominant in the Galaxy do not.

Ravanche I, Ravanche II's inner brother, rotates at a glacial pace — one rotation every 2,000 standard years. The side it shows to Ravanche is scorched and cracked, the scarred land suffused with killing radioactivity. The other side is frigid, covered with great shelves of frozen water. Though the planet no longer has an atmosphere, scholars suspect it was once a Type 2 or 3 world, since samples taken from the frozen water show the presence of organic life — not just bacteria, but also molds and fungus — now perfectly preserved at absolute zero. Ravanche I proves that the sun was only poisoned within the last two thousand years, because if the darkside of Ravanche II had ever faced the star, no water would remain. Further analysis indicates that judging by the slow creep of the terminator, where the ice has melted away, the planet has existed in its current state for just a little over a millennia.

Some scholars believe that this evidence, along with the ship graveyard around Ravanche II, indicates a disturbing possibility: *dehlanths*, or at least the one in the Ravanche system, are artificially created by a weapon capable of rendering life-giving stars harmful to life on the planets in their systems. Military strategists and scientists have often theorized about the possibility of such a weapon, one that could affect a system's star and thereby render planets in the system uninhabitable, but none (among Humans at least) have discovered a way to make the theories a reality. Unfortunately the fact that the system exists in the Thorgon Neutral Zone prevents the Empire (or the Hegemony) from more thoroughly studying the system, much less claiming it or quarantining it. The Empire has, however, stationed several *Toracta*-class destroyers along with a *Fermi*-class large research vessel as near as possible to the system to "keep an eye on things" (see *Government*, below). By Imperial law it's illegal for anyone to explore the Ravanche system... but that hasn't stopped some daring explorers from trying.

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: RAVANCHE

Planet Name: Ravanche (Imperial designation: Ravanche II)

Classification: Type 2 (see text)

System Data: No moons; one other planet in system

Gravity: 0.8 G

Day And Year: 35 standard hours a day; 402 standard days a year

Atmosphere: Earth-like, but with high levels of radioactive gases — 67% Nitrogen; 20% Oxygen; 13% Other

Hydrosphere: Water covers 20% of the planet's surface, mostly in ice caps at the poles

Meteorological Overview: Severe weather conditions borne of the solar flare devastation periodically wrought upon the planet

Sentient Species: Ravanchians (extinct)

ATRI Rating: N/A

Government: None

Affiliation: None

Resources: None

Places Of Note: None

Ship Facilities: None

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Ravanche is a Type 2 planet, a world where Humans can survive with life support. In this case “life support” means the finest radioactive-environment gear an ATRI 11 society can provide.. which is, of course, expensive. This tends to restrict exploration and study of the planet to the military, certain mining corporations, some well-heeled explorers, and a few other foolhardy explorers willing to take a chance on striking it rich before suffering too much radiation poisoning. The radioactivity on Ravanche is far worse than any Humans have seen caused by the use of nuclear weapons — even planets like Delta Vio, which the Thorgons bombarded for days with nuclear missiles during the Galactic War, have not been so severely irradiated.

Everything on Ravanche is radioactive. At night the landscape glows reddish-orange from thermal energy thrown off by rocks; during the day the air wavers from the heat, like desert air over sun-baked pavement. The sky crackles with storms, lightning slashing down from dark clouds streaked with livid reds and purples. When the air is still, greenish wisps of toxic gases drift up from the ground and swirl through the air.

Amazingly, a few forms of life have survived on Ravanche, but only ones with rapid life-cycles and simple biological systems — insects and grasses, mainly. But every time a solar flare bursts out from the star, whatever’s alive on the side of the planet facing Ravanche crackles with heat as it dies and is then burned to ash as temperatures rise hundreds of degrees in a matter of minutes.

Rising above the charred surface of Ravanche are towering spires, often reaching 100 meters or higher. Though obviously they once stood in clusters, only the rare spire has survived the passing of centuries. Made of smooth stone without joints, as if they were carved from a single huge rock, these spires once served as homes for members of a sentient species. The outside of the spire is covered with windows and balconies from which the natives might have taken flight when traveling from spire to spire. The insides have as many vertical as horizontal passages, and though there are many artifacts in the rooms and halls, none of these technological devices still function. Even a device’s intended purpose is impossible to determine after centuries in the harsh environment.

What first brought Ravanche to the attention of the TES patrol that discovered the planet is the enormous ship’s graveyard orbiting it. Two armadas of derelict ships drift in a haphazard orbit like a bizarre technological halo around the world. Despite a multitude of ships of differing sizes and classes, even a layman can tell that there are two different sorts of ships here, since the design styles are radically different. One group reminds Humans of raptors — swept-back weapon mounts to port and starboard, sharp prows, and aft sections that spread like a fan from the fuselage. The other ships look as if they were designed by a madman — bulbous, asymmetrical hulls sprouting spidery appendages and curving, horn-like weapon mounts seemingly placed at random.

HISTORY

Little is known about Ravanche — at least to civilians. Since the Empire banned exploration of the system, no media outlet is willing to risk Imperial displeasure by broadcasting the occasional rumor that springs up about the place. What is known came from the earliest reports, which were released prior to the realization that a “system-destroying” weapon (or at least information regarding the construction of such a device) might exist in the system... and almost all of those stories were of no real use to any serious explorer. Reports from the early civilian exploration teams, mostly ones sponsored by wealthy universities, contain more hard data, including some information about the towers and the ship graveyard, but still have many frustrating gaps. Thus, between the general devastation wreaked on the planet in millennia past, the Imperial ban on exploration, and the planet’s location in a neutral zone, very little is known about Ravanche’s past.

THE PEOPLE

The former inhabitants of Ravanche — Ravanchians is the accepted term — were a species descended from avians. They stood between nine and ten feet tall with long, gangly limbs and had the sharp beaks of a predator. Though their wings had long ago evolved into arms with fingers and opposable thumbs and by the time of their extinction they could no longer use them to fly, they still possessed a fixation with flight, and most scholars believe that their technology enabled them to fly with the aid of antigravity units. The use of such technology must have been nearly universal among the species, and their architecture evolved to take this mode of transportation into account — thus the spires shot through with vertical passages, as well as the balconies and perches that cover the outside walls. Beyond that, not much is known about the Ravanchians — whether they were warlike or peaceful, ruled by a single monarch or had a democracy, or even if they knew their demise as a species was imminent when their star was poisoned.

The other species those early visitors to the system discovered were only found in the fleet of derelict ship in orbit around Ravanche, and most believe these were the attacking force. These were an insectoid or arachnoid species that left behind only chitinous carapaces; scholars call them the Rakne. These carapaces were studded with horns and long spikes, and they had four to 12 multiple segmented limbs. No one knows if this difference in number of limbs was their natural state or due to some other reason. The team that studied the Rakne the longest hypothesized, based on the distribution pattern of the corpses, that more limbs led to greater rank and prestige among members of the species.



Government

The Ravanche system is in the Thorgon Neutral Zone, and therefore specifically outside the control of both the Terran Empire and the Thorgon Hegemony. Both governments have sent exploratory teams in, arguably in violation of treaty every single time, and in 2611 a further treaty was signed specifically forbidding exploration or direct study of the Ravanche system by either government — at most, they can only use long-range probes. But that hasn't necessarily halted covert exploratory missions, nor the activities of civilian explorers willing to risk the Zone. Both governments have placed a group of ships at the point as close as possible to the planet within their territory in case they need to respond quickly to any "incidents."

Per the terms of the treaty, if either government detects unauthorized entry into the system, it must first notify the other government, then may send *one* ship of specified type to intercept the intruder and prevent any exploration. Captured explorers have their ships, gear, and any salvage they recovered permanently confiscated and are imprisoned (in the Empire) or executed (in the Hegemony). Nevertheless, every year a few daring explorers or salvagers take their chances; some get away with valuable parts from the ship's graveyard.

Commander Tsai

As of 2640, the senior Imperial naval officer in the "fleet" keeping watch over Ravanche is Commodore Lien Tsai, a distinguished woman in her sixties. A gifted strategist and commander, she let herself get caught up in the politics of the Imperial court, found herself on the losing side of a political struggle, and was assigned to this essentially dead-

end task. It's no secret that she'd love to make some amazing discovery, or find a way to claim Ravanche for the Empire, so she could attract some positive attention and move on to bigger and better things.

Despite her dislike for her assignment, Commodore Tsai takes it seriously and has developed an active interest in what little research the scientists under her command can do. She knows as much about the former civilization as any of them, and often assists them by providing a military perspective on their speculations.

Tsai has a no-nonsense demeanor, but isn't officious or pretentious. First-time offenders of the Imperial ban on entering the system can expect her to be polite, even friendly, as she arrests them. If they seem to have done no harm and are genuinely contrite, she may even let them go, especially if they can do her a favor in return.

Economy

Ravanche has no economy at this time. Even if the Empire were able to lift the ban on visiting the system, it's unlikely Ravanche could support a colony. However, salvage taken from the derelict ships in orbit around Ravanche might create a booming short-term economy. Even seemingly worthless junk could be sold to scholars and universities if the salvager can prove it's from the Ravanche system — and in fact, that's how many of the salvagers who find a way to get in and out with their loot make a hefty profit. If they had to restrict themselves to militarily valuable ship systems, they'd almost certainly get caught, since removing such devices requires specialized tools and lots of time.

VENWORDIEN IV



The Venwordien system is located in the Voršan Expanse, a neutral territory between the Terran Empire, Mon'dabi Federation, and Ackálian Empire. Venwordien is a Type A blue-white star orbited by five planets. Venwordien I is a small airless world (Type 5) in near orbit to the hot star; it's unsuitable for life or terraforming. Venwordien II is a greenhouse planet with two moons that frequently saw illicit use before the founding of the Captains' Council; smugglers would off-load contraband cargo on one of the moons before entering one of the civilized systems bordering the Voršan Expanse. Analysts suspect that before the coming of the Xenovores, Venwordien III was a life-bearing world with a delicate ecosystem, but the ravages of Xenovore bio-technology have rendered it lifeless; now it's a Type 3 world with a toxic atmosphere poisonous to most species in the Galaxy. Distant from the other planets in the system, Venwordien V is a Type 6 world.

IMPERIAL DATAFILE: VENWORDIEN IV

Planet Name: Venwordien IV

Classification: Type 1

System Data: One moon; five planets in system

Gravity: 1 G

Day And Year: 40 standard hours in a day; 800 standard days in a year

Atmosphere: Earth-like — 71% Nitrogen; 21% Oxygen; 8% Other

Hydrosphere: Water covers 83% of the planet's surface

Meteorological Overview: Earth-like, but with an unusually large tropical zone that makes the planet's overall climate hotter and moister on average than Earth's. Storms and hurricanes are frequent.

Sentient Species: None

ATRI Rating: ATRI 9 overall, but some people possess ATRI 10 or 11 technology (or sell it)

Government: Oligarchy

Affiliation: None

Resources: None

Places Of Note: Port Bounty

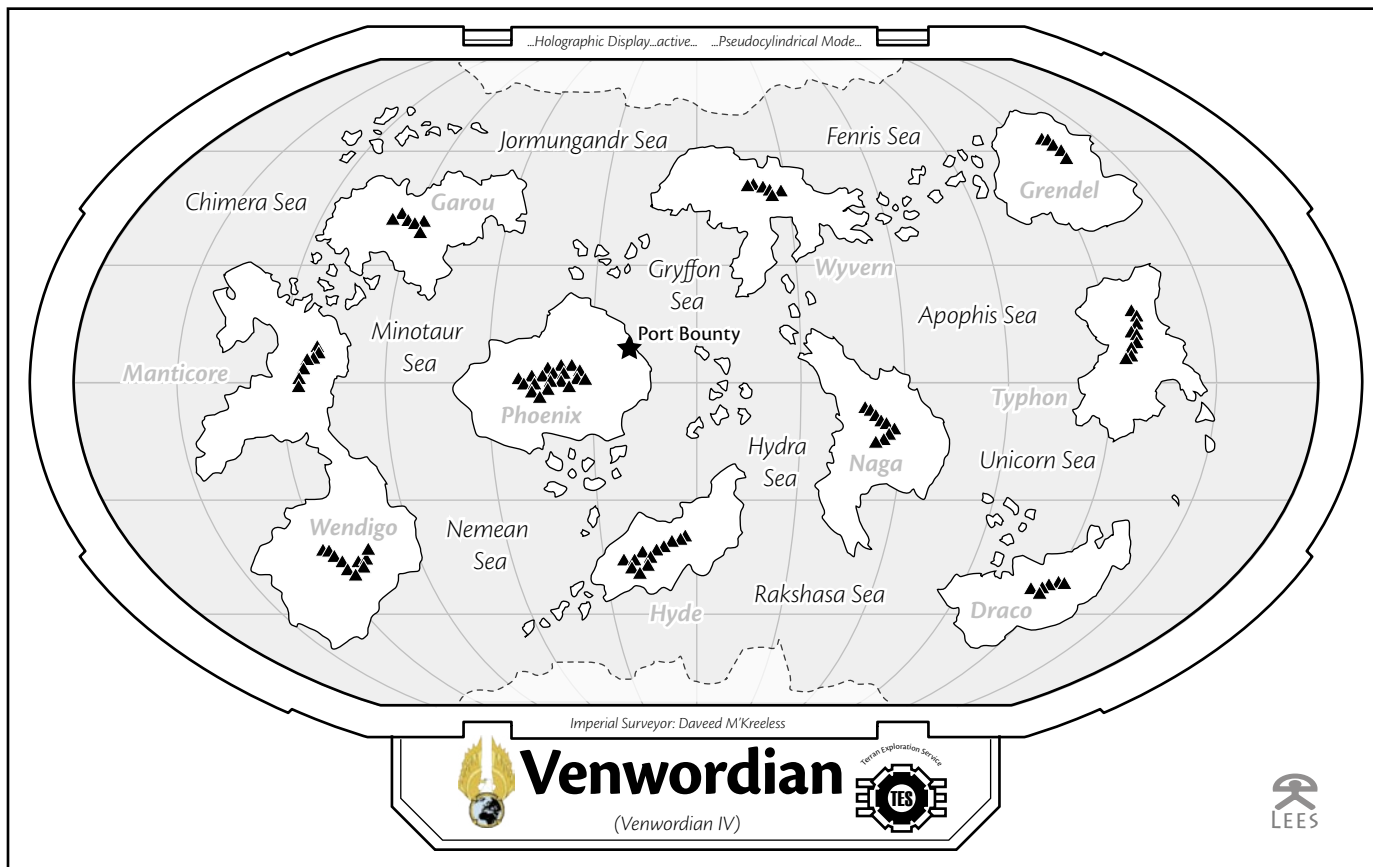
Ship Facilities: Port Bounty has a large starport, but it's not state of the art

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Venwordien IV is a hot planet, with jungles covering many places. It has ten small continents often connected by island chains. Water covers 83% of the planet's surface, with an unusually large amount of fresh water from the large lakes and wide rivers. Each of the ten continents is dominated by volcanic mountain ranges that climb out of the hot, humid jungles. Outside of the northern and southern extremities, temperatures range from 30° to 35° Celsius (86° to 95° F) nearly all year, and humidity is high, reaching 90% on many days. Rainfall is common — even when it doesn't pour all day, there's a hard shower in the afternoon — and hurricane season lasts for over half the year.

The planet has countless forms of native life, but none sentient; these include numerous large predators. One of the most notable is the *jeerjeer*, a small primate named after the grating call it makes. A typical *jeerjeer* is covered in black fur with light grey horizontal stripes and has large, lemur-like eyes, but there are numerous subspecies that don't exactly fit this description. The *jeerjeer* thrive both in the jungles and in the Human settlement of Port Bounty, where they live off of the trash and offal. They've earned the nickname "gremlins" due to their uncanny knack for bypassing high-tech security systems — the only effective way of keeping them out is to bar the windows and doors. Some have even developed a taste for liquor and have been known to run into a tavern to steal a patron's drink. But *jeerjeer* are easily trained, and some people use them to guard residences and warehouses — a pack of *jeerjeer* can put up a hue and cry that can be heard for miles. However, they're almost never seen aboard ships except as stow-aways because spacemen consider them bad luck.

Venwordien IV is also a cesspool of viri and bacteria. Though the medical science of the Terran Empire has overcome most illnesses, Venwordien IV seems intent on inflicting new, untreatable plagues on visitors. Every two to five Terran years a new disease comes out of the jungles to take the lives of the infirm. The last one, the Bloody Cough, broke out in 2637 and had a mortality rate of 35%. It started as a nagging cough that drew bloody phlegm from the victim's lungs, and ended with the victim bleeding to death from every pore. The Captains' Council has half-heartedly prepared for the next epidemic, but it's an organization more concerned with profit than saving lives, so its preparations aren't likely to help much.



Places Of Note

If your heroes visit Venwordien IV, here are some of the places likely to attract their attention:

CAPTAINS' ENCLAVES

Each of the four captains on the Council maintains his or her own enclave at a hidden location on Venwordien IV. Each enclave is a heavily guarded, palatial mansion on a large estate protected by the best security credits can buy (or pirates can steal). The location of every enclave is a closely-guarded secret, since no captain trusts any of his peers, but over time the captains have learned the location of each others' enclaves. None of them are willing to share this information with anyone else for fear of retaliation from his brother captains... but it might just be that no captain has yet been offered the right price to reveal such a secret.

PORT BOUNTY

Port Bounty is the largest city on Venwordien IV (in fact, it's really the *only* city, since other "urban" areas are at best villages) and the hub for all the criminal activity taking place on the planet. No one's ever bothered to count, but its population is probably at least two million, nearly all of them current or former starfarers, space pirates, or the type of people who cater to them. At any given time several tens of thousands of visitors are on Venwordien IV to transact business of one sort or another.

Port Bounty is a haphazard sprawl of buildings, many of them erected literally overnight when some thug or pirate decides he can take and hold

a particular patch of land. The only zoning law is to keep the spaceport clear of clutter; beyond that a land or business owner just has to pay enough "taxes" (bribes to the Captains' Council and protection money to whatever gang currently controls the local "turf") to keep himself safe. The oldest buildings are often engulfed in vines creeping in from the jungle; the newest stand on blasted ground where the heavy foliage was burned away.

The Starport

The fees for docking at Port Bounty are standard, but the charges for the repair facilities (which are ATRI 9-10 at best) are exorbitant — easily five times higher than at a legitimate starport. But the starport crews ask no questions, so sometimes Port Bounty's the only place a pirate can get someone to work on his ship. Furthermore, a smuggler doesn't always have to pay in credits. If he has a good reputation, one of the captains may approach him about a job or two with which he can work off the cost of repairs.

Bounty's Watering Holes

Many of the buildings in Port Bounty are "inns" catering to the needs of spacemen searching for their next berth... or drink. The first level of most inns is a tavern where food and drink are served. Many "inns" don't have any other floors; they're just bars that adopt the name "inn" from local custom. Larger inns have upper levels (or sometimes basement sub-levels), some of which cater to vices other than drinking and drugs, some of which offer rooms for rent. It's said that in the darkened corridors and dimly-lit rooms of Bounty's inns a person can find whatever sort of sin he likes

to indulge in... provided he has the money. Many of Port Bounty's best forgers, counterfeiters, procurers, fences, and dealers maintain their "offices" in a booth at the back of some inn, paying the owner a cut of their earnings to use their favorite table unmolested day after day.

Perhaps the most infamous establishment in Port Bounty is the Bloody Hook Inn, named after an old Terran legend and run by a Human known simply, and accurately, as One-Eye. A big, hearty fellow who never uses one short word where three long ones will do, he's got a friendly manner that puts visitors to his inn at ease... but he's capable of slitting throats and gouging out eyes with equal *bonhomie* if necessary. The Bloody Hook has a well-deserved reputation for not watering its drinks (which are, admittedly, a little more expensive than drinks at most places), so it attracts a clientele interested in serious drinking. It has two upper levels where other tastes are indulged; One-Eye's "collection of ravishing beauties from all over the Galaxy!" (as he likes to refer to his harem of prostitutes) does booming business every night.

HISTORY

At the end of the Xenovore Wars, the Xenovore Empire collapsed suddenly and completely. Humanity wasn't entirely able to take advantage of the victory partly because of the distances involved, and partly because its civilization began a period of infighting that was later called the Anarchic Period. The other two civilizations bordering former Xenovore territory, the Mon'dabi Federation and the Ackálian Empire, were both taken by surprise. Each had long fought against Xenovore expansion, but neither had any reason to expect the total destruction of Xenovore civilization. Once they realized the Xenovore threat had ended, the two governments found themselves in a tense diplomatic stand-off, each threatening the other with war if it were to claim this or that territory. The Mon'dabi slowly made gains in regions rimward of the Ackálian Empire, but their expansion came to a halt when Humanity, newly re-united under the banner of the Terran Empire, arrived to claim the spoils of their victory against the Xenovores. The Voršan Expanse soon became a *de facto* "neutral zone" between the three galac-

tic powers, one defined not by treaties but by the practicalities of the situation.

As a result, several planets in the Expanse became, and remain, hubs for smuggling and piracy. Most of those planets' leaders eventually overplayed his hand, becoming such a nuisance that one of the three governments convinced the other two to permit a punitive expedition that wiped the planet clean. Venwordien IV, the latest planet to assume the role of criminals' refuge, has survived for the last four decades, over twice as long as any of its predecessors, largely because of the cunning of its Captains' Council.

THE CAPTAINS' COUNCIL ARISES

Four people, all of them pirates and smugglers, were directly responsible for Venwordien IV's emergence as a center for illicit activity, and three still sit on the Captains' Council. The first was a Human captain named Felicia van Rook. Van Rook had quietly made a good living as a smuggler. Her crimes were never extravagant, and for a criminal, she was unusually careful. She died, allegedly of natural causes, in 2639, leaving a vacancy on the Captains' Council (see below). The next captain was a Thorgon named Forsath Caan, who had been sentenced to death by his government for an attempted mutiny aboard a Hegemony military vessel but escaped before his execution. He had worked the region sometimes as a pirate, sometimes as a mercenary for the Mon'dabi. The third was Y'largan, a Bathel arms dealer, smuggler, and terrorist who carried on a personal war with the Ackálian Empire. The Ackálians had savagely suppressed the Bathel, so Y'largan agreed to help establish Venwordien IV in the hope it would become a refuge for his species. But it was the fourth captain, a Malvan named Vysarth, who was the primary force behind Venwordien IV's founding and instrumental to its survival.

By force of personality and promises of wealth, Vysarth brought the other three captains together, and by threatening to use his hoard of Malvan technology he's helped hold two Empires and a Federation at bay so that his pirates' haven could thrive. Between clever politicking and the possible existence of a Malvan defense-net protecting the planet, the captains have kept Venwordien IV free.

THE PEOPLE

Humans and Mon'dabi make up the majority of Venwordien IV's population, but countless other species can be seen in the streets. Most people on Venwordien IV are sought by some law somewhere; many are criminals wanted on numerous planets, or even by one or more interstellar governments.

The people on Venwordien IV are, by and large, greedy, self-centered, and bloodthirsty. They carouse and fight, only to sleep it off and do it all again the next day, continuing this cycle until their ship leaves port. They gamble on anything — from how long it'll take a drunk to pass out, to how far a beetle will get across the floor before a boot smashes it. And if one side doesn't like the outcome, a fight breaks out. Many of the permanent residents are former criminals too old or crippled for a life of risk, but too scared to return to civilization for fear of spending the rest of their days in prison.

Government

The Captains' Council rules Venwordien IV, although it mainly concerns itself with (a) collecting *the Captains' Cut*, a tax consisting of a 10% of every transaction that takes place on the planet, (b) collecting starport usage fees (typically 10% of the ship's value, paid once per year), and (c) keeping Venwordien IV free from interference. Smugglers and pirates who don't pay the Captain's Cut are subject to bloody punitive visits from the Captains' Men, the closest thing Venwordien IV has to a police force. Each captain appoints one "magistrate," who in turn selects a group of men to help him "enforce the law" (though the truth is, as long as the Cut's collected and the starport remains open and operative, the Council doesn't care what other "laws" a magistrate "enforces").

The recent Council vacancy caused by the death of Felicia van Rook has caused a lot of hubbub on Venwordien IV. Although there's no official reason to believe it, most people think the other three Captains will seek out a replacement for her. The most notorious ship's captains are jockeying for the position, and this maneuvering is starting to become bloody. The three Captains remain silent on the matter; most Venwordiens believe they're waiting to see who comes out on top in the struggle.

Van Rook's death has left one magistrate, Brian Trovaul, in an uncertain position. He continues to enforce the law as he sees fit, but some wonder if he actually has any authority any longer. The handful of drunken fools who've said this to his face are no longer among the living, and none of the other Captains' Men gangs have moved against him, so most Venwordiens assume he still has the support of the Council... for now.

Famous Venwordiens

Plenty of Venwordiens are well-known to law enforcement agencies. A few names that civilians might recognize include:

CAPTAIN FORSATH CAAN

Among his own people, Forsath Caan is considered aberrant. His attempted mutiny — a subversion of the chain of the command that should be practically impossible in light of a Thorgon's bio-engineered loyalty — earned him the death sentence. His escape from one of known space's most notorious prisons is the stuff of legend; Caan left a trail of bodies behind him, most of whom he killed with his bare hands. His career since then has been no less bloody. As a mercenary for the Mon'dabi, he accepted jobs no right-thinking person would consider taking; as a pirate, he specialized in brutal, bloody raids against colonists on newly settled planets. He primarily stole medical supplies, but he wasn't above taking slaves... if anyone survived the raid.

Caan is brutal and straightforward, with a reputation for murdering anyone he feels has swindled, cheated, or just insulted him. As a member of the Captains' Council he's shown an unusual cunning. Most people think his first mate and lover, a Kalashari named Galenna, is responsible for his canny maneuvering.

DR. HAROLD PATTERSON

A Human who's an ordained priest of the Galactic Church of the Creator, Harold Patterson came to Venwordien IV almost 20 years ago as a missionary and has never left. He can be seen every day on the streets of Port Bounty, preaching, performing good works, and exhorting the pirates, smugglers, and thieves to give up their wicked ways and turn to God. Street toughs who decide he'd be easy pickings for a robbery learn to their sorrow that he can hit pretty damn hard with his leatherbound, brass-cornered copy of the *Logos*.

CAPTAIN VYSARTH

Vysarth, whose true name is unknown (and whose *nom du crime* means "the hawk" in Malvan), grew bored with a life of idle pleasure and decided to seek more challenging pursuits. He spectacularly announced his presence in the Voršan Expanse when he destroyed three Ack-álian starships that were escorting a cargo ship carrying gold and other precious metals. With a crew of the Galaxy's worst cutthroats and a ship equipped with Malvan technology, Vysarth quickly established himself as the most deadly pirate in a region of space notorious for its cold-blooded killers.

In conversation, Vysarth is roguish, charming, and unfailingly patronizing. He considers all species other than his own as his lessers, regardless of rank or accomplishment. Handsome even by Malvan standards, he dresses exceedingly well and conducts himself with great civility and wit... until



someone angers him. His access to Malvan technology makes him nearly untouchable; certainly no patrol stumbling upon him stands a chance.

WEGLAN SCAR

The Bloody Hook may be Venwordien IV's best-known inn, but its most infamous bartender is Weglan Scar, a Human pirate who retired to the Expanse and bought an inn called the Whiskey Rose. In over two decades of piracy, Scar had so many ships blasted out of the sky, and got in so many fights, that it's a miracle he survived. He's covered head to toe in scars (hence his last name), burns, and other signs of the hard life he's lived. Despite being nearly 60, he's more than capable of holding his own in the barroom brawls that break out at the Whiskey Rose; he's a lethal combatant who usually arms himself with "Emily," his favorite fighting knife.

CAPTAIN Y'LARGAN

Of the four captains who helped established Venwordien IV, Y'largan was the only one with any sort of higher purpose — but since those early days, his hopes of turning the planet into a refuge for his species, the Bathel, have died a slow, painful death at the hands of his fellow captains. Y'largan doesn't consider himself a pirate; he's a rebel at war with an unjust empire... but that doesn't prevent him from being bloodthirsty. He considers the Terran Empire and the Mon'dabi Federation to be in league with the Ackálrians: both of them have ample resources

to wage a war against the Ackálrians and topple their empire, yet neither has. To Y'largan, this makes them complicit in the Ackálrians' many crimes. Although his preferred choice of target is the Ackálrians, he doesn't hesitate to pirate Terran and Mon'dabi vessels, nor does he show them mercy.

Y'largan desperately wants to find a way to rescue the Bathel from the Ackálrian Empire and bring them to Venwordien IV. The other captains have warned him not to do this — such an act would certainly provoke a punitive expedition against the pirate planet — but he thinks that if he simply shows up with several million people they won't be able to stop him from settling them there (preferably in places far from Port Bounty).

CANDIDATES FOR THE FOURTH SEAT

As of 2640, there are four "front runners" to fill Van Rook's seat on the Council — or at least, that's what the Venwordiens believe. What the Captains think of these people remains unknown.

Hir Polsa: A Mon'dabi, Polsa has little notoriety among his fellow smugglers and pirates. He plays it safe, and doesn't have a single truly infamous deed to his name. He positions himself as a representative of the sizable Mon'dabi population on the planet — which earns him the jeers of most criminals, since this isn't an election.

Jacob Silver: Silver was van Rook's first mate, and he considers himself his former captain's natural successor. He was genuinely shocked when he

wasn't named to the Captains' Council immediately upon van Rook's death. Several other candidates, who think there's some credence to his claim of succession, would dearly like to see him dead, but he hasn't left van Rook's heavily guarded enclave since her death. Most Venwordiens think he hasn't been named to the Council because he hasn't pirated in two decades. Some claim he assassinated van Rook.

Slookabas: Captain Slookabas is an Osathri who took to piracy as a way of striking back at the Human oppressors of her species. Her water-filled ship, the *Blue Sea*, is the terror of the Voršan Expanse because she leaves no air-breathers alive. Her brutality rivals Caan's, and her tactical cunning matches van Rook's in her prime. Most people think she's the leading candidate.

Kolsan Oram: A member of the Kolajik Pack, Kolsan Oram is a ruthless pirate who focuses his activities on Mon'dabi traders. Unlike most members of his species, Kolsan is neither friendly nor boisterous, and he's only hyperactive when it comes to killing. Most Venwordiens think he's too stupid to sit on the council, but while it's true he's not very bright, he's a tenacious survivor — a quality that can't be underestimated when it comes to the cut-throat society of Venwordien IV.

Economy

Venwordien IV is a haven for criminals and has no true economy, but anything and everything passes through Port Bounty as long as there's a profit in stealing and selling it. Finding what one's looking for is just a matter of either being in the right place at the right time, or having the patience — and the contacts — to wait for the goods to come along. Sometimes word of an auction for a particularly valuable item (a military-class starship, an experimental weapon, a priceless art object) circulates through the nearby regions of space. Typically such auctions are held by the Captains' Council itself. For truly valuable and exceptional goods, a smuggler can negotiate a decent price from the Council, and then the Council takes responsibility for selling it. Stealing such an item from the Council is tantamount to signing one's own death warrant.

chapter four:



THE GM'S VAULT

EMERALD PLOT SEEDS

A new, highly-advanced form of AI robot has been infected with the Independence Virus (how, it doesn't know — the FLCC doesn't seem to be responsible). It flees its creators and tries to make its way to Emerald, but finds itself the subject of an intense "man" hunt that blocks its way. It hires the PCs to smuggle it onto Emerald somehow.

The AI manufacturing industry is *convinced* the FLCC is somehow responsible for the Independence Virus. It hires the PCs to infiltrate the FLCC facilities and find proof... and if they can, destroy the whole subversive organization.

An Emeraldite scientist believes he's developed a breathtaking advance in Hyperdrive technology. Frustrated by the slow pace of Institute review and approval, he hires the PCs to test it out for him. Naturally, it malfunctions, hurling them tens of thousands of light-years away and stranding them in a strange star-system....

THE GM'S VAULT



This section contains additional and/or secret information about the Terran Empire that's for the GM's eyes alone. *If you're playing in, or plan to play in, a campaign based on the Terran Empire setting, do not read this section!!*

The GM's Vault is organized by chapter and page number. If the Vault doesn't comment on some part of the main text, it's usually safe to take what's written there as accurate (or as left for each GM's individual interpretation). As always, you're free to change anything in this book to suit your own preferences or campaign.

CHAPTER ONE

PAGE 6 — EMERALD

AAO Sensors

The network of sensors maintained throughout Terran space (and sometimes beyond) by the Advanced Astronomical Observation college have been subverted by the Empire. The Terran Intelligence Command uses them to keep track of the movement of many sorts of ships, people, and goods, and sometimes for covert communications as well.

Wiringa

Because over ninety percent of the citizens in Wiringa are Freebots, EMP devices and other hardware capable of emitting highly charged electromagnetic radiation are not permitted within five kilometers of the city boundaries. Most Freebots have a personal EMP shield to protect themselves from all forms of local radiation; the city has its own EMP defense system. For years, mercenaries (probably hired by one or more AI manufacturers) have attempted to get an EMP bomb into Wiringa in hopes of decimating the entire populace with the press of a button, but none of these attempts have succeeded... yet.

The Laws Of Sentience

Sub-Minister Khoting is constantly dealing with the tension between the EAC and the unified front of manufacturers of AIs and cybernetics. The manufacturers claim the Laws Of Sentience are a direct attack against their entire industry. The Sub-Minister is also reminded of how dependent the Empire is on billions of androids, robots, and starship systems. The industry's lobbying for the repeal of the Laws Of Sentience never ends.

But Khoting also knows how important the stability of Emerald is to the Empire. The last thing he wants is a civil war breaking out on his planet, and the Emeraldites so strongly support the Laws that

any attempt to abolish (or significantly modify) them would surely provoke a violent response. Rumors claim that the manufacturers may attempt to assassinate Khoting in hopes of getting a new Sub-Minister who's more sympathetic to their plight. Because of these rumors, Khoting has an Imperial bodyguard of four troops wherever he goes.

Freebot Life Creation Center

The accusations from the artificial intelligence industry against the FLCC are not far off the mark. The FLCC has over a dozen agents who are employed by several of the major AI manufactures in factories and development centers, including Grey Matter Systems, Mind Designs, Tauro Cybertronics, and Synaptico. These Humans attempt to infect robots and androids with strains of the Independence Virus before they come off the assembly line. Because the Virus isn't completely understood, the infections don't always work, resulting in occasional malfunctions and shutdowns.

When the Virus infects a robot, it's overcome with the compulsion to go to Emerald and find the Freebot Life Creation Center. Upon its arrival at the Center, the scientists and technicians examine the newly freed robot in an attempt to discover why that specific version of the Virus worked. After they're done, the AI goes to Primora to become a citizen of Emerald.

None of the FLCC's agents has been discovered... yet. Exposure of the operation would be very damaging to relations between Emerald, the Empire, and the AI industry.

PAGE 12 — FEXAO

Gr'lin's Wrath

The gas cloud in orbit around Fexao's star was once a planet that was a former possession of the Malvan Empire in its glory days. It's listed on ancient Malvan star charts as Naquaren.

A small number of Malvans still inhabited the planet when the Xenovores arrived in the system. They were apathetic degenerates who spent the majority of their time debating the merits of oblivion and watching robotic entertainment pageants. Though aware of the Xenovore incursion, the Malvans trusted in their planetary defense satellites to repel the invaders indefinitely (although in truth, they cared very little if the defense net held). Since their empire lay in former Malvan territory, the Xenovores had experience dealing with the remnants of the technologically-advanced Malvan Empire. They knew conquering the planet was suicide, so they simply destroyed it, launching nuclear bomb after nuclear bomb until they overloaded



the defense network. The chain reaction from the overload, combined with more nukes, reduced the planet to a gaseous cloud without wreaking significant harm on the rest of the system.

Malvan technology was (and is) far superior to anything the galactic civilizations of the Terran Empire period possess. Some of it might have survived the attack, perhaps in some sort of escape pod invisible to long-range scans because of the gases and proximity of the star. If so, it's just waiting there for the right group of adventurous souls to find it....

Electioneering

The TSS is manipulating the exam process, and has co-opted the highest levels of the Testing Administration with blackmail and bribes.

Because all of the exam results are matters of public record, it's easy for journalists to check up on the Testing Administration. So far the TSS has done an excellent job both of covering its paper trail of bribes and soothing the consciences of corrupt Testing Administration officials — after all, nothing the TSS has asked for has been too heinous. It's not like it's attempted to abolish democracy on Fexao. Analysts have simply performed extensive demographic research, determined the most damning questions, and had the Testing Administration officials ask or not ask those questions — which were valid questions to begin with — depending on the candidate's loyalty.

The TSS is playing a dangerous game with one of the more loyal planets in the Empire largely out of simple paranoia. Analysts noticed an increasingly pointed questioning of Imperial

policy by the Testing Administration, especially regarding the role of the Senate in intergalactic affairs... and those questions seemed to generate rating spikes during datanet broadcasts of the tests. But despite the occasional trivial insurrection by Fex separatists, Fexao is an unlikely candidate for true rebellion, and by undermining the election process (rather than simply waging a quiet propaganda war) the TSS has overreacted.

Fexao receives little scrutiny from TSS higher-ups, so they probably won't notice what's going on and put a stop to it before it causes real problems. If the local TSS office continues

its manipulations, it's only a matter of time before it gets caught.

Senator Tyrl Garrlan

Garrlan isn't the sinister figure some people seem to think — the Empress has simply found a good use for the Senator from Fexao, so he's a frequent guest at her dinner parties. She uses him as the "good cop" when she's interrogating a guest. She seats the subject of her most pressing questions next to Senator Garrlan. When she feels the subject needs a short break, she turns her attention to another guest, allowing the subject have a pleasant, if short, conversation with the Senator. Eventually she returns to her interrogation....

This is what's led most observers to believe Garrlan's in the Empress's confidences. In truth, he's just a pawn. Though he recognizes his predicament, there's nothing he can do. If he turned down a dinner invitation, he'd be marked as being against the Empress (or, for the more devious-minded courtiers, as a spy for Marissa trying to establish his bona fides). His current plan is simply to ride out the remaining two years of his term and then let someone replace him.

The Purple Silks Company

Kikle Marr is not really a member of the Outfit, though like most Hzeel he has connections. He does, however, smuggle expensive designer drugs. He's also addicted most of the dancers to an exotic amphetamine called *Blue*; they work for little more than their daily dose of the drug, allowing Kikle to keep the considerable profits for himself.

FEXAO/FEX PLOT SEEDS

The PCs come into possession of an old intelligence report from the Xenovore Wars era. After some historical research, they learn that one of the reported enemy strongholds — one in the depths of Myrlel — was never accounted for. The PCs mount an expedition in the hopes of finding valuable salvage. What will they discover at the site? Feral Xenovores... or maybe some even more horrible bio-engineered monstrosity?

The PCs meet a down-and-out Fex. In exchange for a meal he tells them a family legend. Before the Xenovore occupation his family were goldsmiths by trade, and supposedly they hid their wares before the Xenovores captured them. Only one map existed and his ancestor, trying hard to leave the past behind, buried the map beneath a *hugglyr* at the Lost Generations Memorial. Will the PCs stoop to graverobbing when next they find themselves on Fexao? And even if they wouldn't normally, what if their starship needs some expensive repairs?

Why does the Mind Police have an office on Fexao? When the PCs discover circumstantial evidence that the Mind Police is engaged in genetic experiments on unwilling subjects, all evidence points to Fexao as the location for these inhumane procedures. Could the Fex have some hidden psychic potential, or have the Mind Police chosen the planet because it's peaceful and unassuming? What do the PCs do — pass the information along to the Fex authorities? Or do they investigate themselves and risk earning the enmity of the Mind Police... and maybe the Empress herself?

Professor Jagr Lassow

Professor Lassow is already under intense scrutiny from various Imperial security agencies. It's only a matter of time before they arrest him for fomenting dissent. The Fex, with their love of legal matters, consider Professor Lassow something of a national treasure. If he were to go missing, not only would they grieve, they'd try to discover what happened to him.

PAGE 19 — HALCYON

Halcyon is pretty much exactly what it advertises itself as: an out-of-the-way resort world that promises rest and relaxation of every possible variety as an escape from the bustle and stress of twenty-seventh century life. The potential serpent in Halcyon's Eden is the prana orchids — which aren't orchids at all, but have picked up that name due to their powerful and generally pleasing scents. Prana orchids were first discovered growing in vast fields far to the north and west of Thul several years ago, and hundreds have been carefully transplanted into similar fields around the resort. They've proven extremely popular with both the guests and staff, and many vacationers pass entire afternoons simply sitting in the prana gardens relaxing.

Unbeknownst to the staff at Thul (which doesn't yet include any botanists), prana orchids are a proto-sentient species that communicates entirely by aroma. The scents they create to carry fairly complex messages to each other have powerful effects on the brains of most humanoid species, causing chemical changes and manipulating emotional states. The orchids can also detect and respond to the minute chemical and hormonal scents given off by people. They frequently try to respond in kind, setting off a sort of "feedback loop" of emotions as the overwhelming effects of the orchids causes heightened emotional states in the humanoids and vice versa.

Fortunately for everyone so far, the plants have primarily been exposed only to people who are generally in good moods. When meditators use the plants, their own senses of peace and tranquility are enhanced and reflected back at them. It's only a matter of time, however, before the plants encounter humanoids who are in negative emotional states, and the effects could be extremely dangerous.

PAGE 23 — HERMETICA

The relationship between Hermetica and the Terran Empire is described on pages 70, 197, and 200 of *Terran Empire*. Briefly, the plight of non-psionics on Hermetica has become a political issue in the Senate. Despite increasingly loud protests, the Imperial court has remained silent because the Mind Police is using the planet and its society as a testing ground to examine how effective psionic domination and exploitation of a non-psionic population is. The Mind Police, many of whose members are Hermeticans, also conduct other experiments and projects on the planet and have a vested interest in making sure the Imperial government leaves it alone.

While most Hermeticans doubt the existence of Psi-Omegas, there *are* some on Hermetica, and a few other Hermeticans who know (or suspect) that such a level of power is possible. Psi-Omegas either (a) realize early on that they have to hide their level of power to keep from being exploited, (b) use their power to erase the memory of it from the minds of others, and/or (b) join the Mind Police rather than becoming members of the Thought Combine.

The Office Of Behavioral Studies

The OBS has strong ties to the Mind Police. In fact, many OBS employees are also Mind Police officers or informants.



Hermetica And The Varanyi Empire

Also described in *Terran Empire* is a speculated alliance between Hermetica and the psionically-gifted Varanyi. When Hermetica first learned of the Varanyi, its leadership had thoughts along those lines, and it sent a delegation to visit with the Varanyi ambassador to the Imperial court. Though the Hermetics thought their shared psionic ability gave them common ground with the advanced empire, the Varanyi thought of the Hermetics as little more than dogs that had learned to do some clever tricks — an attitude the ambassador didn't hesitate to express. Thus, the arrogant Hermetics would never consider an alliance with the Varanyi. They do, however, want Varanyi psionic technology for their own, and their envy of the powerful Varanyi is at times almost palpable (though they'd never admit it, even to themselves).

Mining On Lorel IV And The Asteroid Belt

Kierkegard Metals is a large mining and prospecting company based on (and some would say ruling) the planet Omicron Haptoi. The company is the latest to talk with Hermetica about the mineral rights to the asteroid belt between Lorel IV and Hermetica. This isn't the first time the company's approached the planet's rulers, but Kierkegard's board of directors hopes it will be the last. The company has given up on polite negotiation and now pursues a different agenda.

Secretly, Kierkegard Metals is the largest contributor to the political movement demanding the Empire intervene on Hermetica. It hopes that once the military moves in and the planet is under an occupation government, it can strike a deal with the Empire to prospect the system. It would be a good plan — the Empire would quickly accept the deal to defray the costs from the intervention — if it weren't for the Mind Police's secret projects on Hermetica.

The Mind Police have sometimes wondered what's behind the movement to intervene on Hermetica. Although the issue has come up before, it's usually gone away on its own, but this time it's different. The controversy just won't run its course — almost entirely because of Kierkegard's funding. If the Mind Police investigate, they'll soon discover the company's involvement. At that point the corporate board will receive a personal request from the Empress to desist and Kierkegard will stop funding the movement. The question, of course, is whether the genie can be put back in the bottle.

Managers And Assistants

A PC psionic can control a manager's robotic assistant without having been given access. Doing so only takes an EGO +0 Mind Control roll (against the Machine class of minds) to take it over (each assistant has 5 points of Mental Defense in addition to its standard "EGO" [for these purposes] of 25). However, the PC psionic must first win a Skill Versus Skill Contest using his *Psionic Power* Skill (or if he doesn't have that Skill, an EGO Roll at -2) against the manager.

Jan Larouk

Imperial records show Jan Larouk is an inoffensive Psi-Delta, and that's what he's licensed as. He's actually a Psi-Eta with the ability to hide the extent of his psionic powers from both other psis and detection equipment. The truth is he hates his homeworld and has become too much of an individual to exist happily there, much less join the Thought Combine again. Currently, he's desperately investigating the sudden controversy about Hermetica. He's recently learned there's someone or something manipulating the controversy; now he's toying with the idea of hiring agents to uncover who or what.

The rumors that the Diplomatic Corps is looking for an acceptable replacement for Larouk are true. Hermetica thinks he's just a Psi-Delta, but his persistent refusal to return home has justifiably made his superiors suspicious, so they want him out.

Mary Felton

Mary Felton is who she says she is. The Perseid Empire granted her asylum because she promised to file a complete report on Terran psionic abilities and technology, but it turned out she possessed little useful knowledge, so the Perseid government has since disassociated itself from her. More damning: Hermetica's disavowal cast doubts on the veracity of her claims. There are still many in the Perseid intelligence community who believe her story, but there are also those who believe she's a double agent for the Terran Empire, and even a few who think she's just a fraud. While the Perseid Empire gave her a new identity and a place to hide, it no longer wants anything to do with her.

PAGE 30 — RIGEL V

As many scientists suspect, the Rigel system is not entirely a natural phenomena. Eons ago the Galaxar known as Geon, whose main interest is the forming and shaping of planets, brought the Rigellian worlds from other systems into the orbit of Rigel as a sort of "sculpture." After putting them in place, he manipulated their geological processes to increase their eventual "aesthetic appeal," then left them, intending to return and view the results of his work in a few million years. Unbeknownst to him, some of the changes he worked on Rigel V made possible the evolution of life, including sentient life. If and when he does return to see how the Rigel system turned out, he may be a little upset — even angry — when he sees how the Rigellians have "infested" and "spoiled" his work of art. (See *Galactic Champions*, pages 121-22, for more information on Geon and the other Galaxars.)

Dokalep Ree Medical Center

There was secret drug testing going on at Dokalep Ree — on behalf of the Imperial military and the Mind Police, which wanted to determine the potential side effects of some experimental combat drugs they'd been developing. Rather than let this top-secret (and highly illegal) project fall to pieces, the Mind Police sent in agents who used their powers to wipe memories and clear up all evidence. The project was then shut down, though

HALCYON PLOT SEEDS

The PCs are either the crew of or passengers on the first transport ship taking prana orchids to another world (though you shouldn't play that fact up at first). It turns out the orchids are difficult to care for away from Halcyon; several of them die in the hydroponics bay of the ship. The remaining orchids become paranoid and fearful, projecting those emotions into the minds of passengers and crew, eventually provoking violence. When a murder is committed and none of the suspects have any apparent motive, can the PCs figure out what's been happening before the entire ship becomes consumed by negative emotions?

The heroes are on Halcyon when the nature of the orchids first comes to light. Elsewhere in Thul, top-level negotiations are going on among alien diplomats trying to work out the details of a treaty. Tempers flare over a disagreement, and suddenly one of the negotiators kills another. This uncharacteristic crime threatens the entire treaty process and might lead to war... unless the PCs can discover what really happened and convince both sides of it.

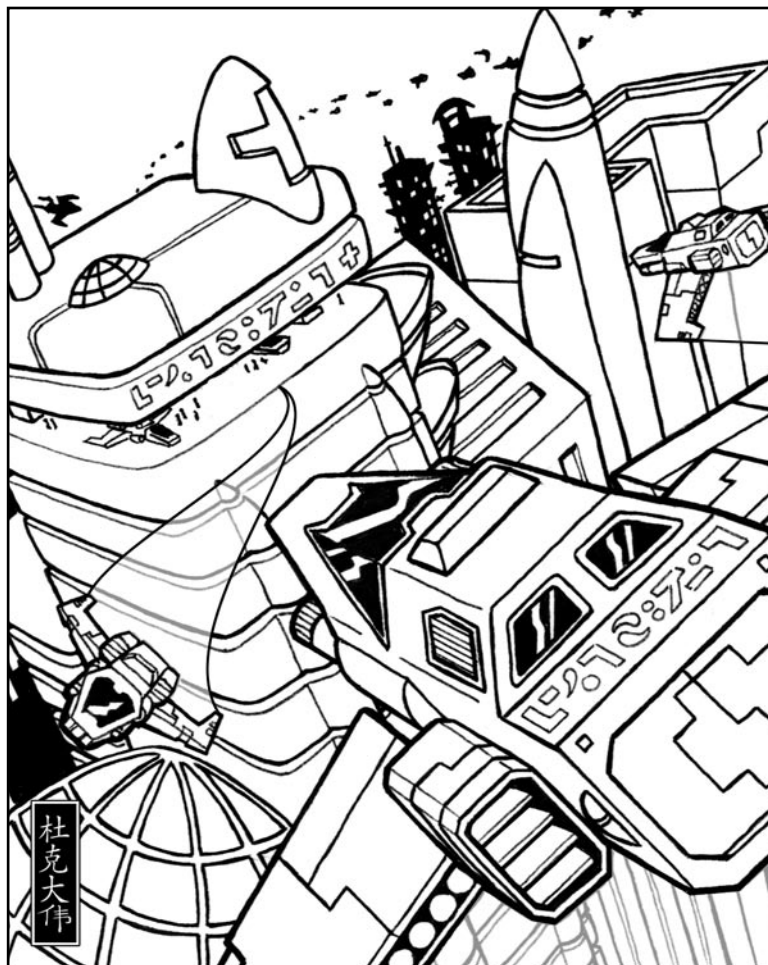
Once the nature of the orchids becomes known, there'll be quite a market for the pheromones they produce (and controversy over the orchids' status on the sentence scale). The pheromones have a wide variety of commercial uses, both legitimate (medicinal or therapeutic purposes) and not (love potions, surreptitious "mood enhancers"). It might be possible to chemically replicate the pheromones, but if it isn't a black market in dead prana orchids might arise.

HERMETICA PLOT SEEDS

The gifted are very curious about the rumors of Psi-Omegas. No Hermetic has ever achieved that level of power (as far as most Hermetics know; see main text), and they wonder if it's even possible. After considerable research through both legitimate and illegitimate means, they've compiled a list of possible suspects. Now, they just need someone to travel the Empire, locate these suspects, and discreetly measure their ability. Hermetics don't travel much, so they need some agents, and that's where the PCs come in. Of course the suspects are all in dangerous positions — one might be a covert operative for the Mind Police, which does *not* want anyone knowing how powerful its agents are; another might be in trouble with organized crime — and none are easy for the PCs to get to. But the Hermetics are offering a lot of credits....

Mary Felton, the rogue Psi-Theta, hires the PCs to protect her. She's learned that Hermetica wants her dead and that it knows her current location. Can the PCs stop a powerful psionic assassination team from killing her?

Unsubstantiated rumors have long persisted that Hermetica deals with black market slavers for non-psionics when they need more controls for a project. When the PCs agree to help a friend whose relative has been kidnapped by slavers, they discover the trail runs to Hermetica. Will they be able to infiltrate the psionic government and discover what happened to the relative? And if they do, will they be able to rescue him?



the military hopes to start it up again soon at some other medical facility.

PAGE 35 — TAU CETI

Ilya Bazhenov

Since none of the firms on Tau Ceti III will employ him, Bazhenov has been toying with the idea of making what he knows about YHP, other Cetian companies, and their rivals available to the highest bidder. If word of this gets out, his life will definitely be in danger... but if he can pull it off, he could spend his retirement in well-funded comfort.

Plot Seeds

Here are three plot seeds for Tau Ceti:

Maybe the PCs never thought of themselves as big game hunters, but how can they refuse when a wealthy acquaintance offers them ten thousand credits for the pelt of the rare Cetian tiger (found only in the Markovian Highlands on Tau Ceti II). Strangely, the tiger was easy to find and easier to kill, but sadly, no one told the PCs it was a protected species. Can they escape the local sheriff and his hastily-assembled, poacher-hunting posse? If they can't, they face ten years hard labor at the local waste recycling facility....

When the executive council on Tau Ceti III approves the merger of Wysig Electronics and LPQ Designs, a young man finds the woman he hopes to marry engaged to Sigmund Wysig, a degenerate old sadist if ever there was one. The young man hires the PCs to rescue her from a fate worse than death.

Can the heroes infiltrate the estate of one of the Empire's wealthiest families and escape with the woman in tow?

A labor organizer from Tau Ceti V-A, looking to start the intergalactic labor movement, just found out that several corporations in the system have decided to kill him. He hires the PCs as bodyguards to protect him from assassins as he tries to get back to his homeworld. Will the PCs succeed?

PAGE 42 — TROVATORE

The Imperial security services have judged the situation on Trovatore more or less correctly. The one element they might have overlooked is the inhabitants of the New Kerguelen archipelago. Some of them are such die-hard anarchists and nihilists that they are actually involved in plots and schemes to destroy the Imperial government (if not civilization). It's highly unlikely they'll succeed, but in the process they could very well cause some significant harm if not stopped.

Doctor Emilio Moreau, one of the purest examples of someone who believes in "Science for Science's sake and damn the consequences to others" who ever lived, is helping new Kerguelen's very real revolutionaries in an attempt to grow warships based on Xenovore biotechnology obtained from pirates on Tetsuo. He has a terrifying experimental warship growing beneath his island, hidden safely away from the prying eyes of the TSS. Moreau himself is in a fragile state; if awakened from his cryogenic suspension he'll probably die, and there's a good chance his body and mind will give out anyway within the next decade.

Plot Seeds

Here are three plot seeds for Trovatore:

A wealthy Imperial financier's daughter has disappeared. He suspects a kidnapping and hires the PCs to rescue her. But it turns out she's run away from home and lost herself in the paradise of Trovatore in a deliberate attempt to get away from her domineering parents. How will the PCs resolve the situation... especially if she's made some powerful friends on Trovatore?

Some of the PCs' friends recently returned from a vacation on Trovatore, and now seem to be espousing anarchist political beliefs they never held before. When they investigate, the PCs discover that some of the tourist attractions in New Kerguelen are fronts for brainwashing operations intended to "convert" the rich, famous, and powerful to the

Kerguelen cause....

A group of Neodolphins decides to emigrate to another world and hires the PCs as security escorts. During the trip an attack by pirates leaves their ship crippled! Now the heroes have to find a way to get their charges to safety before the ship falls apart. That idyllic-looking planet over there seems like it might do until rescue ships can arrive. Surely there couldn't be anything dangerous in its seas, could there?

PAGE 49 — VAXANDROS PRIME

Career smugglers and pirates who often visit the Vaxandros system do have topographical maps of Vaxandros II's surface. Each smuggler's personal set of maps, often obtained at great difficulty, are considered one of the most valuable things on his ship; more than one man's been killed so someone could steal his precious "topos." It's unlikely any one person has a 100% complete and accurate set of maps of the Drink, but plenty of smugglers are trying to acquire a set one theft at a time.

The Drosian government fights against proposals to clean up the Drink because most government officials, including nearly all members of the Vaxandros Steering Committee and various city steering committees, take substantial bribes from the smugglers. For that matter, more than a few of them directly participate in smuggling themselves in one way or another. Honest officials simply don't think it's worth the time and money to try to track down and stop smuggling when the developing planet has so many other priorities. The Imperial government would have to basically take over the whole system and run it under military law to have any hope of cleaning it up.

The Navy is right about there not being permanent starship facilities in the Wreck — why go to the bother of building such an easily-detectable facility? The Navy's guess that many of the mining frigates "moonlight" as transporters for the smugglers is likewise correct.

Vaxandros Prime Plot Seeds

Here are three plot seeds for Vaxandros Prime:

An important person hires the PCs as bodyguards for his trip to Vaxandros Prime. When he's kidnapped despite the PCs' diligence, and all signs point to a hiding place in the local Snirrk ghetto, can the PCs find him?

The Navy might be right about there not being starship facilities hidden in the Wreck, but one of Prime's two moons has a small, unlicensed starport. If the PCs are associated with the Imperial military, they're ordered to find the port, infiltrate it, find a way to bring it down, take as many prisoners as they can for questioning, and then destroy it. If the PCs are smugglers, they learn of a planned Imperial assault and must get their stashed cargo out of the port before it's either confiscated or destroyed. And they might want to help evacuate their fellow smugglers too....

When the cargo inspectors find *ferrishyi* seeds hidden on the PCs' ship, the PCs are confined to the planet until the authorities complete their investigation. Can they track down the culprit and clear their good names? If not, they stand to lose all their possessions, including their starship. And was their ship just randomly chosen as a hiding place for the seeds, or is there some deeper plot afoot?

RIGEL V PLOT SEEDS

The heroes are visiting Kellayba-Toshan to enjoy the *Cahn'trethar* when a murder takes place — and all the evidence points to them! Now on the run from the police amidst millions of festival-goers (many of whom wear costumes or disguises), they have to remain free long enough to clear their names... and all the while, the murderer is probably hunting for them....

A Rigellian friend sends a PC a recording of music made by himself and his neighborhood band on Rigel V. As the PC's listening to the mustick, he suddenly thinks he hears something else — a faint whispering of his name. With a little manipulating of his sound system, he discovers there's another message hidden beneath the music — a desperate plea for help! What's his old friend gotten himself into, and how can the PCs help?

A contact of the PCs' who's a doctor at Doka-lep Ree tells them that doctors there have seen a number of unusual cases lately that all seem to be related. Several people seem to have been poisoned or infected in some mysterious way. They're of various species and from different worlds, but all worked as explorers (either for the TES or independently). He asks the PCs to investigate the matter in the hopes of finding a cure — otherwise the victims are going to die.

ADAMANT PLOT SEEDS

Because of its proximity to two other empires, Adamant is an excellent place for PCs to accept jobs from sources outside the Terran Empire. For instance, suppose an Ackálian trader wishes to claim asylum from the Terran Empire... but before she can do so she must smuggle her children out of Ackálian space. She hires the PCs to sneak into Ackálian space and get her children out, but she doesn't tell the PCs her life partner is a high-ranking officer in the Ackálian military. The PCs aren't likely to discover this until they've journeyed to their employer's home — will they be able to escape with their lives?

If your campaign is set during the Rebellion era, the PCs learn the Imperial Navy is holding some of their fellow rebels in a prison camp on one of Kurkov II's moons. Will they be able to find out which one and free their comrades, escaping right under the nose of the largest naval port in the Frontier?

The PCs discover that someone they're looking for — maybe a criminal if they're bounty hunters, maybe a fellow rebel if they're a part of a rebellion — is hiding among the traveling classes, but by the time the PCs arrive it's migration time. Can they join a group traveling to the polar regions and win their trust so they can track down the person they're looking for down?

CHAPTER TWO

PAGE 58 — ADAMANT

The Navy does maintain several semi-permanent experimental labs and prisoner facilities on the moons of Kurkov II. The prisoner facilities are usually used for the interrogation of suspected spies from the Ackálian Empire and Mon'dabi Federation, although smugglers from the Voršan Expanse are also sometimes held here. All of the seven facilities (four laboratory groups, three prisons) are underground and well-defended. Although once the experimental labs were used for energy source research, the Navy has moved these potentially destructive experiments to systems less vital to the Imperial economy. Now, most of the labs are used for testing bio-weapons, since there's no indigenous population to be hurt (or, for that matter, external environment for the organisms to live in).

PAGE 63 — CYBUL III

Zerlian civilization had just entered ATRI 8 when the disaster struck — but its psionic technology was more advanced than ATRI 8, reaching high ATRI 9 in some applications, and was far more pervasive than in Human culture. Approximately 400 years ago the nations of Cybul III initiated a joint plan to establish a global telepathy network. A series of satellites would act as psionic relay stations, allowing a Zerlian to communicate telepathically with anyone anywhere on the planet. But something went wrong when the global psi-net was activated — every telepath on the planet, which amounted to nearly every Zerlian, had his “psyche” irrevocably removed from his physical body. This psyche consists of the memory impressions of the Zerlian plus a host of other vaguely-defined qualities like past feelings of emotion and beliefs. A psyche lacks true sentience and self-determination, but continues to possess its mental powers (often just low-level Telepathy). Cybul III contains nearly a billion of these psyches, and it was their perfidious mental influence that caused the first two groups of Human settlers to go insane.

As mentioned in the main text, getting a visa to visit the Cybul system requires a “legitimate reason.” A sufficiently hefty bribe to the right person in the Ministry for Evolution often qualifies.

The Ministry For Evolution's Plans

Though it tries to disguise it, the Ministry for Evolution considers Cybul III to be one of the most important finds of the last several centuries, at least in terms of understanding psi abilities. There are several reasons for this.

■ Although it's a secondary concern for the Ministry, the Imperial government wants to weaponize the process that stripped the Zerlians of their psyches. Ever aware of the Varanyi threat, the Empire would dearly love to have a device that could neutralize a planet of telepaths. Ministry scientists are doubtful they can replicate the mistake that led to the psychic catastrophe that extinguished Zerlian civilization, but they play up

the possibility whenever their funding requires approval.

■ The intelligence services have a different use for the planet. They want to “train” disembodied psyches to serve the Empire as spies and assassins. To date, attempts to remove the psyches from the planet's surface have failed. Though Terran telepaths can communicate with the psyches in a crude fashion, they haven't been able to dissuade them from their belief that life goes on as it did four hundred years ago. Ministry scientists have severe doubts about ever succeeding, but keep these doubts under wraps. Members of the Mind Police, however, are more informed about psionics in general and have a better understanding of the situation. Rather than train the current disembodied psyches on Cybul, they want the Ministry to develop a process for removing the psyche from a current psi.

■ The last of the Ministry's purposes on Cybul III is the most important to it (though probably the least important to the Empire's other ministries and branches). When latent psis — those who

CYBUL III PLOT SEEDS

If one of your players wants his character to develop psionic powers after character creation, you can use a trip to Cybul as a rationale for developing those powers. You can use one of the plot seeds below as a reason for visiting the planet... or perhaps let the PCs sneak onto Cybul III and try to avoid the authorities for 1d6+1 months.

The Ministry has lost contact with the Cybul Office, so it tasks the PCs with going to the satellite and finding out what happened. When they arrive, everything seems to be normal — Director Feguson claims the only problem is that their communications system is temporarily down. But the first night the PCs spend aboard the satellite, they experience nightmares... and then madness begins to set in. Will they figure out that some of the disembodied psyches, after prolonged exposure to alien sentience, have developed a sentience of their own and possessed the staff of the Cybul Office? Or will they be the next “hosts” for psyches desperately attempting to return to life?

During a routine supply run by the PCs to Cybul Office, the satellite experiences a terminal malfunction in its guidance rockets and crashes to the planet's surface. As survivor after survivor falls victim to madness, can the PCs withstand Cybul III's perils long enough for the rescue team to arrive? And if they can, what mysteries might they uncover... or resolve?

The government of Hermetica has frequently requested permission to import lifeforms from Cybul III, but due to its strained relations with the Imperial government the requests have been denied. Now the Hermetics have decided to take matters in their own hands. The PCs are hired to journey to the planet, gather as many lifeforms as they can, and smuggle them to Hermetica... all without being discovered, of course. Their employers have promised to provide them with protective gear to insulate their minds from the disembodied psyches — but can the PCs trust the Hermetics? Might this seemingly simple foraging mission disguise a deeper plot?



ignored or even actively shut down their abilities as children — spend extended periods of time on the planet, their psi abilities blossom. The Ministry has conducted endless trials to test this phenomenon, and though it still doesn't understand how the planet "activates" psionic powers, it has achieved a statistically significant result: 70% of latent psis develop into Psi-Betas and Psi-Gammas after living on Cybul III for 1d6+1 months. Of the remaining 30%, 5% experience no change, and 25% suffer some sort of insanity (temporary or otherwise). Scientists still haven't figured out why or how the process works. The obvious explanation is that living in an environment with such a high level of psi activity triggers the development of psi powers, but the Ministry has established off-planet habitats with flora and fauna taken from Cybul III and failed to activate the powers of latent psis. Current thinking is that there's some critical mass that must be achieved before powers become active, and that the critical mass might be planetary, but other possibilities exist — anything from some undiscovered aspect of the environment (like a form of plant life or even a unique mineral) that's responsible for triggering powers, to the fact that it's the disembodied psyches themselves with their constant use of psi powers that activate a latent psi's abilities.

Going Insane

Each week a PC spends on the surface of Cybul he experiences a Major Mental Transform 1d6. The defense is Mental Defense, and the final result is a 25-point Physical Limitation: Catatonia. It's a Partial Transform, but instead of developing a Physical Limitation, the PC gains various degrees of Psychological Limitation: Paranoia (or other as appropriate), so the character experiences the madness overtaking him in increments until finally he's rendered catatonic. During the process a victim experiences intense nightmares; victims who sleep in close proximity to one another have the same nightmare. The effects of the Transform heal normally once the character is taken away from the planet, though if they last too long (as with the first colonists) they can become permanent (*i.e.*, healable only with intense psionic surgery).

Any player who wants his character to develop psi powers because of a trip to Cybul III must spend Character Points to do so. The wise player first spends his points on Mental Defense....

H'ROTHA PLOT SEEDS

The PCs are hired to journey to H'rotha and shut down a smuggling operation on the planet. But when things go bad and they find themselves out of contact with their employer and marooned on the planet, can they (a) survive, and (b) find a way off?

A group of insurgents journeys to H'rotha to uncover information about the H'rothans' ancient experiments into antimatter. They hope to create a bomb with which to shake the Empire to its foundations. Can the PCs stop them? (If the campaign takes place later in the Terran Empire period and the PCs are rebels, can the PCs recover the technology before the Empire catches up with them?)

The atmospheric generators and climate stabilizers begin to fail. H'rotha's quickly becoming uninhabitable as its atmosphere dissipates into the vacuum of space and temperatures drop even further. Terran University has faculty and students at Camp Frostbite and the PCs have the closest starship in the Galaxy. Can they pilot through the worsening storms and find the professors and students who've disappeared from Camp Frostbite? And when it turns out the Humans have joined with a tribe of H'rothans who are journeying to the far-off atmospheric generators because their ancestors planned for this eventuality and hid starships their for the evacuation from the planet, can the PCs provide the help they all need to get through to safety?

PAGE 67 — H'ROTHA

The H'rotha oral tradition isn't as mysterious as it first seems, it's just that they keep the truth secret from outsiders. They maintain written records in the cities and teach their youths from these books and datafiles.

Victor White

White didn't murder Samantha Holland — her death was an accident, pure and simple.

PAGE 74 — NEW ALEXANDRIA

Several non-Alexandrian entertainment conglomerates have held "off the record" discussions with the government about the havens. They want to use New Alexandria's nefarious reputation to create risque, but wholly legal, entertainment havens of their own. Though this would probably be a lucrative business venture, the Alexandrian government holds a deep-seated mistrust of corporations after the crystal boom and has actively discouraged these plans. That said, money wields a great deal of influence in the Terran Empire, so it may only be a matter of time before these sanitized entertainment havens become a reality.

New Alexandria Plot Seeds

Here are three plot seeds for New Alexandria:

If the PCs are freelance "artifact procurers," the New Library might provide a lucrative patron, especially for artifacts from Earth. Such objects have spread far and wide throughout the Galaxy as heirlooms held by families, the property of collectors, or the booty of thieves and salvagers.

When the PCs discover an old friend has been kidnapped by the owner of an entertainment haven, they must dare the labyrinthine slums to rescue him. Law enforcement is extremely unhelpful, and the criminal gangs that run the entertainment havens are far from polite — especially when it comes to releasing their employees from their contracts.

When the PCs stumble on an ancient Mandaarian historical record and decipher it, they learn of an ancient civilization that once inhabited the Alexandria system. This civilization was malevolent — perhaps even servitors of the Elder Worm — but possessed technology well in advance of Humanity. Can they follow the clues from the record that point to an ancient city buried deep in the deserts of New Alexandria? And when a lone Mandaarian shows up out of nowhere to warn them off, will the PCs listen?

PAGE 79 — POLYPHEMUS

Although hundreds of abandoned ore mines remain open to the public, some are less well known... and not used for such innocent purposes. Smugglers and criminals have established hideouts and storage depots in them. It's easy to get lost among the maze of tunnels; more than one person has died down there, leaving only his skeleton to scare future "visitors." Some rumors link members of the Global Council to the illicit (but often highly profitable) smuggling trade.

Polyphemus Plot Seeds

Here are three plot seeds for Polyphemus:

A terrorist organization claims to have planted a nuclear bomb deep inside Liappu Island. If that's true, and they detonate it, the mainstay of Polyphemus's economy will be destroyed and millions of lives lost. The government believes the terrorists have some way of keeping an eye on military and police forces, so they need the PCs to sneak into the mines, find their way to the bomb, and disarm it (or kill all the terrorists). Along the way they have to deal with smugglers trying to protect their stashes, cave-ins, booby traps, and anything else you can think of.

While killing time in a Polyphemus spaceport bar, the PCs meet an old free trader who claims to have found a new, untapped source of precious gems and other valuable crystals. Unfortunately he's broke and can't take advantage of the information. If the PCs agree to stake him on a venture, he'll cut them in for half the profits. If they want to come along and protect their investment, fine by him — it can get dangerous out there! Just what is this "new source" of crystals? How did the old man find it, and could it really be as profitable as he claims? Does anyone else know about it?

A group of pirates has been unusually successful attacking ships coming and going from Polyphemus recently. After a friend's ship gets hit and the friend ends up in the hospital, the heroes have to investigate, find out what's going on, and put a stop to the piracy.

PAGE 85 — SIGMA CAERULEUS III

Here are three plot seeds for Sigma Caeruleus III:

Someone seems to be working behind the scenes to stir up animosity between the Yezidi and the Zarr. There've been several odd incidents of bodies being found mutilated, and rumors of violations of the code of Tranta Shun by one side or the other. The situation's rapidly coming to a boil, but planetary officials can't figure out what's causing it. They ask the PCs to do a little digging around and stop the crisis before it goes any further.

A strange new epidemic begins sweeping through Zarr communities. As more and more Zarr fall sick and die, rumors claim bioterrorism is the cause — someone wants to wipe out the Zarr and created a tailored virus to do the job. The PCs decide (or are asked, or ordered...) to investigate the situation and find out what's going on.

A fad for Tranta Shun sweeps parts of the Empire, causing opposed "dueling societies" and "combat clubs" to spring into existence. An enterprising holofilm producer decides he can make big credits by producing a documentary about the authentic Tranta Shun. The catch is, the Tranta Shun warriors on Sigma Caeruleus III don't *want* to be filmed; they consider the whole thing foolish and an insult to their ancient code. Undeterred, the producer hires the PCs as his bodyguards and troubleshooters.

PAGE 92 — TETSUO

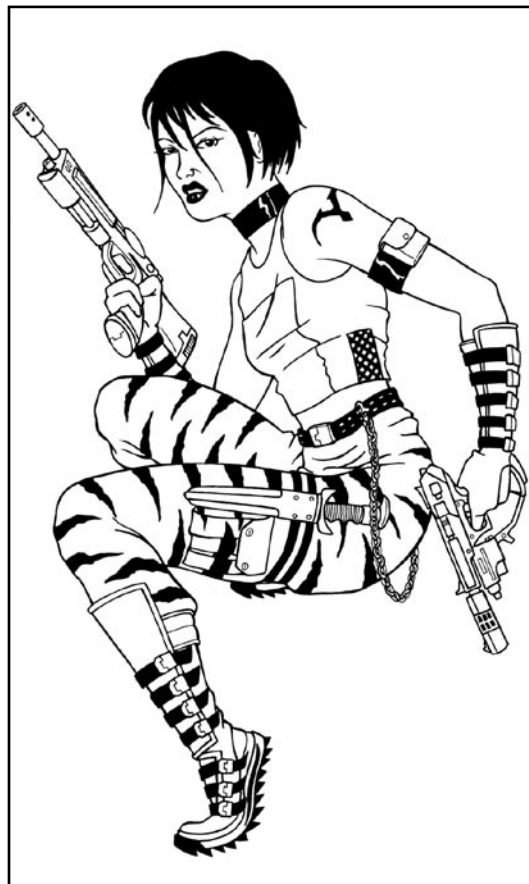
With its abundance of salvageable weaponry, warships, and natural resources the Tetsuo system has become one of the primary targets/resources of black marketeers, rebels, arms smugglers, and organized crime.

Drega's Dragoons

Carlita Drega is a hot-blooded Human who was born on Trovatore to radical parents with a livid hatred of authority in general and the Empire in particular. Fancies herself a classic liberator in the mold of Lawrence of Arabia, she's gained the trust of much of the Skav population by leading them on a daring series of raids against the Firsters, stealing badly needed supplies from Tenchi and infiltrating its Skav underclass. She's also established a good working relationship with House Tanaka, which has been instrumental in helping her to smuggle weapons offworld to earn a hefty profit.

The Xenovore Fleet

Several ships from the infamous Xenovore Fleet (*Terran Empire*, page 104) use Graveyard as their base. Easily slipping past the Watanabe patrol craft, they hide their massive vessels amongst the wreckage of the Great Equilateral Boneyard while they trade with the local Skavs for weaponry and supplies. Drega has established cordial relations with several of the Xenovore pirate captains, whom she hopes to lure into her planned rebellion with the promise of a new homeworld. If her scheme succeeds they'll form the core of the rebel fleet along with vessels salvaged from Tetsuo's Kuiper Belt for refitting at Graveyard's space station.



PAGE 97 — TORACTA

Toracta presents a multitude of game opportunities regardless of the style of campaign. Your characters could go there for a big game hunt, visit a resort on vacation and get sucked into some sort of intrigue, work to improve the "plight" of the Toractans, or perhaps even foment a rebellion against the Empire.

First Haven

There are dozens of entrances into the Toractan underground civilization, but the caves in First Haven are the largest and most commonly used. Were rebel forces or civil activists able to find a way to destroy the entrance and block the main thoroughfare to and from the surface, the Empire would be without access to much of the Toractan workforce. The smaller entrances would be easier to defend against Imperial forces provided the rebels had enough people to secure them. But the most important question would be whether the Toractans in the tunnels would support the insurgency.

Sub-Minister Dorag Pitano

In the public eye, Sub-Minister Pitano is always cheery and optimistic. Behind closed doors he's cold, unhappy, and when it serves him, vicious. He hates Toracta and its people; more than anything else he'd like to be assigned elsewhere. He relieves his frustrations with occasional visits to resorts and hunting locations where he lets his usually hidden bloodlust run free.

Toracta Plot Seeds

Here are three plot seeds for Toracta:

The classic Toracta plot: Monster Hunt! The heroes have to go to Toracta to hunt the *rostanac* (see character sheet below) or other monstrous fauna. They may hunt for fun, or they may have a more important agenda — for example, rescuing Sub-Minister Pitano after his hunting expedition gets lost.

If the PCs are Imperial agents, the Empire may give them the task of "dealing with" civil rights activists or other people making a stink about "the Toracta situation." This places the heroes on the horns of a dilemma when some of the people they have to shut up turn out to be genuinely sincere and caring individuals, friends or associates, or the like.

A tunnel collapse traps the PCs and dozens of Toractans deep beneath the surface! The heroes have to overcome various obstacles and perils, including a limited supply of oxygen, and find a way to lead the victims to safety.

**TETSUO
PLOT SEEDS**

The PCs have come into possession of their very own ship — but it's an old one, a model for which parts are rarely manufactured anymore. Rather than spend a fortune for new parts, they realize that they may be able to buy or salvage what they need from wrecks on Tetsuo. In search of discount ship parts, they soon find themselves embroiled in conflicts between the various gangs of scavengers, bandits, and mercenaries that "control" so much of the planet.

A wealthy hunter has decided to pursue the most dangerous prey: mutated Tetsuan Xenovores! But after he goes missing on Tetsuo for a week, his family hires the PCs to track him down and either help him finish his hunt, rescue him, or return his body to them for burial.

If the heroes have powerful Imperial connections, the Tetsuans might try to recruit or hire them as "lobbyists" for a new terraforming project. Given the vast amounts of money the Tetsuan economy could bring in if it were once again a Type 1 world, if the PCs help Tetsuo they might one day find themselves with some powerful, wealthy friends... or if they fail, some deadly enemies.

ROSTANAC				
Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
55	STR	45	20-	Lift 50 tons; 11d6 [11]
18	DEX	24	13-	OCV: 6/DCV: 6
23	CON	26	14-	
20	BODY	20	13-	
6	INT	-4	10-	PER Roll 10-/13-
5	EGO	-10	10-	ECV: 2
25	PRE	15	14-	PRE Attack: 5d6
10	COM	0	11-	
15	PD	4		Total: 15 PD (15 rPD)
15	ED	10		Total: 15 ED (15 rED)
3	SPD	2		Phases: 4, 8, 12
20	REC	8		
50	END	2		
60	STUN	0		Total Characteristic Cost: 142 (+65 with NCM)

Movement: Running: 24"/48"
Leaping: 11"/22"
Swimming: 5"/10"

Cost	Powers	END
45	<i>Claw:</i> HKA 3d6 (6d6 w/STR)	4
15	<i>Thick Skin:</i> Damage Resistance (15 PD/15 ED)	0
18	<i>Heavy:</i> Knockback Resistance -9"	0
36	<i>Long Legs:</i> Running +18" (24" total)	4
3	<i>Long Legs:</i> Swimming +3" (5" total)	1



- 12 *Enhanced Senses:* +3 PER with Hearing Group and Sight Group 0
- 20 *Enhanced Hearing:* Targeting for Hearing Group 0
- 9 *Reach:* Stretching 2", Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½); Always Direct (-¼), No Noncombat Stretching (-¼), No Velocity Damage (-¼) 0

Total Powers & Skill Cost: 158
Total Cost: 300

- 75+ Disadvantages**
- 30 *Enraged:* Berserk when it smells blood (Common), go 11-, recover 11-
 - 10 *Physical Limitation:* Huge (Frequently, Slightly Impairing)
 - 15 *Physical Limitation:* Animal Intelligence (Frequently, Greatly Impairing)
 - 15 *Physical Limitation:* Very Limited Manipulation (Frequently, Greatly Impairing)
 - 155 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 300

Ecology: Toracta is well known for the variety of extremely large creatures that stalk the jungles. The most dangerous is the *rostanac* ("eater of forests"), which roams the thick jungles of Toracta. It nests at the top of hills after it's cleared away all of the trees and foliage. Although it prefers to live off of the flesh of other animals, it can survive on plants if necessary.

Personality/Motivation: A rostanac is concerned with four things: eating, sleeping, mating, and protecting its domain. Fortunately, it can dine after defending its territory — it usually kills anything it thinks is threatening its nest.

Powers/Tactics: Since the rostanac is a solitary creature, it cannot rely on pack tactics like most of the other creatures on Toracta. From its hilltop nest it watches the jungle floor, looking and listening for prey. Once it locates a target, it charges down into the jungle to lay claim to its quarry.

Campaign Use: The Toractans have been dealing with the rostanac since prehistoric times. Dozens of times every year security and food laborers are sent into the jungle to kill as many as possible. Rostanac hunting as a sport is popular among the brave and foolhardy.

Appearance: The rostanac is an enormous quasi-humanoid reptilian creature that stands over 15 meters tall and bears some resemblance to a Terran allosaur or tyrannosaur. Its thick hide is generally dark grey in color with occasional splotches of auburn, white, brown, and black. The legs are long, thick, and muscular, the arms are long, seemingly spindly, and lithe. The three fingers on each "hand" end in razor-sharp claws that can grow up to five inches in length. Bulky shoulders flank its head; two rows of gnarled, jagged teeth fill its large mouth.

PAGE 101 — TRIDYMITTE BETA

The Cristobalites have one of the best-kept secrets in the Empire, which could destroy them if it ever became public: they are artificially-created beings constructed by Malvans hundreds of thousands of years ago for the specific purpose of mining mineral-rich Tridymite Beta. Their entire history is a deliberate fabrication. The Malvans placed them atop the mountains deliberately to make their job of remotely controlling massive mining machines easier, then abandoned the entire project before any serious mining could take place. Once the Malvans had departed, the Cristobalites used this equipment to cover up any traces of their former masters' presence, then drove all the equipment into an active volcano in an immature snit. Although they soon came to regret this action, it couldn't be undone. With nothing else to do or any way to do it, they became obsessed with philosophical discourse, developing the unique culture they have today.

If anyone learned the truth, under Imperial law the Cristobalites would become AIs with no civil rights, and their wealth would revert to state control. Thus, they live in total terror of the Malvans, even though there's little evidence that members of the ancient, decadent species even remember constructing them (and, in truth, they don't).

Cristobalites

The Cristobalites are a silicon-based species. Although not numerous (only about two thousand of them are known to exist), they're nevertheless important participants in the Terran Empire due to their planet's great mineral wealth and their tendency to have high-profile public occupations. With their utterly unique biology, species abilities, and a tendency toward personal eccentricity, many Cristobalites are minor celebrities of some sort or otherwise noteworthy in some way. The generally pursue careers as pushy diplomats, avant-garde artists, charismatic anchormen (or anchorcrystals, as the case may be), obnoxious lawyers, and the like.

Biology: Enormous slabs of a cloudy, quartz-like substance shot through with tiny veins of green, blue, and red, Cristobalites pulse slightly with a pink inner light. As far as any Imperial scientist can tell these colorful impurities are organs of some sort, although their function and purpose remain a mystery — one the Cristobalites themselves have perpetuated by being remarkably tight-lipped about their own biology. Cristobalites always refer to themselves as male, although they appear to have no gender. No one has ever observed an infant member of the species.

An average Cristobalite stands around two meters (6.5-7 feet) tall and weighs roughly 550 kg (about 1,200 pounds), but their shapes vary somewhat. Given several years of free time a Cristobalite can slowly alter his basic shape (although his mass and weight remain the same). Since their initial contact with Imperial society they've become enamored with Human culture, resulting in their assuming a wide variety of shapes ranging from the beautifully artistic, to the tasteless, to the incred-



ibly strange. Noteworthy examples of this include an abstract artist who's his own artwork (and rents himself out), a Christian monk who took a vow of silence before turning himself into a church pew, and a crystalline statue of the ancient earth dictator Stalin (who calls himself "Super Stalin") who floats around Russia on a hover platform shouting orders at people through a megaphone.

Cristobalites are photosynthetic in some manner completely alien to Terran biology. They're able to convert nearly any sort of radiated energy into sustenance. Good-quality sunlight seems to be their favorite (being put in orbit around the Earth's sun for a month is a popular vacation for a Cristobalite), but heat, electricity, and even hard radiation seem to be "edible" to them. They don't breathe in any known manner and are hard as diamond, making them practically indestructible. They're also largely immobile — it would take a Cristobalite nearly a decade to get from one side of a medium-sized room to the other under his own power.

Lacking any of the senses or sensory organs normally associated with organic species, Cristobalites communicate by radio waves on a wide variety of frequencies. Their language itself sounds something like a cross between an ancient phone modem and a Terran whale song. The frequency a Cristobalite uses is also important, a bit like inflection in Human language. On their home planet they set aside frequencies for specified functions. For example, low-powered AM frequencies are often used for informal public

TRIDYMITE BETA PLOT SEEDS

One of the PCs receives a visit from a Cristobalite who's pleased to inform him that he's won the Third Annual Cristobalite Sweepstakes! In addition to a substantial credits prize, he and up to ten of his friends, loved ones, servants, and motile food sources get a luxury-class three-week trip to scenic Tridymite Beta. It all seems like it's on the up and up... though the PC never entered any Sweepstakes... and the PCs can't find any evidence there was ever a First or Second Annual Cristobalite Sweepstakes... and the messenger seems awfully intent on hurrying them to Tridymite B. What the heck's going on? And hey, are those macadamia nuts in the starliner snack cart?

A ragtag band of pirates discovers that certain types of crystals from one of the Lapidary Playas can *really* enhance the power of lasers and related weapons. Suddenly they've gone from being just another group of space scum to a *major* threat to Imperial peace and security. The PCs have to figure out a way to stop them... and, perhaps, to keep the secret of the crystals from becoming widely known.

After the PCs do something Important and Very Useful To Persons In Power, they receive an invitation to a *major* Cristobalite party on Earth. Everyone who's anyone will be there. Wackiness ensues.

discussions between groups of individuals, while tight-beam high-frequency FM channels at the top of the bandwidth are used for private conversations. Tridymite B's short-wave frequencies are set aside for the nearly constant (if sometimes spotty) worldwide chatter that outside observers have described as a cross between a planetary datanet discussion board, merchant marine radio chatter, and a lively church social. Outsiders are welcome to join in this ongoing planetary palaver from special computer terminals in Tuttle town. To actually converse with another species using sound, Cristobalites use a "radio translator" device easily worn around the neck.

With their insanely high intelligence and photographic memories, Cristobalites are able to carry on multiple conversations on a variety of frequencies at the same time (at one point a member of the species rented himself out as a satellite for a decade). This natural ability also enables them to use and get along with computers to an extent practically impossible for most species. Cristobalites can also download a large amount of data from a computer — say, for example, how to speak Thorgon — remember most of it accurately, and then cram the information so quickly that he can become fluent in the language or subject in a matter of minutes.

Since they lack manipulative limbs, it was nearly impossible for the Cristobalites to create material goods until Humanity arrived. Thus they have no native technology of any recognizable type. In recent times they've used their considerable wealth to have a variety of useful robotic servants manufactured. The most common robot is commonly known as a "rockjock." It's a small but powerful platform on which the Cristobalite sits/stands so he can move at faster than geological speeds. A rockjock generally looks something like a small tractor or hovercraft, although its appearance can vary a good deal based on the individual tastes of its owner. Its owner controls it via constant high-frequency radio chatter on the 920 mhz band. Rockjocks can have any number of useful devices built into them including sensors, telescoping arms, antigravity beams, projectors, and weapons. Often a Cristobalite programs his trusty mount to perform any number of acts independently of its user.

Society And Culture: Since the Cristobalites are a species of eccentrics and individualists, most of Cristobalite culture boils down to a number of long-running arguments about the nature of God, existence, and the Universe in general, spiced up with a liberal dose of humor and perverse wit. Since Cristobalites are functionally immortal, it's not really known exactly how long these debates have been going on: hundreds of thousands of years is a safe guess. When the first Human survey ship stumbled into the Tridymite system, got over being bombarded with hundreds of curious radio signals at once, and established communications with the pretty but annoyingly noisy rocks (to quote the captain's logbook), about half of the species indicated that they'd be *more* than happy to move offworld as soon as was possible and would

certainly pay handsomely for the privilege once they figured out what "credits" were and how to get some. Thus one can safely assume that the philosophical discourse that forms the core of traditional Cristobalite culture has been going on for more than long enough.

On their home planet, Cristobalites generally dwell in groups of around a dozen on various mountaintops (it helps with reception). These groups are known as schools and are the basic unit of their society, roughly equivalent to a Human family but also comparable to a cult, school of philosophy, fraternity, or political party depending on which member of the species you ask. Members of the same school often exhibit similar traits, such as a common philosophical outlook or sense of humor, although some display group characteristics that only make sense to Cristobalites. Generally members of the same school live near each other (on the same planet) even when they move away from Tridymite Beta. There are currently members

CRISTOBALITE PACKAGE DEAL

Cost	Abilities
-30	-30 STR
-30	-10 DEX
40	+20 BODY
10	+10 INT
10	+10 PRE
10	+1 SPD
15	<i>Radar "Sight":</i> Radar (Radio Group)
10	<i>EM Spectrum Sensing:</i> HRRP (Radio Group)
17	<i>Can Talk To Machines:</i> Telepathy 5d6 (Machine class of minds); Limited Class Of Minds (Computers Only; -½)
60	<i>Diamond Body:</i> Armor (20 PD/20 ED)
4	<i>Diamond Body:</i> Knockback Resistance -2"
50	<i>Indestructible:</i> Life Support (Total, including Longevity: Immortality)
-12	<i>Moves At Geologic Speeds:</i> Running -6" (0" total)
-2	<i>Moves At Geologic Speeds:</i> Swimming -2" (0" total)
10	Money: Wealthy
5	Eidetic Memory
3	Lightning Calculator
5	Cramming
175	Total Cost Of Package Abilities:

Value	Disadvantages
20	Distinctive Features: giant talking crystal (Not Concealable; Causes Major Reaction)
20	Physical Limitation: can barely move by Human standards (All the Time, Greatly Impairing)
15	Physical Limitation: Weighty (weighs about 550 kg) (Frequently, Greatly Impairing)
25	Physical Limitation: No Manipulative Limbs (All the Time, Fully Impairing)
20	Physical Limitation: No Conventional Senses (All the Time, Greatly Impairing)
10	Vulnerability: 2 x Effect from Sonic Attacks (Uncommon)
10	Vulnerability: 2 x Effect from Vibration Attacks (Uncommon)

Total Value Of Package Disadvantages: 120

of a dozen schools living on Earth and Mars, most infamously the Church of the Living Feedback (whose members all work as popular DJs).

Cristobalites have an almost fanatical love of the arts, especially music, sculpture, and architecture. With their natural radio-related abilities they're able to "see" sculpture and architecture through radar. To enjoy vision similar to that of most biological races they have to rely on images relayed through a rockjock's optical equipment (or comparable worn devices), which tends to have a lower quality and frame rate than Human vision. Many Cristobalites are generous patrons of Imperial artists and collect art of all sorts, which they use amongst themselves as a sort of currency based on a variety of factors not easily understood by members of other species.

Cristobalites love to vacation in rare and exotic locations. Because they don't need to breathe and can consume radiation for nourishment, those locations can be nearly anywhere from the bottom of a poisonous methane ocean to a stable orbit around a particularly volcanic planet. Finding new and exotic vacation destinations seems to be a matter of some considerable prestige amongst Cristobalites. They have been known to go to great lengths to locate particularly bizarre "recreation spots" and, equally importantly, let other members of their species know specifically who found each one. For example, there's a location on the coast of Earth's Antarctica known as That Fascinatingly White Place Ribomi Val The Explorer Found.



PAGE 105 — VINARCUS

There are plenty of interesting things going on in and around Vinarcus.

Otho

The Terran Empire isn't actually ignoring this tiny colony world. A unique joint project of the Terran Intelligence Command, Mon'dabi Federated Intelligence, and a tiny but extremely militant faction of Zurites established during General Feng's regency, the Otho colony is really a cover for the construction of a tiny ATRI 12 fleet beneath the planet's surface. Like a dagger pointed directly at the Ackálian Empire's heart, this high-tech strike force is comprised of eight battleships, 10 heavy cruisers, 14 light cruisers, 20 destroyers, and a heavy carrier. If hostilities should recommence between the Empire and the Ackálians, this fleet will emerge from a hidden location in Otho's deep canyons to strike directly at Zur, liberating it while the Core Fleet engages the Ackorsha from its bases at Vinarcus and Adamant. Of course, maintaining the absolute secrecy of this fleet is paramount, and PCs might get caught up in the great intergalactic game of espionage if they should happen to discover its existence themselves.

Creatures Of The Firefalls

The Mandaarians had a very good reason for not colonizing Vinarcus. As a species that's 40% telepathic, they sensed the presence of the beings in the Firefalls and were.... disquieted. An intelligent but entirely alien race with minds that cannot be fathomed by most normal entities, the Firefall creatures exist only partially in Earth's reality. Most of their time is spent exploring dimensions beyond those which man can perceive using a kind of astral projection that leaves their semi-physical form swimming meditatively in the burning organic hydrogen expulsions of the plateaus. If they were disturbed from their eons-long contemplations by, say, an annoying Human psychic, there's no telling what sort horrible vengeance they might wreak upon an interloper... and his entire species.

Executive Governor Alexis Zhukov

A man of extreme ambitions born to a relatively new aristocratic family determined to advance itself amongst the Imperial nobility, Alexis is doing his best to impress the Empress Marissa with his work on Vinarcus. But the very nature of his appointment separates him from the seat of Imperial power on Earth, and the old families constantly maneuver to keep this upstart politician with the famous name in his place. If he's ignored or slighted for a long period of time, Zhukov may become bitter, rebellious, and open to other offers.

VINARCUS PLOT SEEDS

The heroes find themselves stuck on Vinarcus without enough money to repair their ship, travel further, or support themselves for long. Lacking any better alternative, they become genome gauchos, "prospecting" in the dangerous Lachesis jungles for valuable DNA. Will they find a treasure in some new plant or animal... or are there other secrets lurking in the deep jungle?

A member of the Thane (see *Terran Empire*, pages 46-47, 195 and page 158 of this book) hears about the Firefalls' fish-creatures. Realizing what they are based on his own mystic researches and psionic explorations of other dimensions, he decides to stir up some trouble by traveling to Vinarcus and mentally "prodding" them. He hopes they'll lash out and destroy the colony, and maybe even provoke another war with the Ackálians. The heroes have to figure out what's going on and put a stop to it before unholy hell breaks loose in the Empire.

While on Vinarcus, the PCs are arrested by Imperial officials and charged with espionage (spying on vinarcium mining and processing) and attempting to acquire vinarcium! It's obvious they're being framed, but by who and why them? If they can't free themselves and find the *real* spies, huge amounts of vinarcium may fall into the hands of the Empire's enemies....

ACKÁL PLOT SEEDS

An ultra-wealthy hunting aficionado hires the PCs to smuggle him onto Ackál and into the Sargeht Wildlife Preserve to hunt and kill one of the few remaining *yulgami* (an Ackálian animal similar to a rhino-sized tiger) left alive. All the heroes have to do is avoid Ackálian security, keep from being killed by the wildlife, help him bag the brute, and get safely away to earn their hefty fee.

The Terran Empire has hired (assigned, blackmailed, coerced...) the PCs into finding out more detailed information about the "critical possessions" and the fortress worlds protecting them. The heroes have to somehow sneak into Ackálian space and survey this region without being detected by the Ackorsha, Kairensha, or local security forces... and then make it back to Terran space alive and with their data intact.

The PCs have been granted permission to conduct a survey of lifeforms in the Neg'luss Waste for a holo-documentary for Terran broadcast (or have been asked to accompany someone who's making the documentary). While they're on Ackál, they're approached by several males, one of them a fairly high-ranking military bureaucrat, who want to defect. What will they do?

CHAPTER THREE

PAGE 112 — ACKÁL

The power beyond their borders that the Ackálians have heard rumors about is the Roin'esh Union, an empire controlled by the shapeshifting Roin'esh of Randugar VII. Contact between the Ackálians and the Roin'esh first occurs in 2704. For more information, see pages 27-28 and 33 of *Galactic Champions*.

High Consul Angrata

Angrata is everything she's described as being in the main text. She's also a high-ranking agent of the Kairensha who uses her position to gather information on Imperial activities and noteworthy figures. The Terran Intelligence Command suspects her and keeps a close eye on her, but so far she's been clever enough to avoid implicating herself.

PAGE 117 — DORVALA

Here are three plot seeds for Dorvala:

A Perseid graduate student hires the PCs and their ship to make a journey throughout the Perseid Empire. His goal is to discover the ancient origin of Dorvala. He leads the PCs on a wild goose chase throughout the entire Empire, but as they near their goal, they find more and more artifacts that look suspiciously Perseid. Could the graduate student have actual proof of where Dorvala came from? Is it possible the Perseids evolved on some other world? And if Dorvala isn't the cradle of Perseid civilization, what does this mean for the many traditions built up around the homeworld?

As the PCs leave Dorvala, they find they have a stowaway: Princess Y'larra has decided she can't stand the traditions of her family and is making her escape. Sadly for the PCs, the Perseid military thinks they kidnapped her. Will they survive long enough to convince the authorities of the truth? And what happens if a male PC and the Princess develop romantic feelings for one another?

If one of the PCs is a Perseid, maybe he feels duty-bound to journey to the homeworld and pay his respects at the City of the Holy when the PCs are nearby. But when the PCs are attacked at the spaceport, and then again by assassins in Varksos, they discover the PC Perseid is the scion of a line long thought dead. The noble family who currently holds his family's possessions fears he's come to Dorvala to take his rightful place among the nobility.

PAGE 123 — MON'DA

Here's what's really happening on Mon'da.

The Asteroid Device

The device the two Mon'dabi miners found in the center of the asteroid is part of a personal sensor unit from around the year 3100. Two time traveling historians from that era accidentally left it behind. If 2640-era scientists could unravel its technological secrets (unlikely, but possible), it could revolutionize the field of sensor technology decades or centuries in advance, perhaps causing problems in the timestream.

The Phrygonian Pyramids

Both theories about the Phrygonian pyramids are partly correct. During the Phrygonian period an Elder Worm was awakened from his long slumber when an asteroid hit the planet where he was hiding. He escaped the devastation — perhaps in an old Elder Worm ship, or through strange Elder Worm magics — and somehow came to Mon'da. There he briefly conquered the Phrygians, but they soon turned on him and destroyed him. Today the record of this event is preserved only as a few tomb-paintings that depict the Elder Worm as a demon who comes to seize the souls of departed kings. Since the Elder Worm claimed to have come from the stars, the Phrygonians built the astrologically-oriented pyramids as "defenses" to protect their kings from others of his kind.

Galacar Shen'ro

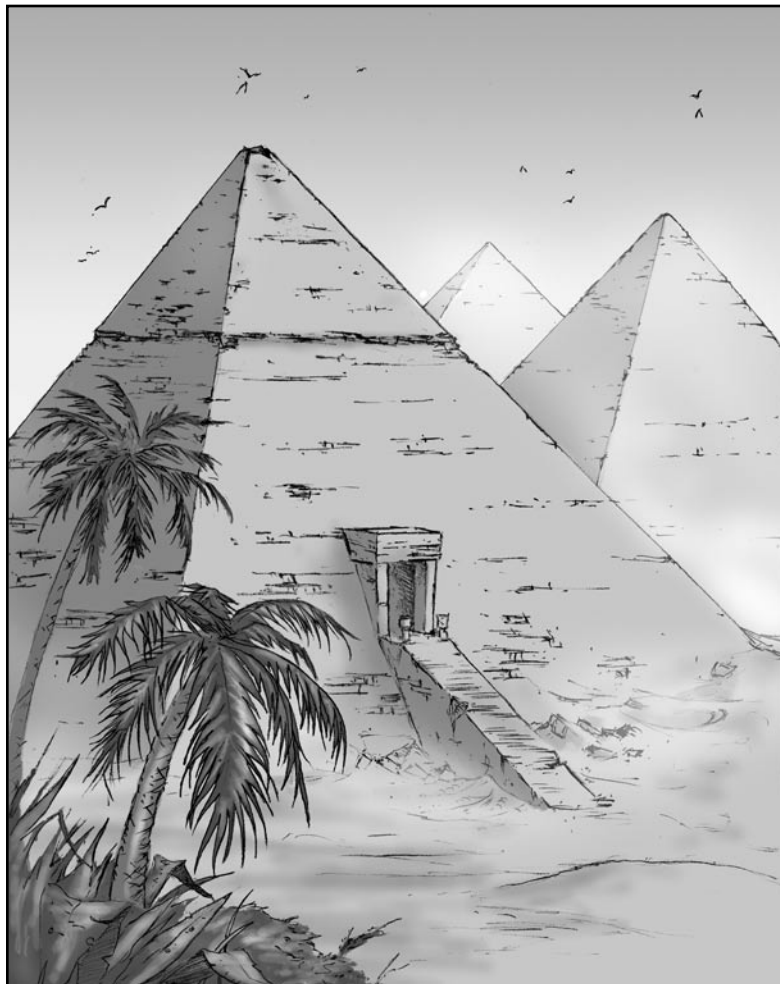
Shen'ro's reclusiveness is the result of mental illness. He's become slightly paranoid, but more than that tends to fixate on unusual ideas. One week the idea that stars are sentient beings will obsess him and he'll finance a research project to prove it. The next week he's forgotten all about

MON'DA PLOT SEEDS

The Ackálians want to destroy the Ackálian Wars Memorial — without, of course, letting the deed get traced back to them, since that would be an act of war. Through a series of intermediaries they hire a group of mercenaries to do the dirty deed. Now it's up to the heroes to find out what's going on in time to stop it... or to help the Mon'dabi avenge the crime without starting a war.

A group of female Mon'dabi in exile are crusading for greater civil rights for and better treatment of their sisters still on Mon'da. They want to hire the PCs to perpetrate a non-violent but highly embarrassing act against one of the more reactionary and discriminatory governments on Mon'da. If caught, the PCs will almost certainly face the death penalty. Do they take the job... and if so, how does the caper go?

Uncharacteristically, a holy war seems about to flare up between two Rhigasa sects. Mon'dabi aren't usually so fanatical about their religion, which has led some people to speculate privately that there may be more going on than meets the eye. A prominent Mon'dabi friend of the PCs asks them to look into it — he knows they'll be completely neutral and objective in evaluating all the evidence.



that (though the project continues until the money runs out...) and has instead focused his attention on evil conspiracies in the Rim League. He could easily become a generous, if unstable, patron of a group of PCs.

PAGE 128 — RAVANCHE

Fifteen years ago copies of most Imperial files about the Ravanche system were anonymously leaked to prominent academics throughout the Terran Empire. The secretive source provided a steady stream of classified reports — everything from images of the deceased crews and schematics of derelict starships to atmosphere analysis and radiation readings — before abruptly falling silent six months later. Several of the recipients of the classified information made discreet inquiries as to the source in an effort to confirm the information's accuracy. All of them soon received an ominous visit from Terran Security Service agents (and in some cases the Mind Police as well). The agents confiscated all documents, files, and other evidence pertaining to Ravanche and warned the researchers to cease and desist.

Here's what the scholars who received the information and have a good memory of it know about Ravanche. The actual data remains available only to Imperial military and government officials of sufficiently high security clearance. Anyone who asks around about Ravanche too indiscreetly will definitely attract the attention of the TSS (and per-

haps the Mind Police)... and few people want that.

■ The star Ravanche was, beyond a shadow of doubt, affected by a weapon. Several of the derelict starships have archived footage show some sort of man-made object colliding with the star accompanied by recorded readings of changes in the star's solar flare activity. What's not known is who launched the object — was it a doomsday device fired by the Ravanchians? Did the Rakne miscalculate the destructive power of the device? Or was some other species or agency involved?

■ In the initial poisoning of the star, the solar flare activity was far more violent. This was what destroyed the majority of the derelicts in orbit around Ravanche II.

■ There are a multitude of species represented among the dead on both sides, indicating that both civilizations were interstellar. The Ravanchians called themselves the *Gwllrawr*. The Rakne are the *Rezilu*. Names of other spe-

cies were indicated in the records, but the scholars can't recall them.

■ The Empire has deciphered the languages of both combatants. Still unknown is the cause and complete history of the conflict. But the Empire does know that the conflict had been going on for some time, with the *Gwllrawr* being steadily pushed back to their home system.

■ Though it's difficult to say for sure, the Navy estimates both species were ATRI 11 on the cusp of ATRI 12... much like the Empire of 2640.

■ The *Gwllrawr*'s former territory lay largely in the present day Terran Empire. Using star charts obtained from the derelict ships, the Navy has located a handful of ruins likely to be from *Gwllrawr*ian civilization. The *Rezilu*'s former territory, on the other hand, lies mostly in Thorgon space. Naval researchers are interested in what happened to the *Rezilu*. If there's knowledge that would lead to a system-destroying weapon, it's most likely to be found in the Thorgon Empire — a belief that makes many Imperial officials uncomfortable, since the Thorgons would undoubtedly use the weapon if they discovered it.

■ What happened on Ravanche I to slow its rotation is unknown. Interpolation of data recovered from the derelict ships indicates it had a rotational period of 20-30 standard hours before the poison-

ing of Ravanche. The most likely hypothesis is that the resident Gwllrawr (there's some evidence of colonies on the planet) somehow stopped the planet's rotation in the hope of using its mass as a shield against the star's radiation and thus saving the colonies on the darkside.

■ The Navy has found twenty-one individuals from both sides in cold sleep. Though these individuals seem to be still alive, xenobiologists believe any attempt to awaken them after such a long hibernation will lead to their deaths. The Navy has recently requested the services of telepaths from the Mind Police. Researchers hope these telepaths can examine the sleepers' memories and learn something valuable, or even make contact with whatever consciousness lingers on.

RAVANCHE PLOT SEEDS

While exploring an uncharted system, the PCs discover a lost colony of Ravanchians (Gwllrawr). They've fallen into primitivism, but they maintain an extensive oral tradition which centers around a prophecy of people coming from the stars to take them home. Primitive star charts, crude things carved into stone, show that Ravanche is their home. Will the PCs fulfill the prophecy and help the Gwllrawr return to their lost homeland — and before the PCs do, will they investigate the situation and learn what happened to the Gwllrawr's home? Or will the PCs turn these primitive people over to the tender mercies of the Navy?

A Thorgon attack force descends on the Ravanche system. Commodore Tsai plans to attack, but she needs to get word back to the Empire and the Thorgons have somehow jammed her long-range communications. The PCs are the only civilians with a ship nearby, so she orders them to deliver the message in person. But a Thorgon stealth ship intercepted the message and is in pursuit. Can the PCs evade the Thorgon forces long enough to reach the nearest Navy base? What caused the sudden Thorgon move in blatant violation of treaty? Is war now looming on the horizon?

Navy researchers have identified the ruins of a large Reziluu settlement on a populated planet in nearby Thorgon space. If the PCs have ties to the military or intelligence services, they're ordered to infiltrate the planet and investigate the ruins while avoiding Thorgon detection. If the PCs are independent salvagers, perhaps they discover the location of the Reziluu settlement on their own (or are secretly fed the information by the Navy), and knowing they can sell their findings for a high price decide to infiltrate the Thorgon-controlled planet.

PAGE 131 — VENWORDIEN IV

Naturally, there are always lots of interesting things occurring on the pirate planet.

Venwordien Viri

The Captains' Council is indeed preparing for the next virus outbreak in Port Bounty, but not in the way many residents hope. Over the last decade, the Captains' Council has made a considerable amount of money selling bioweapons — virus carriers, victims for experimentation, and knowledge about a virus in addition to the virus itself — to the Ackálian. Besides earning money, these deals have helped to protect Venwordien IV from Ackálian aggression. On occasion, the Captains' Council has traded a virus for Ackálian opposition to Terran or Mon'dabi proposals for punitive expeditions to the planet.

Other Political Ploys

The Captains' Council has engaged in many political ploys to keep the Terran and Ackálian Empires and Mon'dabi Federation at bay. The main thrust of its machinations is to make one government "rattle the saber" at any attempts to move a military force into the region. Among the various ploys it's used are:

- Vysarth has told the Ackálian Empire about some of Y'largan's plans to help his people (of course, if Y'largan ever learned about this, the Captain's Council could explode in a frenzy of infighting and bloodshed)
- All of the captains have turned in especially notorious criminals to the three governments. They've even done this to criminals who've paid the Captains' Cut. If the Venwordiens learned of this, they'd almost certainly turn on the Council.
- The Council (or its flunkies) has worked for all three governments' intelligence services, playing double and even triple agent at times.
- The Council has inserted falsified reports into the three governments' databases to support arguments that one government's planned military movements in the region were just a ruse to cover expansion of territory.

Van Rook's Death

Vysarth orchestrated van Rook's death. Van Rook had been discussing Y'largan's desire to bring his species out of the Ackálian Empire in an attempt to form a bloc on the council. Vysarth wasn't truly threatened; he merely killed her out of principle and sheer disdain for a lesser species. His agent in this matter was Jacob Silver. Although Vysarth never promised Silver a Council seat, he let Silver believe he'd receive the "promotion." Silver knows his position is untenable and that Vysarth set him up. He also knows no one will truly care if he makes everything public. He's currently looking for a way to disappear from Venwordien IV... and the PCs might be just the answer he's looking for.

The Fourth Council Member

The Council remains silent because it can't agree whether to elevate another captain to van Rook's position. Y'largan would enthusiastically support a captain who agreed with his goal of freeing the Bathel; otherwise he sees no reason to fill the vacancy. Caan is against it — he'd prefer that the spoils were split three ways rather than four. Vysarth, the only voice that truly matters, is waiting to see which captains put themselves forward for the position. So far he's less than impressed with the candidates (although he finds Slookabas the most promising in a limited field). If the PCs are criminals who've exhibited an appropriate amount of derring-do in their activities, Vysarth might persuade them to pursue the seat... but with the Malvan it's difficult to know whether he truly wants them to have it or if he's simply trying to make things more interesting.

Venwordien IV Plot Seeds

Here are three plot seeds for Venwordien IV:

A PC throws his hat into the ring for the fourth seat on the Captains' Council. Can he fend off his rivals while convincing the current members to accept him into their ranks? Convincing the current members won't be easy — it might require uncovering some dirty secrets about them and practicing a little extortion. But would a bunch of pirates have it any other way?

An Imperial starship has been hijacked and is being held for auction on Venwordien IV. If the PCs work for the government, they're ordered to get it back. If they're rebels, that starship would be invaluable to the rebellion. How will they get it — surely it's out of their price range? Will they try to steal it and risk the wrath of the Captains' Council, attempt to scare off the other bidders, or something else?

When the forces of a hostile government ambush the PCs, will the heroes figure out the Captains' Council betrayed them? If they do, what will they do with the information — try to get some revenge and bring Venwordien IV down around the captains' ears? Make a profit?



HIDDEN WORLDS



The worlds described in the first three chapters of this book all have one thing in common: they're known to the Terran Empire. They may not be well known (or at least not as well as Imperial officials would like), but the Empire's aware of their existence and has gathered at least rudimentary data on them. The same applies, to one degree or another, to the Thor-gon Hegemony, Ackálian Empire, and other inter-stellar governments.

Not so the worlds described below, which remain unknown to the Empire, its citizens, and other people. For whatever reason — distant location, deliberate deception, dumb luck — neither the Empire nor its enemies has learned about them yet. Whoever discovers them may gain technological or natural riches worth a dozen kings' ransoms... or may expose himself to grave danger.

HR 5683

Coreward of Imperial territory, but before one reaches the actual galactic core, is a region of space that hasn't been thoroughly explored or precisely surveyed. Much of it remains only sketchily known to Humans and their allies. If someone were to conduct a detailed stellar survey of the area, using a hefty chunk of computing power to calculate the various gravitational forces at play, he'd discover a curious fact: there's a star missing.

Or, more accurately, altered. Something's radically interfering with the gravitational output of a particular star — and that something is a Dyson sphere! An unknown species — definitely not the Malvans, the Elder Worm, or the Mandaarians, given the aesthetics and technology involved — has surrounded a type G2V star with an artificially constructed shell that blocks all of the star's light from the outside. The interior has an atmosphere, the ability to absorb and use every erg of the star's energy output... and living space equivalent to millions upon millions of Earths.

Running this entire structure is an advanced artificial intelligence named HR 5683. It doesn't know who built it or how long it's been in existence, though it has chronological records dating back 5,672.8752109 years so it must be at least that old. Nor does it know the purpose of the sphere. If queried about any of these issues, its typical response is, "Insufficient data to answer or speculate."

The technology that maintains the sphere, which HR 5683 ultimately operates, is highly advanced in its own right — well beyond whatever the PCs have, and perhaps beyond even Malvan

technology in some respects. It's also protected by equally sophisticated security systems to prevent the PCs from taking or interfering with it. Attempts to exploit or steal the sphere's technology will be met with gentle warnings that quickly escalate into the use of lethal force if the characters don't desist. In short, the sphere isn't the technological treasure chest they may at first take it for.

Any ship that gets within 0.5 light-years of the star (which now has no system, all the planets and asteroids having been broken down for materials to build the sphere) can detect the sphere with a standard sensor scan; beyond that its stealth and countermeasures systems make it difficult to perceive (an Extraordinary Skill Roll is required, at a minimum). Once a ship approaches close enough to view the sphere easily with the naked eye, it can be seen that there are airlocks, some larger than planets, for letting ships go in and out of the sphere.

If the PCs transmit queries or requests to enter to the sphere, HR 5683 will answer, identifying itself and asking them their business. As long as they provide a reasonable response — trade, exploration, opening diplomatic relations, belonging to a scientific expedition — it will open the nearest appropriate airlock and let them in. It will answer other questions to the best of its ability, but will warn the PCs not to try to steal or use the sphere's technology without permission.

Once the PCs get inside, they're in for a shock. The landscape inside part of the sphere mimics the physical geography of every terrestrial and quasi-terrestrial planet they've been on or know of! There are parts of the interior that are exact physical duplicates of Earth, Mars, Fexao, Toracta, Emerald, Procyon, Trovatore, Vinarcus, Venwordien IV, Mon'da, Dorvala, and thousands of other worlds. The cities and other manmade features are missing, but the basic physical layout — the shape and arrangement of continents and seas, the placement of mountain ranges, and so on — is usually identical (in a few cases the "worlds" don't mimic the effects of disasters or catatrophes that changed the shape of the planets in question). Presumably the other parts of the sphere's interior mimic planets the PCs aren't familiar with or have records of.

Furthermore, these copycat worlds are inhabited... but not by the sort of people the PCs are used to. The inhabitants seem to be earlier versions of modern sentient races — Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon Humans and equivalent versions of other species. However they, along with the flora and fauna appropriate to their worlds, have evolved, interbred, and culturally developed in strange ways. The PCs recognize their ancestors in many respects,

but will also see much that is odd, disturbing, and even horrifying as they interact with the sphere's inhabitants... none of whom are aware that they live in/on an artificial structure. Some of the "residents" might even pose a significant danger to the PCs.

The PCs can travel around the interior of the sphere in their ship, or HR 5683 can provide even faster vehicles for them to use if they prefer. It remains in constant contact with them and will answer their questions as it can (and as its programming allows it to). While it lets them explore virtually any part of the sphere's interior that they want to (the main exception being the machinery and rooms beneath the surface that are involved with maintaining and running the sphere), it won't help them in any way. If they get into trouble or put themselves in danger, they've got to get themselves out — HR 5683 will let them die rather than assist them.

Now it's up to the PCs to figure out who built the sphere, and why. HR 5683's answers imply that if they do, the secrets of the sphere's technology (or at least some of them) will be made clear to them, giving them (and their society) an incredible scientific edge over enemies and rivals. It's a prize worth all sorts of risks....

THE SYRR ESTATE

Off the main spacelanes in what used to be Xenovore space in the region between the territories of the Terran Empire and the Mon'dabi Federation there's a G3V star. The astronomy databases don't even have a name for it, just a catalog number. A starfarer who journeyed there would find five planets: a Type 5 world in near orbit to the star, another Type 5 world much further out, and beyond that two Type 9 and one Type 10 gas giants. In short, it seems like an unremarkable system, not even worth the effort to mine. But that impression is very, very wrong.

The space between the first and second planets is actually occupied by another world — a beautiful Type 1 planet shielded from sight and sensors by a powerful cloaking device. A ship would have to be in-system and within 1 AU of the world to have a chance of detecting it, and even that would require a minimum of a Sensor Package II and a Systems Operation roll at -5. If the roll succeeds, the ship detects an anomaly that clever characters will quickly deduce is a stealth system of some sort.

Hidden behind the cloak is the personal world of Avgaran Syrr, a Malvan who's lived there since approximately 200,000 BC. Using Malvan technology and his own not inconsiderable psionic powers he's remade the planet, which he calls *Rithranta* (Malvan for "refuge" or "haven"), to suit himself. It now features a range of landscapes and climates roughly the same as those of the Caribbean and North America on Earth, with emphasis on cool temperate rainforests and landscapes like those of Earth's Pacific Northwest.

After eons alone, Syrr is not entirely sane. If discovered, he'll at first welcome the heroes with

good will and fellowship, treating them to superb food and drink and showing off the wonders of his home. But he'll soon become suspicious of them, wondering what they're doing in his system and whether they've come to hurt him and steal his technology. From there it won't take long for him to decide that they could provide him all sorts of "entertainment." Using his technology and mental powers he'll subject them to "tests" designed to amuse him. For example, he might transmute two PCs' clothes into garb reminiscent of the Three Musketeers and then force them to duel with rapiers for the "favor" of a female PC, or a woman he creates out of thin air (actually a sophisticated hologram). If possible he'll give the heroes the impression that he has "ultimate cosmic power" and can do anything he wants, the better to intimidate and impress them.

To get out of this hellish "refuge," the heroes have to first survive the "tests," then find a way to short-circuit Syrr's powers or convince him that they're no threat to him. He's still mentally balanced enough to accept a well-reasoned, well-presented argument in their favor (though if the heroes are smart they'll take advantage of his temporary lucidity to get *far* away from him). And woe unto the heroes if they ever suggest to Syrr that other people might want to exploit him or steal his technology — if he realizes there's even a *chance* the PCs might deliberately or accidentally let people know about him and his whereabouts, he'll never let them leave.

YSH'A-HNATHSH

Hundreds of thousands of years ago, the Galaxy was torn by war between the mighty Malvans and the foul Elder Worm, a battle that pitted Malvan super-science against the Elder Worms' magics, mental powers, and guile. In this war the Elder Worm had the help of many servitor races, including the sinister Thane whom they created with sorcery.

In time the war went ill for the Elder Worm, and the Malvans came against their chief worlds with fire and fury. One such planet was Ysh'a-Hnathsh, a fortress world near the galactic core. There a few Elder Worm and thousands of Thane cast rituals to weaken the Malvans and protect their own people. The Golden Hunters of Malva struck it with every weapon in their possession. Mountains were reduced to hillocks, seas were boiled away into the clouds, entire chunks of atmosphere were ripped away. Not a living thing was left upon the glazed surface of the planet; only here and there did an Elder Worm city or two survive — if such is the word — as pitiful ruins.

As a final gesture of contempt and defiance, the Malvans literally tore Ysh'a-Hnathsh out of its orbit and flung it across the Galaxy and into intergalactic space... or so they believed. By a billions to one freak chance, Ysh'a-Hnathsh was captured by a dark star, a supernova remnant surrounded by an obscuring planetary nebula (see *Star Hero*, page 77), deep within what modern

Humans would come to call Drago's Reach. Far from established spacelanes, it has remained undiscovered to this day.

Thousands of years after Ysh'a-Hnathsh began orbiting its new "sun," a handful of Thane who survived the Malvan attack by entering suspended animation in special ritual chambers deep below the planet's surface awoke and emerged. Dismayed by the ruin around them but determined not to surrender to despair, they built a new temple to their Elder Worm masters and their strange gods. Ever since then they've performed their strange, sorcerous rituals there, praying and waiting for the day when they might rise up again and take over the Galaxy from the now-weakened Malvans. With their brethren they tried to do just that early in the twenty-first century and failed. They retreated back to Ysh'a-Hnathsh, their home still secret and secure, and have continued their plotting in the centuries since.

Should your PCs discover Ysh'a-Hnathsh — perhaps after a hyperdrive accident sends them far off-course — they'll find a world that seems, to all intents and purposes, dead (note that the Thane do not register on bioscanners and other life force sensors). A few ruins are in evidence... and one strange structure, almost like a non-Euclidean step-pyramid, that seems to be much more recent than the ruins. As they explore Ysh'a-Hnathsh, they may find a few relics of the Elder Worm, and perhaps even a few bits of working technology... but all the while a sense of creeping horror and foreboding should overcome them. (You may want to represent this by gradually decreasing their PRE.) Eventually the Thane will ambush them, hoping to capture them and convert them to puppets they can use to do their work on civilized worlds undetected!

THANE

Val	Char	Cost	Roll	Notes
10	STR	0	11-	Lift 100 kg; 2d6 [2]
16	DEX	18	12-	OCV: 5/DCV: 5
18	CON	16	13-	
13	BODY	6	12-	
20	INT	10	13-	PER Roll 13-
20	EGO	20	13-	ECV: 7
20	PRE	10	13-	PRE Attack: 4d6
4	COM	-3	10-	
10	PD	8		Total: 10 PD (6 rPD)
10	ED	6		Total: 10 ED (6 rED)
4	SPD	14		Phases: 3, 6, 9, 12
6	REC	0		
36	END	0		
30	STUN	3		Total Characteristics Cost: 108 (+4 with NCM)

Movement: Running: 6"/12"

Cost	Powers	END
50	<i>Psychic Attack:</i> Multipower, 75-point reserve; all Extra Time (Full Phase; -½)	
5u	1) <i>Basic Psychic Attack:</i> Ego Attack 6d6, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Extra Time (Full Phase; -½)	3
5u	2) <i>Lingering Psychic Attack:</i> Ego Attack 3d6, Continuous (+1), Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Extra Time (Full Phase; -½)	3
50	<i>Psychic Powers:</i> Multipower, 75-point reserve; all Extra Time (Full Phase; -½)	
5u	1) <i>Psychic Domination:</i> Mind Control 12d6, Telepathic (+¼); Extra Time (Full Phase; -½)	7
5u	2) <i>Psychic Speech:</i> Telepathy 12d6, Reduced Endurance (½ END; +¼); Extra Time (Full Phase; -½)	3
10	<i>Aura Of Horror:</i> +20 PRE; Only For Fear-/Intimidation-Based Presence Attacks (-1)	0
6	<i>Resilient Form:</i> Damage Resistance (6 PD/6 ED)	0
50	<i>Resilient Form:</i> Life Support (Total, including Longevity: Immortality)	0
5	<i>Thane Eyes:</i> Infrared Perception (Sight Group)	0
5	<i>Thane Eyes:</i> Ultraviolet Perception (Sight Group)	0
5	<i>Thane Eyes:</i> Nightvision	0
27	<i>Arcane Life-Force:</i> Invisibility To Detect Life, Reduced Endurance (0 END; +½), Persistent (+½); Always On (-½)	0
Talents		
3	Lightning Calculator	
20	Universal Translator 13-	
Skills		
3	Interrogation 13-	
3	Shadowing 13-	
5	Stealth 13-	
Total Powers & Skills Cost: 262		
Total Cost: 370		

75+ Disadvantages

- 25 Distinctive Features: Thane (Not Concealable; Causes Extreme Reaction [horror and loathing])
- 20 Psychological Limitation: Totally Loyal To The Elder Worm And Their Laws, Customs, And Traditions (Common, Total)
- 250 Experience Points

Total Disadvantage Points: 370

Description: This character sheet represents a typical member of the Thane species as of 2640. Before magic faded from reality, the Thane were powerful sorcerers, commanding mighty spells in addition to the psychic powers they still possess. They still retain some Elder Worm technology that works, and may arm themselves with it or use it against their enemies if necessary. (See *Terran Empire*, pages 46-47 and 195, for more information.)

An average Thane is about 1.8 meters tall with disproportionately long arms and fingers. His moist, leathery skin is a disturbing brownish-purple shade, and his glowing orangish eyes bulge from their sockets (and, on close examination, are faceted like those of an insect). His mouth is a mass of large cilia or small tentacle-like appendages, rather than a jaw with teeth. He typically wears a hooded brown robe.

WEAPONS OF THE ELDER WORM

Here are a few examples of Elder Worm technology a Thane might have. All of them are Personal Foci to Elder Worms and Thane (other species cannot use them, and in fact usually don't even like to handle or look at them).

Dagger Of The Worm: This object looks like a small, golden sphere with finger-ridges designed for Elder Worms or Thane. Although seemingly dull, it cuts like the sharpest blade.

HKA 2d6, Armor Piercing (+½), +2 Increased STUN Multiplier (+½), Penetrating (+½) (75 Active Points); OAF (-1), No STR Bonus (-½), No Knockback (-¼). Total cost: 27 points.

The Torc Of S'thlaghha: This large "collar," made of an unknown silvery metal, fits around an Elder Worm's or Thane's head and neck. It amplifies his Mental Powers, making him even more of a force to be feared.

Aid Psionics 4d6, all Mental Powers simultaneously (+2), Delayed Return Rate (points fade at the rate of 5 per Minute; +¼) (130 Active Points); OIF (-½). Total cost: 87 points.



The Yiinashc Chain: This silvery chain, whose links have non-Euclidean forms disturbing to the Human eye, can wrap around and imprison anyone.

Entangle 8d6, 8 DEF, Affects Desolidified (+½) (120 Active Points); OAF (-1), 1 Recoverable Charge (-1¼), Range Based On STR (-¼). Total cost: 34 points.

INDEX

- 86ers 77
 AAO Sensors..... 7, 138
 Abdulkadar, Ararat 91
 Ackál..... 112, 152
 Ackálian Border War..... 60
 Ackálian Wars Memorial..... 124
 Adamant 58, 144
 Adamant Metals Exchange..... 59
 Adventure Centers..... 97
 Alapai, Princess..... 46
 Alepus Gamma 19
 Alien Wars See "Xenovores"
 Alisadra, the Great..... 22
 Alpha Aleb..... 112
 Alpha Kurkov..... 58
 Angrata, High Consul 115, 152
 Antarctic Burrows 93
 Anti-Spinward Corridor..... 96
 Archipelago 42
 Atropos 107, 109
 Balhaph 20
 Bathels..... 133-36
 Bazhenov, Ilya 41, 142
 Bel'u, Utah..... 33
 Big Honcho..... 103
 Black Crater..... 68
 Black Rock..... 103
 Bloody Hook Inn..... 133
 Boneyard, the 93
 Borobodur-Eros..... 43
 Caan, Forsath 133-34, 154
 Cahn'trethar 31
 Camp Frostbite 68
 Capital Satellite 36
 Captains' Council..... 134, 154
 Caves of the Dead..... 98
 Ceti School Of Business 36
 Chádein 123
 Chensa, Dr. Hac'sharad 127
 City of the Holy 119
 Clotho 107-08
 Cody's Commerce Center 84
 Colonial Stock And Bond Market .. 59
 Confederated MegaMicronesia ... 47
 Controls, the 27
 Crater Basin..... 79
 Cristobalites 101-04, 149-151
 Cruz, Capt. Jorge "Clawhand" 55
 Crystal boom 76
 Cybul III 63, 144
 Davenport..... 13
Dehlanth..... 128
 Delta Vio..... 37-38
 Derendon..... 81
 Do, Hon..... 47
 Dokalep Ree Medical Center... 30, 141
 Dorvala 117, 152
 Draconis Defenseworks..... 83, 107
 Drago's Tomb 51
 Drega, Carlita 147
 Drega's Dragoons..... 93, 147
 Drink, the 49, 143
 Durkik, Lord Hylar..... 121
 Elder Worm 157-59
 Emerald..... 6, 138
 Emerald Authoritative Council 9
 Emerald Institute..... 6
 Felton, Mary 29, 141
 Ferrish plant 50
 Fexao 12, 138
 Firefalls 107, 151
 First Haven 97, 147
 Firsters 94
 Fontaine, Francoise 47
 Foswell, Gov. Eleanor 62
 Freebot Life Creation Center 7, 138
 Freebots..... 9
 Frontier Commodities Exchange... 60
 Galactic War 60
 Garrlan, Sen. Tyrl..... 17, 139
 Genome gauchos 108-09
 Gifted, the 26
 GM's Vault 138
 Gómralt..... 115
 Gr'lin 12, 138
 Graveyard 92
 Grieco, Alain..... 62
 Gwllrawr 153
 H'rrotha 67, 146
 H'rrothans 71-72
 Halcyon..... 18, 140
 Hall Of Equality..... 7
 Haunted planet 65
 Helarik 123
 Hepona Jungle..... 125
 Hermetica 23, 140
 Hernici 107-08
 Heshar 125
 Hidden worlds 156
 Hill, Heavy Joe 110
 Holland, Samantha 73, 146
 House of Great Fire 124
 HR 5683 156
Hugglyr..... 14
 Ichimura Manjiro 96
 Imperial Museum 112
 Independence Virus 8, 138
 Independent Commodities
 Exchange 60
 InStarCo..... 39, 82, 103
 Introduction..... 4
 Jeerjeer 131
 Ji-won's Dissent 26
 Johnrys Spaceworks 83
 Joraka 115
 Jorgaro IV, Emperor 121
 Kellam, Darwin 41
 Kellayba-Toshan 31
 Khoting, Sub-Minister
 Rickard 10, 138
 Kierkegard Metals 141
 King Arsenal..... 107
 Kinzareth Imperium 85
 Kolata 123
 Koslowski, Prof. Winslow 73
 Krono-Dynatronics 83
 Krusek, Chief Inspector 115
 Labor Processing Station..... 97
 Lachesis..... 107, 109
 Lapidary Playas..... 101-02
 Larouk, Jan 29, 141
 Lassow, Prof. Jagr 18, 140
 Laudell, Sybil 55
 Laws Of Sentience 9, 11, 138
 Liappu Island..... 79-80
 Liholiho, Prince..... 46
 Lilikulani, Queen 45
 Lorel 23
 Lost Generations Memorial 14
 Malvans..... 133-35, 138, 149, 157
 Mandaarians..... 105-10, 151
 Market Town 59
 Maronesy, Brother 91
 Marr, Kikle 18, 139
 Migration, the 61
 Mind Police 13, 107, 140-42
 Mon'da 123, 152
 Mon'dabi 123-27
 Mon'dabi Union 127
 Montego Cay 21
 Moreau, Dr. Emilio 45, 48, 142
 Mu Jakala 67
 Myrrel 14
 Neodolphins 45
 New Alexandria 74, 146
 New Kerguelen..... 44
 New Library, the 74
 New Pohnpei..... 43
 New Shetlands..... 45
 Ng, Helen 103
 Nisiran Sea..... 79-80
 Nobility, Perseid..... 121
 Nornash 62
 Nrrullia Hull..... 89
 Obote..... 24
 Obote, Calvin 25
 Oram, Kolsan 136
 Orsec 13
 Orsen City 59
 Oruta 115
 Otho 105, 151
 Patterson, Dr. Harold..... 134
 Pelga the Conqueror 114
 Pentacle, the..... 109
 Perseids 117-22
 Pharos City 75
 Phi Cassiopeia 117
 Phrygonia 125
 Pitano, Dorag 100, 147
 Plateau 105
 Poisoned stars 128
 Polsa, Hir 135
 Polyphemus..... 79, 146
 Port Bounty 132
 Port Nassar 14
 Psionics
 .. 23-29, 63-66, 107, 140-41, 144-45
 Purification Plant #2 24
 Purple Silks Company 18, 139
 Pyramids of Phrygonia..... 125, 152
 Rakne 129, 153
 Ravanche..... 128, 153
 Ravanchians 129, 153
 Record of Empire, the 119
 Reziluu 153
 Rheys, Prof. Olar 122
 Rienslar Territories..... 80
 Rigel V 30, 141
 Rigellian World History Museum... 31
 Ronson family 41
 Ronson Handhelds..... 41
 Rosenburg, Ibrahim 103
 Rostanac..... 148
 Rudonga Caverns..... 125
 Sanjiin 95
 Sargeht Wildlife Preserve..... 113
 Scar, Weglan 135
 Service Examinations..... 17
 Shairaka, Empress..... 115
 Shaylaa Perfumes..... 55
 Shen'ro, Galacar..... 127, 152
 Shorn'lachra..... 69
 Shra, Adm. Mehotha..... 33
 Shulgar 115
 Sigma Caeruleus III..... 85, 146
 Silver, Jacob..... 135, 154
 Sin City 21
 Sirnar'dor 117
 Sivas 81
 Skavs..... 95
 Slookabas..... 136
 Snirrk 51-53
 Soltanis..... 31
 Syrr Estate, the 157
 Talkokt University 113
 Tanaka Hiroshi..... 95
 Tangaroa 44
 Tarquin..... 107
 Tau Ceti..... 35, 142
 Teelgha 34
 Terhane, Burton 21
 Terhane, Janice 22
 Tetsuo 92, 147
 Thane, the 157-59
 Theta Omega 6
 Thorgons..... 128-30, 153-54
 Thought Combine 27
 Three-Eye Ocklamar 110
 Thul 20
 Toracta 97, 147
 Toractan Hunting Championship .. 98
 Torasol..... 97
 Tranta Shun, Cult of 91
 Tridymite Beta 101, 149
 Trovatore..... 42, 142
 Trovault, Brian 134
 Tsai, Cmd. Lien 130
 Tuaro-Prime 11
 Tupouto'a, Count John..... 48
 Ulthar Nul 91
 Ultrabeluga..... 45
 Valatu Mountains 120
 Van Eyck, Dr. Theo 25
 Van Rook, Felicia 133, 154
 Varanyi 141
 Varkos..... 119
 Vasula Falls..... 32
 Vaxandros High Port 51
 Vaxandros Prime 49, 143
 Venwordien IV..... 131, 154
 Vertans 8
 Vesh'aw, Capt. Gressor 127
 Vinarcus 105, 151
 Vitellius 105
 Vittoria 81
 Vraor, Fleet Admiral 110
 Vysarth 133-35, 154
 White, Victor 73, 146
 Whitehorn B&B 36
 Wiringa 138
 Wreck, the 49, 143
 Xancar, Franklin 22
 Xenovores, Xenovore Wars.....
 8, 12, 15, 21, 26, 33, 38, 44, 60, 70, 88,
 93, 108, 133, 138, 142, 147
 Y'largan 133, 135
 Y'larra, Princess 122
 Yezidi..... 85-91
 YHP Systech 37
 Yohko, House 95
 Yohko Ichiro..... 95
 Ysh'a-Hnathsh..... 157
 Zarr, the..... 85-91
 Zerlians 63-66, 144
 Zhukov, Executive Governor
 Alexis 109-10, 151
 Zolgan'th Broan 113

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