

Stellar Reaches

A Fair Use Fanzine for Traveller



A Samardan Press Publication

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Issue #13, New Year 2011. Version 10.

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Our website: www.stellarreaches.com

Credits:

Cover Art: *A soldier and a wardog during the Nishhingh War, 633 Imperial.*

The graphic is titled "Nuclear Dawn" © Nikolay Yeliseyev. Visit his galleries at

<http://nikyeliseyev.blogspot.com/> and <http://nikolay.cgsociety.org/gallery/427137/>

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The Stellar Reaches fanzine's website can currently be found at <http://stellarreaches.nwgamers.org>. Please feel free to browse the site for more information, as well as back issues and other downloads as they become available.

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For more information on BITS, check out their website at <http://www.bits.org.uk/>

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Letter From The Editor

Greetings, Fellow Sophonts:

Within this issue of **Stellar Reaches** is the expansion of the Hegemony, Republic and Duchy series to the other side of the Lesser Rift, in Beta Quadrant of the Empty Quarter. Currently dominated by the humanist Hegemony of Lorean, this area was long part of the bloody domains of the Suedzuk Vargr, a.k.a. the Blood Vargr. Quite a lot of history was written here, generally to the sorrow of the inhabitants. In 993, however, things are looking up, with the generally pro-human Irilitok Vargr taking the place of their hyper-violent cousins, the influence of the Damlaer Hegemonio softening the influence of their more strict Arzula cousins. The bitter times of the Era of Horror now largely faded from the consciousness of local humaniti, but the scars of the time merit a brief discussion, if only to memorialise how the Suedzuk vanished from the territory they once gripped with their claws.

The Lords of the Quarter focuses on the singular personalities that shape the political destiny of the region: Emperor Gavin himself, Sector Duke Dethwabtakebwebwakawa, Regent Haesha of the Julian Protectorate, President Kougradh Iro'nirdgveis of the Rukadukaz Republic, and Hegemon Lorin Beronan. Archduke Koktso of Antares and Emperor Shonyfra of the Second Empire of Gashikan, while not ruling territory within the sector, have a powerful indirect influence on the region.

Sixteen Tons outlines an adventure in Udusis subsector, where the PCs – as masters of a Broadsword mercenary ship – lead a convoy into a clash with pirates that dominate the orbits of the poor backwater world of Belumar.

Finally, a powerful new actor gets their time in the spotlight with Minor Races of Chartered Space: The Yileans. The Second Empire of Gashikan is largely their creation, a monument to the most singular act of vengeance to shape Chartered Space, and presented the Vargr with the bitterest losses they had ever faced. And yet, the glory days of the second-oldest interstellar empire known to man are long past: a form of stagnation and increasing decadence has shot through both bone and muscle of the Yilean race and their state. The question is no longer if an explosion will destroy their ancient empire, but when...

Assuming all goes well, the Hegemony, Duchy, and Republic series should continue in issue #14 of **Stellar Reaches**: a new article in the Biography of Selected Ship Masters should be available as well. Otherwise, who knows?

Ω

Interesting links:

The SCP Foundation: <http://scp-wiki.wikidot.com/> Every Imperial Scout needs to go here, at least once.

Infinity plus: <http://www.infinityplus.co.uk/index.htm> Older Science Fiction Fans can use some inspiration.

Small Wars Journal: <http://smallwarsjournal.com/> For the specialists among us.

Escape From America: <http://www.escapefromamerica.com/> When you decide to take up Travelling seriously.

Fred on Everything: <http://www.fredoneverything.net/index.html> A U.S. Marine (ret), War & Police reporter.

TVTropes: <http://tvtropes.org/> For the Referee. WARNING: Time Sink!

Reading ahead,
Alvin W. Plummer
Editor, **Stellar Reaches** fanzine

BITS Task System

From pg. 8, BITS Writers' Guidelines June 1999. Copyright ©1999, BITS. All Rights Reserved.

T20 Open Game Content from the article "Extending the Task Resolution System to T20" Copyright 2003, Jason Kemp.

MegaTraveller (MT), Traveller: The New Era (TNE) and Marc Miller's Traveller (T4) all use a graduated system of task difficulty ratings – Average, Difficult, Formidable, etc. 'Classic' Traveller (CT) and GURPS Traveller (GT) use modifiers to the task rolls instead. Traveller T20 (T20) uses difficulty classes (DCs) to define target numbers for skill checks. The BITS Task System provides a simplified common ground for all these rule sets, using difficulty ratings with corresponding task modifiers for CT and GT and DCs for T20 as shown in Table 1. The means by which spectacular (GT: critical) success or failure are achieved are defined by the rule set used. Similarly, the GM should apply the rules for special tasks – opposed, co-operative, hasty, cautious, etc. – according to the rule set used. As always, these are only guidelines – the GM may alter any task roll as appropriate to enhance the game.

TABLE 1: TASK DIFFICULTIES

BITS Task Difficulty	T4 Difficulty	T4.1 Difficulty	GT Target Modifier	TNE Difficulty	MT Difficulty	CT Target Modifier	T20 DC
Easy	Easy (Auto)	Easy (1D)	+6	Easy	Simple	-4	10
Average	Average (2D)	Average (2D)	+3	Average	Routine	-2	15
Difficult	Difficult (2.5D)	Difficult (2.5D)	0	Difficult	Difficult	0	20
Formidable	Formidable (3D)	Formidable (3D)	-3	Formidable	Difficult	+2	25
Staggering	Impossible (4D)	Staggering (4D)	-6	Impossible	Formidable	+4	30
Impossible	(5D)	Hopeless (5D)	-9	Impossible	Impossible	+6	35
Hopeless	(6D)	Impossible (6D)	-12	Impossible	Impossible	+8	40

Ex. Maria Charles is forging a complex document, which the GM rules is a Staggering task. Maria has Forgery-4 (GT: Forgery-16, T20: Forgery +18) and the relevant attribute (MT, T4) is INT 10 (TNE: INT 9, T20: 15).

CT: Task success is normally $2D + Skill \geq 8$. Maria requires $2D + Forgery \geq 12$ ($8 + 4$ for Staggering difficulty). Alternatively, the GM may prefer to apply the target modifier as a negative modifier on the dice roll, i.e. $2D + 4 - 4 \geq 8$.

MT: Staggering difficulty is equivalent to MT's Formidable (15+), thus the task is $2D + Skill + (Stat / 5) \geq 15$. For Maria this is: $2D + 4 + 2 \geq 15$.

TNE: Staggering difficulty is equivalent to TNE's Impossible, thus the task is $d20 \leq (Skill + Stat) \times \frac{1}{4}$. For Maria this is $d20 \leq 3$, i.e. $(9 + 4) / 4$ rounded down.

T4: Maria requires $4D \leq INT + Forgery$. (Note that T4's Staggering rating of 3.5D is ignored.)

GT: Maria requires $3D \leq Forgery + Target Modifier$, i.e. $3D \leq 16 - 6$.

T20: Maria requires $d20 + 18 \geq 30$. (Note that the INT modifier is already factored into the skill check.)

Task definitions should always be used sparingly – the GM should be able to define the difficulty and required skills and equipment for most tasks using common sense. Where strange skills or equipment are needed, these can usually be listed, without requiring a full task definition. Where a full task definition is required, use the following format (you don't need to use the bold or italics formatting; plain text is fine):

To find a boar:

Difficult Recon (GT: Tracking), or

Difficult Hunting (T20: P/Hunting), or

Formidable Survival

+1 Difficulty if riding at full gallop.

+1 Difficulty if lost.

-1 Difficulty if moving slowly.

Spectacular Success: They have surprised a boar and have one round to act before it reacts.

Success: They have found boar tracks and can begin following them.

Failure: No tracks found.

Spectacular Failure: They have become lost.

+1 Difficulty indicates a harder task (e.g. an Average task becomes Difficult) whereas -1 Difficulty is an easier task (e.g. Difficult would become Average).

NOTE: This system has been extensively play-tested but suggestions for refinements are always welcome.

Hegemony, Republic, Duchy: Part IV

By Alvin W. Plummer



Hegemony freighters approach Kigourzus. Specialized refuelling techniques are required with hot gas giants, to guard against hull failure. Kfueraer system, 993 Imperial.
This graphic is titled "Cauldron" © Brian. See his work at <http://currentsofspace.blogspot.com/>

Beta Quadrant: The Sparks

The systems of Beta Quadrant gained their nickname "The Sparks" because the fires of war and raids were always ready to burn within the region. With the absorption of the region into the Hegemony of Lorean, this isn't as true as it once was, but the name and the reputation has stuck. The term is also an implicit comment on the local Suedzuk packs: local humans are not considered real Sparks, and are instead derided as 'tailless Sparks' or 'dead Sparks'.

Summary: Grimdark Traveller

From the Long Night to 300 Imperial, this region was dominated by the Suedzuk Vargr, a race known for very high comfort level with casual violence. Humans within

this area of space had a very hard time under their rule. This changed drastically with the War of Men, when several human-majority systems and planetary regions won their freedom. From the middle of the 400s to the Nishhingh War, there was a vibrant golden age with competing ideals, pocket empires, and cultures all innovating and striving for excellence. The Nishhingh War sent the region into a slow, self-destructive decline that ended with the arrival of the Hegemony of Lorean. It rapidly grew to dominate the region, more by diplomacy than warfare. This militaristic nation sucked the region dry, funding its many wars. Eventually, the demands grew too great on the downtrodden sophonts, both human and Vargr, and there was a widespread rebellion, that was crushed in the Era of

Horror. Things remained grim until the absorption of Damlaer into the Hegemony, and the concurrent association of the Hegemony with the Julian Protectorate. Over time, there was a loosening of restrictions and an easing of oppressive measures, and the Irilitok Vargr began to rise in prominence, moving to displace the decimated Suedzuk Vargr packs.

The Vargr Age

Mythology, n. The body of a primitive people's beliefs concerning its origin, early history, heroes, deities and so forth, as distinguished from the true accounts which it invents later.

Ambrose Bierce, -2678 to -2607 Imperial

From the end of the Vargr Pillaging to the late end of the local Long Night (c. A.D. 2800 to 4879, c. -1700 to 359), local interstellar activity was utterly dominated by Vargr, as well as the government of every inhabited system. Modern humaniti who know of the Vargr Pillaging in Beta Quadrant assume that the era was little more than two thousand years of misery, oppression, poverty, slavery, and sudden death. While largely true, this tells only the human side of the story.

The era between c. A.D. 3500 to 4879 (c. -1000 and 359 Imperial) is viewed as a legendary Heroic Age by the

Suedzuk Vargr of today (993 Imperial). Amazing levels of intramural, intensely *personal* violence was sustained for far longer than any human society could manage. The only thing that could unite the Blood Vargr was a human uprising, which was invariably put down with astonishing ferocity. Humans within these societies were brutally abused as slaves, serfs or hunting prey: even the most valued slaves (usually technicians or accountants) were always a whim away from sudden death. It was in this era that the term 'the Sparks' – sometimes 'the Spark Worlds' – was coined for these systems.

The 'Blood Vargr' – the local Anglic term for the Suedzuk with their infamous coats of red fur – had undisputed authority, and make up the solid majority of the Vargr population until roughly a century ago, with only a few 'fake Vilani' Ovaghoun and 'cutie-pie' Irilitok Vargr interspersed in the general population. The Blood Vargr are infamous for the destruction of the garden world of Gashikan, the homeworld of a minor human race called the Yileans, in A.D. 2862 (-1658 Imperial). However, in A.D. 3093 (-1427 Imperial) the Vargr were effectively exterminated within Gashikan Sector by the Yileans' Wolvesbane Project. The Project, an anti-canine plague, was successfully quarantined within the sector by the Vargr, but only at great cost.



Blood Vargr fighters, conducting reconnaissance over a destroyed city on Black Pearl, c. -1765

The graphic is titled "Nuclear Winter" © Philippe Bullo. See his work at <http://www.darthmagus.com/wallpapers/NuclearWinter-2.jpg>

The violent, tightly-knit and isolationistic nature of Suedzuk psychology led to continual Vargr-on-Vargr

raiding and pillaging during the Vargr Age. In time, the Blood Vargr saw the destruction of better-armed

starfarers as the acme of heroism, not only because of the bad intensions these travellers had most of the time, but also because of the glorious charisma surge that was gained when the 'local pups' whacked stronger and better-armed opponents.

From time to time, a few far-sighted Vargr packs would attempt to build an industrial-oriented (instead of warrior-oriented) culture. Their most notable projects were on two worlds: Ssilnthis and Uzola. These surprisingly well-thought out and organized attempts were launched with high hopes in A.D. 3680 (c. -840 Imperial). Despite being a more difficult environment, Ssilnthis proved to be the successful settlement, with a major industrial economy and two massive underwater cities – Kamman and Ua Grengvuangfhuafhuez – by A.D. 4420 (-100 Imperial). Eventually, they roped in the few scattered bands of human survivors as slaves for their industrial base. The Uzola prospered mightily, serving as a major Vargr industrial site for centuries. By -800 Imperial, the world was covered with factories and hyperviolent hive towers, and, at TL 12, was very wealthy for the era. But in a few centuries, unrestrained atmospheric poisoning was causing major problems. Despite the successful adaptation of local life to the new atmosphere (and the importation of off-world species), the Vargr themselves were largely driven off the world by c. A.D. 4000 (c. -500 Imperial).

Originally, the starships and equipment of Beta Quadrant was provided by the factories of Uzola. But as this world was slowly poisoned, these things were provided by outside Ikonaz agents from Ikon or Ssilnthis. These 'gifts' had strings attached: usually, the starfarers were tasked to fight in proxy wars or pirate actions against a competitor. This fitted well with the local Vargr starfaring attitude: wolves in space, ever on the move, looking for something to take, someone to kill, another way to gain glory, renown, and respect across the stars. Visitors from outside the Quadrant – like the first K'kree traders to visit, around c. A.D. 4000 (c. -500 Imperial) needed strong Vargr escorts to conduct business unmolested.

Deliver my life from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dogs.
King David, -5526 to -5491 Imperial
From The New American Standard Bible

Between c. -100 to 370, the few non-physical, non-violent positions in local societies were fobbed off to human serfs and slaves. Even at the low tech levels of the Spark Worlds, this placed serious responsibility on the shoulders of the human underlings. But despite

the implicit power in their hands, it took a century before the intimidated humans dared to revolt anywhere. Such uprisings merely led to the gruesome slaughter of the humans: sometimes just the men, sometimes families, and sometimes whole cities. Human Hunts and Wild Hunts were by far the dominant form of entertainment during this period: oftentimes, these Hunts would take on a religious and cultic cast.

No claws. No fangs. No speed. No bloodthirst.
Nearly blind in nightsight, truly blind in scent...
and practically stone deaf!
No scales, or wings, or fur, or poison spray.
Not even a stump of a tail!
Just fat and soft skin,
a ridiculous patch of hair on the head,
and a pathetic need
to hide their nakedness with rags.”

“They are stronger than us...”

“So let them use their muscle as our slaves, before they meet their rightful end in our bellies!”

Pack Leader Kfoaghsak
and his Alpha Mate Lafhou Uenats
Near-legendary ancestors
of the Suedzuk Vargr
c. -2322 Imperial (Apocryphal)

Keeping a reign on the Blood Vargr was quite difficult for their would-be handlers. From around 100 Imperial, they were no longer given any position of responsibility onboard Ikonaz starships, excepting muscle. At the time, the Vargr rejoiced in renouncing all the wimpy rear-echelon positions, and focusing on what they loved best: close quarters combat, hopefully with explosives, large-calibre guns or sharp implements. Moreover, the notion of blade fighting being more charismatic than firearms led to many Sparky groups to downplay guns and ranged weapons when possible. Even simple literacy became a marker of a weakling, someone who couldn't be trusted in the heat of combat.

There are many worlds with life biologically hostile to Vargr life. And yet, many worlds are inhabited by humans – bony, yes, but absolutely PACKED with usable proteins and delicious layers of fat, easily digested by ourselves, the Chosen of the Ancients.

Surely the Ancients had a hand in the design of this most widespread of prey!

Ue Ghuagz, Father of Modern Suedzuk Biology
c. -1046 Imperial

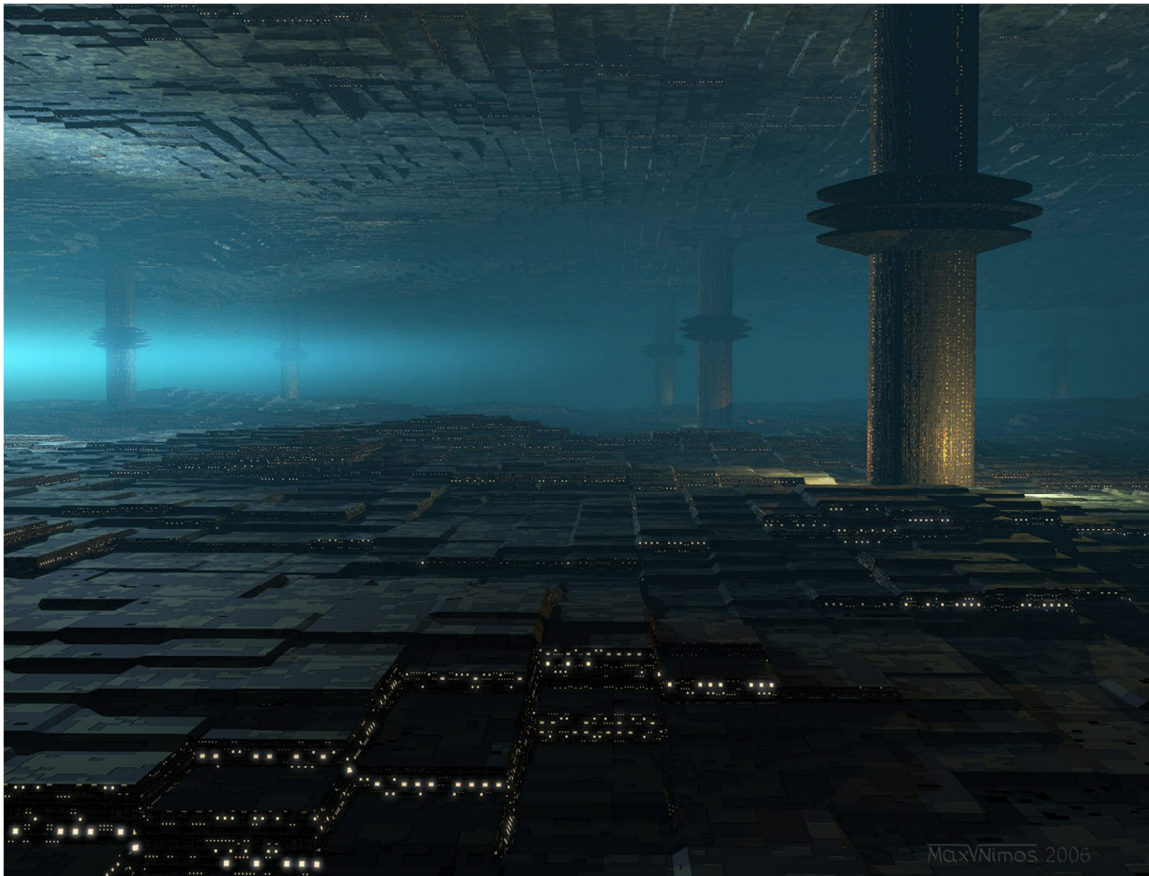
Only later did Suedzuk historians understand the depth of the folly this kind of thinking reflected. But at the time, the concept of self-criticism didn't even exist among the Suedzuk: there were only bards and warrior-poets, who valued entertainment far more than accuracy. Vargr scientists at the time only saw reasons why this was the best of all worlds, designed solely for the sake of the Vargr: Vargr historians only saw everlasting Suedzuk dominance, and eternal human subjugation. By c. A.D. 3500 (c. -1000 Imperial) technical advancement began to decline gradually: but this slow-motion collapse, powered by the endless wars and destruction of the region, was hardly even noticed by the charismatic Vargr rulers at the time: "They only had ears for the roar of the crowd, but lacked a nose for the future," as the famous Vargr historian/novelist Ikkong wrote in 719 Imperial.

The Age of Ssilnthi Conquistadores

Mine, Mine, Mine.

Pack-Captain (later, Pack-Prince) Kulloerr
Watching the world of Lallelerrarr
(soon to be renamed Kulloerr)
revolve before his starship.
c. 290 Imperial

On one world, ruled jointly by Suedzuk and Ovaghoun Vargr, there was... something different going on. During a minor uprising on Ssilnthi, a farsighted Vargr (Master Boss – and later Pack GreatFather - Ongour'k Gatzua) decided in A.D. 4243 (-277 Imperial) to grant various concessions to the human slaves – after he had personally killed and eaten the ringleaders, naturally. His slaves not only proved to be more valuable alive than dead: his leniency even sparked some genuine loyalty to him and his Pack.



Kamman, the senior industrial site of Ssilnthi, dominating the Mgolaar cavern. ~ 200 Imperial. Several wealthy Vargr worlds follow Ikon's example, reserving the land for religious hunts, wilderness, and Vargr-style herding/hunting/farming techniques. The graphic above, titled "Alien City" © Max V. Nimos. See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1337751

Gatzua continued to experiment, using different methods in running his slaves, servants and work gangs. Gatzua's songs, stories, and proverbs illustrating his discoveries and theories led to the Oreiraargaedzitzun Neokvgra'ousathuugsue (translation: 'Revolution in Human Servitude/Obedience Instruction'). Eventually the Master Boss' more humane and effective human control & management techniques are put to paper in the -240s. They lead to a sustainable level of increased production for Ssilnthi: this wealth directly led to greater trade revenue with the Ovaghoun Vargr. This revenue was reinvested, powering a compounding rise in both the quantity and quality of TL 9-10 material produced. A side benefit was the resurrection of both the additional trade and the writings of Gatzua was the resurrection of literacy as a common skill among the Vargr of Ssilnthi.

Between c. 280 and 310, a major cultural shift took place among the interstellar corsairs based on Ssilnthi. Dozens of starships left Ssilnthi, not to trade or raid, but to seize the worlds and rule the stars. The Ikonaz blocked their way spinward, an ocean of black hemmed them in rimward. But trailing and coreward, there were plenty of worlds ripe for the plucking. Their captains, filled with visions of blood on the hunting fields, found that their technological lead led to glory, power, and victory, no matter how hard their enemies fought. The level of superiority Ssilnthi Vargr had over their dirtside opponents within the subsector led to the brief era of the Ssilnthi interstellar conquistador and freebooter.

Across many Spark worlds, humans were put in charge of the 'boring trivia' of actually running a low-tech civilization. The more industrial-minded Ssilnthi Vargr found humans – once properly trained – to be better factory drones than the local Vargr could ever be. A few of the brightest were even taught how to use and maintain the sophisticated equipment of a starship. None were thought to be worth a tail-toss as a warrior.

There are two methods, or means, and only two whereby man's needs and desires can be satisfied. One is the production and exchange of wealth; this is the economic means. The other is the un-compensated appropriation of wealth produced by others; this is the political means.
Albert Jay Nock, -2651 to -2573 Imperial

For men, there may be two means.
But for the Blood Vargr, there is only one.
Duke Jejenok of Yogesh, 79-200 Imperial

Flaws in the Vargr governments – mainly traceable to Suedzuk paranoia, valuing the leader's personality more than his performance, and a distinct preference for violence over negotiation – worked to destabilize the conquistador governments as soon as they came into being. These problems were exacerbated by local jealousy and envy at the starfarers, an attitude of disdain against the uncivilized locals by the Ssilnthi conquerors, and distrust on all sides – Ssilnthi Vargr, local Vargr, and local humans. Whenever possible, local Vargr began to challenge the authority of the conquerors, with challenges ranging from theft to vandalism to riots to violent insurgencies.

Winds of Change

Shall we have our lives, our children, our future
Twisted into an inhuman form?
Shall we welcome the cruel yoke, and live
Where monsters rule men?
The anonymous poet 'Mutanabbi'
Sibikaar system, -1752 Imperial

By the early 300s Imperial, Ssilnthi dominance was visibly disintegrating.

At the start of the century, there were many festering hostilities and less-than-successful Vargr operations against human rebellions. By the 310s, several major Vargr worlds had begun to get rid of their conquistador overlords, led by the human slaves of Uatukoikaz (later renamed Justice) in 311, who fought for their native Vargr lords. By the 330s, conquistador rule was limited to worlds where they made up the majority population, usually low-pop systems of less than 10,000 sophonts. The weakness of the conquistadors also opened up opportunities for a new wave of pirates. While lacking the technology to compete with Ikonaz hunting packs, the Sparks are able to challenge the conquistadors – and win.

Even though the conquistadors were largely gone, local humaniti was still universally subjected to Vargr rule. Since about 300 Imperial, humaniti across the Beta Quadrant were aware of the existence of a huge human-dominated empire 'somewhere across the Rift'. Even more knew of the Protectorate, where humans and Vargr lived together in peace for the most part. And there were whispers of a third human empire, committed to a holy war against the inhuman Vargr. From the most comfortable and pampered slaves – accountants, programmers and other 'brain slaves' – to the 'disposable livestock, bred strictly for high fat content and good sport', the hunger for liberty and the

thirst for vengeance stirred in the hearts of men across the Quadrant. The most humiliated and abused slaves

heard rumours of human empires cleansing entire sectors of Vargr, and dreamt, and whispered.



The Rirrg Tekoirrgkfoanger, the very first Blood Vargr pirate/conquistador starship launched from Ssilnthi, c.280 Imperial.
The graphic is titled "Manta MKI -Study-", and was created by Alexander Kröner.
See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=244065

With the seeds sown, three outside parties acted as catalysts to fuel the War of Man:

Agent of Change: Vargr Refugees

While the Vargr within the Quarter focused on raw violence, the joy of hunting humans (and anything else that can offer a real challenge – sophonts preferably, or at least megafauna with claws, teeth, and a bad temper), and the hunger for glory, the shrinking number of independent Vargr worlds of Arzul sector were fighting for survival. Fleeing from Yilean-backed Death Fleets, many refugees fled to the Sparks in the early 300s.

The Empty Quarter packs distanced themselves from the Vargr immigrants as weak losers, unfit for anything but the lowest-status work. However, the organizational skills of the Irilitok Vargr eventually gave them an edge in economic and military competition with the locals. The Ssilnthi eventually saw the Arzul

Packs as competitors, and between 315 and 330, preferred to launch corsair raids against Arzul shipping rather than other targets.

They know nothing about humaniti. Nothing at all. Pack Protector Ererighzoughzume, watching Blood Vargr harass their human prey before killing her & leaving her organs splattered on the ground for their pups to devour. c. 303 Imperial

The wealth generation of the Arzul organizations always inspired jealousy (leading to heavy taxation), and sometimes pure envy as well, as enraged Vargr mobs destroyed Arzul Vargr establishments and ripped apart the merchants they could catch. In reaction, some refugees, translating wealth to power, began to arm local packs, and even human bands, that hated conquistador rule. This enraged the conquistadors, but they had a hard time isolating the Arzul smugglers and

bringing sufficient force to bear on them. Several attempts were made by the conquistadors to coordinate operations, but mutual pride and suspicion led these initiatives to a dead end.

Agent of Change: Imperials among the Sparks

The first modern Imperials to enter Beta Quadrant were a flotilla of ten armed far traders, which visited Ssilnthi in 123 Imperial on a trading mission. They spent a year in the area – losing four ships to pirates, one to a misjump, and one to an unknown plague - before making the Ssilnthi-Ikon-Antares run home. As profits were low and the risks were high, they never returned.

The violent, dangerous and – most importantly – unprofitable region was rarely visited by Imperial traders. However, various freelance groups and organizations – unofficially led by the Duke Hebrin - provided guns, training, and supplies to anti-Vargr forces. The Imperial Client States in the region were used as staging areas and a ‘smuggler’s route’ between the Ikonaz Sphere and the Spark Worlds. The gun-running and covert initiatives only lasted for a dozen years (330-342) before the Imperials were driven out. However, the arming of human freedom fighters paid long-term dividends, especially among the humans who became self-sufficient in getting arms and cash. Among the long-humbled humans, there grew a certain awe of the Imperium: this aura of respect still lingers among local humans over 600 years later.

All my life, I have lived under Vargr masters.

Always, they take what they wish and kill as they please, when they please, simply to prove they can.

Always, men cringe at the blood-red fur, the glistening fangs, the nostrils flaring in anger.

Always...

Until now.

Escaped human slave ‘Applehead’,
342 Imperial

Of greater local importance was the spread of strongly humanist religious thought, generally via Imperial Solomani missionaries of various stripes. The Duke Hebrin, in his role of Caliph, strongly encouraged the spread of Sunni Islam among the Spark Worlds. Various Hindu sects, especially the more aggressively humanist groups, found a receptive audience on many worlds. Darwinistic ideologies that stressed the competition between species, and the necessity of human supremacy in a tough, uncaring universe, was never popular in Imperial space – but gained an extensive audience among some human cliques in Beta Quadrant. The Ways of Men, a predecessor of the Last Man cult, began to seep into Beta Quadrant by indirect channels from Arzul Sector; it also promoted human dignity, human culture, and human power.



Previous: *Imperial smugglers on the move, somewhere in Beta Quadrant, 335 Imperial*

The graphic is titled "Scorpio's Haunt" ©Philippe Bullo.

See more of his work at <http://www.darthmagus.com/>

Agent of Change: The Black'n'Reds

None is too many.

Motto, VIII Detachment,
Legion of Breskain

The Black'n'Reds is the informal name of the VIII Detachment of the Legion of Breskain. The Legion is a military organization created on Gashikan in -612 to fight the Vargr. In 364, a group of four thousand men and their families arrived unannounced over the Vargr world of Kherriz in a fleet of 35 starships. Staffed mainly by steel-blue skinned & black-haired Yileans (the human minor race native to Gashikan), the Detachment promptly exterminated the 800,000 Vargr residents, renamed the system Pramas, and settled it themselves as a secret base of operations against the Vargr. Interestingly, the intensely-paranoid Suedzuk chose not to investigate what happened there, especially as no Vargr scout ever returned from the system. Mysterious rumours of a mutant, spaceborne version of Wolvesbane further guaranteed isolation.

The instinctually totalitarian Yileans had one long-term objective – the utter extermination of the Vargr within the Empty Quarter (and everywhere else) – and two mid-term goals: rebuild local human confidence and pride, and weaken Vargr authority and power over local humaniti. They preferred to work indirectly and through intermediaries, to hide their presence from the Vargr (who would kill them on sight or scent), and to reduce local dependence on the Detachment.

The Black'n'Reds position as honest brokers and disinterested outsiders 'with only the universal needs of all humaniti in mind' provided a foundation of trust between them and the largely mixed Vilani locals. This impartiality before Vilani & Solomani was actually genuine: the Yileans find *both* major human races admirable, for different reasons. For their part, the local human insurgents were also dazzled by the Yilean mystique: as of 364, the distant, tightly organized Second Empire of Gashikan has been ruling over a thousand systems for 2,000 years, utterly exterminating the Vargr within their extensive borders.



Legion of Breskain temples to the God of Man, on Pramas, 372 Imperial.

The graphic is titled "Antic City Of Akator" ©Philippe Bullo. See his work at

http://www.darthmagus.com/paysages_virtuels/album/slides/Antic%20City%20Of%20Akator.html

The War of Man

Aurë entuluva!
Day shall come again!
Húrin, facing the Troll Guard
during Nirnaeth Arnoediad
The Silmarillion

Only on 359 Imperial did the first successful human uprising against the Vargr take place, on Ufhoerrr – a world dominated by humans, whose Vargr rulers preferred playing charisma games against each other to keeping the teeming masses in check. By the year 375, nine of the 84 systems within the Quadrant were ruled by humans. (They were renamed Nisaga (formerly Ufhoerrr), Pramas, Tsooe, Aerstou, Zuethun, Flange, Managa, Cotan, and Gagan.) Another 25 human-majority systems were still ruled by Vargr, but most were in one of the various stages of rebellion.

[Note: Gagan (renamed Osaerr by a future Vargr government) was actually a Vargr-majority world whose military got caught off-guard. Amusingly, the world of Ssilnthis, one of the few Spark Worlds that had retained the human name after the Vargr conquest, never was part of the War of Man.]

A few rebellions were successful in exterminating the Vargr: but for most humans genocide, however appealing, was simply too difficult and expensive to pull off - even with eager Black'n'Red assistance. The usual pattern in the War of Man (359-402) followed that of the War for Justice:

- a surprise cut-off in electricity, communication, or life support
- a Vargr assault meeting opposition far stronger than what they bargained for
- an increasingly forceful string of human victories...

and then, with the Vargr facing the death of his Pack, his mate, and his pups,

- the Vargr somehow rally against long odds
- resistance soars to absolutely heroic levels
- the overwhelmed humans start losing serious ground...

and the Vargr pause, and request to negotiate terms.

The Black'n'Reds influence during the war was almost totally indirect: setting examples in the field, giving advice, providing inspiration, extending loans, setting up financial and surveillance networks, and giving

training on Vargr psychology and tactics. Providing weapons, starships, and money was uncommon at the start of the Julian War, and almost unheard of at the end of it. Legion-only operations were restricted to destroying Vargr space installations and orbiting starports. NBC warfare was avoided, to protect the human population from reprisals. Interactions with the Imperials were friendly, but kept at arm's length.

"I would kill you all, if I had the manpower.
But I don't, and we need to rest."
"Another day, then."
"Another day."
General Farid and PackMaster Akedhagugzua
Just before the signing
of the Truce of City Eka-tu
Aerstou system, 132-375

The Human Ascendance

The War of Man finally petered out in 402, with humaniti in control of sixteen worlds. Another ten human-majority worlds were still ruled by Vargr, but the various peace treaties, truces, and bargains left most of those humans with substantially greater liberty and under less Vargr control than they could have imagined before the War.

Men will be free! Men will be free,
and no clawed or fanged animal shall dare touch
what is rightfully ours!
Abdul nin Neluj,
First President of the Calculo
Nisaga system, 443 Imperial

The Black'n'Reds were unsatisfied with this result. They planned to strengthen the human worlds, encourage human-Vargr hostility, and begin operations to restart the war and push for complete victory on every world – victory being defined as Vargr extermination. However, rumours of their presence & actions had spread, and the usually divided Blood Vargr united to drive them out of Beta Quadrant. After their presence and location were verified by the Vargr – a trivially easy affair, given the number of leads – the Legion fought two to-the-wall defensive actions against massed Vargr raiders, successfully repelling them both times (401, 415 Imperial). However, the second battle of Pramas severely weakened the Yileans. After promising to return and 'finish the job', the Black'n'Reds abandoned the world to their Mixed Vilani allies. A brief flurry of Vargr raids followed (416-417), which destroyed much of the remaining high-tech infrastructure.

Between 402 and 409, numerous worlds were renamed in human tongues, replacing the various Vargr names. Humaniti already outnumbered the Blood Vargr on many of the high-pop worlds: their more cooperative nature lead to stronger interstellar trade, cultural, and technological exchanges, compared to the poor relations the isolationistic Vargr had (with humaniti or with each other). With a more outward outlook, the number of starports and starships multiplied: by the 440s, over half of the starships in Beta Quadrant were crewed by humans. The average system tech level rose from TL 2 – 4 to TL 6 – 8, with over 20% of the systems at or above TL 10 by c. 500 Imperial. While much of the human population looked upon the Imperium fondly, pressure from the Protectorate prevented any worlds from requesting Imperial Client status. Several unofficial Protectorate ‘client relationships’ were created with a handful of Vargr-dominated worlds, but these alliances were as weak as a spider’s web.

An Unexpected Shift

Vargr worlds with a large human minority generally reacted by either suppressing humans further, driving them to extinction, or expulsion. Only Ssilnthi, ‘always ahead of the pack’, reacted by downplaying Vargr supremacy and stressing the importance of character and integrity, regardless of species. A major factor in this paradigm shift was the writings of Morth Sawng (456 - 476), the only major female Red Spark philosopher in history. In her short life, she wrote several works, insisting that hunting of humans was the source of Vargr-human hostility. The Wild Hunts may be the pinnacle of Suedzuk Vargr ecstasy and the most sacred moment of many religious sects, but it simply had to stop if the Blood Vargr Packs were to survive in an increasingly human-dominated universe.

We claw and strike and kill.
 We feast on the flesh of our enemies.
 And trapped in our wilful blindness,
 by blood and hunger and love of the kill,
 we tear apart our pups.
 Morth Sawng, 469 Imperial

Claws tear flesh, but cannot touch spirit.
 Huntpriest Engurzendze,
 before Morth’s Tomb, 905 Imperial

Her controversial arguments led to her very unpleasant death in a Vargr meatmarket on Ssilnthi. But by the early 500s, large-scale hunting and devouring of

humans (and, eventually, other sophonts) was banned by numerous Red Spark-dominated governments. Even the killing and eating of the old, weak and sick was largely criminalized by the time of the Imperial Civil War. As of 993 Imperial, only annual ceremonial hunts, usually involving the worst human criminals and rebels, are tolerated by most Spark Worlds within the Empty Quarter. In wartime, eating dead sophonts was officially forbidden by the Blood Vargr, but still occurs on an occasional basis. The Julian Protectorate and the Hegemony of Lorean treats such acts as a war crime: in a congruent manner, the Imperium treats it as a violation of the Imperial Laws of War. The rules of war in the Ssilnthi Zone – like most of the Vargr Extents – vary by the world, by the war, and by the leadership.

The Bright Age

Hic domus, haec patria est.
 This is my home; this is my country.
 Virgil, -4591 - -4540 Imperial

The period between c. 450 (when interstellar trade really started to flourish) and the Nishhingh War (629-645) Imperial is referred to locally as the ‘Bright Age’. By the early 440s, the Vargr world of Ssilnthi, while still first among equals, was no longer the only source of TL 10 – 12 equipment and starship maintenance. Various Vargr and human entrepreneurs raised the tech levels and starport class of several small worlds, extending and strengthening the reach of interstellar commerce in the Quadrant. The arts and philosophy grew in complexity and scope, in both Vargr and human societies. Most notable were various forms of visual chanting, fine mathematical & aural poetry, and several remarkable examples of organized blood dances, enveloping entire cities.

To dance, to sing, to hunt, to take, to tear and eat
 – that is life!
 Ekhsgegvgru,
 Blood dance composer/performer
 575 Imperial

The pattern of small, high-tech worlds affiliated with heavily populated, low-tech systems formed the basis of the first interstellar regimes. The first human-run interstellar state among the Sparks Worlds, the Orchard Commission, was founded in 452 Imperial. By the early 500s, the sheer number of competing governments had made bushfire and proxy wars routine in the region.



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Former residence of Morth Sawng on Ssilnthis, 480 Imperial.

By the 550s, the site had become a pilgrimage shrine to 'the TrueSpeaker Morth Sawng.'
 The graphic is titled "Laboratory of Professor Lunpinbau" © Nikolay Yeliseyev. See his work at
<http://nikyeliseyev.blogspot.com/> & <http://nikolay.cgsociety.org/gallery/551796/>

As of 001-510, the following interstellar polities existed within Beta Quadrant, complete with their date of creation:

Polity	Population Centre	Tech Centre	Date
The Orchard Commission	Orchard/3116	+Cagico/3112	452
*The PeaceSphere	Justince/2405	Pramas/2504	462
Stellar Republic of Cotan	Cotan/2212	Cotan/2212	474
The Bond of Rit-tik	Tsoe/2704	Tsoe/2704	476
*Kulloerr Nation	+Gagan/2202	Kulloerr/2103	481
*Abuish	Abuish/3202	Taegzoer/3201	483
*Lili Dynasty	Dharo/2516	Ughoko/2615	487
Gangas	+Riiagemi/3219	+Riiagemi/3219	490
Taabe Imperium	Zuethun/3007	Engaell/3008	492
The Preca Republic	+Gupta/2810	+Gupta/2810	502
*Kingdom of Uenkakh	Reskhuda/2605	Uenkakh/2707	509
StarCommand	Flange/2009	Flange/2009	509
†The Damlaer Union	Damlaer/3138	Damlaer/3138	516

* Vargr-dominated governments

+ System name changed between 510 and today (993 Imperial)

†Damlaer is actually located in hex 3138, Lorean subsector (Damlaer subsector before 942 Imperial), in neighbouring Amdukan Sector to coreward.

The interstellar situation was quite fluid and unpredictable. While there were a continual series of small-scale flare-ups, no local power wanted to spend the blood and treasure an all-out war would require. Neither the Protectorate nor the Imperium was able to establish a reliable partnership with these highly independent-minded interstellar states.

Eventually, hostilities came to a head in the Great Chain of Battles, a series of consecutive raids, battles, bombardments and invasions that stretched from c. 510 to 575. Both the Imperium and three Protectorate governments sent a few military assets to fight for their allies. But as the wars ground on without conclusion, these outside powers slowly reduced their commitment, and had abandoned the field by 540. The only permanent result of these wars was the destruction of Abuish, as that government, including Taegzoer/3201, and Abuish/3202 systems were conquered and forcibly annexed into the Damlaer Union in 534 Imperial.

Fight after fight, blow after blow
That is what makes our Nation grow!
Cotan marching cadence, 540s Imperial

A set of rules on warfare, based on the Imperial Rules of War, were formally agreed to by all the local starnations by 592. Many of the most aggressive and bloodthirsty Red Spark starship captains, stymied by the new rules and entranced by the violence of the Imperial Civil War, worked to set up a series of fuel dumps across the Sangre – Cairne – Sahale gap, skirting Imperial naval forces in the area. After the new jump3 route was made, they surged into the area, causing havoc in the area in throughout 612. However, to their great surprise, the large Ikonaz pirate groups already in the area turned against them, destroying their fuel dumps and killing off many of their ships in 613. When news of this arrived in Beta Quadrant, intense enmity was sown between the Suedzuk and the Ovaghoun Vargr.

After the Imperial Civil War, short, sharp skirmishes became prevalent among the Spark Worlds between the various powers. Inevitably, a skirmish grew into a major fight, more and more resources were committed, and a bitter conflict, the Nishhingh War, burst into flame.

The Nishhingh War

'It is ever so with the things that Men begin: there is a frost in Spring, or a blight in Summer, and they fail of their promise.'

'Yet seldom do they fail of their seed,' said Legolas, 'And that will lie in the dust and rot to spring up again in times and places unlooked-for. The deeds of Men will outlast us, Gimil.'

'And yet come to naught in the end but might-have-beens, I guess' said the Dwarf.

'To that the Elves know not the answer,' said Legolas.

JRR Tolkien, The Return of the King

-2565 Imperial

As we fight the enemy, we become the enemy.
Strategos Ihard, StarCommand, 633 Imperial

Despite the long-standing agreements restricting military activities, the Nishhingh War (629-645) still caused far greater casualties than any previous war: at ten billion dead civilians and 400 million dead combatants, the casualties were far greater than the Great Chain of Battles (3 billion dead civilians and 100 million dead combatants.) Only the devastation and the cruelty of the Vargr Pillaging surpassed the death and grief of this conflict within Beta Quadrant.

The Nishhingh War was fought between the Great Alliance (including the Kingdom of Uenkakh, the Bond of Rik-tik and Kulloerr Nation) and the BloodUnion (a military alliance between the Stellar Republic of Cotan and Flange's StarCommand.) Even though the militaries of these states largely obeyed the local rules of war, the simple fact was that even conventional warfare and can cause great chaos and widespread ruin, if pressed with sufficient intensity and fury.

The combination of weapons cost, tactics, and available resources lead the opposing groups to focus on the creation and deployment of large, infantry-heavy armies fighting in heavily built-up and urbanised areas. Artillery, mortar and ortillery support was widespread: but so was potent and plentiful anti-air support, which made airborne medivac and resupply of endangered units (isolated and/or under heavy assault) extremely hazardous. A massive number of injured sophonts died who in other wars would have been successfully pulled out of the line of fire and stabilized.

As the BloodUnion tightened her grip on the Great Alliance's trade routes, the Alliance steadily weakened. Kulloerr Nation dropped out of the conflict at 636 after being bled dry on the battlefield, making a separate

peace with the BloodUnion. Tsooe surrendered at 640 after a crushing defeat in her homesystem: reflected sunlight from cloud of shattered vessels could be seen at night over that world. Reshkhuda was successfully invaded and occupied at 645 at huge cost of life, for both invaders and defenders, causing the Vargr government on Uenkakh to throw in the towel and

dissolve the Kingdom. With the end of the Kingdom, the human and Ikonaz-style Vargr/Vilani corporations of the BloodUnion were able to dominate interstellar trade in both Cotan and Flange subsectors without interference.



The invasion of Osaer, 634 Imperial. This graphic is titled Gravics Ground Assault Division # -*3_1 © Glenn. See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1539538

To appease the unfavourable reaction to the BloodUnion's conquest (especially from the Vargr), the Treaty of Cotan was signed in 648: this banned the destruction/corruption of major civilian communication, life-support, and electrical facilities and the refusal/unnecessary delay in accepting 'reasonable offers of surrender.' This Treaty, supported by both the Imperium and the Protectorate, went a long way in discouraging total wars locally. However, the PeaceSphere remained unsatisfied until the BloodUnion was dissolved in 660 due to internal disagreements.

Aftermath

Slow deaths are to be feared more than swift ones,
for men, the world, and civilization herself.
The pain of the bitter end wipes away
the good times from memory.
The energy spent resisting the inevitable
leaves nothing for posterity.
And the agonizing futility of the hard death
breaks the spirit of all.
Professor Egror,
on the collapse of the Rule of Man
University of Sylea, -1033

The destruction and devastation of the Nishhingh War was similar to the aftermath of the First World War in

European history. The bitter and agonizing death of the Bright Age in a sea of torn flesh and shattered minds was a blow that the Sparks failed to recover from. A certain bitter cynicism within Suedzuk Vargr thought seeped into their society, twisting and undermining Red Spark culture in ways that even the long-past War of Man couldn't accomplish. The common citizens and subjects of the victorious human powers, after learning that their sons were torn to shreds for the sake of corporate gain, grew to despise their governments and the major corporations. This wave of contempt and spite poisoned relations between the people and their leaders, and the distrust sown led to increased crime and lawlessness – and strong public support for those who challenged the authorities, regardless of rationale.

From the end of the Nishhingh War in 645 to the rise of the Hegemony, most conflicts were within the interstellar governments. When they didn't involve direct attacks against the State, it involved two or more internal factions, fighting because of racial, economic, linguistic, or regional differences. Attempts by government mediators to soothe the various conflicts were derided or simply ignored. A wave of major terrorist incidents between 683 and 697 sparked a major centralization of authority in most of the polities. One incident, the destruction of StarCommand's capital city of Datros via a 'suitcase nuke', led to the immediate collapse of the government in 78-693, and to its eventual replacement with the Flange Democratic Zone in 705.

The most tragic case was Reshkhuda, where the local ruling TL 13 Suedzuk Vargr bands were locked in combat with each other and much of the human population at the same time. At around 40-722, a family of viral diseases were released that tore through the population like a wildfire. Fearful of Legion of Breskain involvement, the world was quickly quarantined as the Vargr population died. It did not stop there: the strange nature of the biosphere, able to prolong life, changed the nature of the plague in two crucial ways. First, it somehow permitted the plague to jump the species barrier, wiping out over 90% of the human population as well as 100% of the Vargr. Secondly, it prolonged and altered the terminal course of the disease, increasing the pain resistance of the afflicted, as well as driving them paranoid and

mindlessly violent. By the early 800s, when the disease finally vanished, the world had collapsed to TL 2, and the surviving human population had collapsed from 100 billion to 900 million.

Throughout the 700s, a declining regional economy accelerated these internal struggles, causing a general rise in law levels across the board. The declining fortune of the local economy was the major cause of the collapse of two polities:

- the Orchard Commission in 714 - replaced by two governments: the Regency of Orchard and New Pallavas, centered on Maarkhuda/2913.
- The Vargr Lili Dynasty in 734 - replaced by the human StarCrown government.

A third government, the PeaceSphere, suffered a partial collapse as the numerous governments on Justince simultaneously disintegrate in 732. Negotiations between Pramas and the various new fractions and emerging governments lead to subsidised transportation, to allow certain refugees to emigrate. The success of this venture led to the reconstitution of the PeaceSphere in 742.

Other interstellar states starved off collapse by cutting back expenditures and regulations, reigning in inflation and encouraging cultural unity and mutual support, both laterally (between races and regions) and horizontally (stronger corporate and elite support and a chain of (neo)feudal/socialist obligations, in return for loyalty and obedience.) While the economic measures generally brought good results, attempts to strengthen and unify their cultures via social engineering and indoctrination proved quite difficult – in many cases, impossible – to pull off satisfactorily.

While the interstellar states endured throughout most of the 700s, they slowly became moribund and culturally sclerotic. In the end, they were unable to successfully react to the encroachment of the Hegemony of Lorean: most of these nations were assimilated into the Hegemony by 800 Imperial. In general, their human populations initially welcomed the Hegemony, seeing it as shaking up The System, and opening up doors for the common man to make his mark. The local Vargr had a rather different opinion.



Suedzuk mining craft, Athuerr system, 698 Imperial

The graphic is titled "Asteroids I" ©Alexander Kröner.

See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=244526

The Rise of the Hegemony

If I knew that a man was coming to my house with the fixed intention of doing me good, I would run for my life.

Henry David Thoreau, -2704 to -2659 Imperial

The Hegemony of Lorean, the dominant government in Arzul sector, was founded in 734 Imperial. The Hegemony started out as a 'trade and aid' group of interstellar Mixed Vilani traders, centred on a cluster of high-population systems dominating Mycocona subsector. In addition to Mixed Vilani worlds, the early members of the Hegemony are descended from:

- German & Russian-led colonial expeditions, consisting of East European settlers. These were generally 'cultural/racial preservation' groups.

- Saudi & Egyptian colonies: often, settlers from the Gulf States (Kuwait, the Persian Gulf Emirates, etc) were to be found here as well. These groups had the closest ties to the Empty Quarter, as they often interacted with the Gushgusi Arabs.

- East Asian projects: the Japanese, Korean, and Chinese societies were quite nationalistic, and usually kept a distance from each other, and even greater distance from the other Solomani settlers. They had the best relations with the local Vilani, and had the greatest initial investment in equipment and technology.

- A single but influential settlement by the Chileans, 'the Prussians of South America.'

These worlds, knit together by Mixed Vilani traders, grew to be a boon for the region. The great success of this trade coalition led to a sharp rise of economic - and soon after, military - power. Naturally, greater power led to greater expansion.



Firestation Sandy-Three, located on Sharleda, 832 Imperial

The graphic is titled "Citadelle Des Sables" ©Philippe Bullo. See his work at <http://www.darthmagus.com/images/slides/CitadelleDesSables-4.html>

Hegemonic Growth

734 – 8 systems, one subsector (Mycocona/Arzul)

740 – 15 systems, one subsector (Mycocona/Arzul)

750 – ~40 systems, two subsectors (Mycocona/Arzul, Ambro/Arzul)

760 – ~70 systems, five subsectors

Arzul Sector: Kotsfa, Nishamidu, Gorzadi, Mycocona, Ambro

After 760, the rate of growth finally began to slow down...

770 – ~100 systems

Arzul Sector: Gakhir, Kotsfa, Nishamidu, Gorzadi, Mycocona, Ambro

Amdukan Sector: Damlaer (now Lorean)

Star's End Sector: The Sandworlds, Kedepar

780 - ~150 systems

Arzul Sector: Gakhir, Kotsfa, Nishamidu, Gorzadi, Mycocona, Ambro

Amdukan Sector: Damlaer (now Lorean)

Star's End Sector: The Sandworlds, Kedepar, Al Mayadin, Five Systems

The Empty Quarter Sector: Tsooe

790 - ~230 systems

Arzul Sector: Gakhir, Kotsfa, Nishamidu, Gorzadi, Mycocona, Ambro

Star's End Sector: The Sandworlds, Kedepar, Al Mayadin, Five Systems

The Empty Quarter Sector: Flange, Tsooe, Cotan, Nisaga

[Note: a diplomatic agreement led to a local withdrawal from Amdukan Sector.]

This explosive rate of growth - over 200 systems in 60 years, or the conquest, absorption, or settlement of three worlds every year – is practically unheard of in the annals of Charted Space. Only one power has ever maintained a better rate of growth for decades on end: the early Third Imperium, from 0 to 80 Imperial.

The Hegemony of Lorean is a far younger government than either the Imperium or the Protectorate (to the extent that it is a government...) The Hegemony of Lorean is a crypto-theocratic humanist state, with an establish history of friendship with the Second Empire of Gashikan. The government had genocidal inclinations earlier in her history, like the Yileans that so many Arzula admire. However, influential slave brokers and corporate executives persuaded the Hegemony to let the obedient Irlitok Vargr slaves live out their lives, if only for the sake of the economy.

Today, under the influence of the Julian Protectorate, slavery has been largely replaced with a caste system, and most Hegemonio aren't interested in genocide: they are satisfied in denying any Vargr a place in the government, the Hegemonic civil service, or the State Cult of the Last Man. Attempts have been made to induct Vargr troops into military service, with dismal results. However, a new attempt, using the Lorean Rangers as a testbed, is again underway. Besides the exclusion from most government service, most Vargr face some petty restrictions or discrimination on their worlds, but rarely is it more than forms of segregation. The most crippling restriction is the bar on Vargr working on or owning Hegemonic starships. As the Irlitok grow wealthier, there is increasing pressure to change this, with some results in Lorean subsector in Amdukan and in Beta Quadrant in the Empty Quarter.

It's highly amusing. Most empires in history – especially those moralizing Solomani ones – love to proclaim their willingness to fight wars of conquest in the name of... freedom! From Rome destroying Greek independence to protect 'the freedom of the Greeks' to the Hegemony swallowing Beta Quadrant to 'guard the liberty of Men', the imperial thirst for power always wears the stolen garb of their betters.

Counsellor Lasgrefhoentue of Ikon,
speaking before the Protectorate War Council.
Asimikigir system, 805 Imperial

Racially, the Arzula are dominantly Vilani in ancestry, with a strong 'minor notes' of Solomani Slavic & Arabic heritages. Assorted minor human groups, now extinct as discreet races, also influence bloodlines across the sector. Culturally, they are best described as a blend of

Vilani conformity and caution, a Solomani taste for relentless expansionism and racial supremacy, and a very old-school political messianic authoritarianism. Their imagined destiny is as the catalyst of the Last Man, which will at once destroy all their nonhuman enemies, bring humaniti across the next evolutionary level, and insure the glory of the Arzula people forever.

Hegemonic expansion into the Empty Quarter

Hegemonic expansion was driven by the need for economic growth. Their welcome within Beta Quadrant was due to the desire of local governments for protection by a 'Big Brother', as well as a need for financial aid. One notable exception: the Star Republic of Cotan was attacked by the Hegemony in 789 in a brief war that ended in the heavy bombardment of Cotan and her unconditional surrender.

Once the defeated interstellar governments were broken up, Suedzuk-dominated worlds were treated far more harshly than the human-dominated worlds, with hundreds of thousands dying at any sign of rebellion. The Hegemony was pleased to conscript local men to police the Vargr worlds – men who held very old and hard grudges against their former oppressors. Suedzuk complains regarding their ill treatment was ignored and casually dismissed, while every request by the local troopers for support – involving a nice strong burst of artillery, for example – was quickly fulfilled to the letter.

In a simultaneous assault, Hegemony attacks were launched against the world of Ssilnthi and the Flange Democratic Zone in 796. However, both were successful in repelling the assault: Flange by her own wits and wealth, and Ssilnthi with assistance from the Damlaer Union, a powerful member-state within the Julian Protectorate. However, both were forced to dissolve all their interstellar treaties, alliances, and (in Flange's case) her multisystem government as a condition for a peace treaty.

The Imperial government was very pleased to see such a growth-oriented people like the Hegemonio rise up on the other side of the Lesser Rift, as a solid counterweight to the long-established Protectorate. In 808, overriding the vigorous complaints of the Vargr Archduke and the Julian Protectorate, the Imperium and the Hegemony signed a trade & friendship agreement, and in 814 a mutual trade pact was signed – the origin of the Deep Space Station Project, linking the Hegemony with the Imperium.

Government	Date of union	Major motivating factor
Tsosoe (single-world)	771	Money, Hegemony settler 'population invasion'
*Abuish	774	Money, bribes
Taabe Imperium	781	Protection from the PeaceSphere
*Kulloerr Nation	782	Planetary uprising
Regency of Orchard	784	Trade, bribery
*The PeaceSphere	784	Threatened invasion
New Pallavas	786	Internal coup
Stellar Republic of Cotan	789	Bombardment, invasion occupation
The StarCrown of Dharo	799	Money, terraforming
Gangas	807	Money, trade
The Preca Republic	824	Lost on a bet

* Vargr-dominated governments

The Blighted War

Man has killed man from the beginning of time, and each new frontier has brought new ways and new places to die. Why should the future be different?
 Col. Corazon Santiago
 "Planet: A Survivalist's Guide"
<http://www.generationterrorists.com/quotes/smac.html>

Despite her internal economic strength, the Hegemony of Lorean had met their match on several frontiers. Growth Rimward was blocked by the Lesser Rift and the Imperium, and barred in Trailing-Spinward by the powerful Julian Protectorate, of which the Damlaer Union was a potent member. Coreward-Spinward, the mighty Second Empire of Gashikan blocked the Hegemony. Finally, the Hegemon turned his land-hunger and highly experienced military to Coreward-Trailing. Between 822 and 835, much of Arzul Sector was conquered...

...but it didn't stay conquered. The prideful Hegemon had finally bitten off more than he could chew. Between 835 and 870 the Blighted War bled the Hegemony dry as it tried to conquer five subsectors. Certain victories ground into stalemates, and stalemates slowly twisted into routs. Supply convoys to distant worlds ran into heavy interference from fast-moving raiders: attempts to trace their support network would fade into nothingness. Major military installations, built in the greatest secrecy and with airtight security, would suffer mysterious nuclear or antimatter explosions within a year of going into operation.

The Era of Horror

By 845, the cost of this fruitless war began to bite into the common Hegemon subject. By the 860s average citizens of even the wealthiest worlds were going without food once a week, getting by with only ten hours of electricity a day. Empty Quarter systems suffered more, with millions kept on the edge of famine, drought, or freezing 'for the sake of the war effort'.

The men of steel, men of power
 Are losing control by the hour.
 Phil Collins, "Land of Confusion",
 -2535 Imperial

The austere, stoic, and long-suffering nature of the patriotic Hegemonio finally broke in 869. On both human and Suedzuk worlds within the Empty Quarter, scattered rebellions morphed into worldwide riots and planetary coups. Military resources, tasked to launch yet another offensive into the heart of Arzul Sector, were redirected to pacify the revolt. The rebellion didn't fall so easily, leading to an ugly war as Hegemony forces clawed back the worlds they had lost. The coreward war in Arzul was eventually abandoned: the last Hegemon warship jumped from the battle zone in 165-870, ending the Blighted War.

Most Hegemony records of the Era of Horror remains sealed, but it is known that a substantial fraction of the indigenous human population were killed, and the rest terrorized into cringing obedience. Most of the Suedzuk packs were simply wiped out.

Revival

The collapse of the Hegemonic position in the Coreward half of Arzul Sector led another wave of social unrest and political chaos in the remaining Hegemonic worlds of Arzul Sector. The long-held Kotsfa subsector, strongly influenced by the anti-Hegemony propaganda, decided to take action. Led by local traders and prominent religious leaders, they successfully seceded in 872, defying the weak Hegemony efforts to stop them.

The further disintegration of the Hegemony was stopped only by the suicide of the Hegemon in 307-872, and the decision of his successor to immediately lift all economic restrictions and austerity measures while renouncing all war debts. The hyper-inflated currency was dumped, and privately-held currencies were permitted to take its place; precious metals, rare earths (including lanthanum, used for starship jump grids), the Imperial Credit, and the Julian Star were also authorized for use as currency. This had the effect of salvaging the economy while destroying every major banking establishment, every financial house, and most family fortunes within the Hegemony.



A Vargr farm on Kharo, 990 Imperial. While the atmosphere is being reformed, it will take another half-millennium before it can be reliably breathed safely by Vargr (and humans).

This graphic is titled "Heavens Reach" © Glenn.

See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1759282

Social Mores

Before their bitter and extremely costly defeat in the Blighted War and the near-death of their government & the resulting civil strife and economic collapse, the Arzula were capable of breathtaking acts of arrogance. (To this day, 'Arzulan', used as an epithet, denotes a pitiless, cruel contempt for anything or anyone who stands against you.) Over time, as immediate threats diminished, the memory of the Horror faded, and Irlitok (and, later, Damlaerite influence) grew within the Hegemony, the Arzula character softened somewhat, at least before outsiders. While still harsh and commanding compared to the human norm, they now try to suppress their sadistic instincts, and emphasise 'strength and honour' in themselves, rather than joy in inspiring terror and fear in their subjects. Soldiers who speak of 'protecting the weak' are no longer openly ridiculed and humiliated. Ordinary Hegemonio are now permitted to openly speak and act out of love, guilt, sadness, and regret – something that would have been a capital offense before the Horror,

and is still subject to ridicule, fines, and – in extreme cases – psychological therapy/limited personality 'enhancement' in the Home Worlds of Arzul Sector.

1. Don't think you're anything special.
2. Don't think you're as much as us.
3. Don't think you're wiser than us.
4. Don't convince yourself that you're better than us.
5. Don't think you know more than us.
6. Don't think you are more than us.
7. Don't think you are good at anything.
8. Don't laugh at us.
9. Don't think anyone cares about you.
10. Don't think you can teach us anything.
11. Don't think there's anything we don't know about you.

Jante Law, the Scandinavian Social Code

Within Beta Quadrant, local humans still prefer to avoid the pale Arzula, but they rarely see them, except in government announcements, starports, and certain 'model colony worlds'. The few Arzula that live among

Beta humaniti are typically dissidents and exiles – formal or informal – from the demanding, conformist, militaristic society of their homeworlds in Arzula Sector.

Women and Children

Hegemonic cultures, like the Arab and East Indian cultures throughout the Quarter, are quite comfortable with corporal punishment of children, in public and in private. What makes them unique, even in these ‘soft times of peace’, is their discouragement of showing affection to children. Arabs can be quite sentimental regarding children, and East Indians have the usual kindly feeling towards tykes, but the Azula Hegemonio sees this as teaching weakness in an unforgiving world.

Showing public affection children is subject to frowns of disapproval at the least, and parents who do so may have their child permanently taken away in the more strict societies of the Home Worlds, ‘for dereliction in parental duties’. Indeed, infanticide is quite common among the Arzula, and the lives of children in general are held to be of drastically less value than that of adults, as they are not productive (and tax-paying) members of society: an attitude reflected in that culture’s laws. Within the Hegemony-held Spark Worlds, emotional control is far more relaxed, and the lives of children are held to be of more value. Only public displays of emotion are discouraged and legally punished as a matter of public decency on the Arzula colony worlds, i.e. weeping, affectionately holding hands, shouting in anger, screaming in fear, etc.

It’s a hard society, where a child has to turn to an uplifted dog for a hug.

Ominotago Big-Mouth
Captain of the *Sand Creek* Far Trader
993 Imperial

incomprehensible on this matter. Innately violent paranoids, they may have nothing but clawed and fanged hate for anyone outside of the pack, but they are very tight with those in the pack. Refusing to show affection to their own young is profoundly alien, as to be simply incomprehensible.

On the other hand, even the Arzula Hegemonio – who, like the Arabs, upholds a strong view of *paterfamilias*, *purdah*, and family discipline – would be outraged with the treatment of women within the Six Subsectors, with Arab honour killings of women who disgrace their families and clans a commonplace, and East Indian women often dying due to suttee funeral customs, or outright dowry killings. All three cultures look with contempt on Imperials drafting women into military service, while the Imperial Core types, utterly blasé before any sort of cultural weirdness, are absolutely dumbfounded by the existence of an Interstellar Ruling Elite that is grounded in a unifying *religion*, instead of a proper corporate/military/familial matrix.

In the meantime, the Bwaps (who keep 90% of their own females in the crèches, out of the public eye) and the Vilani (whose own women are a lot more socially involved than local Solomani women – but only after spending thirty years of their average 130 to 140 years of life bearing and raising their four children, As Demanded By The Traditions) just want everyone to just Follow the Book and/or Stop Changing Things.

The Irlitok Silver Age

These types don’t need extermination.
Domestication is good enough.

Hegemon Traten, in a message to
Field Marshal/Commodore Ujjain,
Hegemony Pacification Group *Quietus*,
870 Imperial

The Irlitok Vargr, generally gregarious and warm-hearted sophonts, have a problem with this attitude, but are careful not to challenge their social superiors. Baha’i and Christian attitudes run counter to this ethic: they have limited influence within Beta Quadrant, and none at all in the Home Worlds.

The Damlaerite Hegemonio, intimidated and envious of the stoic self-discipline, organized and efficient culture, high tolerance for pain, and serious mien that comes naturally to the Arzula, try to ape them by publically beating their children and roughing up the Vargr servants – but their heart simply isn’t in it. Even the quick-to-kill Suedzuk Vargr find Arzula Hegemonio

The amazing ability of the ordinary Hegemonio to bounce back from any setback shone through, as the Time of Madness (869-873) ebbed away into the past. To the astonishment of all, the Irlitok Vargr cultures were the first to return to health. They had managed to hold up under the unyielding burden of the Blighted War, avoided any major Hegemonic punishment, and kept their distance from anti-Hegemony rebels. As their reward for their passive acceptance and loyalty to the Hegemony, a host of restrictions on the Irlitok was removed. Moreover, they were encouraged to gain even more liberty – should they move to the Hegemony worlds of the Empty Quarter, taking what used to belong to the Suedzuk. Millions have taken up

the over: while the Irilitok are still a minority in Beta Quadrant, they are rapidly expanding, while local humaniti is growing at a slower rate, and the Suedzuk are clearly shrinking in population. With low-key support from the Menderes Corporation, the Irilitok Vargr developed a lead in banking & high finance that they enjoy to this day. As Hegemony law restricted interstellar business, starship ownership and crews to humaniti, the major Vargr packs put their

money to work in restoring infrastructure, opening up light manufacturing concerns, and setting up private educational networks. When permitted, they also bought real estate, turning ruined cities into habitations fit for Vargr, or ploughing them under and using the freed land for agribusiness or private hunting grounds. Some Irilitok Vargr even took an interest in the development genetics, computing & electronics.



Zataang, capital of Zuethun and unofficial provincial capital of the Hegemony.
The Viceroy of Zuethun has theoretical (and increasingly, actual) authority over Beta Quadrant of The Empty Quarter and Alpha Quadrant of Star's End, Empty Quarter's neighbour to trailing.
 The graphic is titled "Autumn Holiday" © Nikolay Yeliseyev.
 See his work at <http://nikyeliseyev.blogspot.com/> & <http://nikolay.cgsociety.org/gallery/401494/>

While the Irilitok Revolution of c. 900 onwards has most benefited the leading Irilitok packs, it has also provided a substantial boost to the regular 'upper middle-class' Vargr. The Irilitok of the Hegemony are still less free than their kin in the Asimikigir Confederation – or even compared to their brothers in the Ovaghoun-dominant Rukadukaz Republic.

As the Vargr grew wealthier, Hegemony humaniti grew more envious, especially among the lower classes. Various groups of disgruntled men led political attacks against the Vargr: some successful, most not. Among the most successful was The Order of One. The Order, inspired by the human-revered Legion of Breskain, established a settlement on Pramas in 866. Following the legionary example, the Order avoided direct military confrontation, instead working as a clearinghouse on anti-Vargr operations. This increased tensions between the species on Pramas considerably, including several riots and violent confrontations.

Soft Master: "Guns do not covet your wealth, seek revenge, or justify their actions with righteousness. Fear not the weapon, but the man who wields it."

Airborne: "But if the enemy is unarmed, why arm him again?"

Soft Master: "We cannot kill them out of hand and we cannot control them. Therefore, we had to let them go. These are desperate, crafty men. Who knows what diabolical instrument of destruction they could devise if they were driven to such extremes? We would be battling the unknown.

Give a man a weapon, and he will use it. We know their weapons, and therefore, we know their limitations."

GI JOE #32, vol. 1, -2517 Imperial

Eventually, local humaniti got back on their feet as well. The upper classes are tied to Hegemon civil, religious,

or military service, and managed to survive on their government stipend and benefits – although even they went thru some very lean times. The ‘second-rank’ families involved in commerce had lost the first-mover advantage to the Vargr in the best fields, so – after a lot of grumbling, and more than a little violence – they shifted their investment into heavy manufacturing as well as the ‘human preserve’ of starship construction and interstellar trade. Most humans were satisfied simply to see the factories open up again, no matter if they were working for humans or Vargr.

By the 910s, the Hegemony was on a major roll again. The economy was surging, and the future looked as bright as a supernova – outside of the Hegemonic Empty Quarter, which never fully recovered from the Era of Horror. Looking to expand again, the Hegemon turned his eyes on Damlaer: from 915 onwards he sent emissaries, secretly and publicly, to contact the major leaders of the Damlaer Union of Amdukan Sector...

Victory – with a Twist

Hegemony actions and growth led to an increasing level of tensions between the Hegemony and the Protectorate. The defection of the Damlaer Union from the Protectorate to the Hegemony on 236-933 sparked the Lorean Strikes (from 933 to 936): a series of sharp and fast attacks on key infrastructure, communication, and ship-building points within the Hegemony. The strikes were initially successful, but rebuilding was unexpectedly rapid: and the avenging Hegemony counterstrike fleets, which the Protectorate planned to isolate and destroy, never materialized.

Where are they? Where are they hiding?
Tell me that, and I’ll pluck off my tail myself
and hand it to you for a duster.

Star Legion Rear Admiral Torgrudhatatas
to his Intelligence Chief, 328-933

It slowly dawned on the Protectorate that they will have to retake Damlaer by invasion & occupation. After much bickering, major elements of the Protectorate were organized into an assault fleet, and jumped into Damlaer system in 119-936. Finding no resistance, and finding the Hegemony occupation force absent, the Protectorate landed her forces and swiftly and efficiently occupied the system. However, in day

127, the main Hegemony fleet jumped insystem, catching the Protectorate napping, with much of their strength already on their way back home. As the Hegemony ships opened fire, local adversary ground forces suddenly erupted up from the sea and poured down from *under* the mountains, destroying the local Star Legion forces and devouring the Protectorate army in the greatest defeat of Protectorate arms in history.

The crushing defeat of the Battle of Damlaer sparked a major political crisis within the Protectorate, resolved only by a charismatic/media-driven showdown between the Menderes family and their Vargr critics. The Fellowship of Nobles, a major Protectorate Vargr government of the time, collapsed as a direct result of this defeat. Internal tensions remained high until the Menderes, in an astonishing coup, persuaded the Hegemon to join the Protectorate in return for Julian recognition Damlaers’ absorption into the Hegemony, the revocation of the Imperial Credit’s status as legal tender within the Hegemony (an act demanded by Menderes Financial, a branch of the Menderes Corporation), and a mutual agreement restricting naval bases within the Empty Quarter.

In 942, the Protectorate and the Hegemony formally signed the Treaty of Var-Inaka (restricting naval basing) and the Julian Concord, incorporating the Hegemony into the Julian Protectorate as an Associated State. In addition, Damlaer subsector was formally renamed Lorean subsector, and became the new capital of the Hegemony.

Finally, on the insistence of the Rukadukaz leadership, the Treaty included the provision of a ‘buffer zone’ of neutral systems between the Lorean Hegemony and the Rukadukaz Republic, with an average of six parsecs between their borders. Referred to as ‘the Ssilnthis Zone’ by Travellers, this region is now famous for the nastiness of her pirates and the lawlessness of local space.

Killing humans and stealing their stuff isn’t the *only* thing we can do. It’s just so much more *satisfying* than the bloodless drudge work that flat-faced, *tamed* Vargr think we should be doing instead.

Songorruaghkkoingee,
Blood Vargr guide to the Ssilnthis Zone,
987 Imperial



Hegemony supply & logistics station, Tsooe system, 940 Imperial

The graphic is titled "Uzuz" © Philippe Bullot.

See his work at <http://www.darthmagus.com/science-fiction/album/slides/Uzuz.html>

Changing Times

The 897 arrival of a Baha'i group of missionaries on Pramas caused a spiritual evolution on Pramas. The integrity of the initial wave of missionaries is still held in high esteem, although the large wave of recent converts have necessarily involved a dilution of religious commitment. When extensive 'liberty and conscience' legislation was authorized by the Hegemon in 929, the Baha'i faith quickly grew: local believers accepted both human and nonhuman believers in their Study Circles. In addition to various houses of worship, the Baha'i have built four large temples on the world, at the 'uttermost east, west, north and south' to stress the unity of the world.

The changes the Baha'i have brought in have also made the world a magnet for all sorts of philosophies and religions, both mainstream and eccentric. As human-Vargr relations on the world grew more sympathetic, the genocidal ideology of the Order of One was increasingly unwelcomed by the citizens of Pramas.

However, the Order's wealth, political contacts and security forces seemed to make them unmovable. Even so, the increasing wealth and status of the Vargr gave them greater leverage in the high councils of the Hegemony. Eventually, with two notable groups – the planetary leadership of Pramas and the major interstellar Vargr packs – demanding action against the Order, the Hegemon was forced to expel the Order of One from Hegemony space in 949. Most of the Order willingly relocated to the Sangre system during the 950s: but certain splinter factions refused to budge, requiring a costly military action in 958.

Meanwhile, in 960, Flange petitioned to join the Hegemony to gain trading rights and Protectorate protection. She was permitted to join with Protectorate approval in 963, over the vigorous objections of the Rukadukaz Republic. The Hegemon renewed attempts to woo Ssilnthis – the last major holdout - to join the Hegemony under very favourable conditions, but the major powers of that world, back by the Ikonaz, stoutly refused. Hegemony actions to provoke a series of pro-

Lorean coups on Ssilnthi ended in disaster on 972, putting an end to plans to absorb the system.

After Flange was fully integrated into the Hegemony economy, the government again hit the limits of internal growth. Due to financial constraints, the Hegemon is reluctant to expand militarily to gain new

markets. There are increasing tensions between the old heart of the Hegemony in Mycocona/Arzul and the new capital in Lorean/Amdukan, which needs to be addressed. Several worlds in Beta Quadrant are hot-spots of anti-Hegemony hostility: the locals don't have the muscle to secede and make it stick, but they can and do make it a pain to run the place.



Hegemony forces on deployment, Tsoe system, 940 Imperial
The graphic is titled "Troopers" © Philippe Bulot.

See his work at <http://www.darthmagus.com/science-fiction/album/slides/Troopers.html>

Local pirates and illegal smugglers remained cowed. Hegemony forces continue to be re-tooled for system protection and the deployment of light expeditionary forces to various trouble spots, and away from the famed, feared, and VERY expensive Pacification Groups. Internal development continues to a small extent, but the growth squirt powered by the absorption of Damlaer has come to an end. It is hoped that strengthening trade links with the Imperium will lift the more heavily populated Spark Worlds out of the poverty they currently endure. Certainly, trade overtures to the K'kree are going nowhere...

elements of the defeated nations claim that they will continue the fight, but there is no evidence of this occurring. Most interestingly, there is no evidence of covert Hegemonic support for them, either.

Worlds with a single planetary government aren't meant to be peaceful and open and into civil rights! When I see a planet with just one government I look for the mass graves. It's some kind of natural law or something, world governments grow out of the barrel of a gun.
Charles Stross, in *Iron Sunrise* (2004)

Our forefathers conquered world after world,
while all we can do is count bean after bean!
Yeku ka Komperu,
Viceroy of Nisaga Province,
960 Imperial

Of local importance, the Justice War of Unification (981 - 987) has recently ended, leaving the world under the rule of a local Suedzuk Vargr military leader of a largely human and Irilitok Vargr army: while distinctly cool towards the Hegemony, he has carefully avoided openly challenging Hegemon authority. Expatriate

Also of note is the rise of Nisaga into a renewed era of prominence. Oscillating between ugly civil wars, recovery after the latest world war (sometimes conventional, sometimes nuclear), tyrannical world-states, and Vargr pirate rule, Nisaga had a hard time of it from roughly 550 to 900 Imperial. However, like Zuethun, Nisaga did not challenge Hegemonio authority (aggressively), and avoided the full brunt of the Era of Horror. Coupled with a stable, popular human government that enjoys the favour of the Hegemony, her power and population is now growing vigorously across the stars – often coming into conflict

with those that resent her exalted position compared to her sister worlds.

Analysis: What is Essential is Invisible to the Eye

Racial Relations

The Hegemony of Lorean is as heavily divided culturally as the Imperial Empty Quarter. Instead of 'Bwap Ritualists, Solomani Hindu East Indians, Solomani Islamic Arabs, Vilani Ritualists, Solomani American Indian Aminists, and Solomani American Indians Christians', read 'Arzula humanist conquerors, anti-Vargr humanist locals, on-the-make Irilitok financiers, Solomani Hindus, Solomani Arabs, and cash-oriented, fun-loving Damlaerites.' A reasonable man would think that the Hegemony would be as heavily divided, envious, and prickly as the Imperial Empty Quarter – but he would be wrong.

The essential difference is that there is a single nation-race-culture matrix in unquestioned command of the region, the Arzula Hegemonio. They are quite insistent regarding human supremacy within the home systems in Arzul Sector – to the extent of killing Vargr visitors without the proper, authentic paperwork, and banning Vargr-crewed starships from the region. However, their attitude is far more relaxed 'in the colonies'. Only Suedzuk Vargr starships are banned, and Vargr visitors are tolerated on most worlds. The Damlaerite Hegemonio, while lacking the 'command aura' of the hard-edged Arzula Hegemonio, are respected for their ability to enrich the Hegemony – regardless if the Damlaerite in question is human or Vargr. Their influence within Beta Quadrant goes a long way to soften Hegemonic rule here, and works to prevent a re-occurrence of the Era of Horror.

You have the money, we have the guns.
You *know* we were meant to work together!
Hegemon Lurco before the Damlaer Senate
921 Imperial

Beta Humaniti

While both the Arzula humans (a tag for 'Mixed Vilani from Arzula sector') and the various human peoples of Beta Quadrant believe in the superiority of Man over other sophonts, the Arzula still see local humaniti as an annoying and troublemaking subject people. Even the reasons for their claim are very different: the local human peoples draw their reasoning from various religious teachings, while the Arzula insist on a human-first policy for essentially Darwinian reasons. The Arzula get along better with the money-and-mistresses men

from Damlaer: undisciplined and untrustworthy they may be, but they don't let the past trap them in some sterile cultural cul-de-sac. They know how to work (when they have to), how to broker a deal, and how to lead an urbane, cultured, civilized life.

Oddly enough, despite the doctrine of human superiority, the Arzula humans prefer to work with the Irilitok than with the local 'Beta humaniti'. Officially, Beta humaniti has higher status and more legal rights outside of their homeworlds than the Irilitok Vargr, and supposedly the Arzula rule for the benefit of all humaniti, with the Vargr either ignored or a foe, imprisoned on their worlds. But on most worlds, there is no universal point of shared allegiance among the local humans: no shared religion, unifying idea or ancestor. Indeed, the only link between them is their humaniti, and that bond between a proud ruling race and a quietly resentful subjected populace.

Oderint Dum Metuant

Let them hate, so long as they fear.
Lucius Accius, 170 B.C. – 86 B.C.
(-4690 – -4606 Imperial)

In contrast, the stable relationship the Irilitok have with the Arzula, and their honourable record of loyalty and obedience to the Hegemon (compared to the local humans), makes them more worthy of trust than the local humans in the eyes of the Hegemonic leadership.

Excluding Arzula-only colony worlds, there are two major centres of support for Hegemonic rule: Zuethun and Nisaga. Zuethun is where the solid majority of surviving Blood Vargr are located, thanks to their ability to limit biowar damage and willingness of the major packs to humble themselves to the Hegemony (while manipulating Hegemony military commanders into wiping out old competing packs and rival Blood Vargr nations during the Era of Horror). The human nations here openly encourage Hegemonic institutions and religions to take deep root on the world, while always keeping a vary eye on their innately violent neighbours.

Nisaga is the other major pillar of popular Hegemonic support in Beta Quadrant. Their prosperity and political stability has coincided with Hegemonic rule, and is something that the Hegemony is pleased to take credit for. Despite their subject status, the locals are assisted in a variety of ways: for example, the starport was recently raised to class C. to support their expansion.

The Surviving Suedzuk

Not *everyone* invited will be coming back from lunch.
"Morning Report"
The Lion King, -2527 Imperial

The surviving Suedzuk Vargr are *very* aware that the Arzula Hegemonio wiped out their packmates from Beta Quadrant, and, in earlier times, much of Arzul Sector (with assistance from the Yileans of Gashikan in both cases.) The more sophisticated of the Suedzuk Vargr leaders – and the sophisticated leaders are the only ones left alive at this point – play politics as well as they hunt.

The Pack leaders push hard to funnel the natural aggression of their followers into avenues that don't bring them in conflict with the Hegemonic humans. Several Packs have turned their claws to the Irilitok, the human's pet Vargr. After all, wiping out an Irilitok settlement does not attract nearly the same lethal response that slaughtering a human village would. Moreover, it's a strong morale booster to the local Suedzuk, while proving to the stars that the Blood Vargr of the Empty Quarter are not a dead nation, not yet. The Irilitok initially complained to their human superiors, who only responded with moving words, token & symbolic actions, or half-hearted military deployments. Mercenaries would be an alternative in Imperial space, but raising mercenary groups is forbidden within the Hegemony. Irilitok military forces have been organized, but they generally need a 5:1 to 10:1 advantage, or the Suedzuk would just tear through them like a hot knife through butter.

[Referee: as a suggested rule of thumb, assume that 80% of all Irilitok forces have Green morale, 15% Trained, and 5% Regular.]

Fortunately, the Irilitok do have the advantages of increasing wealth, better technological know-how, and – most crucially – the ability to man and crew starships within the Hegemonic Empty Quarter, all things denied the Suedzuk. They have strong relational advantages, having humans as allies (or at least as indifferent superiors) while the isolated Suedzuk are variously feared, loathed, hated, or utterly despised by all the major races of the Quarter. Demographically, the Irilitok are still on a strong upswing, while Suedzuk numbers are still trending down.

Even cultural factors favour the Irilitok. Their gregarious packs are quick to share information with each other, and even pick up tips and hints from

human allies and the more generous human masters. The paranoid Suedzuk packs, on the other hand, rarely share information, or give each other any assistance at all – even in the face of universal death, as certain incidents during the Era of Horror proved.

Finally, after centuries of being taught and bred to be submissive and friendly, the Irilitok are again allowed to fight and to kill for their own. It's been a long time, and entrenched habits are hard to break. However, even now there are a few Irilitok who have learned to take pleasure in the hunt, and savour the scent of freshly shed blood...

The World of the Spirit

Religion is regarded
by the common people as true,
by the wise as false,
and by the rulers as useful.
Seneca, -4525 to -4456

Some religions are more useful than others.
Emperor Artemsus, 150 Imperial
founder of the Lentuli Dynasty

The Hegemony was established with a mandatory, exclusive State Cult – that of The Last Man – with the essentially religious quest of exulting mankind to godhood by means of scientific achievement, genetic engineering and military victories over Inhumanity. With the major changes in the character of the Hegemony over the last century, the materialistic nature of the quest has been increasingly downplayed, with the Inhuman Enemy more likely to be depicted in government temples as a cruel and undisciplined heart than as a blood-thirsty man-eating Suedzuk corsair.

While being a disciple of the Last Man cult is still mandatory for major government positions, non-disciples are now permitted to join the government in all positions below that of regional planetary governor (Baron, in Imperial terms) and the military rank of Captain/Colonel. The Last Man cult continues to expand in the quadrant: both the Last Man and unique local religions hold sway at Star's End, with Christianity and Islam making deep inroads. The majority of Damlaerites continue along their chosen path of egotism, irreligion and superstition, while their cognitive elites waver between coolly pragmatic utilitarianism and assorted forms of hedonism – with the occasional collapse into personality cults around the politically powerful figures of the day.

The Suedzuk Vargr greatly resented being pressured to worship and exalt the Last Man: great bonfires of Last Man material started burning in Vargr lands within a minute after freed from this obligation. (It has become an annual festival in many Suedzuk lairs and businesses.) Most returned to various forms of the Sacred Hunt as their form of worship, but Blood-drinkers, a new form of Suedzuk religion, has grown rapidly since the 940s. Nowadays, the Sacred Hunt only involved chasing, killing, and devouring non-sophont animals, excluding certain criminal executions on local major religious festival days. The sheer range of

possible animals to hunt, possible environments to hunt in, rules for the chase and the kill, even variations on how to tear apart the flesh, is bewildering to the rare human visitor who is permitted to observe (but never join) the Hunt.

There has also been a revival of a previously abandoned mode of worship, that of Claw Art. This ecstatically violent, extremely ceremonial form of fighting/dancing/chanting has become quite popular among the lower-class Irilitok – despite (or, perhaps, because of) its high fatality rate among practitioners.



Gyro-scooters, Captain Gita Khanna Starport, Nisaga system, 915 Imperial.

A Damlaer design, these light people-movers can be found in starports across the Hegemony. 993 Imperial

The graphic is titled "Gyro-Scooter Test Run" © Chipp Walters.

See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1232373

Supplement: The Era of Horror

Preamble: the War of Men

While the distant War of Men broke Suedzuk Vargr power across a large swath of the quadrant, it was the Era of Horror that largely destroyed the Blood Vargr as a force in the region, opening the door to their replacement by the Irilitok Vargr. Just how this was done is an informative look at military operations against the Vargr in the Third Imperium's near abroad.

Whenever humaniti gained the high ground, they were quick to use it in orbital strikes. This initially placed the Suedzuk at a disadvantage – especially at that time, when they were using human slaves to master technology that they couldn't be bothered with. After all, an illiterate packmate who was handy with a rifle – or, better yet, a set of steel claws – generated far more Charisma than any amount of dorks spouting technicalese.

The Suedzuk soon came up with an effective response: 'hugging the enemy'. Their packs would rapidly close the physical distance between themselves and human settlements, heavily armed, and work to intermingle with them – but NOT attack them. This created quite a nice set of bonuses for them. First, it would shift the battlefield from long-distance to vehicular & close-quarters combat, something the Suedzuk excel in. Second, their sudden arrival would intimidate the humans, who still had a great dread of their former masters. Third, it would force humaniti to shift battlefield resources from the offensive to the defensive, easing the pressure on the Suedzuk packs who chose to remain in their core holdings. After all, unlike human women, Vargr females are as geared to aggressively hunt, tear, and kill as much as their pack males, and the need to protect their young only made them more canny and ruthless in the application of violence – less prone to grandstanding to gain charisma, more focus on getting the job done as quickly as possible.

But most important were two effects, one obvious, one subtle. This tactic negated standard orbital operations of the day, as the starships could not destroy the close-in Vargr without destroying their own wives and children. (A very pleasing side-effect is the decreased footprint of the Vargr groups still in the core areas, making it more difficult for the starships to track down and kill.) The subtle masterstroke was the unstated

message: "if you kill my pups, you will kill your own children. Your technology will not save you. But ease off, and we all can get the time we need to protect our kin." In the end, no human uprising was willing to pull the trigger to gain an empty victory, so the wars would come to an end. When humaniti – after shoring up their defenses – was again ready to renew the conflict, they universally found that the Suedzuk had also made their own preparations, making a restart of the war much more costly than previously planned...

A Different Kind of War

Things went differently when the Hegemony decided to end the war in the distant subsectors of Arzul Sector, to pacify their holdings in the Empty Quarter. Here again, the violently-inclined Suedzuk stuck first and hardest against the local Hegemonic garrisons – and were quite pleased to see local humaniti follow their lead, for once. The Hegemony, long an enemy of the Vargr, had always assumed and planned for Vargr attacks, but were caught off-guard by the willingness of men to attack the supposed Guardians of the Race, as well. And this was not all: the Hegemony was absolutely *stunned* to see humans obey the Suedzuk, their old racial enemy, in combined attacks against the Hegemony.

The Hegemonic position largely collapsed within Beta Quadrant in 869. There were only one heavily damaged and besieged Hegemony ground installation left in all of Beta Quadrant by 37-870s, with the Hegemonic Navy holding five systems – Ueksang, Aezil, Llongnan, Taegzoer, and Abuish – all in a distant corner of Beta Quadrant. Victory seemed assured to the rebels, prompting celebrations even as two retasked and reequipped Hegemony Pacification Groups – *Quietus* and *Serene* - finished massing in the Mycocona homeworlds.

The rebels knew full well that the homeworlds were only somewhat less impoverished than themselves: moles within the Hegemonic government had provided reports that showed the Hegemonic economy near collapse. The reports were accurate, but they didn't take the account the willingness of the 'soft and comfortable core worlds' to make enormous sacrifices. Many nations have made the claim to "make any sacrifice, bear any burden" for victory, but few have actually been willing to follow through without a direct

threat to their homes and families. The Arzula are part of that very select group – and it would be the sophonts of Beta Quadrant, both humans and Vargr, who would pay the price for their ambition.

Execution

The actual military operation to retake the Quadrant took only about a year and a few months. Low-population systems were visited by Flotillas/Battalions and Squadrons/Regiments, and advised to surrender or die. Most resisting systems were sterilized, but a few were able to repulse the Hegemony – for a time.

The central Hegemony Pacification Groups initially struck at the high-population systems of Tsosoe and Justine simultaneously, on 84-870 Imperial, easily destroying the comparatively weak naval presence. However, subjection of the planet itself was difficult, due to the Hegemons insistence that total human planetary casualties be kept under the 10% range. Fortunately, the Hegemony had received a decent schooling in biological warfare from advisors from the Legion of Breskain – men who make it their business to know the many ways to kill a Vargr. (The fact that biowar is a good deal cheaper than conventional war was a major bonus for the threadbare Hegemony forces.)

A typical encounter would start by burning off the interface zone between the human and Vargr settlements, driving the Vargr together. Then comes the application of the diseases and poisons, usually by fast-moving, low-flying craft, but sometimes by more unexpected means. As the Suedzuk realized that they were infected, their instinctive paranoia would cause their organizations to collapse, allowing ground forces to destroy them piecemeal. Even before these deadly plagues, a few of the Blood Vargr were able to defeat Hegemonic biowarfare, sometimes by cunning, sometimes by technology, and sometimes by resistant blood-lines. The most prominent example of successful resistance was conducted by the Suedzuk packs on Zuethun against an attacking Flotilla/Battalion: while eventually compelled to surrender, they were able to ward off extermination, and are currently the largest single group of Suedzuk Vargr within the Hegemony. Only a small minority of Suedzuk Vargr on Justine survived, usually totally paranoid groups that avoided all contact with anyone. The old Blood Vargr packs on Tsosoe were completely wiped out.

After those worlds were subjugated in late 870, the Hegemony Pacification Groups moved directly to the strongest centres of rebel naval strength, in

Riiakea/3219 and Orchard/3012, both high-population worlds at the time. Orchard's naval forces were annihilated easily, but the world's orbital defense grid and missile emplacements were made of sterner stuff. Even the Hegemony's threat – and action – to kill a city for every 30 minutes the world resisted had no effect. So on 8-871 Imperial, the Hegemony Pacification Group *Quietus* detonated 20 gigaton EMP warheads over the world, and retreated. They licked their wounds, and returned two months later to a world where almost all of the population had died along with the electrical grid. When the Hegemony proclaimed their dominion over the system, the response was only silence: so the Pacification Group moved on, looking for new worlds to conquer.

The Hegemony Pacification Group *Serene* was directed to Riiakea, which has risen to prominence over the last century as Nisaga continued to writhe in her private agony. The Hegemonic forces encountered several Ikon-designed warships of a higher technology level than her own TL D: while eventually destroyed, these hostile ships inflicted notable losses to the Pacification Group. When preparing to assault the planet, scout vessels and probes determined that most of the population was not to be seen. High-penetration TL D densitometers with the Pacification Group had a depth of 100 meters, enough to trace most but not all of the underground bunkers and tunnels of the world. The standard and neutron nuclear weaponry borne by the Pacification Group would be unable to penetrate deeply into the earth, and the gigaton and cobalt warheads were not to be used in the current tactical situation. Field Marshal/Commodore Jinef decided on an incendiary approach, burning 80% of Riiakea's plant cover; moreover, the Exotorik supervolcano was successfully induced into erupting. Together, these events created enough dust and ash to ruin the planet's biosphere and cool planetary temperatures drastically. Years later, Hegemony ground units dug mining shafts into a few of the known bunker complexes, finding only mummified corpses. Most of the underground network remains unexplored: rumours of survivors and even underground societies persist, but has never been proven.

Aftermath

The last major centre of organized resistance in the Empty Quarter was snuffed out with the collapse of the last rebel polity, the Nemjamo Republic, on Justine on 107-871. The Horror continued on certain worlds whose population still resisted, even after their national leaders had surrendered. Here, the Hegemony used various forms of collective punishment and

intense humiliation to pacify the population. For example, following Mongol tactics, a Hegemonic soldier would walk into a town, and kill a few innocents. Any attack on his person, any attempt to bring him to justice, would result in a brutal slaughter by watching Hegemonic forces. Religious leaders who attempted to rally even non-violent resistance would be quickly captured and put to horrible and humiliating deaths, televised worldwide. As a way to test for local loyalty, a Hegemonic rifle would be 'casually' left behind on patrol. If that weapon was not laying exactly where it

was left when the patrol returned, quite a lot of the local people would die, in ugly and painful ways.

Although the Horror petered out by 880 Imperial, certain forms of ritual humiliation still remain until 993 Imperial, including invasive screening techniques for Beta humaniti and the Suedzuk Vargr at Hegemony starports. Dalmarite & Arzula Hegemonio are exempt, 'as they pose no security risk': Imperials are also treated with respect, being 'honoured guests of the Hegemon'. Increasingly, Irilitok Vargr are also exempted from most forms of security theatre.

On Tsosoe, 115-870 Imperial...

The Vargr were surprised when the old soldiers were dropped off just outside their camp. In the forests of Thegronogru, the Dzidhaangoerrr Pack ran hit-and-run attacks with their bare claws: tracking down small knots of men by their scent, slipping in close, unseen, killing them unexpectedly, and grabbing their equipment. The Dzidhaangoerrr generally did not keep the weapons, instead selling them to other Vargr packs in return for food & shelter for their females and young in the camps of stronger packs.

The hunters watched the men carefully. After the soldiers secured a perimeter, several dozen boxes were dropped in the centre of the perimeter: the G-carrier then lifted off. The men then organized themselves, drew swords – swords! – and started walking directly to the hidden Vargr... *singing* as they strode forward.

The skirmish was harder than it had any right to be: the men knew something about basic swordsmanship, and the swords gave them an extra reach that they used to good effect. But the Vargr were younger, and more agile, and knew how to wear down the men in the heat of battle. Moreover, the Vargr naturally hunted as a pack, knowing where each of their members were without conscious thought, and guiding the flow of battle as a group. And in the end, experience and teamwork won over strength and self-discipline, and the men died.

After eating their first full meal in a *long* time, the surviving Vargr turned to the boxes, and opened them. There were much in the boxes they didn't understand, but much that they did – weapons, ammo, and gun cleaning equipment; mines, explosives and detonators; rations and medicine. Yes, the guns and tools were designed for the hands of men, not the Ancient-altered hands of the Vargr, but they can be made to serve.

With what was found in the boxes, the Dzidhaangoerrr and the packs that they traded with were able to go on the offensive for the first time. And things went well... for two weeks. Then, like a marionette after the strings were cut, every Vargr who had handled the captured material died. Well, almost all: the ones who used the human rations were infected with brainworms, which drove them to seek out other Vargr communities and, oozing diseased pus, spread the eggs of the brainworms wherever they went. Those who used the human medicine received relief from their symptoms – but also received a dose of retroviruses with drastically increased the rate of sterility in infected Vargr males, and spontaneous abortions and stillbirths among Vargr females.

As for those who ate the flesh of the doomed soldiers? They became Typhoid Marys, their bodies – and, eventually, their minds & memories – hijacked by the complex of diseases that only lived to spread itself, and consume its hosts.

The slain men, who willingly died to spread death among the Vargr, were proclaimed Avatars of the Last Man by the Hegemon in 924 Imperial. Numerous military units and several civilian devotional societies burn incense to their memory across the Hegemony.

The Lords of the Quarter, 993 Imperial

By Alvin Plummer

Presidents and Prime Ministers lead from behind.
Nobles lead from the front.

Cleon II Zhunastu, former Emperor,
before the Sylean Guard
73 Imperial

The following leaders are discussed in this section: Emperor Gavin Alkhalikoi of the Third Imperium, Archduke Koktso of the Domain of Antares, Sector Duke Dethwabtakewebwakawa of the Empty Quarter, Regent Harsha Menderes of the Julian Protectorate, President Kougradh Iro'nirdgveis of the Rukadukaz Republic, Hegemon Lorin Beronan of the Hegemony of Lorean; and Emperor Shonyfra of the Second Gashikan Empire.

Of the current generation of leaders, the senior Imperial leadership is the most inexperienced in regional affairs. Emperor Gavin is quite distant from the Empty Quarter, knows little about the Quarter, and is relatively new to the political scene as rulers. Archduke Koktso is an absentee noble: his duties as the unofficial patron of nonhuman Imperial citizens had him practically camped out on Capital during the run-up to the Solomani Rim War. After the war started, the Archduke went on a fact-finding mission across the coreward regions of the Imperium, to assess the state of nonhuman minorities in the area. Dethwabtakewebwakawa, while Sector Duke for only three years, is familiar with all the major factions of the Empty Quarter and is the real face of the Imperium in the sector – despite internal distaste regarding his rule.

Regent Harsha, while acting primarily as a figurehead in these times of Julian peace, has been a force in the region for over a decade. President Iro'nirdgveis has been leading the Republic for only two years, a bit less than the Sector Duke. Emperor Shonyf has been on the throne since he was twenty-one, but the weakness of his government has limited the import of his actions.

A Traveller from the Imperium would question the inclusion of the leader of the Second Gashikan Empire in this review. After all, the Empire has no holdings in the Empty Quarter. There are two reasons:

1. While the Gashikan Empire is over 30 parsecs from the nearest Six Subsector world, it is a

powerful coreward neighbour of the Julian Protectorate (and her associated state, the Hegemony of Lorean).

2. The deeply anti-Vargr attitude of this ancient government (founded at -1784, it is far older than the Third Imperium) and her very sophisticated culture has strongly shaped Amdukan and Arzul sectors. Amdukan sector, directly coreward of the Empty Quarter, is the home of the Asimikigir Confederation and the heartland of the Julian Protectorate. Arzul sector, directly trailing of Amdukan sector, is the home of the interstellar Azulan culture that dominates the Hegemony of Lorean.

Gavin Lykaois Alkhalikoi, Emperor of the Third Imperium

It's the galaxy's largest grassroots autocracy!

Ambassador Silky Battaglia II,
of Scanlon/Scanlon/Canopus,
describing the political structure of the titanic
Third Imperium to the leadership of the
fifteen-system Scanlon Accord, 294 Imperial

Gavin, tenth Emperor of the Alkhalikoi dynasty, forty-first Emperor of the Third Imperium, was born in 946, the first-born of the eleven legitimate children of Emperor Styryx. He was a studious and serious-minded young boy, who always tried to live up to the expectations of his mercurial father and kindly, if somewhat distant, mother.

Naval Officer

Prince Gavin was never comfortable with the demanding expectations of his station in life: he felt that he just didn't have the raw intelligence, will to power, and political/social skills needed to keep the Imperial Court in line, after his father died. Feeling the need to uphold his duty, he joined the Imperial Navy in 965. Prince Gavin was not a particularly clever Imperial officer, but he was conscientious, personally brave, and hard-working. His pointed refusal to allow endless political temptations to distract him from his naval duties brought favour from the Admiralty, but were

seen as shirking crucial political and dynastic duties 'in order to play the spaceman-hero' by his father in Capital.

After discussing this conflict within the Alkhalikoi dynastic circle, Prince Gavin formally declared his preference to have his second-born sister, Elizabeth, inherit the Imperial Mandate in 968. (Note: the position is not automatically inherited, but conferred by the Imperial Moot.) Princess Elizabeth, with her raw ambition and fierce intelligence, had a personality more suited to ruling trillions of sophonts than the highly conventional and conformist Gavin. Despite this, Princess Elizabeth, like Prince Gavin, did not receive the title 'Grand Prince/Princess' that denotes the formal successor of the Emperor.

The dynastic heads decided to let Gavin fulfill his naval service to the Imperium as he and his superior officers saw fit. Eventually, when his sister was raised to Empress – after the insubordinate Solomani Autonomous Region was brought to heel, as planned – Prince Gavin would work as her right-hand man, either as a senior commander of the Imperial Navy or as a very powerful Imperial field agent, ensuring that what the Empress commands are actually obeyed. While his sister would work with the powerful interests that form the framework of Imperial Rule, Gavin would put 'blood in the game', making sure that the Imperium (and especially the men of the Imperial Navy) sees that House Alkhalikoi is not afraid to fight and die with them, in the cold and in the dark.

When the Third Frontier War broke out in 979, Lt. Cmdr. Prince Gavin was serving on board the 300,000-dton, TL E Diaspora-class battlecruiser *Iusea*, operating with the major Imperial fleets guarding Corridor Sector. To show their support for the war, the Prince was transferred to Regina Subsector Fleet, operating in the old Alkhalikoi stomping grounds of the Spinward Marches. After several months doing morale work, the Prince was posted on the *Starrise*, a 30,000-dton, TL D Timarin-class battle rider, serving honourably during the Third Frontier War. This Frontier War was mainly focused on commerce raiding, with the occasional thrust by Zhodani cruisers deep into Imperial space. The *Starrise* had a difficult time of it: while the ship herself performed well, her battle tender was destroyed in 980 (stranding the *Starrise* and her sister battle riders in Menorb system for several months).

In 983, Prince Gavin was transferred to Querion Subsector, where the intensity of the fighting was second only to Jewel Subsector. Promoted to Commander and given command of the *Nilexxoniri*, the Prince led strike teams in counter-attacks against

Zhodani re-supply points and bases. Named after named after a famous naval officer of the Sylean Federation era, the TL D, 80,000-dton Lorimar-class strike carrier was well suited to the task.

Eventually, word of a senior Imperial noble commanding a warship in battle reached the Zhodani High Command, who decided to make an example of the *Nilexxoniri*. They managed to lure the *Nilexxoniri* to attack a Zhodani field repair point orbiting the small gas giant of Fia Ekadr at Atsa, a Zhodani system in Chronor Subsector. At 103-983 Imperial, the 4th Querion Penetration Squadron – including the *Nilexxoniri* – entered the system to strike the wounded Zho starships gathered there. But as they neared victory, a Zhodani battleship fleet emerged from the thick atmosphere of Fia Ekadr to kill the Imperial squadron. One battleship was destroyed and another gravely wounded in the close fighting, but all four strike carriers (and many of their escort ships, generally destroyers) were lost in the battle. Commander Gavin expected to die with his ship, but was persuaded to abandon ship with his crew.

He fled the battle scene with the surviving elements of his squadron to Gyomar. With the loss of the other senior commanders of the Penetration Squadron, Gavin became Squadron Commander. He successfully shepherd his surviving ships thru the Zhodani systems of Massina Subsector (Subsector-D of Foreven Sector), re-entering Imperial-held territory in Day 163, 983 Imperial. After being hailed as a hero, he was promoted to Captain, and transferred to the central Imperial Staff College on Capital for additional training and education. He continuously pushed for the freedom of his captured crewmen, but they were only released with the general armistice at the end of the war, in 986 Imperial.

[Referee: Even as Emperor, Gavin still makes time to respond to communications from former members of the *Nilexxoniri* crew. In game terms, this amounts to one letter a year for a PC, and one major favour every four years. It can still take a long time to contact the Emperor, due to the immense distances involved.]

In the meantime, Princess Elizabeth grew in understanding the 'deep structure' of the Imperium: not just the money flows and corporate networks, but also the blood-bonds and network of shared interests. She found that 'following the money' is easy, compared to following the oaths, the unspoken understandings, the chains of favours and debts, the tangle of family, race, and species alliances, and brotherhoods both open and secret.

Emperor

His father, never the most even-tempered of men, grew more erratic after the death of his beloved daughter Adela. His poor reactions during the Third Frontier War – and, more importantly, his refusal to learn from his errors, or listen to the advice of more experienced military men – led to a major loss of confidence among the Imperial military regarding Emperor Styryx’s competence in managing a war. Even the carefully laid-down plans Styryx himself had planned out would crumble if High Command wouldn’t compensate for mistakes and surprises, or if the Imperial Army continued to be wilfully neglected. Eventually, the Emperor was forced to abdicate at gunpoint in his fresher, with everyone expecting the Princess Elizabeth to rise to the Iridium Throne.

To the astonishment of Charted Space, she made a moving speech that stressed her elder brother’s better suitability to rule, his bravery in battle and his closeness with his spacers, sharing the hardships and the joys of naval life. The actual vote was delayed by a week due to her sudden change of heart: the Moot would have liked to delayed a lot longer, but the need to have leadership in the still-secret planned war against the Solomani, coupled with the solid agreement of the Navy (still stinging over the abdication of Styryx), the grudging tolerance of the Army for Prince Gavin, and the lack of opposition by Imperial familial & corporate interests, led to a near-unanimous vote. The Moot stripped all noble authority and titles from Emperor Styryx - now just Styryx Hakon Alkhalikoi – and transferred them to his first-born son, Prince Gavin, in 989.

Elizabeth spoke to Gavin on a secure channel.
'My dear brother, you need to round up all the psions you can find and shoot them. And paint the Imperial Palace yellow.'
'Why yellow?'
'I knew you wouldn't ask about the first part!'
Core Sector joke, early 990s.

[Referee: there is enormous speculation on the reasons why the very ambitious Princess Elizabeth chose not to accept the position of Empress, a position she trained most of her life for. She refuses to answer questions on the matter, giving rise to a major branch of current conspiracy theory. Even a casual glance of her powers shows that she has only one title to her name – Baroness of Heguz, a minor world in the Spinward Marches – but remains a member of every Imperial council and committee that matters.]

The known coup plotters and those who assisted them were eventually arrested by Emperor Gavin’s orders, and tried for various High Crimes by Duchess Sintentirutho of Core subsector. The Duchess found some (not all) of their actions illegal, and they were sent to an Imperial Exile world to serve out their years of punishment. Duchess Sintentirutho also ordered the military personnel dishonourably discharged from the Imperial Services, but the implementation of this order has been delayed by strong disagreement within the Armed Services and the Nobility. As of 993, the conspirators retain their formal military ranks, although not their authority: the possibility that this order will be quietly rescinded remains.

Officially ‘dead’ to the Imperium, Styryx is imprisoned in a very comfortable guest suite within the Imperial Palace. He is isolated from his supporters and friends, both physically and electronically: those who do have contact with him are carefully screened for any signs of sympathy for the man. A clergyman of Styryx’s (but not Gavin’s) religion has been sworn to secrecy, and is permitted to visit the former Emperor once a month, to give counsel, provide certain religious rites and insure his good treatment. As far as is known, Styryx is resigned to his current state, and is focused on bringing peace and serenity to his soul as his priest advises.

[Referee’s note: In the Official Imperial Timeline, Styryx Hakon Alkhalikoi will die next year, in 994 Imperial.]

Emperor Gavin in his coronation address stressed his willingness to fight against the “craven oath-breaking racists of the Solomani Sphere,” and swore to reintegrate them into the Imperium, “regardless of the cost in blood and treasure.” (These words would come back to give him great grief and heartache later.) He also insisted on the essential sameness of sophont life & consciousness, and, after giving several anecdotes on the distinct personalities of Imperial humans and nonhumans, announced that the Imperium would defend both alike, and treat both of equal worth.

However, he also spoke of the two secret threats to the Imperium. One threat was the corruption and treason the Solomani Party was spreading throughout the Imperium; the other was the insidious breakdown of trust and brotherhood sponsored by ‘twisted psionic powers’ spreading in the body of the Imperium. “The Imperium will drive out both the rimward poison of the mind and the spinward rot of the spirit, regaining both health and unity!” As such, the Emperor directed the Ministry of Justice to imprison all active members of the Solomani Party, and aggressively move to crush all

psionic activity within the Imperium. (Word of Zhodani treatment of Imperial prisoners during the Third Frontier War has only hardened the Emperor's opinion on the matter.)

'Ending psionic activity' is typically done by various forms of lobotomy, be it with subtle TL 14 electro-chemical methods or crude TL 6 ice picks thru the forehead. The Emperor strongly favours the Rule of Law: evidence of psionic activity must be able to stand in an open court of Imperial Law, and the use of lethal force is restricted to cases when there is an imminent threat to Imperial security, lethal resistance is shown against Imperial officers, or a serious threat to civilians.

Emperor Gavin is quickly gaining a reputation as a no-nonsense Emperor, who does not suffer fools gladly. He does have a gentler, even gallant side, finding the 'collateral damage' of war intensely repulsive and quickly sticking up for the 'ordinary citizen' and the 'underdog' aliens within a primarily human culture. As the Imperium is in a middle of a difficult and grinding war, the Emperor makes it his business to know everything – everything – involved in the war, from Solomani economic planning to Imperial small arms, from the names and a thumbnail description of every Imperial Marine Colonel in the field to the religious beliefs & secular ideologies of the senior Solomani leadership. He reserves operational decisions to the commanders at the spot, but he encourages them to 'dump the deadwood' – especially within the officer corps. In his free time – measured in minutes per day – he makes a quick & dirty review of Noble reports from across Imperial space.

The Emperor is considering the appointment of a new Archduke of Sol, temporarily granting him the traditional Archducal powers to unify & rationalize military leadership across the enormous Theatre of Operations, while shortening communication lines to a point closer to the front – perhaps in Sufren System, in Diaspora. However, Emperor Gavin worries of a playing into the hands of a new Emperor of the Flag: after all, he himself was put in place by a coup. A victorious Grand Admiral could easily lead an unstoppable fleet – consisting of most of the Imperial Navy – to Capital, easily crushing any resistance he would try to put up. If any Archduke was to be appointed, it would have to be someone he could trust implicitly, yet also a man who's smart enough and forceful enough to get the job done....

[Referee's note: Later in his reign, after the Solomani Rim War, it is known that this aggressively anti-psion Emperor authorized the quiet resurrection of the

Psionic Institute on Terra/Solomani Rim and on Regina/Spinward Marches. What changed his mind? Something discovered after the war? A desire for omniscience? His inability to pry into the minds of the Solomani leadership? A personal incident of some kind? Revised Zhodani policies regarding the treatment of Imperial prisoners? This is left for the Referee to decide.]

Family: Emperor Gavin's father, Styryx, was quite the player. Gavin has 44 known and verified half-siblings, and another five whose claims to paternity are still being verified. Standard procedure is to permit the half-siblings to live, so long as they formally renounce any claim to the throne before an Imperial Court (all surviving 44 bastards have done so). As they are still Alkhalikoi, the Emperor – as Archon of House Alkhalikoi – keeps them under surveillance, granting them very minor bureaucratic positions and stipends amounting to no more than 10,000 Cr a year. So far, none has proven themselves worthy of even a knighthood, never mind elevation into the legitimate Alkhalikoi line. However, many people are unaware of just how little they are worth to the Emperor, and desperately curry favour with these individuals, thinking that they will get some kind of pull with the Emperor through them.

Gavin's relationship with his six surviving siblings is fairly close. In a reversal of old family plans, Princess Elizabeth works as Emperor Gavin's enforcer, and is the most connected and informed single individual within the Third Imperium – and in Charted Space. She is also a very wise councillor in her own right. Even though Gavin is formally Archon of House Alkhalikoi, almost all family decisions are actually made by Princess Elizabeth, who enjoys the unstinting support of Gavin.

An outline of the current senior membership of the Imperial Family:

Styryx – Former emperor. Former Archon of House Alkhalikoi. Age: 72.

Officially treated as dead in regard to noble obligations, powers, etc.

Helen – First wife of the Styryx. Age: 67.

Formerly the First Empress & Imperial Consort.
Former Senior Matriarch of House Alkhalikoi
Currently styled Empress Mother

Mary – Second wife of Styryx. Age: 45.

Formerly the Second Empress
Former Matriarch of House Alkhalikoi
Currently styled Empress Dowager

Gavin – Emperor of the Third Imperium. Age: 47.

First-born child, and son of Styryx and Helen.
Archon of House Alkhalikoi

Marqui of Usdiki (Inheritable, territorial)
 Chunlai – Imperial Consort and Empress. Age: 41.
 Duchess (Rank title, not inheritable)
 Offered Matriarchal rank: declined.

Elizabeth – Second-born child, and daughter
 of Styryx & Helen. Age: 45.
 Senior Matriarch of House Alkhalikoi
 Household Justiciar – handles internal family
 justice and adjudicates household law issues
 Baroness (Inheritable, territorial)
 Unmarried.

Christopher – Third-born child, son of Styryx & Helen.
 Age: 40. Patriarch of House Alkhalikoi
 Household Chamberlain – controls access
 to the Emperor, and manages his estates and
 financial concerns. Duke (Rank, not
 inheritable) Married: three children.

Achilla – Fourth-born child of Styryx & Helen. Age: 39
 Former Matriarch of House Alkhalikoi
 Former Minister of State & Imperial Chancellor
 – handled domestic and foreign affairs, and
 the secret services.
 Duchess (Rank, not inheritable)

Married into House Tukera: no children
 Current Lesser Matriarch of House Tukera
 Director on several Tukera corporate boards.

Midas – Fifth-born child of Styryx & Helen. Age: 36
 Patriarch of House Alkhalikoi
 Minister of Commerce – handles Imperial
 trade, tariffs, treasury, and taxes
 Household Treasurer (until late 993, when this
 position will be handed to a cadet branch of
 House Alkhalikoi.) Duke (Rank, not inheritable)
 Married: four children.

Adela – Sixth-born child of Styryx & Helen.
 960-980 Imperial. Died: terrorist incident.
 Never married.

Penina – Seventh child of Styryx & Helen. Age: 21

Married into House Rothschild: three children.
 Currently being groomed for Matriarchal
 duties.

[Referee's Note: As soon as a woman marries, she is considered to have left her old family and joined the new family. Naturally, this means that she is not trusted by *either* the old or the new family, unless sufficient time has passed, or she has proved her loyalty in some way.]

The children of Styryx and Mary include Hans (identical twin boy, 972-992), Martin (identical twin boy, age 20), Deana (girl, 17), Adela (girl, 14), Malcolm (boy, 11), and Osborn (boy, 9). Hans Tutor Alkhalikoi was a member of

the Imperial Marines, and died while repulsing a Solomani boarding attempt of the Imperial dreadnought *Fearless*. Martin, who served with Hans on the same ship, continues to serve on the Solomani warzone on behalf of the Imperium.

Born in 946, Emperor Gavin is currently 47 years old. He has been married to Chunlai Wendy Alkhalikoi (née Nankivell, currently 41 years old), a member of a powerful, loyalist pureblood Solomani family, for 22 years. (The Emperor himself is 'Mixed Vilani'.) They have five children: Prince Paulo (12 years old), Princess Pamela (10 years old), Princess Cleona (7 years old), Prince Yu (5 years old), and Princess Yunlie (2 years). Princess Yunlie has Downs Syndrome, a consequence of being conceived late in her mother's reproductive life: her mother chose not to abort the child. The Imperial public is aware of both the disease and the decision: their response depends on their culture, religion, and view of the Imperial nobility.

Koktso, Archduke of Antares

So you're telling me that a bunch of favour-currying *human* bureaucrats and happy-faced *human* Nobles told the Emperor that everything's just peachy-keen in racial relations. No doubt that's why most of the Navy is currently engaged with a bunch of rabid racist rockheaded sillymany *slime* across *the entire rimward frontier!*

Archduke Koktso to his seneschal,
in 990 Imperial

Archduke Koktso was born in the archducal station of Cerise (in the Antares system) in 39-963. He spent most of his formative years bouncing around Antares Sector, as a tag-along of his rather neglectful father Archduke Gvueneghz. Koktso was the youngest in his family, but his superior interpersonal ability – compared to his more studious and reclusive brothers – marked him as the right kind of pup to succeed the Archduke. After interviewing his friends, foes, and family, advisors to the Emperor agreed, and backed Gvueneghz's decision.

While on a goodwill tour of the Julian Protectorate (and to feel out Julian reactions to a possible Imperial-Solomani war), Archduke Gvueneghz was killed in a truly daring and meticulously planned-out pirate attack in 49-979. Later investigation would reveal that the strike was carried out by the Black Death Band not for political or financial reasons, but simply to reap the huge boost in charisma and respect that any Vargr (or human, for that matter) would receive on killing an important and highly-protected individual. But at the

time, the strike was thought to single strong Julian support for the Solomani, and the possibility of the Imperium facing a two-front was raised.

Koktso was promptly elevated to the head of the Archduchy. The Protectorate avoided war and eased tensions by providing a prompt shipment of Vargr and human heads, formerly belonging to the pirates. The captured dependants of the pirates were also deported to the Archduke, to do with them as he will. In this instance, the Archduke chose to show clemency, and simply let them go, providing free transport back to the Protectorate to any who desired it. Profuse Julian apologies, delivered in person by the Regent of the Protectorate, were graciously accepted, and the unfortunate incident was dropped.

The Domains that Archdukes preside over were useful during the Pacification Campaign era of the early Imperium: however, their sheer scope makes them a threat to the Iridium Throne, as they are large enough to generate enough resources to contest the Emperor's authority across a large percentage of high-tech/high-pop systems. As such, their authority is now largely ceremonial, without the right of military command or taxation – but with the right to create Imperial Barons – before the Strephonian Reforms of the early 1100s granted them their old authority back.

[Referee: While this policy was intended to shake the Imperium from stagnation and disrupt the formation of sector-sized cultures separate from the Imperial mainstream, it actually acted to accelerate the fragmentation and destruction of the Third Imperium.]

For most of the 980's, the Archduke resided on Capital, lobbying for the nonhumans suffering under Solomani rule, and building public support for a major military push to reintegrate the Solomani Sphere into the Imperium. During this time, the Archduke visited Antares Sector three times, but the Empty Quarter only once, in a whirlwind tour of Nulinad subsector in 989. While there, Archduke Koktso worked to ease tensions between the impoverished Empty Quarter and the wealthy Antares Sector, with little to show for it.

Despite this letdown, Koktso was pleased to see that 'his' Domain – not only the formal territory of the Domain of Antares, but also the Imperial Empty Quarter, the Julian Protectorate, and the Hegemony of Lorean (an Associate State of the Protectorate) support Imperial actions against the distant Solomani Sphere. He was also happy to see that his trust in his family and his household retainers was well-rewarded with a peaceful and well-managed Domain.

[Referee: This article follows the map "Domains of the Third Imperium" in the MegaTraveller supplement "Referee's Manual", which lists The Empty Quarter, Hinterworlds, Magyar, and Verge as outside of any established domain. While the Imperial Emptyheads are extremely proud of this status – which, among other things, means that they need not kneel to any Vargr – the general poverty of the region suggests that there is a price to be paid for the lack of high-ranking patronage for the sector.]

"After journeying for years and an immense number of parsecs, we expect action from you, not words of sympathy! Are you the Patron of the Vilani, or are you not?"

"If it were only that easy..."

"Only the Emperor has more authority than you!"

"The Fleets are already deployed and engaged, Marquis Uusshagugabimi! Half the Corridor fleet is already being re-equipped..."

"Our people are dying *now*, your Grace! While the Navy licks her wounds, our people are being destroyed *now*! Our names – our homes – our property – our families – our lives – our traditions – nothing is safe!"

"We must – WE MUST – follow the lead of the Emperor! If he says wait, we WAIT. If we strike unprepared, the Solomani will rip us to shreds, and if the Navy is broken a *second* time, the oath-breaking, shrine-smashing, disrespectful *revolutionaries* will not stop at the borders of the Solomani Sphere!"

Archduchess Masiinguu of Vland
and Marquis Uusshagugabimi of Yontez,
364-992 Imperial

From 990 onward, the Archduke – as a response to Vargr charges of hypocrisy and neglect – has been on a major tour of the coreward Imperium, drumming up support for the war, listening to complaints from the citizenry, and gathering information on 'the Home Front' from Antares to the Spinward Marches (where his family originated, and some ancestral holdings are still maintained.) Afterwards, he plans to present himself to Emperor Gavin at Capital, to relay his on-the-spot findings on the human/nonhuman (and especially Vargr/human) relations, support for the Solomani Cause (or the lack thereof), and his recommendations to strengthen the Imperial bond between them.

As of Holiday-993, having finished his tour of the Domain of Deneb, Archduke Koktso is enjoying the holiday with the Archduchess of Vland on her capital world. While the Archduke enjoys playing the tourist, Archduchess Masiinguu is encouraging Koktso to consider Solomani-Vilani relations as well, when he makes his presentation before the Imperial Court on Capital. When not attending to her esteemed guest, her attention is focused on insuring the financing of the war and regularizing the flow of men and material at a high level. When she has time, she attends to the complaints of Vilani representatives from the Old Expanses, relaying the cries of loyal Imperials cursing the oppression and discrimination of Solomani invaders against them.

Family: Like most Vargr, Archduke Koktso has a twin, Uevino Se. Currently, Uevino Se acts to handle internal disputes within the ruling family pack (consisting of 27 male and 25 female Vargr, ignoring Vargr under the age of 17), while Koktso focuses on Imperial duties. Koktso mate, Lady Ghuesaedzozosae (she permits her impatient Solomani subjects to shorten her name to 'Ghueside'), handles financial and security matters for the ruling pack: Lady Ghueside has also carved out a place for herself as 'Alpha Female' for all Vargr within Antares sector.

Koktso and Ghueside have chosen to follow the Gvegh custom of serial monogamy: so far, both remain satisfied with their five-year relationship as it is. Neither expects a lifelong commitment.

Dethwabtakewebwakawa, Sector Duke of the Empty Quarter

You do have all your papers in order, right? Backup copies of the holocrystals? Everything's waterproofed, of course? How about your passes – both electronic and physical? And you have three references from responsible authorities for every substantial clam you're going to make? You do? Properly verified? Let me see – I ain't going thru all this more than once...

OK, now about your appearances...

A weary Mixed Vilani Court Clerk,
tidying up visitors before presenting them
to the Sector Duke,
125-993 Imperial

The Sector Duke was hatched on Wesaswek on 037-942, as the first-hatched of his cluster of eggs. Naturally, he was raised according to the proper requirements of his station as a Bwap of the

Bebewebboekebseb crèche, as well as a possible heir to his father's seat as subsector duke. After his satisfactorily predictable and safe childhood was complete, he dutifully laboured as an 'Apprentice Noble' – a Bwap social rank, not a formal Imperial rank. He stood in for his father in public appearances, was drilled in the minutiae of Imperial Laws, Traditions and Regulations, and underwent a continuous stream of exams, tests, and presentations before a vast array of bored mid-ranking Imperial officers. ("The Solomani were the worst – always nodding off in the middle of a presentation! How unspeakably *rude*! And I'm not even going to *mention* what those *nasty* Vargr officers were doing, off in the corner...")

As part of his training, Apprentice Noble Dethwabtakewebwakawa was sent on a tour of the major Imperial houses in the Empty Quarter. He spent a year as a member of the liaison and household staff in the ruling houses of the Nulinad, Yogesh, Gimushi, Hebrin, and Udusis duchies. Three additional years were spent outside the Imperium, as a low-ranking Imperial Trade Attaché on Damlaer – capital of the Hegemony of Lorean – and Ikon, respectively. (It was while on tour in the Protectorate that he developed an interest in the conditions of non-Imperial Bwap, and – in the face of consistent human disinterest in the Hegemony – also gained an interest in sophont rights outside of the Imperium.)

After his return to Wesaswek in 980, he was selected as a member of the Imperial Diplomatic Corps, handling internal trade disputes and obscure controversies. His good grasp of human psychology and deep understanding of the issues behind the numbers brought him the attention of senior Diplomatic Corp officers. He was promoted to the Imperial legal bench as a trade judge, and was just making his reputation when his father died in 983. His family felt that someone with great exposure to a variety of human societies and personalities would make a good successor to his solidly provincial and locally-focused father, and so Dethwabtakewebwakawa was chosen to inherit the titles of Baron Wesaswek and Duke Lentui.

As Duke, Dethwabtakewebwakawa spent little time at home. Leaving home affairs to his crèche elders, the Baron criss-crossed the Six Subsectors, using his influence to resolve trade disputes, hold hearings, make judgements, and act as a heavyweight go-between in human-Bwap conflicts. He was often seen in the Sector Court, bringing a matter to the attention of the Sector Duke and – more importantly – he had enough political pull to make things happen. Despite

the generally humanist sentiment within the Court, he made no notable enemies, although several felt his detail-laden presentations exhausting. On the other hand, he made several genuine friends, not only among the Vilani nobility, but – wonders of wonders – even a few Solomani nobles of East Indian descent.

Upon the death of the Sector Duke in 990, the senior nobility could not agree on who to select as a successor. Eventually, it became obvious that none of the human Dukes or Duchesses would allow any other to rise to the Sector throne (Duke Dethwabtakewebwakawa did not involve himself in these matters, as the opinion of Bwaps – whatever their rank – was not welcome). Several months went by without a decision, until family representatives of Archduke Koktso warned that they would relay the matter for the Archduke’s personal attention, if the local Nobility could not solve the puzzle themselves. Spurred into action, the Nobility called a meeting of the *entire* sector aristocracy for an emergency Moot on Nulinad. Once there, a feverish bout of sustained horse-trading, bargaining, pleading, and deals was hacked out in assorted backrooms (many of them smoke-filled), until the ‘least-bad’ choice of the Duke of Lentuli rose to the top of the Not Hated lists.

After *again* trying to find some human – *any* human – that could be a suitable compromise candidate, the local Nobility held their collective nose, and voted to offer the position to Dethwabtakewebwakawa – on the condition that his choice for a successor would be a human male of Solomani origin. After weeks of consultations with his elders and the *Atapas-attawapawab*, Dethwabtakewebwakawa agreed.

The recently enthroned Emperor Gavin was delighted to accept the recommendation, and permitted the secret conditions. The official rise of Sector Duke Dethwabtakewebwakawa was proclaimed in the Holiday-991 Honours List, and the Emperor offered his congratulations to the Empty Quarter aristocracy for “the maturity and wisdom of their choice.” With deep sighs of regret, the Dukes and Duchesses bent the knee before the Bwap Sector Duke (after assurances that no photographs would be released to the public), then hurried home to wash the bad taste from their mouths.

The Mask of Command

Duke Dethwabtakewebwakawa – unofficially known as ‘Duke Dethwab’ or ‘Duke Dethie’, but never in his presence – is of two minds regarding his new position. On one hand, he is a strong Bwap nationalist, who has always pushed for a higher profile for his people, on

and off the public stage. On the other hand, there is a suppressed instinct to defer to humans (especially the Vilani) on political matters, as Bwaps have always done. The Duke is aware that any sign of weakness or dependency on humans will weaken his authority. Emperor Gavin has privately made it known that he expects the new Duke to rule as a full and trusted vassal of the Iridium Throne, and not as a figurehead or as an alien face for human power. Finally, many humans within the Six Subsectors feel that the Bwaps have enough power over their lives as nit-picking bureaucrats: to them, having one on the sector throne is the straw that breaks the camel’s back.

To deal with all these different expectations, Duke Dethwabtakewebwakawa has decided to stick with the rulebook as written, ignoring traditional expectations and following the letter of the law. His Mask of Command is that of a demanding, assertive yet oddly charismatic leader, with all the details of every issue at his moist fingertips. All the written and explicit responsibilities and requirements of being a Sector Duke are upheld, to the letter – but no more than that. The Duke insists on full and detailed documentation for any change or shift in his government, and his swift mastery of the minutiae of Ducal authority means that he is not easily fooled.

While building up his political position, Duke Dethwabtakewebwakawa must also serve his liege. His primary duty, as always, is the defence of the realm. What this means is finding a way to beat the pirates that are infesting the Imperial space lanes, and getting a handle on the Shadow Cartel situation that is corrupting too many of his agents on the ground. With the Sector Fleet fighting in the Old Expanses, Emperor Gavin has eased his demands on the Empty Quarter, but the resources Duke Dethwabtakewebwakawa has been left with seem inadequate to the task.

But the pattern-seeking Sector Duke knows full well that he has more firepower than any number of pirates: the question is gaining useful intelligence, proper placement of his forces, and seizing the initiative. More importantly, he understands piracy to be a fundamentally economic problem, not a military one. Duke Dethwabtakewebwakawa feels that, if he can reinforce the integrity of the Ministry of Justice field agents AND shift out the crucial numbers from the sea of data available to him, he’ll be able to roll in the policies needed to ‘drain the swamp’ instead of sending his limited forces on wild goose chases.

While piracy is the most urgent problem at the moment, today’s starfaring criminals simply don’t have

the muscle needed to take on any sizeable world within the Six Subsectors – and without a real productive base, they can never truly threaten Imperial rule. Internal ethnic, racial, and religious hostilities do have that capacity – and it is these essentially political issues that the Duke’s advisors and political friends are pressing him to resolve. However, Duke Dethwab-takebwebwakawa is finding that

...ruling the humans of Lentuli, long familiar with Bwap ways, is one thing. [A Bwap] Ruling all of the Six Subsectors is something else entirely!
First Advisor Wataba-pesa,
House Bebewebboekebseb/
Bebewebboekebseb Crèche,
913 Imperial

The ‘pure liquid evil’ of psionics strikes at the very heart of interstellar commerce and the sanctity of the sophont mind, poisoning openness, trust, risk management, the art of the deal, even corrupting the very laws of physics. Emperor Gavin is committed to rooting out its corrosive and destabilising influence within his realm. Sector Duke Dethwabtakebwebwakawa may differ with his liege on minor matters, but when it comes to the chaotic disorderly madness of psionics, he stands shoulder-to-shoulder (well, shoulder-to-ribs) with his Emperor.

Understand, Rome was not held together by her tangle of ancient and contradictory laws, nor by her bizarre and unlikely series of checks and balances, nor by a single religion or racial bond. She was held together by a shared culture. Her masters all had the same outlook, spoke the same language, shared the same dreams. So long as that remains true, Rome stood – and we will stand too, so long as Imperials are *Imperials*, regardless of race or creed or homeworld.
Archduke Paulo, in a private address
to the Solomani nobles of the Domain of Sylea,
750 Imperial

Privately, the new Sector Duke complains continuously about leading old, long-established nobles who don’t want to be led. Even the Vilani, his most reliable backers, tend to buck against any major changes in the way things are, and quietly resent increased restraints on their freedom of action. The senior Solomani nobles – especially the Arabs – tend to resist him just for the sake of doing so, whenever it benefits them or not. The Imperial civil services are divided into ‘pro-Dethwab’ and ‘anti-Dethwab’ factions, and the military – more tolerant of regulations than most in the subsector – quickly grew tired of his ever-escalating

demands of greater supervision and increased form-filling and data-tracking. An increasing minority of Solomani officers choose to simply ignore the detailed micromanaging, especially at the company and starship level. Those who couldn’t ignore the Rules As Written found an amazing array of methods to twist them, undermine them, subvert them, or decided ‘asking for forgiveness is easier than asking for permission.’

[Referee’s note: The infamous Imperial overlapping ‘dual chain of command’ – as noted in the Mega-Traveller works – was at the root of all sorts of shenanigans.]

Finally, the Duke, knowing that his honeymoon period is long gone, has assembled a small team to draft plans for a wild shot at converting his rank title to an inheritable title. If – and it’s a huge if – he can somehow get a real, sustained economic revival going within the chronically impoverished Six Subsectors, he could get the respect he needs to both quiet his critics and earn some serious credibility from the Iridium Throne. Note that the Duke is far more comfortable with top-down government-managed initiatives than he is with bottom-up free market ones.

Family: Duke Dethwabtakebwebwakawa is married to Lady Eskasobpaabtaso, a female member of his powerful ‘Bwap family’, the Peo-e-a-a-athwako-ep Crèche. As per tradition, she is rarely seen outside of the home, acting as a matriarch to other female Bwaps and their children. Her own two children, Satdaap-kabebkada (male, 20 years old) and Abkabee-feabpo (female, 17 years old) are already able to contribute to the crèche: Satdaapkabebkada is a student at the University of Sylea as a mathematician, while Abkabee-feabpo is nearing the end of her training as a ‘senior nursemaid’. (This is a human translation of the Bwap term, but the Bwap reality is not too far from the human idea: just throw in a pouch for the young to be carried in.)

Harsha Olencia Menderes, Regent of the Julian Protectorate

The difference between an aristocrat and a democratic politician? Not everyone born an aristocrat lusts after power.

Regent Harsha, 135-985 Imperial

Harsha Olencia Menderes was designed by one of the wealthiest families of Charted Space. A partial clone, she was a member of a batch of geneered prenatal children created by Menderes Genetic Products. While

most of her siblings were determined to be unremarkable and aborted, she was found to possess a unique set of genes, whose expression could be quite useful to the Menderes family. As she was deemed worthy of life and membership in the Menderes clans, she was granted legal personhood, named Harsha by a Matriarch of House Menderes, and permitted to be born in 940. She was assigned to be raised consecutively by a senior branch of the human Menderes family and the old and influential Mysaigrokrar pack of Amdukan Vargr, an old Menderes ally. Upon gaining legal adulthood in 946, she chose the middle name of Olencia, to honour a semi-mythical American colonist of the Rule of Man era.

She adjusted well to living with both humans and Vargr, gaining a proficiency in the Vargr language. While naturally charismatic, Harsha was only mildly interested in politics: she preferred to just enjoy life with her friends, and perhaps help out some unfortunate with her time and money. Over time, she placed more and more emphasis on a mix of charitable work and public entertainment, gaining a respectable following and good press for her public shows and care for needy children and cubs.

In 975, the senior members of the family asked Harsha to become Regent. She initially declined, as she had no interest in politics. However, they reassured her that, with the Protectorate at peace and the Corporation free of any threat to its profit margins, what the Protectorate needed now was an attractive and personable figurehead. If there were any real challenges to the Protectorate, the family and the best minds of the Protectorate would be at her fingertips. She chose to accept, and was enthroned as Regent soon after.

The Julian Protectorate is publically a mutual-defence pack, and privately a corporate trade and production zone, run for the benefit of Menderes Corporation (as opposed to, say, the banking establishment, or senior military & industrial dynasties). Regent Harsha's official portfolio has no urgent demands, as the Protectorate enjoys peace on her borders and the supremacy of Menderes Corporation is unchallenged within them. As the Protectorate does not actually rule the member states, most of her day-to-day work is geared to using the immense prestige of her family name to enhance the bonds of the societies of the Protectorate among each other, and with her House. This involves giving awards, hosting august ceremonies, and representing the unified Protectorate at assorted political, social, and religious events. She also works to insure comity within the Protectorate, leading by example when

possible, and insuring that even irreconcilable differences don't lead to interstellar hostilities. While most of her predecessors focused on resolving conflicts between member states, the Regent is working on a more granular level, meeting the leadership of every major world (high-pop, TL C+), as well as the heads of the member states.

There have been various domestic crises, but only one was extraordinary: the death of Archduke Gvueneghz, a guest of the Protectorate, while his cruiser approached Odszouu. War with the Imperium suddenly went from practically impossible to highly likely. The Star Legion quickly uncovered the corsair's bases, and – at the recommendation of her advisors – the corsairs' heads and their captured dependents were sent as a form of apology to Emperor's representatives on Antares. As Regent, Harsha also made the journey to Antares a little later, to personally apologize for the disaster. In private talks, she reassured the new Archduke that she has no intention of supporting the Solomani Confederation in a two-front war. Archduke Koktso's advisors analysed the classified information the Regent provided, and supported her claims. The Vargr decided that the Julian Regent was telling the truth – and that was that.

In 993, Regent Harsha is doing what she does best – connecting with her citizens, showing Protectorate concern with the controversies of the day, cooling down hostilities, and building bridges across racial, cultural, and economic divides. Recently, she has turned her attention to the other Vargr states within the Extents, and is actively seeking ways to encourage them to reconcile with any nonVargr sophont minorities within their borders – especially human minorities.

Family: Regent Harsha was never interested in marriage and reproduction: this is a genetic disposition, as she was to focus her energies on public life, not in marriage. Other branches of the Menderes family handle reproduction and child-raising duties, as per design and intention. Harsha has done well enough to guarantee that portions of her unique DNA will be re-used by her House for many generations to come.

As the senior public figure of the Menderes family, she works closely with family corporate, banking, security, and governmental leaders. All report to the various leaders of the Menderes clan, including Archoness Calista Menderes, the head of House Menderes.

Regent Harsha maintains a Panet relationship with Gegk Dhuksenarz, a wealthy female Irilitok Vargr from

Airus, a powerful Protectorate world in Kaasam/Mendan, hex 2922, UWP A4439A9-E (993 Imperial.) "Auntie Harsha" enjoys playing with Gegk's pups, and marvels at how quickly they are growing up. For more about Panet relationships, see **Stellar Reaches #4**, [Alpha Quadrant of the Empty Quarter Sector](#).

Kougradh Iro'nirdgveis, President of the Rukadukaz Republic

You think I have power? Oh, don't tell me that the parades and the conferences, the debates and the bodyguards fooled you too! If you want to know who has *real* power, forget the guns, forget the flags, and follow the money.

President Iro'nirdgveis,
speaking off-the-record to an old rival
53-993 Imperial

Iro'nirdgveis, an Ovaghoun Vargr, was born on the Ikonaz Vilani world of Lusliki (Vector/Amdukan 0609), at 947 Imperial. His family and packmates were 'simple working-class factory workers,' managing and maintaining delicate robotic machinery for the Vilani-dominated manufacturing firm Agkuuduu Precision Goods. Iro'nirdgveis had always aspired to be an actor, so at the age of 16 he left his home and relocated to the planetary entertainment capital of Lid Irdikhiirargimi.

He was fortunate to find one of the few Vilani directors, Kiirlik Mar, who could really work with the Vargr. Together, they made quite a team, building up a strong repertoire in the war and adventure-action film genre in the late 960s and throughout the 970s. However, it was Iro'nirdgveis' forceful personality off the screen that started to garner a real attention in the public eye. Many Vargr respected his mastery of the Ikonaz Vilani language, making his points felt in ways that could not be easily dismissed as 'another renegade Vargr rant.' The Vilani respected Iro'nirdgveis' respect and obedience to Vilani cultural mores, including conformism, collective decision-making, and respect for the ancestors and the Old Ways.

After the smash hit *Howl of Triumph* (Anglic translation), Iro'nirdgveis felt that it was time to make a partial shift to politics. He started up his own show in 982, again with Kiirlik Mar's support. Iro'nirdgveis was a fair-to-mediocre political pundit until he met Ullgo Isiidhoskodzoen, a freelance political advisor and image specialist. She was the one who persuades Iro'nirdgveis to shift his focus from 'beating the drum

on Vilani holding down the Vargr economically' to 'levelling the playing field.'

After building up support, Iro'nirdgveis was finally invited to join a Vargr network of high-Charisma leaders in 985. Each leader would focus on building up his charisma on a given area & social strata of a given world, and would support each other's initiatives. This particular Vargr network – not organized enough to be a political party, but too stable to be just an alliance of convenience – felt that Iro'nirdgveis had enough cross-boundary reach to gain a substantial number of votes among both the Vilani and the Vargr. After arranging Iro'nirdgveis' life to suit the kind of package they wanted to sell – including marrying him off to his political advisor, positioning him as a leader of a Vargr-Vilani riot, and filming him in pseudo-military settings, his newfound political friends pulled enough strings to get Iro'nirdgveis recognized as a contender for the Presidency.

For over two years, Iro'nirdgveis campaigned and campaigned, 'licking pups & kissing babies', as the saying goes. He ran respectable numbers in the polls, but was still going to lose until his major opponent shot himself in the foot, denouncing 'The Craft and Malice of the Vilani.' His slip of the tongue was endlessly repeated, and the Vilani electors and public overwhelmingly dumped him – ignoring his pleas of regret – and voted for other Vargr. A plurality voted for Iro'nirdgveis, enough for a run-off election. In the two-candidate run-off, the Vilani voted for Iro'nirdgveis practically as one man, which – coupled with just enough votes from his Vargr supporters – led to Iro'nirdgveis winning the Presidency of the Rukadukaz Republic in 304-991.

As President, Iro'nirdgveis has spent most of his time wrestling with Vilani corporations, attempting to get them to re-institute affirmative action procedures for the benefit of the Vargr. The Vilani are uninterested in doing so, but they are willing to give a 'hands up' to Vargr-owned businesses, even providing up to 50% of the start-up capital in return for 40% of the ownership – and assorted tax breaks to make up the difference.

Ovaghoun are Ikonaz.

Vilani can be Ikonaz.

Irilitok can serve the Ikonaz.

Common Republican proverb

993 Imperial

The other major internal issue, the continuous increase of the Irilitok Vargr and the slow displacement of the

native Ovaghoun, has been pushed aside and ignored as much as is possible. The Irilitok have no voting rights when it comes to electing officers for the interstellar Republic, and are systematically discriminated against across the interstellar state. Being bred by humans as an easy-going and peaceable race compared to the more organized and militaristic Ovaghoun, they lack the charisma, the organization, and the ancient heritage of power and authority that the Vilani respect.

President Iro'nirdgveis is rather uninterested in interstellar affairs, so long as the Imperial fleets stay on their side of the border. Like most all Ikonaz Vargr, he has a deep dislike for the Hegemony, but they have been quiet so far in his term of office. He does often attempt to get the Menderes Corporation to invest more in the Republic, but they refuse to do so: "We're a business, not a charity, a development fund, or an arm of the government." Attempts to persuade Regent Harsha to push Mercedes Corporation to a more conciliatory attitude have gotten nowhere.

Family: As per Ovaghoun (i.e. Vargr Ikonaz) custom, President Iro'nirdgveis maintains a highly polygamic household. His charisma and wealth is high enough to permit the maintenance of six high-rank and eighteen low-rank official mistresses, as well as three wives. Iro'nirdgveis has trouble keeping track of his 72 descendants, (and another eight 'in the oven') but the President does the best he can, given his busy schedule. Note: Vargr births tend to be twins, but triplets and quadruples are certainly within the realm of possibility. Single births are rare, and have semi-mystical significance in Ovaghoun culture).

Lorin Beronan, Hegemon of the Hegemony of Lorean

Walk slowly, keep your hands visible at all times, and *don't* wander from the path. The hidden snipers are a little wet behind the ears.

Junior Chamberlain Spran
to Captain Cáceres, Imperial Navy
On the grounds of the Apex,
Damlaer, 993 Imperial

Lorin Beronan is the current master of the Hegemony of Lorean. Born in 922, he was accepted as a Monk of the Order of High Science in 934, a reclusive but respected order within the Unified Cultus of the Last Man (colloquially known as the 'Last Man' creed). He grew to be an outstanding researcher and philosopher, writing the seminal work The Thoughts of Men and Wolves, a cultural history of the interaction of human

and Vargr scientific philosophers within the Julian Protectorate, at the tender age of 24. A competent accountant and talented entrepreneur, he simultaneously swiftly rose to Master of Revenue for his order at 29.

Master Beronan was well on his way to becoming Primate of High Science when circumstances intervened. A string of major banking failures and notable bankruptcies within the Hegemony government threatened to undo the stability that was forged after the Time of Madness. Many economists thought that guarantees to depositors and an infusion of cash from Menderes Corporation would be the best solution to calm the troubled waters. Master Beronan disagreed, fearing the compromise of Hegemony independence and the rise of moral hazard. Instead, he successfully led negotiations for a more lenient repayment plan for the debtors in question. As the crisis ebbed, Master Beronan's arguments laid down a more forceful legal and moral framework regarding financial activity. Impressed, the ruling Hegemon permitted Master Beronan to personally execute two dozen senior financiers and auditors, whose systemic failure & incompetence had put the Hegemony at risk.

At Hegemon Darsol's invitation, Master Beronan left his order, and joined the Hegemon government as the Junior Minister of Finance in 958. His outstanding work and amazingly quick and subtle mastery of the bureaucracy and the legal system brought him to the head of the department in 969. After several years of satisfactory service, Minister Beronan, now openly groomed for the Apex, was inducted into the Four Swords Regiment as a Lieutenant/Ensign in 975. Lt/Eng. Beronan completed one cycle of service, with three years of intensive training, four years commanding a reinforced artillery company, and another five years as an engineering hand on the Hegemony Warship *Bitter Cut*, within the Hegemony Protection Group *Parietis*.

After his eleven years of military service, Beronan and four other suitable candidates was invited to the Apex, the residence of the Hegemon. Legally registered psions (all high-ranking Last Man clergymen) spent two days asking Beronan questions and reading his mind, sometimes subtly, sometimes forcefully. Beronan and another man were judged to be a 'viable successor' of the Hegemon: two other men were 'honourable but insufficient' and the fifth executed for 'harbouring a treasonous mind'. Hegemon Darsol, having chosen his death date and prepared for his apotheosis, chose Beronan as his successor. After sharing a fine meal with Beronan, senior advisors, and various ministers and

friends, Hegemon Darsol drunk deeply from the ruby-red poisoned chalice placed at his left hand, and died later in his sleep. After a week of public mourning, Beronan was exalted as Hegemon in a Last Man religious ceremony in 258-980: the other, now officially nameless contender was placed in a government low berth as 'reserved talent', joining 22 other men in their long, long sleep.

As of 993, Hegemon Beronan has been ruling the Hegemony for thirteen years. He has continued the 'patient strength' policies of his recent predecessors, encouraging free trade (both with other Protectorate members and internally), the slow but continuous relaxation of internal controls, and strengthening relations with the Star Legion.

After receiving several parties of very wealthy and heavily humanized Amdukan Vargr from the Asimikigir Confederation, the Hegemon is seriously considering opening up Arzul Sector to Vargr settlement. He has sent several trial balloons, which were shot down as expected. He now plans to use a different, more theological approach, stressing that the adoption of human ways by the Vargr proves the superiority of humaniti, and that such Vargr is to be welcomed into Arzul Sector, not rejected. The enormous wealth that the leading Vargr families bring (and the unofficial but strong support of Menderes Corporation) should help in easing tensions while enriching the Hegemony as a whole. The free and non-violent interaction of Amdukan Vargr and local humaniti should also help in increasing the integration of the Hegemony with the rest of the Julian Protectorate. Already, the Hegemony has relaxed controls on senior Vargr leaders and licensed Vargr tour groups to operate within Arzul Sector.

"It's the usual Solomani Setup. A great economy, some rights and freedoms for the ordinary man, strong racial pride – and, just behind the curtains, hard men with harder eyes, making sure things stay nice and orderly."

"And this is different from the Imperium... how, exactly?"

[pause]

"Replace *racial* with *Imperial*."

Free trader Diana Mayor and Lekiiir Atomic,
On a walking tour of the city of Preaksais,
Zuethun, 003-984 Imperial

The most pro-Imperial of the Julian Protectorate's current leadership, Hegemon Beronan has often encouraged more Imperial-Protectorate co-operation: but, as only an Associate Member of the Protectorate, his opinions does not carry the weight of other Full Members who have a deep-seated hostility to Imperials. Relations with the Second Empire of Gashikan remain mutually respectful, but cool: Emperor Shonyfra continues to make overtures to encourage the Hegemony to leave the Protectorate, but the rewards he offers are meagre compared to the loss of markets, technology, security, and social networks the Hegemony would have to bear.

As the head of the Unified Cultus of the Last Man, the Hegemon continues a policy of limited tolerance for other religions, and has attempted to draw back to the Way some of the less heterodox cults, philosophical clubs, and ritual societies, with mixed success. As the New Morality grows within the Orders, the Hegemon has encouraged increased censorship within the Home Worlds and Star's End, with respectable results. Attempts to extend these policies to Damlaer space and the Empty Quarter, however, has crumbled in the face of local derision. A similar pattern of Home World support and Colonial rejection has been shown for his campaign against internal corruption, as well.

Family: The Hegemon's family resides on Fathall, a pleasant world dominated by the clergy of the Last Man (at 993: A8669DE-7, hex 0834, in Mycocona/Arzul). His family is given no special status within Hegemon society – but they are proud of him, anyways. He permits himself to pay for his surviving siblings, nieces and nephews (and grand-nieces and grand-nephews) to come and visit him on the capital world of Damler: it's just nine parsecs, after all. A ten-week round trip (assuming a jump2 ship, one week in jumpspace, one week in port) is practically a neighbourhood jaunt in Traveller terms. While the 71-year old Hegemon is no longer bound to his monkish oaths, he remains personally celibate: in his view, sex is but a distraction from duty and piety, and the little desire that remains in his aged body is best suppressed and sublimated to useful activity.

Shonyfra, Emperor of the Second Empire of Gashikan

Let the party rock on – but take your leave before the bills comes due.

'Captain Caveman',
of the Far Trader *Collision Detection*
985 Imperial

Emperor Shonyfra, leader of the Second Empire of Gashikan since 967, has rather cool relations with the Protectorate bordering his rimward reaches. While as anti-Vargr as most Yileans, neither he nor his people have the old thirst for war that marked the earlier days of Empire, and border tensions are at an all-time low. He remains disappointed with his old ally, the Hegemony of Lorean, but Gashikan no longer has the ability to pull the Loreans out of the Protectorate orbit. Only a major Vargr raid could shake the Empire out of her current torpor – but the extremely wary Vargr neighbours still remember the pitiless, genocidal Gashikan of old. The borders have been quiet for generations now, and remain so today.

Emperor Shonyfra has turned a blind eye to the import of Vargr as slave muscle, something that is still officially illegal. While the 42-year-old Emperor continues to make anti-corruption gestures for PR reasons, he has little concern about handling interstellar justice or insuring military discipline. The Emperor is far more interested in enriching his pockets and rewarding his friends, rather than enriching the State or serving his people. The complaints of leading Yileans are simply tuned out, and even the slow fading of the Yilean race only spurs him to an occasional speech on The Greatness of Yilean Blood – nothing more. Emperor Shonyfra does have an interest in novelty, and

considers himself an expert in sports, gambling, and worldly philosophy. As a clear reflection of his society, the Emperor is quite popular within his realm, and is the subject of many a toast.

Family: the Emperor, like most of the senior Gashikan nobility, values pleasure far above familial duties, but it must come in a sophisticated, elegant, and indirect form, fit for one with such refined tastes as himself. His many wives – all of Vilani or Solomani heritage – remain childless, and the household officials in charge of succession are finding it difficult to locate a male relative, however distant, who is both able and willing to take the throne. But for now, the economy continues to run fairly well, and the majority of the populace supports the Emperor's rule – indeed, they rejoice at the relaxation of numerous long-standing restrictions & regulations, including required number of live births per woman, years of male service in the military, and the amount of permissible debt allowed per person per year. "The muzzles of the Vargr have been hammered shut: let us celebrate, as our noble ancestors would demand!"

[Referee's Note: the Second Empire isn't due to collapse until 1070 Imperial, due to economic problems and a destructive civil war. Even by 1116, long after the Third Empire was born, no Yilean world had attained TL D+. That leaves 77 years for the PCs to party in a deeply decadent interstellar empire. So long as they don't live to see the Gashikhan Civil War, that's fine for most parties – but they could easily be caught up in the numerous riots, disturbances, and failed rebellions that lead up to the Big Kahuna. Or the Referee may just quietly ignore the timeline...]

Sixteen Tons

By Alvin Plummer

Introduction

Sixteen Tons is a starmerc adventure, with some opportunities for a little trade profit on the side. The PCs are expected to have an armed starship at their disposal. This adventure assumes the PCs command or crew an 800-ton Broadsword, the *Bouncing Betty*, bearing a full loadout of turret weapons and carrying 17 additional troops which may come in handy. This adventure uses the BITS Task System, with Classic Traveller rules.

Ever since the Imperial Navy pulled out of the sector to fight the Solomani Confederation, business has been quite profitable for the PCs. The sword dividing the quick and the dead has left the PCs on the right side of the equation, allowing them to quickly trade up from a Suleiman scout, to a refitted Beowulf trader, to a proper mercenary ship, the *Bouncing Betty*. Having got their baby, they now have to find the jobs to feed her and keep her in good shape – not too difficult, in the current environment. Their prime goal is to completely pay her off before the Imperial Navy returns and pounds some semblance of order back into the Six Subsectors of the Imperial Empty Quarter.

Better Than Gold

The adventure starts at 216-993, with the PCs are lounging around in their comfortable quarters on Aisha/Udusis, in the Delta Quadrant of The Empty Quarter. Via their cell/datapad/internet account, they are informed that a possible client is interested in their services. While the client is willing to pay the going rate to employ both their starship and ground troopers, smart PCs should instigate a nice bidding war for their services: space security is in high demand within the Imperial Empty Quarter right now, and there is no reason why they should sell themselves cheap. In any case, Sir Daamodar Puthenveetil Chakyar, representing the Bountiful Trading Line, is the high bidder.

The Bountiful Trading Line is interested in conducting a for-profit famine relief mission to Belumar. As there is no voidspace caravanseries in hex 1837 (the traffic to Belumar is too thin to support one: see **Stellar Reaches #6** “Empty Quarter Echo”, by Jeff M. Hopper for more on the caravanseri), the small fleet will have to jump from Aisha, to Takoda, to Lakea, to Belumar. Lakea is fairly well protected, and Takoda is probably OK, but

Belumar system is known to always have a pirate or two lurking about.

Assuming the PCs agree, they are expected to go ahead of the flotilla, which will assemble at Aisha in three months. (It takes time to do *anything* in the Traveller universe.) Within the next two weeks, the PCs are expected to personally determine the threat levels of Takoda, Lakea, and Belumar. They are to report back to Sir Daamodar, and help him determine the best way to protect his ships. If the PCs choose to engage any pirate they come across, the Bountiful Trading Line is willing to pay a bounty, and grant the PCs complete salvage rights: but if they lose, it’s the PCs problem.

The PCs may choose to ask around the local Traveller community about the current pirate profile. They can readily determine that, while there are numerous hiding places for pirates to gather, there are rather thin on the ground: there just isn’t that much interstellar traffic in Udusis subsector. What pirates there are, are thin and mangy creatures in rickety starships. It’s more common to find a dead pirate ship, her worn out fusion plant finally giving up the ghost, than to hear a live ship give out the “heave-to and be prepared to be boarded” signal. The pirates that can be found are exclusively human, and – when caught – are invariably ‘part-time pirates’: professional pirates don’t bother with the thin pickings available.

The few starfaring Vargr accepted by the local Traveller community are widely known by sight and ship: other travelling Vargr tend to get disappeared unexpectedly, in space or in port. Fortunately for any PC Vargr, they are usually just a single member of a majority-human group, and are assumed to be ‘spoken for’. This provides a measure of protection in the subsector, but they shouldn’t press their luck. Vargr passengers in transit also protected by being ‘under the cloak’ of their human crew, but again, they shouldn’t make themselves a nuisance. Note that those Vargr who do make trouble – loosely defined – bring problems on their human associates, as well as themselves. Tread carefully.

Scouting Ahead

To meet the conditions of their contract – and kill some time, as the Bountiful Trading Line gets their act

together – the PCs are expected to survey the route beforehand, with a special focus on possible pirate hotspots. A Bountiful Trading Line agent will join them, to handle paperwork and planning for both the PCs and the coming small convoy of ships.

Aisha

This system is rather different than the other three systems, being Arab Muslim rather than American Indian Christian/Animist/Hindu. It's also more closely tied to 'Standard Imperial Culture', rather than distinctively Emptyheaded ways of thinking. The locals like to think of themselves as an up-and-coming system, but excluding population growth, there hasn't been much progress made in the three centuries since the initial colonization. On the other hand, there hasn't been a lot of declension either, as new money continues to be pumped into the local economy, from both their distant homeworld and the Imperium herself.

As this system is ruled directly by the Imperial Ministry of Colonization, there are enough Imperial Navy SDB ships to deter all of the run-of-the-mill pirates in the area.

Takoda

This system has a reputation for violence due to her internal divisions. Initially, this was a racial division between pureblooded American Indians and mixed-race American Indian: then, another layer of division was laid between pure Solomani and Mixed Vilani: then, a third layer was made, between Christian and Animist (and soon after, 'original' native Animist and Animist-Hindus). Fortunately, the internal difficulties have been resolved for a century now, providing a certain amount of prosperity and steady growth. While not a particularly desirable place to live, Takoda is now far from the bottom of the pile, and still on the way up – slowly, but surely. The class-B Imperial starport, no more than ten years old, is now turning a profit, providing a justification for a week-long, planet-wide celebration and a reason for the world's tribes to draw together in shared happiness.

The various surviving tribal-racial and tribal-theocratic governments share ownership of two old but serviceable Suleiman scouts that serve as system SDBs: coupled with a few scattered ground-based laser and missile sites, the basic needs of planetary defence are served. Beyond the 100-diameter limit, though, you're on your own. A few silent, picked-over corpses of unfortunate merchant ships can be spotted by any

visitor to the system: the Imperial Navy is expected to clear them up, after the Solomani Rim war is over.

Lakea

While Takoda was settled during the first three centuries of the Third Imperium, Lakea was settled in the following three centuries, leading up to the Imperial Civil War. Before her settlement, she was most famous as a refuelling stop for the Majestic Circuit of Emperor Angustus (arrived day 295, departed day 297, of the year 357 of the Imperial Era). These three days are still celebrated: Emperor Angustus remains the only Emperor to have extensively toured the Imperial Empty Quarter, and remains the favoured Emperor of Emptyheads everywhere.

The system has prospered quite pleasantly since the Civil War, and is a local centre of technological goods and large capital equipment, including starships. Unlike the other systems, Lakea is on the X-Boat route, and is the place to get the latest news (except in regard of the Rim War, where Aisha gives some stiff competition.) A highly sophisticated form of American Indian culture, closely coupled with the rough democratic and frontier ethics of the early United States, makes Lakea the centre of American Indian society within the Empty Quarter.

The system was traditionally guarded by one of the mercenary 'braves societies' of the American Indians, but recently one of these societies have chosen to swear fealty to the Imperial Baron (and Great Chief) of Lakea. The Eagle Claw comprises of two Broadswords and two Empress Maravas (retooled for mercenary service): two dedicated SDB boats are expected to be commissioned for their use by day 250 of the year 993 Imperial. There were an increased level of pirate activity in the years 990 – 992, but an Eagle Claw strike at their base of operations (such as it was) put an end to it. Current pirate activity is notable for its absence.

Belumar

Belumar, like many other systems within the Empty Quarter, has gone through a cycle or more of settlement, partial or complete collapse, and later re-settlement. The current population dates from the first three centuries of the Imperial Era, and is primarily composed of American Indians. Unlike most of the American Indians within the Empty Quarter, this group is largely from the south-western region of the First American Republic, and includes a plurality of Mexican Indians & Mestizos. The world is a bread-basket: the population sometimes grows rich, and sometimes poor, depending on the demand for food. But regardless, it has no native industrial complex: such things are seen

as too polluting, and fundamentally unnecessary: maximum profits for the world and her sophonts are gained by specialization in growing and trading foodstuffs.

Unfortunately, years ago the Imperium requisitioned the freighters that usually resupply the worlds' mechanical and food processing equipment, as they were needed to shore up a failing war effort at the other side of Charted Space. The lack of resupply led to a slow degradation of the world's ability to grow food. Now, Belumar is having difficulty even feeding herself, with the agricultural equipment and robots needed to tend to her continent-wide farms and plantations malfunctioning or going inoperative due to lack of proper maintenance. The withdrawal of the Imperial Navy has also hit Belumar harder than most: the pirates in the subsector are weak, but the world can no longer afford to pay for starmercs, and has no native space defensive capacity. Pirate raids on the world are now a weekly occurrence, and even many ordinary civilian starships are turning pirate, if only to pick up unprotected and abandoned equipment, just lying there in the field.

As the PCs jump in, they can spot 1D6+1 starships – all Beowulf's - simply ignoring the commands of the unarmed starport, landing and taking what they please. These part-time pirates that are harassing Belumar will ignore the PCs unless the PCs open fire: if the PCs do fire on the pirates, they will flee to the 100-diameter border and make their jump as quickly as they can. They have no interest in fighting an 800-ton Broadsword, especially one with a clear edge in firepower.

[Referee: If the PCs are using a 200-ton or smaller starship, the pirates will attack rather than flee. They feel that they are equal to the PCs one-on-one, and they have the advantage of numbers.]

If the PCs successfully drive away the pirates, they will be treated as heroes when they land: if not, they will be treated with a great deal of respect and fear, as the locals believe that the PCs are professional men of violence who can do them a great deal of harm. (This is true, by the way.) The Chamberlain of the local ruling Noble House will rush to greet the PCs, and entreat them to fight the pirates, offering a lot of promises in return. This includes 'the hand of my daughter and half my kingdom', but pointedly excludes any money up-front.

What the PCs do from here is up to them: the local nobility has no ability to stop them from doing what

they want, or even pull a decent bluff. The Referee may remind them that they are paid professionals whose reputation is built on doing the job, not by braking contracts to do deeds of derring-do – or conduct some private empire-building, depending on the PC's character.

More Hands Make Light Work

Within a week after their return to Aisha, the ships of the Bountiful Trading Line arrive: a group of four Beowulf Free Traders, and an Akkigish Subsidized Merchant. They are laden with grain-based foodstuffs from the Sydite world of Iisdirrii (Udusis 1937), and are ready for their journey to Belumar.

For the record, they are named, respectively,

- *Global Illumination*
A respected trader, commanded by an old spacedog, the Syndite Captain Tesir. Captain Tesir is the senior captain of the Bountiful Trading Line, and is a dedicated interstellar trader. He is also something of a mentor to other Syndite traders in Udusis subsector, as he's willing to spend some time sharing his hard-won wisdom with them. The crew is 100% Iisdirrii Syndite.
- *Streets of Gold*
A DYI project, this ship, hauled off the salvage pile, is held together by the ingenuity of her Anglo-Arab engineer-captain, ShipMaster Kyd. Once all the bugs are worked out, he plans to sell it to the shipping line for a substantial profit, and move on to another ship resurrection project. The crewmen are generally Arabs from Hebrin, a fair distance from home.
- *Third-Grade Science Project* (usually shortened to just 'Third-Grade')
Found abandoned in deep space, the *Third-Grade* is used as a trader by the Solomani Arab Captain LucaSan – but the trading business is used merely as a way to fund the Captain's scientific exploration interests. The crew is an eclectic collection of Sunni Islamic clerics, scientific researchers and university interns.
- *Seaquest*
This wandering vessel is manned with a mixed uplifted Dolphin/geneered Merman/amphibious Luriani crew – and one Mixed Vilani woman, hard-up enough to take a job in a hostile ship's environment, with the crew

areas flooded with 1.5 meters of water. The *Seaquest's* home port is Dekha, a wealthy world from distant Deneb. The Captain and crew plan to remain with the Bountiful Trading Line for another two years, before moving on to Core sector.

A single sophont orca inhabits the entire passenger section. Taking the name of "Pod Ten Explorer", he initially left Terra 10 years ago to learn more about the habitability of distant oceans for orca, and the cultures of other aquatic sophonts. (The killer whales are not particularly friendly to humaniti, despite being uplifted by the Solomani. The dolphin crew tends to keep their distance: after all, the orcas still tell tales of the sweetness of dolphin flesh...)

Like all his kind, Pod Ten Explorer's homeworld is Terra: as soon as he heard of the start of the Rim War, he requested transport back home. It's taking longer than he thought – both the war and the journey. He has filed quite a large number of reports back home, but he is doubtful if any got thru the battle lines to his academic circle back in the Indian Ocean. His plan is to remain at Capital under the auspices of a Noble financial backer until the war is over, and then take a fast transport to Terra.

- *Andalusian Conqueress*
The Bwap crew of this human-owned fat trader is still licking their wounds after a recent scrape with pirates. When told 'your cargo or your lives', the Bwap resisted – until their manoeuvre drive was shot up. They then ditched the cargo into space, to be quickly snapped up by the pirates. They managed to limp to port, but are still smarting at the loss of their cargo.

(They did get a good ID of the pirate vessel, and have informed the authorities. They have industriously poured over the video of the incident, and could probably pick out the thieving Far Trader just by watching how she manoeuvres in space, if they cross her path again...)

If the PCs believe that one starmerc is insufficient protection for the convoy, Sir Daamodar will hire another one. He will let the PCs pick which one of the three he should choose, but getting another starmerc

will hit the PCs pocketbook (Sir Daamodar is working with a fixed budget here).

- The *Greed'n'Fear* – "A custom, upteched Beowulf fitted out for jump2... experienced crew, good reputation... two triple-turret missile launchers..."
Price: the PCs must split 1/3 of their contracted pay with the *Greed'n'Fear*
- The *Gimble Lock* – "Another Beowulf, from Ley sector... crew just trying to make ends meet... captain is ex-Navy, claims to have seen some action... standard single laser turret, single sandcaster..."
Price: the PCs must split 1/8 of their contracted pay with the *Gimble Lock*
- The *Right Hand Rule* – "A Suleiman Scout... green crew of three just starting out as starmercs, trying to build a reputation... single-laser turret..."
Price: the PCs must split 1/15 of their contracted pay with the *Right Hand Rule*

[Referee: Treat the *Greed'n'Fear* as a Veteran ship, the *Gimble Lock* as Trained, and the *Right Hand Rule* as Green. For reference, I am using the scale Elite/Veteran/Regular/Trained/Green to determine crew morale and quality.]

Captain Tesir, the civilian Syndite captain of the Beowulf Free Trader *Global Illumination*, strongly suggests to the PCs to use any spare cargo space with food, preferably stuff that will keep like wheat, rye, or nimik – a fairly common 'edible grass-like plant' in the Six Subsectors. Nimik grows well in salty soils, is a good source of carbs, and is quite hardy. Should the PCs shop around, they will be able to find a sixteen-dton lot of nimik, available at 7000 credits/dton. Referees should encourage negotiating the price.

Beatdown

As soon as the PCs convoy jump in over Belumar, they will meet a band of pirates who will immediately open fire. The number varies, depending on the PCs actions the first time they visited Belumar. If the PCs drove off the pirates, then only the four core members of Team Venom – the lead ship *Kryminalni*, and her sisters *Thugee*, *Instant Sunshine*, and *Dirt Nap* – will be present to fight them. If they ignored the 1D6+1 pirates attacking Belumar earlier, then these same pirates join the core group in the attack on the *Bouncing Betty*.

Details of the ships involved are provided in the appendix. The Bountiful Trading Line's Free Traders are all built on the same plan as the *Global Illumination* shown in the appendix: so does three of the four of the core Team Venom starships. *Instant Sunshine* has her own missile-heavy configuration. The miscellaneous pirates all follow the plan of the *Stepping Star*.

Team Venom is permitted +1 on the initiative roll, due to the Fleet Skill of their pirate lord. The *Kryminalni* is permitted +1 to their ship's computer level, due to the skill of her ship commander, the pirate lord. The *Thugee*, *Instant Sunshine*, and *Dirt Nap* never retreat unless the *Kryminalni* is destroyed or disabled (incapable of manoeuvre or fire).

Bountiful Trading Line:

Morale levels:

Global Illumination Veteran

Other Bountiful Trading Line ships Trained

Team Venom:

Kryminalni Infinite: fights until disabled

Instant Sunshine Infinite until the *Kryminalni* is disabled, falls to Veteran afterwards

Thugee and *Dirt Nap* Infinite until the *Kryminalni* is disabled; falls to Regular

The other pirates always Trained

The battle will be held close enough to Belumar for wounded ships to have a good chance of ditching dirtside, which is far better than being left to drift powerless in space. Returning from the crash site to the starport should be a difficult journey, as there are no planes, the few trains are currently rusting hulks, and only limited large bodies of water for shipping. And always the question: will this group of low-tech natives run from, or violently attack, the off-worlders? Communication is quite unlikely, as few off-worlders speak the local Spanish- and American Indian-derived languages, and only the wealthy and well-educated locals speak Anglic or Modern Vilani.

Payday

Assuming the PCs win the battle, they receive their payment and bonuses as per contract. A solo victory, without any losses in the convoy, gives a nice boost to their reputation – and future job offers. The Belumar planetary government is very interested in securing

their services, and is willing to offer a renewable five-year contract. They can't pay in Imperial Credits, but can offer region that holds a promising mix of infertile & fertile land: the equivalent of their own small country.

Appendix: Aisha

Currently, the *Bouncing Betty's* homeport is Aisha/Udusis/Empty Quarter, hex 1836, UWP C450563-B. A pleasant desert world within the Six Subsectors, Aisha – named after the Prophet Muhammad's nine-year-old bride – is the site of a long-standing Imperial Ministry of Colonization (MoC) project. Some 'touch-up' terraforming was conducted, especially on the planned site for the first city. While colonists are solidly orthodox Sunni Muslims, they are not related to the local Arab cultures, but have been brought in from Arab Muslim settlements from the important world of Conda (Conda/Daibe 2718: A5969DC-D in 993 Imperial) a century before the Imperial Civil War.

As of 993 Imperial, Conda is one of the most powerful Islamic theocracies within the Imperium, but there is little pressure to convert the dhimmi (infidel) majority, as non-believers can be taxed at a higher rate by the system government than orthodox Muslims. Conda is not a true front-line system in the current Rim War, but she has seen her share of Solomani raids on her shipping, and two deep strikes against her industrial centres and constellation of starports. As most of Aisha's inhabitants still maintain long-standing family and business links to Conda, there is a strong market for Rim War news, and freelance couriers have made Aisha one of the most informed worlds in the Empty Quarter.

Local Aishaites view most other Muslims within the Quarter as Emptyheaded heterodox peasants, so wrapped up in their ignorance and superstition as to be barely Muslim. Naturally, the rest of the Islamic ummah within the Six Subsectors see the Aishaites as uppity snobs, still fantasizing that they are in the heart of human interstellar civilization, instead of being on the ragged frontier of Imperial rule.

The world itself is still ruled by the Imperial Ministry of Colonization, and there is a substantial (and largely deserted, due to the war) Imperial Scout base sited on the world. The system administration envisions their system to be a model for the rest of the Six Subsectors to follow, but most knowledgeable Imperial nobles and scouts see this as a failed project. The primary reason it's still funded is due to prestige reasons: Conda is fairly important in the realm of Imperial-Solomani

Architects Fee: MCr 0.680 Cost in Quantity: MCr 54.360

HULL: 200 tons standard, 2,800 cubic meters, Flattened Sphere Configuration

CREW: Pilot, Engineer, Medic, 2 Gunners

ENGINEERING: Jump-1, 1G Manoeuvre, Power plant-1, 2 EP, Agility 0

AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/1 Computer

HARDPOINTS: 2 Hardpoints

ARMAMENT: 1 Single Pulse Laser Turret organised into 1 Battery (Factor-1)

DEFENCES: 1 Single Sandcaster Turret organised into 1 Battery (Factor-2)

CRAFT: None

FUEL: 22 Tons Fuel (1 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)

On Board Fuel Scoops, No Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS: 10 Staterooms, 20 Low Berths, 7 Middle Passengers, 20 Low Passengers, 91 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS: None

COST: MCr 68.630 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 0.680),

MCr 54.360 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME: 57 Weeks Singly, 46 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS:

This version of the free trader has the standard armed loadout. Useful for ships 'expecting trouble', a.k.a. almost every ship in the Imperial Empty Quarter, as of 993 Imperial.

Ship: Stepping Stars

Class: Beowulf (Pirate Edition)

Type: Free Trader

Architect: Alvin Plummer

Tech Level: 9

USP

AA-2611111-000000-10000-0 MCr 67.950 200 Tons

Bat Bear 1 Crew: 5

Bat 1 TL: 9

Cargo: 91 Tons Passengers: 7 Low: 20 Fuel: 22 EP: 2 Agility: 0 Pulse Lasers

Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops

Architects Fee: MCr 0.680 Cost in Quantity: MCr 54.360

HULL: 200 tons standard, 2,800 cubic meters, Flattened Sphere Configuration

CREW: Pilot, Engineer, Medic, 2 Gunners

ENGINEERING: Jump-1, 1G Manoeuvre, Power plant-1, 2 EP, Agility 0

AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/1 Computer

HARDPOINTS: 2 Hardpoints

ARMAMENT: 1 Single Pulse Laser Turret organised into 1 Battery (Factor-1)

DEFENCES: 1 Single Gatling gun organised into 1 Battery (Factor-0)

CRAFT: None

FUEL: 22 Tons Fuel (1 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)

On Board Fuel Scoops, No Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS: 10 Staterooms, 20 Low Berths, 7 Middle Passengers, 20 Low Passengers, 91 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS: None

COST: MCr 68.630 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 0.680),

MCr 54.360 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME: 57 Weeks Singly, 46 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS:

Hey - what happened to the sandcaster?

AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/1 Computer
HARDPOINTS: 2 Hardpoints
ARMAMENT: 1 Single Pulse Laser Turret organised into 1 Battery (Factor-1)
DEFENCES: 1 Single Sandcaster Turret organised into 1 Battery (Factor-2)
CRAFT: 1 20-ton Launch
FUEL: 44 Tons Fuel (1 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)
On Board Fuel Scoops, No Fuel Purification Plant
MISCELLANEOUS: 13 Staterooms, 10 Low Berths, 9 Middle Passengers,
10 Low Passengers, 228 Tons Cargo
USER DEFINED COMPONENTS: None
COST: MCr 138.562 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 1.372),
MCr 109.752 in Quantity
CONSTRUCTION TIME: 82 Weeks Singly, 65 Weeks in Quantity
COMMENTS:
This armed version of the Fat Trader is, frankly, undergunned. The
number of available empty turrets restricts her ability to defend herself.

Ship: Right Hand Rule Class: Suleiman
Type: Scout Architect: Standard
Tech Level: 11

USP

 SS-11222R1-000000-10000-0 MCr 52.634 100 Tons
Bat Bear 1 Crew: 5
Bat 1 TL: 11

Cargo: 4 tons Fuel: 34 EP: 2 Agility: 1 Pulse Lasers
Craft: 1 x 3T Air/Raft
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification

Architects Fee: MCr 0.526 Cost in Quantity: MCr 42.107

HULL: 100 tons standard, 1,400 cubic meters, Needle/Wedge Configuration
CREW: Pilot, Gunner, 3 Other Crew
ENGINEERING: Jump-2, 2G Manoeuvre, Power plant-2, 2 EP, Agility 1
AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/1bis Computer
HARDPOINTS: 1 Hardpoint
ARMAMENT: 1 Single Pulse Laser Turret organised into 1 Battery (Factor-1)
DEFENCES: None
CRAFT: 1 3-ton Air/Raft
FUEL: 34 Tons Fuel (3 parsecs jump and 56 days endurance)
On Board Fuel Scoops, On Board Fuel Purification Plant
MISCELLANEOUS: 4 Staterooms, 4 Tons Cargo
USER DEFINED COMPONENTS: None
COST: MCr 53.160 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 0.526),
MCr 42.107 in Quantity
CONSTRUCTION TIME: 38 Weeks Singly, 30 Weeks in Quantity
COMMENTS:

Yes, this is the ubiquitous Suleiman scout, now gang-pressed into starmerc
service. (Image of 99-pound weakling hauling 60 lbs. of Marine equipment
comes to mind: shakes head sadly.)

Ship: Greed'n'Fear Class: Modified Beowulf
Type: Free Trader Architect: Alvin Plummer
Tech Level: 11

USP

AA-2621221-000000-00002-0 MCr 105.734 200 Tons
Bat Bear 2 Crew: 5
Bat 2 TL: 11

Cargo: 42 tons Passengers: 7 Low: 20 Fuel: 44 EP: 4 Agility: 1
Craft: 1 x 3T Air/Raft
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification

Architects Fee: MCr 1.057 Cost in Quantity: MCr 84.587

HULL: 200 tons standard, 2,800 cubic meters, Flattened Sphere Configuration

CREW: Pilot, Engineer, Medic, 2 Gunners

ENGINEERING: Jump-2, 1G Manoeuvre, Power plant-2, 4 EP, Agility 1

AVIONICS: Bridge, Model/2 Computer

HARDPOINTS: 2 Hardpoints

ARMAMENT: 2 Triple Missile Turrets organised into 2 Batteries (Factor-2)

DEFENCES: None

CRAFT: 1 3-ton Air/Raft

FUEL: 44 Tons Fuel (2 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)

On Board Fuel Scoops, On Board Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS: 12 Staterooms, 20 Low Berths, 7 Middle Passengers,
20 Low Passengers, 42 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS: None

COST: MCr 106.791 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 1.057),
MCr 84.587 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME: 57 Weeks Singly, 46 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS:

This is a custom-built version of the Beowulf, owned by a very successful trader who - after getting 'the big score' of over 100 million credits - decided to blow it all on a new'n'improved version of his old ship, instead of, say, buying a roomy tropical island on a civilized world. Boys and their toys, indeed.

Minor Races of Chartered Space: the Yileans

By Alvin Plummer

Background

The Yileans are an intelligent human minor race, native to Gashikan (as of 993 Imperial: A8679AC-C, orbiting a variable star at 1 AU). Gashikan is a green world, full of life and beauty, with the land fused into one super-continent. The last major attack on Gashikan was c. 3300 years ago: the once-great, now long-dead city of Nitholis is maintained as a monument to that distant era. Most of the other scars of the Sack of Gashikan were made good centuries and millennia ago: even the radiation deserts have vanished, covered by rich, moist jungle. Only the scars on the Yilean mind remain.

But let's step back a bit, before the attack that reshaped both the Yilean worldview and several sectors of Chartered Space.

Like all humaniti save the Solomani, the Yileans were deposited on their world by the Ancients, but there are few planetary relics of that time of any significance. By TL 3 (the Industrial & Scientific Revolutionary era), the orderly Yileans had created *the Gashikan*, a worldwide government. While the composition of the government fluctuated between a hereditary monarchy, charismatic dictatorship, and a wealthy oligarchy, the single worldwide state was always maintained & rebuilt. At around -4400 Imperial (A.D. 100), the Yileans were rising to TL 4 (industrial engines & electrical power) when they were contacted by scouts and explorers of the Vilani Isiirdi, the co-ordinating council of the three Vilani bureau/interstellar governments: the Ziru Sirka (Grand Empire of the Stars) had not yet been founded. The Yileans were assigned to the Makhidkarun Bureau: emphasising the aristocratic and militaristic element of Vilani culture, this bureau stressed interstellar governance, and was run on a for-profit basis. The Yileans fitted in very well with the authoritarian Makhidkarun ethos, and was happily humming along at TL 9 by -4200 Imperial.

When the well-organized Ziru Sirka collapsed in -2204 (A.D. 2316), the Yileans were shocked. This shock turned to dismay as the Terrans fumbled through the Ramshackle Empire period, and the dismay grew into horror as chaotic & destructive Vargr raiders, hunting packs, and warfleets started to rampage throughout their own corner of the galaxy. Finding the Rule of Man

Navy incapable of protecting their worlds, the Yileans proclaimed the rebirth of the Empire of Gashikan in -1784 (A.D. 2736), eight years before the Rule of Man disintegrated in -1776 Imperial.

The new empire began to push back vigorously against the Vargr, but the Vargr banded together to burn out the very heart of the Yilean people. In the fateful year -1685 Imperial, the Vargr fleets – dominated by the Suedzuk - struck at the world of Gashikan herself. Over 400 million Yileans died, as well as the empire itself. Since that time, the Vargr represent everything the Yileans hate: 'chaos, disruption and anarchy.'

[Author's note: I bet the Vargr *also* represent failure, and the final extinction of their lives, and the lives of everything they love and cherish. So for the Yileans to live, the Vargr must die. An easy call for the Yileans to make.]

The Yileans recovered, and in -1646 the Second Empire of Gashikan was born. The first order of business was the extinction of the Vargr, seen more as a plague to be eradicated rather than as an intelligent species. Biological weapons were preferred, as illustrated by the Wolvesbane Project. The 'genereed microbes', tailored to kill canines, was released in -1427: by the end of the year, all the Vargr within Gashikan Sector was dead. However, the Vargr foiled attempts to spread the plague further, and despite the setback the Gashikan Race Wars continued. Many further attempts to exterminate the species as a whole failed, but the continuous physical and biological warfare again rendered the Vargr locally extinct within Gashikan Sector by -1000 Imperial, a date used by historians to mark the end of these military operations. The Vargr now avoid the sector, even as the purity of the fury the Yileans have for the Vargr has dimmed to an unceasing, restless hatred, instead of an immediate imperative to wipe the Vargr off the face of the universe, right now.

After 2639 years of rule, the Second Empire is old, old, old: visitors find that it feels more antique, mannered, and ceremonial than the far older Zhodani Consulate.

Internal discipline is breaking down: the tolerance of Vargr slaves is no longer unheard of in the frontiers,

and few young men now sign up for Extermination Expeditions into Vargr space. Yilean racial patriotism is failing in another way: while intermarriage with the Vilani (and, to a lesser extent, the Solomani) was fairly common among the elites, the common peoples had always stuck with their own. No longer: only two-thirds of the citizens of the Gashikan Empire are pureblooded Yileans, and this percentage is slowing but surely slipping downwards – especially on Gashikan herself. Many fear that by 1100 – a mere century from now – only one-third of the population will be of pure Yilean blood. The wealthy and the elite Yileans proclaim the need for the Pure Yilean Lineage to continue on forever, unchanged: but the population watches as they return home to their beloved Vilani & Solomani wives, and draw their own conclusions.

In the meantime, without an enemy to fight, the Yileans tend towards stasis, which easily slips to stagnation. The economy is moribund, and the Empire's ability to manage it grows weaker over time. As the interests of both the rulers and the ruled shifts from production to consumption, the importance of The Good Life surpasses that of the old calls of Duty to Nation and Race. Lip service is paid to the old slogans, but the heart turns elsewhere.

Personality

The Yileans are within the expected human parameters in behaviour. They are more socially egalitarian than the hierarchal Imperial mindset, despite being ruled by a monarchy. They also hold the community to be of greater importance than the individual, and strongly prefer a unified, comprehensive, changeless authority to anything that smacks of 'anarchy' – a balkanized world, divided branches of government, a press that gets off-message, changes to the laws, challenges to authority, declarations of autonomy and freedom, chatter about 'my rights as an individual'...

Individual Yileans are also expected to uphold their part in the social order. Deviation from social norms is 'corrected'. All youths are intensely tested, and channelled into suitable occupations. Finally, every Gashikan, Yilean or otherwise, is expected to be content in his place in the social order.

Yileans from the Gashikan Imperial Core have hardly ever seen a Vargr: unlike their descendants of the still-future Third Gashikan Empire, the current Imperial Core types are carefully indoctrinated to hate the Vargr with intense rigor, as if they were the sheer essence of evil. However, this is a hypothetical hatred: almost nobody they know has seen a real, live Vargr. In effect,

a group of stereotypes, exaggerations and projected, imagined fears are bundled up and given the label 'Vargr'. Current Yileans are also taught that they are the great defenders of humaniti and civilization against the ever-present Vargr horde: but again, there is a great disconnect between the propaganda and how they actually live. There is no real disbelief or hostile scepticism in the general public: more like disinterest and complacency. "OK, so the Evil Vargr Hordes are pounding the gates, ready to Kill and Eat Us All – but the military are doing such a great job in protecting us, that not a single Vargr ship has been seen in this part of space for centuries. Yay, Army! Yay, Navy! [pause] OK honey, what's for dinner?"

In 993 Imperial, Yileans from the Border Worlds see things quite differently. No Vargr raid these words: they are too fearful of being killed or, worse, trapped & captured, infected with some ghastly disease, have their memories re-arranged, get infected cargo slipped into their cargo bay, and then released into the wild "to spread the good news of their return to their pack". There is no Charisma to be gained by raiding the Gashikan, only pain and death.

Instead, the poorest and the weakest of the Vargr sell themselves to Gashikan corporations and interests, to be used for brute labour and medical test subjects. These Vargr already have negative Charisma, if that's possible, and are liable to be killed by other Vargr just for breathing too much: they might as well sell themselves and give the ones they love some kind of tangible reward, and set the value of their life at some number above zero.

Most these Gashikan operations can be found just outside of Gashikan Space: but, for the sake of convenience and easy transport to other Gashikan worlds, more and more of these operations can be found on the border worlds within the Second Empire. The sight of a Vargr no longer causes mass panic, as these profoundly depressed and self-hating Vargr are far more likely to commit suicide than steal a hamburger or hurt a kitten. Hard-core Yileans would prefer to kill these Vargr for defiling Yilean land with their filthy footpads, but the more powerful Yileans see the financial benefits to letting them live and work for chump change.

Yileans from the Middle Worlds instinctively and naturally hate the Vargr. But they have more pressing problems to attend to, as they are the ones who are bearing the brunt of the slow economic downturn. The Gashikan Imperial Core is carefully attended to by the central government, and the Border Worlds have their

own ways of making money, but the Middle Worlds always seem to pay the price without reaping the reward. Laws and regulations that make sense in the wealthy Core are just an added burden to the lives of the Middle Worlds: again, the Border Worlds are quicker to find exploits and loopholes in the laws than their more staid cousins, and will outright ignore them when necessary. The Middle Worlds, without the wealth of the Core or the flexibility of the Border Worlds, instead pride themselves on their obedience to the authorities, and their patriotic hearts.

The rewards for their conventional thinking continue to decline, even so.

They are slowly, quietly, getting increasingly sick and tired of being taken advantage of. Their suspicion that 'others' are stealing what rightfully belongs to the Middle Worlds continues to grow. Their unreflective obedience to the authorities continues to be stressed and tested. And nowadays, there are ambitious young charismatic politicians, proclaiming themselves to be their saviour, to have the vision needed to bring back the Good Old Days.

Most of the time, nobody listens to these strange men and their wondrous words. Usually, they just disappear one day, to be eventually forgotten. But some consistently evade capture, and their tiny, insignificant audiences have started to grow. Eventually, they will be large enough, and motivated enough, to do what has not been done for thousands of years: spark a revolutionary civil war among the Yileans.

Very few Middle Worlders ever leave the Empire: those that do tend to have personalities more associated with the Border Worlds or the Imperial Core than the Gashikan Heartland. Solomani and Vilani visitors to the Middle Worlds are welcome, but it would be wise of them not to flaunt their wealth.

Vargr visitors, of course, are instant targets of their repressed rage. They are essentially prisoners of their starship: to be seen walking around the starport is to invite security personnel to kill them 'on suspicion' – and get promoted for doing so. To leave the starport is to ask to be physically torn apart by enraged mobs.

Status

Minor human race.

Masters of the Second Empire of Gashikan.

Homeworld

Gashikan (Gashikan 2732 A8679AC-C)

Languages

Modern Gashikan. Those encountered within the Empty Quarter usually speak Protectorate Anglic as well. A few may speak Imperial Anglic (Transform dialect, the tongue of Antares and the Empty Quarter) reasonably well. None speak any Vargr tongue.

Physical Description

Men average 183 cm and 50 kg, women 173 cm and 45 kg: 'tall and skinny'. They simply don't get fat. Adapted to ultraviolet radiation, their skin is universally steel blue-black. Straight black and slightly wavy black hair is the norm: there is no body or facial hair.

Once upon a time, being part-Yilean identified you as part of an upper-class family. However, such a prestigious heritage has grown steadily more common, especially on the homeworld, where they now make up half the population. Blue-black skin and straight black hair are the traits that stand out: the traits of height and the lack of body fat are less likely to be inherited, compared to the corresponding Vilani and Solomani traits.

Territory

The Second Empire of Gashikan at its greatest extent included Gashikan sector as well as half of Trenchan and Mendan sectors. Small portions of Meshan and Gzaekfueg sectors were also under their administration. Over the last millennia, there has been limited pushback at the edges, but the Empire remains substantially intact as of 993. This includes the three non-Yilean confederations in Mendan sector, currently affiliated with the Second Empire of Gashikan.

Adventures

As the Gashikan Imperial Core is a good 90 parsecs coreward from the Imperial Empty Quarter, it's quite unlikely that any Emptyhead will see anyone from this region of Gashikan. But not impossible: Solomani racial societies sometimes invite a few Solomani brothers from the Second Gashikan Empire to join their meetings. Less frequently, pan-humanity groups have been known to invite distant brothers – Solomani, Vilani, and Yilean – from time to time. The aboveboard groups enjoy the amenities of Antares, but the hard-core supremacist groups prefer the Imperial Empty Quarter: the environment is definitely more austere (and so, more bracing, more masculine, and less distracting – a good place for racial warriors & guardians), there is no Vargr Archduke to worry about, gaps in Imperial surveillance are easier to find, and

there is a broader base of sympathy in the general population.

For their part, the Gashikan Imperial Core Yileans may have been taught to hate the Vargr, but their natural reaction is... curiosity. "So, this is the Great Enemy. Seems less awesome in person than in the vids. Hmm...."

Border World Yileans are the kind that Imperial Travellers will most likely meet. Border Worlders may hate the Vargr, but they generally don't fear them, and are willing to leave the borders of their Vargr-free empire in search of profit. Note that in 993 Imperial, racially Solomani and Vilani Gashikans are more likely to be seen outside the Second Empire than mixed-race Yileans, and those of mixed blood are more likely to cross the border than pureblooded Yileans. The 'frequent travellers' have learned that a veneer of politeness to the Vargr gets results: the ability to restrain your repugnance in the presence of the revolting Vargr can mean the difference between returning home rich, and returning home empty-handed (or even not returning home at all...)

Due to their conservative nature, Middle World Yileans rarely leave the Second Empire of Gashikan. When they do, it's more likely to be for an Extermination Expedition of some sort or other than for any other purpose. Those who leave for trade behave more like Border World Yileans than Middle World types: those who leave for political/diplomatic purposes think more like Gashikan Imperial Core types.

Local Reactions

The Ovaghoun Vargr are strongly shaped by the human culture of the Vilani, but they won't tolerate Yileans: immediate exile or immediate death are the alternatives typically given. There will be no business with Yilean traders, as that's a known vector of Yilean biowarfare agents. The Ikonaz Vilani won't lift a finger to save them if the Ovaghoun decide to kill them immediately, and will side with the Ovaghoun in any dispute.

[Referee: The Yileans have a firm TL ceiling at TL 12, while the Ikonaz are at TL 14. Several attempts to wipe out the Ovaghoun have been detected and neutralized,

thanks to vigilance, superior technology and, occasionally, the assistance of the Protectorate Office of Care. "This Office handles interstellar medical issues and controversies, and often works as a mediator between systems, and a channel to disseminate new medical discoveries." – **Stellar Reaches #9**. These biowar attacks are conducted only by Yilean freelancers: nowadays, the Second Gashikan Empire only pays lip service to the ideal of exterminating all Vargr everywhere.]

Yileans are rarely seen in the Hegemony of Lorean. When they do arrive, they are warmly received as welcomed guests by the Arzula Hegemonio. Although the Hegemony is now part of the Julian Protectorate and is building up relations with the Imperium, they still have fond memories of Gashikan support in their early wars against the Vargr, dating from long before the foundation of the Hegemony. The Irilitok Vargr strenuously avoid being in the presence of the Yileans, and are quick to do medical tests on anything the Yileans touch or breathe. The Suedzuk will kill them if they see them, without a second thought.

To most Emptyheads, the Yileans are just skinny foreigners with dark blue skin who can't speak Anglic properly. Imperial Vargr of Ovaghoun extraction will hate them, but more as a known threat, not as someone who needs to be killed immediately. Imperial Vargr of Irilitok extraction will fear/dread them: the more aggressive Irilitok will openly curse them, but won't physically strike.

Self-Image

The Yileans are the fourth of the powerful and influential branches of humaniti. We are the founders of the Second Empire of Gashikan, after the Zhodani Consulate the oldest continuous interstellar human government in Chartered Space. We Yileans are proud to have led the great human counter-attack to Vargr aggression, fighting to win and engaging in innovative tactics to give all humaniti the breathing room we needed to recover. Yilean generosity and warmth to the Vilani & Solomani is broadly reciprocated, while our limitless hatred of all things Vargr is imitated and admired by numerous human cultures bordering or within the Vargr Extents.

The author fully acknowledges **GURPS Humaniti** as the primary source of inspiration and information on the Yilean minor race. We also acknowledge the use of <http://dmckinne.winterwar.org/pdfs/TravellerIntegratedTimeline.pdf> for various historical details. No infringement or challenge of the copyright of any or all entities involved in the creation of these original sources is intended.

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