

Stellar Reaches

A Fair Use Fanzine for Traveller



A Samardan Press Publication

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Founder: Jason "Flynn" Kemp. Editor: 2005-2010

Our website: www.stellarreaches.com

Credits:

Cover Art: Not everyone settles on breathable worlds orbiting healthy, warm suns. Some Travellers prefer to spend their final days in a land of alien, hostile beauty. This graphic is titled "Red Dwarf" © Justinas Vitkus. See his work at <http://justv23.deviantart.com/art/Red-dwarf-348711539>

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The **BITS Task System**, although modified to include Traveller T20 difficulty classes, has been provided with permission by **British Isles Traveller Support (BITS)**. Its presence here does not constitute any challenge to the rights for this system, and we gratefully acknowledge Dominic Mooney and Andy Lilly for their generosity in allowing our use of this system to allow future adventures to be written in such a manner as to be more useful to all published Traveller rules sets.

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:

This issue is really about pictures and personalities. Thirty-four separate personalities, ranging from a dead Sector Duke to a living underworld negotiator, are loaded in the “Personality Profiles III” article. Leaders are generally emphasised, as they are the ones who shapes games and campaigns, influencing both the nature of the fight and the kind of goal being fought for, for good or ill. There are a good selection of straight up good guys, villainous bad guys, and mysterious grey guys as well. Most are tied to the military or commerce, with the occasional psion, diplomat, or nun tossed in.

A special effort was made to highlight links, connections, and relationships between the various interstellar tribes of the Empty Quarter. Sci-fi technology and far future ideas are what make science fiction science fiction, but the stories worth telling are about personalities, not abstractions, governments, or technological know-how. And that’s how it should be: it is the human soul that is immortal, not empires or tools, however advanced or powerful.

Ω

While personalities (and their adventure hooks) are the primary focus of this issue of **Stellar Reaches**, it isn’t the *sole* focus.

In “Petition”, I outline a simple interaction between a band of PCs representing a guild of star traders and the current Sector Duke, attempting to negotiate a break for their membership. I ended up making the appendixes bigger than the story, just to keep track of all the undercurrents the situation could touch on, from the nature of Imperial Honour to the city districts. Even the very membership of the PC team is shaped by the environment its in and the membership it represents, and can be fought over in this scenario.

With “Old Business: The Scent of Death”, I reach back to the ‘Counties and Churches’ alternate universe of **Stellar Reaches #22** to finish up one of the major loose ends: the destiny of the Vargr. The winners write the history books: but everyone faces defeat at some point in their lives, and a full-orbed understanding of the Creation we live in will take this into account as well.

Role-playing games generally focus on the individual, the PC group, and some governments as the main actors, but I like to keep an eye out for charities as well. So of course I fleshed out the Association of Hope in the article of the same name, touching on its history, goals, personnel, and suchlike.

Ω

“To get through the hardest journey we need take one step at a time, but we must keep on stepping.” This is one of the driving thoughts behind the entire Empty Quarter. Most of my characters are in the middle of a tough – even a doomed – fight, but they have no interest in giving up merely because it’s tough. The goal is worth the struggle, and the prices to be paid, however steep.

Ω

A final word of thanks to the artists around the world who so generously helped to bring **Stellar Reaches** alive! May God’s love shine on all of your hearts, and your kindness repaid sevenfold!

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.

Personality Profiles III



Cool ships on hot worlds... A senior visitor arrives on Hebrin, 992 Imperial.

This graphic is titled "Crush Landing" © Goran Delic

See his work at <http://delic.deviantart.com/art/Crush-landing-395620460>

Brevet Commodore Baron Jadeep Upadhayay, Imperial Navy

UPP B5C8CC, Age 38, East Indian Solomani

Skills: Ship Tactics - 3, Handgun - 2, Vacc Suit - 2, Admin - 2, Engineering - 2, Fleet Tactics - 1, Brawling - 1, Streetwise - 1, Carousing - 1, Navigation - 1, Laser Weapon - 1, Gravitics - 1, Ships Boat - 1, Mechanical - 1, Medical - 0, Forgery - 0, Grav Vehicle - 0, Computer - 0, Linguistics - 0, Hunting - 0, Disguise - 0, Bribery - 0, Interrogation - 0

Languages: Anglic (Transform, Native), Anglic (Julian)

Tools & Aids: Commodore Upadhayay is usually armed with a pistol

Visual: A fairly light-skinned, solidly-built East Indian, well-groomed, with a thin beard and a strong military bearing. He only seems to wear either an Imperial Navy uniform, or the sumptuous clothing of a respected Imperial Baron. ("T-shirts? Jeans? Sneakers? What manner of dress is that?")

Opening Theme: Toto, "Africa" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTQbiNvZqaY>¹

¹ I'd just like to point out here c31's recommended soundtracks for wargames, <http://www.c3iopscenter.com/currentops/2014/02/01/soundtracks-boardgames-andy-cassavetes/>. I select my tracks according to the

Summary

A highly decorated naval officer from Irash, Commodore Baron Upadhayay captains the *Stella Gladio*, a TL 13 Sabrewolf-class, 5000-ton Fleet Destroyer, one of the most powerful assets still tied to the Quarter. Commodore Upadhayay has a very extensive amount of connections within the regular Imperial Navy, which he used to remain in the Quarter with a useful ship instead of heading to Diaspora with the rest of the sector fleet. His unofficial authority is a good deal larger than that of a single ship, being the senior regular Navy officer in Hebrin subsector.

History

Upadhayay started out as an ordinary officer recruit, with his entry into the Academy greased by his influential father – and his membership in a powerful Hindu military caste. He has done quite well in the service, consistently surpassing expectations even in difficult circumstances, and gaining training in various specialized schools. His results and his natural gregariousness have netted him a lot of friends in the Imperial government, and a lot of favours he can call upon if needed.

Politics

In the tribal racial/religious politics within the sector, Baron Jadeep is also the unofficial leader of the East Indian/Hindu group within the Imperial Navy, and is expected to speak up for their concerns: fortunately for Imperial rule, both he and his Imperial Navy counterparts among Muslim Arabs, American Indians, Bwap, Lazisari, and Vilani use their influence to resolve conflicts and keep everyone united against the pirate foe, instead of indulging in sectarian hostilities.²

As Captain, Baron Jadeep was one of the few who remained untouched by the Shadow Cartel corruption of the senior Imperial officers of Hebrin, and his leadership of the Colonial forces against the Hebrin pirate bases was instrumental in turning the tide against them in Hebrin subsector, and justified his brevet promotion to Commodore. He is pressing to have the new Admiralty leadership to let him loose against the pirate bands that are still harassing shipping in the subsector: but the Admiralty is more interested in protecting the ice ships of Hebrin – which keeps alive the billions of the world – than in protecting interstellar commerce.

(Yes, protecting those starships beyond the 100-diameter world boundary is an Imperial responsibility. Still, the Imperial officer is focused on the *entire* subsector, while the subsector Colonial admiralty (practically speaking, the Hebrin system navy) – under whose authority he now serves, until the regular Fleet returns – is primarily concerned with the billions on their homeworld, unsurprisingly.)

The Duchess of Udusis subsector has made it clear that if Baron Jadeep chooses to retire from Imperial service, there is an Admiral title waiting for him in the Irashi Colonial Navy. So far, the Baron has decided to turn it down, and continues to fight for the Imperial interest in Hebrin subsector.

PC Connections

Hindu naval PCs within the Six Subsectors look up to him as a genuine hero, as a model to emulate, and as the defender of their cultural/tribal interests within the Navy. PCs from other ethnos simply see him as simply a respected, cultured, and able leader of sophonts.

character and the situation, but my goals differ from most wargammers. And, just in case you are interested in wargames ... have you considered **Striker**, **Striker II**, **Snapshot**, **Brilliant Lances**, **Battle Rider**, or **Imperium** from GDW? Look them up at <http://www.rpgnow.com/>

² Here's the thing about the Six Subsectors. In the West of the 20th/21st century, we naturally assume that the military's loyalty to the State surpasses/subsumes allegiances to race, religion, locality, and leader. This is not *automatically* true in the Six Subsectors: even in the Imperial Navy, many officers must *consciously* push for unity under the Imperial Starburst. (See: the assassination of Indira Gandhi.) Nobody *assumes* impartiality in the Quarter: a reputation for objectivity, fair-mindedness and unbiased judgment must be earned before the keenly watching eyes of all.

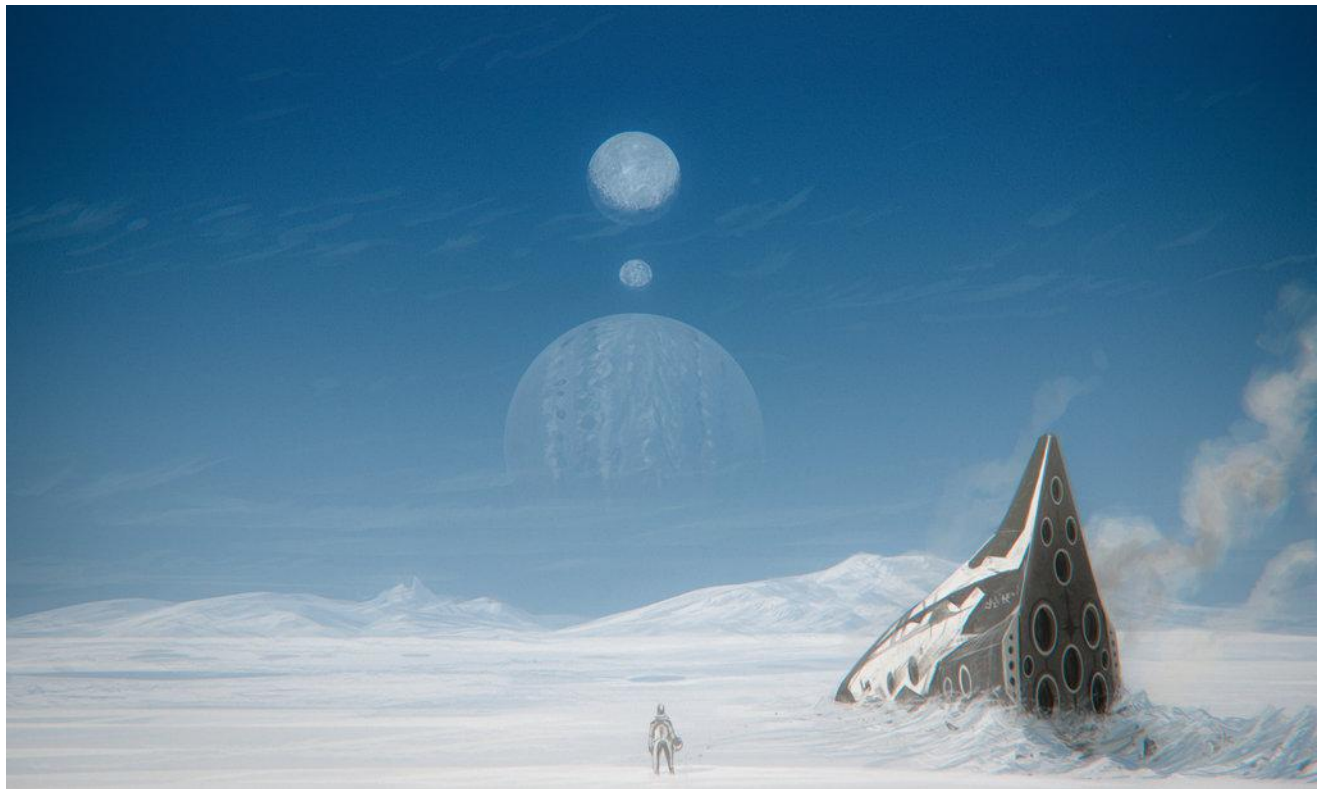
In his Imperial capacity, the Commodore may well give PCs anti-pirate assignments throughout Hebrin subsector. If the PCs are in Imperial service, these orders may well be direct; if not, then the PCs are senior Imperial-allied starmercs, hired by a corporation, who tap into Commodore Upadhayay's knowledge and informed advice when planning operations.³

Major Worry

Like most Imperial and Colonial officers in the Six Subsectors, Commodore Upadhayay's number one concern is the coming of the high-tech Ikonaz Pirates in force to rob and steal – and perhaps, to stay and rule. The Commodore leads one of the most powerful Imperial vessels remaining in the Quarter, save the distant Tokitre Squadron – but he would need to lead the system's military perfectly – and in perfect co-ordination with the ground batteries – to get his chance to repel such a force. According to the traditions of his family and caste, death is the only excuse for failing at such a critical mission as protecting the Imperial subsector capital.

With a small group of trusted Imperial officers, the Commodore is running several dry runs and models of likely engagements against an Ikonaz incursion. The most likely scenarios looks bad... bad, but not impossible.

Closing Theme: Globus, "Preliator" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5q6skxRLnsl>



Across the Imperium, numerous dry, desert worlds like Hebrin rely on the Ice Trade for their daily existence – a business that comes with its own share of risks and dangers. Somewhere in Hebrin's outer system, 993 Imperial.

This graphic is titled "Crash Landing" © Justinas Vitkus

See his work at <http://justv23.deviantart.com/art/Crash-Landed-379114503>

³ This being the Empty Quarter, 993, it doesn't take much to be a notable mercenary. A starmerc group with three starships and a fairly decent victory and Rules of War record would fit the bill, easily. (And, times being what they are, the Commodore won't put too much on the Rules of War business if the PCs weren't too public about their atrocities, and avoided any major challenge of Imperial authority.)

Ship: Stella Gladio Class: Saberwolf Block I
Type: Fleet Destroyer Architect: Alvin Plummer
Tech Level: 13

USP

DF-E146AF5-090000-97006-0 MCr 5,266.672 5 Ktons
Bat Bear 1 11 1 Crew: 57
Bat 1 11 1 TL: 13

Cargo: 16 Crew Sections: 5 of 12 Fuel: 2,500 EP: 500 Agility: 6 Marines: 5
Craft: 1 x 50T Modular Cutter
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification

Architects Fee: MCr 52.667 Cost in Quantity: MCr 4,213.338

Detailed Description

HULL
5,000 tons standard, 70,000 cubic meters,
Needle/Wedge Configuration

CREW
14 Officers, 38 Ratings, 5 Marines

ENGINEERING
Jump-4, 6G Manoeuvre, Power plant-10, 500 EP, Agility 6

AVIONICS
Bridge, Model/6fib Computer

HARDPOINTS
50 Hardpoints

ARMAMENT
10x Dual Missile Turrets organised into 1 Battery (Factor-6),
10x Triple Beam Laser Turrets organised into 1 Battery (Factor-9),
20x Dual Plasma Gun Turrets organised into 1 Battery (Factor-7)

DEFENCES
10 Triple Sandcaster Turrets organised into 1 Battery (Factor-9)

CRAFT
1 50-ton Modular Cutter (Crew of 2)

FUEL
2,500 Tons Fuel (4 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)
On Board Fuel Scoops, On Board Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS
32 Staterooms, 16 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS
None

COST
MCr 5,319.339 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 52.667),
MCr 4,213.338 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME
148 Weeks Singly, 118 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS
Based off of the "Saberwolf" Fleet Destroyer, Traveller20's Traveller's Aide #7, Fighting Ships supplement, page 36. In 993, this is an aging but serviceable class within the Imperial Navy. Many ships have been partly upgraded to TL 14, and there are now TL 14 vessels built from the keel up: but not the Stella Gladio. The ship - like the rest in her class, named after Terran vessels of the Interstellar War era - was deemed unfit for service in the Solomani Rim battlespace, and left behind when the mass of the Fleet left.

This vessel is supposed to be used in groups of five, and led by a light cruiser. That isn't going to happen: but thanks to the able leadership of her captain, the Stella Gladio has done well as a guardian of Hebrin subsector.

Oskfa'r Kr'rukghadhiishon, Head of the Tirradk

UPP 5D7BCE, Age 38, Ovaghoun Vargr

Skills: Ship Tactics - 3, Fleet Tactics - 2, Linguistics - 2, Liaison - 2, Vacc Suit - 2, ATV - 2, Electronics - 2, Recon - 1, Handgun - 1, Infighting - 1, Demolitions - 1, History - 1, Streetwise - 1, Rifleman - 1, Wheeled Vehicle - 0,

Languages: Kuummommoengh (Ovaghoun/Irilitok language, Native), Julian Anglic, Ikonaz (Vargr)

Tools and Aids: A service pistol, and a ceremonial knife (push dagger, similar to a ulu)

Visual: A prematurely aging, but still agile and alert, mottled brown/black/grey furred Vargr. Now out of military service, he dresses richly, as an Ikonaz Vargr of his charisma is expected to.

Opening Theme: Shiro Sagisu, "EM10A_Edit#070705",

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsUHqWK6gE8>



Nulinad's pretty teched-up for a Gushgusi world: as a sector capital, there's a good amount of off-world imported technology being put to work. Maintaining it could be very lucrative...

This graphic is titled "Outside the Walled City" © Neil Thacker

See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=2492220&np

History

Originally, Kr'rukghadhiishon wanted to be an administrator in the Vilani-style bureaucracy that governed his Ikonic underwater settlement (at the time – governments come and go among the Vargr), but his strong cultural links to the Irilitok and his tainted Ovaghoun bloodline put an end to that dream. Instead, he was simply drafted into the Roengiivink, a self-funding branch of the Ikonic System Navy that hasn't gone pirating in over a century.

Adapting to what is basically an established starmerc unit (with major trade and industrial interests on Ikon), Kr'rukghadhiishon showed remarkable skill in both space warfare and maintaining good relations with key Irilitok traders, something that the ruling Ovaghoun (with their innate contempt for the human-pleasing Vargr) have great difficulty stomaching. Despite his associations with the Irilitok – even speaking their language in public! – the Ovaghoun officer was still able to keep out of the loathed 'Irilitok-stinking' category, and so kept the respect of the Ovaghoun leadership as well as the adoration of the Irilitok masses. Despite his wealth and charisma, he found that he could not enter the highest circles of power and influence on Ikon: but he *is* counted as a member of the Rukadur, the select group of Ovaghoun Vargr and Vilani, elected or not, who dominate the Republic as a whole.

New Work

Rather than fight a long, difficult, and dangerous battle for increased acceptance on Ikon, Kr'rukghadhiishon decided to work on a project that had been bubbling in the back of his mind for a long time. Much of the Vargr in the Imperial Empty Quarter are left in impoverished quarters, ghettos and reservations where they are left to stew in their poverty and kill each other as they wish. Kr'rukghadhiishon knows for a fact that this can be changed, but it will take work to bring Ikonaz-style discipline and order to the Vargr slums.

Change must come as a package, from the heart, to the claw, to the pack, to the hunting range. The Vargr of the Imperium will never be able to claw their way up the pit they're in if they remain divided: they need help if they are to rise up to what they were meant to be, and Kr'rukghadhiishon plans to get them what they want.

First, soon after he retired from naval service, Kr'rukghadhiishon relocated to Guezdhe, a wealthy and well-connected world dominated by the Irilitok. Here, free from the baleful influence of anti-Irilitok attitudes, he leveraged his charisma to push for an organization that would extend a friendly hand to the downtrodden Vargr on the other side of the Lesser Rift. This organization, the Tirradk, finally got started up last year on a solid footing.



The official seat of the Imperial Sector Duke of the Empty Quarter is the city of Jajapur (See *Stellar Reaches* #19, pp. 12-13). The Starburst (, Sṭārabarṣṭa), the complex of buildings where the sector-scale Imperial military is managed, is actually located in the Nulinadian desert region of Antareta (a shortened form of , Antahīna rēta, “Endless sands”). This graphic is titled “Desert City” © Sebastian Wegner.

See his work at <http://sebastianwagner.deviantart.com/art/Desert-City-366804924>

Future Plans

With the backing of several Ovaghoun, Vilani, and Irilitok notables, and with his re-induction into the ranks of the Roengviink, Kr'rukghadhiishon is ready to put the first set of plans into motion. The *Otzoukhmgighgrii* will make her journey from Ikon to Antares, permitting Kr'rukghadhiishon to confer with the pack of Archduke Koktso, master of the Imperial Domain of Antares. (As of Holiday-993, the Archduke himself is on Vland, conferring with the Archduchess of the Domain of Viand.⁴) In addition to lobbying for Tirradk operations in the Six Subsectors, Kr'rukghadhiishon as a military representative of the Rukadukaz Republic will assist in the Julian Protectorate's work in patching up relations after the assassination of Archduke Gvueneghz, Koktso's sire.⁵ While the rift between these great powers was officially healed with the apologies of the Regent of the Protectorate, there are still other matters that need to be attended to, in order to fully rebuild trust and confidence.

⁴ See *Stellar Reaches* #13, page 41

⁵ See *Stellar Reaches* #18, page 74

After these meetings are concluded, the *Otzoukhmgighgrii* will journey onwards to Nulinad, capital of the Imperial Empty Quarter. Kr'rukghadhiishon will meet with Sector Duke Dethwabtakewebwakawa, promoting the newly founded Tirradk and stressing how the Tirradk could help in raising up the Imperial Vargr of his demesne from a lawless liability to a profitable asset, better integrated into interstellar society and more obedient to Imperial Law. Kr'rukghadhiishon will also work to lessen general Bwap/Vargr enmity and hostility, using the example of the Ovaghoun as proof that Vargr can be solid members of Imperial society.

In a secret portion of the meeting, Kr'rukghadhiishon will offer a substantial portion of the Roengviink military to help guarantee the rule of the Bwap Sector Duke, in case "the regrettable hostility of reactionary Solomani elements of the population hardens into an outright rebellion, supported by unreliable Colonial forces." As the Roengviink are considered an integral part of Ikon's military forces, there would be all sorts of diplomatic and political consequences involved in Protectorate Vargr forces killing Imperial Solomani humans in Imperial space, in support of a nonhuman Imperial Duke.

Note that Emperor Gavin simply cannot spare the forces from the front lines of the Solomani Rim War to reassert his authority in the nearly trivial Imperial Empty Quarter. The Antares Sector Fleet is at full strength, and *could* do so – but they have to balance this other more important objectives: protecting Lishun Sector; keeping the force united to better balance the Star Legion; guarding Antares herself; and remaining in prime condition as a reserve force in case the Sector Fleet is called up to replace losses in the front lines, or – if the Solomani somehow break through the lines – rapidly move to form a last barrier before the Imperial Capital herself.

"Honestly speaking, it's just a lot easier to let the Protectorate uphold Imperial authority in the sideshow known as the Six Subsectors, and let all the adults focus on what's important on the Rim. It helps to repay the loss of Archduke Gvueneghz and rebuilt confidence...and if all the Imperial worlds in the Six Subsectors chose to rebel, what could those impoverished throwbacks do? Throw rocks at the sky? The wealth and power of all 134 Imperial worlds in the Quarter amounts to less than an inhabited continent on Vland alone!"

After the meeting in the Sector Court, it will be on to Pamushgar (with a brief stopover at Lazisar, to pay proper respect to the regional military powerhouse). Kr'rukghadhiishon plans to reforge the local Vargr into his own cultural image, a cultural Vilani/Vargr amalgam, to replace the fruitless and atrophied Imperial Vargr cultures of today. To pull off this multigenerational task, the support of the leading Vilani of the Empty Quarter, the Marquis Pamushgar, is indispensable. "You have the burning desire to bring Conformity, Consensus, Tradition, and Prosperity to your Vargr neighbours – and we have the money to make it happen."

Before the *Otzoukhmgighgrii* returns to Guezdhe, there will be a last stopover at Udusis. Most of the Imperial Vargr in the Six Subsectors – numbering over a billion – resides on this world. Despite the never-ending hard times, both the Solomani and the Vargr have generally lived in peace on this backwater world, too busy nursing shared grudges against Outsiders to really hate each other.⁶ Kr'rukghadhiishon would prefer to completely write off the Solomani as a hopeless cause, but the exception of Udusis is simply too big to ignore, despite her poverty. He knows what the Vargr records and scouts *say* about the Solomani, but Kr'rukghadhiishon needs to see with his own eyes, smell with his own nostrils, and know them *himself* before making his final decision about the Solomani.

Closing Theme: Capsule, "Jumper"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viycVSrrCXk>

⁶ Yes, the locals are Abrahamic (Sunni Moslems, in this case); and yes, they are as humanist as you please. But there's a difference between doctrine and behaviour...



Kr'rukghadhiishon understands that if the Vargr is ever to gain sufficient charisma in the Imperial Empty Quarter, they have to prove themselves to be builders and designers, not just killers or servants. Thus, Kr'rukghadhiishon's vigorously publicized funding of all-Vargr construction projects, built with a hard Vilani eye when it comes to safety margins, for the use of all sophonts. This graphic is titled "construction"

© Ben Andrews. See his work at <http://ben-andrews.deviantart.com/art/construction-380156753>

Ship: Oukfuesa
 Type: Light Cruiser
 Tech Level: 14

Class: Moull
 Architect: Alvin Plummer

USP

CL-K6566HF-090000-00509-1	MCr 11,977.561	15	KTons	Agility 5
Bat Bear	6	3 2	Crew: 155	Fuel 8,440 tons
Bat	6	3 2	TL: 14	

Cargo: 2 Crew Sections: 15 of 11 EP: 900 Shipboard Security Detail: 15
 Craft: 1 x 50T Modular Cutter, 12 x 10T Fighters
 Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification
 Backups: 1 x Model/6fib Computer

Architects Fee: MCr 119.776 Cost in Quantity: MCr 9,582.049

Detailed Description

HULL
 15,000 tons standard, 210,000 cubic meters,
 Flattened Sphere Configuration

CREW
 20 Officers, 123 Ratings, 12 Pilots

Book 5 Crew Breakdown

Command section: 7 officers and 4 ratings;
 Engineering section: 6 officers and 47 ratings;
 Gunnery section: 2 officers and 15 ratings;
 Flight section: 1 officer, 12 pilots and 15 ratings;
 Service section: 3 officers and 27 ratings;
 Medical Section: 1 officer

ENGINEERING
 Jump-5, 6G Manoeuvre, Power plant-6, 900 EP, Agility 5

AVIONICS
 Bridge, Model/8fib Computer

1 Model/6fib Backup Computer

HARDPOINTS

2 100-ton bays, 3 50-ton bays, 60 Hardpoints

ARMAMENT

2 100-ton Missile Bays (Factor-9),
3 50-ton Particle Accelerator Bays (Factor-5)

DEFENCES

60 Triple Sandcaster Turrets organised into 6 Batteries (Factor-9)

CRAFT

1 50-ton Modular Cutter (Crew of 2),
12 10-ton Fighters (Crew of 1)

FUEL

8,440 Tons Fuel (5 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance, plus 40 tons of additional fuel)
On Board Fuel Scoops, On Board Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS

81 Staterooms, 2 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS

None

COST

MCr 12,097.337 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 119.776),
MCr 9,582.049 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME

167 Weeks Singly, 134 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS

The Moull class is designated as a light cruiser, but really, it's designed to strike at supply lines deep into Imperial territory.⁷ Such strikes leverage Vargr strengths and skills to their maximum, so - despite its lack of armour and cramped living quarters - the Moull is a highly regarded posting. This class is quite common in the navies of the Star Legion proper, the Asimikigir Confederation, and the Rukadukaz Republic.

In ideal operations, the fighters are packaged out in squadrons of four, and sent to either map out the likely jump points for inbound cargo ships, or act as a sensor picket. The cruiser herself would destroy most vessels at a distance with her missile array, switching to the PA's only to finish the prey off or when the missiles run out. The ship bears no marines or boarding craft, and is unsuited for the space police role: she is meant to kill, not capture, cargo ships.

The Moull class is in no way meant to fight on a proper battle line. In a sticky situation, she depends on her agility and her sandcasters to squeeze her out of a bad spot long enough to jump out. Should the main computer be destroyed, the backup computer will still allow three parsecs jumps out of trouble. However: despite the fact that the Oukfuesa alone must flee/avoid a proper Imperial Navy ship of the line, it's high tech level, competent crew (treat as experienced/veteran) and skilled captain ("Ship Tactics-3, baby!") makes it able to take on the Colonial forces of the Imperial Empty Quarter. All of it.

Thanks to her long legs, the Moull class is on occasion pressed into the courier or armed yacht role. In the case of this particular ship, the Oukfuesa, two fighters (and two pilots) have been left behind, to give additional space to the entourage (and baggage) of Kr'rukghadhiishon, the current captain of the ship, head of the Tirrradk, and member of the Rukadur.

⁷ It's bad form for the Julian Protectorate to mention in public that they still consider the Third Imperium as their major threat, especially in times of peace and cordiality on the borders. But at the end of the day, you judge nations by their capabilities, not their intentions. No need to ruffle feathers or rattle swords: just keep the military properly well-equipped and well-trained.



Very few Ikonaz starship captains and exploratory traders have heeded Kr'rukghadhiishon's call to expand the Republican trade network through Vargr-hostile Hegemonic space, and into Vargr-hostile Hebrin and Udisis subsectors. But 'very few' still amounts to a regular (if thin) flow of traders, many visiting their poor Vargr cousins on Udisis and showing what the Vargr can achieve, if they set their minds on it.

This graphic is titled "Dust" © Goran Delic. See his work at <http://delic.deviantart.com/art/Dust-164243184>

Janet Ryan, Legal Advisor

UPP 7BB696 Age 26, Anglo-Celtic Solomani

Skills: Legal - 1, Carousing - 1, Steward - 1, History - 1, Small Boat - 1, Long Blade - 0, Sub-machinegun - 0, Grav Vehicle - 0, Computer - 0, Research - 0, Dance - 0, Vacc Suit - 0

Languages: Anglic (Transform, Native)

Tools & Aids: Just a foldable datapad

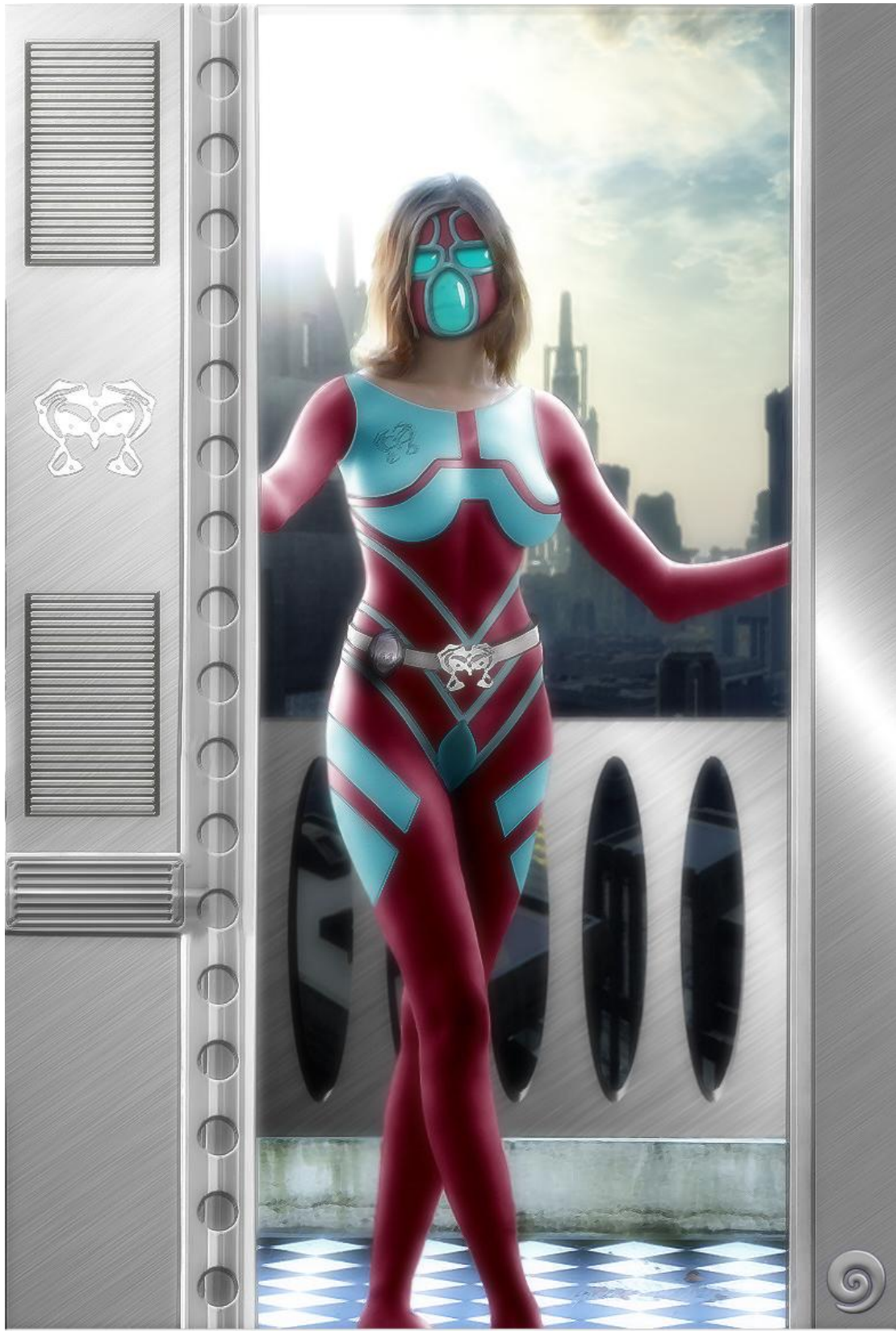
Visual: Usually a skin-tight bodysuit, as is popular in some upper-level castes of Irash

Opening Theme: Double, "The Captain of Her Heart"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YX-Ru1XkNZc>

Originally a purser of the *Kibou* – a Far Trader of the four-ship Starskipper line – Miss Ryan was left behind on Irash when she fell ill with a local respiratory disease brought on by the tainted atmosphere. When she recovered, she learned that the *Kibou* never made her return leg on the Hebrin-Cooke-Shuiku-Irash run.

While trying to arrange transport to her homeworld of Cooke, the former purser learned that the *Kibou* was unexpectedly spotted in Drago's Belt, and both crew and ship seemed to be satisfactory – but, her employer soon after decided to boot her from Starskipper's rolls, giving her a cash payment instead of transport back home.



2007

Alpha Centauri

Alpha Centauri is actually hundreds of parsecs from the Empty Quarter, so I'm repurposing this image for Miss Ryan, resident of Irash. Gas masks can be stylish! This graphic is titled "Alpha Centauri" © Luis Carlos Guerreiro
See his work at <http://trash63.deviantart.com/art/Alpha-Centauri-56075703>

Ryan expects that the *Kibou* will soon enough return to Irash, and she plans to meet the ship (and her lover) when it docks. Until then, she's finally gotten her local employment permit, and is employed doing lucrative interstellar legal work – mainly drawing up contracts - for the import/export business. If the *Kibou* doesn't stop by in a few months, though, she's going to get her money together, and go looking for the *Kibou*.

Till then, she's going to enjoy doing some high-tech yachting with her wealthy new friends. She's picked up on it rather quickly, and loves the feel of the breeze. Even the tainted air is better on the seas of Irash! It makes her wonder how it was, when *all* the trade routes were tied to the ocean winds and sailing ships.

Closing Theme: Christopher Cross, "Sailing"
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyYhZ9HH8cl>



*Distant Journeys on Alien Worlds lead to Unexpected Discoveries.
Especially when the worlds in question have been inhabited for thousands of years, like Irash.*

This graphic is titled "Memorial of the Past" © Justinas Vitkus
See his work at <http://justv23.deviantart.com/art/Memorial-of-the-past-385213639>

Hulyah Benzerga, Senior Reporter

UPP 997998, Age 22, Arab Solomani

Skills: Research - 1, Linguistics - 1, Interview - 1, Disguise - 1, Persuasion - 1, History - 1, Jack-o-Trades - 1, Handgun - 1, Shorthand (Gregg) - 1, Wheeled Vehicle - 0, Computer - 0

Languages: Arabic (Hebrin, Native), Anglic (Transform)

Tools & Aids: The woman is wired, always. She also carried a *nice* set of TL A/B dual-use cosmetics/disguise aids: (Referee: add +1 to Disguise skill) a professional spy who knows what he's looking at is going to give a low whistle...

Visual: An attractive, vivacious, and engaging young Arab woman, dressed in the slim & stylish manner of upper-class Hebrinite females: “knowing what to reveal, what to hide, and what to hint at”. Looking at her, you have no idea how she manages to hide a body pistol on her person,⁸ but she does (and an extra clip of ammo, as well.)

Opening Theme: Peter Gabriel, “Big Time”
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PBAI9cchQac>

Pushing Forward

A child of a pious Islamic merchant family on Hebrin, Hulyah was eager to rebel against her upbringing as vigorously as possible. While unable to gain entrance to university, her gossipy blog gained the attention of some scouts from R Publishing⁹ who put her on the payroll. Leveraging an absolutely *sprawling* networks of contacts, friends, acquaintances, and informers, she gets access to all sorts of juicy stories: some she publishes under her official by-lines, others in underground datafeeds, and still others ‘not ready for primetime’ are fictionalized with a thin veneer and sold in virtual and physical venues subsector-wide.

Currently, Hulyah is busy focusing on the broad range of sexual follies enjoyed by the ruling class of Hebrin.¹⁰ These kind of lurid tales and antics have brought her a large and devoted readership, and – for their own reasons – the planetary establishment has indulged her gossip mongering. But while gutter-gossip is *very* profitable, Hulyah wants to rise from the porn stars and the drunkard wastrels, and get taken seriously in the high-brow chattering classes of the Six Subsectors. She remains quite hostile to authority figures, yet feels out of her depth in the bespoke-suited, big-money circles where the heart of the corruption lies¹¹ – nor can she think of a way to get her massive audience interested in all those abstract zeros and money flows.

A new source, however, has started dropping off encrypted packages in her heavily guarded email inbox. While none of the revelations are all that substantial, they are all deliciously hilarious, painting all of the ‘elder statesmen’ types in the worst possible light. Hulyah has been attempting to weave these bizarre antics into a sharp point¹², but despite her intelligence, she just doesn’t have the way with words to really give her posts the kind of bite they need.

She definitely has the money needed to buy a good ghostwriter, though. Preferably someone who hates all sanctimonious authority, religious and secular alike; isn’t blinded by bloodlines or mystical blather or ornate traditions or official uniforms or some peer-reviewed consensus; and is able to handle himself well in a pinch. A starship isn’t needed, but you never know...

Closing Theme: Mike Post, “The Rockford Files”,
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Pn34ijQOVk>

Damondar Rustagi, Supervisor, Grav Vehicle Dealership

UPP 746BB7, Age 27, East/American Indian Solomani

Skills: Grav Vehicle - 2, Trader - 2, Linguistics - 2, Streetwise - 1, Broker - 1, Admin - 1, Gravitics - 1, Psychology - 1, Liaison - 1, Computer - 0, Equestrian (Polo) - 0

⁸ “Irrefutable evidence that hammerspace exists!”

⁹ See “Seasons Change”, **Stellar Reaches** #5, for more information on R Publishing.

¹⁰ For inspiration, you can use http://takimag.com/article/the_man_who_almost_became_torontos_crazy_mayor_kathy_shaidle, or the intellectual decadence described in <http://www.brusselsjournal.com/node/5113>. As for the reasons behind the decadence (and the cure for it), you can’t go too far wrong visiting <https://www.garynorth.com/members/login.cfm?hpage=12031.cfm> (Executive summary: ‘money’)

¹¹ I wouldn’t be too hard on Hulyah here: certain aspects of high-level finance is *deliberately* unintelligible to outsiders. (Ever tried actually *reading* Keynes’ General Theory? To learn why you can’t read it, see <http://www.garynorth.com/public/6195.cfm> (free) If you are an Austrian economist uninterested in tenure, see <http://www.garynorth.com/public/6217.cfm> (free) for a high-risk but necessary mission.)

¹² This is the bar she wants to reach – but can’t do so... yet: http://takimag.com/article/triumph_of_the_mediocre_theodore_dalrymple

Languages: Anglic (Transform, Native), Indian English, Modern Vilani

Visual: Despite his increasing wealth, Mr. Rustagi still dresses, thinks, and acts like a lower-middle-class man on his way to a better life. His business dress is clean and well put together, but with a few years of wear-and-tear; the datapad is solid and sensible, but not the latest model. Lots of earth tones, little flash.

Opening Theme: The Cars, “Drive” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xuZA6qjVfU>

A Pamushgari child, born of a world-bound dad and a star travelling mom, Damondar didn’t excel at anything until he hit his teens: being Solomani on a Vilani world didn’t help much *at all* when he was growing up. (And you thought your teen years were hell!) His break came when his father brought in a used grav car, the first one ever seen in his extended family. His father was an electrician by trade, and helped start off his son in getting to grips with the vehicle, but it was his son who mastered the fundamentals of gravitics on his own.



“Getting high-tech product out the door and in the hands of waiting customers is what it’s all about! Now, the Solomani like their high-tech sales rooms all flashy and sleek and cool, but we’re on Pamushgar, so the games’ different, top to bottom. Tradition, Reliability, Conformity, and a Solid Support Contract – that’s the key here!”

This graphic is titled “dealership” © Ben Andrews

See his work at <http://ben-andrews.deviantart.com/art/dealership-368449328>

As Damondar grew more knowledgeable about the wonders of gravitics, he grew more interested in telling his friends about his newfound love. Egged on by his friends, he tried to actually drive the vehicle, but got into an accident the first time. Fortunately for an airborne vehicle, no harm was done to either the kids or the car, and after a beating his father sent him to grav flying school. With this, his destiny was set.

Damondar was successful with his online courses, and graduated with honours. Instead of taking a job as a pilot like everyone expected, he shifted into a sales job, working directly for Ling-Standard Products (yes, the massive Imperial megacorporation). His American Indian mother – who was now retired with a bundle, but never very talkative about just how she *got* that bundle – was very disappointed with this decision, and was never shy about making her feelings clear whenever possible.

Surprising all, this rather nondescript boy developed a strong character as a grav vehicle salesman, able to move product and spread a good bit of his enthusiasm to his customers. Following the local custom of the small Solomani community, Damondar let his mother arrange a marriage for him. Guided by both her Hindu/Animist beliefs and her feminine intuition, she picked out a fairly pretty lady with child-bearing hips. Married now for two years, a child is finally on the way, and a promotion to the Gold Accounts – handling wealthy spacers with money to burn – is rising in his future.

Life is good.¹³

Closing Theme: Mike and the Mechanics, “The Living Years”
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGDA0Hecw1k>

Squire Hshama Sorron, Captain, the FlameSpace Group

UPP 9BB4BA, Age 34 (40), Mixed Vilani

Skills: Handgun - 2, Bribery - 2, Navigation - 1, Leadership - 1, Pilot - 1, Persuasion - 1, Rifleman - 1, Engineering - 1, Computer - 1, Naval Architect - 1, Electronics - 1, Hunting - 1, Swimming - 1, Wheeled Vehicle - 0, Paint/Sculpture - 0, SubMG - 0, Vacc Suit - 0

Languages: Anglic (Transform, Native)

Visual: Squire Sorron looks much and acts much like how a heroic Noble should, in the eyes of the typical Imperial citizen in 993. Handsome, tall, well-spoken, walking with strength and grace, a born leader of men. Squire Sorron’s lack of intelligence is cloaked by his extensive education, a network of smart friends, and good people skills.

Opening Theme: Clint Mansell, “Sacrifice” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qyh9H6ikiFg>

A man of Shamokin – and not Didshep, like some scurrilous ruffians claim¹⁴ – Hshama was born into the Sorron family, a clan long tied to the service of one of the Imperial Noble Houses that dominate that wealthy world’s economy. He was successful enough in the household trials and tests to get a shot at the Imperial Naval Academy – and managed to win a seat, to the joy of his family. After graduation, he served well in destroyer and escort squadrons, earning a string of citations and honours – including one incident when he knowingly ordered his Marines to their deaths to buy time for additional merchantmen to escape.

When the Solomani War started to turn bad, Ley’s Sector Fleet was dispatched to reinforce the Imperial lines, but Lt. Cmdr. Sorron was held back at the request of the family elders. Over his very vocal objections, Sorron was honourably dismissed from the service, formally accepted as a squire of House N’Quili, and brought in to lead a house-affiliated interstellar transport business.

The FlameSpace Group is geared to transport people and goods in the face of intense opposition, with their clients being the Imperial government, more powerful planetary governments, and sector-wide corporations.¹⁵ At 993, the Group has sustained some losses in men and material, but not enough to do more than dent the wave of profits into company accounts. Most of the vessels were originally TL B-C starships that the Imperium didn’t care to use in the Rim War, and so were available for purchase, refit and deployment by FlameSpace. But as FlameSpace’s success grew and grew, the company was able to get its hands on better equipment – and gained enough influence in high places to keep it out of the grasp of the increasingly ravenous Imperial Navy.

¹³ At least some of that dirty business his mother left behind on an airless moon starts to show up....

¹⁴ It’s a long story. In any case, the world itself is located at Ley/1002; named Didshep in 1105, and Shamokin in 993.

¹⁵ Tukera Lines usually dominates this market with specialist subsidiaries, but the Imperial government contracted all of these near-milspec ships at a price Count Tukera simply couldn’t say no to.



Old Readers of Stellar Reaches may recognize this class of freighter from way back in Issue #11, set during the Imperial Civil War three centuries ago. “The Empty Quarter has need of useful transport regardless of their age – and no need for more museums,” so these working relics are kept flying. This graphic is titled “Spaceport 2” © Max V. Nimos. See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1641236&np

As a Squire of the House, Sorron will be given authority over Blazing Light transport group. These vessels will be making alternating runs from Shamokin to Yogesh (for high-tech materials needed by Yogeshi’s manufacturers), and Shamokin to Hebrin (to supply that system’s military with needed TL 14 parts and supplies they can’t find anywhere else.¹⁶) Also, placing these ships under Sorron’s command is partially meant to make up for snatching him away from his ship and his friends the moment they were going to see some *real* action, against the Solomani. Whether this will placate his wounded feelings remains to be seen.

Should Squire Sorron focus on his job rather than the past, he could be quite successful. There is need for his services in the Quarter, and even after the war is over, the FlameSpace Group can expand into the Julian Protectorate, and perhaps even into the Two Thousand Worlds. But the Squire will need to keep his eye on the ball: some Imperial Navy officers would still like the chance to seize his ships ‘for the war effort’ (and incidentally to get their promotion); the low-tech Suedzuk Vargr pirates will be looking for indirect ways to cut him down; and the high-tech Ikonaz pirates may mark his ship as a priority target. Things can get moving fast, leaving no time to mope about the past.

Squire Sorron doesn’t know about the Shadow Cartel yet. He will. The Shadow Cartel hasn’t discovered Squire Sorron’s expensive anagathics habit yet. They will.

Closing theme: Gowan, “A Criminal Mind” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ylijddy2JSA>

¹⁶ Ushmigad has the technology, but not the population or the depth of market, needed to help out Hebrin. “The size of the market matters, not just how advanced it is!”

ARMAMENT

10 Single Beam Laser Turrets organised into 10 Batteries (Factor-2),
6 Dual Fusion Gun Turrets organised into 3 Batteries (Factor-6)

DEFENCES

4 Triple Sandcaster Turrets organised into 4 Batteries (Factor-4),
Armoured Hull (Factor-3)

CRAFT

2 100-ton SDBs (Crew of 2)

FUEL

520 Tons Fuel (2 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)
On Board Fuel Scoops, On Board Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS

37 Staterooms, 25 Low Berths, 15 Emergency Low Berths,
10 Middle Passengers, 20 Low Passengers,
452.5 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS

None

COST

MCr 1,614.705 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 15.987),
MCr 1,278.974 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME

132 Weeks Singly, 106 Weeks in Quantity

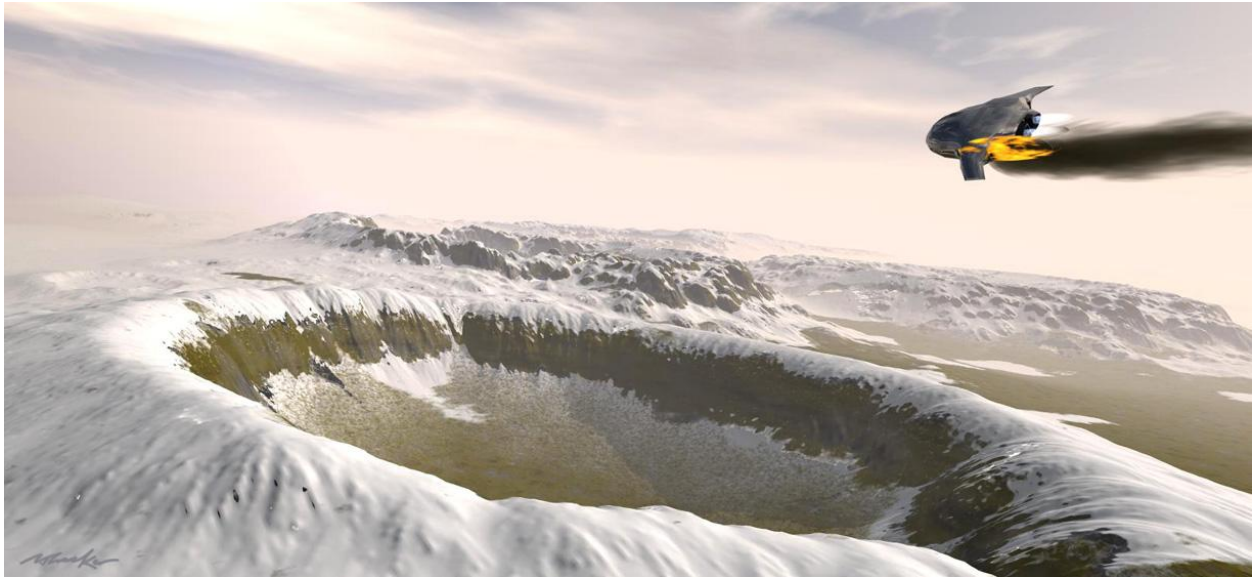
COMMENTS

The Flamethrower class is geared to shipping high-priority items through the teeth of substantial opposition, primarily that of multiple pirates or mid-population, low-to-mid tech planetary forces. It is not designed to challenge the militaries of major systems, as their meson guns and substantial missile batteries can overwhelm the defenses of the Flamethrower. The Flamethrower can be used as a support platform for ground forces, resupplying the men on the ground while hosing down enemies from the skies (including enemy grav tanks).

The Ignition Point is the third ship of her class, and the first to be built at Shamokin/Ley Sector. Her keel was laid down only a few months before the war started, and by mid-992 - when it became obvious that the war was going to take a lot longer than expected - she was already the target of numerous seizure, requisition, and eminent domain confiscation orders. How the FlameSpace Group and House N'Quili successfully defied, rendered void, nullified, and gutted these orders from on high is worthy of an epic ballad, in and of itself. And the tale has not been fully told yet: making an enemy of the Imperial Navy bureaucracy and Navy-allied Nobles, even with just awesome bureaucratic legerdemain and dazzling political manoeuvres rather than a ferocious military defeat, is bound to have a chain of consequences that will likely outlast the Solomani Rim War itself..

In the meantime, the Ignition Point is undergoing final preparations as the heart of the Blazing Light transport group. Until she proves herself, the group will consist of just her and the two mini-SDBs she will bear, the Fuel and the Heat; but assuming that she can bring home the bacon (and anything else her wealthy customers need), she will become the nucleus of a tough little convoy, "able to keep the key worlds of the Empty Quarter resupplied, even in the teeth of the toughest pirates with the best Ikonic technology around."¹⁷

¹⁷ The FlameSpace Group should be more cautious in their gloating: quite a lot of the Ikonaz - Vargr & Vilani alike - would take these words as a charismatic challenge. That's not the best way to go about things, if you just want to get stuff from Point A to Point B. On the other hand, if you want to instigate a major war between high-pop/high-tech Imperial Shamokin and high-pop/high-tech Protectorate Ikon, this kind of boasting can definitely do the trick. And as for the rest of the Quarter? "When elephants clash, the grass gets crushed."



This small SDB has it better than many of her sisters – when she crashes and dies, at least they'll know where she lies, and it's possible that her crew will survive her. It's far better than becoming another frozen corpse, forgotten and alone, silently drifting in an elliptical orbit for the next few millennia...

This graphic is titled "Brace for Impact!" © Neil Thacker.

See his work at <http://justv23.deviantart.com/art/Fast-skies-307526859>

Ship: Fuel
Type: SDB
Tech Level: 14
Class: Match
Architect: Alvin Plummer

USP
SD-1604B81-E30000-20002-0 MCr 218.600 100 Tons
Bat Bear 1 1 1 Crew: 2
Bat 1 1 1 TL: 14

Cargo: 0 Crew Sections: 1 of 2 Fuel: 11 EP: 11 Agility: 1

Architects Fee: MCr 2.186 Cost in Quantity: MCr 174.880

HULL
100 tons standard, 1,400 cubic meters, Flattened Sphere Configuration

CREW
Pilot, Gunner

ENGINEERING
Jump-0, 4G Manoeuvre, Power plant-11, 11 EP, Agility 1

AVIONICS
Bridge, Model/8 Computer

HARDPOINTS
1 Hardpoint

ARMAMENT
1 Triple Mixed Turret with:
1 Beam Laser (Factor-2),
1 Missile Rack (Factor-2)

DEFENCES
1 Sandcaster in the Mixed Turret, organised into 1 Battery (Factor-3),
Armoured Hull (Factor-14)

CRAFT
None

FUEL

11 Tons Fuel (0 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)
No Fuel Scoops, No Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS

2 Staterooms, 2 Low Berths, 0 Ton Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS

None

COST

MCr 220.786 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 2.186), MCr 174.880 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME

38 Weeks Singly, 30 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS

The Match is a small, heavily armoured SDB, originally designed to bear a mixed turret of a dual-barrel fusion gun and a laser, backed by a TL C computer. However, production problems with the fusion gun, as well as improvements in engine size and fuelling, allowed a proper TL E computer to be installed, at the cost of agility and a strong surge in cost. Instead of the fusion gun, a mix of a laser, missile tube, and sandcaster was used instead.

The key to the ship's role is in the missile, more than anything else. With a good mix of drones and standard missiles, long-range fighting is possible, coupled with increased problems for the enemy targeting systems. The Match SDB is designed to resemble the Flamethrower class on the electronic spectrum, further distracting incoming missiles.

The strangest oddity of the ship are the two staterooms. One is enough for almost every imaginable mission, and the space used could be freed up for cargo, additional fuel, or even to boost agility up a notch. A strong case could even be made for just inserting two couches, or even small staterooms, instead of actual full staterooms. Attempting to figure out what the naval architect was on when he made that decision remains a common source of merriment and argument.



Never mind the starships, grav-belts, or even wheeled cars: the vast majority of Travellers in-sector conduct their journeys on foot, same as always. The graphic is titled "Traveller at Evening" © Justinas Vitkus.

See his work at <http://justv23.deviantart.com/art/Traveler-At-Evening-423903031?hf=1>

(Dame) Gamaagin Kigiisii, Imperial Agent

UPP 49C7BB, Age 26, Mixed Vilani

Skills: Combat Rifleman - 2, Grav Vehicle - 1, Leadership - 1, Heavy Weapons - 1, Mechanical - 1, Lighter than Air - 1, Computer - 0, Linguistics - 0, Biology - 0

Languages: Anglic (Core, Native)

Equipment: Has a TL 14 ultralight on her person – packed in a light backpack – as well as a rifle.

Visual: At first glance, a small, unassuming woman with a bland face, mild manners, and – when excited or surprised – a rasp to her voice.¹⁸ Some decent time with her would uncover a toughness and daring that is not expected of women within the patriarchal Empty Quarter. Gamaagin is working to soften her Core accent, into something more generic and forgettable.

Note: In Dame Gamaagin’s case, Linguistics only refers to the scientific field: she has no ability to speak in additional languages, only an understanding of how languages function.

Opening Theme: Al Stewart, “Roads to Moscow” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAqP35A9Oi8>

Born on Yirsh Poy – a nearly airless Sylean desert world a mere two parsecs from the Imperial Capital of Sylea herself – Gamaagin long dreamt of serving the Imperium in some capacity or other, beating back the barbarians and protecting the light of Imperial civilization. She was surprised when she was accepted into ROTC while at university, and astonished when she was selected for the Household Calvary¹⁹, but was happy to take the billet. Her service record was reasonably good, and despite her light frame she was willing to step into harm’s way regularly (shaming her sisters in battle), but eventually her luck ran out, and she got a nasty maxillofacial injury during a clash. It took a year to properly rebuild her lower jaw and throat, and she received additional medical treatment after an honourable discharge.

Afterwards, Gammagin was contacted by certain treasonous elements within the Household Calvary, but Gammagin managed to inform the *correct* intelligence contact²⁰, at a time when most Imperial covert agencies were lousy with Solsec moles, assets and agents. Unofficially, she was recruited as one of Princess Elizabeth’s field agents, working as trustworthy muscle as the Princess laboured to clean house. (A particularly daring exploit earned her a knighthood – which will be made public *after* the Solomani Rim War is concluded.)

Currently, Gammagin is en route to the Imperial Empty Quarter on a free trader, under assumed cover. The Quarter has long been used as a dumping ground of the unwanted, and Gammagin will be helping loyalist agents track down various sophonts who don’t care to be found – and who won’t hesitate to use violence to *stay* lost and unaccounted for. If she survives her tour of duty, she will... well, probably just sign up for more of the same. She’s that kind of woman.

Closing Theme: Al Stewart “On the Border”, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z2L_OyS21IM

¹⁸ The surgeons did a great job reconstructing her face, but the vocal cords & throat were not perfectly restored. The technology does exist for perfect reconstruction: but that costs money.

¹⁹ Note that the Household Calvary does NOT swear allegiance to the Imperium, but only to the *person* of the Emperor, Gavin. This is a distinction with a difference.

²⁰ Had she chosen the *wrong* contact, this story would have had a very swift and unexpected end.



CGSociety.org

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Elizabeth, Princess of the Third Imperium.

“So far above your pay grade, you can die laughing about it.”

The graphic is titled “Duygu” © Levent Bozkurt.

See his work at <http://levent.cgsociety.org/art/portrait-painter-duygu-2d-401873>

Deren Tirentiion, Underworld Negotiator

UPP 497B99, Age 60, Mixed Vilani

Skills: Pilot - 3, Liaison - 2, Linguistics - 2, Jack-o-Trades - 2, Handgun - 1, Leadership - 1, Commo - 1, Tactics - 1, Brawling - 1, Vacc Suit - 1, Psychology (Vargr) - 1, Grav Vehicle - 1, Acting - 1, Persuasion - 1, Survival (Woodland) - 1, Combat Rifleman - 0, Forward Observer - 0, Heavy Weapons - 0, Demolitions - 0, Stealth - 0, Foil - 0, Computer - 0, Survival (Desert) - 0

Languages: Arzula-G (Native), Kogvi (a diplomatic/trade/scientific Suedzuk Vargr language within the Hegemony), Tenirruet (a widespread Irilitok Vargr trade language within the Hegemony)

Equipment: Typically a handgun, and a translator (Transform Anglic/Arzula-G, and Hebrin Arabic/Arzula-G). You'd be surprised how hard it is to find an Arzula-G language module in the Third Imperium...

Visual: Tirentiion looks like nothing but a friendly, glad-handing, harmless old grandfather from the Old Country, complete with a funny language and funny clothing. This is correct... except for the 'harmless' part.

Opening Theme: The Jitters, "The Bridge is Burning" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVMblOgGpbg>

A Life of Bloodshed, Crime, and Lies

Another refugee from the ~~Hell Worlds~~ Home Worlds of the Hegemony of Lorean, Tirentiion spent most of his life within the Da Honvogv, a fairly typical Lorean unit of twelve 2000-ton destroyers, each with a selection of heavy armour, light armour, and artillery. In no way are these ships optimized for space, atmospheric, or ground warfare... but they give the Hegemony the flexibility they need when dealing with their Blood Vargr enemies.

The dead are dead, and what has passed is done! I have a ship and a fighting crew and a girl with lips like wine, and that's all I ever asked. - Conan of Crimmeria

After a long and successful career fighting in space, the air, the ground, and even underwater, Tirentiion was granted a cushy semi-retirement position, working with the Domestication branch of the Hegemony to better shape the Vargr to better serve human ends. Unfortunately, Tirentiion got caught up in some nasty bureaucratic power plays, and found himself the patsy when certain Domestication initiatives fell apart spectacularly (involving, yes, lots and lots and *lots* of slaughter.)

Avoiding the police moving to arrest him, Tirentiion fled the Home Worlds, seeking sanctuary. He first went to Damlaer, but – despite the far lower law levels – it was in some ways even *more* dangerous for a refugee like him than the Home Worlds.²¹ On it was to Beta Quadrant of the Empty Quarter, with his dwindling funds. But there, the loyalist Arzula hated him for his supposed sympathies with the Vargr, and the Arzula dissidents loathed him as a leading oppressor – and probably acting as a fake defector too, in better destroy the more trusting dissident cells. Even the usually friendly Irilitok Vargr keep their distance from Tirentiion: they know how Domesticators work, and they don't like it, not even a tiny bit.

Capsule Description: Perhaps you remember that bit from the movie **Up**, when the dog says "My name is Dug. I have just met you, and I love you." Well, now you know the goal the Hegemony Domestication Units have for the *entire* Vargr race. Any resemblance between the plans the Hegemonio have for the Vargr, and the Homo Servus race of the book Drakon – or even Grandfather's original goals for the Vargr – are certainly not coincidental.

Finding no place to rest, Tirentiion managed to get himself hired as a temporary pilot on an Imperial/Hegemony interface line that stretched across the Lesser Rift. He was a replacement pilot for the original who got badly torn up in a bar brawl where over half the clientele had claws and fangs. Tirentiion's Void pilot license managed to pass

²¹ The Referee can take <http://www.lewrockwell.com/2014/01/william-norman-grigg/worse-than-north-korea/> as a model.

muster, with the starship crew in question helping to hide his presence from the authorities until they were ready to actually make the needed jumps. Once arriving in Hebrin, he paid for fake Hebrin ID from certain discreet individuals at the starport to successfully cross the XT²² line, and the last of his money as a bribe to enter the world as a bona fide Hebrinite citizen – who can't speak a lick of Hebrin Arabic, Modern Vilani, or Transform Anglic.

Thanks to a relentless tsunami of lies and half-truths, Tirentiion managed to get himself accepted by the local Hegemonio community – dominated by fun-loving, deal-making Damlaerites rather than feared Arzula killers like himself. His skills with dealing with Vargr – especially Blood Vargr from Hegemonic space – made him invaluable to those elements of society that have a need to discuss business matters with bloodthirsty pirates with really short tempers. Tirentiion is planning on a three-month break soon, though, so he can finally start learning Hebrin Arabic properly. (Anglic will have to wait, especially for a man who wants to blend in with the native.)

Closing Theme: Mike and the Mechanics, “Silent Running” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ep7W89I_V_g



“Ah, I see that the Blood Vargr have stopped by for a visit. Time for the commute to work!” The graphic is titled “c9” © Robert Maschke. See his work at <http://airage.deviantart.com/#/art/c9-103284473?hf=1>

Webpa-apob, Interstellar Merchant

UPP 6656AA, Age 34, Bwap

Skills: Admin - 3, Liaison - 3, Carousing - 3, Broker - 2, Bribery - 2, Song - 2, Trader - 1, Grav Vehicle - 0, Laser Weapon - 0, Vacc Suit - 0, Pilot - 0

Languages: Bwap.

Equipment: A Bwap/Anglic (all dialects) translator, and a ~~smartphone~~ handcomp for handling complex financial transactions.

²² XT – the Extraterritoriality line. This marks the difference between Imperial property and the sovereign territory of the planetary government. Any Traveller player can give you at least a half-dozen tales about this interesting bit of real estate, and how critical it is to be on the right side of the line, at the right time...

Visual: Webpa-apob wears the typical kaftan garment & hood that the Bwap need in less-than-saturation humidity environments. This clothing helps Bwaps remain as humid as possible.²³

Opening Theme: Kool and the Gang, "Celebration" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GwjfUFyY6M>

Parties

Webpa-apob is just one of the many Bwaps with a successful career in interstellar trade. Unlike many Newts, Webpa-apob also greatly enjoys the party-hardy side of the business, seeing it as part of the Natural Order of Things. There isn't a party tradition that Webpa-apob doesn't know about, a (legal) merchant ritual that he hasn't observed – while heavily intoxicated, more often than not – or a boozy joke he hasn't shared. Webpa-apob's a natural singer, too, trilling/croaking out the great standards in melodies and harmonies that are very sweet to the Bwap ear...

All of it in Bwap, as Webpa-apob can't speak a word of Anglic. Or any other language, excluding only his native tongue.

Disorder

While born on Marhaban, Webpa-apob is currently residing on Nulinad. While the world is friendly enough, the piracy scourge that is sweeping the sector brings with it a lot of disorder and chaos, something that makes Webpa-apob quite nervous and unhappy. It will be years at least before the Imperial Navy properly reasserts its authority across the Six Subsectors, and in the meantime the local Dukes can't seem to get their act together.

Should the PCs have to deal with Webpa-apob, he is sure to give them long, long spiels on why business is down, why the pirates are creating great disorder, why the nobles are failing to uphold the Imperial Mandate, why The End is Nigh...

Cleon's concept of the Imperial Mandate was originally derived from ancient Vilani legal theory, especially the concept of *karunargur* ("emperor's merit"). The *karunargur* was a quality held by the *karun* or ruler, incorporating both his worthiness to govern for the benefit of all the people, and his right to claim the authority to do so. The ruler was "vested" with *karunargur* by tradition, and he could lose the quality if he ruled in such a way as to break tradition. – **GURPS Traveller Nobles**, page 59

...but this won't stop him from pressing for the best deals possible, nit-picking the exact language of a contract, or enjoying a party when the opportunity strikes.

Order

With a few other like-minded Bwap, Webpa-apob is interested in establishing a new crèche in the centre of a Nulinadian rainforest, where the humidity is high enough for the Bwap to walk freely, with the assistance of large misters, high-tech open-air humidity-builders and fog generating equipment.²⁴ The site should be close to a easily accessible plateau, above the transplanted/biogeneered rainforest, where other sophonts can live comfortably without dripping in sweat. To properly establish the crèche, Webpa-apob will need a Far Trader to make regular runs between Nulinad and Marhaban, to transport the proper ritual specialists to insure complete and perfect compliant with regulations....

Which is tied directly to the goal of the crèche: to teach non-Bwap how to fit in with the Proper Order of Things, the Great Tree that links all. Interested Vilani will be invited first, then the real targets of the crèche, curious and

²³ According to **Journal's Traveller's Aid Society** #11, page 13, this kaftan is why the Bwap have a nickname, 'towelheads'. And, they need a great deal of humidity... and are very bureaucratic... and live in theocratic dictatorships... and reside in an Arab-named world of Marhaban ("Hello"), in a sector named after a blasted region of Saudi Arabia. I sense that *someone* had an unpleasant stay in a rather hot part of the globe...

²⁴ Whether Webpa-apod will have the assistance of the Bwap Sector Duke, is something I leave to the Referee.

spiritually inclined Solomani and Vargr. Webpa-apob and his Bwap associates feel that with a proper indoctrination education and the clear example of the Bwap, all sophont life can be properly organized to bring satisfaction to all.

Closing Theme: Seals and Croft, "Summer Breeze" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QsHuV3Aj1os>



Nulinad's population is primarily Solomani human: but there are still various Bwap and Vargr communities scattered across the world. Pictured above is Tamikhil, the closest human settlement to the planned Bwap crèche, as of 993 Imperial. The graphic is titled "Babahund" © Geoffroy Thoorens. See his work at <http://djahal.deviantart.com/#/art/Babahoud-67419522?hf=1>

Ikrazkar, Interstellar Merchant

UPP AAF8, Age 25 (110), Mixed Human (extensively modified)

Skills: Jack-o-Trades - 4, Brawling - 3, Hunting - 2, Tolerance (Vargr) - 2, Survival - 1, Music - 1, Electronics - 1, Gravitics - 1, Grav Vehicle - 1, Grav Belt - 1, Energy Weapons - 1, Vacc Suit - 1, Axe - 1, Gambling - 1, Swimming - 1, Heavy Weapons - 0, Streetwise - 0, Admin - 0, Broker - 0, Navigation - 0, Leadership - 0, Laser Weapon - 0, Trader - 0, Ships Boat - 0, Pilot - 0, Computer - 0, Liaison - 0

Languages: Arzula-A

Equipment: Despite his wealth, Ikrazkar only keeps a few simple tools and gizmos, most notably an Arzula-A/Julian Anglic/Transform Anglic translator. A collection of axes is maintained; mainly human and Vargr, though the occasional oddity can be found as well. Finally, a collection of the senior military award of the most prominent planetary governments (equivalents to the Medal of Honour or the Victoria Cross) is slowly being accumulated.

Visual: A large, heroically built man, wearing rich TL-14 robes and garb, and enjoys the very best of Lorean luxuries. His stance, voice and mien naturally commands respect, even adulation among the impressionable. He is always in the company of two discreetly armed human aides and four unarmed Hegemonic Vargr servants.

Note: The Tolerance skill refers to Ikrazkar’s ability to tolerate non-submissive Vargr in his presence. Particularly uppity member of this slave race²⁵ tests the Third Child’s endurance: make an appropriate test to his Tolerance skill in these cases.

Opening Theme: Clint Mansell, “The Last Man” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUgC6215Gko>



Ikrazkar once thrilled to visit his halls on Ikon, and gaze at massive statues of himself, revelling in his own greatness. Now? It’s just so much dead stone, to be dumped on some egocentric merchant for a pittance.

The graphic is titled “Ballroom” © Max V. Nimos. See his work at

http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=24289&np

Origins

Ikrazkar is a Third Child, part of the Deified Man’s breeding program to create the genetic bridge needed to bring mankind to godhood (and, as a natural and inevitable side-product, the Vargr to extinction). Ikrazkar was never expected to be the Last Man himself, but only a stepping-stone to Him.

In the old days, the Lesser Children would have been killed (pre- or post-birth) after they were no longer of use; just as many Arzula families kill their more unimpressive or wayward children today. However, legal rulings from the more prominent Last Man Orders – including the Order of High Science, the old stomping grounds of the current Hegemon – have decree that the Lesser Children could be of unique value to the Last Man when He is Manifested in the Chosen Artificial Womb. As such, they should not be put to death needlessly.

Various other Orders, Cults, and Societies both public and secret disagreed with this decision. In Ikrazkar’s case, the best they could do was arrange a posting for him at Ikon, homeworld of the Hegemonio-loathing Ikonaz Vargr. Surely, they will arrange a rather permanent end for the Third Child, removing a living obscenity and restoring proper balance to the universe.

²⁵ Last Man theology insist that the Vargr were a born and bred slave race, who committed the great sin of rebelling against the Ancients... who were exalted humans, of course. It will be the Last Man who will finally bring humaniti back to godhood... on the shattered bones of all of the Vargr.

Travels

The plans of Ikrazkar's enemies never came to fruition, as the Menderes Corporation invited his esteemed personage to take a tour of the Julian Protectorate, visiting every last one of her ~1000 systems. Visiting each one of her systems, and spending a month enjoying the pleasures of food and flesh each world had to offer, took about 90 years.

Other men would have eventually gotten bored of such travels and pleasures, but Ikrazkar continued to enjoy every minute of it. Every woman, every world, every delicacy was a fresh new discovery to him, and life continued to be as vibrant, passionate, and fascinating as ever. Starships and crews, regents and emperors, wars and disasters came and went... he, Ikrazkar, remained.

Return

This (apparently) ageless man²⁶ cheerfully returned to Ikon, finding that almost everyone has forgotten about him. Choosing celibacy and poverty for an amusing change of pace, he went to work as a common trader... who soon somehow got very sweet, no-bid contracts that was simply unheard of for a common trader to receive. As for the women... the more he refused them, the more they chased him.

Despite openly identifying himself, the local Vargr were mysteriously uninterested in killing him. Perhaps there was no charisma to be gained by killing an unimportant pseudo-god – the Vargr are very jealous about charisma and fame, and well know that killing someone can actually *take* charisma from you, and give it to the dead. Or maybe they resented being manipulated into performing a garbage disposal role by Arzula: "We aren't going to kill him for you. Do it yourself!"

In the meantime, Ikrazkar moved on to an idealistic phase in his thinking. After taking up fasting and meditating, he decided that in the end, he was *not* a god. Although Ikrazkar was not nearly as destructive as most wealthy and influential men could be – merely bedding women and enjoying life, rather than killing men and burning cities – still, it was fundamentally just seeking after enjoyment without meaning, wasting his power and talents, chasing after wind. As guided by his trusted advisors and friends, he has spent his time and talents pleasing himself, and has now seen that his god, his life, was nothing but a meaningless, powerless, empty fantasy.

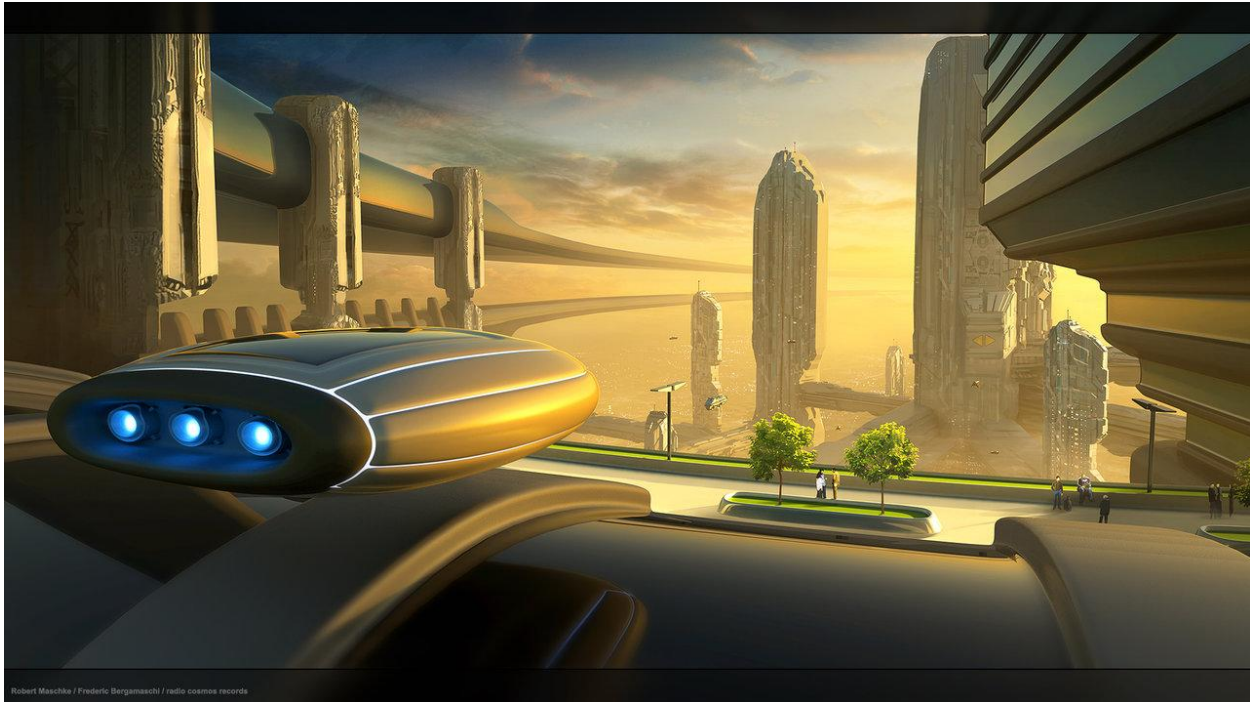
This failure – and the implicit deceit of those who he trusted completely – made him extremely angry, a fury and rage that had never dominated his thinking before. He carefully considered the most painful and irrevocable way to get his vengeance on his handlers and masters... and sent for the most hard-core, driven, dedicated Christian believer that his servants could find. "The kind of saint that powerful men kill."

It was time for a long, long discussion on things that really matter.²⁷

Closing Theme: John Debney, "Resurrection" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aCzsTmWvXE>

²⁶ Only certain Last Man genetic engineers *really* know if he is truly ageless, merely long lived, or will one day experience 'accelerated aging trauma.'

²⁷ When he's ready to act, Ikrazkar can start with North's article "Beating the State" (home churches for the win!) <http://www.garynorth.com/public/12131.cfm>. He can continue with the paywall articles "The Return of the Tutorial System" (<https://www.garynorth.com/members/login.cfm?hpage=12129.cfm>) and "The Results of Moore's Law Are Being Distributed by Pareto's Law" which includes this tidbit: anything the NSA can do today, any bright young thing can do in 2045 (<https://www.garynorth.com/members/login.cfm?hpage=12127.cfm>).



Just another safe, prosperous, comfortable Vilani world? Well, yes, but the interesting thing here is a homogeneous Vilani world under a Vargr interstellar government. (Vilani-culture Ovaghoun Vargr, yes... but still!) This world – Lusliki – does exist within the Rukadukaz Republic, but not quite in the Empty Quarter. She’s actually located two parsecs from the sector boundaries, in subsector Vector of Amdukan Sector, or in Travellerese: Lusliki/Vector/Amdukan. The graphic is titled “Canopy harbor II” © Robert Maschke. See his work at <http://airage.deviantart.com/art/Canopy-harbor-II-434891018>

Shii Nish, ex-Soldier

UPP B74A8A, Age 52 (actual age: 34), Mixed Vilani

Skills: Combat Rifleman - 3, Heavy Weapons - 3, Grav Vehicle - 1, Computer - 1, Vacc Suit - 1, Tracked Vehicle - 1, Tactics - 1, Mechanical - 1, Brawling - 1, Stealth - 1, Instruction - 1, Leadership - 1

Languages: Ikonaz (Vilani), Native

Equipment: Nish still has his rifle, and some spare magazines.

Visual: Just another middle-aged, latté-coloured Mixed Vilani with a small potbelly, brown eyes, and black slightly wavy hair, dressed conservatively. Perhaps a good 8% of the entire human race looks a lot like him. Nish is very strong, but in a tough & sinewy way, rather than in the bulky, muscular style.

Opening Theme: Kansas, “Dust in the Wind” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tH2w6Oxx0kQ>

The Right Man at the Wrong Time

As was chosen by his community caste leaders, Nish signed up for military service with the Kseokh: a mid-level ‘regular army’ Vilani-ranks, Ovaghoun-officered force that has been serving those Vargr packs, fleets and nations that can afford its services for almost 80 years now. During Nish’s time in the service, the Kseokh consisted of two divisions of infantry, one division of armoured infantry (a.k.a. battledress), and two brigades of armoured cavalry (a.k.a. grav tanks), all of it in paid service to The Rukadur, the government of the Rukadukaz Republic.

This TL 14 force was mainly engaged in peacetime garrison and training duties: and as usual, when there was no fighting required, the actual warrior-officers were replaced by perfumed princes and pure bureaucrats focused on expanding their power, their department headcount, their turf, and their budget. It isn’t really true that the Vilani are instinctive bureaucrats like the Bwap are, but they are far more comfortable in such an environment than the

Solomani are, with their love of conformity and precedent and consensus and the rest of it. Nish knew his business with the tools of his trade, inside and out, but his stiff-necked nature made him far less a bureaucratic infighter than the frenemy NCOs he had to work with every day. Like many men before and after him, he stepped on the wrong toes on the wrong time, and despite his increasingly desperate efforts, he was forced out of the Kseokh.

Victory at a Price

Not only did Nish failed to inherit the Vilani skill of in-group politics, he also failed to inherit their longevity. He hasn't hit forty yet, but the years have left a deeper mark on him than on many other Mixed Vilani of the same age. He catches various diseases faster than others, and takes longer to recover; and he looks visibly haggard and worn compared to other men of his age as well. Still, he remains as strong as a bull, and Nish believes that he still has time to make his mark somewhere, truly do something significant, before he dies and joins the ancestors in the other world.

(Or is forced to return to his truly safe and truly stifling homeworld of Lusliki, a world so predictable, unchanging, creatively sterile, and regimented that Nish occasionally calls it 'the other world' as well.)

Closing Theme: Simply Red, "Holding Back the Years" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yG07WSu7Q9w>

Kzadz Dhaityirrufgakir, Rogue

UPP 598BCA, Age 30, Irilitok Vargr

Skills: Streetwise - 3, Linguistics - 2, Intrusion - 2, Stealth - 2, Wheeled Vehicle - 1, Scrounge - 1, Liaison - 1, Sub-Machinegun - 1, Tactics - 1, Jack-o-Trades - 1, Leadership - 1, Computer - 0, Farming - 0, Infighting - 0

Languages: Tenirruet (Irilitok trade language, Native), Arzula-F, Anglic (Julian)

Equipment: Kzadz has quite a selection of odd tools on his person, most legal. His right hand is actually a replacement for his original: when using it for delicate work, raise his agility to 15 (F).

Visual: The rogue dresses in the comfortable, successful style of a prosperous Irilitok merchant within the Hegemony: never so flashy as to spark human envy, yet still with a certain pizzazz and (especially) scent, so other Vargr can understand that he's a cut above the common pack.

Opening Theme: Europe, "The Final Countdown" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9jK-NcRmVcw>



The Vargr have always loved sensational social displays of charismatic dominance, and – after several centuries – big wheels are coming back in fashion. On Mni Grovktakh, a large gas giant moon in Ksuel system, 985 Imperial. The graphic is titled "Moonshiners" © Goran Delic. See his work at

<http://delic.deviantart.com/art/Moonshiners-389185157>

GLORY!

Like most Irilitok, Kzadz is a rather cheerful Vargr, happiest with his littermates, working to please everyone, human and Vargr alike, and bring them all into one united pack. Unlike most Irilitok, though, there is a certain daring streak in his nature, and a willingness to fight for his pack when pressed too hard.²⁸ By 30, Kzadz had made a fortune in hands-on skulduggery, lost it while avoiding a Hegemonic crackdown, and – after setting things on a even keel with The Man – made another one as a middleman, making all sorts of deals between all sorts of parties. Quite a lot of legends circulate about Kzadz, most focusing on his sixth sense, quick wit, a smoothness in misdirecting his marks while conducting a break-and-enter... and a fondness for unusual ammunition.

Maxim 16. Your name is in the mouth of others: be sure it has teeth.

Howard Taylor, "The Seventy Maxims of Maximally Effective Mercenaries"

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schlock_Mercenary

DANGER!

Unable to simply relax and enjoy his money and fame, he sent out feelers for an even bigger heist... and his most interesting nibble came from some very foreign Vargr, with their oily black coats liberally flecked with crimson red splotches. Kzadz made it clear that he wasn't interested on stepping on the tail of the Hegemony: but that wasn't what the very alien Vargr were interested in. Of all things, they were interested in the jewellery preferences of Imperial Noblewomen within the Six Subsectors.

When he asked why, their tails started wagging furiously, until they turned around, grabbed, and held them down.²⁹ With their tails still twitching spastically, the foreign Suedzuk explained through their translators that they were interested in setting up a transport line directly from their hazily-identified homeworld directly to each of the six subsector capitals the Imperium holds in the Empty Quarter.³⁰ When asked how in the galaxy did they plan to get Suedzuk-crewed ships through fanatically anti-Suedzuk Hegemonic Space, the strangers smiled toothily, used both hands to grip their now frantically squirming tails, and said (in flawless Tenirruet) "None of your business!"

Of course, Kzadz had to take the job after this. The money, while *very* good, had almost nothing to do with his decision: it's the chance to be part of something that promises to be absolutely *legendary* that hooked him. Now, all he needs is some unsuspecting Imperial merchantman to transport to the subsector capitals himself and a few "female Vargr from far away, with a custom that requires them to be always covered up head-to-toe and wearing dark-tinted filter masks."³¹

Closing Theme: The Eagles, "Hotel California" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOG1Ucw5HDg>

²⁸ When he fights alone, it isn't because "I am worth something, and so you have no right to harm me," but because "I am the property of the Pack, and you have no right to harm what belongs to the Pack!" Not that the distinction matters too much should his bullets rip your guts apart, a la <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJGH7cDFw7c>, but it is important for role-playing purposes...

²⁹ Any resemblance to Dogbert is not coincidental.

³⁰ Of course, one of those subsector capitals, Nulinad, doubles as the sector capital.

³¹ The covering is to hide their red-flecked pelts from others, and the filters are to hide from their own nostrils the scent of fear. (Bad Things Happen when the Blood Vargr smell fear.) Incidentally, the TL 14 Ikonik helmets contain some solid translation software (including all the human and the more common Vargr languages within the Empty Quarter – and the Bwap tongue, too!), a handy-dandy encyclopedia/glossary, and a nice suite of combat support software, with a special emphasis on close-quarters combat and squad-level tactics (Referee-speak: +1 for infighting, +1 for tactics, +2 to Education (Empty Quarter data only).)

Duke Sheikh Zaki bin Temiz, Imperial Emissary

UPP 85BA9E, Age 26 (50), Solomani Human

Skills: Leadership - 4, Liaison - 3, Linguistics - 3, Steward - 1, Jack-o-Trades - 1, Persuasion - 1, Interrogation - 1, Medical - 1, Instruction - 1, Admin - 1, Bribery - 1, Carousing - 1, Grav Vehicle - 0, Computer - 0, Mechanical - 0, Vacc Suit - 0, Sub-Machinegun - 0, Navigation - 0, Electronics - 0, Gravitics - 0, Laser Weapon - 0, Recruiting - 0, Commo - 0, Streetwise - 0, History - 0, Interview - 0

Languages: Arabic (Hebrin, Native); Arabic (Classical); Hebrew (Ancient); Anglic (Core)

Equipment: This is an Imperial Duke, in the direct service of the Emperor of the 11,000 worlds: what he wants, he *gets*, up to an Imperial Navy light cruiser.

Visual: Normally a hearty and lively young man, dressed in the blazingly white classical Arab robes of the desert. Besides a ceremonial dagger (used thrice, always in the service of the Imperium), he carries nothing else, as he needs nothing else. Due to recent events, though, the Duke is withdrawn and morose, dressed literally in sackcloth woven by the widows of the Solomani Rim War, and the ashes of a charred world.

Note: Sheikh Zaki's Ducal title is a Rank title, arising from his excellent work as an Imperial Ambassador.³² If he makes a request of the iridium Throne, it will be granted: the Duke has earned the implicit trust of Emperor Gavin. However, the Emperor is often months away via Jump-4 X-boat... fortunately, the Sheikh³³ has a reliable knack for getting things done independently.

Opening Theme: Steve Jablonsky, "Arrival to Earth" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4H0JDomv8ac>

Entering the Service

Initially sixth in line to the Ducal Throne of Hebrin,³⁴ Zaki was initially encouraged to join the Imperial Navy as the preferred goal of any Imperial aristocrat. He did as his family requested, but failed to rise above ensign. But he managed to get his Household elders to let him transfer to the Imperial Diplomatic Corps, where he did spectacularly well. The Sheikh is a quick study of people and personalities, and while his aging brain has failed to retain *everything* he has learned in his decades of Imperial service, one thing he has kept is a powerful recall for names and characteristics, human and alien alike.

The reason Sheikh Zaki has steadily risen to his exalted position is because of a skill easy to state, but difficult to emulate: he can get the hardest Solomani Abrahamic theocracies to toe the Imperial line when it comes to the major issues.³⁵ This can be difficult, as these cultures insist that there is a legal code that stands above the Will of the Emperor. Traditionally, the Iridium Throne preferred to let the Imperial Navy illustrate *exactly* how powerful this Invisible, Insubstantial King of all the Cosmos is beyond the 100-diameter planetary boundary that marks the legal limit of planetary authority – and, on occasion, *within* that legal boundary as well.

But, as certain events within the former Solomani Autonomous Sphere demonstrated, the effectiveness of Imperial policy was growing... counter-productive, let us say. A policy revision was called for.

³² Don't forget: planetary governments are fully sovereign nations, with the Imperium only controlling "the space between the stars" ... and the starport. And a rather extensive military establishment, especially regarding the Navy. And the Emperor's Share – 2% of the stock of all interstellar companies within the Imperium.

³³ Unofficially, other Nobles tend to refer to Duke Zaki as "the Sheikh", and not Duke Zaki, as 1) he has no fief, 2) he isn't actually in command of an Imperial sector or subsector, and 3) as a marker that this man is *not* an ordinary Noble: caution is advised.

³⁴ As more children were born to the directly ruling line, Zaki grew farther and farther from inheriting Hebrin Subsector. As of 993, Zaki is now 36th in line to the subsector throne.

³⁵ This is in contrast with the major Vilani theocracies, which – ever since the power of the Solomani was broken in the Imperial Court – make it a point to aggressively support the Emperor in all things. The various Stellar Divinity theocracies are generally comfortable supporting the Imperial Starburst as well, with only the occasional quibble here and there on minor side issues.

Serious Problems...

The revised Imperial policy was promulgated by Emperor Styryx in 970. While insisting that the authority of the Emperor derived from the consent of the governed – and *not* the debatable existence of invisible deities, real or imagined³⁶ – the Emperor was willing to entertain the hypothetical possibility of laws above his own. However, such laws and such a ruler – especially if they claim to be even *more* authoritative than the repeatable and demonstrable Laws of Physics, say – will have to demonstrate their effectiveness without the support of the Iridium Throne, as there is no consensus on the actual identity of this hypothetical law-giver, or the actual content of said laws.³⁷ “Should this hypothetical almighty deity persuade a majority of Imperial citizens of its existence, then the Iridium Throne *may* choose to take its desires into account. Not before.”³⁸



Of all of his travels in the service of the Emperor, Duke Zaki still remembers his earliest days in the Imperial Diplomatic Corps with the most fondness. Opening up the universe to an Imperial Citizen has a certain charm nothing else has ever matched. The graphic is titled “Moonshiners” © Malo. See his work at <http://donmalo.deviantart.com/art/WAVING-GOOD-BY-376443697>

Deciding that the Imperium merely worshiped power qua power – and had no interest in some culture-specific, narrow-minded, particularistic provincial bleatings about ‘truth’ or ‘justice’ – the Solomani Abrahamic religions merely withdrew their consent to Imperial Rule, no longer recognized the Emperor as a Divinely-appointed authority, and ceased to pray for his health, rule, or reign. “The Emperor can kill who he wishes, rape who he pleases, and take what he wants, when he wants, because he wants it. So let the might of his hand and the power of his fleet be the god that saves him.”

The Solomani Party prospered nicely as these events unfolded.

...And a Solution

Then-Marquis Zadi convinced Emperor Styryx to strongly, publicly and definitely revoke his policy before the end of the year. That was the easy part, as Imperial Law is whatever the Emperor says it is. The hard part was going to all the Abrahamic theocracies, and getting them back in line. Getting their co-operation regarding taxation, military policy, and Imperial Law was actually rather easy... but there were no prayers for the Emperor, and increasing numbers of Abrahamic believers took great delight in stressing the *strictly* materialistic basis of Imperial Authority.

³⁶ Discussions on whether the major Noble Houses, the Megacorporations, or the Imperial Navy count as deities are smoothly sidestepped: you never know what a given world or Noble chooses to worship...

³⁷ And if it was put to a vote, Vilani Ritualism would come out as the largest belief system within the Third Imperium by a plurality (not a majority) – a religion with but little concern regarding a god or gods, and a powerful drive for conformity, consensus, ritual, and tradition.

³⁸ “...and we will hereby ignore the fact that only motivated minorities have ever changed history in a significant fashion. Or dominate and direct any government.” Emperor Styryx didn’t add.

And all across the Solomani Sphere, Imperial banners were being brought down, and Solomani Party banners were being hauled up.



Whether the Lazisari Prophet Calci gained his inexplicable powers from God, the Cosmos, the Ancients, the Ancestors, Ultra-high Technology, or Forbidden Psionic Techniques remains in hot dispute across the Empty Quarter. What isn't in dispute is what happened when Imperial Ministry of Justice agents tried to arrest him... The graphic is titled "LANDSCAPE_11102013" © Malo. See his work at <http://donmalo.deviantart.com/art/LANDSCAPE-11102013-406521286>

Marquis Zadi swiftly returned to Capital, and spoke to the Emperor regarding the issue. Eventually, a direct appeal from the Throne was sent to the Solomani worlds, as the Emperor *asked* for the prayers of all loyal Imperials – explicitly including Solomani Imperials – for their deities and spirits to guide him in his rule.³⁹ This satisfied almost all the Solomani-dominated worlds outside of the Solomani Sphere, and even a fair number of worlds within the Sphere. Until he was recalled due to the imminent start of the Solomani Rim War, the Marquis (later upgraded to Duke in 975) laboured day and night to bring back the major theocracies back into the Imperial fold, rarely even bothering with force⁴⁰, and instead stressing unity, relationships, and mutual forgiveness.

Today

Duke Zadi sees the outbreak of war as a personal failure. In the end, his labours, his stirring speeches, his networking, and even his own prayers came to nothing.⁴¹ In the old days, it was common Imperial policy to physically deliver a flawless copy of Josephus' *The Jewish War*⁴² to misbehaving Abrahamic theocracies by the hand of Duke Zadi, personally signed by the ruling Emperor. Now, with real blood – human and alien; Solomani, Vilani, Mixed, and all sorts of minor human – being vigorously splashed across the stars by all concerned, such symbolic threats look like a particularly macabre form of pathetic childish humour.

Duke Zadi offered to publicly resign and be stripped of his title in dishonour before the Iridium Throne, but Emperor Gavin wouldn't hear of it. Instead, the Emperor ordered the tired diplomat to return to his homeworld of

³⁹ Yes, I know that Eisenhower, one of the better ~~Emperors~~ Presidents, declared "Our government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is." <http://www.garynorth.com/public/12062.cfm> Still, I prefer my leaders to be more... *choosy*... regarding which spirits, guides, and lords to recognize. Of course, different peoples have different lords, which is a good reason to prefer pocket-sized civil governments to sprawling galactic empires (and the violence and centralized, unaccountable authority their mere existence demands.)

⁴⁰ First, direct threats only inspired increased resistance (in both strength and variety of forms) and second, the loyalty of local Imperial forces was growing more doubtful by the year...

⁴¹ The Duke is being unjustly hard on himself: he managed to salvage the legitimacy of a rather stupid Emperor (well, temporarily), and beat back the threat of religiously-driven hostilities within the Imperium proper. And there is something to be said for restricting the Rim War to a primarily racial and political matter, rather than let it grow into a religiously fuelled war as well.

⁴² Which, under the title *The Wars of the Jews*, you can download here: <http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/2850>. Apropos of nothing, I will point out that House Tamiz led the Hebrin Rebellion, described in *Stellar Reaches* #12, page 9-10.

Hebrin, and see if he could calm the waters there, reducing the ancient hostilities between Moslem and Hindu, Solomani and Vilani and Bwap and Vargr. “Enough small victories add up to a great victory, and even your limited successes has earned greater praise from me than all but the greatest military victories so far in this bitter war.” Also, the Emperor put the Duke on notice, that one day this war will end, and he expects the Duke to lead the Imperial diplomatic team when the time comes. “There are reasons why I never reprimanded you for your usage of anagathics, vassal Zadi.”⁴³

Enter the PCs

The Player Characters will be hired into the Duke’s service: *why* they were hired depends on their behaviour and reputation beforehand... and their level of success.

- Natural-born losers would be hired for a throwaway purpose that they probably won’t survive, and plans for foolish PCs will factor in their foolishness;
- Ordinary PCs who are just getting by will be hired for their ho-hum skills, and in the expectation of only ho-hum results;
- Solid, reliable PCs will be preferred for better work, one humble but important brick in a soaring arch the PCs can only get a glimpse of;
- And extraordinary PCs, known for pulling off the impossible, will be chosen for the toughest and most difficult of missions: they will also have the best grasp of the Duke’s intentions.⁴⁴

The PCs natural preferences in violence, pro- or anti-social attitude, sneakiness, bravery, scientific curiosity, and comfort level with alien cultures will be factored into their missions: not perfectly, but pretty well, and sometimes with a deep insight into their personalities.⁴⁵



While the blue-white world of Gaeko looks like a fine home, appearances are deceptive in this case. Sophonts who can see the peculiar radiation from the world can better sense the danger. From a lunar settlement in orbit about Gaeko, 845 Imperial. The graphic is titled “LANDSCAPE_11102013” © Malo. See his work at <http://donmalo.deviantart.com/art/LANDSCAPE-11102013-406521286>

The PCs will never see the Duke in person: instead, a Squire⁴⁶ in Ducal livery will deliver a hologram-projector, where a smiling and happy Duke will provide direction. It’s of better quality than that of Star Wars: at TL 14, it has colour, and limited artificial intelligence providing a fair imitation of the Duke’s personality in a good mood, able to

⁴³ Anagathics helps to delay aging: a nice perk, but it makes the heirs waiting for the noble to die *very* impatient, so it is traditionally frowned upon by Nobility in the interests of, erm, a stable and predicable chain of succession.

⁴⁴ Exactly what these intentions are is left for the Referee to decide. Here, I am assuming that Duke Zadi really does intend to build a lasting peace to the Six Subsectors – but he needs some pieces moved around first...

⁴⁵ The sharp-thinking PC, connecting the dots, will realize that *someone* has been keeping rather close tabs on them during their earlier adventures. Who that someone is, is left for the Referee (and perhaps a secretive PC) to decide.

⁴⁶ In my use of the word here, a Squire is not a young obedient naïf, being inducted into the complex world of Noble Service in the style of the Medieval Age. *My* Squires are derived from the lawyer’s ‘esquire’, so they are professional, skilled, experienced adults getting serious Noble work done backstage. *Your* usage... is up to you.

answer the basic, reasonable questions and follow clear chains of logic (but forget about subtle inferences or most inductive reasoning...)

It won't take long for the PCs to discover through public sources that Duke Zadi has been depressed since the start of the Solomani Rim War. Figuring out why he's so happy in the holograms – if it's really him – is something of a puzzle.

Referee: The reason? Soon after his meeting with the Emperor, Duke Zadi had a dream where he passed his hands over the stars and worlds of the Six Subsectors, and the fighting, hatreds, and old grudges blew away, leaving only peace and serenity. Since then, he has kept a sorrowful face in public, but a joyful face in private – and to certain chosen servants, for his own reasons.

Yes, I would be tempted to mock and ridicule such dreams myself: despite my fear of God, my mind is Western, and appeals to dreams and visions exasperate me.⁴⁷ However... how I feel and how God feels are two different things. God did send visions to Joseph and Pharaoh, Solomon and Daniel, Joseph & Mary, and even the wife of Pilate.

Duke Zadi, a Muslim, comes from a Sunni Islamic background: and Arabs place value in dreams. Even as I speak, many Arabs are led to Christ not by logic or argument or wealth, but by dreams sent from Heaven.⁴⁸ Duke Zadi himself is a Muslim: but who can bar God from speaking to whomever He wills?

Assuming that it is God speaking, and not merely the Duke's own desires. But that's for the PCs to discover, the old-fashioned way.

Closing Theme: The Track Team, "Peace" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ftScS4flbQ>

Small-Runt, Totem and Warrior of the Webinigan⁴⁹

UPP A976B4, Age 21, Suedzuk Vargr

Skills: Infighting - 2, Sensor Ops - 1, Laser Weapon - 1, Vacc Suit - 1, Zero-G - 1, Grav Vehicle - 0, Computer - 0, History - 0

Languages: Anglic (Transform)

Equipment: A reflex armoured spacesuit (six hours of air, TL A), and laser rifle (also TL A). No grenades usually, but a few flash-bangs.

Visual: Just a larger-than-usual Blood Vargr, bearing arms, wearing the livery of a Solomani American warrior band.

Opening Theme: Trevor Jones and Randy Edelman, "Promentory"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1ryJDVuZ6k>

Introduction

Twenty-one years ago, there was an American Indian fighter, leading his team in a counter-assault against a Suedzuk corsair. Taking the ship was as ugly as you'd suspect, but it *did* get done. While looking for any survivors – the business end of his gauss rifle leading the way – this fighter was surprised by a stick'em, gripping him to the wall. He began to yell for help when a bag was shoved into his hand: he focused, and a Suedzuk female swiftly backed away from him, then stood, waiting for him to accept the unspoken deal.

⁴⁷ "Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore fear God." Eccl 5:7

⁴⁸ See <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/april-web-only/why-muslims-are-becoming-best-evangelists.html?paging=off>

⁴⁹ "Abandoned" in Ojibwe.



Sometimes, when he was young, Small-Runt was told of the first homeworld of the Webinigan, far away in Gushemege Sector. None of the band ever made the commitment to make the months-long return journey: but if any did, Small-Runt just might join him. The graphic is titled “Tranquility” © Gabriel Gadjos. See his work at <http://pipper-svk.deviantart.com/art/Tranquility-151564528>

As usual in these circumstances, he promptly shot her dead. The surprising part is, he didn't immediately open the bag into vacuum, nor did he smash it against the wall or stomp on it until it stopped moving. By sheer force of personality, the fighter made his team... then his crew... and finally his tribe accept his decision.

Puphood

The four Blood Vargr cubs could not be allowed to play with the human children, but they heard their voices, and smelt their scent. They did bond strongly with the fighter who saved them, fed them, gelded them, laboriously taught them Anglic, bore their bites and slashes, and introduced them to the ways of the tribe. One by one, as they quickly grew stronger and smarter, he introduced them to the other men of the tribe, then the women.

They weren't really accepted until they proved that they could be trusted not to harm the infants and the children, even if the little ones yelled and screamed and stomped on their tails unexpectedly. Of the four, only one proved unable to make the adjustment – who was then beaten to death by the men of the Webinigan. The two surviving littermates, Red Drops and Crooked Tooth, proved to be better fighters than Small-Runt, and earned the respect of the men more faster than he did. But was the bigger and more learned Small-Runt – with his interest in American Indian religion⁵⁰ – who became the unofficial mascot and totem of the tribe.

The surviving Vargr were never made members of the tribe: however, they were accepted as totem-bearers. They were always free to leave – and never return – but so long as they supported the tribe and obeyed the chiefs, they could remain as protected resident aliens. On an isolated, airless moon of their home system of Wapeka, a small, black-stoned monument was placed near – but still separate from – the many large white blocks. Like the human

⁵⁰ The local form of space-based Animism is more tuned to orbits and asteroids and batteries and starships than to eagles and forests and winds and buffalo. A few basics of original American Indian belief still remain, but they are just a handful of ancient fragments among thousands of years of change, hope, and loss.

faces on the white blocks, a laser etching of the Vargr faces were engraved, and a small vial of blood of each Vargr was flash-frozen and ceremoniously placed within the block. Upon their death, their names will also be engraved, and a three-sentence description of their life as well.

The Destiny of Brothers

One day, the fighter who adopted the cubs failed to return. Although not human, they were permitted to cry out for their dead Advocate/Master as his name was etched in among the monuments. After going through great grief, Small-Runt found solace in the hard, cold, yet graceful beliefs of the Webinigan – reflecting the hard, cold, yet graceful environment they lived, fought, and died in.

Crooked Tooth chose a different path: as he resisted his natural fear/hatred of anyone outside of the tribe (pack), his thoughts rested on his long-dead mother who traded her life for his. He grew more distant and paranoid of the humans, trusting only his littermates, and worshipping the spirit of the Nameless One, his dead mother. He pressed for her remains, and told that her biomass was used for the hydroponics systems⁵¹... just as dead American tribesmen were. This soothed his mind, and remained loyal to the tribe, but he never again worshipped in the Webinigan fashion as Small-Runt did. Instead, when home from the hunt, Crooked Tooth would spend his spare time among the hydroponic equipment, learning from the tribeswomen how to garden well and grow the food the 10,000-strong Webinigan band needed as they wandered in Wapeka system, moving among the moons, worlds, and asteroid every few years.

Red Drops was increasingly troubled as he dwelt on his murdered mother and on how he was forever different from the humans. He wanted to be one with the tribe, but that was impossible, so long as he existed as a Vargr. So, Red Drops thought about the essential nature of humaniti, the essential nature of the Vargr, and left the Webinigan to bring his vision to pass. He failed, and died, and Small-Runt inscribed his name in the memorial block on an airless world.

And Today

Small-Runt continues to serve the Webinigan: sometimes as a warrior in the field, and sometimes as a Totem in local religious ceremonies. Increasingly, though, Small-Runt is being coached to blend in with other Vargr: not to truly infiltrate the enemy – that is practically impossible for blood-bonded Suedzuk packs – but to gather common rumours and general knowledge, shared among the Vargr... and not with the humans. Small-Runt is to pose as an out-of-region Vargr, an escapee from the clearly anti-Vargr Hegemony of Lorean. As the Suedzuk are so xenophobic, paranoid, and deadly, no one is going to pry *too* closely about which pack and which world he came from: but it will still pay to build a proper cover story.⁵²

PCs who actually know something about covert operations would be welcomed to give a hand... especially if they are American Indian. Those who follow the old beliefs would be a shoe-in.

Closing Theme: John Stanford, "Timescapes"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Jfbv-wJL2c>

⁵¹ Yes, we all know that in The Future – starting from 50 years form now, if not earlier – most people will be printing their food. But I'm still fond of the old-school sci-fi clichés...

⁵² For example, take Wolfgang Lotz, an Israeli spy who worked out of Cairo. He posed quite successfully as a former member of the Afrika Korps until a *real* ex-member of the Korps had a conversation with him...

Wolves know that it is easier to slaughter the flock
From Inside the Gates...

...and so the Wolf came amongst the Circle of the People
Pleading that the Christ came to die to redeem the Wicked
But the Saint, wiser than the Foe, demanded Repentance,
Not just Words.

But with the sheepskin gone, the Wolf stood just as he was, a Wolf,
He could no longer draw close for a certain slaughter
But he could still kill the shepherd!

But unlike the New Adam,
This lesser man did not come to die and save the world
But only to protect the flock,
And strike down the Wolf,
Which he did.

It is not right to take the bread of children,
To cast it to the Dogs,
Nor should they be granted anything holy.

- A Solomani parable, from the Empty Quarter⁵³



Old school, low-tech scouting is still quite common in the Empty Quarter. Somebody needs to be the first to go in and take a look, and the Gushgusi are disinclined to wait for the Imperial government to act: "If you want something done, you go and do it yourself." The graphic is titled "SCOUTING" © malo. See his work at <http://donmalo.deviantart.com/art/SCOUTING-365834867>

⁵³ Variations on a Theme: "No Redemption for the Wolves" <http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/No-Redemption-for-the-Wolf-7825>

Professor Ern Arnets, Ansara Temple

UPP A3D9FA, Age 34, Jonkeereen

Skills: History - 2, Linguistics - 2, Legal - 2, Instruction - 2, Economic - 2, Survival (Desert) - 1, Research - 1, Enclosure - 1, Sophontology - 1, Sociology - 1, Admin - 1, Psychology - 1, Robot Ops - 1, Persuasion - 1, Liaison - 1, Brawling - 1, Wheeled Vehicle - 0, Handgun - 0, Laser Weapon - 0

Languages: Eloris (Native)⁵⁴, Anglic (Transform)

(Notes: To summarise the Jonkeereen⁵⁵: They are an artificial human species, created by the Imperial Ministry of Colonization to live as nomads on desert worlds. While the majority of this race lives in Jonkeer/Deneb – and most of the remainder within the Domain of Deneb – a small pilot program was started in the Imperial Empty Quarter. While it ended up a failure due to the profound hostility of local Solomani cultures vis-à-vis artificially created humans, a remnant population survives on Gasadim (10,000) and Lukaau (40,000) in isolated villages.

Enclosure skill: the ability to tolerate enclosed spaces; also, tolerating other sophonts within a meter's distance. Note that the Jonkeereen, speaking to people within a meter from their person (preferably two). Coming closer than a meter is a challenge: violence may result. The race is struck with a mild case of claustrophobia: most will avoid entering enclosed areas like starships.

“In Jonkeer's one major permanent settlement, the architecture clearly illustrates the race's need for space. Buildings are built outwards rather than upwards and have many large windows. Individual dwellings cover much more surface area than the homes of almost any other species. Most buildings have only one floor. Having more would mean that the lower floors would be denied the open sky. Those with multiple levels have tall ceilings and as much of the outer wall as possible is windowed.”

MegaTraveller Journal 3, “Races of the Domain: Jonkeereen” page 93

Equipment: Not much, besides the standard datapad. But, when meeting Imperials, the Professor will strap on a slug pistol, for which he has an ‘open carry’ permit from the Thesh Matri, the sovereign Yashodhani nation where he currently resides.

Visual: Professor Arnets is tall & dark-skinned like the rest of his race, but unlike the majority of Jonkeereen he has a bit of meat on his bones. There are protective membranes for his eyes and ears, to shield them from sun and sand: his clothing are long, colourful gowns with broad vertical stripes and lengthy cloth headgear.

Opening Theme: Peter Buffet, “Lost Frontier” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOKXoeso5ow>

At Home

Within the Imperial Empty Quarter, there are two surviving populations of Jonkeereen: the population on Gasadim is quite conservative, but the larger population on Lukaau is simply reactionary. Both work well with each other, but they depend on Vilani and Bwap traders to maintain a trickle of news and visitors between each other.⁵⁶ There has been several petitions to previous Sector Dukes to relocate their people out of the hostile sector before the

⁵⁴ This is only distantly related to the major Jonkeereen language on the homeworld, back in Deneb Sector.

⁵⁵ See *Traveller's Digest* #19, pages 26-27, or *Traveller: The New Era's Regency Sourcebook* page 60-61 (which you can buy at <http://www.rpgnow.com/product/245/TNE-0314-Regency-Sourcebook-Keepers-of-the-Flame?term=Regency+Sourceboo&it=1>), or the *MegaTraveller Journal 3* article “Races of the Domain: Jonkeereen”, or buy Mongoose Traveller's *Deneb Sector* at <http://www.rpgnow.com/product/103866/Deneb-Sector...> or go to the webpage, <http://www.freelancetraveller.com/features/columns/t5i/jonkeereen.html> for a good summary

⁵⁶ Adventure nugget: roleplay a Jonkeereen group, experienced spacers, who have a mission: get a starship, and forge a *permanent, reliable* connection between the two regional branches of the Jonkeereen.

inevitable Last Bombardment strikes: time will tell if the Bwip now on the throne will listen and act before it's too late.⁵⁷

Arnets himself was born in the Lukaau group (in 993: B450857-9): something of a prodigy, he was groomed for a leadership position for his tribe. All of the Jonkeer tribes within the Imperial Empty Quarter are desert nomads, but Arnets received his education via electronic devices, data networks and the occasional tutor. He won a corporate scholarship and studied interstellar macroeconomics, eventually earning a doctorate.



One of the few undamaged Jonkeereen sacred/meditation sites left intact, the Ban Harastin still has a regular trickle of visitors, and even a few pilgrimage groups in the high holy days of the year. The graphic is titled

“Romulan Senat” © MagikUnicorn. See his work at

http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=2491599&np

Challenging the Sun

While working as a freelancer economic consultant for those fearless Imperial corporations daring to extend their reach into the Six Subsectors, he investigated the roots of the then-building Solomani Rim War, and decided that it has nothing to do with the moralistic veneer of Solomani mistreatment of nonhumans, and everything to do with Imperial Core megacorporate interests longing to expand into the closed, yet fabulously wealthy Solomani Rim markets. Feeling that broadcasting this message would help reduce hostilities between his people and the hard-edged Solomani population that strongly shapes the Six Subsectors, the Professor made his attitude and feelings very clear.

⁵⁷ I said it before, and I'll say it again: the Empty Quarter is no place for weak tribes. If the Jonkeereen had a decent high-pop - perhaps even mid-pop/high-tech – system in the region, they could hold out: but as it is...

This message resonated well with the Solomani population of the Imperial Empty Quarter⁵⁸ (). It resonated so well, that the Imperium arrested Professor Arnets on charges of subversion and treason. Due to the incompetence of the guards⁵⁹, though, Arnets was able to escape and was next spotted in Yashodhan, teaching at Ansara Temple, the premiere educational institution of the planet. The Imperium placed diplomatic pressure on the nation of Thesh Matri to turn him over, which was rejected. Instead of ordering an intervention, the Imperium instead had interstellar news agencies simply drop Professor Arnes and everything he said down the memory hole.⁶⁰

Alone

The Professor is happy with the hospitality of the Thesh Matri, and most of the Yashodhani are happy to support a gesture of independence against the exceedingly powerful Third Imperium. However, the Professor feels that he is fast becoming yesterday's news, and dislikes being associated with the Solomani Party (which would be more than happy to put the Jonkeereen minor humans 'in their proper place'⁶¹). More importantly, he is very homesick, and is acutely aware of his responsibilities to his people: Arnets is the only professor among the Jonkeereen in the Empty Quarter, and his deep knowledge and wisdom is greatly missed in tribal circles.⁶² Perhaps he should not have 'meddled in matters above his station', as the Imperial Aristocracy would put it, and stuck with caring for his people.

The Troubled Road Ahead

Perhaps the PCs are able to sneak this wanted man back to his homeworld. Or maybe the Solomani Party will make a concession for this alien Friend of the Race, and insure that his people are sheltered and favoured so long as Professor Arnets continues to stir the pot against the Imperium. Or a team from one of the local, mutually-hostile Imperial secret services – desperate to win the favour of the very powerful, very demanding and very lethal Princess Elizabeth – is on its way, to pull off a kidnap and rendition of the traitor back to Imperial Space.

While most Yashodhani are Hindu, they lack any great enmity to the Jonkeer, seeing them as an exotic priesthood, rather than a corruption of the human person, and thus a defilement of the caste system.⁶³ But there are various racially- and religiously-motivated individuals within the Six Subsectors who would like to make an example of the Professor given the opportunity, be they Darwinian atheists, pure animists, monotheistic believers, or polytheistic devotees.

Time will tell what actually happens.

Closing Theme: The Korgies, "Everybody's Got to Learn Sometimes",
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOqXy64-hTw>

⁵⁸ Damn them as Emptyheads as you please, but the Solomani locals always were hostile to any major corporation, especially those that originate outside of the Six Subsectors. This goes double for corporations coming from hated Antares... the sector, and most certainly the world herself. See <http://stellarreaches.nwgamers.org/2014/01/06/mountains-of-money/> for more.

⁵⁹ Or, perhaps, sympathetic guards... or maybe the right bribes, plus a new identity. It's hard to tell – a lot of the records regarding this incident were oddly corrupted...

⁶⁰ For an analogous situation, see <http://teapartyeconomist.com/2014/02/07/video-edward-snowden-interview-memory-holed-media/> Underground pro-Solomani media, primarily East Indian, still drop a line or a paragraph from the Professor on samizdat weblogs, circulated memory sticks, and mimeographed pamphlets.

⁶¹ Hierarchically-minded the Party may be, but it's friendlier (cough) than the local Solomani religious authorities, who consider the Jonkeereen to be walking abominations, fit only for destruction. The irony of a highly conservative race being despised by highly conservative religions may be worth reflecting on.

⁶² Of the 50,000 Jonkeereen within the Empty Quarter, perhaps three dozens have left their homeworlds...

⁶³ Actually, being descendants of the low-caste Dalits who did *not* convert to Christianity – **Stellar Reaches** #19, page 31 – they do not tolerate the concept of caste in their version of Hinduism.



Ansara Temple, built in the ancient Early Interstellar East Indian style of over two thousand years ago, in the early Rule of Man era. "Even the windows are real melted glass, and not some artificially grown composite!"

The graphic is titled "As Darkness Falls" © Neil Thacker. See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=2438408&np

Sadef Rissanem, Singer

UPP 489B7B, Age 18 (22), Mixed Vilani

Skills: Song - 2, Carousing - 1, Linguistics - 1, Music - 1, Equestrian - 1, Handgun - 0, Wheeled Vehicle - 0, Computer - 0, Farming - 0

Languages: Modern Vilani (native), Old High Vilani

Equipment: Like many Vilani, Miss Rissanem carries a TL 9 general-purpose expert system⁶⁴: something like a very practically-oriented encyclopaedia & adviser. Not much on abstractions, theories, or logic, but lots of solid, sensible recommendations for a vast range of circumstances and problems.

Visual: A good voice and – despite her mixed heritage – a great representative of classical Vilani standards of beauty: 162 cm, lightly muscled, slightly tinted skin, black hair, and those famous deep-set golden eyes. Her face is finely featured, with thin lips, small-yet-cute ears, and an elegant aquiline nose.

Opening Theme: Akiko Shikata & Wataru Hano, "Sands of Time",

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XcgrxsMwTxk>⁶⁵

Joyful Work

From a young age, Miss Rissanem showed talent in both composing the traditional melodies in the traditional manners, and actually singing in even the most complex and sophisticated of the prescribed Vilani forms. As she grew more accomplished in her art, she relied ever more on her supporting caste, working together to build a rather striking repertoire using melodies and hymns that haven't been performed since the Long Night. The artistic focus of her Gimushi subcaste – shaped by her Vilani kin in Antares and Lishun sectors – has been in providing

⁶⁴ Vilani culture discourages actually *understanding* things, as this leads to the twisted evils of experimentation and innovation. Even doctors and professionals are expected to rely heavily on their (admittedly very reliable) expert systems and low-level AIs, and limit (preferably eliminate) creative thinking.

⁶⁵ "A song about a little scared demon-girl who just wants to help people?" "A category mistake: the Japanese call people demons, when they are only sinners. People can repent: demons just generate better lies."

musical art to accompany the Emperor on his sacred mission to enforce True Conformity and a Profound Consensus across all of Charted Space.



The thousands of years of pre-Conquest Vilani history – ‘when the stars were young, and the worlds full of wonder’ – still remain as an inexhaustible treasure trove of stories and heroic tales. A vast range of discoveries and revelations, all linked to exactly one cultural viewpoint, stretching across time and space.

The graphic is titled “WAY_TOO_BIG” © Malo. See his work at

http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=2438408&np

<http://donmalo.deviantart.com/art/WAY-TOO-BIG-433421173>

The long, long, *long* delay of Imperial armies on their great march to Terra has finally been made good, and there are numerous Vilani musical guilds, castes, and schools who are cheering on the Imperial Starburst in the Solomani Rim War. But the focus of Miss Rissanem subcaste isn’t so much on exalting the Imperial forces, as much as underscoring the tragic history of the Solomani, befit of the wisdom that only the millennia-deep culture of the Vilani can provide.⁶⁶

In the current epic cycle being composed, the amazingly destructive wars of the Terran Revolutionary Era – from Napoleon to Pol Pot, roughly, with a special focus on the racially-driven Hitler – are described. As the Solomani leadership⁶⁷ focus on National Glory and the Master Race, the Vilani chorus warn that these Disgusting Revisionists and Revolutionaries will bring nothing but disaster and disgrace for their nations: the slaughter of French youth permanently giving European dominance to Germany; the German Wars leading only to the gutting of all Europe as a world power; and the Russian and Chinese Revolutions doing little more than setting back their nations by decades.⁶⁸

As of 993 Imperial, the finishing touches of the epic cycle are currently being made. With an eye on the American Indians in the sector, special mention is being made of not only the Solomani penchant for racial aggression, but of the fundamental distinction between the unstable and untrustworth Solomani culture an the solid and predictable Vilani culture: **broken treaties**.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Yes, the Vilani have mastered the Solomani moralizing cant of “the need to *kill* your people, in order to *save* your people”. I can see a tear glistening down the cheek of the last Shadow-Emperor all the way from here...

⁶⁷ These leaders bear a striking resemblance to the *current* leadership of the Solomani Party.

⁶⁸ The Vilani see socialism as naught but a demonstration of Solomani incompetence and short-sightedness: “You *need* corporations to build wealth, and the *anchor* of tradition to keep all unified. An ever-expanding conformist culture of prosperity and stability is the way to reduce and restrain the distortions of Difference until, finally, All Are One! One People, One Social Order, One Thought – FOREVER!”

⁶⁹ More on this in the Appendix.

Until All Are One

As an intense follower of the Vilani Way, Miss Rissanem could have been found across the Six Subsectors, using her sweet, airy voice to grace not only Vilani meetings and ceremonies, but Vilani-Bwap conferences, Vilani-Lazisari concerts, and various Imperial occasions as well. She was always *quite* interested in sharing the stage with performers of Solomani extraction as well, but they always turned her down.⁷⁰

For the last year, Miss Rissanem has been concentrating on her performance, happy to be a talented yet seamless part of the whole. But despite her perfectly Vilani appearance, she has enough Solomani in her to have a (broadly subsumed) desire to stand out like a star, to be the Special One that brings the entire sector together in perfect cultural unity, following traditions that have stood the test of time for thousands of years.

The singer is especially interested in the Vilani/Hindi syncretic culture of Irash, and will use even unorthodox means (*shock!*) to learn more about that system.

Interaction

If the PCs have a jump2 Far Trader, they may well be chartered to bring Miss Rissanem's 20-man group to various Imperial systems for performances. The ship's cargo space will have to be modified, to carry the additional passengers. Aside from pirates, the performances are likely to be peaceful: the primary goal is to bring the sector together under the Imperial Banner, not to shock or enrage. The secondary goal is to put Vilani culture in a flattering light, while indirectly but inescapably highlighting the flaws of the Solomani cultures – flaws that can be gently remedied, as Vilani culture is more deeply accepted.

The crucial factor for a PC charter is a history of reliability, trustworthiness, and Imperial patriotism over various tribal, ethnic, and sectarian allegiances. Vilani-culture crews are preferred, but Solomani crews that respect Vilani culture will be chosen before Bwap or Lazisari crews. Solomani crews that devoutly follow a Solomani religion will never be selected, for any reason: "We prefer to avoid Unforeseeable Accidents whenever possible."

Also, "*This* is the Empty Quarter. Who you are, where you come from, and what you believe in, *matters*."

Closing Theme: KOKIA, "EXEC_REBIRTHIA=PROTOCOL/." <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvoncs3EUeg>



⁷⁰ That might have something to do with "all performances must meet interstellar traditions and standards of propriety"... standards largely preset by the *Vilani*, as always. "Determine the legitimate boundaries of discussion, and you win the discussion. Always and forever." Did I neglect to mention the Vilani love of Timeless, Eternal, Unchanging Stability?

*"Crossing the myriad worlds of Charted Space – graceful, beautiful, dead – it changes a man."
"And a culture." The graphic is titled "Triton" © Justinas Vitkus.*

See his work at <http://justv23.deviantart.com/art/Triton-296012020>

Aramai Saharian, Nun of the Green

UPP 7535A6, Age 27, Solomani

Skills: Farming - 2, Biology - 2, Dance - 1, Meteorology - 1, Legal - 1, Theology (Bright) - 1, Grav Vehicle - 0, Computer - 0, Music - 0, Song - 0, Handgun - 0, History - 0

Languages: Thimai (Native)

Visual: Green-Robed Saharian dresses in thick cloth robes of green (with some brown and purple trim) and highlights and standard leather sandals (fur-trimmed boots in winter). She is generally silent unless directly spoken to, but is almost always typing into her TL 8/9 Scrivener porta-puter: sometimes tentatively and sporadically, sometimes furiously. Her dark hair is kept under a green French hood, her facial features and phenotype is broadly East Indian Solomani, with a few hints of different minor races here and there. She bears no weapons, and – besides trimming shears, a trowel, or a spade – avoids them whenever possible.

(And no, her order does *not* keep a well-worn woodchipper in the back... that's what the hand axes are for!)

Opening Theme: Dream Academy, "Life in a Northern Town" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O17MA58P-QY>

In contrast to the broadly unified Islamic systems are the worlds of Flange, Justince, Reskhuda, Lakuusa, Dakamii, and Diagemi. They are unique as they retain a hold on various unique beliefs, religions, and philosophies that flourished during the Bright Age (450- 629 Imperial). Over the centuries, they have aggregated into various distinct religions that share a family resemblance: a strong duality (Yin/Yang style) with each realm ruled by an abstract and impersonal god/force; an emotionally driven ethic, rather than a strict legal code; active obedience in youth, and passive, contemplative worship in old age; a strong communal ethic; and art as a form of worship.

Stellar Reaches #19, page 20

Adoption

Little Aramai always loved the woods, the growing plants blooming and shrinking every day, and the buzzing bees with their blur of shining eyes on their cute little stalks. She always felt a close connection to the spirits of her world as well, welcoming both humans and Vargr on her rich and fertile lands. Her sensible, pragmatic mama always thought that she should focus on what you can see and touch, like the farming fields of her village, and especially the family plot; but papa encouraged her in growing her imagination, thinking about the nature of the world, and writing everything down in paper notebooks. (When she got her first electronic Scrivener as a birthday gift from papa, mama hit the roof about the expense, but Aramai was practically walking on air for weeks.)



Green-Robed Saharian has always loved tales of her Green religious order, and remains interested in an enduring mystery: the exact location of the “Earthlike ring world” where the Founder of the Green died.

There can’t be that many living terrestrial ringed worlds with two moons...

The graphic is titled “Evening at Saturn Ver. 2” © Justinas Vitkus. See his work at

<http://justv23.deviantart.com/art/Evening-at-Saturn-Ver-2-326472303>

When she reached 10, mama wanted to set up an arrange marriage for a good dowry, but there were no wealthy suitors for a girl who was only good for farming and making castles in the air. Papa managed to get in touch with a group of passing Vargr nuns, and persuaded them to take her on as an apprentice. At first, Little Aramai was terrified that they were going to kill her and eat her the minute they got out of sight of her village... and at an earlier time, they might have. But not here, and not now: for the Suedzuk of Dharo, humans have not been on the menu for *centuries* (excepting punishment for major crimes), and the child was allowed to peacefully cringe in a corner, sometimes peeking from the arms that covered her face.

When a human nun of the Green came to pick her up, Little Aramai was overjoyed. The travel to the starport, meeting all the other young initiates of her own age (and younger!), getting into the low berths, and just waking up on a different world was an amazing adventure. The pale, grey-clad Hegemonio soldiers at the starport were very scary and shouted a lot, but were not as terrifying as the Vargr nuns as they bit into a squirming snack, then carefully licked up the blood. Still, Little Aramai was relieved when her group was allowed to leave the starport in peace.

Better ruled by dogs than by men – typical *visitors* to Beta Quadrant, comparing the Vilani-shaped Rukadukaz Republic and the tyrannical Hegemony of Lorean.

Better ruled by men than by wolves – typical *residents* of Beta Quadrant, comparing the brutal-yet-predictable Hegemony of Lorean and the inhumanly vicious, psychotically chaotic Blood Vargr packs of yore.

Growth

On Diagemi, Little Aramai grew into the Green-Robed Saharian, taking her vows at 18. Diagemi is far different from her native world of Dharo: wealthier, with a stronger gravity and far fewer people. The few Vargr nuns of her convent looked softer, and their spirit was far softer than the Vargr of her homeworld. More importantly, almost all of the nuns of Oled Convent were from Dharo, and spoke her language: three even came from her village!

Green-Robed Saharian grew quite knowledgeable in her studies, and loved not only biology, but farming as well. She learned of her order’s work with other old believers to bring forth a new faith, the Bright faith their fathers shared before the Hegemony, and why her order followed the Priestly school rather than the Prophetic school.

The young student has a good-enough grasp of Bright theology⁷¹, but she is more famous for the purity of her faith. She is always contemplating the Planes of the Real, considering how N-space and J-space⁷² interact with each other. Mystically-minded, she believes that all reality is intimately interconnected, and notes her speculations even as she brings dying plants to life, and living plants to blossom.

Discovery

Some of her writings have been published in a little booklet by her convent, with a well-maintained dot-matrix printer (which distinctly resembles the Epson MX-80 of millennia ago). It was initially distributed in small religious bookstores on Diagemi a few years ago, and proved to be a regular bestseller: just last year, 10,000 copies – all in Thimai, and none in local versions of Anglic, Arabic, Arzula, or Hindi – were printed up for her homeworld. No electronic copies were made, as spacers were felt to be uninterested in such thinking. So Oled Convent was very surprised when a steady flow of pilgrims began to drop by, for the sole purpose of talking to Green-Robed Saharian!

⁷¹ A theology that’s still a work in progress, by the way.

⁷² That’s Normal Space and Jump Space



One of the numerous, partly-underground homes the Green-Robed have built for themselves.
The graphic is titled "Habitation_3" © Ben Andrews. See his work at <http://ben-andrews.deviantart.com/art/habitation-3-352796601>

Diagemi is a green tourist world, so it wasn't completely impossible, but it was definitely unexpected. Even more surprises were in store, as some spacers – and in the Empty Quarter, *all* spacers are wealthy, compared to the dirt-siders – began to sell everything to join the Nuns of the Green.

Green-Robed Saharian now has a lot on her plate: how to handle the great flows of money coming in, without corrupting the convent; how to expand on her teachings to better guide her growing number of followers; how to deal with narrow-eyed Last Man observers, with their close connections with the interstellar government; and how to arrange her first tour across the stars, when she can't even speak the language of most of her enchanted readers. And in the world of church politics, the Priestly sects are already holding marches with her image on their flags, while the Prophetic groups are increasing their attacks on her name and character: being used as a proxy for hostile factions distresses her greatly.

So the Green-Robe meditates, and gardens, and types. She feels the wheels begin to turn around her, and reaches out to the Forces that govern her thought. Whether they will empower her, tear her apart, or prove to be just deceiving shadows themselves remains to be seen.

“Carnivorous Driver. Do NOT Cut Me Off.”
– Suedzuk Bumper Sticker, Zuethun, 993 Imperial

Closing Theme: Peter Gabriel, “Curtains”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpXCpmk5xdo>

Ekatan Korpai, Megacorporate Officer

UPP 5ACBB, Age 25, Mixed Vilani

Skills: Liaison - 4, Broker - 3, Linguistics - 2, Admin - 1, Trader - 1, Brawling - 1, Grav Vehicle - 0, Wheeled Vehicle - 0, Computer - 0, Sub-Machinegun - 0, Vacc Suit - 0

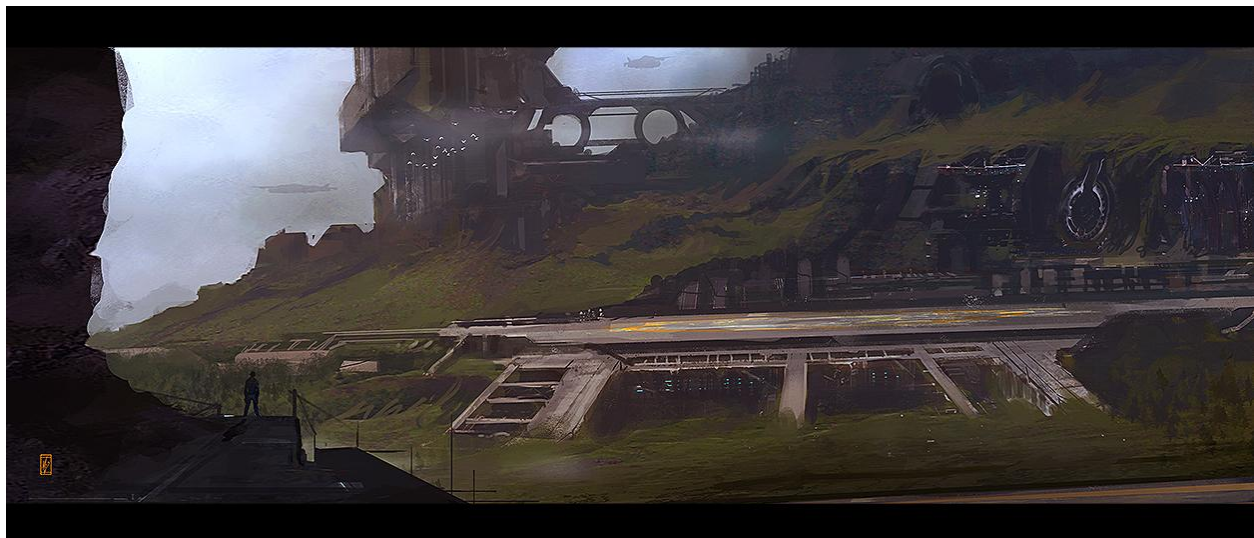
Languages: Anglic (Transform, Native), Modern Vilani, Hebrin Arabic

Visual: A well-tailored, sharp-looking Company Man, from his regulation hair cut to the shine of his dress shoes. Mr. Korpai is one of the few denizens of the Imperial Empty Quarter who wouldn't look out of place in corporate-dominated Delphi Sector, or in the heart of the financial district in any given Imperial Core world.

Opening Theme: Vangelis, “Abraham's Theme” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clw512Afw9U>

A Man on the Make

Born on Nulinad in an upper-class family (with rumours of High Nobility blood), Mr. Korpai was always meant for greatness. Even before formally graduating from the top university of the planet, he had already been hired by Tukera Lines as a junior assistant, working out detailed shipping schedules with Imperial and planetary government representatives from across the Six Subsectors. Transferred to Sales, Mr. Korpai – already with a perfectly groomed wife and a fine home in a very good neighbourhood – went where the other megacorps couldn't in this unforgiving sector⁷³, leveraging relationships to get business done, with the right kind of fees (read: big fat ones) for Tukera assistance.



A Tukera Lines maintenance facility, designed to handle the yearly overhaul freighters and liners need to keep them running in good condition. The graphic is titled “LANDSCAPE_10052013” © malo. See his work at <http://donmalo.deviantart.com/art/LANDSCAPE-10052013-370775145>

⁷³ See that sub-machinegun skill? That actually proved useful a time or two... it's *that* kind of sector. “Did your MBA cover light assault weapons and hand-to-hand combat?”

Now, Mr. Korpall has a very difficult assignment in his docket, all related to the Grand Tour project.⁷⁴ Several hard-fought negotiations and brokered deals were needed before the greatest logjams were broken, and real assets started to be released for deployment in Capital and Vland. But the jewel of the Grand Tour – a 10,000-ton, high-tech showcase starship running a permanent circuit to connect Nulinad with the most wealthiest worlds in the nearby Imperial sectors – is currently shelved, as all the best starports are tied up in contracts with the Imperial Navy for warships. Lots and lots of warships.

Mr. Korpall's mandate is to alter this situation, so Tukera Lines can get the cutting-edge starship she wants, to build up the trade she wants, to make the long-term returns the shareholders has come to expect. Mr. Korpall's plans have places for both reliable, top-tier assets and expendable cut-outs: let's see which group the PCs end up in....

Closing Theme: Hans Zimmer, "One Simple Idea", <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6Y8Ln1zrvk>

Ab "The Newt" Dendeo, Peacemaker

UPP A976B8, Age 31, Mixed Vilani

Skills: Computer - 2, Liaison - 2, Vacc Suit - 2, Robot Ops - 1, Mechanical - 1, Robotics - 1, Gravitics - 1, Handgun - 0, Navigation - 1, Ships Boat - 1, Linguistics - 1, Electronics - 1, Rifleman - 1, Admin - 1, Gambling - 1, Grav Vehicle - 0,

Languages: Anglic (Iper'mar, Native), Tankii

Visual: Following the unofficial uniform of the tech-oriented Iper'mar, Dendo wears a long set of dark grey overalls, something like a low-tech bodystocking, under a short baggy set of bright orange overalls (t-shirt/longs shorts). The bulky translator he used to talk to non-Imper'mar occupies one of his many pockets.

Language Notes: Iper'mar Anglic is not too distant from Transform Anglic – a bit closer than today's English and Dutch, say – but, while the grammar is fairly comparable, the vocabulary is usually a bad match. Not good, when you are dealing with highly technical issues.

Tankii is a form of Modern Vilani that wandered off the reservation. Only spoken in certain regions of Miigaki, off-world Vilani cultural guardians have been pressing local Vilani leaders to get their language back to proper specifications. After endless meetings and conferences, the Vilani Miigaki agreed to do so – if their off-world cousins would pay for it. This was easily agreed to (one thing Vilani cultural protection societies don't lack is money) but the problems of the Solomani Rim War have put the kibosh to these plans, for a decade at least.

Opening Theme: Kenji Kawai, Eiyuu Tatsu ("Hero, Stand Up")

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TODtGnCRYeY>

Building the Peace

Dendeo was always just another grease monkey, handling robot maintenance for the Imperial starport of Miigaki, when the Solomani nations – being squeezed off their continent by rapidly expanding glacier sheets – decided to move into uninhabited Vilani lands closer to the equator. Or *tried* to: the Vilani, seeing the violation of various treaties and hearing their protests ignored, began shooting refugees. This led rather directly to the Sixth Miigaki World War (983-984 Imperial) with the actual wipe-out of the Solomani only prevented by two brigades of the Duke of Hebrin's household troops, and their accompanying air support.

⁷⁴ See *Stellar Reaches* #12, page 22-23. To summarize: several of the better worlds of the Imperial Empty Quarter are attempting to drum up business between themselves and the rest of the Imperium, finally breaking the stagnant economy and allowing this backward sector to rise to an equal footing with Antares the majority of Imperial worlds.

Both the Duke of Hebrin and the majority of his men-at-arms were Solomani Arab Muslims, which immediately led to accusations of bias by the Vilani Ritualist population. (*The aides of*) Sector Duchess Insaë, (*long-experienced in ruling this difficult part of the Imperium*) another parachuted-in Noble from the Imperial Core, managed to take the situation out of Duke Hebrin's hands and into (*their*) her own before yet another agonizing spasm of ethno-religious warfare wracked the Six Subsectors.



More visitors to the Imperial Starport. The graphic is titled “Dropships Away” © Neil Thacker. See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=2437041&np

While all this turmoil was going on, Dendeo – then a young man of 21 – used his position in the starport to build a makeshift, informal Imperial Contact Group, getting in as many Solomani refugees as possible. Roping in several free traders, he manages to save the lives of thousands of Solomani, using bribes and threats of testifying before the inevitable Imperial War Crimes tribunals to get hostile Vilani officers to drive their prisoners into starship holds instead of mass graves.

After the war was over, Dendeo's heroism and passionate testimony made him a local star in interstellar society for a few years. He knelt before the Sector Duchess as he received a civilian medal for the unity of gallantry & compassion – The Imperial Heart – from her hand, and was one of the better-regarded Imperial negotiators, handling the Duke of Hebrin's purchase of the still-green Peaindii Island from the Vilani province-nation of Fragasfishgar, for settlement by the surviving Solomani (but remaining under Fragasfishgar sovereignty, and so paying taxes to the Fragasfishgar).

Victory and Defeat

This year – 993 Imperial – marks the 10th anniversary of the Sixth Miigaki World War. The 100,000 Solomani remaining on the world celebrate their survival and their cultural independence, and try to forget the ill-considered war and how much it costs them. The relentless expansion of the ice sheets has slowed and slowed: perhaps the glaciers will be pushed back and the Lost Lands will be regained, centuries from now.

The Vilani Nation – a.k.a. all the province-nations of the very theoretical Vilani National World-Government that rules the world – openly celebrate their victory over the lawless and tradition-smashing Solomani, and the genocidal Vilani leadership are spoken of warmly on the black & white televisions, “nobly sacrificing their lives before a Solomani-dominated Imperial Court, for the eternal security of Our People.” This is quickly followed by cries for a crushing Imperial victory over the disgustingly innovative Solomani rebels of the distant Rim worlds.

Everywhere there is talk of the Victory of the Vilani Nation: but Dendeo can sense that this 10th anniversary of the war will be the last time the Nation will even pretend to be a single, unified world government. The Scouts classified Miigaki as balkanized over the howls of the world's leadership: but this classification has proven to be more and more obviously true, as all of the governors of the ‘provinces’ go their separate ways: keeping their tax monies, making their own laws, and building up their own armed forces. The Vilani here have deviated more and more from Recognized Vilani Norms, even as their dominance over the local Solomani grew more absolute. The Solomani are broken now... and so is the old unified Vilani culture.

The Referee may wonder, “Starships definitely outweigh soldiers armed to Korean War technological levels – why not put that muscle to use?”

That’s a great question. The answer, as any true interstellar tribesman of the Quarter could tell you, is that TL 6 Vilani soldier doesn’t stand alone: on certain issues, he has billions of Vilani – and even more billions of Vilani-culture sophonts – standing behind him. It’s certainly possible that said starship could just use the shipboard lasers to (literally) smoke the Vilani troops, and pick up the Solomani refugees. And it’s a certainty that either the refugees, or the crewmen themselves will talk. Word will reach certain ears, who will crosscheck the data (public records, but sometimes other ones too, legally or not) to verify said starship was at said starport at said time.

And Vilani vengeance will then be taken.

Or, depending on the wronged party, Islamic vengeance... Hindi vengeance... American vengeance... even Bwap vengeance.

Any local resident can reel off the local proverbs:

“Tribes that will not fight back, and will not flee, will be destroyed”,

“You only get to keep what others can’t take”,

“Promises, prayers and Imperial laws are one thing:

money, guns and trained men are something else”,

“Reputation, respect, and the right to be let alone must be *earned*”,

“Blood calls out for blood”,

“Tradition is forged from fire and steel”,

“Always look out for your own, first and foremost”,

“Everything for those of La Raza; Nothing for those not of La Raza”,

“The Faithful must fight for what’s theirs”,

and on... and on... and on...

The traders and civilian captains of the Six Subsectors *know* this, and more: Vilani traders must work with Arab suppliers, East Indian manufacturers rely on Bwap accountants, and Lazisari space stations are protected by American Indian mercenaries...

On the other hand: as cultures develop economically, the expense of war just keeps on climbing faster and faster, overwhelming any possible profit. This is true even for backwards regions of space: not even the most stiff-necked men of the Empty Quarter can pay those kind of escalating prices forever, as the Hebrin Rebellion demonstrated.⁷⁵

Keeping the Peace by Uniting the Pieces

Fortunately, the Province of Fragasfishgar – with a population of 40,000 Vilani citizens and 100,000 Solomani residents – is unlikely to rock the boat, and try to pound the Solomani into conformity. And the Solomani are unlikely to rebel, less they provoke the Vilani to another war, and face complete annihilation – at a time when the Imperial Navy is far, far away, and the Duke of Hebrin, their Noble Patron and Protector, has to spend his time and manpower fighting forces on the pirates to keep the trade lanes open.

Dendeo spends his weekdays maintaining the Imperial starport as a respected maintenance man, and his weekends communicating with both Solomani and Vilani leaders within Fragasfishgar, on TL 9 laptops on loan from Duke Saqr, the new Duke of Hebrin. Dendeo has grown adapt at using the details of the treaties that grant the Solomani Peaindii Island as leverage to force the two sides into agreement, earning him the nickname of The Newt.

⁷⁵ Too bad the endlessly sophisticated, urbane, and cosmopolitan Imperial Government didn’t get the message, as the later War of the Rebellion proved.



A few Miigaki Solomani survey their homeland, now lost under the ice.
The graphic is titled "Expedition Sketch" © Zee Durrani. See his work at
<http://zeedurrani.deviantart.com/art/Expedition-Sketch-423659207>

He has taken the time to learn Tankii, the common language that is replacing Modern Vilani on Fragasfishgar, and is hoping to persuade the local Vilani to renounce their ties to an increasingly foreign culture, and become a new people with the Solomani residents; a new nation, with a new language, and a new culture. "Why should we kill and hate each other because of what powerful leaders hundreds of parsecs away did thousands of years ago? Let's make something bright, something new – together!"

Closing Theme: Gary Chang, "Cityscape"
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SHRX4-QMeo>

Daerk Ushda

UPP 9BAAB1, Age 29, Mixed Vilani

Skills: Rifleman - 3, Computer - 2, Tactics - 2, Mechanical - 1, Swimming - 1, Admin - 1, Heavy Weapons - 1, Brawling - 1, Intrusion - 1, Survival - 1, Foil - 1, Disguise - 1, Grav Vehicle - 1, Wheeled Vehicle - 0

Psionic: Psi - 5, Awareness - 1, Clairvoyance - 1, Special Psi - 1

Languages: Anglic (Dlani, Native)

Visual: A loud, vulgar, and imposing man from the other side of the Imperium, Mr. Ushda wears the uniform of a Marquisate Household trooper. With a prematurely balding shock of red hair, hard beady eyes, and blunt facial features, his dull and brutal air tends to lead his opponents to underestimate him.

Special Psi: Left for the Referee to determine.

Equipment: He always carries a sidearm, as well as several notepads and pencils, but dislikes most electronic devices. Communication is handled by shouting simple Anglic words very loudly: spoken Dlani Anglic can be basically understood by the Transform Anglic speakers that dominate the Empty Quarter, but a lot of the subtleties are lost. *Written* Anglic is far more consistent across the Imperium and beyond: thus, the low-tech pencils & paper.

Opening Theme: Hans Zimmer, "Shiver My Timbers" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RisL9l8HzmM>



Even excluding the massive Solomani Rim War, harsh battles on alien worlds are common enough within the Third Imperium. The graphic is titled "Cyclops" © Goran Delic. See his work at <http://delic.deviantart.com/art/Cyclops-422603388>

Walking on the Daerk Side of Life Work

This soldier was at one time attached to a visiting company from distant Ilelish, in the Akkula Worlds. However, he was left behind when his unit shipped out, and bureaucratic bungling led the Army to deny that he had even been enlisted. Despite Ushda's vigorous stream of curses, the Nulinadian clerks in charge at the sector capital simply refused to even administer a simple DNA test that would have cleared up the situation in five minutes.

Now without a home, or even a set of proper Imperial identity papers, Ushda fell in with various teams of adventurers, getting involved in all sorts of extremely illegal and immoral activities, from the slave trade to psionics to piracy. The last run-in with Imperial forces has left him with an Imperial bounty of 500,000 credits on his head dead, 300,000 credits if captured alive.

During a brief stay on Nulinad using a murdered man's identity as cover, Ushda got in touch with a few allies who paid up on some favours, and even an officer from his old company. Currently, he's laying low on Sashar, until he obtains enough cash for a new cover identity, something that will survive inspection by the Imperial military. This kind of thing is NOT cheap in the low-tech Imperial Empty Quarter.

Long used as muscle on other teams, Ushda is putting together a team of his own. His people may work ugly when they're not monstrous, but they are definitely competent. What he's up to is unknown, but those who know him best think he's going to need a starship soon enough – regardless of what the current owners think about it. But first, some quick jobs for the new ID....

Closing Theme: Hans Zimmer & James Newton Howard, "Agent of Chaos"
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZTsgfjOHnE>

Squire Ner'Satden Arc

UPP AB8BFA, Age 26 (28), Mixed Vilani

Skills: Legal - 3, Admin - 2, Leadership - 2, Linguistics - 2, History (Revolutionary Political) - 1, Engineering - 1, Persuasion - 1, Perception - 1, Bribery - 1, Combat Rifleman – 1, Gambling - 0, Grav Vehicle - 0, Computer - 0

Languages: Anglic (Dlani, Native), Anglic (Transform), Hindi (Nulinadian)

Visual: A strong, solidly built man, of great intelligence and handsome features. Squire Ner'Satden is always careful to position himself as a natural leader of men – and, admittedly, he is usually successful at this.

Equipment: The Squire always carries a sidearm, but dislikes most electronic devices... except for his TL B datapad, stuffed with interlinked Imperial Case Laws and Court Rulings. Possession and mastery of this device grants the lawyer, licensed for all Imperial Courts (both civil and military) , a +1 modifier in cases involving Imperial Law.

Opening Theme: The Wojahn Brothers, "Oh No, You Didn't" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dEbE3fGfF-o>

Getting By

Like Daerk Ushda, Squire Ner'Satden was originally from the Akkula Worlds: indeed, they were part of the same company from Ilelish Sector, over half a year away by Jump-4 starship. Unlike Ushda, the Squire arranged for his disappearance from the company, to avoid certain gambling debts he raked up with the company officers. Some complicated scheming had his Imperial enlistment transferred to a pro-Imperial mercenary group (with time served counting towards retirement and a proper military pension). Unfortunately, his unit was shattered during an Abadani insurgent offensive; fortunately, he was able to get himself captured rather than killed, a difficult stunt to pull during an all-in enemy assault.

Eventually, he grew attracted to Abadani socialist/populist doctrines – it seemed to be a fantastic way to put incredible amounts of power into the hands of the select few. Thanks to the revolutionary drive of Abadani, even more control can be seized by fast-moving ideologues than could be gained by appeals to Tradition or Order. The Squire found this profoundly appealing... but kept his thoughts to himself, as he struggled to grasp how to harness all that potential power in the hands of the right sort. Not the ordinary noble, but a true messianic figure, a Man of the People and a Man of the Houses.

After satisfactorily clearing up various bureaucratic & legal messes, the Squire is now using his legal license to do standard Imperial contract work for corporations and minor nobles. This kind of legal work is restricted to sophonts who have the right Legal License from the Sylean Bar, like he does. Being one of the three lawyers in the sector licensed to draw up the proper contracts needed by the local Nobility, his money problems have been resolved quite firmly.

But – now with the proper Army discharge papers – Squire Ner'Satden really wants to return home to his liege, Rowor of House Ilethian, Duke of Dlan. The Squire has already started on an outline to restructure the Imperium, to allow greater benefits to flow to poor citizens – even to impoverished citizens in backward sectors like the Empty Quarter.



Watching the TL 15/16 radiators provide the catalysts needed to inhibit the native microorganisms of his native world has always fascinated Squire Ner'Satden. Imported all the way from the Hive Federation, they were worth their weight in gold... The graphic is titled "Colony 2257" © Zee Durrani. See his work at <http://zeedurrani.deviantart.com/art/Colony-2257-407828655>

Future Plans

Additional research in revolutionary movements continues to occupy Squire Ner'Satden's spare time. He was absolutely delighted to discover how House Castro and House Kim and the Red Princes of China built their fortunes and untrammelled power while proclaiming their love of the Working Man – and how the smartest intellectuals of their nations backed them to the hilt. Discovering this delightful elixir of True Power – untrammelled by the flimsy distractions of Tradition or the fantastic delusions of Religion – Squire Ner'Satden is now focused in how to set up the optics, to insure broad Vilani acceptance of the Restoration.⁷⁶ Fortunately, the Revolution (which, depending on the market, may better be sold as a Restoration) will require Rigorously Enforced, Comprehensive Conformity; something that will be sure to bring a smile to the face of any Vilani face, dreaming of a Changeless Consensus...

"With enough raw data... enough centralized control, surveillance and direction... enough technology... the right mathematical formulas... and the best, wisest minds of the Imperium... Universal Prosperity will surely spread from the few to the many!"

From the Commanding Heights, the Expertise of a Commoner's Meritocracy, a Democracy of the People, infused with the best elements of the Nobility and the Military, will give birth to a Unified Mind, bringing All Sophonts under the Banner of the Sun!

NO to wasteful, chaotic feudalism!

NO to feuding classes, religions, races, planetary governments dividing the people of the Imperium, weakening us, snatching our glorious destiny from our failing hands!

YES to a single, unified Imperial State, directed by the Mightiest of Minds, bringing ALL Sophonts under ONE single law, ONE single culture, ONE single destiny!

All who stand against the People will be ground to powder – but all who stand with the People shall Rise with the Banner of the Sun!"

Yes. *This* is the kind of glorious abstraction that billions of men would die for in the future, after the Solomani race-driven fantasies have been set to rights. A very nice mix of envy, power fantasy, novelty, and sanctimonious, egalitarian cant, with just the right touch of messianic fervour to add flavour to the blather. My liege should be informed of the potential for this flavour of agitprop...

– from The Secret Journals of Sir Ner'Satden, Greatest of the Ilethian Counsellors. Dlan: 1098
(Household Publication: Archducal Permission to Access Required)

⁷⁶ Of course, this political shift will have to be presented as a Restoration to the Vilani, and a Revolution to the Solomani. Fortunately, a man with Squire Ner'Satden's silver tongue just might be able to pull it off.



Visiting humid Perpethwe was always a pleasure for the Squire: the Bwap are always willing – and able – to pay top dollar to be completely compliant with Imperial requirements. The graphic is titled “Fog” © Goran Delic. See his work at <http://delic.deviantart.com/art/Fog-263739484>

The Squire is confident of his ability to gain Ready Cash from Noble Purses, and is in the market for a cheap, reliable Free Trader to bring him home.⁷⁷ But there are three requirements that must be met.

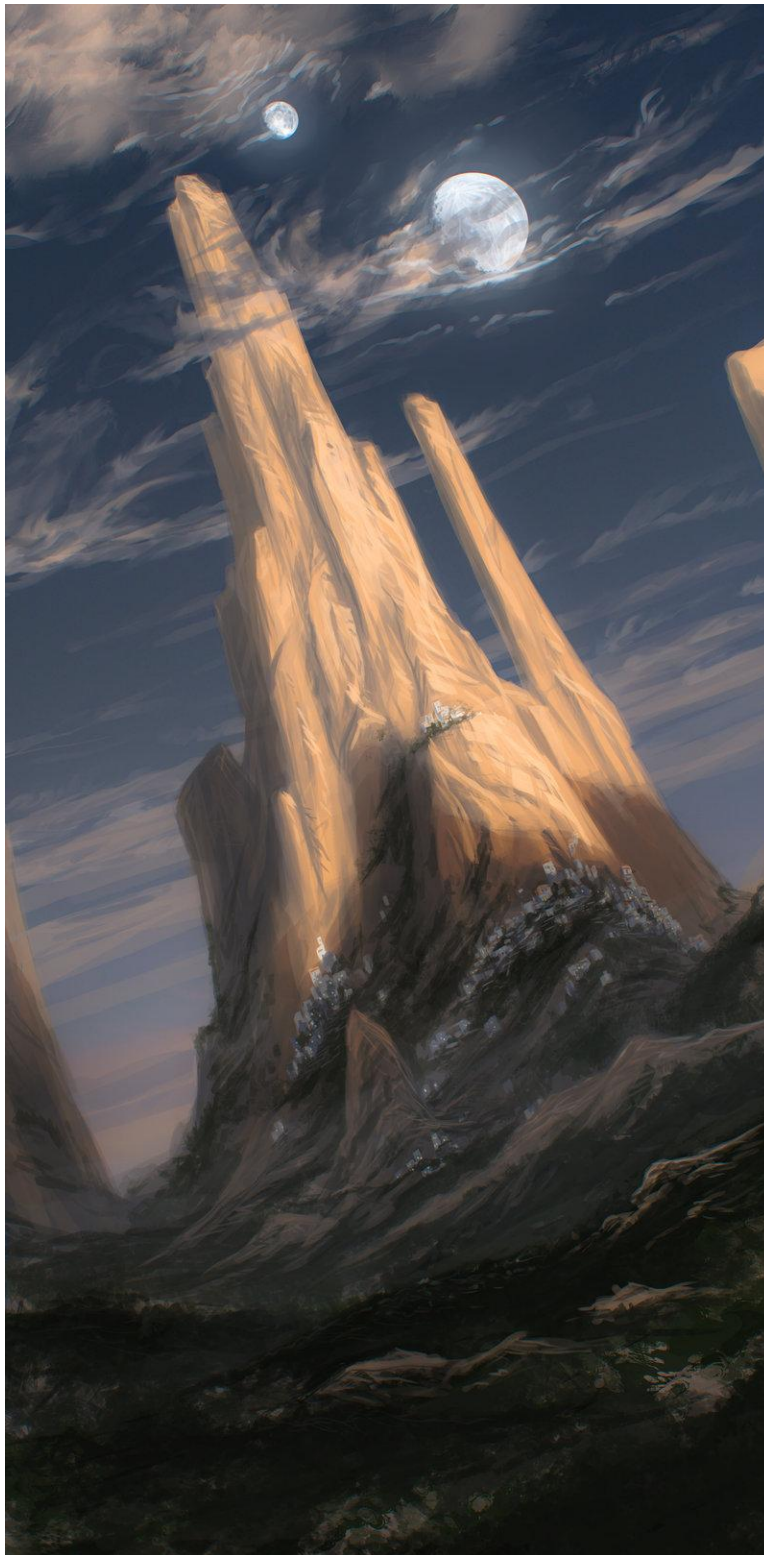
First: there is an old war buddy from his company, also from Dlan who needs to be found and brought to him, by the name of Ushda. He will be very handy in the future, and the Squire is willing to pay handsomely for a PC team to retrieve Ushda.⁷⁸

Secondly, the Squire really needs a reliable crew and ship, hopefully someone *not* born & raised in the Empty Quarter Sector, to bring him back home to Dlan, Ilelish. Squire Ner’Satden will be wary of hiring locals, but will consider it if they have a flawless piloting record. The Squire is not easily rattled, but what really spooks him is the piloting abilities of the locals. He’s been on the world for seven months, and twice he witnessed an orbiting Free Trader collision with his own eyes, with a tiny sun in the skies briefly burning in the night.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ As an aid to the Referee: imagine Nguyễn Sinh Côn waiting tables for powerful Europeans in 1918, and pleading on the plight of his people under colonial rule... before switching to Active Measures, and changing his name to Ho Chi Minh. As an analogy, this vaguely resembles Squire Ner’Satden’s position (no pleading, better pay, better social status, and lots more writing... actually, more like Karl Marx himself) but his ideas didn’t reshape the galaxy until that fateful day, on 132-1116 Imperial (Saturday, May 12, AD 5635) when Archduke Dulinor assassinated Emperor Strephon.

⁷⁸ Referee: This should be doable, if a sufficient amount of money is flashed before Ushda’s nose. The promise of a free – no, *money-earning* – ride home can’t hurt, either!

⁷⁹ The reader is assumed to have seen his share of disastrous Russian car accidents on YouTube. On the other hand, the cheerful incompetence of the pilots have led to very well-experienced clean-up crews who are fantastic at clearing orbits in less than a day, down to the stray screws travelling at 20,000 kph...



Most Imperial visitors to the Six Subsectors tend to quickly tire of the strife, the provincialism, and the petty quarrels of the inhabitants. But Squire Ner'Satden is more likely to laugh at the trials of life in the Quarter, instead of screaming in frustrated impotence like most outsiders do. And sometimes, you can uncover places of real beauty, like the Highlands of Chiring We. The graphic is titled "Evening" © Justinas Vitkus.

See his work at <http://justv23.deviantart.com/art/Evening-317571816>

Third, the Squire has grown comfortable with the use of anagathics for health, well-being, and life-extension.⁸⁰ He wants the PCs to either secure obtain a large supply ‘somehow’, to carry with him on his long journey; or to be able to quickly hook up with discreet suppliers on the major worlds they will visit on their journey. In the meantime, he continues to hone his writing style to build on his greatest rhetorical strengths: 1) change the subject, 2) personal attacks.

Closing Theme: Eugène Pottier, “L'Internationale” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aZ731aR_SBY

Kuezangar

UPP D9B8894, Age 24, Urzaeng Vargr

Skills: Mechanical - 2, Linguistics - 2, Infighting - 2, Grav Vehicle - 1, Vacc Suit - 1, Combat Rifleman - 1, Wheeled Vehicle - 1, Demolitions - 1, Electronics - 1, Tactics - 1, Computer - 0, Swimming - 0

Languages: Kfukakh (A Urzaeng language, Native); Ikonaz (Vargr), Anglic (Transform).

Trying to learn Pre-Stellar English for fun, and failing miserably: only a few words and phrases have been mastered.

Visual: Massively built, with a thick coal-black coat that hints at his ancestors’ origins in a polar mountain range: “somewhere in Gzaekfueg. Sector, a good 150 parsecs from here.” His hands that have a more powerful grip than any Vargr the PCs have ever met, and can crumple thick metal cans. As of 001-993 Imperial, Kuezangar likes to wear well-tailored silk & fur robes, hemmed in yellowing animal fangs.

Equipment: When local law levels permit, Kuezangar always carries a light slug carbine. Kuezangar also has a disorganized, eclectic collection of build-for-Vargr tools, computers, clothing, toys, books, and other random items

Opening Theme: Neal Hefti, “The Odd Couple” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Syt8qQUbzVc>

Kuezangar is a frenemy of one of the PCs. (Referee’s choice.) His muscle, decent military skill set, and mechanical aptitude can come in very handy in a pinch, and has a rather good contact network among ruff’n’ready Vargr mercenaries and ex-pirates (“Don’t stress the ‘ex’ too hard...”). For a pup of the might-is-right, kill-the-weak Urzaeng culture, Kuezangar is remarkably well-mannered, and doesn’t go out of the way to bully weak and scrawny sophonts around as much as he used to... except for the PC he’s tied to.⁸¹ “Kind of like your best friend, whose sole purpose is to troll you and revel in your misfortunes.”

The Vargr is actually pretty good at irritating the PC, and *loves* it when the PC tries to physically hit him. “It’s so *cute* when you try to fight!” There’s a distinct possibility that the PC will actually try to kill him: the Referee will have to determine what result is best for the story he’s telling.⁸² Kuezangar is supremely confident in his fighting

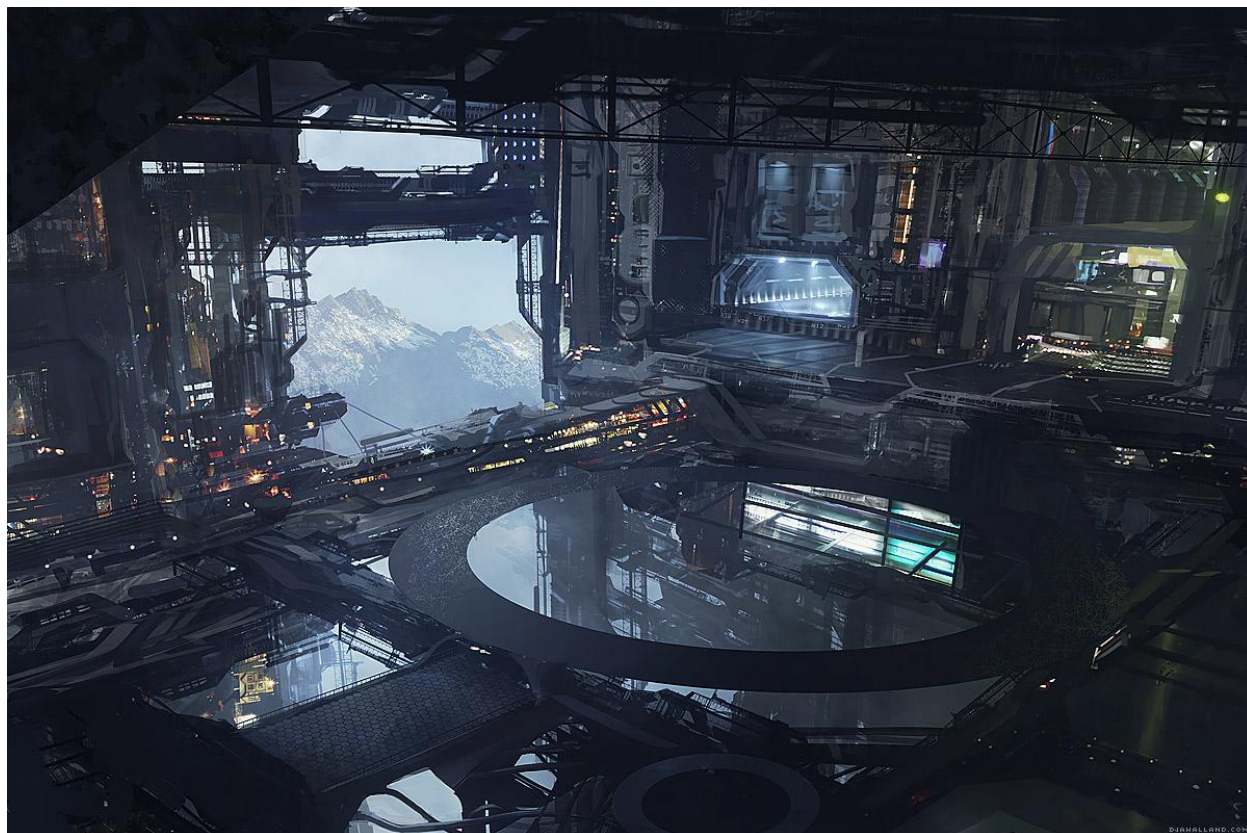
⁸⁰ Anagathics does help with life extension, but it isn’t very useful for health and well-being per se... and watch out for the side effects! See the **MegaTraveller Player’s Manual**, page 16 for details, which you can buy here: <http://www.rpgnow.com/product/432/MT--MegaTraveller-Players-Manual?it=1> Note that it’s a TL 15 drug, which makes you wonder how Squire Ner’Satden managed to get a regular supply in a backward region of a TL 14 Imperium...

⁸¹ And the Bwap: but that’s more on general principles. Harassment of the PC in question is something that Kuezangar finds *particularly* enjoyable, and definitely worth going out of his way for.

⁸² Note that killing a Vargr without cause *does not count as murder* on certain Solomani-dominated worlds in the Imperial Empty Quarter, even though (depending on the Referee’s vision of the Imperium) it *may* be an Imperial crime. If the Referee decides that the Imperium *enforces* the law against murder – as, canonically, it does against chattel slavery – then there is the possibility of understaffed & underequipped Imperial Ministry of Justice agents fighting a solid wall of racial hostility... *armed* racial hostility... to crack the case and get the killer. If the Referee decides that the Imperium *does not enforce* the law against murder (as the ultrahigh law levels of numerous Imperial worlds imply) then Vargr PCs are going to have some very tense role-playing situations in certain cities, nations, even worlds within the Imperial Empty Quarter, the minute they step out of the Imperial Starport’s Extraterritoriality Zone – never mind in the Hegemony of Lorean, where the Vargr are legally unpersons. The actual situation in the Hegemony is better than it looks on paper, and an Imperial Vargr is given more leeway than native Irilitok Vargr (who are more trusted than local ‘Beta humaniti’, giving the lie to official humanist dogma), but things can still get dicey. ‘Caution is advised.’

skills, so he will not strike to kill initially, preferring to play and humiliate the PC (and milk the resulting Charisma bonanza for all it's worth). But if he feels that his life is *really* in danger, Kuezangar is fast, strong, experienced, and definitely willing to kill.

(But if victorious, Kuezangar will be in a *world* of trouble – powerfully-built Vargr killing men kicks off all sorts of instinctual knee-jerk reactions locally. In some worlds – like Nulinad, Pamushgar, even Udusis – Kuezangar has a good chance at a fair trial, and could well be set free on a plea of self-defence. On other worlds... not so much.)



“Ah, so we meet again! Good to have you here to observe my latest victory...” On an off-the-charts orbital complex, somewhere in the Empty Quarter. The graphic is titled “Northern Conveyor” © Geoffroy Thoorens. See his work at <http://djahal.deviantart.com/art/Northern-Conveyor-147491689>

Kuezangar does stay on the right side of the law (so far as the law knows...) in his work in the ‘asset protection business’, but is given to such gems as “You can get more with a kind word and a gun, then just a gun,” “If you have to kill a man, it costs nothing to be polite,” and “A criminal is someone with predatory instincts who has not sufficient capital to form a major corporation... yet.” (Referee: reword to suit your campaign as needed.)

He still has a certain weakness, in the delight he has in smelling the fear of others, and can be tempted to use his bulk to push, bully and intimidate others, especially the weak. This isn’t just show, either: Kuezangar knows how to use his muscles, strength, and typical Vargr lightning-fast agility in a fight against sophonts his own size: but he’s older now, and is willing to back out of a fight if he thinks he’s outmatched.

He still has a kind of mocking-protective, teasing-teaching relationship with the PC the Referee has decided to target, though. He’s quite likely to sign up with the PC group if the adventure is exciting, has the possibility of charisma and renown, and is willing to even lose a bit in pay and prizes to get the chance to needle the PC target one more time...

Closing Theme: Maurice Jarre, “The Man Who Would Be King” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bgaCYy_Q_vk

Major 16-Alpha-M Autora-Green

UPP CBB6AA Age 30, Mixed Vilani

Skills: Combat Rifleman - 3, Recon - 2, Intrusion - 2, Vacc Suit - 2, History (Military) - 1, Brawling - 1, Stealth - 1, Small Blade - 1, Recruiting - 1, Instruction - 1, Demolitions - 1, Grav Vehicle - 0, Computer - 0, Early Firearms - 0, Tactics - 0, Swimming - 0, Zero-G - 0

Languages: Anglic (Core)

Visual: A powerfully built man, Major Autora-Green is a military bioengineered man, part of a produced set of 10,000 related near-clones from a mid-pop/high-tech Imperial Core world, bred as part of Miir/Dagudashaag's military tribute to the Emperor to support Imperial Rule across the stars in lieu of monetary taxes (It's a long story.) While his physical attributes are prime, this man – his first name and colour-code changes as he develops and gains more skills – was bred for only average intelligence. The Major wears Imperial Army Commando gear, and actually has no civilian clothing at the present time.

Equipment: Bears a pistol, a ~~smartphone~~ handheld Army mini-link, and a datapad.

Opening Theme: The Seatbelts, "Space Lion" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKnVaDwUg5s>

Origins

Designed and created in the high-tech waterworld of Miir (Argi/Dagudashaag 1534: In 993 Imperial, A65A597-D) Sophont Unit U790JU95RNFVAQH3-AUTORA-8/16 spent the first 14 years of his life in strenuous physical training regimes and limited intellectual training: reading & writing up to a complete primary education, with a focus on military applications, and arithmetic (up to algebra) with a stress on military logistics. Recitation, memorization, discipline, and unreflective obedience was the primary focus of mental education; spiritual and cultural training was grounded solely in loyalty to the Imperial Throne, and the requirements of the Imperial Army as an arm of the Emperor. A decent survey of ground-based military history was provided, with a focus on notable post-Imperial Civil War operations across Charted Space.

As per design specs at the time, U790JU95RNFVAQH3-AUTORA-8/16's⁸³ aggressiveness is *only* tied to violence, not to sex: inborn sexual preferences were restructured to both tie his entire focus to bring pain and death to the enemy, and to protect comrades-in-arms from unexpected violence⁸⁴. Naturally, the Major only feels truly alive and invigorated on the battlefield, and longs to be at the Solomani warzones, not in the backwater of all Imperial backwaters.

Pre-Contact Group

In the 990-993 period, then-Captain 5-Alpha-M Autora-Yellow led Commando Group 10 to neutralize high-priority Solomani paramilitary cells within the Empty Quarter, with great success. Then, his work as shifted to cadre work, training up the noble household forces that make up the bulk of remaining high-tech ground forces within the Imperial Empty Quarter. The captain's solid success here lead to the proudest moment of his short life – not the Imperial awards & commendations (though they are appreciated) but the shift of his reproductive status from Yellow to Green, permitting his genes to be used as source material for future Miir-bred soldiers.

⁸³ The man memorized his unique alphanum code as his formal name, but would only use it in his training cadre back on Miir. The Imperial Army uses a different alphanum code for a unique, DNA-tied identifier, but the man was encouraged to choose a more human-readable name as a spoken identifier for standard use.

⁸⁴ How military bioengineers of the future balance sexuality, violence, and aggression is an interesting question. I suspect that said soldiers would be used as terror weapons, with everything they do geared to bring pain, fear, death, and disease to the enemy. "Victory justifies all things", as any rational pragmatist would tell you, "and mystical-magical cant about *morality* and *war crimes* will shift with the times, just like always." Fortunately, I also suspect that the days of the mass soldier is numbered: technology continues to bring more and more tools into the hand of more and more people, while the military bureaucracies remain as hidebound, turf-protecting and fixated on numbers, procedures and budgets as ever. "If we can't count it, it doesn't exist!"

As Sophont Unit U790JU95RNFVAQH3-AUTORA-8/16 was bred sterile, reproduction by artificial means is the *only* way he can hope to breed. The man has no sex drive (in contrast to a *ferocious* appetite for violence), so women are nothing but whiny, weak, somewhat ineffective near-aliens to his mind⁸⁵; but his ego is stroked by knowing that his genes are valued by the scientific guardians of his race, and will be used into the indefinite future for new soldiers that will bring even greater glory to the Imperium.



Massive mecha are not commonly seen in the Third Imperium: certain physical laws make them impossible on 1-G worlds. (Sorry, Mechwarriors!) On the other hand, there are numerous low-G worlds out there, as well as mysterious Ancient (or other pre-Imperial high-tech) relics that should not be disturbed.

The graphic is titled "NOT_A_SAFE_SPOT" © malo.

See his work at <http://donmalo.deviantart.com/#/art/NOT-A-SAFE-SPOT-375855256?hf=1>

Due to his nature, Captain Autora-Green has no sympathy for those outside of his unit; but he does have... well, a natural understanding of how the locals think and act.⁸⁶ His observational abilities and a here-and-now engagement with the sophonts around him allow him to improve his interaction with his students, despite the general reliance on local, flesh-and-blood translators.

(Autora-Green knows that his authoritarian Core accent is repulsive to many within the Quarter, but doesn't want to be seen to be dependent on a machine to communicate to the troops. Fortunately, using a living sophont as a translator *adds* to a foreigner's prestige in the Six Subsectors...)

Promotion to the Contact Group

With his new duties, the new Major 16-Alpha-M Autora-Green now must work with militia leaders, householder troops, and planetary armies throughout Gimushi subsector. There are various goals involved here, primarily to protect starports and major cities from pirate raiders, but to also improve interoperability and information exchanges on threat patterns across the subsector. Perhaps half the time, the major gets to be near or at the action, sometimes taking command himself, but usually letting the more experienced officers make the plans, restricting himself to choosing the most suitable plan.

⁸⁵ Note that this bred soldier has no natural protective instincts regarding women or children: "A threat's a threat, period. And if something doesn't concern my unit or my mission, then it's someone else's problem, period." He *does* have a tight blood-brother bond with the other men of his unit, though, and has had respect for higher authority drilled into his skull for a very long time now.

⁸⁶ Understanding someone deeply does not automatically lead to even a gram of empathy. *Woe* to the PC group that learns this the hard way...



TL C+ warbots are a rare sight in the Empty Quarter – even in the ultra-wealthy Rukadukaz Republic (the Vargr dislike robots, which don't grant charisma to their Vargr masters). So when they do appear, it can be a big surprise to the PCs – perhaps a fatal one. The graphic is titled "Guardians" © Goran Delic. See his work at <http://delic.deviantart.com/#/art/Guardians-30250395?hf=1>

(If you look at his skills, you will find that the major only has Tactics-0. The only reason he got this much is because of the major *slowly* learning to imitate the better-clued-in local field officers.⁸⁷ You will also note useful instruction and recruiting skills, and a superb level of weapon handling and marksmanship, but *no* leadership skill.)

Having to deal with the demands and requests of the colonial forces is still difficult for Major Aurora-Green. However, he has decided that he “would rather work with the lions of Gimushi than the slaves of Argi.” Over the months, he has slowly pulled back on actually organizing and linking together these very disparate soldiery, and pushing forward to what he loves best: leading companies into firefights and assaults, setting up ambushes, planting ship-busting explosives during boarding actions, and leading recon teams in the desert. The various colonial officers, who dislike Imperial supervision, are indirectly encouraging him

The PCs

The high-level officers observing the activity have decided against revoking the promotion; even though they have solid grounds for doing so, they would rather have the major continue on his present course, and gain more tactical and hands-on experience and learn from the masters. That way, at least someone reliable, not tied to a

⁸⁷ Yes, he took a ton of tactical classes at home. “Books, drills and virtual reality fighting are no substitute for the real thing!” Or, more charitably, even the best schooling must be adapted for the situation at hand... and the Major is slow to adapt when it comes to tactics.

local world, will be able to lead Imperial forces into local operations with a degree of hands-on expertise and a real feel for pirate tactics and behaviour.

But that still leaves the original job, linking up the local militaries, undone. This is where the PCs – serving officers and men of the Imperial Army, at least one having the rank of captain – come in. The PC captain will be the adjutant to the major, but instead of handling company matters, they will be handling network, communication, and various back-office technical matters for the various Gimushi militaries.⁸⁸ As such, the PCs will be granted the use of a small starship for quick transport, probably a jump2 scout/courier. Every three months, they will report back to Major Autora-Green (or his successor, should the combat-loving major get killed in one of his many aggressively-structured deployments). The major will make the final decisions, request clarification, etc.

And off the PCs go again, meeting military officers from dozens of militaries, speaking a good variety of languages (usually including Transform Anglic), following various religions and cultural mores, and using a cross-section of technologies. Getting everyone to work together – and knowing that the major will get the credit for good results, while the PCs will suffer for any gaffe – will be the joy and the bane of their lives for the foreseeable future.⁸⁹



Almost all of the major's live combat experience has been in sparsely- or unpopulated areas... and he's glad of it. Urban warfare in the Empty Quarter simply stinks. The graphic is titled "TRAPPED" © Malo. See his work at <http://donmalo.deviantart.com/art/TRAPPED-376047897>

Thoughts on the Side

While in the Empty Quarter, the officer has struggled to understand why the ethnoreligious conflicts of the Empty Quarter are so much harsher, bitter, and nastier than the cool and clean corporate wars of the Imperial Core.⁹⁰ He's pigeonholed all sorts of experts, harassed old Emptyhands, and argued with an impressive number of out-of-sector mercenaries, Noble householders, and corporate warriors, trying to make sense of it all. At the start of 993, Major Autora-Green has finally gathered all of his various scribbled notepads, tape-recorded thoughts, mp3 rants, blinding powerpoints, and stack of aborted drafts, and is going to dump them all on a PC to organize and ghostwrite.

⁸⁸ Keep an eye on the difference between peacetime and wartime militaries. A quick intro can be found in "Rules of Engagement: How to Become a Three-Star General" from North: <https://www.garynorth.com/members/login.cfm?hpage=12437.cfm>

⁸⁹ Refer to **Stellar Reaches** #18 & #19 for demographic and background information for the Empty Quarter. Or, just make your own!

⁹⁰ One of the many beloved local tricks: spiked ammunition. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62Bi3RPz_2E



The Lazisar Directorate Navy – a local military powerhouse – deploys her forces on behalf of the Emperor. Dagemi, 993 Imperial. The graphic is titled “Scouts Deployed” © Neil Thacker.

See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=2424844

After the PC is done with the ghostwriting, the major will go over the draft, putting the lessons he learned in the Co-operative Violence classes back home to work in ‘fleshing out’ the PC’s work, then slap a title on it – Nasty, Brutal, and Hollow: Warfare in the Imperial Empty Quarter – and have it printed out in a civilized world in the Imperial Core – with only his name as author. (What? Did you expect something different?)

Any original thinking in the book will have to come from the PC (the major’s Intelligence is only 6, a.k.a. ‘average’). If the PC is both highly intelligent and can write well, the book is mildly successful, and the major will have a few remunerative speaking engagements to attend to. He’ll need the PC to teach him the ‘piercing new insights’ he’s supposed to have gained, which is where the PC can either extract some money, useful favours, or have a bit of fun at the Major Autora-Green’s expense...

Closing Theme: Andreas Vollenweider, “Dancing With The Lion” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onp_uRj6FNE

likush Khaasira, Mistress of Purity Cargo Lines

UPP 8394A7 Age 34 (84), Pure Vilani

Skills: Jack-o-Trades - 3, Linguistics - 2, Computer - 2, Electronics - 2, Grav Vehicle - 1, Persuasion - 1, Streetwise - 1, Recruiting - 1, Sociology - 1, Wheeled Vehicle - 0, Handgun - 0, Theology (Vilani) - 0

Languages: Modern Vilani (Native), Old High Vilani, Anglic (Transform)

Visual: A well-kept pure Vilani woman; only her slowness – as bad as a Solomani! – betrays her great age. Looking at her, you would see a respectable woman, but not a high-status one: her late husband made too many enemies to allow her to keep her high social status after he died.

Equipment: A small, TL 14 portable expert system, which advises her of the lengthy train of history, precedent, and advise for both her personal life and her business.

Opening Theme: Akiko Shikata & Watau Hano, “Sands of Time”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XcgrxsMwTxk>

The Unrecognized Noble

A true daughter of Pamushgar, Mrs. Khaasira has had many lives: scientist; mistress; then wife to Khugi Khaasira, who for one moment in time was the most wealthy man of the Imperial Empty Quarter; mother to four children – all of whom took their share of Khugi’s wealth after his death, and left the Empty Quarter for better worlds; widow; starfarer; merchantman; and now mistress of a specialist trading line.



Decent ships, doing good work in the Six Subsectors – but only a shadow of their Mistress’ former wealth and glory. The graphic is titled “*Hunters of the Dunes*” © Neil Thacker. See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=2460912

The Mistress has done numerous good works, both as a business leader and as a devout follower of Vilani beliefs of tradition, prosperity and consensus. The only thing she really wants is the title of Respected before she joins the ancestors: something denied her due to old grudges many hold against her long-dead husband, not least on Pamushgar herself.

Building The Line

Following the ways of her husband, Mrs. Khaasira has always looked for ways to combine making money with the higher goal of building up an interstellar consensus across the stars. The Quarter has always been hard, barren soil for such ideas: but a spasm of ethnic strife in the 950s Imperial opened up an opportunity. At the time, interstellar trade between the combatant cultures led to the use of dangerous cargo as a vector for attacks: not just explosives, but bioweapons, virulent pests (even rats, flies and cockroaches), hostile chemicals, and computer viruses hidden in a vast array of electronics.

Mrs. Khaasira was never the marketing genius her husband was: but she picked up a few tricks, and, supported by a few family friends and some Shugilii castemen, she set up two landing berths owned by her new company, Purity Cargo Lines. Chartering an old ship, she installed electronic labs at each berth – one at Hebrin, and one at Irash – to guarantee the purity of all electronics on her ship. Rigorous attention to detail and protocol insured that everything shipped on *her* ships was safe to eat, use, and install. As her reputation for ‘sound, safe goods’ spread, she was able to spread to every subsector capital, as well as a few additional worlds like Belumar, Ka-aswa, Marhaban, Eninsish, and of course Pamushgar.⁹¹

The crisis eventually sputtered out, but her cargo line continued to turn a nice profit, even though the great years of growth faded away. Traditionally her ships are unarmed, and manned by only trustworthy Vilani and Bwap – and no Solomani, with their endless and never-ending tangle of cultural, racial, nationalistic, and religious grudges.

⁹¹ But not Ushmigad. No self-respecting Vilani cultural adherent will touch that heretical world if they can possibly avoid it – regardless of its wealth...

But with the Imperial Fleet absent and pirates whipsawing across the sector, most of her vessels had to be mothballed and the berths & labs closed down.

Hibernation

Fortunately, her connections with Shugilii castes and sympathetic Vilani nobles and magnates (and other Vilani-culture types) across the sector has allowed her people to gain useful employment until the Imperial Navy again returns to clean out the ruffians. But there is still the occasional, very high-paying charter that makes it worth her while to haul out a ship from mothballs, power up the labs once again, and thoroughly check out a shipment.

But where she can find the crew needed to take an unarmed starship across such a dangerous void? (Or, for starmerc PCs, “Where can she find a reliable star-mercenary crew to protect her precious ship and cargo?”)

Closing Theme: Enya, “Orinoco Flow”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTrk4X9Actw>

Captain Hulie Sharram-mg

UPP 464CAA Age 42, Mixed Vilani

Skills: Liaison - 3, Leadership - 2, Ships Boat - 2, Gambling - 2, Legal - 2, Brawling - 2, Vacc Suit - 1, Navigation - 1, Pilot - 1, Admin - 1, Trader - 1, Broker - 1, Streetwise - 1, Carousing - 1, Handgun - 1, Energy Weapon - 0, Gravitics - 0, Mechanical - 0, Grav Vehicle - 0, Computer - 0

Languages: Anglic (Transform)

Visual: An unprepossessing, wiry man with a shock of greying red hair that clashes with both his swarthy skin and his pastel-coloured company robes and overcoat (which look two sizes too big for him). The number of gadgets that can be found in the folds of his robes continually surprises the casual observer.

Equipment: A vast range of minor gadgets and doo-dads, which may or may not be exactly the tool he needs at a given moment. This includes a proper handgun and a laser pistol, as well as various handheld translation devices.

Opening Theme: Penguin Cafe Orchestra, “Vega” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1zIFHU1Eyl>

Peak, Fall and Rise

Captain Sharram-mg has spent his entire merchant career on one ship, the *Golden Gift*. While beginning his career as a drive hand, he moved on to Administration, Sales, and the Deck crew before gaining the exalted position of Captain just a year ago. While his massive ship is currently going through an overhaul at her homeport at Gardanina/Antares/Antares (in 993 and 1105: B797210-B, hex 2324) the Captain is going through the trading route his officers have plotted for him with a worried eye.

For decades, the *Golden Gift*, a converted warship, has done well working the routes between Imperial Antares and the Julian Federation, especially the Rukadukaz Republic, with the very best profits on the Antares/Ikon run. However, as the Star Legion and the Vilani-influenced Republic continued to tame and regularize internal piracy – effectively turning it into a fragmented, regulated customs, inspection, and light space police force – there is less and less need for the armed and ready *Golden Gift*, compared to more fragile but more profitable freighters.

Fortunately, in the Imperial Empty Quarter, the owners of the *Golden Gift* can find the chaotic, violent situation that their ex-warship can properly prosper in. Without the Imperial Fleet to enforce order, all sorts of freelancers – native and across the Lesser Rift – has dived in to steal whatever they can. (Or, in the case of the Suedzuk Vargr, kill, kill, and – if you remember to do so – do some stealing as well.) The well-armoured and well-armed *Golden Gift* can shrug off all but the most massive, dedicated and well-organized of pirate attacks, so allowing her to profit where others can't.

Worries

But isn't the pirates that Captain Sharram-mg is worried about – it's the locals. Being from Antares, more than a quarter of his crew are Vargr: and while Antares is comfortable with the Vargr – complete with a Vargr Archduke – the Imperial Empty Quarter is *not*. Having a human captain helps: but many of the natives will still remain suspicious, perhaps claiming that he's a front for well-organized Ikonaz corsair or Shadow Cartel interests. "They did the exact same thing at Mikik – a bunch of humans and Vargr, claiming to bring trade and enlightenment to us backward Emptyheads – and you saw what they did to that world! Ain't no way I'm going to let them do a number on MY homeworld!"

Moreover, the Gushgusi never liked Antares Sector: 'too wealthy, too superior, too sophisticated.' This hostility is quietly present among the local nobles, and openly expressed among the lower classes, but it can't be escaped. It has to be faced head-on – without sparking a riot or a duel... or a war.⁹²

Help Needed

It makes the Captain wonder if he can hire one of the less hostile local traders, to act as a kind of trader-scout for the Golden Gift. Someone who can run interference for him, dull the edge of the hostility, and remind the locals how wonderful and useful high-tech goods can really be!

A secondary, but practical goal: in these difficult times in a difficult sector, some of the lesser worlds don't have the Imperial Credits to purchase the expensive high-tech goods – from toys to industrial equipment – that the Golden Gift is selling. So some kind of barter is needed: maybe land, or unusual lifeforms, or labour... something that he can sell for Imperial Credits on a major world. The right kind of Far Trader crew, acting as a guide to new worlds and new markets, could make the expedition... or break it.

Closing Theme: David Lanz & Paul Speer, "White Sands" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h58pjfgrc7g>



Whenever Captain Sharram-mg remembers Antares, he remembers the Pillars of Time, back on his homeport of Gardanina. The graphic is titled "Pillars of Time" © Justinas Vitkus.

See his work at <http://justv23.deviantart.com/art/Pillars-of-time-378717746>

⁹² Captain Captain Sharram-mg has heard *stories* about the xenophobic governments of the Six Subsectors...

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS

None

COST

MCr 15,283.667 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 151.323),
MCr 12,105.875 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME

172 Weeks Singly, 138 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS

The Golden Gift is covered with a thin layer of gold leaf on top of the superdense hull. The vessel is ornately decorated, inside and out: it isn't too bad on the eyes, but the garish, flashy patterns made out of cheap-yet-durable shiny synthetic crystals gets on the casual Imperial human's nerves after a while.

A one-of-a-kind refit of a sub-optimal colonial cruiser class, the Golden Gift is basically a heavily protected box with two good punches. When she was first refitted decades ago, there was a great debate on whether the ship is better served with laser turrets rather than sandcasters: sandcasters was chosen, to present less of a charismatic challenge to Vargr pirates and lower the hostility Vargr worlds would have for a heavily armed 'Imperial Trade Ship' orbiting their high-population cities.

This decision has served the Golden Gift well, when she was plying the Antares/Ikon trade route (with occasional excursions elsewhere in the Rukadukaz Republic); whether it will continue to hold true as she shifts to the Empty Quarter is unknown. If pirate attacks prove that the ship needs better armament, then it will be provided: but the ship will have to survive such attacks first, before her cost-conscious owners will spring for the refit. This could be a problem.

As even Vilani-influenced Ovaghoun Vargr transportation networks are somewhat disorganized, the Golden Gift has her own distribution network, in the form of 25 armed G-carriers. Up to last year, 20 small fighters were also carried by the vessel to provide protection against a 'flash fleet' of minor Vargr pirates, but these were removed in the latest refit in favour of more cargo space. Whether this was a wise or unwise decision is again up to the Referee to decide.

Ship: Ogets	Class: Kinema Ashic
Type: Cruiser	Architect: Alvin Plummer
Tech Level: 13	

USP

CR-L3347GL-793307-008E9-0	MCr 19,535.880	20	KTons
Bat Bear	3	1	111 Crew: 173
Bat	4	2	212 TL: 13

Cargo: 106 Crew Sections: 20 of 9 Frozen Watch (x10) Fuel: 7,700 EP: 1,400 Agility: 2
Shipboard Security Detail: 20 Craft: 2 x 50T Modular Cutters
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification
Backups: 2 x Model/7fib Computers 1 x Bridge

Architects Fee: MCr 195.359 Cost in Quantity: MCr 15,628.704

Detailed Description

HULL

20,000 tons standard, 280,000 cubic meters, Cylinder Configuration



MaxNimos 2006

Just one of the amazing sights Captain Sharram-mg was privileged to see was the launching of the Shaku Irgligushii, an enormous chemical rocket build by the Vilani of Zukhisa in commemoration of their very first locally-built spaceship, so many thousands of years ago. The graphic is titled "T minus 4 hours" © Max V. Nimos. See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1303328&np

CREW

23 Officers, 150 Ratings

Book 5 Crew Breakdown

Command section: 7 officers and 4 ratings;
Engineering section: 6 officers and 52 ratings;
Gunnery section: 4 officers and 31 ratings;
Flight section: 1 officer and 6 ratings;
Service section: 4 officers and 36 ratings;
Medical Section: 1 officer and 1 rating

ENGINEERING

Jump-3, 4G Manoeuvre, Power plant-7, 1,400 EP, Agility 2

AVIONICS

Bridge, Model/7fib Computer
1 Backup Bridge, 2 Model/7fib Backup Computers

HARDPOINTS

Spinal Mount, 6 100-ton bays, 120 Hardpoints

ARMAMENT

Meson Gun Spinal Mount (Factor-E),
2 100-ton Particle Accelerator Bays (Factor-8),
2 100-ton Missile Bays (Factor-9)

DEFENCES

2 100-ton Repulsor Bays (Factor-7),
120 Single Sandcaster Turrets organised into 4 Batteries (Factor-9),
Nuclear Damper (Factor-3),
Meson Screen (Factor-3),
Armoured Hull (Factor-7)

CRAFT

2 50-ton Modular Cutters (Crew of 2)

FUEL

7,700 Tons Fuel
(3 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance, plus 300 tons of additional fuel)
On Board Fuel Scoops, On Board Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS

90 Staterooms, 90 Low Berths, 106 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS

None

COST

MCr 19,731.239 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 195.359),
MCr 15,628.704 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME

172 Weeks Singly, 138 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS

The six members of the Kinema Ashic cruiser class was laid down on Squire/Uradnim/Antares, 913-920 Imperial. United as a cruiser squadron, they were to support the planetary government's drive to better dominate Uradnim subsector, and protect Squire planetary interests faster and more effectively than the Imperium could. This activity

quite annoyed the subsector Duchess - who resided at Ishiishala, not Squire - leading to various power-plays, standoffs, and shows of force. In the end, the situation was resolved by the Emperor replacing the ruling ducal family with a senior Squire dynasty; in return, much of Squire's expeditionary (read: jump capable) forces were brought under direct colonial navy rule under a Squire-born Imperial captain - who was promptly transferred to the Squire navy.

The Squire Fleet was used for various second-echelon duties in Uradnim and Urunishu subsectors - generally anti-pirate and anti-insurgency work - until the fleet was dissolved in 950 Imperial. Two of the Kinema Ashic-class ships were returned to Squire, two sold to various planetary navies, and two were slated to be scrapped. Of the set to be scrapped, one, the Ogets, was permitted to be purchased by a trading consortium, on the condition of the removal of her spinal mount.

As a warship, the Ogets did well enough, handily destroying various lesser combatants while suffering at most superficial damage herself. She never saw a major interstellar war, but given her design she would have done well enough - assuming that her opponents were similarly low-agility, average tech level starships.

Captain Waya

UPP 888AC5, Age 28, Solomani

Skills: Computer - 4, Combat Rifleman - 3, High Energy Weapon - 3, Mass Drivers - 1, Heavy Weapon - 1, Tactics - 1, Medical - 1, Vacc Suit - 1, Zero-G - 1, Disguise - 1, Electronics - 1, Unarmed Combat (Special) - 1 (2 vs. Vargr), Wheeled Vehicle - 0

Languages: Anglic (Transform)

Visual: A strong and agile Solomani man, with a hard face and hard, intelligent eyes. He is generally found wearing the casual dress of the Tsasahli, one of the very far-flung descendants of the Cherokee tribe.

Equipment: A rifle and a TL 14 tablet, with all sorts of hacking, programming, and interface tools, especially tailored to handle the (humanly) unpredictable chaos that is known as the Vargr programming world. A nice tool for dealing with Vargr, and able to provide a great range of surprises when the local Vargr pirate opens his commo link (and his TL 11 computer) to tell you to surrender...

Note: Unarmed Combat (Special) refers to the Sagwu-Ta'li-Nvgi American Indian martial art. It was developed specifically to counter superior Vargr agility by leveraging human strength against Vargr weak points, with powerful moves that make it difficult for the Vargr physique to counter. So, while Captain Waya's Unarmed Combat Skill is at 1 (one) against humans, it is at 2 (two) against Vargr.

Opening Theme: Peter Buffet, "Fire Dance" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Lb0MmhAq2A>

Heading Up

As soon as he was weaned at the age of two, Waya has been following the way of the warrior. Ship raiding, small unit tactics, and punishing training were the order of the day for the first few years... until his talent with computers was discovered. This simply increased the workload, with tough training in the day, and heavy studying at night. Amazingly, Waya did not break under the strain: his knew that his tribe needed him, and he will *not* fail his people.

His sheer determination eventually paid off in the battlefield, and with the respect of the other braves. More than once, the edge his technical skill provided turn a defeat to a victory, and a ordinary victory into a profitable capture of an entire Vargr corsair, bringing in all sort of cash. Unfortunately, due to tribal politics Captain Waya has not been given the respect he deserves by the tribal leaders: but his brains and his fighting skill has certainly earned him the respect of his peers in the Void.



Instead of a spotter and a sniper, the Tsasahli prefer double-sniper teams – they find it helpful for delivering extra intimidation to the enemy. The graphic is titled “territory” © Ben Andrews.

See his work at <http://ben-andrews.deviantart.com/art/territory-382834204>

An Opportunity

There is a chance to get past the social barriers that is holding the Captain back. The tribal elders are satisfied with the Captain’s work in the field against the Vargr, but they remain fixated on the Muslim threat to infidels like themselves. This is something that Waya has long argued against: “They are *yesterday’s* enemies! Why are we wasting precious oxygen about an enemy that was hammed down by the Imperium decades ago?”

Captain Waya is confident that if fewer resources were held in reserve for an enemy that will never strike again, and more was put to work against the enemy that seeks to rip open the throats of the tribe *today*, the safety of the Tsasahli would be far more assured. But the tribal council remains adamant: “The Jihad is the Jihad: it does not change, and it does not rest. Ever.”

How he can persuade the council to change their minds is something he’s always stewing over with his friends (like, perhaps, the PCs). If it can be done, his social status and respect before the civilians will rise as high as it does among the braves, and his leadership of the entire tribe becomes inevitable. Perhaps if he can convince the Muslim Brotherhood to defend something that belongs to his infidel tribe: that might do it.

And what if the elders don’t budge? Waya will remain loyal to the tribe, continue to fight her enemies, and bide his time. Military success counts for a lot, when you’re pushing out the margin of survival for your small nation a little bit more every day. But even though he has a lot of fighting to do in the Void, Waya still makes the time to teach the more talented children in the tribe about computing, even more than the weapons. Warfare is needed for survival, but mastering technology is what will turn survival into prosperity.

Closing Theme: Alice Gomez, “Flute Dreams” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YY7TwSw5bo>

I wouldn't hold my breath myself, waiting for the Faithful to die for the sake of the Loathsome Infidel.⁹³ On the other hand, the captain is fundamentally correct: the Jihad is a spent force in the Empty Quarter. Power-religions will always fall before those with greater power: and if there's one thing the Imperium has, it's **Power**.

If you aren't going to go for the Power, then you are left with two options: **Escape** (in the style of the East) or **Ethics** (in the style of Moses). I'm with Moses, myself. And you?



Even massive animals – elephants, dinosaurs, and stranger beasts – can be taken down by a man with a rifle.

The graphic is titled "Sand Deamon" © Goran Delic.

See his work at <http://delic.deviantart.com/art/Sand-Deamon-126960862?hf=1>

Captain Waya is NOT a starship captain, but the leader of the Steeltoe Deathstick, a military unit of 30-40 men used for small-scale military operations. Broadly equipped to TL A, the Steeltoe conducts assaults against Vargr spaceborne strongholds, usually space stations or bases on hostile worlds, moons or asteroids. As of 001-993, most of the Steeltoe are equipped as light rocket, mortar, and plasma artillerymen, with a few men providing site security. The Steeltoe are cross-trained in Marine ship security and forced-entry into hostile starships, like practically every other American Indian brave in the sector.

⁹³ Of course, Christianity is entirely grounded in the sacrifice of the Righteous One for the sake of the Filthy Sinner. I remain amazed by those who claim that both religions serve the same God, when it's strikingly obvious that this simply isn't the case.

Sector Duke Marcial Rios⁹⁴ (deceased)

UPP 441ABF, Age 85 (died 990 Imperial), Solomani

Skills: Equestrian - 4, Liaison - 3, Economics (Interstellar) - 2, Grav Vehicle - 2, Foil - 1, Brawling - 1, Aircraft (Ultralight) - 1, Battle Dress - 1, Hunting - 1, Gambling - 1, Vacc Suit - 1, Grav Belt - 1, Music - 1, Grav Vehicle - 0, Computer - 0, Electronics - 0, Energy Weapon - 0, Screens - 0, Mechanical - 0, Fleet Tactics - 0, Spinal Weapon - 0, High Energy Weapon - 0, Combat Engineer - 0, Combat Rifleman - 0, Sling - 0, Gravitics - 0

Languages: Anglic (Core, Native)

Opening Theme: Sir William Walton, "Agincourt Song" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nvFY93WBPPY>

Alternate Theme: Ralph Stanley, "On Death", <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Q-QH1XiCQw>

Visual: A well-tended tomb in the Stellar Cemetery, the traditional burial place for Imperial heroes, located on Nulinad. The tomb is of an expensive local marble, bordered with entwined gold and iridium highlights. Delicate etchings of the Duke's loves – starships, starfighters, horses, women, and gambling – are engraved in the stone.

You mean, in his final years? An aged spacer-turned-noble, who forgot more about Naval operations than most men will ever know. He radiated authority and discipline... as well as charm and gallantry before the ladies. Still, his Noble robes (and occasional naval uniform) hung loosely from his frame, and all the wounds he has borne in service to the Iridium Throne ached more and more, the closer he drew to his death. He is remembered for his ferocious bravery and razor-sharp intelligence in Corridor as a Subsector, then Sector Admiral, as well as his famous conquests as a Lothario... and most choose to forget the distasteful end of his service as Sector Duke of the Empty Quarter.

When the famous Naval hero was appointed Sector Duke by Emperor Styryx in 972, many expected him to turn around the ever-impoverish, ever-fratricidal Six Subsectors. And to his credit, he did dampen down anti-Imperial sentiment on Hebrin, instigated stronger economic bonds with the Hegemony of Lorean (including the Deep Space Stations that now link the Hegemony with the Imperium directly), and strove mightily (and in the end, largely successfully) to disperse the intensely tribal 'mini-fleets'⁹⁵ that then harassed trade and commerce within the Six Subsectors. Most notably, he successfully solidified and anchored the work of previous Sector Dukes in reforming the sector's Imperial military establishment as a truly professional organization, free of sectarian divisions and allegiances, and a dependable, reliable tool of the Emperor.

On the other hand, Sector Duke Marcial *really* enjoyed his gambling, his whoring, and his adventuresome holidays. His favourite courtesan, an Iper'mar woman by the name of Mai, not only got a knighthood but a barony as well, outraging both the pious commoners and the convention-minded chattering classes. A punishing polo accident that killed the daughter of a subsector Duke from Fornast caused all sorts of bad feelings, all around: emissaries from Capital had to be sent to soothe hard feelings and head off a dynastic feud. When his gambling debts got too big to hide with financial shell games, various Hindi financiers contacted him in private, offering to ease the pain... in return for certain low-profile rulings and decisions that would elevate "the *truly* loyal subjects of the Imperium over the violent, fanatical, and untrustworthy barbarians."

Inevitably, word leaked out, and the roar of the scandal in 985 came close to undoing everything the Sector Duke strove for. As it was, the Sector Duke had to make amends by converting to Sunni Islam⁹⁶, building various mosques and Islamic libraries on Hebrin and other Islamic-dominated worlds, and by trying to learn Classical

⁹⁴ So I finally decided to flesh out the old paramour of the Baroness of Charity, as described in Empty Quarter Echo, **Stellar Reaches** #5.

⁹⁵ Excluding the Bwap Tap-a-wewaka-atapas (Guardians of Order) – and not *just* because trusted Bwap bureaucrats get to interpret the rules and regulations, have contacts all the up to the Imperial Palace, or are in charge of fat pots of money they can invest 'at their informed discretion'. They have always maintained a pro-Imperial policy they enforce with their usual inflexibility and detailed focus, and the top-flight Guardian legal advocates are proud of the 0% conviction rate for any Imperial Rules of War violation.

⁹⁶ "He is a Muslim, who is one outwardly."

Arabic. Still, despite all this, the religious neutrality of the Imperial bureaucracy and military was preserved, much to the disappointment of the Islamic religious leaders... and the quiet satisfaction of the Hindus (and the rest of the infidels), including the financial backers who *still* retained control of the Sector Duke's purse strings. Moreover, only the Duke (officially) converted: the rest of his clan remained as dismissive of supernatural religions as ever.



The Sector Duke's personal starfighter, last flown just a few months before his death in 990. Acquired during his tour of duty in Corridor sector as a gift from a grateful world, this is the only known Diarnou-class fighter in the entire Empty Quarter. Christened "Annabelle" by Sector Duke Marcial, it is currently being prepared for display in a museum raised in his memory, to be publically dedicated and opened in 90-993 Imperial. The graphic is titled "The ride" © Goran Delic. See his work at <http://delic.deviantart.com/art/The-ride-392922631>

The Sector Duke never got to die in the company of beautiful women, as he wanted. Instead, he died on the polo grounds, racing against men less than half his age, when his horse threw him off. Death was instantaneous... but instead of a simple Islamic funeral, a huge, ornate Imperial State Funeral was held, free of any and all religious imagery or ritual, and only the Imperial Sunburst hanging over his coffin.

Closing Theme: Sir William Walton, "Crown Imperial" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AKIFkWSsOE>
Alternate Theme:⁹⁷ Peggy Lee, "Is That All There Is?" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ny5z8gKM18>

⁹⁷ Both alternate themes were picked up from Gary North's articles, "The Price of Your Bucket List" and "On The Second Half of Your Life". It's serendipity, I say!



While the Marcial Museum has not been formally opened, there have been sneak peeks opened to selected members of the public. Here, an old-school model display of old-school, Imperial Dawn-era starships is seen: only a few of the visitors get the meta-joke, instead complaining of a lack of entertaining touchscreens and holo-displays. The graphic is titled "Space Museum" © Max V. Nimos.

See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1662649&np

Unknown (formerly "Fara Suncaster")

UPP 688B97, Age 34 (42), Mixed Vilani

Skills: Streetwise - 5, Acting - 2, Grav Vehicle - 1, Computer - 1, Tactics - 1, Bribery - 1, Sensor Ops - 1, Handgun - 1, Persuasion - 1, Jack-o-Trades - 1, Small Blade - 1, Artisan - 1, Forgery - 1, Physics - 0, Gambling - 0, Vacc Suit - 0, Biology - 0, Gravitics - 0

Psionics: Psi - 5, Telepathy - 1, Clairvoyance - 1, Teleportation - 1

Languages: Anglic (Transform)

Visual: An attractive Mixed Vilani woman, in the sense of 'a truly elegant lady' rather than 'hot-hot-hot!' She takes good care of her looks, which is the reason behind the difference between the apparent and real age here, not her limited Vilani inheritance.

Equipment: Good makeup, fine clothes, and a body pistol. A great memory doesn't hurt, either, in her line of work.

Opening Theme: David Holmes, "Tess" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAoxTK5f1CM>



A large part of Ms. Suncaster's heart is still tied to her first love, uncovering and studying the more bizarre lifeforms of the Third Imperium. But you can't go home again... The graphic is titled "Deadly Planet" © Neil Thacker. See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=2483113&np

The Curious Scientist

“Ms. Suncaster” was born under a different name, survived a difficult childhood, and lived as a scientist, investigating how certain biological lifeforms interacted with artificial gravity fields. She grew interested in the more challenging, difficult-to solve puzzles, and – drawing on her less-than-legit contacts – began to gather information tying together psionics, biology, physics, and artificial gravity.⁹⁸

Eventually, her secret queries and discreet investigation led her to the United Will, a covert psionic religious order and – since the *ferocious* destruction of the Hindu-based psionic groups by the then-Arab Muslim dominated Imperial forces within the Quarter – the main source of forbidden psionic knowledge within the Imperial Empty Quarter.⁹⁹ She managed to complete her training, but her study cell was betrayed, and escape from Imperial authorities was very difficult – even with teleportation. While in flight from one safe house to another, she suffered serious concussion damage by a sniper’s bullet that grazed her skull, resulting in the loss of most of her old scientific skills.

The Femme Fatale

In the end, allies of the United Will were able to give her a new identity: her old name and her old family wasn’t lost in the sniper’s strike initially, but eventually in forgetfulness and disuse.¹⁰⁰ To help fund the United Will – her only friend and help in the universe now – she learned to befriend businessmen, get them drunk, and get their secrets. (The alcohol was cover for her real method, a form of telepathy/mind-reading. It was difficult at first to learn to pick out what you wanted from an alcoholic haze, but she managed.)

She grew better at her job, and gained a bigger cut of the take... and grew more notorious, so she sharpened her acting skills, street smarts, and stayed on the move.

On Her Own

The criminal elements of the sector clued her in on a coming Imperial Purge, as the repercussions of certain psionic activities in Gimushi’s financial network begin to build and *build* and **BUILD**.¹⁰¹ “Ms. Suncaster” implored her team leadership to get out of the sector – or at least bug out of their home base – but they ignored here, insisting that their precogs¹⁰² would give early warning of any Imperial strike.¹⁰³

“Ms. Suncaster”, getting nowhere with the team, teleported out. Very quickly, she ditched her identity, put on a simple ‘cheap & disposable’ cover one, and teleported out again to parts unknown. It’s likely that she has prepared at least one ‘strong cover’ identity that can stand Imperial scrutiny: beyond this, only the Referee knows.

Closing Theme: Graeme Revell – “I’m Alone on This” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYynh4XQBAM>

Mimgiim Garerpirsaguka, a.k.a. “Atropa Ivirne”

UPP 7AAB98, Age 26 (30), Mixed Vilani (heavy on the Vilani)

Skills: Acting - 3, Computer - 2, Psychology - 2, Vacc Suit - 1, Commo - 1, Trader - 1, Sensor Ops - 1, Linguistics - 1, Small Blade - 1, Persuasion - 1, Steward - 1, Leadership - 1, Handgun - 0, Grav Vehicle - 0, Pilot - 0, Streetwise - 0

Languages: Ikonaz Vilani (Native), Anglic (Transform)

⁹⁸ This was before the rise of Emperor Gavin, when psionics – while still hated and very illegal across the Imperium – had a bit more leeway and wiggle room. Trying to pull off this stunt in today’s Imperium (993 Imperial) is a elaborate form of suicide without a *lot* of careful prep work...

⁹⁹ For a *little* more on the Will, see **Stellar Reaches** #18, page 67.

¹⁰⁰ See “Becoming the Mask”, <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/BecomingTheMask>

¹⁰¹ See “Psionic Scandal”, **Stellar Reaches** #12, page 21-22.

¹⁰² Pre-cognitive psions, who can see into the future perfectly. *cough*

¹⁰³ Yes, it’s Fiver and the Field of Blood – except this time, the precogs were deceived, but the street was not.

Note: Miss Ivirne never speaks Ikonaz Vilani while 'at work' in Imperial Space. Only when back in the Rukadukaz Republic, or with her genuine compatriots, will she let her guard down and use her native tongue.

Visual: A slim young woman with a wholesome, trustworthy face. She dresses and speaks to emphasise her youth, innocence and supposed ingénue nature, obviously needing a strong, masculine hand to guide and protect her.

Equipment: She has a few TL 14 gadgets, a change of clothes, and a few hundred credits to her name. She has a medical condition (or a soft drug addition, depending on her mark) which requires regular doses of a drug that she keeps in a small locked suitcase.

Opening Theme: Fleetwood Mac, "Little Lies" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UiGjxytLy8>

Referee Warning: This NPC is definitely capable of a Total Party Kill. Use with caution.

To the Players

Miss Ivirne is a freshly minted trader from Shamokin/Ley, a very high-tech influential world bordering the Imperial Empty Quarter. She was hired by a visiting Hegemonio far trader, the 600-ton *Saumonov*, on her long run between Shamokin and Zuethun... but her captain refused to pay her, and she quit. (If she thinks that it will build sympathy, she will also suggest some form of sexual harassment and onboard danger, as well.) She is eager for a paying position on a starship, isn't afraid of hard work, and will work cheap in order to get to the stars she longs to see.

To The Referee

Every word told to the players is a lie. Including 'and' and 'the'.

Miss Ivirne – actually Mimgiim Garerpisaguka, of Ikon – is working with a highly lethal one-ship Ikonaz corsair, the *Kaama*; and is using the stolen identity of a similar-looking woman who was captured, interrogated, and murdered. She has every intention of killing off the PCs and stealing both ship and cargo, and it's going to be difficult to stop her.



The Vargr team Miss Ivirne works with does indulge in a few train robberies, from time to time. The graphic is titled "3:10 to Yuma" © Goran Delic. See his work at <http://delic.deviantart.com/art/3-10-to-Yuma-419026573>

Assuming that she is hired, she will indeed work hard and well as the newest hand. Comfortable in playing a role, she will be cautious in showing her intelligence, skills, and leadership ability, and careful to keep on the mask of a trustworthy-yet-trusting follower to the lead PC. Miss Ivirne will work hard to become that man's lover; warm-hearted, generous, and eager to please.

After a few months, Miss Ivirne will 'develop' additional skills rather quickly: especially with computers and communications, but also her trader and sensor ops skills. She will continue to be a combat-shy homebody though, avoiding combat and danger whenever possible. On-board, she will push to be as much a useful hand as possible, growing to fit in well with the crew.

TPK

Eventually, in 3 + 1D months, the PCs will be ready to jump to their homeport. Beforehand, Miss Ivirne would have loaded a new, TL 14 program into the ship's computer. Most PCs in the Empty Quarter will be flying a TL 9-12 starship, so the onboard computer will be helpless before the sophisticated program. But nothing will happen until the jump is made...

...and there will be a slight misjump. The ship will be fine, but they will exit jump 500 diameters from their homeport, not 100 diameters. An annoyance, but nothing serious.

In the sleep-cycle before exiting jump, she will say a codeword, and the ship's computer will lock down the vessel and freeze all controls. Miss Ivirne will kill the lead PC in his (typically drugged) sleep with whatever weapon is available: blunt or sharp, it won't matter in the end. The entire ship, excepting her cabin, will be depressurized and opened to jumpspace, killing the crew and any passengers. After the computer detects no life signs other than her own, the hull will be resealed and repressurized.

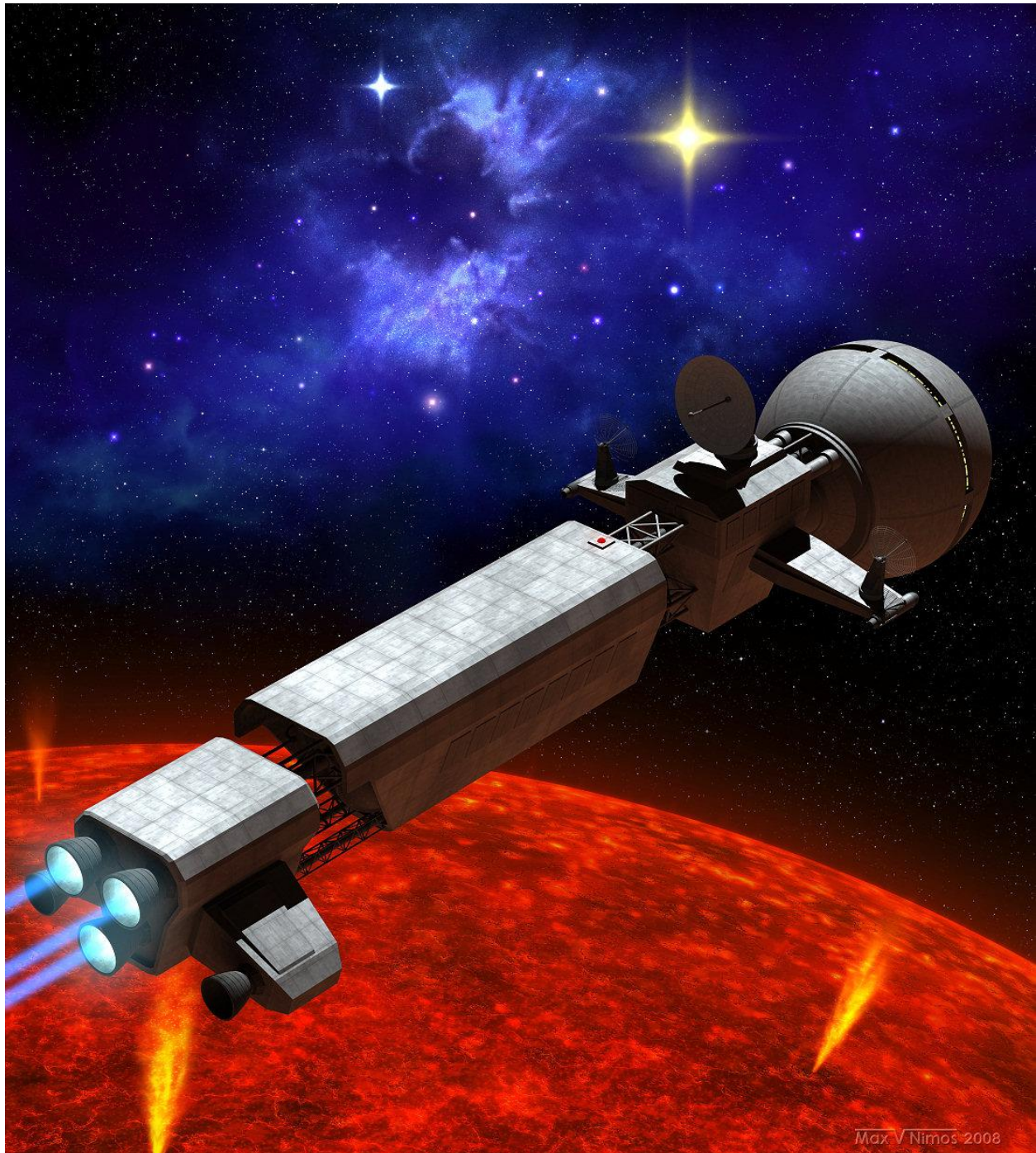
When the ship exits jumpspace, a large, TL 14 Ikonaz corsair – the *Kaama* – will be waiting, bearing the Flaming Eye of a Vilani pirate. The ship will be carefully inspected by armed and well-trained pirates for any unwanted survivors, then loaded into the docking bay, and transported to Ikon for clean-up and reselling. Miss Ivirne will be professionally debriefed by her Ikonaz Vilani and Vargr compatriots: her share in the take, amounting to 15% of the PCs ship's worth, will be provided to her in cash – minus income tax (these are *Ikonaz* pirates, after all).

Sidestepping Trouble

This adventure is designed to be quite difficult to foil... but, it *can* be stopped in progress.

The fastest way to stop the plot is to simply try to read Miss Ivirne's mind. The woman has a TL-14 electronic blocker in her skull, which displays cycling images of smiling children, unicorns, flowers, and rainbows to anyone who tries to do so. This device is powered by long-run batteries, not human mental strength, so there is no way a psion can break past it. Of course, no psion still alive in the Third Imperium is such a fool as to demand why he can't read her mind – and get a one-way ticket to the lobotomy table or a firing squad. But a PC psion can easily intuit that her mind is being blocked *for a reason* – and quietly decline to hire her.

Another way is to try to verify her story of the *Saumonov*. The PCs will find that she remembers the ship and crew clearly, but dates are always uncertain. A Hegemonio starship on such a journey should stand out like a sore thumb, and yet there are no starport records. If questioned about it, Miss Ivirne will play the cute, ditzy, scattered-brained woman, and will have no idea why the ship isn't in the records "Maybe they work with pirates, and the name I was told isn't the name they told the port!" "Maybe the Shadow Cartel fixed all the records, to remove any trace of her!" The wise thing is to go by the book, and pick someone else to hire: but could you really say no to those huge, pleading eyes?



The fact that Early Dawn-era Vilani transports (last seen in the Space Museum, page 80 of this issue, and page 33 of Stellar Reaches #19) are still in use in the Imperial Empty Quarter tend to put off a lot of people. But look at it from the point of view of the locals: it's very reliable, the plans and specs are easily found (and far cheaper than those 'Imperial Data Packs' Capital keeps pushing), the technology required is a perfectly reasonable TL 11, and upkeep is a snap. And certain Vilani governments – I'm looking at you, Pamushgar! – swear by First Imperium technology, turning to it at every opportunity. The graphic is titled "Explorer 2" © Max V. Nimos.

See his work at www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1627520

Flushing Out the Wolf

It's more likely that the PCs would get involved in this adventure because their earlier group was TPK'ed, and their new characters and ship is tasked with getting some vengeance. This could be because of tribal affiliations, business loss prevention/deterrence work, or an overworked subsector Duke putting it on the place of a family-allied

mercenary group or household staff. It is even possible that the investigators are Imperial Ministry of Justice staff, trying to crack a chain of cold cases, as one more similar ‘mysterious disappearance’ has just been added to the pile.

However, most MoJ men are tied up with driving pro-Solomani groups underground, hunting psions, or tackling the major pirate groups that are infesting the Six Subsectors. A comparatively small matter like a chain of unaccountable disappearances are more likely to be handled by a Retribution Group – a fairly common posse of vengeance-seekers in the Imperial Empty Quarter.¹⁰⁴ It could be a single ship, just a worried friend or a member of the same clan, but is more likely to be a ship’s crew managing some hired investigators, and agents, with a small 4-man team of mercenaries and/or bounty hunters for the actual capture/execution.¹⁰⁵

Initially, there is very, very little to go on. There is no ship, and there is no crew. There *is* evidence from the starport of the disappeared ship jumping in a good deal farther from the starport than usual... then a bigger ship closing to it’s position... then both ships merging into one (possibly a capture, or a docking)... then the bigger ship vanishing into jumpspace. No distress signals, no weapons fired, no nothing.

For 1D6 months, there will be nothing else to discover, no other evidence, no nothing. If the PCs quit, that’s OK – there are other adventures.

But if the PCs keep their ear to the ground, they will eventually hear of odd rumours. Rumours of:

- A dreaded Siren: an attractive woman – perhaps a crewwoman, perhaps a passenger – who boards a starship: and then the starship is never seen again. (“The usual Emptyheaded chauvinism... now mixed with superstition!”)
- Stronger, harsher preaching against dallying with strange women who are very willing to get in the sack. (“What a bunch of sexual repressives!”)
- A decreased likelihood of hiring people outside of the clan, the tribe, the House – no matter what the stranger’s credentials. (“The place is so stuffed with frightened, fearful xenophobes, it’s unbelievable!”)
- If you see a passenger or crewman fooling with outlandish, high-tech toys, get rid of the toys or get rid of the man! (“Emptyheads revelling in their backwardness, same as always!”)

If the PCs are from out-of-sector, they will certainly laugh as well. The local traders aren’t laughing, though – and those who follow the traditional advise are more likely to be seen again after making the jump, compared to those who ignore traditional thinking.

If the PCs are from in-sector, they will start looking for a Siren - ignoring the snickering of the out-of-sector co-workers. The starport grapevine will spread the news (the Imperial Starport Authority within the Empty Quarter is a fundamentally different beast than in the rest of the Imperium), and the starport guards and the closed-circuit video inspectors will take special note of attractive female starfarers (for more than the usual reasons).

There will be plenty of false alarms, and false accusations. The PCs will have to find a way to shift thru the chaff, and home on to the single, twisted needle in the haystack.

“...behold, you have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out.”

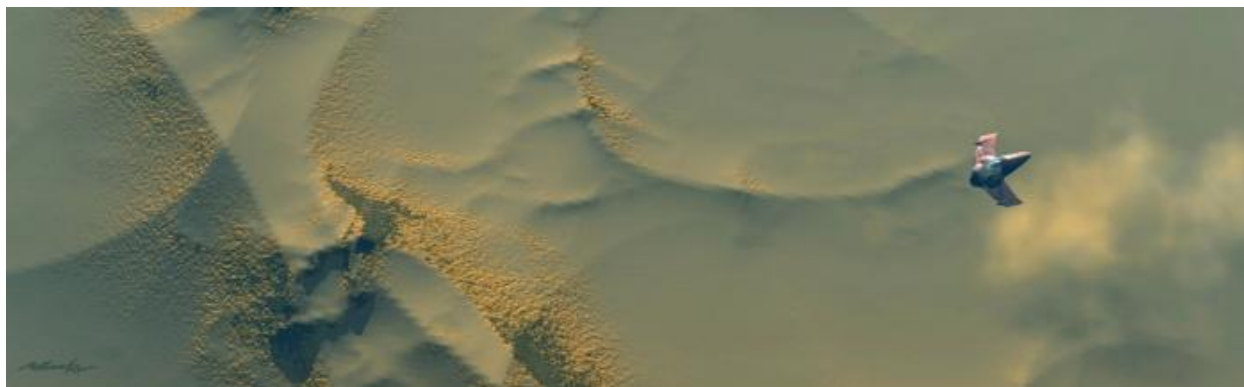
If the PCs are civilians, they are more likely to try to get the Siren, and then (if she survives the capture) to try to use her¹⁰⁶ to lure the *Kaama* into a trap. (There’s no way most Colonial *warships* can stand up to a toe-to-toe fight with a TL-14 corsair, never mind anything the PCs are likely to have!) The crew of the *Kaama* are trained and

¹⁰⁴ See “Monsters in the Dark”, **Stellar Reaches** #9, for a brief variation of the theme. Different cultures have different names for this kind of force, but everyone – even the Bwap – have their own set of in-house investigators for these kind of issues.

¹⁰⁵ The Imperial Empty Quarter has always had a harsh undercurrent; and now, with the Imperial Navy gone...

¹⁰⁶ If the sweet and vulnerable Miss Ivirne (HA!) doesn’t survive the capture, perhaps just her synthesized voice and image will do. But will the PCs get the personality and jargon right? And will they know that she speaks to her associates in Ikonaz Vilani, NOT Transform Anglic?

experienced professionals... but they have grown fat and a bit lazy on the easy kills their Siren¹⁰⁷ have been bringing to them on a platter, so the PCs have a real chance here. But they had better get it right the first time!



A ship's boat streaks across one of the many, many, many deserts of the Empty Quarter.
The graphic is titled "Flight Across the Sands" © Neil Thacker. See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=2453001&np

If the PCs are military men, they may be more eager to have a head-to-head fight against the *Kaama*, and 'cut off the snake's fangs, instead of just cutting off it's lying tongue... and giving it a chance to grow a new one'. There are few high-tech Imperial warships in the sector capable of putting the *Kaama* in its place: and the owners of these warships are not likely to let them go without a serious payoff at the very least. The solid majority of these groups, knowing that these ships are their *only* real protection against the dreaded coming wave of high-tech Ikonaz pirates, will not let them go for **any** reason – not even a direct order from Emperor Gavin himself!

Bull-headed PCs who don't somehow get access to a high-tech warship are welcome to die, riding a low-tech warship or civilian vessel in a direct attack against the *Kaama*. If the ships aren't too far behind in tech – say, TL 12 – there could be power in numbers and size: so a flotilla of 15 200-ton, TL 12 free traders¹⁰⁸ against the *Kaama* just might be able to pull off a victory. The operative word here is *might*.

Closing Theme: HyperDuck Studios, "Deities" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwS9wDVAEig>

"There are a dozen views about everything until you know the answer. Then there's never more than one."
— C.S. Lewis, That Hideous Strength

Ship: Kaama
Type: Corsair
Tech Level: 14

Class: Da Sheg Baa
Architect: Alvin Plummer

USP
PP-6122381-000000-30003-0 MCr 413.268 600 Tons
Bat Bear 4 2 Crew: 26
Bat 4 2 TL: 14

Cargo: 3 Crew Sections: 1 of 26 Fuel: 138 EP: 18 Agility: 0 Marines: 10
Craft: 1 x 220T Docking Bay, 2 x 2T Air/Rafts
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification

¹⁰⁷ Or Sirens...

¹⁰⁸ And how would such a flotilla be gathered? Mercenaries are too expensive for most everyone but the big boys: but there are benefits for having ties with a heavily armed tribe, be it the Muslim Brotherhood, the Vilani Corporate Forces, the Hindu Military Castes, the American Brave Societies, even the Bwap Guardians of Order. The Imperial Navy is gone, but the locals have every intention of taking care of business themselves...

Architects Fee: MCr 4.133 Cost in Quantity: MCr 330.614

Detailed Description

HULL

600 tons standard, 8,400 cubic meters, Needle/Wedge Configuration

CREW

Pilot, Navigator, 3 Engineers, Medic, 6 Gunners, 10 Marines, 4 Other Crew (Bureaucrats)

ENGINEERING

Jump-2, 2G Maneuver, Power plant-3, 18 EP, Agility 0

AVIONICS

Bridge, Model/8 Computer

HARDPOINTS

6 Hardpoints

ARMAMENT

2 Triple Missile Turrets organized into 2 Batteries (Factor-3),
4 Dual Beam Laser Turrets organized into 4 Batteries (Factor-3)

DEFENCES

None

CRAFT

1 220-ton Docking Bay,
2 2-ton Air/Rafts

FUEL

138 Tons Fuel (2 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)
On Board Fuel Scoops, On Board Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS

27 Staterooms, 4 Low Berths, 3 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS

None

COST

MCr 417.401 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 4.133),
MCr 330.614 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME

99 Weeks Singly, 79 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS

A large corsair, the Da Sheg Baa is a fairly common class within the Rukadukaz Republic, capable of nabbing the typical small starship whole, and bringing it home for the feast. Unlike many Ikonaz corsairs within the Republic, the Da Sheg Baa places a stronger emphasis on financial efficiency, rather than on military efficiency. Thus, the lower-rated jump drives, the limited weapon systems, and the lack of armour, sandcasters, and agility. The typical Imperial crew is still going to shudder upon seeing a Da Sheg Baa corsair, though: the typical Ikonaz corsair just wants to rob you of your cargo, but these big boys want the entire ship. As for what happens to the crew...

Like a few other common Ikonaz starship designs, there is additional space on the corsair for the bureaucrats that is demanded by the Vilani-shaped culture of the Republic. Tax and revenue forms must be filled out, incident reports filed, regulations enforced, appeals documented, import duties paid. Note that when these ships operate outside of Julian Space, these regulations do not protect the lives or property of the victims in any way, shape or form.



Business trips in interstellar societies are more enlightening, even awe-inspiring, than those of worldbound societies. But after a few years, even a ringed gas giant in the sky becomes blasé to the jaded Traveller, tightly focused on those critical corporate spreadsheets... The graphic is titled "DESERT MOON" © Justinas Vitkus. See his work at <http://justv23.deviantart.com/art/Desert-moon-356196517>

Nimukashsh U

UPP 46C7C9, Age 27, Mixed Vilani

Skills: Admin - 2, Handgun - 2, Legal - 1, Combat Rifleman - 1, History - 1, Linguistics - 1, Sculpture - 1, Math - 0, Wheeled Vehicle - 0, Grav Vehicle - 0, Unarmed Combat – 0, Computer - 0

Languages: Modern Vilani (Native), Anglic (Transform)

Visual: Mr. U looks, acts, and dresses just like billions of other conformity-minded Vilani businessmen, and wouldn't rate a second glance on the street. A fairly observant watcher can pick up the slight East Indian influences – genetic and behavioural – that pull him off the precise median of Vilani norms. Mr. U doesn't mind his genetics: a real Vilani is the enfleshed expression of his ancestors, and welcomes *all* of his ancestors into his life, body and soul. The behavioural discrepancies annoy him, though.

Equipment: Usually a datapad, it's information properly backed up on a larger laptop kept in his office, residence, or hotel room.

Opening Theme: Bombay Dub Orchestra, "Compassion", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pdy7oNQmUM>

Born and raised on Pamushgar, Mr. U initially joined the military caste, serving in the planetary armed forces for a term. He did well here, but he was eventually discharged for reasons that were never made clear. Among the Vilani, you remain in your caste for life, but his skills in auditing and accounting were still able to win him a second career as an armed chartered accountant – a useful speciality in the Empty Quarter.

As of 993, Mr. U is on his way to Nulinad, to conduct an audit of a local subsidiary for it's Vilani parent corporation on Pamushgar. The local business, a video streaming service specializing in business presentations, has proven to be a bad cultural fit for its Vilani master. The local East Indians have driven off a Bwap accountant (it was the salt water pranks that finally did the trick) and a woman Vilani accountant (egalitarian, the Solomani aren't – and that goes triple in the Empty Quarter.)

"You know the High Law of the Empty Quarter?"
"First, kill the communication grid!"
"Not the military one... the cultural one."
"Fear God, Love Your Own, and Hate Your Enemies."
"Yeah. Just be sure to keep it in mind when in the sector: it will save you a *lot* of trouble."
"Hold on... doesn't one of the local religions teach their followers to *love* their enemies?"
"Yeah, the Christians. But Tribe comes *far* before words in an old book to most of them."
"So... exactly when will the killing stop?"
"Only the stars and the sands can answer that question."
from Love is a Two-Edged Sword: Reflections on the Six Subsectors
(Nulinad:723 Imperial)

Back at headquarters, the corporate consensus is that the Solomani are just acting like the bigoted bastards they have always been, and Mr. U with his military training is the one to put them in their place. Mr. U is not so sure: he's been off-world a few times in the service of his world and his Duke, and knows that building a Proper Consensus requires that the stronger party listens, instead of merely shout louder and pound the rulebook harder. "And it's rather hard to see the real situation from 12 parsecs away. Sometimes, you just have to get out there and see for yourself."

It's possible that the situation on Nulinad has grown too poisonous and toxic for the Vilani corporation to hold on to the East Indian subsidiary: the numbers and the office atmosphere will tell the story. Mr. U doesn't think that overt violence will really strike, but local corporate lawyers are arranging a concealed-carry license for him anyways. But selling off the Nulinadian subsidiary is going to hit the corporate bottom line.

Somehow, the audit has to be done: that's priority number one. Mr. U is interested in getting more than the basics done, though: the failure to local leadership to protect the off-world staff also rests on his mind. When he heads back to corporate headquarters, his fellows are going to press for his views on whether to disband the subsidiary, sell it off, or completely overhaul it. Mr. U wants to make the right call here, as it's the key to getting a possible promotion and more difficult assignments.

Closing Theme: Bombay Dub Orchestra, "To The Shore", <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BAHjuEqOso>

Dr. Saddam Essa

UPP 8AB5FC, Age 40, Mixed Vilani

Skills:

(TL E) Computer - 4, Medical - 3, Commo - 1, Turret Weapon - 1, Vacc Suit - 0, Grav Vehicle - 0, Handgun - 0

(TL 2) Medicine (Herbal, Tsai botany) - 0, Equestrian - 0

(No Tech Limitations) Admin - 3, Liaison - 2

Languages:

Letta (Native human tongue, from a distant Protectorate world you never heard of)

Anglic (Julian, the language he actually speaks)

Dr. Essa is now resigned to the fact that he'll have to remain on Tsai for a long time, and spends his spare time trying to master the major local Vargr and human language, written and spoken. It's a long, long process: only the most common words, phrases and script forms has been truly mastered by 001-993 Imperial.

Visual: While Mixed Vilani, he's on the pale-skinned/dark-haired side of things, with a very slight, easily missed blue tinge that reveals a bit of Yilean parentage as well. Due to some past troubles, he has gained some low-tech (TL 9-B) but well-fitted cybernetic modifications, including an artificial leg, hand, and low-grade eyes – no zoom, heads-up display, or fancy gimmicks, but at least he can see in a truncated manner. Dr. Essa's limited sight includes eight levels of brightness, six basic hues (black, white, red, yellow, green, blue), and five tones. "No artistic career for me – but still better than blindness, even the colour-blindness of the Vargr!"



The good doctor, on a journey very far from home.

The graphic is titled "Traveler" © Maxim.

See his work at <http://akirawrong.deviantart.com/art/Traveler-262876247>

Unlike the unpowered foot and the easily powered-up hand ("Amazing what a properly-engineered winch can do!") the eyes require difficult-to-source high-tech batteries from distant Ikon. (Even in the Vilani-culture Rukadukaz Republic, Vargr technical standards lean to the cheerfully chaotic.) To save on battery power, Dr. Essa's eyes are often powered down, leaving him blind: 'cheap' sunglasses are worn as a matter of habit.

"*CHEAP?!?* You must be a spoiled spacer! Do you have any idea how hard it is to get flimsy, disposable plastic sunglasses built for the *human* face out here?"

Clothing includes dark pantaloons, light shirts, and sweaters, all under a rich-but-worn overcoat, topped by a red-rimmed white cap that marks the medical profession for certain regional human cultures on Tsai/Tsahrroek/Empty Quarter.

Equipment:

While most of the high-tech drugs are gone, the electronic know-how to create simple pharmaceuticals from raw, TL 0-3 remains in his beloved (and locally irreplaceable) solar-powered hand-comp. A pistol with four bullets remains as his hold-out weapon, but the public respect for medical doctors is his main shield.

The Doctor also has a translator, which can handle the most common Julian Protectorate languages, as well as Imperial Anglic. Nothing on the local human (or Vargr) languages of Tsai, though.

Opening Theme: Markus Schmidt, "The Old World Order", http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2_bVjgE86g

An Inauspicious Start

Despite the Arab name, Dr. Essa's actual parentage is obscure, and his beliefs can be boiled down to "care for the family, care for your patients, protect your property, and always get paid". Not a sophisticated code, perhaps, but it's workable.

During his childhood and youth, Essa was simply handed off between random groups of Travellers, tied together only by their shared homeworld of Taxgo (Divide/Amdulan 1235: in 993 Imperial, D241975-9) and their Letta language. But, despite this ramshackle youth, Essa was able to grasp the value of education, and read absolutely everything. Having to navigate a kaleidoscope of interpersonal difficulties, environments, and chancy circumstances on dozens of worlds and ships, Essa grew skilled in moving through a maze of challenges with only a few scrapes and bad scares.

A look at his UPP will show a limited level of native intelligence, but a good school career is based on following instructions and passing tests (regurgitating information), and that Essa could do quite well: he was even able to master the vast body of knowledge needed to be a physician, graduating in 978 Imperial on Ikon and paid for by a mix of government subsidies, scholarships, and high-risk/high-reward assignments. He fell in with the Protectorate Traveller community he was born into, with a range lovers, friends, enemies, and allies drifting in and out of his life. Easy come, easy go...

...until one of his patients died on him, leaving a young toddler in his care, and no next of kin. Nobody else cared much if the kid lived or died: 'It's simply not my problem.' If Dr. Essa had decided to simply put the child in a founding home, or keep her in clothes and food (and out of danger) until passing her on to a good-enough couple, he would have done well enough, so far as the Protectorate Traveller community was concerned. But instead, the small child captured his heart, and he always found a flaw in the people who asked to care for her... a reason to distrust the generous or heart-felt offers, and care for the girl himself.



Songsinger Essa, pensively contemplating long-gone times. As for her mount... the belly rumbles.

The graphic is titled "I'm hungry" © Justinas Vitkus. See his work at <http://justv23.deviantart.com/art/I-m-hungry-302498691>

Problems

Naming the child Songsinger – after the child's relentless crying – he took on more daring assignments, often working for mercenaries in the small-unit medic position. Despite his range of injuries – losing his eyes to a laser, his leg to a land mine, and his right hand to a large and very sharp piece of shrapnel – he managed to get the kind of money he need to properly care for his baby. But the damage of war isn't only physical: his personality grew harder, more violent, and more short-tempered.¹⁰⁹

Things came to a head when in an argument, when he returned to the civilian trader's life, and his ship was docked on Tsai, one of the more backward worlds of the Republic. Dr. Essa struck his daughter, hard. But that isn't what

¹⁰⁹ See "The Truth About War Heroes", <http://www.freemansperspective.com/truth-about-war-heroes/>
On why Christians must avoid military service in today's world, I recommend Lawrence M. Vance's work: either his blog posts - http://www.lewrockwell.com/author/laurence-m-vance/?post_type=irc-blog - or his articles - <http://www.lewrockwell.com/author/laurence-m-vance/> - will do.

ruined the relationship: it was a string of cruel curses and poisonous words, attacking all she loved and all she was, which drove Songsinger away from him.

It took a few days before the guilt broke his pride, and he began to search for his adopted daughter: to no avail. The Doctor realized that he had nobody, nobody in the entire galaxy, except Songsinger, and that throwing her away meant throwing away his own heart as well – all in the name of how smart he was, how right he was, how strong he was.

Searching

Ever since that day, Dr. Essa has been searching for his daughter. He has long left behind his last ship's crew, who merely shrugged and hired on someone else to take his place on the roster. His medical skills keep him fed in his travels, and the physician has gained a new respect for local home remedies and low-tech medicine as well. When he can, he hired local investigators, armed with a few photos and scraps of information of an off-worlder woman, wandering the lands on the back of a local beast.

The hard journey, often on foot, has tempered his character, and the miles of solitude and thought has given him a better handle on his temper and his anger. The need to care for his limited supply of high-tech equipment – and the knowledge that, once it's gone, its gone for good – has taught him patience and respect. And, as an easily identified man on an alien world, dependent on the locals for food and safety, he has had to rebuild old people skills, building up his business and his reputation as a healer despite significant language and cultural barriers.

His immediate plan is to earn enough to purchase a riding animal (which means learning to ride one, a skill he's working on with increasing success). His final goal is to bring back his Songsinger back into his life, and be the father she needs him to be. Dr. Essa is not too far from reaching both destinations, but there's still some way to do – in distance and in spirit – before he gets there.

Closing Theme: Tilman Sillescu, "Walking Barefoot", http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6SUv_XS_ddE



The artist as a young Traveller, making her own future, step by step.
The graphic is titled "Journey" © Justinas Vitkus. See his work at
<http://justv23.deviantart.com/art/Journey-300411910>

Kr'ravgridzadz

UPP 9F9B84, Age 22, Ovaghoun/Suedzuk Vargr

Skills: Acting - 2, Infighting - 1, Linguistics - 1, Streetwise - 1, Stealth - 1, Handgun - 0, Wheeled Vehicle - 0, Computer - 0, Vacc Suit - 0, Zero-G - 0

Languages: Ikonaz Vargr (Native), Anglic (Transform)

Visual: Kr'ravgridzadz looks and behaves like many Imperial Vargr in the Six Subsectors, dressed in the threadbare Gushgusi manner, humble and shamefaced before the humans. Unlike the proud and wealthy Ikonaz, the easygoing Irilitok, or the violent Suedzuk, Kr'ravgridzadz

Equipment: A pistol, a knife, and five sets of TL 13 Chameleon cloaks, cut for Vargr wear. Kr'ravgridzadz' favourite set of steel claws was shattered during a recent fight with some stubborn prey.

Opening Theme: Paul Oakenfold, "Burns Attack" <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1D-5Rf1bjOk>

The Skippable Preamble

The Vargr are predatory carnivores, and they like to hunt. A lot.

Unlike their canine ancestors, though, the Vargr are sentient, and are able to alter and channel their aggression into a variety of ways, not just the Endless Hunt. Moreover, the Vargr – even the Blood Vargr – are social animals, and *almost* always value the survival of the group over satisfying their instincts. But on the other hand, the higher the Charisma status, the greater the ability you have to strike and to kill, just as your natural instincts dictate. "The right to lead" and "the ability to organize a successful hunt" are quite closely linked in Vargr society: only the definition of a successful hunt has changed. Few Vargr packs actually need to bring down a large herbivore, but quite a lot need to meet their sales quota for the month...

(Well, yes, there *are* the corsair packs: but even they are usually quite flush for a year or even longer if they make a single, solid kill, and are able to either properly strip it and/or haul the catch home.)



Some Imperial Highports are more unusual than others. Indara, 990 Imperial.

The graphic is titled "Asteroid City" © Justinas Vitkus.

See his work at <http://justv23.deviantart.com/art/Asteroid-city-293342145>

While it is the Logaksu (the Lair Vargr) who are the true heirs of the original Vargr, is it the Suedzuk of the old Vargr Enclaves (now generally called the Red Vargr, or the Blood Vargr) who most revere actual, flesh and blood hunting, preferably of other sophonts. In the Empty Quarter, the Suedzuk have been decimated by the onslaught of humaniti, and few still cling to the old ways. But the prestige and charisma to be gained in blooding their offspring in the traditional manner means that a few Suedzuk packs – usually those tied to the oldest corsair bands of Ssilnthis – are still willing to risk a lot, to gain a distinction that they will have to hide from all but a few.

By 993, even most of the Suedzuk Vargr of Ssilnthis are against the practice. The surviving humans of the world of Ssilnthis are all under the protection of some Vargr pack or other, and the humans of the Rukadukaz Republic are guarded by the Ovaghoun Vargr. The Hegemonio have nothing but hate for the Suedzuk who have slain so many of their own, and will inflict nasty consequences on the surviving Suedzuk populations they now rule, as a reprisal to *any* attack. The Ssilnthis Gap is becoming an overworked hunting field, with few easy picking left – excepting the occasional careless Imperial trader. That leaves the Imperial systems, on the other side of the Lesser Rift.

Now, the Character

Kr'ravgridzadz attempts to live up to his Ovaghoun/Irilitok name as much as possible... and hide his Blood Vargr heritage, as well. Long-lasting dyes work to camouflage the tell-tale red splotches on his fur – being as colourblind as other Vargr, Kr'ravgridzadz has had to commit all of these locations to his memory. More difficult is fighting the 'poor impulse control' of his always-hostile Suedzuk heritage, but years of training and practice has made it second-nature now. The hardest thing to fake, though, is Irilitok humility and co-operation. Humans can't tell the difference, but other Vargr can tell actually *smell* the strain Kr'ravgridzadz has when faking submissive behaviour, when his *real* instincts range between authoritarian command, raw defiance, and disembowelling the target. It makes his fellow Vargr uneasy...

Currently, Kr'ravgridzadz poses as a teacher/guide for a group of three to eight young Vargr, nearing the age of adulthood. Thanks to his acting skill – and assisted by the usual dismissive attitude humans have to submissive Vargr – most humans just wave him pass, incurious of exactly *what* Kr'ravgridzadz is teaching his charges.

A Quick Bite

The main goal of the hunts Kr'ravgridzadz organizes is to have his large Vargr pups handle their first face-to-face human kill. If possible, Kr'ravgridzadz would prefer to do this aboveboard, as soldiers or executioners of a lord or government. If necessary, Kr'ravgridzadz will make other arrangements, preferring to pick off someone on the outskirts of society, who few will miss: perhaps on a lightly populated world, or in a ghetto where no one cares about another corpse turning up unexpectedly. Wherever life is cheap, there you will find him and his students.¹¹⁰

Even Kr'ravgridzadz is unwilling to openly challenge human authorities in Imperial Space, or kill in the broad daylight: that kind of thing, he leaves to the pirates, the corsairs, and the raiders. He just wants to get some blood on his student's hands, get them to smell the fear from the victim, and then get them to their home pack safely.

Transport

Lacking a ship himself, Kr'ravgridzadz works with a lot of shady merchantmen and pirates with the thinnest cover stories ever heard, to get from one system to another. Often, he has to discreetly muzzle and/or handcuff his more feral, paranoid students when travelling by starship: in his line of work, it would not do to poison relations with the Traveller starfaring community by having a starship crew find one of his students over the half-eaten corpse of the ship's engineer. That kind of thing is bad for business.

Closing Theme: HyperDuck Soundworks "No Rest for the Wicked"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3kjNkLw5ys>

Lance Corporal Caleb Cirromon, Fathwaas Prime Guardian

UPP B9786A, Age 28, Mixed Vilani

Skills: Combat Rifleman - 2, Vacc Suit - 2, Bow - 1, Linguistics - 1, Stealth - 1, Long Blade - 1, Energy Weapons - 1, Battle Dress - 1, Heavy Weapons - 1, Brawling - 1, Recon - 1, History - 1, Grav Vehicle - 0, Wheeled Vehicle - 0, Computer - 0, Research - 0

Languages: Anglic (Transform, Native), Bwap

Visual: An interesting American Indian/East Indian/Jewish mix; the Vilani part of his heritage is distant enough to be invisible to anything but blood testing and the standard Solomani Party saliva test. He's build strong and agile, and has a typical military bearing.

Equipment: Note: cross-trained to work with TL D equipment, as well as the TL B equipment of his homeworld.

¹¹⁰ But not on the battlefield, where the prey can kill the hunter. Kr'ravgridzadz is uninterested in a fair fight, even if it does give lots more Charisma than a mere stealthy murder in the dark does. "There are too few Suedzuk as it is, and the mother will react very violently if one of her precious pups don't come back."

TL D equipment includes Battle Dress, FGMP-13, Laser Rifle, Laser Pistol, and a Grav Belt: the rest of is equipment is at TL B.

Opening Theme: Taro Iwasiro, "Onimusha 2: Chapter V: Truth of Loyalty"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JcxsNpGbsl0>

Cirromon was born and bred on Fathwaas, a Bwap world with no notable human presence. His parents trained him in the Christian religion and tried to guide him into a merchant career, like themselves: the religion took, more or less, but he loved fighting more than trading.

As soon as he could he signed on with the Guardian starmerc¹¹¹ group. Strongly tied to the Bwap Guardians of Order, this Bwap/Vilani unit (consisting of three starships – all Broadwords – in 993) supports Bwap operations across Nulinad and Gimushi subsectors, mainly in escort and asset protection duties. Among the Guardians, Bwap command and crew the starships, but most of the actual troopers are humans,¹¹² usually Mixed Vilani residing on majority Bwap worlds. The troopers are well-equipped, and heavily trained for boarding actions, small ground operations, and cadre training and support of Bwap military units. (Being a Prime Guardian, Lance Corporal Cirromon would be the equivalent of a commando in the Imperial forces.)

As of 001-993, the Lance Corporal is being trained up for an extended operation into the Rukadukaz Republic, along with the rest of his mates on the *Tefe Kefa*, the Broadword he serves on. Somewhere in Tsahrroek subsector, the homeworld of the Slarelthen¹¹³ awaits discovery, and L/Cpl Cirromon will be providing security for the Bwap/Vilani expedition that will be looking for it. It is known that Slarelthen relics were uncovered on several worlds in Tsahrroek (three or more worlds, to be determined by the Referee), but local disinterest means that the actual homeworld of this species was never determined.



¹¹¹ The Guardians are *not* true mercenaries: for all intents and purposes, they are sworn human auxiliaries of the Bwap Tap-a-wewaka-atapas. If you follow the paperwork to the letter (as well as the money), they are mercenaries: but if you follow the oaths, they are part of the unofficial (but very real) Bwap-Vilani alliance, one of various assets kept in play in case the local Solomani decide to attack their worlds and assets.

¹¹² Humans can survive in a broader range of climates than the Bwap can, and are generally more durable, stronger, and tougher as well. The Bwap *can* fight, but are not as good at it as humaniti: the chaos of the battlefield is too much for them. (But when it comes to 16th century drills and squares... or 19th century/Traveller-style mass naval clashes... the Bwap get a lot more competitive!)

¹¹³ For more on the Slarelthen, see **Stellar Reaches #1**, page 15. Summary: a minor non-human race, who never obtained jump drive, but did reach TL 17 in many other areas of technology, including medical technology.

COST
MCr 499.566 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 4.946),
MCr 395.696 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME
112 Weeks Singly, 90 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS
This is a stripped-to-the-hull Broadsword. It's up to the PCs (or the Referee, or a combination) to determine what the loadout of the ship is. Note that the type of turrets added can reduce agility.

Note also that this ship will be designed for a primary Bwap crew. The human part of the ship - "Human Country" - won't have the suffocating humidity, overwhelming heat, and dripping moisture that most of the ship will be set to: but that's just the crew cabins and the human mess. Everywhere else, from the bridge to the engine rooms, will be as oppressively humid as any sauna.

Umarah Al Sati, Senior Broker

UPP A967B9, Age 38, Mixed Vilani

Skills: Liaison - 3, Admin - 2, Medical - 2, Computer - 2, Legal - 2, Trader - 2, Robotics - 1, Gambling - 1, Zero-G - 1, Broker - 1, Handgun - 0, Vacc Suit - 0, Grav Vehicle - 0, Computer - 0, Research - 0, Ecology - 0, Acting - 0

Languages: Anglic (Transform, Native)

Visual: Despite his Mixed Vilani heritage, Mr. Al Sati identifies with the Hebrin Arabic culture, and dresses as such. He still retains the good looks of both Arab Solomani and the Vilani bloodlines, though, and has a lengthy list of lovers and ex-wives to his name.

Equipment: Just a TL 14 business briefcase, which acts as a mobile office. In addition to the mandatory computer and communication equipment, it also acts as a mobile printer, and a nice supply of paper and pens and synthetic quills (useful when working on the low-tech worlds). The communication gear is especially built to work with landlines, faxes, and telegraph lines as well, allowing it to work from TL 4 up to TL 9. Data inputs allows everything from scanning parchment to reading punch cards and floppy disks, to working with wireless networked storage (a.k.a. 'the cloud'). Finally, it comes with extensive security built-in, keeping industrial espionage at bay.

Opening Theme: Oystein Sevåg, "The Door is Open" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6nbhbmMxNps>



Always searching for the next opportunity, the next deal... The graphic is titled "Beautiful Desolation" © Neil Thacker. See his work at at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=2457159&np

Prelude

Umarah was born in a corporate power couple, from an Arab father with an interstellar megacorporate career and a Vilani mother who balanced running a pharmaceutical business with a famous desert/urban gardening media empire. He only sporadically saw both parents at home at the same time, and was essentially raised by the Muslim Arab servants. While he never converted to Islam, he has a far more sympathetic view of the religion than most of the Vilani on Hebrin... or even his father, who long ago abandoned any faith in Allah, preferring to worship his ancestors in the Vilani fashion.

His elder siblings chose to follow in their parents footsteps, into various megacorporations or as administrators of their mother's various business, but Umarah chose to strike out in a different direction, at first studying Geology (which he dropped), then studying Mechatronic Engineering (successfully getting his degree here). His science career got sidetracked, though, when his supervisors realised that he had far better sales talent than most of the nerdy engineers did.

Profits

Umarah had a way to gain talent, hiring people from his clients (rather than poaching his competitor's staff) who value the increased status and pay he can offer them. Always looking for a way up, Umarah worked for various Solomani corporations. (The Vilani ones all insisted on lifetime contracts – with hefty penalties for quitting – that Umarah just couldn't stomach.) Rising to a senior sales manager with his current employer, Intaj Electronics, Umarah began to criss-cross Hebrin subsector, working with local agents: he picked up customers portfolios they lost, built up his business intelligence on the issue, sniffed out what went wrong, and was able to win back the old customer three times out of four.

Problems

Nowadays, though, Umarah has an increasing problem on his hands. Intaj Eletronics is increasingly having to deal with well-made fakes: industrial equipment that looks exactly like the real thing on the outside, but with substandard components on the inside. The cheats can undercut Umarah, still make a profit, and leave Intaj with the ruined reputation.¹¹⁴

Now, if Intaj Eletronics was a Vilani corporation, it would have access to assets – in-house or contract – which would be enforcing corporate copyrights in a rather forceful manner. But it's a broadly Solomani corporation, so it never set aside the budget for such activity.¹¹⁵ Umarah is undeterred though, and has promised that he'll find a way to fix the problem, which is where the PCs come in.

¹¹⁴ No, there is no high-pop industrial world named 'China', 'Cathay', or even 'Zhongguo' in the Empty Quarter. Most of the Industrial systems in the Quarter are dominated by a Vilani business culture, which is fiercely protective of copyright and IP rights. However, Kakhasaek is a Vargr industrial world, which couldn't give a hoot about copyright...

¹¹⁵ Solomani corporations wail to their governments to protect their IP rights, allowing bureaucrats to lunch with each other for a decade while the competition devours their market. But for the Vilani, the corporations *are* the government, leading to rather different outcomes. It is better to assume that the IP rights of any lone inventor (or inventive PC) will be stolen by batteries of corporate lawyers: so, release the rights into the public domain, and make your money as the top master and advisor in the field.

I remember when I used to work with Uirgaa Investment, an old-line Vilani brokerage firm. One time, I noticed that one of the interns was suddenly missing the first bone of his ring finger. I asked him directly about it, but he was rather evasive in his replies. However I managed to get an old hand to talk about it. It seems that he was caught dipping into certain accounts without permission, and, after a little discussion, the intern, his manager, and the HR officer agreed that a little amputation was in order. The company even paid for the trip to the hospital and the medical care, so it wasn't really so bad in the end.

Oh, don't give me that stunned look: you know how the Vilani are. "Nobody leaves the company, and all problems are handled in-house." Company uniform, company urban districts, company police, company laws, company temples, company hospitals, company schools, company priests, company graveyards. When a single company is too small to organize things properly, syndicates, guilds, conglomerations, cartels, and co-operative bureaux get set up. Complete vertical integration, all the way!

Or maybe you have never visited the Third Imperium before? Let me guess: this is the first time you have ever left your Solomani homeworld, and you are shocked – *shocked!* – to see direct corporate rule without the usual crowd-pleasing fantasy fluff to obscure the obvious.

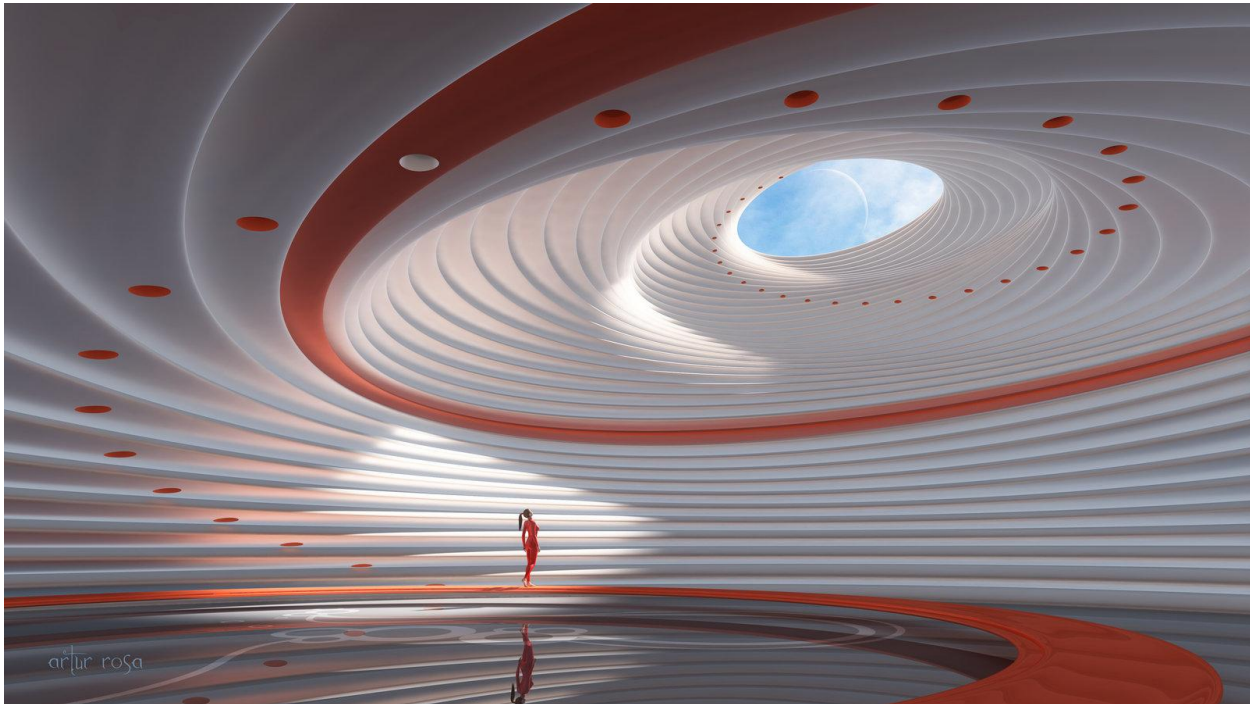
Sir Lang Earle, First Manager of Natey Interplanetary LLC, in
[From Urban Beggar to Star Tycoon: The Story of Lang Earle](#)
(Nulinad: 991)



A blood-red world rises over an exceptionally dead landscape. The graphic is titled "Charon" © Justinas Vitkus.

See his work at <http://justv23.deviantart.com/art/Charon-419755777>

Petition



The Oval Hall is not a formal, fully equipped conference hall within the Palace of Jewels – but it is where the Sector Duke prefers to meet his friends, to relax, to consider the Proper Order of Things, and to plan out his next move. This graphic is titled “The Flaming Circle of our Days” © Artur Rosa. See his work at <http://arthurblue.deviantart.com/art/The-flaming-circle-of-our-days-358584635>

Preface

This is a social/cultural/political adventure, which involved quite a bit of wheeling and dealing, but little violence if all goes well. If the Referee (and the player group) like his violence, he should just skim the adventure, treat it as background, and focus on the “Should things go wrong...” section.

In the adventure proper, the PCs will have to negotiate the political shoals of conflicting nobles, corporate concerns, and a restless membership to get the best deal. The reward of success is protecting your guild, and so insuring the re-election of the PCs at the next convention: keeping their position helps with business, and in building respect among other starfarers. The price of failure means not only being kicked out at the next election, but an increasing tone of hostility between the local Gushgusi traders and the sophont that sits on the Sector Throne, Sector Duke Dethwabtakewebwakawa.

Vast amount of background fluff – more than the adventure itself! – has been stuffed into the

Appendixes. It’s really just useful for overthinking Referees, who want to know all the worldbuilding mechanics that’s going on behind the scenes.¹¹⁶

PC Identity

In the Imperial Empty Quarter, who you are – and, even more important, which tribe you represent – is of critical importance.¹¹⁷ As the PCs are meant to represent their trading guild, The Far Caravans Guild, the typical four-man PC group must include:

- A Solomani East Indian Hindu
- A Solomani Arab Sunni Moslem

¹¹⁶ Well, I *also* want Christian believers to learn how to Think Things Through. As God commands Christians to be wise judges, we must understand the principles that govern us.

¹¹⁷ If you want to read the lengthy, extended digression that was replaced by this sentence, go to “Appendix: The Importance of Identity”

- A Mixed Vilani Lazisari Kikhushi
- A Bwap

The American Indians are absent from this list, as they simply lack the political/military muscle to get on it.¹¹⁸ All of these cultures – including the Bwap – are patriarchal; so all the representatives are men.¹¹⁹

All the PCs should be generated for at least three terms (twelve years of experience). All the Players should write a paragraph¹²⁰ on how the PCs gained the fame and respect among the local merchants they need to be nominated as a trader representative: this paragraph will be read in character to the group (don't forget body language: a few props could be useful as well). The actual skill set is not as important as the reputation the PC has: but savvy Players will be sure to emphasise Liaison, Streetwise, and Admin/Legal skills for this adventure.

(If the story is continued past this adventure, spare a thought for starship, trader, and personal defense skills.)

The starship should be completely paid off (for additional prestige among the merchants who elected them), and owned by at least one of the PCs – perhaps all of them, if they usually work in a group. I am assuming no violence during their journey to the sector capital of Nulinad, thanks to a hired starmerc escort (or even a small Noble warship, on a quid pro quo basis), by the sheer power of the PCs reputations among local pirates, or thanks to certain under-the-table arrangements with said pirates.

What Needs to be Done

Sector Duke Dethwabtakebwebwakawa (“Duke Dethwab” to Imperial citizens who gave up trying to pronounce his name, “Duke Dethie” to irritating acquaintances, and “Duke Death” to his enemies) holds court at Jajapur: the entire city is officially Imperial territory, and is located close to the starport.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ But see “Appendix: Changing the Rules”

¹¹⁹ Or, substitute the Bwap term for ‘adult male who upholds community responsibilities regarding leadership, wealth generation, and violence.’

¹²⁰ Exuberant role-players are permitted to write their five-page biographies, but only the Referee is required to read them – and reward the player for good roleplaying/punish for bad roleplaying.

¹²¹ For a visual, see **Stellar Reaches** #19, page 13.

Much of the paperwork and prepwork for the audience has already been laid down by onsite Guild lobbyists and agents, so the PCs will only have to wait two weeks until the actual audience begins. The Guild welcoming party, the social whirl with other movers and shakers in the sector capital, and the parties to be had I leave to be fleshed out by the Referee. Try not to pick up any new, expensive habits while in the sector capital...

The PCs may party at night, but they have to work during daylight hours. For some odd reason, policy wonk work regarding a fictional far future economy is disliked by Traveller players, whose eyes glaze over when viewing spreadsheets populated with numbers pulled from thin air. So, this can be completely ignored, abstracted, or drastically simplified depending on the PCs preference.

Still, they should be at least be aware of the main issues at hand. As their vocal and rowdy membership would put it:

- Don't tie us down with a pile of fees we can't afford to pay!
- Don't bankrupt us with regulations we can't afford to meet – or even keep a track of!
- We can't meet all the safety requirements and still operate, so lay off!
- Most of these regs and requirements are tailored for the wealthy worlds of the Imperial Core: we have a completely different situation here in the Six Subsectors!
- Most of these regs and requirements can only be met by Sector, Domain, and Imperial-scale corporations: applying them to us free traders is unfair!
- Will you kindly stop bothering us and start bothering the pirates!
- Will you start acting like an impartial judge, and not an bought-and-paid for agent of the megacorporations who only want to squeeze us out!

“OK? OK!”

Getting it Done

The PCs need to be briefed in how to get the Sector Duke to see things the Guild's way. This can be broken down to the following subparts:

Protocol: the right form of address, when to bow (and when not to), knowing the proper procedure in the Sector Court and in the other occasions to meet with the Great and the Good.

Rainmakers: no ruler – certainly not the Sector Duke – rules alone. One of the Imperium’s driving goals is to promote and manage interstellar trade, so the team will have to find out which of the Sector Duke’s servants and ministers they need to convince first, so they will say a few words to the Duke in the back rooms that can help the Guild’s cause.¹²² Fortunately, the onsite Guild lobbyists have figured out the right people to talk to: however, it’s up to the PCs to make their case.

Enemies: there are always opponents who the PCs will need to outwit. Unfortunately, the opponents here are wealthy and powerful megacorporations, which the bureaucratic Bwap and his Vilani associates have a natural sympathy for. Fortunately, this is the Empty Quarter, not the Imperial Core; there’s a long history of resistance and hostility to megacorporate concerns among the Solomani nobility and populace, and some smart PR can make it politically impossible for the Bwap to stand against the goals of the Far Caravans Guild.

In Court: When making those extremely polite, highly veiled, very indirect, completely impersonal, not-quite-threats threats – I like to call them “gentle, thoughtful advise against making regrettable decisions” myself – *precise* phrasing is required. Whenever possible, you *don’t* want the Sector Duke to feel that you were forcing him into making a decision he doesn’t like, because you *don’t* want to find out what a truly pissed High Noble can do to ruin your life (at the very least). Instead, you want to make him think that *your* goals are really *his* goals, and that by helping you, he is really just helping himself.

[Referee: Yes, it *is* possible for the PCs to win a direct confrontation with the Sector Duke. But to do so, they need collective action – say, having all the starport personnel cease working until the Sector Duke gives in to the demands of the Far Caravans Guild. But only *credible* threats can make the cut: and the starport threat isn’t one of them. Waging a tradewar against megacorporate interstellar trade *IS* a credible threat: but the PCs need to watch their language *very* closely, or they could be in prison for ‘aiding and abetting

¹²² Or, better yet, the PCs can get in the backrooms themselves: but this takes an age of hands-on networking and favour-trading, and the PC’s don’t have that kind of time. Unless a powerful noble friend of theirs happens to be in town, and has the time & influence to spare to give them a hand...

piracy’ rather unexpectedly. Know the terrain of battle BEFORE charging in!

Results

There are two ways the Referee can determine the success.

- A) **Role-play out everything!** Have the PCs make their case before the ‘trusted friends’ of the Sector Duke. Have them bow deeply before the Referee – acting in place of the Sector Duke – before offering their warm greetings, and carefully slide into the subject at hand. Figure out the *right* way to bribe certain influential voices (“But *of course* we’re willing to offer free transportation to you and your friends for the next year! We consider it a *privilege* to assist such an important person as yourself in the conduct of your weighty Imperial duties...”) Expect to offer lots and lots and lots of booze and women – but make sure that the Guild isn’t cheated, and that get your money’s worth! If you don’t, you need to find a way to make these powerful cheaters pay: “When we feel the heat, we see the light!”
- B) **Roll those dice!** If acting out the sordid world of political lobbying isn’t for you – “Actually, it’s just like my old dives back when I was just starting out, just with nicer clothes, better manners, and a LOT more top-notch flashy bling” – then you can keep your distance from the icky nature of Imperial policy making by just rolling those dice in gloriously abstract and antiseptic decision trees!

Just as a stab at simulating the whole business with dice, we can go with this:

- 1) Set the stage for the best possible audience before the Sector Duke.

Talking

Let’s assume five meetings with Ducal gatekeepers & ministers. Using BITS (page 4) and the highest party Liaison skill.

Difficult Liaison;

-1 if nobody in the party has Liaison skill,

+1 if Liaison skill used is 2+

Spectacular Success: +2 modifier when speaking with the Sector Duke

Success: +1 modifier...

Failure: -1 modifier...

Spectacular Failure: -2 modifier...

Do this five times, for each minister/gatekeeper/advisor

The enemies of the PCs – a megacorporate representative – will also like to have a chat. There is no way to avoid this. “Anything you say – or don’t say – will be used against you...”

Difficult Liaison;

-1 if nobody in the party has Liaison skill,
+1 if Liaison skill used is 2+

Spectacular Success: +1 modifier when speaking with the Sector Duke

Success: no modifier...

Failure: -2 modifier...

Spectacular Failure: -4 modifier. Also, the PCs must roll within a day (or a few minutes...) to avoid arrest on some charge or other: roll Average Streetwise to avoid this. Arrest means they can’t see the Sector Duke: the adventure is over. (Unless some additional roleplaying is done, at the Referee’s discretion.)

Do this roll once.

Bribing

Let’ assume that the PCs need to bribe two individuals to make certain that the Sector Duke sees certain information the megacorporations would rather have disappear, a megacorporate payoff somehow ‘gets lost in transmission’, or a poor Rank Baron in a useful position, but close to being discharged ‘gets the retirement package he expects – in return for a little assistance in a difficult matter’.

Difficult Bribery;

-2 if nobody in the party has Bribery skill,
+1 if Bribery skill used is 2+

Spectacular Success: All negative modifiers lost in the **Talking** section are removed.

Success: All negative modifiers lost in the **Talking** section are cut in half, rounded up.

Failure: no modifier. Also, the PCs must roll before leaving Nulinad to avoid arrest on bribery charges: roll Average Streetwise to avoid this. Arrest means they lose their case and any gains: the adventure is over. All further attempts at bribery are increased in difficulty, from ‘Difficult’ to ‘Formidable’.

Spectacular Failure: no modifier. Also, the PCs must roll within the day to avoid arrest on bribery: roll Difficult Streetwise to avoid this. Arrest means they lose their case and any

gains: the adventure is over. Also, no further attempts at bribery can be made.

Do this roll once, twice, or never: PC’s discretion.

2) Meet the Sector Duke.

The Megacorporations have been working on him for a while now, and he naturally leans in favour to Megacorp interests, so the PCs have their work cut out to get His Grace to see things their way.

Formidable Liaison;

Add all earlier modifiers to the roll;

-1 if nobody in the party has Liaison skill,
Spectacular Success: the PCs meet their goal – and more. Some meaningful form of grant, deregulation, etc. is provided to free traders in the sector.¹²³

Success: The free traders have no additional burden placed on their operations.

Failure: The free traders have additional legal obligations placed on their operations, primarily safety and anti-theft regs, to insure they are not using stolen property. Expect widespread grumbling and increased hostility against the Sector Duke within the Guild; this will slowly spread to harsher attitudes against the Vilani and the Bwap in general.

Spectacular Failure: All sorts of fees, regulations, licensing restrictions, etc. are placed on the back of the average free trader. Major anti-bribery legislation with stiff penalties and rigorous enforcement increases the difficulty of local traders to do business: but strangely enough, corporate contributions to their powerful friends are not covered in the new regulations.

The Megacorporations laugh, but the locals are not nice people, and they don’t like outsiders. Expect an unpleasant tradewar within the year, on top of piracy concerns.¹²⁴

The Imperial Megacorporations are broadly supported by the Vilani and the Bwap, while

¹²³ There is no tax relief, as the Imperium does not tax interstellar trade at all. Tax burdens are placed on worlds instead; Nobles have personal tax treaties with the Emperor.

¹²⁴ The likelihood that local traders will ally with the pirates against megacorporate interests approaches 100%.

the free traders are generally supported by Solomani Arabs and (some) East Indians, so there will be a racial overlay to this conflict: the Imperium and local Solomani Party agitators will take note, sooner or later. Probably sooner.

Do this roll once.

Follow-up on the Sector Duke's decision.

If the Sector Duke decided **in favour** of the Far Caravan Guild, the PCs need to make sure that this decision sticks. This is not difficult: Bwap are stubborn, and this Bwap doesn't like to waffle, as it would make him look weak in the eyes of the public. (Especially the mildly hostile Solomani public.) Still, it pays to make sure that all the I's are dotted and the T's crossed before leaving Nulinad: the Megacorporations would love to stick in a little last-minute surprise. Not anything that will destroy the PC's accomplishment, but a little hint that they aren't done yet, not by a long shot.

If the Sector Duke decided **against** the Far Caravan Guild, the PCs have one last shot before the train of unpleasant consequences leaves the station.

They will somehow have to squeeze a last-minute unofficial audience with the Sector Duke in before the official proclamation is made. This will be a Formidable Liaison task, as the Mega-corporations will be on guard for just such a stunt. If the PCs can pull it off, they then have to make

- either a Formidable Liaison task to soften their failure one step (From Failure to success, for example)
- or a Staggering Liaison task to soften their failure by two steps (From Failure to Spectacular Success, for example.)

I can always rely on the Empty Quarter to strengthen my migraine...
– Emperor Gavin, 75-993 Imperial.

Appendix: Changing the Rules

The PCs may wish to challenge the exclusion of the American Indians from this team of leaders.

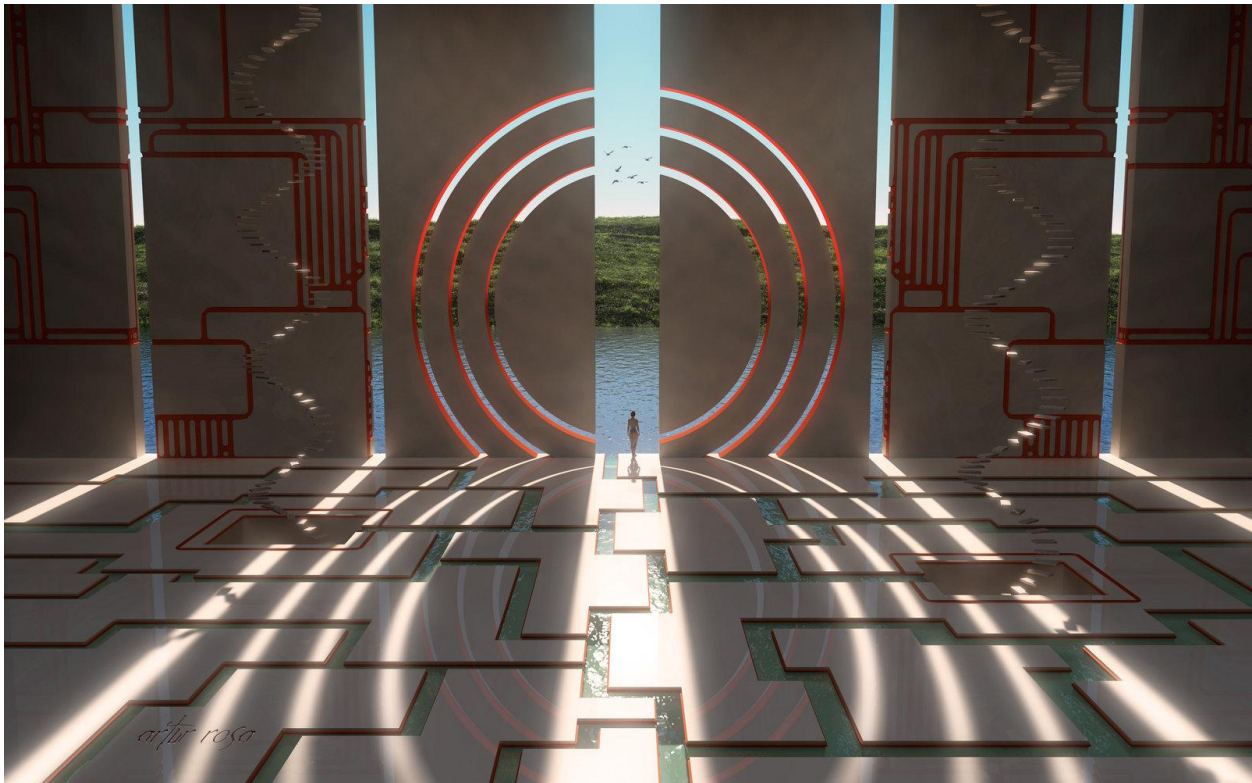
If the PCs want to change this, they will have to make it happen. Any attempt to create a fifth place on the team will be strongly resisted: if it is successfully opened, it will be immediately contested by two other powerful groups: the Vilani, and the Iper'mar (**Stellar Reaches** #5).

The Vargr do not have a hope of joining this group, *regardless* of how many spaces are opened: far too many traders have died by their claws for any tolerance to be extended. Players who are determined to change this fact will discover that they will be expelled: Imperial Edicts that order the Star Caravans Guild to accept the Vargr will merely result in the *formal* dissolution of the group – and it's prompt reconstitution *informally*.

“And if the PCs are willing to dump absolutely *everything* to get the Star Caravans Guild to *really* accept the Vargr?”

Well, they have chosen a worthy challenge – but it's not part of *this* adventure. Then again, it's the need of the group that matters: adventures can and should be rewritten and/or dumped, as the needs of the PCs require.

Given a sufficient number of time, work, and cash, this goal is not truly impossible: there are quite a number of Irilitok and Ovaghoun Vargr in the Imperial bureaucracy, the Imperial military, local mercenary groups – and on the wrong side of the law. How the Referee and the PCs leverage these forces is an interesting little puzzle...



While Sector Duke Dethwabtakebwebwakawa has modified parts of his ruling tower-palace at Jajapur to suit his need for humidity, it's at the Palace of Jewels – originally built for a much-beloved consort of an ancient First Imperium Duke – where the Sector Duke feels most relaxed, and lays down his most important plans. He has had the building renovated at great expense, with high technology and clever air pressure techniques keeping the water-loaded air in, despite the open-to-nature concept of the building. Of course, all of it is set at 100% humidity – the humans can shut up and sweat, for once! This graphic is titled "The Exit" © Artur Rosa See his work at <http://arthurburblue.deviantart.com/art/The-exit-353008044>

Appendix: Historical Background

The PCs are notable of a large interstellar merchant association, the Far Caravans Guild. The Guild exists to protect and promote the economic interests of free traders across the Six Subsectors. The Guild has had a good relationship with the Ducal houses, planetary nobles, and planetary governments over the centuries, and had eagerly worked with local concerns to stifle the extension of Imperial megacorporate interests within the sector. Working with the Imperial government, the Guild was one of the willing tools used to stifle Solomani Party attempts to spark a distracting insurrection in this rather Solomani region of Imperial Space.

Current discontent arose with the failure of the Dukes – all but one human – to select a human Duke to rise to the Sector Throne. After numerous failed attempts, they were forced by their own petty jealousies to choose the lone Bwap among their number, Dethwabtakebwebwakawa, to rise to the position of Sector Duke.

Duke Dethwabtakebwebwakawa – “Duke Dethwab” to the tongue-tied average Imperial citizen – is not as tone-deaf to human concerns as the anonymous rumourmongers claim. As part of the “Apprentice Noble” program his clan arranged for him before ascending as Duke of Lentuli, Duke Dethwab spent time in all six of the Imperial subsectors, as well as a fair bit of time in the strongly humanist, broadly anti-Vargr Hegemony of Lorean. However, the Duke – now Sector Duke as well – is a strong Bwap nationalist, and wants to put a Bwap stamp on the Six Subsectors. This leads not to an attempt for Bwap independence (as this simply isn't of great interest to the sentient amphibians) but in Enforcing Proper Procedures on the sector government and bureaucracy.

The Bwap are always concerned with detailed bureaucratic minutiae, but for the majority of Third Imperial rule of the sector, the Arabs that long dominated the region routinely ignored the Rules As Written in favour of tribal alliances, bribes, religious supremacy, personal gifts, political bargains, etc. The Rules were rigorously enforced when convenient –

especially to hinder enemies – and casually ignored when inconvenient.

With the fall of Arab domination – closely coupled with the end of the Hebrin Rebellion and the Panos Settlement – the Sector Dukes that the Emperor parachuted onto Nulinad were no longer just ignorant outsiders, to be led by the nose by the Arabs who dominated the inner advisory circles, the Imperial military and the Imperial civil service of the sector. Prince Panos drove blatantly corrupt and biased practices into the shadows, while the entire Imperial establishment was vigorously purged of “seditious elements.” The following Imperial Nobles ruled the sector by carefully balancing tribe vs. tribe, and over time gave more and more authority to the weaker tribes – the Bwap most notably, but also American Indians, the Lazisari, the Vilani, even a few Vargr – to insure that the East Indians and the Arabs that demographically dominate the local population are kept from unfettered cultural and political primacy.

Things changed as the decades rolled by. Hebrin, the jewel of the Arab systems, was broken as Imperial-subsidized infidel immigration grew to match, then surpass, the old Muslim Arab population. The Bwap grew from strength to strength, and corruption was pushed down to manageable levels – but still remained noticeably higher than the typical Imperial sector, as the weak local economy simply couldn’t survive if the full force of Imperial rules, paperwork, and regulations were enforced to the letter. Even the consistent enforcement of starship safety regulations, alone, is enough to bring interstellar trade to a shuttering halt.

Since the Hebrin Rebellion, all the Sector Dukes decided on a policy of the light enforcement of most Imperial regulations, so long as the fundamental loyalty of the local systems was given. Formal regulations were rigorously enforced only on the Imperial Military and the personnel of the Civil Service, as there was no way in hell that the environment for another treasonous mass mutiny would be tolerated.

Appendix: The Importance of Identity

Most Traveller adventures are written for a generic group of adventurers, engaged in an adventure that could happen anywhere. I don’t have the slightest problem with this: I have written a few scenarios myself which fit this template.

But that would defeat the purpose of the immense tidal wave of fluff I have written for this sector. What’s the use of deep background, if you don’t put it to work?

The PCs should 1) be able to uncover the significance of what’s happening all around it and 2) put that knowledge to work, to meet the challenge, to show that not only does he understand the rules of the game, but that he can make them *sing*.

And the Referee should – perhaps, must – reward the PC for doing so. Otherwise, why waste the PC’s time jerking him around when he could be playing Xcom: Enemy Unknown or World of Warcraft instead?

But the thing is, if the background is so important, then the PC must fit in it as well. The Empty Quarter is a deeply personal setting: who you are, where you come from, who your family is, what your race and religion and sex is, profoundly determines how the locals deal with you. Isolated, kinless individuals without friends or ally or network are simply asking to get *vanished* the minute they break some unspoken rule, say the wrong kind of joke, or simply show up at the wrong place.

Well, I exaggerate. The Rukadukaz Republic is quite civilized, and has no hostility to foreign visitors. The Hegemony of Lorean is not civilized – regardless of the starships, the high technology, or the many impressive cities – but they also have no great hatred of Imperial visitors... so long as they mind their manners, and don’t go around sticking their nose in places it doesn’t belong or asking subversive questions. It’s only the Imperial Empty Quarter, the Six Subsectors, where the religious, racial, and cultural clashes really make your head swim.

Fortunately, most of the clashes of recent decades result in sharp elbows and a mosaic of small to mid-sized monocultural communities with well-defended borders, instead of the ferocious, occasionally Duchy-wide violence of even a century ago. Still, as traders, it’s the PC’s job to cross the borders in search of a deal, and many PCs have to bring mutually suspicious parties together to make a deal – and to keep to the terms of the deal, even when they can benefit by cheating. Not easy at the best of times: and, with the Imperial Fleet gone and the Shadow Cartel fraying at the bonds of trade, these are not the best of times.

Still, today is far from the worst of days, and the PCs are expected to take their knocks like men. “If you want an easy life, the Imperial Core is *thataway*. But if you want to make something better than it was before, stick around – we can always use another hand!”

Appendix: The Limits of Corporate Power

The Sector Duke has overstepped his bounds, and if he doesn’t pull back, he’s going to get a promotion to Capital/Core, and the Emperor will try – AGAIN – to

find someone who can rule the sector competently... or at least not mess things up so spectacularly as to spark some enraged backwater uprising, distracting him from the most important conflict since the Interstellar Wars which destroyed the *First Imperium*.

“But,” I can hear you say, “the Establishment ALWAYS supports the megacorporations!”

Well, not the Canonical Imperial Establishment.

Why can I say this with confidence?

I can give the answer in just a few words, words that are built into the DNA of Traveller. See if you can spot the common thread among them.

- Mercenaries
- Starmercs
- Corporate Troops
- Route Protectors
- Tradewars

In a proper “business-government partnership”, the corporations can rely on the government to protect corporate concerns – most certainly including the use and monopoly control of violence – in return for corporate support and financing of the government.

To my astonishment and adventure-loving pleasure, this simply *cannot* be true of the Imperium. The Imperial troops work for the Emperor – but the Imperial corporations are in the same fix as the Imperial worlds, and even the Noble Houses: “*You* look out for *your* own interests, and do *your* own killing with *your* own hands. *We* serve the Emperor... *period*.”¹²⁵

It is reasonable to insist that the megacorporations get at least implicit support from the High Nobility. But when push comes to shove, the Great Houses are going to stand aside and let the corporation die. Yes, even the immensely powerful Tukera Lines can and will be cut off, at the end of the day.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Being a God-fearing man, I have some intense philosophical differences with the pagan Imperial government. But I have to admit, I have a *profound* respect for a political leadership that point-blank refuses to a) whore its name out to the money-men, yet b) allows them the tools to protect their people and their property. “Your profit is yours... if you can keep it.” Rough justice, yes, but justice all the same.

¹²⁶ Not even Tukera Lines can snap its fingers and have the Imperium jump at its beck and call. It has its own Route Protectors and Secret Service – the Vermene – for a *reason*...

After all, Zhunastu Industries was Emperor Cleon’s *personal* megacorporation, and the need to create a large market for its wares is debatably the reason for the creation of the Third Imperium in the first place. The Imperium still stands... but where is Zhunastu Industries?

Blood is important... Flag is important... but Corporation just don’t measure up.¹²⁷

Appendix: The Profound Unimportance of the Imperial Empty Quarter

Recall that a single high-pop/high-tech world – Ikon is the world in mind – is worth more than the entire Empty Quarter, combined.¹²⁸

Then recall that, statically speaking, the Third Imperium has at least a hundred – perhaps a few hundred – of absolutely indispensable high-tech/high-pop worlds within her vast territory. None of which can be found among the Imperial worlds of the Empty Quarter.

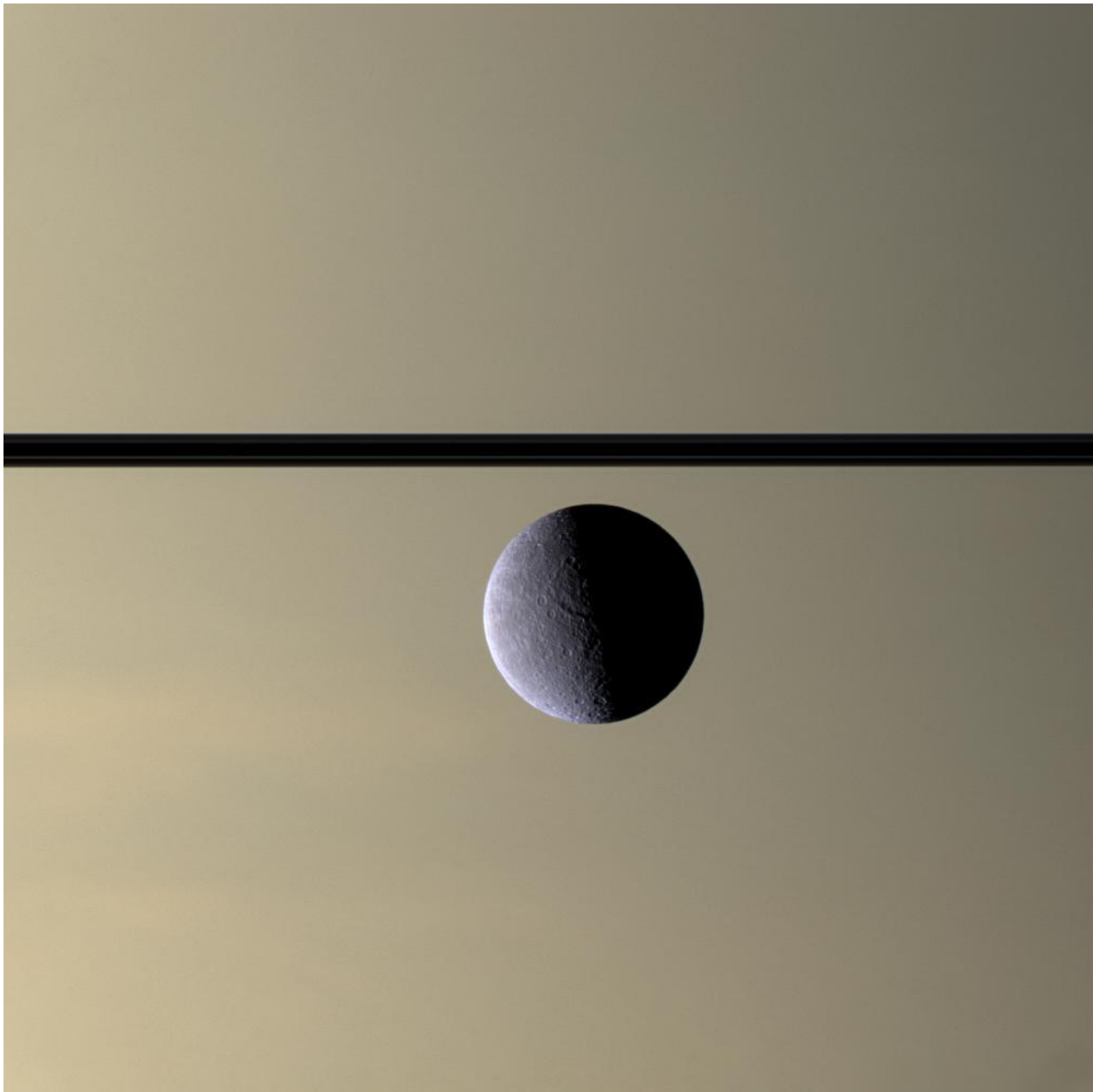
Basically, what this means that EVERY SINGLE SECOND the Emperor spends thinking about the Empty Quarter is a fantastic waste of his time. His time is better spent just grabbing a fistful of Appeals to the Emperor from the Notable Citizens of the major worlds, rapidly skimming through them, and giving a quick thumbs-up/thumbs-down/get more information ruling on them.

Done with a reasonable level of intelligence and competence, His Majesty can add a good 0.1% to 1.0% increase to both public approval to his rule, and overall Imperial wealth, just with this action alone.

On the other hand, the Emperor can spend a full year of his time trying to fix the Empty Quarter, and at the end of the year – even if he was *completely* successful – he would have a sector that was *on its way* to being a worthwhile addition to the Imperium.

¹²⁷ But corporations *do* measure up for the Vilani! As for the Solomani, observe the importance of religion among them, and its *lack* of large-scale impact in Canonical Imperial history...

¹²⁸ **Stellar Reaches** #9, page 37.



A view of Rhea, Saturn's second-largest moon. Image credit: NASA/JPL/Space Science Institute. The use of this imagery should not imply that NASA endorses this fanzine in any form or fashion. See the original graphic at Space Images: <http://www.jpl.nasa.gov/spaceimages/details.php?id=PIA10494>

Appendix: Imperial Honour

It would be easy for me to treat the concept of Imperial Honour with cynicism and ridicule: but the setting won't let me. *Something* has to hold the Imperium together: it was never religion¹²⁹, and the Ruling Solomani Race concept fell by the wayside (in Court

¹²⁹ But see *Stellar Reaches* #22 for a take on an Imperial Catholic Theocracy.

and Noble Circles) in 679 with Emperor Zhakirov's marriage to the Vilani noblewoman, Antiama.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ "Zhakirov: Oldest issue of Arbella. Born in 624, proclaimed emperor by the Moot in 666. Zhakirov's marriage to Antiama in 679 marked and cemented an alliance between the Alkhalikoi Dynasty and the business interests of the Imperial Core; it broke the power of the Solomani interests at court and ultimately led to the Solomani Rim War (990 to 1002). Died in 688." – "Emperor's List", *MegaTraveller Imperial Encyclopedia*. I can hear the premillennial Solomani yells about the Mark of the

So, we turn to honour. Not likely as a governing idea for empire (I'd bet on the thirst for money, power, and fame myself), but not implausible, either: the men of Cyrus' Persian Empire only had three duties – to ride well, shoot straight, and speak the truth – and the lives of Romans, Medieval Europeans, and the Feudal Japanese were all shaped by variations of Honour.

"Let's be candid now, keeping the Bwap homeworld under Imperial rule is the *only* reason why we bother to hold on to the Emptyheads."

"Well, the Quarter also serves as a buffer against the Julian Protectorate, in case they ever get nasty again."

"And every Empire needs an obscure backwater, where certain annoyances too politically leveraged to be spaced or shot can be dumped instead."

"So even the Empty Quarter earns her keep in the vast Imperial family!"

"Absolutely. And also as a negative example. You know: 'It could be that the purpose of your life is only to serve as a warning to others.'"

"So keeping the Bwap happy isn't the *only* reason to keep the Starburst flying there, after all! Good to know. But wouldn't it be great if there were a high-pop/high-tech world there? It would change *everything!*"

"Well, they don't hate each other like they used to. Maybe you'll get your wish... in a few centuries."

Assorted powerful sophonts,
chatting at a fine Sylean restaurant on Capital,
993 Imperial.

Using Deirdre McCloskey's "Virtues lost: How it happened and why we can't live without them" as a quick and dirty guide¹³¹, we can group the seven classical virtues in two groups: The Aristocratic/Pagan virtues of Courage, Justice, Temperance, and Prudence, and the Peasant/Christian virtues of Love, Hope, and Faith. As a first pass, the Imperial Nobility can be said

Beast from here, three millennia in the past. "Why Eschatology Matters", <http://americanvision.org/4566/life-and-death-and-the-last-days-or-why-eschatology-matters/#sthash.4eiWXcKl.dpbs>, is a sufficient response.

¹³¹ The link: <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2013/12/18/3913584.htm>

to tie the aristocratic virtues under a single military virtue, Honour.

Unlike modern western secularism – which despises the very *concept* of eternal virtues – the Imperium holds closely to the aristocratic ones. In contrast to today's unofficial (and therefore unaccountable) ruling nobility¹³², Imperial Nobles harbour no great malice to the Christian virtues, but do not let it dominate their own lives. "Peasants – tied to land, job, or corp – have their proper place, and are permitted to live as they wish: but let us not delude ourselves, and pretend that the virtues of servants are the virtues of masters."¹³³

The Vilani have their own set of 'high governing traditions', which – like the Tao of Chinese culture – are fairly analogous to the Western virtues if you look and squint at them in the right kind of light. With the supplanting of the Solomani by the Mixed Vilani (a reasonable development, as they make up the bulk of the Imperial population), Vilani mores and ideas are slowly reshaping the concept of Imperial Honour; but even in 993, it's still a slow and cautious work in progress.¹³⁴

Appendix: Jajapur Notes

While Jajapur isn't that large a city for Nulinad, there is a great deal of variety in the city districts and wards.

Distinct include:

- East Indian: while the world broadly belongs to them, they only dominate only 40% or so of the city;
- Arab: their stake in the city dates back to the Rule of Man era, over 2,500 years ago¹³⁵;

¹³² I refer to the nobles themselves – not their elected puppets.

¹³³ Contrast this with the Robertson's "I am second" video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjgccYmx13w> Of course, Imperial Nobles are not interested in coming in second to *anyone* except to a higher noble (date of enfeoffment is used to sort nobles of equal rank). To observe how Money Changes Things, see this experiment:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luqGrz-Y_Lc Then, imagine how drastically the wealth to buy entire *worlds* would change the mind...

¹³⁴ As the psychotic events of the War of the Rebellion (1117-1130) proved, it wasn't slow and cautious *enough*.

¹³⁵ As of AD 2013, there are about 13 cities that have been continuously inhabited on Earth for the last 2,500 years (i.e.: since the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cities_by_time_of_continuos_habitation. Always remember, Referee: The Imperial Era - all three Imperia – has been around for a *long time*.

- Bwap: their streets are shaded from the sun with dimming cloths, and suffused with a hot, dense, humid, dripping atmosphere;
- American Indians: only earning their share of the city in the last 50 years, they are still engaged in turf wars legal, cultural, political, and criminal;
- Vilani: benefiting from close connections with the Bwap, the Imperial government, and the megacorporations, their neighbourhoods have a prosperous air about them;
- The Imperial District: where transient Imperial soldiers and bureaucrats live and work. Most of these people never leave their district in all the years they spend in Jalapur. This area is primarily dominated by Imperial Civil Service personnel: as the sector is of limited strategic importance, there are relatively few military personnel here, compared to other sectors.
- The Financial District: Unlike all other Imperial Sector Capitals, *this* financial district is dominated by the few subsector-scale corporations – and even a few large *planetary* corporations – with most of the Imperial megacorporations relegated to second-tier and specialty concerns. Only General Products – co-rulers of the industrial world of Zukhisa¹³⁶ – and the relentless drive of Tukera Lines have permitted them to gain more than a beachhead in the sector.¹³⁷
- The Corporate District: like the Financial District, it is unusual due to the far smaller presence of the Imperial Corporations, compared to most sector capitals. The entire feel of the district would feel weird, difficult to understand, threadbare, and harsh to Imperials accustomed to impersonal, numbers-driven, cosmopolitan Imperial Corporate Culture, rather than intensely personal, relationship-driven, God-World-and-Tribe rooted Gushgusi¹³⁸ business culture.
- The Diplomatic District: For a minor Imperial capital world of only six subsectors and a token amount of wealth, there are quite a number of diplomatic delegations and consulates around. The Julian Protectorate maintains a consulate here, but it's rather dwarfed by the consulate (and surrounding settlement!) of the Hegemony of Lorean. While the main Imperial embassies of the Ssilnthi and Tokitre systems in the Ssilnthi Gap are on Capital¹³⁹, they also maintain small offices on Antares and Nulinad as well. The K'kree maintains a trade delegation on Nulinad as well.
 - There was a Solomani Autonomous Region office here as well. It was closed long ago, but there remains a few Solomani Confederation unofficial representatives that are under house arrest, yet are permitted contact with 'informed friends' from the outside world. "You never know how the tides of war will shift – better hedge your bets."
- The Iper'mar District: As noted in **Stellar Reaches #5**, the Iper'mar are primarily interstellar nomads, living off their technological expertise; but regular access to the Imperial Sector Capital means access to various projects. So, a few small but wealthy subclans remain in Jajapur, 'to guide the Imperium to sensible technological choices.'
- and Startrader District: This *is* the sector capital, so the startown is fairly well cleaned up compared to the others in the Six Subsectors. Still, you don't need to look too hard before finding the same trade tycoons and scammers, solid merchantmen and shady traders, as you'd find at any other startown.

Due to Nulinad's ~~astrological~~ astronomical position and political importance, you'll find more Imperial visitors from outside the sector here than anywhere else, so if you really need to talk to a Denebi from Deneb, a Vilani from Vland, or a born-and-bred Delphi, this is the only place where you have a fair chance of doing it. Also, famous celebrities who have committed to visiting ALL

¹³⁶ See **Stellar Reaches #11** for details.

¹³⁷ The other Imperial Megacorporations are not *completely* shut out of the sector: the Bwap and the Vilani systems welcome their products, and Nulinad and Eninsish are friendly markets. Hebrin is increasingly open as well: but otherwise? "Too much of a struggle for too meager a profit... if you can even get a profit!"

¹³⁸ I wouldn't say 'Emptyheaded' here: you'd be surprised how you can get numbers to lie, and how reliant businesses are on a shared culture, implied trust and unspoken understandings.

¹³⁹ Counting all the 'important single-system governments', the number of embassies at the Imperial Capital is simply *vast*, dwarfing any similar embassy row – "Just a single row?!? How *quaint!*" – in existence.

the Imperial sectors are likely to make a pit stop at Nulinad... then quickly turn their back as they continue their journey, never to be seen in the Empty Quarter again. "If you hope to *ever* meet someone famous in the Quarter, you *need* to be at Jajapur, Nulinad!"

Application: ...And about those Virtues...

Like the modern secular humanist, I advise that the concept of the virtues – and the entire Aquinas-driven attempt to synthesis a Pagan/Christian civilization – is simply obsolete. But not because there are no enduring moral guidelines, as the moderns believe: all the virtues are worthwhile and worthy of respect, so far as they go.

No: it's because the virtues – if you root them in "Tradition and Custom" as Conservative Pagans do, and not in Transcendent Law – are but pale and feeble imitations of the real thing.¹⁴⁰ Even the Aristocratic Virtues of Courage, Justice, Temperance, and Prudence have no root, no anchor, and are thus no restraint on the powerful.¹⁴¹

From the Greek city-states to Rome to today (to the fictional Far Future), the State is nothing more than a tool for the Insiders to benefit at the expense of the Outsiders. All the rest of it – Courts and Schools, Flags and Police, the Media to the Professoriate, Elections and Bureaucrats – are just paraphernalia.

Even Church and Law and God would become nothing but yet another tool in their hand, if they can get their poisonous fangs into it. And, often enough, the Insiders succeed – well, not with the real thing obviously, but it's easy enough to bribe¹⁴² sophisticated and

influential churchmen to build idols that the Insiders will approve of, and are celebrated by the masses.

And what is the Christian response?

- All Empires Fall
- All Lies Crumble
- All Idols Fail
- All Delusions Crash
- Only Christ will Endure

¹⁴⁰ The fruits of the spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) are better guides: but even that is just the *results* of righteous living. The *source* of a noble life is in obedience to God and His Commandments: but that is only possible by Grace, as we have no ability (or even desire) to obey God and live unless Christ moves us to. (Col. 2:12-14)

¹⁴¹ Yes, even Courage – a virtue even lunatic tyrants can uphold – ends up on the scrap heap when the heat gets hot enough. An uncountable number of harmless innocents have been harmed, crippled, or killed by fearful costumed murderers, all in the name of preserving their precious skin. As for the up-and-coming military officer, the one who wins battle after battle, and enjoys the trust of his men? "Time to arrange an accident – strictly to ensure the Unity of the State, naturally." And yet, and yet... "Courage is not simply a virtue, but the form of every virtue at the testing point." Even when C.S. Lewis annoys, he still has a point.

¹⁴² Actually, I think that only the low-level drones are bought off with money or tenure: the really high-level bribes are [Inner Ring](#) invitations.

Old Business: The Scent of Death

There were quite a few instances when Admiral Unio's 'good fortune' ran to ridiculous levels. Intrepid Researchers tracing his path across the Extents – all Vargr themselves, for obvious reasons – end up rather shocked by just how many things could have gone wrong, how narrowly the Sector Admiral sidestepped a lethal trap, or just happened to show up at the precise time that his Vargr enemy was vulnerable. The implications of this ridiculous chain of impossible coincidences – that either the Sector Admiral was guided by God Himself, or was actually God in the Flesh – have inflicted a deep wound of self doubt into the Vargr psyche, with serious consequences to be discussed later.

Especially as the primary result of the Wars of the Claw was the crippling of Vargr power and technology, the deaths of over a trillion Vargr (directly or indirectly), and the re-invigoration of the enemy human race.

—**Stellar Reaches** #22, "Counties and Churches: Beyond the Imperial Borders", page 28.

I never get round to this in Issue #22, so I might as well take a look at it now.

The biggest problem, after a truly crushing defeat, is that you could simply give up. I don't think the Vargr of the "Counties and Churches" universe will do this: even after this massive setback, they are still ahead of where they were when they first started rebelling against their slave status thousands of years ago. The Wars of the Claws are over, and the Vargr still exist, have made substantial gains in recovery, and are even readying for an offensive against the K'kree.

No, the actual defeat isn't really the problem. The problem lies elsewhere, in the mind:

- 1) "Have the gods/fate/destiny/natural selection decisively turned against us?"
- 2) The realization that "We can really lose, we can really die – all of us – and our entire existence can turn into nothing but dry dust. Forgotten."

The first problem is not really a problem. The Vargr simply will not kneel to a human god, nor recognize human morality as authoritative over their own actions – as all of these actions would make the Vargr subservient to the humans. Once you have decided that there are prices not worth paying for any reason, death, and even the extinction of your people and culture, can be seen as the proper choice.

The problem is the *kind* of death they are facing: of being just a road bump in some other race's story. The Vargr hasn't had to face an existential crisis, or face the end of their history and their race since the Wolvesbane Plague threatened to get out of control. With that crisis, a lot of hard work and radical co-operation between the packs managed to save their species, and after the crisis had passed, the Vargr could again grow as before.

But this time, it's different. With the heavy losses the Vargr have sustained in the New Vargr Wars – especially the destruction of so many Ancient weapon caches – the faction-ridden Vargr of *this* universe have lost their main defense against the human Imperium. The smart policy then is to pull back your claws and rebuild again: but the Vargr simply *will not stop* raiding the humans, stealing their stuff, or killing those who resist. And if the humans showed the possibility of wiping them out before, they can fully manifest that possibility next time.

The Vargr can feel the cold fangs of death, resting gently on their throat. It is gentle and soft now, but the grip is unbreakable. The Vargr have never been an introspective species, or one given to worries of a distant future, but the cold winds of the coming darkness is seeping into Vargr art, in the stories they tell, in how they fight. More passion, more recklessness, more joy, more strength – and less thoughtfulness, less planning, less sacrificing today for a better tomorrow. Eating the seed corn, if you will. A final burst of defiance before eternal night.

In summary? In Official Traveller, the Vargr are the creation of Grandfather, who may answer their cries at their time of greatest peril. In the "Counties and Churches" universe, the Vargr have... nothing.

The Association of Hope



The Rajan Rescue in action, 283-990. While not a seminal event like the Imperial retrieval of millions of long-enslaved Imperial citizens from Ikon in the mid-700s ([Stellar Reaches #14](#), page 15), the Rajan Rescue still inspires many within the downtrodden Six Subsectors, and made the Association of Hope's reputation.

This graphic is titled "Salvation" © Ron

See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1703457

Preface

Founded and led by Sir Andrew Sandia¹⁴³ in 135-986 – while still fighting court (and other) battles to secure his wealth – the Association of Hope (AoH) is a rapidly growing charitable network that works to support and rescue victims of piracy within the Imperial Empty Quarter. Sir Andrew has grown bored with the position of Chairman of AoH: success breeds boredom, and new challenges call out to him, so he is interested in turning over the reins to someone else.

The PCs may be fellow charitable workers, hired mercenaries (the AoH does not arm her ships, but is willing to purchase armed protection), or wealthy magnates interested in leading the AoH themselves, to go further in her present course or in a new direction.

¹⁴³ For more on the Imperial Knight, see [Stellar Reaches #21](#), page 30-31

Ethics

Sir Andrew is a Christian, and is strongly motivated by Jesus' charitable and compassionate actions in His life. Unlike most Christians in the Imperial Era – who remain as ethnocentric as the rest of the Solomani – Sir Andrew insists that this compassion be extended to non-human/non-Solomani sophonts, as a form of Common Grace.

Most of his staff operates on different principles. The Vilani (racial and cultural) believe that all sophonts should be brought into one unified consensus, and feel that extending mercy and compassion to those in need helps to bring minds together, thus laying the foundation to true unity and a timeless, never-aging grace and peace. Certain Bwap feel that AoH nourishes the Wapawab, the Universal Tree/Network (envisioned as a great and life-giving tree) that brings order and life to all... even while driven to distraction by the AoH's habit of rule-bending.

The Irilitok Vargr (who make up most of the Vargr within the Imperial Empty Quarter) are strongly inclined to pro-social activities, are quick to recognize the value of human life as equal to their own, and make up a large percentage of the staff in the field. As a large percentage of pirates are Vargr, this makes the Irilitok contribution especially valuable in obtaining information on stolen lives and equipment. On the other hand, as Vargr they are naturally viewed with suspicion... and, some pirates do impersonate AoH Vargr to get their targets to lower their guard, permitting a more easier kill.

There are a small but noticeable faction of Buddhists in the AoH: followers of a monk from Pramas in the Hegemony of Lorean, who led 40 of his most dedicated followers from that world to the AoH office in Hebrin to join and serve without pay. (Six of these followers died on the journey, due to a pirate attack). Sir Andrew is quick to point out to his fellow Christian believers that there are more Hegemonio Buddhists in the AoH than Imperial Christians, Muslims, and Hindus... combined.¹⁴⁴

Said Christian believers remain unmoved, pointing out that love begins at home, with your neighbours – not with distant aliens from far stars – and his own people need him more than strangers do.¹⁴⁵

Goals

Unlike almost all locally-rooted charities – but like many Noble-sponsored charities – the Association is not tied to a particular race, religion, tribe, world, or culture. It is tied to a particular need, though: the relief of victims of piracy.

Pirates exist to steal and to kill. Different pirates have different motivations:

- The desire to inflict pain and death, with the stealing part merely being a fringe benefit: Blood Vargr pirates fall in this category.
- Easy money, with violence used as the prod to get what they really want: the dual-species¹⁴⁶ Ikonaz Pirates & race-blind Shadow Cartel comes under here.
- Religious grounds: the Bengal Lions (Hindu Nobles) and Stellar Sheiks (Muslim Nobles) used pirates for numerous proxy wars for centuries (400s – 800s Imperial). This is no longer the case: in 993, the Muslim Brotherhood works *against* pirates, and not in support of them.

¹⁴⁴ Following Tzu Chi, these Buddhists follow an ethic of universal compassion for all living things, human or not.

http://www.us.tzuchi.org/us/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2047%3Adeveloping-a-heart-of-equality&catid=82%3Aamasterteachings&Itemid=199&lang=en This position has a very small following in the Imperial Empty Quarter.

¹⁴⁵ A substantial portion of local Christians think that Sir Andrew's charity is merely a project to curry favour from Imperial authorities – a successful project, as his knighthood proves. Sir Andrew often retorts that perhaps their hearts are as merely as cold and hard as a nickel-iron asteroid... and his people reply that wealth insulates men from reality, allowing wasteful, self-righteous gestures that poor normal folk cannot afford. What is true is left for the Referee to judge: note that it is possible for *all* of the above to be true!

¹⁴⁶ Human Vilani and Ovaghoun Vargr, both tied to the extremely wealthy world of Ikon, who have no qualms in robbing poor Imperial ships & systems.

"Why do the wealthy steal?"

"Money alone does not bring Charisma in Vargr societies.

Only daring acts of violence and theft brings honour among the wolves of space."

- Racial grounds. The Vargr have an earned reputation as pirates, coupled with their racial pride.¹⁴⁷ In contrast, the pirates of Udisis subsector are quite humanistic: while happy to steal from their own people, they react with rage when Vargr interlopers come for their own pickings. Attempts by Solomani Security to introduce a racial bias among other pirates, focusing on the Shadow Cartel, have met with abject failure.
- By political goals, with the covert PANs (Political Action Networks) once upon a time being a prime example of this. Nowadays, most of the PANs have largely abandoned the old Abadani ideology, in favour of simply stealing plus shouting some party slogans.¹⁴⁸

Quite a lot of the victims of piracy are interstellar merchantmen who are in the wrong place at the wrong time. Some of them merely lose a modular cutter, an air/raft, or some cargo: others lose their ships, and still others lose their lives.

The AoH cannot compensate for financial losses, but they can do the following:

- Trace down and return stranded spacers and passengers to their homeworlds;
- Recover bodies and return them to their loved ones;
- Trace down the enslaved, free them, and bring them home;
- And tend to the wounded.

There are pirates who take hostages, and are willing to negotiate for their release in return for a ransom. The Association of Hope avoids this kind of middle-man position, preferring to give the work to specialized Crisis Negotiation teams. However, there are times when the nearest Negotiation Team is a good dozen light years away, so AoH leaders are trained in the foundations of this kind of work.

The AoH is primarily interested in the protection of sentient life and the return of the dead to their families and clans, and not the return of cargo or property: but if it doesn't interfere with their primary mission, her members are happy to point out where lost cargo can be found should they happen to know of it.

A thin-but-broad network of hospitable friends of the Association is willing to put up penniless survivors of pirate attacks for free;¹⁴⁹ and some allied starship captains are willing to provide transport for free as well.

The free transport usually involves working passage, true, but come on – do you really think that washing dishes, mopping floors, and manhandling equipment can pay for *any* interstellar journey? I respect the principle, but a tough kindness is still kindness.)

Finally, the AoH provides a good number of simple-but-useful free educational material, teaching captains the basic tell-tales of a pirate ambush, ordinary people what to do in case of a pirate attack, and the most successful strategies for defense. (Yes, lethal weapons are suggested, and elementary examples of basic squad tactics are provided.) Also, pirates are often linked with dirtside criminal networks, so the basics of tracking your property and people – especially young girls and women – is also provided. “Once they're offworld, they're almost impossible to get back, so you have to head them off at the pass!”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ “Why do the Vargr Corsairs paint human skulls on their starships?”

“Because it terrifies *humans*, of course!”

¹⁴⁸ Note that the Hebrin Revolutionary Front still provides strong support for the rights of cyborgs... beings generally frowned upon in Imperial culture.

¹⁴⁹ Shout-out on the importance of hospitality: <http://americanvision.org/10608/reclaiming-culture-christian-hospitality/#sthash.5rEVta9z.dpbs>

¹⁵⁰ One useful article on modern sex slavery: <http://www.startribune.com/local/230536631.html> Note how the Smiling Ones like to put on a clean-shaven mask, and prefer to make a beeline to the more innocent girls. “From the suburbs they don't know the difference,” he said. “I'm looking for the naïve daughter that you send back and forth to the bus stop.” Just a note to all the trusting, gullible Christians reading this.

The AoH is not a law enforcement agency, nor does it provide security, but her members can bring interested sophonts into contact with the proper Imperial authorities.



Another sad ruin, standing as a mute testimony of the Era of Horror. The innumerable rotting, empty cities of Beta Quadrant are favoured haunts of the Blood Vargr, and are quite dangerous locations to infiltrate. This graphic is titled "Ruins" © Ron. See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=1725053

Intelligence

As was just written,

"The AoH is not a law enforcement agency, nor does it provide security, but her members can bring interested sophonts into contact with the proper Imperial authorities."

On the other hand, the Association is always interested in tracing down the lost; and the search for them naturally means the collection of intelligence and the building of contacts.

Quite a lot of this intelligence is gained by anonymous tips and discrete hints in various startowns across the Empty Quarter. Some of it is provided by friendly law enforcement officers, or as public releases by the Imperial or Colonial Naval offices. Systems with solid naval forces also comes across the occasional crippled or shattered victim, and the AoH has agents and local friends who keep an ear out for this kind of information. Finally, the typical starmerc come across a wreck every so often, and may choose to drop a note to the AoH directly. In all

cases, the AoH is willing to pay market rates for this information: most government officials turn down the payment.¹⁵¹

There are those contacts who are willing to provide better than average information, in return for a steady sum: the AoH discreetly pays, puts the information to work, and avoids asking noisy questions on just why said informant gets a regular feed of high-grade, actionable information.

The Association's information network is based on worlds on the X-boat routes, with a starport class of A to C. Most information is sent on the X-boats, with only the most sensitive information encrypted and couriered by armed, professional operatives. On occasion, information may be sent via free trader to worlds off the X-boat routes: it is on these worlds that actual pirate activity is most likely. One head office is kept in the subsector capital of each of the six Imperial subsectors, with the headquarters located at the Imperial sector capital of Nulinad.¹⁵²

Personnel

There are thousands of casual allies and occasional volunteers of the Association of Hope, but total headcount of paid staff is kept at 200 per subsector, for a total of ~1200 salaried workers for the Imperial region of the Empty Quarter. On a per-subsector basis, there are usually 50 sophonts on the subsector capital's head office, and another 10 or so on the three-to-seven secondary offices. This adds up to ~100 office staff for the subsector; the other hundred or so are mainly field workers, arranging for transport and medical care for the found, and arranging/providing proper rites and transport for the dead. A small number – perhaps a dozen or so per subsector – are agents, either overt or under light cover, gathering information where slaves, hostages, marooned crews and passengers, and the dead are located and can be recovered.

Regarding the men with guns: most of them are guards, hired on contract for a particular job at a particular time. There is a full-time site security specialist, usually tied to the subsector office but occasionally lent out to support a field office. Each subsector also has one armed courier, often with a biotech memory enhancement, for delivering the most sensitive information to the subsector headquarters. Official records depict each courier as a man of Mixed Vilani descent: whether this is true, or a deception to hide a Bwap/Vargr network say, is up to the Referee to decide.

Most of the AoH personnel are either Vilani (Mixed or Pure) tied to the corpse-preparation and medical castes, or the pro-social Irlitok-Imperial Vargr from Uduis, willing to give a hand to help all sophonts. Few Solomani are interested though: the caste & race-conscious East Indians aren't interested in doing ritually unclean work, and the Muslim mainstream look out for their own, first and last.¹⁵³ Even though the Association of Hope was founded by an American Indian Christian, the rest of his people have rejected his example as well: "Why are you spending your time and money on outsiders? Your own people are the smallest and the weakest in the sector – you should tend to your own, first and last!"

In addition to running interference with the watchful and unsympathetic Solomani – and getting them to at least not hinder the work of the AoH – Sir Andrew is attempting to recruit more Bwap, Lazisari, and Iper'mar full-time members. There has been some success with the Lazisari (with a batch of 25 recruits getting ready for deployment this year) but the Bwap and Iper'mar initiatives are turning into failures. Charity isn't part of the Bwap conception of the universe: exhaustive compliance with the rules is, and the AoH bends enough rules as part of their daily work to turn most of the Bwap off. The Iper'mar are aware of the value of their technological skills, and insist on

¹⁵¹ At least in public.

¹⁵² The Association of Hope recognizes the authority of the Imperium, and will provide information to Imperial authorities when requested. On the other hand, their primary concern is not to uphold the rule of the Emperor, but to reunite families the pirates have broken, and restore the dead to their clans and families: they also believe in protecting their workers and their less-than-savory contacts as much as is possible under Imperial law.

¹⁵³ A major improvement from a century ago, when they sought to subjugate the local infidels under their rule – using the local Imperial forces they dominated as their tool.

getting paid at market rates if they are to be hired full-time. This would be budget-busting for the AoH, so they have decided to continue to hire the Iper'mar on a contract, as-needed basis.

You can easily judge the character of a man by how he treats those who can do nothing for him.
—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Charity LIC is a profit-maximizing medical/biotech business, but they know the use of good publicity. Moreover, the company is built on the bones of a failed medical charity, funded by Imperial Core patrons whose interest – and money – moved on to the next televised crisis.¹⁵⁴ Upon occasion, Charity LIC has been known to come through with some useful advise, surplus equipment, or fresh-faced doctors, nurses, and medical techs to give a hand when it's most needed – and when the optics are good.¹⁵⁵

Equipment

The Association of Hope maintains two old jump2 Far Traders for transporting the wounded and the dead, donations from wealthy supporters looking to do good and get a nice tax write-off at the same time. Both are armed only with sandcasters: the cargo holds have been retooled to fit over a hundred low berths to transport the living and the dead: the staterooms for the six high passengers are usually given over to medical personnel, the starship gunner, and guards on an as needed basis.

The Far Traders are only meant as an immediate reaction force: because demands in these harsh times often outstretch capabilities, the AoH often contracts out both medical personnel and starships. Charity LIC has been known to assist in the most high-profile cases in return for favourable publicity, but most of the work is a low-profile affair, and AoH depends on public-minded Nobles, local businesses, and private citizens to give a hand when it's needed.

For long-term operations – when an entire city or region is harmed due to pirate activity (“Give me the money, or I’ll shoot-up every power station on the continent!”), or when there are vast camps of freed prisoners and slaves to tend to – the AoH needs to rely on merchantmen who are willing to brave the hostile void to bring equipment and personnel to the affected worlds, from power plants to hybrid ESTOLAS aircraft¹⁵⁶ Also, a large amount of relief packs is slowly being accumulated and stored in the subsector capitals of the sector¹⁵⁷, to be rapidly distributed to those in need.

The Rajan Rescue

The biggest victory so far came from the discovery of a pirate prison camp of hundreds of captured women, destined for the sex slave trade. This camp, located on an isolated island on the world of Rajan, was successfully raided on 283-990 with the armed support of starmerces – the Colonial Navy was busy with Hebrin system at the time – and several dozen Far Traders and small liners to transport the freed women to the safety of Hebrin. No support was forthcoming from the local military, who was suspected (later proven) to have cut a deal with the pirates: “Don’t raid our people or attack our shipping, and we won’t notice the strange UFO activity around certain obscure islands.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ See *Stellar Reaches* #5, “Sand Castles” and “Empty Quarter Echo” for more information.

¹⁵⁵ Why Charity LIC is doing this is left to the Referee to decide. Note that the reason need not be sinister: there is a solid business case to be made for the development & encouragement of independent charities, both to promote the Charity LIC name and as a feeder for wealthy yet traumatized customers to enter the Charity system of comprehensive care.

¹⁵⁶ See <http://www.gizmag.com/estolas-extremely-short-take-off-and-landing-all-surface-hybrid-aircraft/29790/pictures#5>

¹⁵⁷ Excepting Yogesh, which has spent much of 992 under a pirate siege/blockade. The pirate hold over Hebrin has been broken in recent months, and escorted convoys has managed to transport relief packs and supplies to Irash, fighting off the pirates that mercilessly raid that subsector.

¹⁵⁸ Yes, if the TL 9 native SDB boats had attacked the TL B pirates, they would have been crushed. Whether this justifies the decision of the Rajan government is up to the reader to decide.



You never know what poorly-lit, secured facility is actually a Shadow Cartel-owned warehouse for stolen goods – or kidnapped slaves. The graphic is titled “HANE_YOU_HEARD_IT_TOO” © Malo. See his work at <http://donmalo.deviantart.com/art/HAVE-YOU-HEARD-IT-TOO-434847595>

This rescue gave the Association of Hope a major boost in fame across the Six Subsectors, and donations roared in. Sir Andrew was able to parley this into a solid donor network, allowing the Association to both expand and stay in the black. By 993, the AoH was deeply rooted this side of the Lesser Rift, operations were running well... and Sir Andrew started getting bored and restless.

The Future

Looking to transfer the Association he built to trustworthy hands, the Imperial Knight started looking for a suitable successor. If the PCs are wealthy (50 MCr+ in ready money¹⁵⁹) and respected by the interstellar community, they may well be contenders to leadership positions: if not, the character An Khipikhirgiidemin in the appendix can be used: PCs who work with the Association should be able to feel the change in management style, from an entrepreneurial, religiously-motivated spirit to a established pillar of interstellar society, driven by an Imperial concern with tradition, community unity, and consensus-based thinking.

Frankly speaking, it isn't really a bad change. It may even be necessary, given the society and the times: it just isn't very interesting and inspirational, and the entire operation becomes a bit dull and routine, if still a good thing for most everyone. If the PCs become leaders of the AoH – by climbing up the ranks, or (if wealthy) outclassing An Khipikhirgiidemin as a better successor in the eyes of Sir Andrew – the future is in their hands.

Or perhaps they PCs understand the need for predicable leadership (and predicable funding!), and prefer to work with An Khipikhirgiidemin as Chairman, doing all the boring but needed work to keep things humming... and themselves as firefighters, fixing field problems with rescued hostages, negotiating with both the Imperial Navy and the pirate packs for safe transport, and arranging proper burial/crematory/other ceremonies that will satisfy Vargr, Vilani, Solomani, and Bwap sensibilities, philosophies, and religions.

¹⁵⁹ “Ready money” here does **not** include land, property (including starships), or other difficult-to-value-and-sell assets like planets, Imperial fiefs, patents, etc. Instead, I am referring to highly liquid items like cash (Imperial Credits & Julian Stars), precious metals, widely distributed stocks (in Tukera Lines (across the Imperium) or Charity LIC (within the Empty Quarter)), and selected bonds and government debt (Imperial debt first and foremost, but also old and successful planetary governments, and of major interstellar businesses).

Before the end of the week, Handicap International plans to send some at least 750 emergency packs to the Philippines via its logistics platform in Dubai. “What makes all the difference is that these packs have been pre-prepared and designed for different sizes of families. The content can be adapted to needs identified in the disaster zone,” adds H  l  ne. “The basic six-person pack contains a tent, cooking pack, blankets, water can, mosquito nets, soap, a plastic sheet and rope. It meets people’s basic needs in the immediate aftermath of disasters like this one.” Benefiting at least 4,400 people, this consignment will be distributed in the affected areas. It will be rapidly followed by other consignments, including packs used by our teams to set up focal points for vulnerable people. They include a clinic tent and basic logistical and medical equipment, enabling Handicap International’s teams to care for injured beneficiaries and to provide them mobility and assistive devices.

Handicap International,

<http://reliefweb.int/report/philippines/philippines-typhoon-hundreds-emergency-kits-affected-families>

Appendix: Sir An Khipikhirgidemin¹⁶⁰

President and CEO, An-Man Industries

UPP A777F5B, Age 61, Mixed Vilani

Skills: Trader-5, Perception-2, Bribery-1, Streetwise-1, Gambling-1, Interview-1, Admin-1, Grav Vehicle-1, Boat (Sand skiff)-1, Linguistics-1, History (Eninsish Vilani on Hebrin)-1, Rifleman-0, Computer-0, Mechanical-0

Languages: Modern Vilani (native), Hebrin Arabic

Tools & Aids: Sir An carries only a small, reasonably-priced notepad and pen.

Visual: Sir An Khipikhirgidemin is dressed in a modified Vilani fashion, influenced by Arabic and the better Vargr styles (without the blinding colour clashes!) As a ranking member of the Vilani corporate caste, only his head and neck is shown: all other flesh is covered with richly patterned fabric.

Opening Theme: Robi Kauker, “Transit Angst” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7PCLH-i_-4

Summary:

Born in a family of horticulture farmers, An received no formal schooling whatsoever or any hint of the outside world; yet he defied the traditions and expectations of his Vilani-culture family, selling the family ground car and using the money to set himself up as a itinerant repairman on the other side of the planet. He never developed any real skill as a mechanic, but he had a knack as a middleman, hooking up skilled traders with the people who needed them, with himself getting a percentage of the trade. Unlike the Solomani, An was able to deal well with Vargr scroungers; unlike the Vilani, An was able to quickly adjust to shifts in the marketplace.

Mastering literacy *after* mastering numbers and accounting spreadsheets, An began to build his industrial empire, leveraging his skill in reading people and paying attention to his customers to survive on the desert world. The repair business became a heavy equipment business, an industry that demands a lot of water – but water is so valuable on Hebrin, that it is the actual currency on the world! An worked with a variety of off-world scientists – especially the very expensive, but very knowledgeable Ipermar talent – to set up water-conserving, water-recycling, and water-substitute factories over a 10-year period. The huge gamble he made – that the loans in water he took out would generate more money (a.k.a. water used to buy goods) than water lost in production – paid off handsomely for him, eventually leading to his knighthood and the expansion of his manufacturing techniques across Hebrin.¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Based very loosely on the life of Chung Ju-Yung, a notable South Korean magnate, born in the North.

¹⁶¹ “You love wearing your Che Guevara shirts,” I told the audience. “He killed thousands of people in the name of the team. Borlaug is an individual who saved a billion lives. Where’s his T-shirt?” <http://takimag.com/article/teamwork-is-overrated-gavin-mcinnis> The article “Teamwork is overrated” can also be usefully extended to cover Vilani cultural attitudes

The wealth also allowed Sir An to bring his employees more closely to the business: following Vilani mores, he instituted near-lifetime employment, free healthcare, and cheap housing, education, and loans for his employees. This action made his business eligible to join the Vilani-style corporate/bureaucratic Bureaux that rules the system, but certain political indiscretions involving bribery and other less-than-traditional actions forced him out of contention, destroying his political career.

While proud of his Vilani heritage, Sir An didn't inherit the races' longevity. The death of his fourth-born child, the proper heir to his wealth, has caused turmoil in his family, with his sons increasingly manoeuvring for a nasty fight after the eventual death of their father.¹⁶² Unable to deal with the anger of his sons or the pain in his heart, Sir An plans to divide up his business among his sons before his death, and then focus on his three main concerns: reawakening the Vilani of Hebrin to their Eninsish heritage and traditions¹⁶³; bringing hope and comfort to starfarers, making the heavens a gentler place – and, naturally, a better place to do business in too; and sand-sailing with his Mixed Vilani wife and as many of their ten grandchildren as they can get.

Closing theme: "Sailing", Christopher Cross, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyYhZ9HH8cI>



It's not common for truly unknown, never-before-seen aliens to raid a world – but it has happened in the past. The Association of Hope has no advise facing such piracy: the PCs will have to make it up on the fly, and – should they survive the encounter – expect to be debriefed by both the Association and the Imperial authorities afterwards. (And probably the planetary government as well, should it still exist.)

This graphic is titled "Invaders overhead" © Neil Thacker. See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=2491046&np

Appendix: AoH starships

Most starships supporting the Association of Hope do so only on an occasional basis; and most of those that do fly the Yellow and White banner are temporary charters. The Association herself only owns two starships, the *Living & Dead* and the *Hope & Loss*. Both ships are of the Empress Marava class, with their cargo bays largely filled with low berths capable of preserving the living in animated suspension, and the dead in a preserved state.¹⁶⁴ The AoH is in the market for an additional scout/courier, capable of at least jump2.

Low berth travel is fairly risky for the living, but the additional medics onboard reduce the risk to a minimum. There are those who are willing to wait for another starship to bring them home using middle or (technically illegal¹⁶⁵) steerage class: if possible, the AoH will pay for their trip home on another starship.

¹⁶² His daughters, of course, are married and have joined another family, so they are ineligible for their father's inheritance.

¹⁶³ **Stellar Reaches** #12, page 10. It would be interesting to imagine the traditions of a (sometimes Zero-G) Vilani culture to a small, originally Arab desert world.

¹⁶⁴ Most low berths can't do this: usually, someone who dies in one just rots away while in the tube.

¹⁶⁵ The trade rules that govern other Imperial sectors are only loosely or sporadically enforced in the Empty Quarter, in a desperate effort to promote *some* kind of interstellar trade. The new Sector Duke plans to change this, and there will be a harsh reaction when he does so.

The AoH is in the market for another ship: a standard TL 11, jump2 scout/courier.

Ship: Living & Dead Class: Empress Marava
Type: Far Trader Architect: Standard Imperial Design
Tech Level: 11 (modified by A. Plummer)

USP
A2-22212R1-030000-00000-0 MCr 105.100 200 Tons
Bat Bear 1 Crew: 5
Bat 1 TL: 11

Cargo: 4 Passengers: 6 Crew Sections: 1 of 5 Low: 4 Fuel: 44 EP: 4 Agility: 1
Craft: 1 x 3T Air/Raft
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops

Architects Fee: MCr 1.051 Cost in Quantity: MCr 84.080

Detailed Description

HULL
200-tons standard, 2,800 cubic meters, Cone Configuration

CREW
Pilot, Engineer, Steward, Medic, Gunner

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

AVIONICS
Bridge, Model/1bis Computer

HARDPOINTS
2 Hardpoints

ARMAMENT
None

DEFENCES
2 Single Sandcaster Turrets organized into 1 Battery (Factor-3)

CRAFT
1 3-ton Air/Raft (Crew of 0)

FUEL
44 Tons Fuel (2 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)
On Board Fuel Scoops, No Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS
10 Staterooms, 128 Low Berths, 6 High Passengers, 4 Low Passengers, 4 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS
None

COST
MCr 106.151 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 1.051),
MCr 84.080 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME
57 Weeks Singly, 46 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS
This is a standard A2 Far Trader, only excepting the 124 extra low berths, and the extra 5.1 MCr added to the nominal price tag. The ship was actually bought used, so the real price was in the high 50s/low 60s MCr, but the additional low berths were bought new.

Of the six high passenger cabins, one is used by the ship's medic, the rest by a mix of medical techs and AoH personnel hitching a ride. The four original low berths are considered too old and worn by the AoH to use for the rescue work, but are also unsuitable for corpse preservation; so the crew is free to use them to carry paying passengers on the side, as an emergency survival system or medical stop-gap until they can get to a hospital, or put the space to use as an unofficial still...

All AoH ships are painted with yellow & white livery, with the white dove symbol located on various places: starship personnel wear a dark mustard overall and cap while on the job. While the ship itself is unarmed, staff may or may not bear small arms and explosives, depending on the starship captain's discretion.



The AoH is more than happy to help out marooned spacers – but first, they have to be found, or somehow make contact with the Association. That can vary between ‘very difficult’ to ‘simply impossible’. Still... there are worlds where pirates prefer to haunt, and those free traders and merchantmen who are willing to give a hand sometimes do an impromptu survey and investigation of unusual sightings and signals, just in case. “You never know...perhaps you’ll be the one grounded on the dirt, one day.”

This graphic is titled “Marooned in the Desert” © Neil Thacker. See his work at http://www.renderosity.com/mod/gallery/index.php?image_id=2430585

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