

The background of the cover is a vibrant, futuristic space scene. In the upper left, a large, dark, textured planet is visible. To its right, a ringed planet, similar to Saturn, is partially obscured by a bright, glowing ring. The sky is filled with stars and streaks of light, suggesting a high-speed journey or a distant galaxy. In the lower half of the image, a large, multi-tiered spaceship with a complex, angular design is flying over a rocky, alien landscape. The landscape features jagged, dark rock formations and a reddish-brown ground. The overall color palette is dominated by purples, blues, and oranges, creating a sense of depth and wonder.

Stellar Reaches

A Fair Use Fanzine for Traveller

A Samardan Press Publication

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Issue #23, Winter 2013. Version 11.

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Our website: www.stellarreaches.com

Credits:

Cover Art: Almost all starships exiting jumpspace within a previously existing object die. The *Severance*, lodged within an Eninish asteroid, is a celebrated exception. This graphic is titled "Unknown Planet" © Camille Kuo See her work at <http://camilkuo.deviantart.com/art/Unknow-Planet-1860949>

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

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Letter From The Editor

Greetings, Fellow Sophonts:

A broad variety of articles are provided in this issue of **Stellar Reaches**!

First, there is a selection of interesting characters for the Referee to use in his campaign. They include:

- A Julian Protectorate Star General with Blood Vargr problems;
- A planet-bound prop pilot veteran, ready to head out to the stars;
- A gas giant starmerc from a Noble family from Core sector, giving a hand to the embattled Sector Duke;
- A successful merchant who could afford early retirement decides to help out a scholar, asking annoying questions of suspicious and well-armed locals;
- A jump-capable cosmetic surgeon, lured by a golden opportunity across the Lesser Rift into the tyrannical Hegemony of Lorean;
- The greatest archaeologist in the Six Subsectors – who has never left his homeworld;
- A burnt-out, ruined, abandoned celebrity – looking to make one last gamble on a distant hope;
- A by-the-book Vargr police officer from the sophisticated Rukadukaz Republic, sent to lend a hand to the anti-Vargr primitives of the Imperial Empty Quarter;
- A Corporate System Administrator, putting the word out for free traders to do some fast transport work, while the lull in pirate activity lasts;
- A captain of a fueller for hire, looking to rake in the cash while the raking is good, and willing to risk his luck among the stars yet again to reach his dream;
- A Julian Vargr Admiral, in a political dance that could place a major world in his waiting hands – or leave him gasping for air in the pitiless void;
- And a famed Irilitok sculptor, in the wrong part of the galaxy, searching for a way out.

Also included in this issue are a few excerpts from the blog, providing additional background detail and development notes for the Empty Quarter.

With “The Parable of St. Ram”, the PCs are places in an uncomfortable position. As world-bound horsemen during the Long Night, they must journey to retrieve a fantastic artefact, overcoming unfamiliar mountains, fending off wolves... and then dealing with spacefaring Vargr raiders with bows and swords. As characters in a greater story, destined to help shape a major religion of the Six Subsectors, what they do has consequences...

“System Flags” is an article that helps flesh out the universe with all sorts of flags. Not too much to say here – but there is a fair bit to see, being the largest article in the issue...

“When Power is Impotent” is a different take on the Quarter, which assumes a less competent Imperium.

Ω

A brief mention of a Traveller’s Tale: <http://www.worldhum.com/features/travel-stories/crawling-toward-bangalore-20130108/> “Crawling Toward Bangalore” by Clay Shivers. Questions on how true or false, stereotypical or accurate this story is can have an impact on the game. The Traveller, living and dealing with strange people on strange new worlds, must often make critical decisions based on rumours and half-truths: how far he should trust a given story, and which tale-teller is worth giving an ear to, could easily be the deciding factor in his continued survival.

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 II



On their way to the stars... This graphic is titled "Speedy" © José Antonio Ochoa.
See his work at <http://josea302.deviantart.com/art/Speedy-385678527>

Star General Giggukimiike Lyihr

UPP 7A9CC7, Age 43, Mixed Vilani

Skills: Admin-3, Combat Rifleman-3, Combat Engineer-2, Mechanical-2, Computer-2, Robot Ops-2, Medical-2, Grav Vehicle-1, Tactics-1, Leadership-1, Demolitions-1, Stealth-1, Recon-1, Forward Obs-1, Survival-0, Pistol-0, Song-0, Heavy Weapons-0, Boomerrang-0

Languages: Julian Anglic

Tools & Aids: General Lyihr is usually unarmed, but usually has an aide or three hovering around him – quite possibly including the PCs.

Visual: Star General Lyihr is man with an average build, but moves like a fast, alert hunter: partly a genetic attribute, partly an inheritance from his low-G homeworld. His military bearing is second nature after over two decades to service, and his dark green & light grey Star General uniform sits naturally on his frame. His overall look is definitely Mixed Vilani – receding sandy blond hair, green eyes and fair skin from the Solomani Slavs, and an above-average height and slightly sunk-in eyes from the Vilani.

Opening Theme: Andreas Waldetoft, "The Stage is Set", Europa Universalis IV
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjekzZaRUXs>

Summary

Star General Lyihr hails from the world of Kadrius, located within the Rukadukaz Republic (in 993 Imperial: hex 0538, C344A9B-9 Vector/Amdukan). For over twenty years he has served within the Star Legion as a ground officer, with his strong abilities as a soldier and a bureaucrat keeping him in good stead. Soon after his promotion as Star General, he was tasked with maintaining & organizing the defence of the Khastok Cluster.

Khastok Command, the Star General's charge, includes not only the Khastok Cluster proper – Byeggra, Khastok, Aerrvok, Zoukhe, and Irikrough – but three outlying systems, Unaeng, Uku and Uedzoen. Most of the population is located on Irikrough, and most of the systems are primarily Vargr. The Technology level bounces between 7 and 8 in the main, and the starports and living standards are generally better than you'd expect for these systems (thank Ikonik wealth, trade, and subsidies for that).

This data is taken from the 993 worksheet, provided with **Stellar Reaches #19**, available at www.stellarreaches.com. All the systems are within the Rukadukaz Republic, a member state of the Julian Protectorate. Please refer to the issue itself for more details on race and religion.

Name	Hex	UPP	Trade	PBG	Stars	Race	Religion
Irikrough	0912	C467752-8	Ag Ri V:7 B:1	824	K4V* M6V	Frag.	Ikonaz-H
Byeggra	0711	B76859C-7	Ag Ni V:0	624	G3V	Mix.Vil	Vilani-R
Zoukhe	0813	C65A57A-8	Ni Wa V:0	102	G7V	Ikonaz	Ikonaz-R
Khastok	0811	A515485-A	Ic Lo Ni V:5	424	K9V M7V*	Ikonaz	Ikonaz-G
Unaeng	1013	D664437-4	Lo Ni V:7	922	M9III F9V*	Irlitok	Ikonaz-H
Uedzoen	1110	E540336-5	De Lo Ni Po Vw	512	K6V	Suedzuk	Ikonaz-H
Uku	1211	B21238A-7	Ic Lo Ni V:6	400	F3V* M7V	Frag.	Ikonaz-G
Aerrvok	0812	D424111-7	Lo Ni V:9	303	(K0V M4V)	Ovag.	Ikonaz-R

Of these eight systems, three have a population of 100,000+, and three have a population of less than 1000 sophonts. This is a fairly poor region, but the leading world of Ikon is so astonishingly wealthy that welfare cheques and financial redistribution allows for a comfortable TL 14 life on most worlds, regardless of their locally sustainable tech level. Khastok is one of the few exceptions within the Republic, preferring the 'poor but free' lifestyle for cultural/historical reasons.¹

Adventure

Naturally, the PCs are meant to work the Star General, as aides and advisors, or as specialists. There are two major directions the storyline can go: cultural contact/exploration, and military/diplomatic. One side can be emphasised over the other; you could start with a cultural focus, and then shift to military; or start with the action, and then work with the locals during the cleanup.

Most military threats involve Blood Vargr raiders from the Ssilnthi Gap. As the Star Legion is a strong and effective organization, attacks by the Suedzuk Vargr are rare: but they do occur, especially at Unaeng, Uku, and Uedzoen: Uedzoen is especially known for the frequency and strength of Blood Vargr strikes, even crippling and destroying Star Legion and Republican warships on occasion (see **Stellar Reaches #20**, page 39). In contrast, several solid Star Legion squadrons keep Khastok especially free of pirates, as the system is a local centre of trade.

As a ground officer, Star General Lyhr is aware that the most likely point for a direct planetary invasion is Uedzoen. Currently, there is a reinforced battalion on that world of 5000 hostile Suedzuk 'Blood' Vargr; resupply can be difficult. The General's forces of ~35,000 are deployed as follows (001-993 Imperial):

Name	Hex	UPP	Soldiers
Irikrough	0912	C467752-8	9,000
Byeggra	0711	B76859C-7	5,000
Zoukhe	0813	C65A57A-8	5,000
Khastok	0811	A515485-A	10,000
Unaeng	1013	D664437-4	1,000
Uedzoen	1110	E540336-5	5,000
Uku	1211	B21238A-7	400
Aerrvok	0812	D424111-7	0

Of the two brigades of Star Legion soldiers on Khastok, only one is kept in standard readiness: the other is kept as a reserve, training, and emergency reinforcement force.

There are two major threats² the Star General (and thus, the PC aide's to the Star General) worries about:

¹ Well, TL A would seem quite wealthy to Americans of the early 2010s; but once food, health, and shelter is handled, poverty is more of a state of mind and a comparative viewpoint than anything else. For example, the vast majority of welfare recipients in the West are wealthier and healthier than the kings of the early 1700s...

² The Referee can always insert a threat from an unexpected direction, just to keep the PCs on their toes.

- the ever-present possibility of a Suedzuk attempt to drive out the Protectorate from Uedzoen (with ample support from the Suedzuk population),
- and the less likely but more critical threat against Khastok, the centre of local trade & local wealth, and thus the focus of Suedzuk envy and bloodlust.

If the PCs are focusing on the first task, they can be fairly sure that the local Star Legion force can hold the world, with one soldier per planetary habitant (male, female, and cubs). They are likely to even hold the world against a combined assault of both the typical Suedzuk raiding group and a local assault. But it would be great if something can be done about reducing the hostility of the inhabitants, so the garrison can just focus on just *one* threat vector.³



While the predominantly Vargr world of Irikrough may look strange to the eyes of a Terran of the late 20st century, the actual technology in use would operate on much the same principles and known science. And if you were able to set up a wireless internet network, you would actually be ahead of the curve! Irikrough, 993 Imperial. This graphic is titled "Last Day on Mars" © Camille Kuo. See her work at <http://camilkuo.deviantart.com/art/Last-Day-on-Mars-8229191>

The local garrison is tough enough to hold their own: and it is perfectly permissible to just run the PCs time on Uedzoen as a straight military adventure, capped with a fight against both local hostiles and a major invasion from off-world raiders. However: while clued-in PCs are well aware of the Blood Vargr drive to kill *something*, they also know that that the Suedzuk are *sentient paranoids*. If they can get some of the local packs to hate their Vargr neighbour more than the off-world Protectorate forces – not easy, but possible – it would be a good step in getting some of the pressure off the garrison. The golden prize that the Star General *really* wants, though, is to have most or all of the local Suedzuk Vargr packs unite *with* the Protectorate garrison *against* off-world Suedzuk Vargr. This

³ No, genocidal operations are not an option. It's been done multiple times by Republican forces – the Ovaghoun Vargr who lead the Republic have a cold, Vilani-like hatred of the Suedzuk – but new Suedzuk packs have always re-established themselves on this world. The Protectorate military that have been invited by the Republic to handle this problem are interested in trying something *different*.

should take quite a bit of work to pull off: but if the PCs do reach this mark, Star General Lyihr will make certain to put them on the fast track to promotions, command positions, and prime postings.⁴

If the PCs are working on the second problem, the main issue is complacency. Thanks to the solid Star Legion SDB squadrons guarding this system, there hasn't been a successful Blood Vargr planetary raid on Khastok in decades, and no Suedzuk pirates (as opposed to lawfully registered and licenced Ovaghoun & Ikonaz pirates) has been spotted in-system for years and years. True: the Mixed Vilani locals remain rather more alert than the average Solomani would be, being less easily bored with routine than other sophonts.⁵ But the two Protectorate brigades are manned by all sorts of sophonts, and are much more prone to slacking off.

This is regrettable, as the locals are only armed to TL-10 levels, while the Protectorate military are equipped at TL-14. As most of the Suedzuk get their weapons from the TL-10 system of Ssilnthi, the Protectorate garrison tends to overconfidence. The Referee may decide to lure the PCs to the same level of smugness the local Protectorate military has, and even send a few easily defeated Suedzuk raiders for the PCs to crush.⁶ Incompetence can then be rewarded in the form of a major planetary strike by multiple squadrons of high-tech Suedzuk packs: sure, they will steal everything not bolted down (and yes, they bought bolt-cutters); but they are *far* more interested in painting the planet a bright, bright red...⁷

Closing Theme: Andreas Waldetoft, "Choose Your Path", Europa Universalis III
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5M4IDgXY7nU>

Zhongli Quan Biángbiáng (鐘離權彪彪)

UPP 65B6CA, Age 26, Mixed Vilani

Skills: Navigation-3 (Aeronautical), Prop Aircraft-2, Helicopter-1, Swimming-1, Stealth-1, Mechanical-1, Electronics-1, Survival-1, Tactics (Prop Aircraft)-1, Vacc Suit-1, Instruction-1, Liaison-1, Ship Tactics-1, Screens-1, Computer-1, Pistol-0, Linguistics-0

Note: All skills are at TL 5, including screens (TL 5 chaff)... except for the Computer skill, at TL 14.

Languages: Irashi Hindi (native), Early Imperium Chinese (written only; Old Imperial Core character set)

Tools & Aids: One cheap TL-14 Irashi/Anglic translator (verbal/written), and one purloined service revolver

Visual: Despite his name, Zhongli has not the slightest Chinese look about him. There are strong traits showing his Vilani and West Indian heritage though, from his Vilani deep hollowed eyes and fine facial features, to West Indian nappy hair and brown eyes: the dark brown skin could be of either race. His clothing fits his culture – light shirt, cummerbund, dark pants, and sandals – if of better material than average, signalling his superior social status (warrior caste). While there is some East Indian blood flowing in his veins, it doesn't show up in physical features...

⁴ As personal aides, advisors, and/or assistants to Star General Lyihr, the PCs have already experienced some career success, and the Referee should encourage their thirst for even more honours and authority.

⁵ This excludes Pure Vilani (who never seem to get bored of anything) and the Bwap (who are rather zealous about all the details, all of the time.) As most Imperial citizens are actually Mixed Vilani, actually *meeting* the characters Traveller players roleplay would be rather unsettling. Don't ask about the 3,500-year language & culture gap, or the number of Vilani loanwords in Imperial Anglic.

⁶ Of course, most PCs won't bother to ask "Why are weak Suedzuk raids being launched against a world they *know* is heavily guarded?" The PCs who *do* ask this question should get a fair shot at victory in the coming battle.

⁷ Bonus points if incompetent PCs are receiving awards for unit readiness *juuust* as the sirens begin to blare...



The deceptively pure blue skies of Urduaan, 993 Imperial. This graphic is titled "The Island" © Camille Kuo. See her work at <http://camillkuo.deviantart.com/art/the-Island-195917268>

Opening Theme: Anonymous (ca. 1500): "Falalalan. Joculatores Upsaliensis."
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwdnNyySDLI>

Summary

Born on Urduaan/Udusis D87A862-5 in the small town of Achabbalr, Mr. Zhongli⁸ was raised to appreciate and follow ancient Chinese cultural mores of the early Imperium of centuries ago, despite the complete lack of Chinese blood in his Irashi/West Indian family. Living on a water world, swimming came naturally to him: his youthful interest in all things military (and natural mischievousness) helped him win his stealth skill.

He tried initially to enter the Air Academy of his world, locally-run despite the world being a formal colonial possession of Shamokin (Ley Sector/1005 A54599D-E: "Didshep" in 1105). Being chosen for a non-military caste⁹, Zhongli was rejected, and was instead routed for technical school. He did well enough here, but pulled some stealth-based and social engineering stunts to get into the local ATOC¹⁰. But when he was ready to graduate, he applied to the Air Academy... and was again rejected, due to his caste.

Zhongli did not give up. Showing remarkable determination against the force of inflexible Vilani/East Indian¹¹ caste attitudes, Zhongli mounted six more attempts to enter the academy, and was rejected each time. But on the seventh, Zhongli managed to skilfully leverage both the Shamokin colonial administration and the sympathy of House Bruce (the Imperial Noble family in charge of the system) in the service of his cause.¹² Finally, his tenacity was deemed to be "worthy of a warrior", allowing his reclassification into the warrior caste and permission to enter the Air Academy.

After graduating, he worked as a navigator in transport propeller and helicopter craft¹³, with some cross-training as a pilot. He was promoted to a full pilot for prop transports, and was enjoying himself¹⁴ until a friendly Shamokin officer arranged for some high-tech computer training for the man.

⁸ Note that his family name is Zhongli: Chinese names are written with the family name first. Also, the last two characters of his name are incorrect: see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biang_biang_noodles for details.

⁹ Caste in Irashi culture follows Vilani practice, not Solomani: so it is chosen by the community when you come of age, and is not inherited.

¹⁰ "Air Officer Training Corps", not "Attack of the Clones". Officially.

¹¹ The Irashi race originates from the union of the Vilani and East Indian races of Irash.

¹² The family estate of House Bruce is displayed on **Stellar Reaches #19**, page 45.

¹³ Yes, there are helicopters at TL 5 (1930s-40s), with one class actually serving in the Search & Rescue function in World War II.

¹⁴ Zhongli loves to regale anyone who listens with the colourful details and oddities of flying props and rotors in the tainted atmosphere of Urduaan. The different shades of the skies; the skills needed to navigate and pilot the various layers of the atmosphere; understanding the various types and densities of airborne particulate matter (including pure clear air streams); how to climb and descend through the atmospheric layers; the use of the nose and the ears, temperature and clouds to detect and elude super-hurricanes on a water world... all this is now a part of who he is, no matter how far he gets from the homeworld.

Once his eyes were opened to high technology and the wonders of the stars, Zhongli was determined to see what else the greater universe had to offer. Unable to speak a word of Anglic (or Vilani, for that matter), Zhongli resigned his commission, soon managed to locate and finagle a TL-14 Irashi/Anglic translator from a departing Shamokin bureaucrat, and is now determined to get to the stars, no matter what.

Closing Theme: Triton Trombone Quartet, “Domine, Exaudi Orationem Meam.”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqF1NBm_dGw

Sir Yusef Idatnus X

UPP 4B63EB, Age 27, Mixed Sylean¹⁵

Skills: Combat Rifleman-3, Zero-G-2, Grav Belt-1, Planetary Science (Gas Giants)-1, Vacc Suit-1, Rocket/Grenade Launcher-1, Fusion Rifle-1, Handgun-1, Tactics (Airborne Grav Belt)-1, Tactics (Boarding)-1, Mechanical-1, Intrusion-1, Instruction-1, Recon-1, Linguistics-1, History (Family)-1, Acting-1, Admin-0, Grav Vehicle-0, Computer-0

Languages: Sylean (native), Anglic (Core dialect). Note that Sir Yusef’s commanding and authoritarian Core accent¹⁶ – common enough for his class – is *intensely* aggravating to the Gushgusi.¹⁷

Tools & Aids: Family ring,¹⁸ Family heirloom pistol. Sir Yusef also is master of a Nimcha mercenary ship, is the commanding officer of her assault team (trained primarily for gas giant operations), and has a personal manservant/valet/bodyguard/backup brain.

Visual: Besides looking quite heavysset like most heavy-worlders – and so deceiving the unpractised eye into overestimating his strength – and being left-handed, Sir Yusef doesn’t have any uniquely Sylean traits.¹⁹ Dark hair, bland facial features, lightly tanned skin... you might as well say “The suspect is not wearing a hat. Repeat: NO HAT.” One thing that is surprising: despite his weight, Sir Yusef is *really* agile, fast, and alert.

The most striking fact about Sir Yusef is that his behaviour is something of an idiot savant, but of a particular type. He has great recall of facts, depending on his cyberwear for support; but his actual intelligence is quite low. However, to be a good soldier you don’t necessary have to be *intelligent*, just *proficient*: and Sir Yusef can definitely lead by example, really knows the tools and tactics of his trade, has great situational awareness, and has no lack of physical courage, instinctual understanding, or luck.

Opening Theme: Tears for Fears, “Gas Giants”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxfFO8zv4cA>

Summary

As can be seen in his UPP, Yusef was conceived an imbecile: and in this case he happened to be conceived within a noble house that 1) forbade genetic therapy or other alterations for the unborn and yet 2) also forbade abortions.

¹⁵ Actually, Sylean/Solomani. The Syleans have a certain hostility to the Vilani and their many, many attempts to eradicate Sylean culture during the long centuries of the First Imperium, so there are very, very few Sylean/Vilani families.

¹⁶ There are several models that the Referee can use for the Core accent. While many Referees will have their Nobles speak in Received Pronunciation or Boston Brahmin, I’m pushing for the Beijing accent, as described here: <https://adventuresinchinese.wordpress.com/the-beijing-accent/>. It better fits a peerage more heavily rooted in naval command than in bloodlines or wealth.

¹⁷ The nice name for Emptyheaders, a.k.a. “Imperial residents of the Empty Quarter.” Not many Imperials feel the need to be nice to this sector’s relatively impoverished inhabitants. Even in the Far Future, there are people at the top, in the middle... and at the bottom.

¹⁸ As is usual, the family ring acts as a personal seal, and an access key to various household databases, command codes, and financial accounts.

¹⁹ One trait that 10% of Syleans – but not Sir Yusef – shares is albinism. [GURPS Humaniti](#), page 130. Note that I ignore the GURPS description for the Sylean language, instead using the old Trwords generator by Leroy W.L. Guatney.

However, household law did *not* forbid cybernetic enhancements,²⁰ so at the age of 12 Yusef was fitted out with a complex of bio-compatible chips, granting him command of a superior private school education, as well as build-in skill in family history, acting, vac suit usage, and handgun usage.

Note: "Tactics (Airborne Grav Belt)" represents fighting with fusion rifles, in the air, with grav belts and battledress, against other battledressed and vehicular opponents. Having a planetary surface below you is of only a secondary concern for the use of this skill: but in Sir Yusef's case, there was never a ground below, just higher pressures and more powerful air currents. Temperature, pressure, air currents, air density, and radiation are key concerns to be juggled when working in a gas giant, as well as rapid 3D reckoning of everyone's location, vector, and velocity. Most engagements that didn't involve boarding action was tied to long distance fighting with rocket launchers, short-distance fighting with energy rifles, and face-to-face airborne struggles involving armoured fists smashing faceplates, yanking off or disabling grav belts, attaching sticky grenades, or direct kicks and twists in an attempt to overstress joints, tear off limbs, or at least rupture suit integrity in the deadly atmosphere.

Rejected by the Imperial Navy Academy, the Imperial Army, and the planetary military of his homeworld of Ploiqu (in both 993 and 1105: Core/Core D422747-7²¹), Yusef was eventually placed in a high-tech mercenary army corps with strong Noble ties. Tailored to allow Core Sector bluebloods rejected by the Imperial services to follow the glory-or-death road, it spent the late 980s/early 990s in a string of assaults and conventional conflicts. Yusef was tied to a specialist ground unit trained to fight in ultra-cold terrestrial environments (think Antarctica, not Pluto). His good service in the field in the direct employ of the Emperor, coupled with surprised and impressed family members lobbying on his behalf, opened the door to a low-level Imperial Knighthood in 990.

Deciding that this unintelligent kinsman could be of some use to Household goals after all, the family Archon has plucked Sir Yusef from the blue-blooded mercenary army²², granting him command of a household mercenary ship and a platoon of householder men-at-arms trained and equipped at TL-14 for gas giant operations, and shipped him off to serve the Bwap Sector Duke of the Empty Quarter in a quid-pro-quo for certain favourable rulings senior Bwap bureaucrats on Capital granted House Idatnus.²³

Bianca Nazario stands at the end of the world.

The firmament above is as blue as the summer skies of her childhood, mirrored in the waters of *la caldera*; but where the sky she remembers were bounded by mountains, here on Sky there is no real horizon, only a line of white cloud. The white line shades into a diffuse grayish fog that, as Bianca looks down, grows progressively murkier, until the sky directly below is thoroughly dark and opaque.

She remembers what Dinh told her about the ways Sky could kill her. With a large enough parachute, Bianca imagines, she could fall for hours, drifting through the layered clouds, before finding her end in heat or pressure or the jaws of some monstrous denizen of the deep air.

If this should go wrong, Bianca cannot imagine a better way to die.

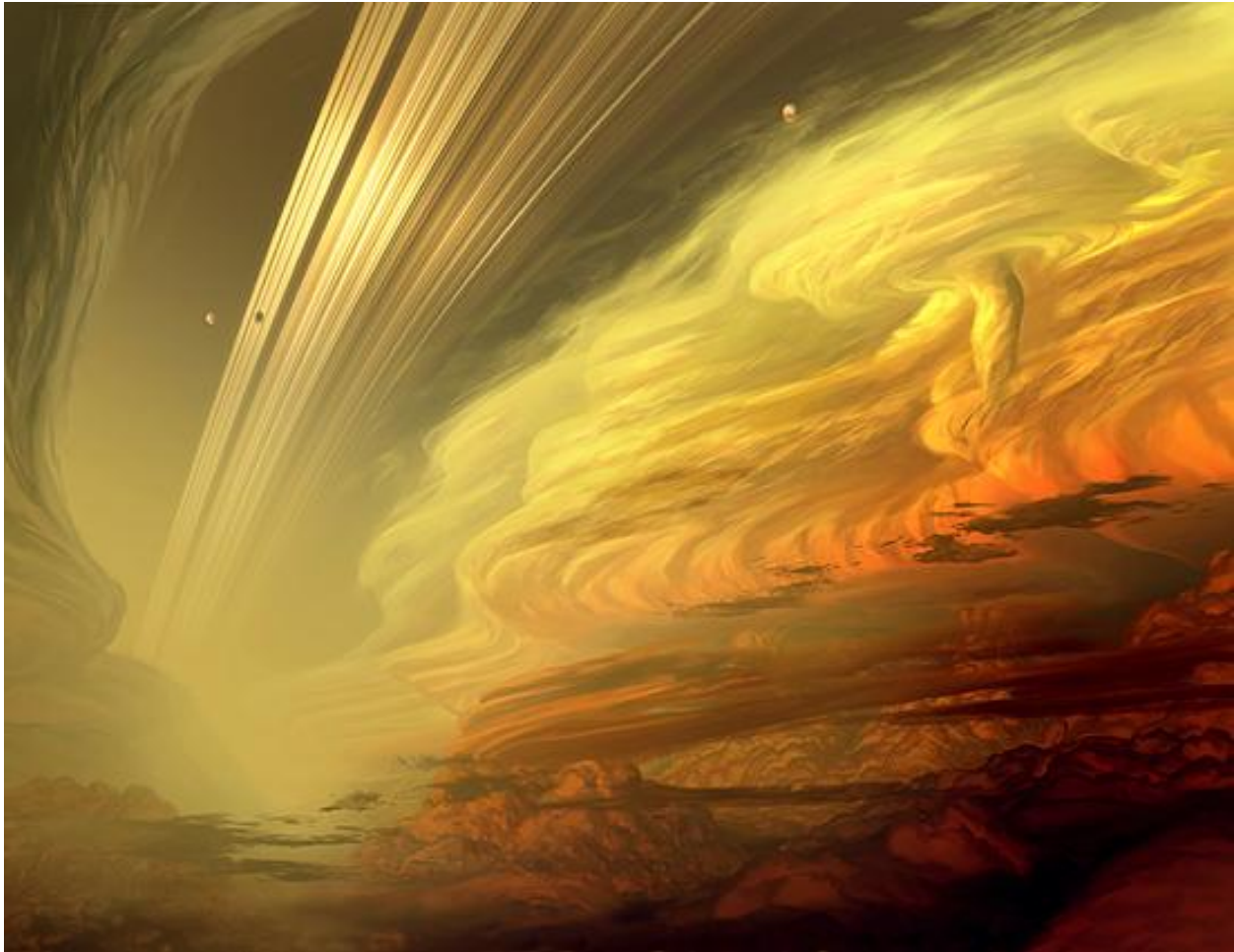
—From the short story "Finisterra", by David Moles, in [The Years Best Science Fiction: Twenty-fifth Annual Collection](#)

²⁰ This is odd: most Imperial Noble families are *exactly* opposite, permitting abortions, genetic therapy (to fight all that inbreeding!), and even cloning (despite commoner opposition), but strongly forbidding cybernetic enhancements.

²¹ TL 7 *isn't* high-tech: but the imported technology is a lot more sophisticated than the locally produced products. And it *is* in the centre of the greatest empire in human history...

²² If you suspect that this mercenary army exists primarily to insure that less-than-desirable sons are permitted to die a glorious death on the battlefield, you're right. The Imperial Army isn't so hard-up for recruits that it must accept men with room-temperature IQs... at least in 993 Imperial, only two years into the Solomani Rim War.

²³ *Of course* Bwap bureaucrats remains as incorruptible as ever. But then again, administrative bureaucrats have a certain leeway in interpreting the regulations, and the major Bwap crèches would *really* like to solidify the Bwap hold on the Sector Throne...



One of Sir Yusef 's chosen battlegrounds: Lidack, one of Nulinad's gas giants. He may even find time to visit the nearby Blue Eye Hotel, on the moon of Lidack Aitch (Stellar Reaches #14, page 71-72), 992 Imperial.

This graphic is titled "Saturn Image"© Matthew Attard. Please visit his gallery at <http://priteeboy.deviantart.com/art/Solar-Scapes-art-slideshow-144166327>

As of 001-993, Sir Yusef is onboard the Sotfeditha-class starship *Nimcha*, and is due to arrive at Nulinad/Nulinad/Empty Quarter at ~50-993, where it will place itself at the disposal of Sector Duke Dethwabtakebwebwakawa for a three-year period. The Sector Duke has a fair number of plans for this valuable military asset: there are few other high-tech mobile assets available at his disposal. Breathtaking assaults on gas giant mining installations, however, isn't the first thing that leaps into his mind...

Closing Theme: Tears for Fears, "Elemental"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gT3V5Z5PpvU>

(Note: all starships are created with High Guard Shipyard (various versions), created by Andrew Vallance.)

Ship: Nimcha	Class: Sotfeditha
Type: Mercenary Cruiser	Architect: Alvin Plummer
Tech Level: 13	

USP	C-6231361-330000-24000-0	MCr 395.830	600 Tons	Agility: 1
Bat Bear	2	22	Crew: 47	Fuel: 198 Tons
Bat	2	22	TL: 13	EP: 18

Cargo: 32 Tons Passengers: 3 Marines: 30
Craft: 2 x 50T Modular Cutters
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification

Architects Fee: MCr 3.958 Cost in Quantity: MCr 316.664

HULL
600 tons standard, 8,400 cubic meters, Cone Configuration

CREW
Pilot, Navigator, 3 Engineers, Steward, Medic, 6 Gunners, 4 Flight Crew, 30 Marines

ENGINEERING
Jump-3, 1G Manoeuvre, Power plant-3, 18 EP, Agility 1

AVIONICS
Bridge, Model/6 Computer

HARDPOINTS
6 Hardpoints

ARMAMENT
2x Single Beam Laser Turrets organised into 2 Batteries (Factor-2),
2x Single Fusion Gun Turrets organised into 2 Batteries (Factor-4)

DEFENCES
2x Single Sandcaster Turrets organised into 2 Batteries (Factor-3),
Armoured Hull (Factor-3)

CRAFT
2x 50-ton Modular Cutters (Crew of 2)

FUEL
198 Tons Fuel (3 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance)
On Board Fuel Scoops, On Board Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS
27 Staterooms, 4 Low Berths, 1 High Passenger, 2 Middle Passengers, 32 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS
None

COST
MCr 399.788 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 3.958),
MCr 316.664 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME
99 Weeks Singly, 79 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS
Despite the completely different look the Nimcha-class mercenary cruiser has from the Broadsword-class ships, the basic functionality is much the same: carry a platoon of soldiers across the stars, with two modular cutters as the primary interface. The Nimcha is an inferior ship in most respects:

- it only bears six turrets instead of eight,
- has one G of acceleration vs. the Broadsword's 3-Gs,
- has Agility-1 vs. Agility-2 (top agility: this may decline depending on loadout),
- lacks the two ATVs and the air/raft on the Broadsword,
- has only 32 tons of cargo vs. the Broadsword's 80 tons,
- and had no extra fuel for onboard craft, while the Broadsword has 48 tons in reserve.

On the other hand, the Nimcha-class cruisers are armoured (Factor-3 vs. Factor-0; are built to a higher standard (TL-13 vs. TL-12); has better computers (Model/6 vs. Model/5); has four low berths vs. none for the Broadsword, and bears slightly more staterooms (27 vs. 25). The Nimcha is also substantially cheaper... but you get what you pay for.

Both ships are Jump-3 capable, and bear two modular cutters. The Sotfeditha has one module dedicated to troop transport (easily reconfigurable for cargo transport), and the other is a dedicated boarding module.

Researcher Limd Namco

UPP 67A8F9, Age 39, Solomani

Skills: Computer-2, Streetwise-2, Broker-2, Liaison-2, Trader-1, Vacc Suit-1, Small Boat-1, Handgun-1, Commo-1, Ships Boat-1, Unarmed Combat-1, Grav Vehicle-0, Wheeled Vehicle-0, Equestrian-0

Languages: Transform Anglic

Tools & Aids: Besides a TL-13 translator for all the major Six Subsector human languages – Transform Anglic, Indian English, Modern Vilani, Hebrin Arabic, Irashi Hindi, Nulinad Hindi, and Lazisari – Mr. Namco also carries a high-tech datapad. On his hip is a slug pistol, and in various pouches is a cool selection of fancy ammunition he never gets a chance to use: a plastic body pistol is strapped hidden on his lower leg. He also wears body armour under his shirt/ vest/poncho dress typical for his region on the world of Cook: but this armour is geared to defeat knife stabs, not bullets or laser fire.

Visual: This ethnically Anglo-Australian man is built large and tough, with a bull neck and meaty fists: but his eyes twinkle with good humour, and the laugh lines on his face are a sign of a hearty and active life, well-lived. Besides the shirt/vest/poncho outfit, loud-patterned pants, and solid spacer boots, Mr. Namco often has some exotic pet or other nearby, but he doesn't keep any for long.

Opening Theme: Hiroshima, "Time on the Nile"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utXFwuei6i8>

Summary

Born and bred on Cooke, Mr. Namco was raised in a fishing village, learning to pilot a small motorboat around the local islands before learning to drive. (He never did learn to swim, though...) He tried to get into college, but despite his sharp mind he was unable to pass the entrance exams: so he shifted to his second choice, merchant school. Here, he succeeded, but after graduation he struggled to get into a ship's crew... any crew, any ship. But in the end, he did manage to crack a local freighter interface line running the short Cooke-Hebrin jump. He built a reputation as a handy man to have around – especially when you need to move a lot of product fast – and grew into a respected trader. While Namco did spend a little time on deck, his first love is and will always be sales: so he spent a year or two on many worlds connected to the trade hub of Hebrin, including Sahale, Rajan, Shuiku, Anata, Kirulan, and of course Hebrin herself. (When possible, he avoided postings on his homeworld of Cooke: "I already know that place like the back of my hand. Send me somewhere *new!*")

While he certainly has solid financial success on most of his sales postings, his most rewarding gig was in the speculative trade. Admittedly, in his first three shots on these ventures, he was left with nothing but worthless empty crates the first time; completely ripped off by a Shadow Cartel front the second time; and, trying his hand with the Hegemony, barely broke even after running some serious risks. But the fourth time, things finally went smoothly, leaving him with a fat payoff and enabling him to retire comfortably.

Unfortunately, retirement bored him out of his skull. Even visiting all twelve of his rented-out high-end apartments on six worlds (and one space station) turned into just another routine... so Namco decided to get the answer to a question that has been bugging him for a long time: "Just how many derogatory names and ethnic slurs are there in the Six Subsectors, anyways? I've collected at least seventeen crass terms for my own admittedly odd tribe of white atheists, and *that's* at a time when nobody has a real hate-on for us!"

Already, Namco has already collected and organized all the disparaging terms his own world of Cooke has for outsiders, from the wrong sort of off-world atheist to the friendliest local Irlitok Vargr to the coldest of the Arzula visitors from across the Lesser Rift. He has managed to team up with an interested professor of a local university (with links to the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service) who has provided some good methodology standards, and will

try to derive some sort of theory from the data Namco is determined to gather and document properly.²⁴ Mr. Namco is well aware that most Emptyheads dislike unwanted questions from off-world strangers, but he's closed more than a few sales with some dangerous customers: "It's nothing that I haven't faced before – and anyways, if you just want to deal with nice people with sensible credit trails, you'd be smart to stay out of the Quarter!"

Whenever he can swing it, Mr. Namco likes to go riding on bipedal ghovas (a generic name for riding lizards in the Empty Quarter), especially cisints (pictured in **Stellar Reaches #12**, page 16). He can't seem to make the leap in skill to Equestrian-1, but that hasn't stopped him from trying whenever possible.

Closing Theme: Hiroshima, "The Golden Age"²⁵
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfaFrewqx6E>



Just for the joy of it, Namco sometimes switches from ghovas to old-school horses, imagining himself to be an Australian explorer on the exotic Terran homeworld, when "horses were the fastest you could ever go, every ship sailed on the ocean blue, and the heavens were the realm of the stars alone." This particular graphic was from his travels within the Hegemony, from the surprisingly friendly and laid-back Arzula world of Abuish, 984 Imperial. This graphic is titled "Journey On" © José Antonio Ochoa.

See his work at <http://josea302.deviantart.com/art/Journey-On-400569547>

²⁴ Despite his intelligence and great knowledge, Mr. Namco knows that he can't solve the core problem of rampant tribalism; and he's quite aware that things are actually a lot better now than in previous centuries, when there was rampant killing and violence, when now most are satisfied with merely calling each other nasty names behind each other's back. Still, at least he can collect the evidence, so others can solve the puzzle. A good memorial for all the traders he knew who died in the field, friend and foe alike, victims to the harsh – and perhaps, justified – local attitudes. (There are *reasons* why Mr. Namco wears body armour and is always armed...)

²⁵ The song's sentimental, yes, but it's still true... and peace naturally leads to increased profit and reduced losses, as a trader of Mr. Namco's caliber well knows.

Surgeon Mi Shikhashahi

UPP 87C9BA, Age 30, Solomani

Skills: Medical-5, Biology-1, Streetwise-1, Broker-1, Admin-1, Trader-1, Pilot-1, Ship's Boat-1, Gambling-1, Computer-1, Grav Vehicle-0, Laser weapon-0, Vacc Suit-0, Chess-0

Languages: Transform Anglic

Visual: A solidly built young man, with a reassuring air of competence despite his youth. He has a general Near Eastern look about him: while nearly pure Solomani, he has both Arab and East Indian ancestors liberally scattered throughout his family tree. He dresses in sensible clothing, complete with doctor's smock and stethoscope (still widely used throughout the Six Subsectors). His few electronic tools are generally hidden in pockets, and designed to fit a 1950s-1980s aesthetic (including the 1960's Star Trek/Star Wars vision of the future), rather than the iPod, Star Trek: The Next Generation or later far future look.²⁶

(PS: What the citizens of the Far Future think is "ancient Terran" isn't always accurate.)

Opening Theme: Paul Simon, "Boy in the Bubble"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uy5T6s25XK4>

Summary

Surgeon Shikhashahi spent his early years on Gudina, the ancient Imperial repository world²⁷ for the Empty Quarter. On this Vilani world (with strong Bwap seasoning), the most sought after positions are in the extensive Imperial bureaucracy, with openings in the even larger planetary bureaucracy being an acceptable replacement. The young Shikhashahi's quick mind rebelled against these mind-killing organizations, and instead focused on the complicated biological systems that entranced him. Before he even left his teenage years, he managed to snag a medical scholarship with Charity LIC²⁸ in university, and developed into an outstanding and skilled young surgeon, with a special focus on cosmetic surgery.²⁹

After graduation, he surprised his sponsors by declining a high-paid position with Charity LIC (and eventual citizenship on the world of Charity herself), preferring to try and strike out on his own with an old friend, Captain Tariq, with his own aging Hospital Ship, the *Stars and Stripes*.³⁰ Charity saw the Surgeon as a competitor, and forced him to choose to either become a contractor with Charity or to get out of Nulinad subsector. Independently minded as always, Surgeon Shikhashahi headed out to the Hebrin Main, leaving the relative safety of Nulinad space behind.

For a year, he did remarkably well: even with the scrounged-up medical equipment, Surgeon Shikhashahi did very good work and made very nice money³¹, enough to finally pay for a proper starship overhaul, and begin to get better equipment. But word got out that he was prospering: so his suppliers started to squeeze him more, and the Shadow Cartel – a powerful influence in Hebrin subsector – came a-knocking. He decided to pay up rather than offer free cosmetic surgery,³² so he can worry less about pirates, but the Surgeon resents the protection racket's cut into his profits.

²⁶ This is designed to fit with his strongly Solomani practice – more below – but the Vilani definitely respect his attitude as well.

²⁷ "Repository World" means "literal *mountains* of bureaucratic forms and paperwork, microfiches, CDs, datacrystals, and clay tablets, tied to all three imperia. So Much Administrivia... but if you know what you're looking for, a genuine gold mine of information!"

²⁸ For more on Charity, see "Empty Quarter Echo" by Jeff M. Hopper and "Adventure: Sand Castles" in **Stellar Reaches #5**.

²⁹ Charity LIC likes to focus on high profit activity whenever possible. "Fixing a broken nail of a princess for 50,000 credits? No problem! Distributing cheap, life-saving medicine to millions of ill children, pups, and hatchlings across the Six Subsectors? Well, it depends on the PR return..."

³⁰ This is a classical allusion to a famous pre-spaceflight Terran nation: much as we may name a boat "Assyrian Glory" today. It's been *thousands* of years since the Declaration of Independence...

³¹ The fact that his clients like the "beautiful clone" look – see <http://kotaku.com/blame-photoshop-for-koreas-beauty-queen-clones-482285894> for the original story (and the real truth: "Pictures Lie") – isn't Surgeon Shikhashahi's problem.

³² A wise choice: surgeons who give new identities to Cartel officers have an unfortunate tendency of disappearing abruptly.



Stukryk still likes to reminisce about his littermates and his puphood home in the Agveth system, a member of the Constellation of Gzakagz (in 1105, it's the 'Constellation of Koekhon') – itself a member of the Julian Protectorate. (In 993: Agveth/Hiraku/Amdukan 1533, C000657-A). Depicted here as it was in Stukryk's youth, in the 960's Imperial.

This Public Domain graphic is titled "L-5 Space Colony" by Don Davis
See his work at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/61549047@N03/5601520094/>

Opportunity

On a trip to Udusis, Shikhashashi's friend (and owner of the *Stars and Stripes*) had a major heart attack. Captain Tariq was fortunate to have a surgeon on his ship when the heart attack occurred: but, feeling his mortality drawing closer, he decided to retire and spend the years he has left with the family he practically never saw. He also cashed out his share of the ship ownership, to pay for the long trip back to his homeworld of Gudina³³ (and have something extra to live on when he gets there.)

The fastest bidder with the most ready cash on hand was an Irilitok Vargr, by the name of Stukryk. A trader from the Hegemony of Lorean, he felt that Surgeon Shikhashashi's skills were wasted in this part of the Imperium, while Hegemonio humaniti – Arzula and Beta alike – would be willing to pay top dollar 'for an exotic Imperial surgeon with his amazing abilities, found nowhere else in the Hegemony!' Moreover, the Star Legion and the Hegemonio fleets were quite good at suppressing pirates, compared to the absent Imperial Navy and the scattered and sparse Colonial fleet: this means fewer security and danegeld expenses, and more money for profits and reinvestment.³⁴

PC involvement can go multiple ways:

- as crewmen of the *Stars and Stripes*, willing to migrate to a highly authoritarian and humanist star empire to escape the chaos of the Imperial Empty Quarter, but uncertain of the ship's new owner;
- as the Hegemonic assistants of Stukryk. Most are Vargr, members of Stukryk's pack, and serve as his right hand, counsellors, and defenders. A few are human, and act as representatives in intensely anti-Vargr areas where the Vargr can't go at the risk of their lives.
- as medical workers with Surgeon Shikhashashi, looking forward to more and better equipment and better pay, but with the dawning awareness that they are exchanging one set of known threats for an entirely different set of unknown dangers;
- as Imperial starmerces, paid to help defend the *Star and Stripes* as they make the journey to Hegemoic space. Note that mercenaries are not officially allowed to operate within the Hegemony, so some fancy legal footwork will be needed: "Put that Admin skill to work!" Interactions between the typical multispecies Imperial unit and their Arzula/Mixed Vilani all-male counterparts should prove interesting: language differences – Transform Anglic vs. Arzula-A and –B, say³⁵ – being the least of them.

Closing Theme: Jan Hammer, "Evan"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h3YIz84thzY>

(Note: The *Stars and Stripes* is a member of the Helper II class, described in **Stellar Reaches #14**, page 85-86)

```
Ship: Stars and Stripes                Class: Helper II
Type: Hospital Ship                    Architect: Alvin Plummer
Tech Level: 12

USP
      H-2611122-050000-00000-0 MCr 83.212 200 Tons      Agility: 0
Bat Bear          1          Crew: 13                  Fuel: 42 Tons
Bat               1          TL: 12                    EP: 2

Cargo: 8 Tons      Passengers: 6 Low: 20
Craft: 1 x 2T Air/Raft, 1 x 1T Ground Buggy, 1 x 4T Ambulance G-Carrier
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification
Backups: 2 x Model/1 Computers

Architects Fee: MCr 0.832 Cost in Quantity: MCr 66.570
```

³³ Why not just captain his Free Trader back home? First, speed: may liners can pull Jump3 or Jump4, but a Free Trader has only Jump1. Related to speed is safety: you want to spend as little time in pirate-infested space as possible.

³⁴ A partial discussion of crossing the Lesser Rift is available in **Stellar Reaches #9**, "Ikonic Voyage", page 31-32

³⁵ OK, OK, a kind Referee can permit some Julian Anglic knowledge. Or electronic translators...

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

CREW
Pilot, Engineer, Steward, Medic, Gunner, 8 Medical Crew

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

AVIONICS
Bridge, Model/2 Computer, 2 Model/1 Backup Computers

HARDPOINTS: 2 Hardpoints

ARMAMENT
None

DEFENCES
2x Triple Sandcaster Turrets organised into 1 Battery (Factor-5)

CRAFT
1x 2-ton Air/Raft, 1x 1-ton Ground Buggy, 1x 4-ton Ambulance G-Carrier

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

MISCELLANEOUS
15 Staterooms, 20 Low Berths, 2 High Passengers, 4 Middle Passengers,
20 Low Passengers, 8 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS
1 Hospital Ward (15 tons, Crew 6, 0.050 Energy Point, Cost MCr 0.100),
1 Medical Lab (4 tons, Crew 1, 0.030 Energy Point, Cost MCr 0.080),
2 Autodocs (2 tons, Crew 0, 0.030 Energy Point, Cost MCr 0.300),
1 Analysis (4 tons, Crew 1, 0.025 Energy Point, Cost MCr 0.200)

COST
MCr 84.044 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 0.832), MCr 66.570 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME
57 Weeks Singly, 46 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS (old)
The Helper II-class hospital ship is a TL C Beowulf, but the cargo area has been refitted as a TL D medical centre. It is a small but highly capable medical centre, for use by the Iper'mar in the Imperial Empty Quarter. The Hospital Ward holds a surgery theatre, a trauma centre, an intensive care unit, and a ward of five beds.

COMMENTS (new)
Unlike most Helper II refits, the Stars and Stripes is outfitted to please a feminine clientele, rather than act as a utilitarian field hospital. Soft pastel colours, gentle curves, light flowery fragrances are the order of the day, outside of the sterile surgery ward. There is also a strong "Ancient Terra" vibe going on, with the 1950s-1980s music, the largest collection of Patrick Nagel prints to be found in the sector, and not a single holograph, computer display, or robot to be seen in patient-accessible areas (outside of the surgery theatre). Wireless transmissions are blocked out/scrambled, quite deliberately. The local Solomani find the setup quite charming: one wonders how the Arzula will see it...

Supplemental Theme: Boney M, "Nightflight to Venus"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AeC5T9Aaoc>

Marquis Dr. Ali Jallood hault Rangarajan

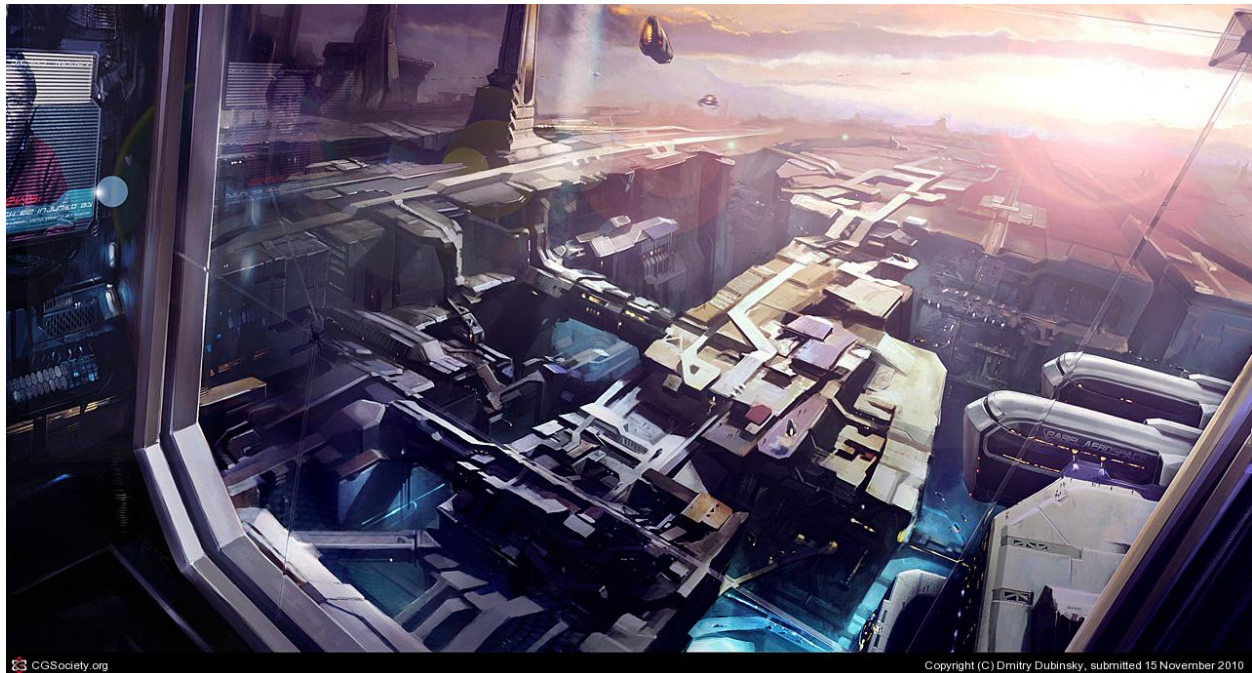
UPP 6B6ACD, age 48, Solomani Arab/East Indian

Skills: Archeology-5, History-4, Research-2, Rifleman-2, Linguistics-2, Instruction-1, Sophonology-1, Legal-1, Heavy Weapons-1, Robot Ops-1, Survival (Desert)-1, Wheeled Vehicle-0

Languages: Transform Anglic (native), Rule of Man English (ancient), Rule of Man Arabic (ancient)

Visual: hault Rangarajan's slim face shows the signs of both his Arabic and East Indian heritage... and also the weathering effects of the desert winds. With a wiry build, his frame tends to be lost in the voluminous dark desert raiment hault Rangarajan prefers. After all these years, the observant eye can still detect something of the military bearing about him.

Scientific Discoveries: Breakthrough x1, Major x1, Minor x4



A section of the linked megalopolis that girds much of Hebrin. The building in the foreground is the fief of hault Rangarajan in his capacity as Imperial Baron of Vintear, and finances much of his research. This graphic is titled "New Babel" © Dmitry Dubinsky. See his work at <http://elhor.cgsociety.org/portfolio/project-detail/935164>

Note: hault Rangarajan has an Honour Imperial Barony on Hebrin, his homeworld, and is a Rank Marquis, awarded for his archaeological discoveries. The baronial title does have a revenue-generating fief attached to it, and is for life, but unlike most Honour titles, it is *not* inheritable... unless *another* breakthrough discovery is made! The Marquis title is tied to his research responsibilities, and is for life: but no land is attached to it. Like all Rank titles, it is not inheritable.

Despite his fame across the Six Subsectors, hault Rangarajan has *never* left his homeworld of Hebrin.

Opening Theme: Stephen Warbeck, "Writing the Proof"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keYywSnjmfQ>

In the Personal Past

Rangarajan was born and raised in a middle-class family of scholars. A bright boy, he excelled in his classes – both online and in the flesh – and easily passed the entrance exams to enrol in the Duchess Imani Science Academy on Hebrin. However, due to a medical calamity, his family was no longer able to support him: but there was a scholarship available, for those who were willing to give six years of his life in the service of the Vilani-style bureaux that now rules this traditionally Arab world. Rangarajan accepted the scholarship, finished his studies in archaeology, and joined the infantry. His intelligence and work ethic stood out enough to obtain a position as a General's Aide, which later led to a command position in a front-line brigade. While this was broadly peacetime service, there were enough deployments – mainly to contain Vargr³⁶/Arab clashes, and suppress the Red Hebrin Squads (the revolutionary/terrorist threat of that era) – to keep things lively.

In the Distant Past

Despite some tempting offers to remain in the Hebrin Army, Rangarajan decided to finally resume his archaeology studies, earning his doctorate in 981 Imperial. His good service to the Hebrin government helped him gain private and governmental grants, financing his investigation of the early Rule of Man era Hebrin – when it was a minor if promising system of the Rule of Man, a.k.a. the Second Imperium³⁷.



The greatest archaeological find on Hebrin in two centuries, surpassing in significance the rediscovery of the Mosque of Al Thart... the Rule of Man era Dakhla Battery of Particle Accelerators. Shown as of 983 Imperial, nearing the end of major excavation.

This graphic is titled "The Dunes" © Wiktor Öhman.

See his work at <http://beere.deviantart.com/art/The-Dunes-352900405>

³⁶ There are a surprisingly large number of Vargr on the desert world, around 10% of the planetary population. But while the Arabic Hebrin of the pre-Hebrin Rebellion era still shapes the public imagination, the real Hebrin – with billions of Mixed Vilani, millions of Bwap and Vargr, and the ebbing force of the Islamic religion – awaits discovery and public recognition. An analogy can be found comparing Interwar Britain with the Britain of 2013, with the old stereotypes still gripping the public imagination.

³⁷ This is a Solomani-dominant region of space, so few call the former Terran government the Ramshackle Empire...

Before the discovery at Gebel el-Zurgh, near the Dakhla Oasis, it was felt that there was no major industrial network or manufacturing capacity on Hebrin in the early Rule of Man (Rule of Man: -2210 to -1776 Imperial, “early Rule of Man” is about -2210 to -2100 Imperial). However, Rangarajan discovery of (and further research at) the lost Dakhla Battery of Particle Accelerators has revolutionized the understanding of the early Rule of Man economy, military profile, and economic activity for this part of the Empty Quarter.

In the Present

Despite the accolades, the respect, the money, and the major honours the now Marquis hault Rangarajan has gained, he remains focused on uncovering more of the distant past. For example, take the discovery that secured his reputation: the massive particle accelerators that were obviously meant to strike down Vargr capital ships (as they were built by Terrans during the legendary Vargr Pillaging, -2400 to -1700 Imperial).

Like most major discoveries, a host of questions followed the Gebel el-Zurgh find. Exactly how major was the Vargr threat during this time? Did they stage a heavy raid every decade – every generation – every year? Did the Terrans (or the sparse Vilani inhabitants of the time) detect any early differentiation of the Vargr species, into today’s Ovaghoun and Suedzuk?³⁸ What was so valuable about early Hebrin that it was worth investing a heavy planetary defense installation? And why was the early industrial network of Hebrin completely lost, even to the Rule of Man records on Gudina?³⁹

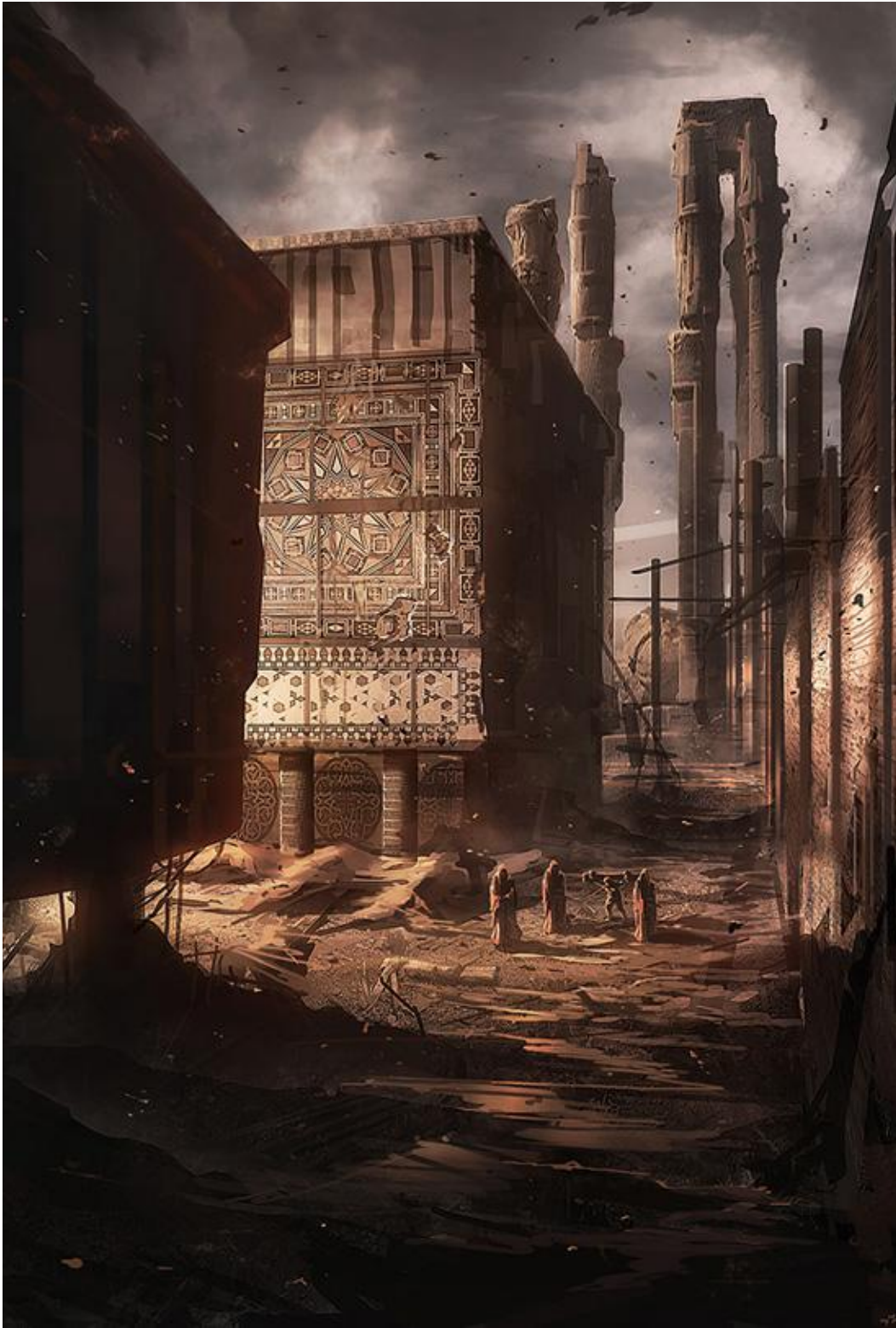
While today’s pirate threat is but a nuisance compared to the Vargr Pillaging of ancient times – or even the endemic local piracy of the Imperial Civil War era, a mere three centuries ago – it’s still stifling the Marquis’ research. Thankfully, the pirates attacking Hebrin – and threatening her vital ice ships, needed to quench the thirst of the billions on this desert world – have had their heads handed to them (especially those treasonous Navy officers!), so the Marquis has a lengthy laundry list of researchers, equipment, and messages for the trustworthy Traveller to fetch for him. The money is solid, but the patriotic Marquis’ understanding of *modern* life and trade beyond Hebrin is rather sketchy... But ask him about Vargr migration patterns during the height of the Long Night, over a thousand years ago, and he’ll *know* the answer cold!

Referee: If the PCs lack a starship, the Marquis hault Rangarajan can comfortably finance the charter a typical Far Trader. A Far Trader is necessarily TL B+ (for the jump2 engines), but Hebrin is a TL 9 system, so the local shipyards can’t produce one: the PCs will have to go out and find one that is available first! If no one is selling at the main starport – Baronet Sir Jasser el Ghachem Imperial Starport (**Stellar Reaches** #21, page 18) – they’ll have to leave the system...

Closing Theme: Michael Gettel, “Sacred Site (in Ruins)”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHa0hA-DHQ8>

³⁸ The Irilitok are a man-bred race of Vargr, during the later Long Night period.

³⁹ Gudina has served as an Imperial Depository of bureaucratic records for all three Imperia...



The Marquis' other major discovery: the long-sought Mosque of Al Thart, the very first mosque raised in the Empty Quarter. Before the disastrous Hebrin Rebellion, such a discovery would have been an opportunity for a powerful outburst of religious fervour across the world, and perhaps all of the Six Subsectors. But now? The top of the news cycle for a day or two... and then largely forgotten by all but the pious.

This graphic is titled "Worship" © Camille Kuo.

See her work at <http://camilkuo.deviantart.com/art/Worship-195912153>

Kavita “Kav” Suryadevara

UPP 8B9B78, Age 25, Solomani

Skills: Streetwise-2, Intrusion-2, Carousing-1, Handgun-1, Wheeled Vehicle-0, Computer-0, Music-0, Linguistics-0

Languages: Transform Anglic, Nulinadian Hindi (written only)

Visual: A statuesque young woman with a hardened face, wearing dingy clothing and bearing an unpleasant attitude. As Miss Suryadevara has recently been released from prison, she has no valuables and little money; only the skills in her head, hostility to the world and people around her... and a distant hope in mind.

Opening Theme: Tears for Tears, “Memories Fade”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtHjY3K5g1E>

Before

Miss Suryadevara was born into a minor titled family: not Imperial Nobility, but a member of one of the minor planetary houses of the local Nulinad peerage. While she enjoyed her childhood, she grew to detest her distant father and her flighty, timid mother, and strongly rebelled against them. Eventually, they gave her a large sum of money – 500,000 Cr – and cast Kavita Suryadevara out of their land and their lives, permanently disowning her.

The money was quite substantial for a teenager, so it took a full three years before Suryadevara completely blew through it. Suryadevara revelled under the attention of the paparazzi; but when the money was gone and the family remained unmoved, the press hounds simply abandoned what had become just another impoverished teenager. She was warned before she left that she would be killed if she was seen again on family property, but she didn’t believe it until she actually tried to reconnect with her family.⁴⁰ After recovering from her wounds, she struggled to get back on her feet: but despite her earlier fame, Suryadevara could only find menial work.

To get more money with less sweat, she turned to crime. Suryadevara’s skill in breaking into secure buildings was fairly respectable, but eventually she pressed her luck too far: unable to remove all her genetic traces, she was identified and arrested by one of the local police Security Agencies⁴¹, and convicted by the government. Sentenced for ten years, Suryadevara was placed on probation after four years; thanks to the good word the warden gave on her behalf, as a reward for the sexual favours she gave him.⁴²

Now

It is now 001-993, and we find Miss Suryadevara, now a free woman, walking past the “Prison Area: Do Not Pick Up Hitchhickers” sign with 200 Cr in her pocket. She’s still fairly good-looking, despite the prison years, but she’s tired of whoring herself out to powerful men. Suryadevara is interested in finally getting off the homeworld she hates, and go somewhere else, somewhere pure and clean. In prison, she’s heard of a world like that: Rasu, where the people are of one mind, dedicated to bringing a whole world to life, and there’s no crime whatsoever.⁴³

Closing theme: Yoko Kanno, “Date of Rebirth”

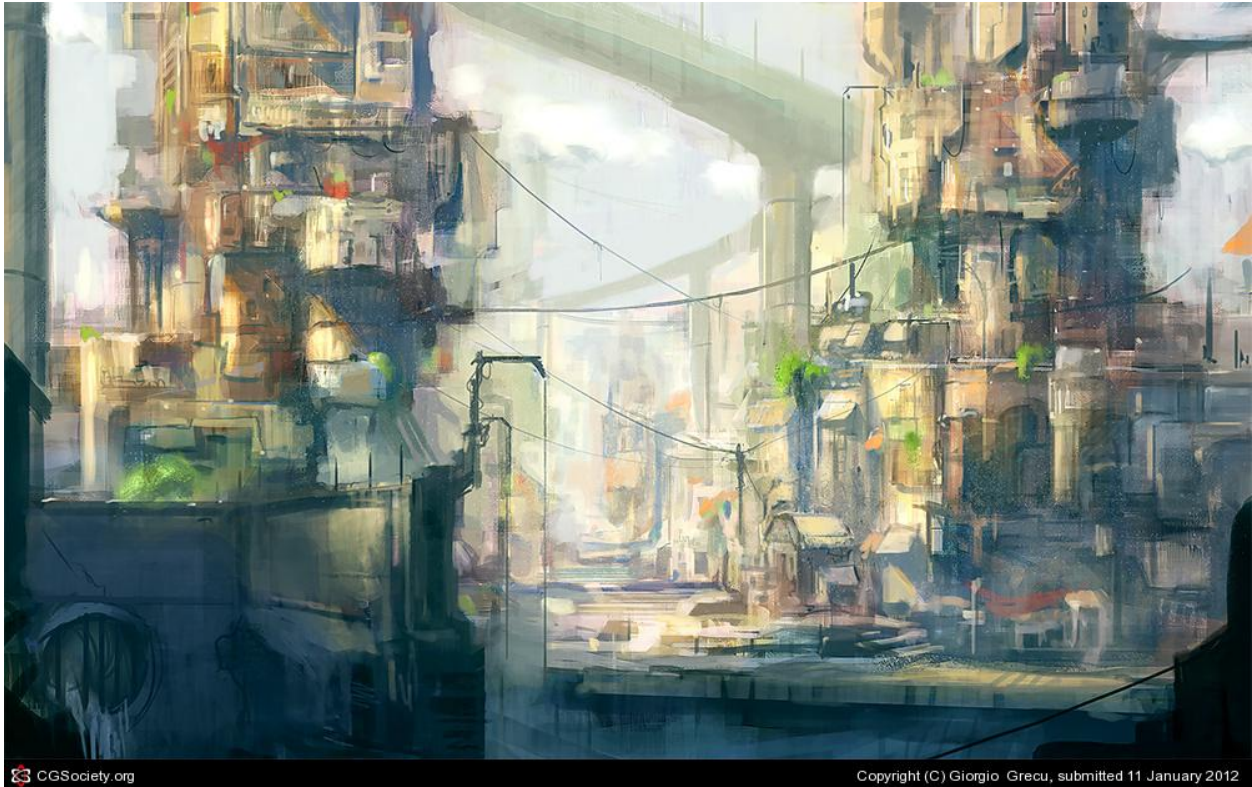
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smhh1n3VEp8>

⁴⁰ There are many Nulinadian tales about vengeful relatives and lovers, pretending to ask forgiveness while plotting violence. Minor House Suryadevara takes such stories seriously.

⁴¹ For more on this, see the “Retirement” adventure, *Stellar Reaches* #8.

⁴² Yes, the warden could have given her a smaller reward for something as cheap as sex; but he liked to feel magnanimous, and wanted to build a good reputation for himself among the prisoners. “You help me, and I help you. You hurt me...”

⁴³ Rasu is better detailed in *Stellar Reaches* #18, page 14. Suryadevara *knows* that it’s one of those Law Level: Insane worlds, but she simply doesn’t *care*, not anymore. But then again, you can always make your own Rasu, to fit your storyline...



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*The tough old town of Pattamundai, Surydevara's haunt
after her days of fame crashed and burned.*

This graphic is titled "City View" © Giorgio Grecu. See his work at <http://shards.cgsociety.org/gallery/>

Gully Foyle is my name
And Terra is my nation
Deep space is my dwelling place
The stars my destination
from The Stars My Destination, by Alfred Bester

Sergeant⁴⁴ Uedk Uegsoun, Rukadur Police Services

UPP BE8AA6, Age 28, Ovaghoun Vargr

Skills: Grav Vehicle-2, Acting-2, Streetwise-1, Forensics-1, Interrogation-1, Infighting-1, Scrounge-1, Disguise-1, Recon-1, Stealth-1, Linguistics-1, Computer-0, Laser Weapon-0

Languages: Ikonaz Vilani (native), Julian Anglic

Visual: Built tough, strong, and agile, Uegsoun has a heroic Vargr build – but his stance, dress, and body language weakens the effect, reflecting his ho-hum Charisma. Vargr faces are not as expressive as human ones, so you have to read his whole non-verbal stance and behaviour to sense the disappointments in his life, instead of reading the worry lines, weary eyes, and balding dome a human copper would have. Still, there's still some spirit left in him: when the circumstances are right, Uegsoun can rise to the occasion: the Referee should then add 1D6 to his Charisma, as a temporary boost.

⁴⁴ Imperial convention is to give the rank of captain to anyone captaining a vessel. But, Uegsoun just doesn't have the charisma to get that rank among the Ikonaz...

Cybernetics: Uegsoun has been augmented, but not with additional strength or speed. (“That awesome agility is pure natural Vargr genetics”, he would say proudly). Instead, he is able to jack into high-tech TL E networks – but not as a solitary hacker. He is *supposed* to work as part of Vargr hunting team in cyberspace, who he would seamlessly merge with as a unified networked mind... but alone, he can’t do diddly-squat. Especially in the Imperial Empty Quarter, where there are very few computer networks he can properly stretch his legs, so to speak.

Without training as an independent operator – never mind hacking – he’s just an extremely sophisticated user account, with no more privileges and access than the system administrator chooses to give him. TL C-and-less computer systems are simply too stupid for him to jack into directly, and TL D networks are very cramped and sluggish. Full-fledged TL E networks are nice and roomy, but the only Imperial Empty Quarter systems he could really ‘run freely’ in as a full user is the main Imperial Navy network on the Sector Capital of Nulinad (and there is no way he’s getting access to *that*), and the main public network on Ushmigad – “A small island of civilization, in an ocean of smell-blind ignorance!”

Opening Theme: Yoko Kanno, “Player”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AlbzZPePNKg>

Among the Civilized Worlds

Uegsoun was something of the black sheep in his pack, more interested in the low-charisma world law enforcement than in the high-charisma work of defying all sorts of laws – preferably, in a spectacularly public, recklessly life-threatening manner. Uegsoun resolutely defied his mates in the pack, driven to at least try to protect the Ikonaz – a.k.a. all the sophonts of Ikon, human and Vargr⁴⁵ alike – from those who would defy the rules that bind everyone together. Fortunately for him, his old alpha male mates over-reached themselves, pulling a destructive stunt that displeased the masses: the tide of public opinion that suddenly destroyed his mates brought Uegsoun into law enforcement as an acclaimed hero.

Fitting into the new pack was hard work for Uegsoun, especially when the ever-fickle eye of the public turned elsewhere and Uegsoun had to face all sorts of status-challenges just to stay in the force. Thanks to a lot of hard work, a consistent refusal to challenge his leaders (while successfully defending his place in the pack hierarchy from lesser challengers), and the solid if understated support of the Vilani underlings, Uegsoun was able to hold on to finally get a measure of acceptance in the pack. He was never able to play the political game like a real pro, so he never got the charisma he really deserved, but Uegsoun got results, which made him useful to the pack.

He did some great work with his team in the vastness and complexity of Ikonaz cyberspace; but after the accolades, most of his specialized equipment and programs was stripped from him, and the unique skill sets wiped from his mind. Uegsoun challenged the decision, and failed: but his fighting was charismatic/impressive enough to catch the attention of one of the Registered Witnesses to the fight. The Registered Witness, a police captain for the interstellar government, later reviewed Uegsoun’s impressive police record and less-than-impressive rewards. After Uegsoun was finished healing up, the commander offered him a place as a squad leader under his authority.

Among the Ignorant Barbarians: Politics

Since the start of the Solomani Rim War, the Imperium has been working various diplomatic channels to keep the wealthy, high-tech, adventure- and charisma-seeking Vargr of the Rukadukaz Republic from pushing into the Imperial Empty Quarter – especially as the only forces now available are inadequate local warships. The Sector Duke has very little pull with the far more powerful President of the Republic, but the Archduchy of Antares is better able to pressure the Republic to make some effort to keep the high-tech pirate packs on their side of the border.

⁴⁵ By ‘Vargr’, I mean the Vilani-culture Ovaghoun. “The bred-for-obedience, charisma-free Irilitok Vargr can clearly never be *truly* Ikonaz – even a scent-blind *human* can see that!”



Everyone always makes a beeline to the mainworld: but if you are willing to wander a bit, you can discover wonders in unexpected corners. Baix, in the Surogota system, 993 Imperial.

This graphic is titled "Mezzanine" © Gabriel Gadoš.

See his work at <http://pipper-svk.deviantart.com/art/Mezzanine-345646969>

The Imperial Ministry of Justice resents the fact that not everything the *Ovrreod* crew knows about impending pirate activity is being shared; and some spacers speak darkly of an unofficial alliance between the Republican government and the major pirate packs to seize the Imperial systems when the time is right. From the Republican point of view, their first duty is to protect their fellow Vargr from the unreasonable demands of the impoverished, uncivilized Emptyheaded bigots, and their second duty is to insure that the Rukadukaz Republic's name and image shines brighter and brighter over time. An unofficial third duty is to support local pro-Vilani cultures, while attacking Solomani culture: this includes strong support for the Solomani Rim War, and vigorous assistance with anti-Solomani Party work (as compared to nominal and limited assistance against the Ikonaz Vargr pirates⁴⁶).

Among the Ignorant Barbarians: Personal

One small part of these efforts is the *Ovrreod* (short for *Ovrreodzovgheinkkfoekan*), a 600-ton Rukadur Police Services patrol ship, which has been reassigned to work outside of the Republic. Captained by Uegsoun, it is tasked to assist the Sector Duke in limiting and restricting Ikonaz pirate activity within the Six Subsectors. The *Ovrreod* is not permitted to attack pirates directly (except in self-defense), but it does provide diplomatic and emissary services to mediate interactions between the local Imperials and the Vargr.

Uegsoun has been able to maintain a higher Charisma level than the two other Ovaghoun Vargr onboard – an Emissary and a Republican Navy officer – so he remains captain of the ship. The *Ovrreod* is crewed by Republican law enforcement officers, all Ikonaz Vilani.⁴⁷ As Uegsoun values the written directions of his government more than the unspoken/political subtext, he has worked to assist the Imperium against all pirates, including those from

⁴⁶The Ikonaz have a long history of enmity vis-à-vis the bloody-minded Suedzuk Vargr pirates, and will work hard to help the Imperium cripple them when possible. While useful, this is not exactly what the Imperium had in mind: the low-tech and mutually hostile Suedzuk broadly use TL B corsairs – no more advanced than the Colonial Navy warships – while the high-tech and exceptionally well-organized Ikonaz Pirates (Vilani and Vargr) are a less spectacular, but far more dangerous threat to Imperial trade & authority. Moreover, the low-tech colonial fleets can handle the low-tech Blood Vargr, but can't deal with the Ikonaz.

⁴⁷ As the Vilani are without Charisma, they can never captain the vessel.

the Rukadukaz Republic.⁴⁸ This has led to occasional friction with the two other Ovaghoun, Emissary Gounfhodzfoeng and Lieutenant Sankoethu, First Republican Navy. Unlike the other Vargr, Uegsong is better attuned to the views of the Vilani crew, who tend to slant their actions and reports to support Uegsong.

Uegsong has yet to order the ship to open fire on an Ikonaz pirate, led by Ovaghoun Vargr. It will be interesting to see what happens when he does.

Closing Theme: Brian Tyler, "Clutch Then Shift"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=diYyji9bfgU>

Not every Traveller player has access to Vargr generation, so the Emissary and the Navy officer are detailed below. Additional description is up to the Players, or the Referee.

Emissary Gounfhodzfoeng, on contract
UPP 5D8784, Age 24, Ovaghoun Vargr
Skills: Liaison-2, Admin-1, Forgery-1, Disguise-1, Grav Vehicle-1, Laser Weapon-0, Computer-0

Languages: Ikonaz Vilani (native)

<p>Emissaries: Individual bargainers or arbitrators employed by Vargr governments and other powers. The fragmentation of Vargr society has resulted in a strong need for intermediaries who can assist in resolving disputes. – from <u>Traveller: Alien Module 3: Vargr. Freebooting Encounter with the Wolves of Space</u>, page 9</p>



A dingy sewer under a dingy city. Kakhasek, 980 Imperial. This graphic is titled "Sewers" © Camille Kuo. See her work at <http://camillkuo.deviantart.com/art/Sewer-370592508>

⁴⁸ Uegsong's failure to play the political game has cost him plenty in his career: but unlike many Vargr societies, the Ovaghoun place *some* value in strictly obeying orders-as-written, so he remains useful to higher authorities.

Lieutenant Sankoethu, Republican Navy

UPP 7984C2, age 26, Ovaghoun Vargr

Skills: Grav Vehicle-3, Infighting-1, Small Boat-1, Linguistics-1, Navigation-0, Laser Weapon-0, Sub-machinegun-0, Computer-0

Languages: Ikonaz Vilani (native), Modern Vilani

Ship: Ovrreodzovgheinkkfoekan Class: Dii
Type: Patrol Architect: Alvin Plummer
Tech Level: 14

USP

T-6344681-000000-40003-0 MCr 565.938 600 Tons
Bat Bear 3 3 Crew: 28 Agility 3
Bat 3 3 TL: 14 Fuel 286 tons

Cargo: 7 Crew Sections: 1 of 28 EP: 36
Craft: 1 x 6T G-Carrier, 1 x 2T Air/Raft, 1 x 30T Ship's Boat
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification

Architects Fee: MCr 5.659 Cost in Quantity: MCr 452.750

Detailed Description

HULL
600 tons standard, 8,400 cubic meters, Cylinder Configuration

CREW
Pilot, Navigator, 5 Engineers, Medic, 6 Gunners, 4 Flight Crew,
10 Police Investigators

ENGINEERING
Jump-4, 4G Manoeuvre, Power plant-6, 36 EP, Agility 3

AVIONICS
Bridge, Model/8 Computer

HARDPOINTS
6 Hardpoints

ARMAMENT
3 Triple Missile Turrets organised into 3 Batteries (Factor-3),
3 Triple Beam Laser Turrets organised into 3 Batteries (Factor-4)

DEFENCES
None

CRAFT
1 6-ton G-Carrier (Crew of 2),
1 2-ton Air/Raft (Crew of 1),
1 30-ton Ship's Boat (Crew of 1)

FUEL
286 Tons Fuel (4 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance, plus 10 tons of additional fuel)
On Board Fuel Scoops, On Board Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS
15 Staterooms, 7 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS
None

COST
MCr 571.597 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 5.659),
MCr 452.750 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME
99 Weeks Singly, 79 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS

The Ovrreodzovgheinkkfoekan is a Rukadur Police Services patrol ship. Usually, it remains in the Rukadukaz Republic, fighting crime... 'crime' defined as illegal organizations led by an insufficiently charismatic Vargr, or by any non-Vargr.⁴⁹ The Rukadur Police Services focuses on the various interstellar mafias that annoy the more powerful, legitimized mafias⁵⁰ that are part of the Rukadur government. Because of the rather turbulent nature of Vargr politics, these organizations can fall in and out of the government rather rapidly; but the rate of the rise and fall is restricted by Vilani mores and the required red tape.

Note that the Rukadur Police Services rarely take on pirate ships directly. They are more likely to provide emissary services, between, say, the Star Legion and the licensed Pirate packs.

Sir Administrator Maaleger Chatterjee

UPP 8868FB, Age 30, Mixed Vilani

Skills: Admin-2, Linguistics-1, Geology-1, Tracked Vehicle-1, Mining-1, Brawling-1, Wheeled Vehicle-0, Computer-0, Streetwise-0, Vacc Suit-0

Languages: Indian English (native), Transform Anglic

Visual: A stocky, solidly-built Irashi (Vilani/East Indian), whose straightforward and sharp language tends to obscure his high education – in a region of space where education is often looked on with suspicion. The knight is dressed in a semi-Vilani bureaucratic style, and is usually found with a datapad that he's reviewing when he's not threatening a slacking employee.



Just another day at the mine, light-years from home. Miinagi, 980 Imperial.
This graphic is titled "Shift Change" © Jeremiah Humphries. See his work
at <http://j-humphries.deviantart.com/art/Shift-Change-186633162>

⁴⁹ Entrepreneurial (ahem) Ikonaz Vilani would have filled out all of the proper paperwork, and so are by definition legal. The local Irilitok Vargr have little charisma and little tolerance for paperwork, so they are the ones that are usually under the hammer: the exact result the bureaucratic procedure was designed to produce.

⁵⁰ Note that the goal of every Ovaghoun mafia (illegal business network) is to become a fully legitimate business – with an armed enforcement branch – that enjoys legal monopolies from the planetary and/or interstellar government.

Opening Theme: Penguin Cafe Orchestra, "Perpetuum Mobile"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6E3znZoFnN8>

A Past Better Left in the Past

Born on Irash into a cadet branch of a noble family, Chatterjee is 22nd in line to the succession of the Ducal throne of Titanstorm, Ley Sector. The likelihood that he will ever get anywhere *near* the Chair of Sunlight is outrageously small – and a good thing too. Sir Maaleger's family has chosen to put a good 20 parsecs between their current residence on Irash and the subsector throneworld of Khimdire/Titanstorm/Ley Sector for some very good reasons...

He was educated at home – a modest estate, with only eight bedrooms – by a small coterie of off-world tutors from Hebrin which serve a good section of minor nobility/untitled corporate executives on Irash. After his formal presentation to Society by his father as a Man of the House, Yogesh Extraction & Refinery (YER), a resource company that supplies the more rare metals and elements to Yogesh's robot manufacturers, accepted Sir Maaleger into the executive stream. Sir Maaleger is one of a half-dozen Imperial Knights currently being groomed by YER for senior positions, taking the place of local barons and baronets who are serving the Emperor in the Solomani battlespace.

Promoted to Problem-Solver

Unlike some of the more refined Imperial Knights, Sir Maaleger has adapted well to the rough-and-tumble corporate culture of YER. After supervising various lesser mining operations and a stint in sales, Sir Maaleger has been promoted to a prestigious position; Planetary Administrator and effective Imperial noble⁵¹ of Miinagi/Yogesh, a system where almost all the inhabitants, permanent and temporary, are employees or dependents of YER. The typical problems he faces involve labour peace and getting the workers to work: workers who are very difficult to fire outright, and rather expensive to replace.

On the pirate front, Sir Maaleger has had to grudgingly cough up 'protection fees' more than once, but at least they were Shadow Cartel affiliates mainly interested in the money, instead of Blood Vargr looking for 'entertainment'. But patrol ships under the aegis of House Dwivedi, a.k.a. the Duke Yogesh, are rumoured to be putting together a proper convoy to get some of the stored ores out of his warehouses and into Yogesh factories, while the Lazisar System Directorate in Gimushi subsector – the military powerhouse in this part of space – is supposed to be organizing a sweep to help out Yogesh subsector, to build on recent successes in Hebrin subsector. "It's about time!"

For now, pirate activity in Miinagi system has dropped to pre-war levels, and Sir Maaleger intends to exploit the lull to the full. He has miners to feed, life support systems to maintain, and mining equipment to refurbish and replace: and if a free trader can offer more immediate cash (or barter better deals) than the robot corps on Yogesh, then he isn't going to pass it up. He's even interested to see if the PC's laser or missile turret is for sale, for the time trouble comes knocking again: it would be nice to give pirates the rewards they have actually *earned*...

Closing Theme: Trevor Jones & Randy Edelman, "Promontory"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1ryJDvZ6k>

⁵¹ Knights aren't actually nobles, and Sir Maaleger has not been given the Rank Baron authority he is effectively using. (As no Archduke has authority over the Empty Quarter, Baronial appointments are slower and more tedious than in other Imperial sectors.) But at this point in time, people aren't too picky on semantics and formal precedence, and are willing to take what they can get. The **actual** Imperial Baron of Miinagi was last heard to be a Major in the Imperial Army, somewhere in Diaspora Sector, doing something with weapons design, testing, and production...



The Carbinit Temple complex on Lazisar, centre of the monotheistic Shirga Mysteries, 990 Imperial. With an exclusively nonhuman following, linked to Kikhushegi (itself a Vilani reinterpretation of Islam), the Shirga are the closest known alien variant of the highly humanistic Abrahamic religions.

This graphic is titled "Finally" © José Antonio Ochoa.

See his work at <http://josea302.deviantart.com/art/Finally-402596174>

Respected⁵² Captain Etheny Xaervoj

UPP BAB7AB, Age 30, Mixed Vilani

Skills: Ship's Boat-3, Pilot-2, Vacc Suit-2, Navigation-2, Streetwise-2, Engineering-1, Naval Architech-1, Admin-1, Computer-0, Laser Weapon-0, Grav Vehicle-0

Languages: Transform Anglic

Visual: While Captain Xaervoj looks like a typical muscular, no-neck thug, there is something about his bearing that suggests his determination to be better than that. There are still traces of his brief military service with the Lazisari Directorate Navy in his bearing as well. Otherwise... tan-skinned, grey eyes set in deep hollows, on the portly side (both muscle and fat), with the odd early-onset Lazisari balding pattern. He dresses like a no-nonsense Lazisari spacer as well: little flash, lots of solid functionality.

Opening theme: Hans Zimmer, "Ga Kopano Part III - The Journey"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8OSiaHmXQM>

Up From the 'Hood

Born and badly raised in a chaotic, impoverished family, Xaervoj went through more in his first dozen years than most would in their lifetimes. Earning his own bread from the age of six, Xaervoj's life was changed when he saw a spacer in the company of some unpleasant local characters in his neighbourhood. He decided right then and there that he was going to be a spacer too, and began his long march to space right away – by begging one of the local grandmas to teach him to read.

⁵² "Respected" is a local title within the Imperial Empty Quarter. Within the area, it can be treated as a form of second-rate Imperial knighthood. Interesting, it is sometimes held in higher esteem than a proper Imperial knight among the local Emptyheads, despite the lack of official recognition and honour: "See? One of our people made good!"

The ghetto Xaervoj lived in eventually came to the attention of the Vilani-style bureaucracy that runs the planet, and there was a brief but ferocious blood-letting as Directorate forces destroyed the local gangs – and a lot of innocent lives, as well. (The Vilani have a fondness for collective punishment.) All of the surviving locals were registered and tested for useful skills and aptitudes, including the 13-year-old Xaervoj. The Directorate decided to put Xaervoj on a science specialist track, but he was unable to keep up with the workload; so instead, he was made an ensign of the Lazisari Directorate Navy.

Ensign Xaervoj did very well there, obedient to his orders, taking his responsibilities seriously, looking out for his men⁵³, and showing no lack in bravery or aggression. But he managed to persuade his Clan-assigned Directorate overseer – the family bureaucrat in charge of his career, and to a large degree his life⁵⁴ – that he would better serve the community as a merchantman.

Pirates!

Over the last five years, Xaervoj worked in the El Treme fueller fleet as a pilot and navigator, assisting starships in need of fuel... at a price. When the Imperial Navy pulled out in 991,⁵⁵ things started to get jumpy. Two ships of the fleet were destroyed before the El Treme owners finally allowed the fuellers to be (lightly) armed. But for Xaervoj, the red-letter day was 31-992, when his ship was attacked by a lone Vargr pirate over Karzana.

To their credit, the sandcasters did a good job in stifling the Vargr's laser fire... but the fuel tank was still empty. So, they had to either scoot over to the gas giant to refuel, with the pirate pecking at them all the way, or stay in Karzana orbit, hoping that a friendly will jump in and join the fight. (Karzana's crippled starport had no useful fuel or space warfare assets herself).

Xaervoj talked it over with his captain, and decided to feign a hit to the manoeuvre drive, letting his ship drift in space. The ship still refused to surrender, so the pirates decided to board the ship, and handle things the hard way. One of the ship gunners was ex-Lazisari Army, who organized the defense of the ship from boarders, sniping from the ship's hull (with the occasional assistance of a ship laser or sandcaster). Xaervoj used his piloting skills to keep the large ship swinging erratically about as the boarders closed, refusing to give the boarders the nice fat landing platform they were expecting.⁵⁶ He didn't power-up and leave the area – to keep up the pretence of a crippled ship – but kept his ship dancing *just* out of grasp.

After a good two hours of this, the EVA-suited boarders finally had enough – or, more correctly, their life support had enough – and the surviving pirates were forced to reboard their corsair, and leave in search of easier prey. Xaervoj refuelled at the gas giant without incident, and – after selling some of the fuel to the starport at a tidy profit – returned home to Lazisar as a minor celebrity.

Waiting

The Sector Duke awarded Xaervoj with the title of “Respected” for his actions, news of which boosted the moral of many starfarers in Gimushi subsector; the El Treme line also made Xaervoj a captain of his own vessel, the *Dewaea*. However, several of the Vargr pirate packs have made it known that Xaervoj will pay for his insolent resistance with his life, spaceside or dirtside.

⁵³ And listening to the senior non-coms. Yes, Xaervoj was a commissioned officer, but he knew his limitations. Coupled with his ability to pick up new information fast, he managed to do very well in the Navy, and could have done even better, if he wasn't so independent-minded.

⁵⁴ The Lazisari government is a massive conservative pappy state, as opposed to the massive Western liberal nanny state. In the West, the State supposed to deliver services, protect the population from all harm, and insure equality for all. On the other hand, the Lazisari Pappy State aims to “put everyone in their proper place” where they can serve the society best, given their personality and their skills. This includes the government micromanaging the career, wages, and training of all citizens, as well as religious beliefs, family formation, social position, and cultural mores.

⁵⁵ The interested reader is directed to **Stellar Reaches #20**, “Distant Wars and Local Piracy, 993 Imperial”, for more information.

⁵⁶ Xaervoj's proudest moment as a pilot was when he managed to clip one of the boarders with the wing of his ship, nice and hard. No doubt, *that* filthy dog is still in a tight, fast orbit around Karzana...



Captain Xaervoj's wife, Crecee, walking the family pooch on Aandii. Crecee is a Cooke native, and the main reason the Captain is interested in moving there. As a Solomani (of Anglo-Celtic Australian descent, instead of the usual Arab or East Indian extraction), she naturally likes her pets.

This graphic is titled "Treasure Expedition" © Jurek.

See his work at <http://solartistic.deviantart.com/art/Treasure-Expedition-413386304>

This has had a number of consequences for Captain Xaervoj; among them, his wife Crecee, a spacer herself, has to remain on Lazisar until this threat blows over. "We can't have the kids lose both parents at the same time!" Crecee was a very competent ship's engineer, and her replacements so far have not been up to snuff.

Lazisar is a heavily controlled, 'observe your neighbour' society, and it's unlikely that Vargr pirates would try to bite him on the homeworld: but it *could* happen. Much more likely is some attempt in space, or when Captain Xaervoj is in an alien port. While a tough and smart captain, Xaervoj is inexperienced in gun fighting, or even hand-to-hand combat.⁵⁷ This needs to change fast, either by training, bodyguards, or both.

In the meantime, Captain Xaervoj has work to do, ships to fuel up, and profits to rake in if he's ever going to buy his dream spread. With rumours of pirate attacks on the deep space Caravanseries,⁵⁸ demand for jump-capable fuellers is going to spike, meaning a once-in-a-lifetime chance to rake in the credits... and maybe hit the pirates one more time!

Closing theme: Chicago, "Wishing You Were Here" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILU2DS_FbzQ



⁵⁷ Things were really brutal when he was young... but that was 18 years ago, in what seems to be another lifetime.

⁵⁸ See "Empty Quarter Echo", **Stellar Reaches** #6, page 23 by Jeff M Hopper for details on Caravansaries.

Captain Xaervoj's application to reside within a restricted-access artificial rainzone is slowly winding its way through the planetary bureaucracy. Should they finally open the door to him and his family, he's already picked out the plot he wants on dry Lazisar. This graphic is titled "Wonderland" © Camille Kuo. See her work at <http://camilkuo.deviantart.com/art/Wonderland-25216701>

Ship: Dewaea Class: Usronnus
Type: Tanker Architect: Alvin Plummer
Tech Level: 11

USP
T-A521252-030000-20000-0 MCr 544.734 1.2 Ktons
Bat Bear 4 1 Crew: 25 Agility 1
Bat 4 1 TL: 11 Fuel: 944

Cargo: 7 Crew Sections: 2 of 13 EP: 24 Shipboard Security Detail: 1
Craft: 1 x 2T Air/Raft, 1 x 1T Wheeled Car
Fuel Treatment: Fuel Scoops and On Board Fuel Purification

Architects Fee: MCr 5.447 Cost in Quantity: MCr 435.787

Detailed Description

HULL
1,200 tons standard, 16,800 cubic meters, Sphere Configuration

CREW
12 Officers, 13 Ratings

Book 5 Crew Breakdown

Command section: 7 officers and 4 ratings;
Engineering section: 1 officer and 1 rating;
Gunnery section: 1 officer and 5 rating;
Flight section: 1 officer and 1 rating;
Service section: 1 officer and 1 rating;
Medical Section: 1 officer

ENGINEERING
Jump-2, 1G Manuever, Power plant-2, 24 EP, Agility 1

AVIONICS
Bridge, Model/5 Computer

HARDPOINTS
10 Hardpoints

ARMAMENT
2 Single Beam Laser Turrets organised into 1 Battery (Factor-2)

DEFENCES
8 Single Sandcaster Turrets organised into 4 Batteries (Factor-3)

CRAFT
1x 2-ton Air/Raft (Crew of 1),
1x 1-ton Wheeled Car (Crew of 0)

FUEL
944 Tons Fuel (2 parsecs jump and 28 days endurance, plus 680 tons of additional fuel)
On Board Fuel Scoops, On Board Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS
17 Staterooms, 7 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS
None

COST
MCr 550.181 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCr 5.447),
MCr 435.787 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME
123 Weeks Singly, 99 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS

The Dewaesa spent half of her 64 years of service in the employ of the Ka-aswa system guard, providing assistance and fuel to misjumping merchantmen. Later, she was sold, and changed hands among the various Bwap trading lines, working to rescue marooned ships and pinch-hitting as a mobile fuel farm, to avoid certain ridiculously overcharging caravansaries. Badly shot up by pirates in 991, she was patched up on Lazisar, and sold to the El Treme fueller line for a pittance.

Even including the cost of retrofitting everything from Bwap to human specs, the ship has proven to be worth the rather small sum spent to buy her, and then some. Before she left the crew to care for the kids (and avoid the elevated pirate threat), Crecee was able to get the engines and the antigrav to behave, and had fixed up most of the wiring and mechanical quirks the refitting guys missed. However, there are still occasional reminders of the previous Bwap occupants that crop up at unexpected times.

If the 993 trading season works out well, Captain Xaervoj is going to push the ship owners to spring for some double-turret missiles for the ship. He feels that just blocking the shots of pirates only enrages them more: they need to have their nose punched before they'll get off his case. Other captains of the El Treme line disagree: they think that drawing blood makes a ship a charismatic challenge, but just blocking shots bore the Vargr pirates, reducing drama and any benefit in the victory.

In any case, everyone is thankful that the Lazisar Directorate Navy is doing a good job in keeping most of the bad boys out: even with the fleet gone, the pirate threat is no worse than it was back before the war. Still, the bad times in Yogesh subsector might start seeping rimward, so it pays to be careful out there.

Admiral Tsigroenoug

UPP 9EACCD, Age 38, Ovaghoun Vargr

Skills: ATV-2, Rifleman-2, Linguistics-2, Grav Vehicle-1, Computer-1, Song-1, Hunting-1, Energy Weapon-1, Combat Engineer-1, Electronics-1, Grav Belt-1, Ship Tactics-1, Tactics-1, Ships Boat- 1, Bribery-1, Infighting-1, Vacc Suit-0

Languages: Ikonaz Vilani, Kriksafugk (a Irilitok Vargr tongue)

Visual: A fat and aging Vargr, with grey hair around the muzzle and the eyes, callouses on his elbows, and a fair number of visible tumours under his skin. The old black coat of fur isn't as bright and shiny as before, and Tsigroenoug isn't interested in dying it properly. Despite all this, he still walks and talks like a high-status alpha Vargr – and is treated as such. The uniform and the length of his Vuraaik (Kriksafugk: “awards/honour/kills”) chain helps.

Opening theme: Andrea Guerra, “La Casa Vuota” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TXD0IBS7ZY>

On the Road to Command

As a Ovaghoun Vargr, Tsigroenoug was never liked or trusted on his primarily Irilitok homeworld of Byegh Aengz. The Ovaghoun Vargr may rule the greatest world of the Rukadukaz Republic – Ikon – and with their Vilani allies may dominate the Republic in every way: but they are careful to make the signs and symbols of their rule on Byegh Aengz a low profile affair. The Irilitok are not the best of fighters, but there are a LOT of them on this world, and even the highest charisma Ovaghoun is wary of pressing his authority past the breaking point here.

Naturally, as soon as he reached his majority Tsigroenoug enlisted in the planetary military: almost completely staffed by Ikonaz off-worlders, they were glad to have a pack brother who was raised on-world, could speak one of

the major local languages, and had some kind of handle on the psychology of the local Irilitok Vargr. He spent so much time alternating between ground operations and space warfare, he joked about being an honorary Marine!⁵⁹



There isn't a Vargr alive who doesn't love the races – and Admiral Tsigroenoung is no exception! This graphic is titled "Race" © José Antonio Ochoa.

See his work at <http://josea302.deviantart.com/art/Race-221216992>

Over the years, Tsigroenoung grew more accomplished as an officer, gaining experience in supporting Star Legion operations within three parsecs of Byegh Aengz. Coupled with some good PR within and outside of the Armed Forces, he was able to secure for himself his present position as Commander-in-Chief, Inner System Forces, the top operational position within the system.

At the Top

Unfortunately, after working so many years to reach the top, the Admiral is now bored, bored, bored. The system is at peace, with the Irilitok locals and the Ikonaz overlords staying out of each other's way. Thanks to Byegh Aengz's isolated astrological position, there are no real threats to system security.

Bored Vargr makes for dangerous Vargr. Within the ruling Ovaghoun circles of the world, there is loose talk of forcibly replacing the current Ikonaz Vargr/Vilani junta with a new set of faces – and Tsigroenoung's name has been mentioned more than once in these conspiracies. Officially, the Admiral continues to insist on his loyalty to the current Vargr/Vilani team ruling the system. But unofficially, he is in indirect negotiations with suitable

⁵⁹ The humanist Hegemony of Lorean's military often alternate between ground and space operations as well, so it may be tempting to compare Tsigroenoung's career with a Hegemonio officer's. Don't do it in the Admiral's presence: like most Republicans, he sees the Loreans as an undeclared enemy of his people and nation.

Ovaghoun Vargr and Vilani partners, mainly in the language of veiled signals, implied meanings, and suggestive symbols. Right now, Tsigroenoung is focused on insuring the loyalty of his inner circle, and the captains and crews of the major combatants and units under his command.

Closing theme: James Newton Howard, "Flow Like Water"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTANle_lcQ

Ship: Kzonkr'roukh'dhdo'ka'ou Class: Lislovs
Type: Battle Boat Architect: Alvin Plummer
Tech Level: 14

USP

BB-P9017HZ-L06608-009S0-0 MCr 38,879.000 50 Ktons
Bat Bear 7 C1 Crew: 467 Agility 1
Bat 9 F1 TL: 14 Fuel 3500

Cargo: 213 Tons Passengers: 9 Crew Sections: 50 of 10 Frozen Watch: 23.5 EP: 3,500
Marines: 100 Fitted as Flagship: Accommodation for Admiral and ten staff
Craft: 4 x 50T Boarding Craft, 4 x 50T Cutters, 1 x 20T Gig
Backups: 1 x Model/8fib Computer 2 x Factor 6 Nuclear Dampers 2 x Factor 6 Meson Screens
Substitutions: Z-50

Architects Fee: MCr 388.790 Cost in Quantity: MCr 31,103.200

Detailed Description

HULL

50,000 tons standard, 700,000 cubic meters, Buffered Planetoid Configuration

CREW

42 Officers, 325 Ratings, 100 Marines

Book 5 Crew Breakdown

Command section: 7 officers and 18 ratings;
Engineering section: 8 officers and 72 ratings;
Gunnery section: 14 officers and 123 ratings;
Flight section: 1 officer and 20 ratings;
Service section: 10 officers and 90 ratings;
Medical Section: 2 officers and 2 ratings;
Marines: 100

470 low berths / 20 per Frozen Watch = 23.5 FW

ENGINEERING

No Jump, 1G Manoeuvre, Power plant-7, 3,500 EP, Agility 1

AVIONICS

Bridge, Model/8fib Computer
Fitted as Flagship: Includes accommodation for Admiral and ten staff
1 Model/8fib Backup Computer

HARDPOINTS

Spinal Mount, 24 100-ton bays

ARMAMENT

Meson Gun Spinal Mount (Factor-S), 15 100-ton Particle Accelerator Bays (Factor-9)

DEFENCES

9 100-ton Repulsor Bays (Factor-8),
Nuclear Damper (Factor-6),
Meson Screen (Factor-6),
Armoured Hull (Factor-20)

2 Nuclear Damper Backups (Factor-6),
2 Meson Screen Backups (Factor-6)

CRAFT

4x 50-ton Boarding Crafts (Crew of 2),
4x 50-ton Cutters (Crew of 2),
1x 20-ton Gig (Crew of 1)

FUEL
3,500 Tons Fuel (28 days endurance)
No Fuel Scoops, No Fuel Purification Plant

MISCELLANEOUS
270 Staterooms,
470 Low Berths,
3 High Passengers, 6 Middle Passengers,
213 Tons Cargo

USER DEFINED COMPONENTS
None

COST
MCR 39,267.790 Singly (incl. Architects fees of MCR 388.790),
MCR 31,103.200 in Quantity

CONSTRUCTION TIME
188 Weeks Singly, 150 Weeks in Quantity

COMMENTS
Named after a famous early Vargr Diaspora proto-Ovaghoun Admiral-King, the Kzonkr'roukh'dhdo'ka'ou was built in Byegh Aengz's innermost asteroid belt, using one of the three modular construction yards owned by Rukadukaz Republic concerns. (All three are now owned by the famous Irilitok Vargr shipwright packs of Guezdhe, and can be found throughout the Julian Protectorate.) The Rukadur did consider upgrading Byegh Aengz's starport to handle the work, but were loathe to do any further technology transfers to an Irilitok-dominated system.

Unlike the locally-produced, TL A warships and system defense boats, not a single local Irilitok Vargr can be found on the high-tech Kzonkr'roukh'dhdo'ka'ou. It is primarily staffed by Ovaghoun Vargr, with Vilani crewmembers⁶⁰ scattered in various low- and mid-level positions. As the onboard Marines are high-charisma positions, only Ovaghoun Vargr are permitted in these positions.

As the buffered asteroid is expected to play the heavy-duty Line of Battle position, she has nothing but the biggest ship-mountable meson gun at this tech level, and major secondary weapons. Vargr demand for some mobility on their warships forced enough power to get an Agility-1 rating. As the primary military asset for the defense of this high-pop world, is unlikely that the Kzonkr'roukh'dhdo'ka'ou will ever leave the 100-diameter region of Byegh Aengz.

Note that Byegh Aengz is only at TL A: if necessary, the Ovaghoun/Vilani crew onboard the TL E Kzonkr'roukh'dhdo'ka'ou could burn down every Irilitok city all on her lonesome, and there isn't a single thing the entire local TL A military establishment could do about it. The threat isn't spoken, or even hinted at. It doesn't need to be.

Supplemental: Strength vs. Agility

If you've been watching the UPP's go by, you'd notice that Vargr strength can routinely equal the strength of humans, even though the average Vargr is a bit weaker than the average human. On the other hand, the average Vargr agility is sharply higher than human agility.

Raw strength matters in warfare, even modern warfare. It's needed in unarmed combat, in carrying loads, in loading shells, in shoving obstacles aside. However, technology has a way of reducing the importance of natural strength (from trucks to powered armour), while increasing the importance of natural agility (from data entry to marksmanship).

So in consequence, the Vargr pilot can outmanoeuvre an equally-skilled human pilot, thanks to his agility. Also, avoid sniper duels with the Vargr, as you will probably lose.

⁶⁰ Unlike the Hegemony of Lorean and the local governments of the Imperial Empty Quarter – but like the Imperial military forces itself – both male and female Vilani are permitted to serve in military positions within most Rukadukaz Republic militaries. Generally under the watchful eye of Ovaghoun officers, quick to step in when the '90% boredom' part shifts to the '10% fame-and-glory' opportunity.

Supplemental: Ikonaz Tactics

The Ovaghoun Vargr have accepted the culture of their Vilani subjects for a long time, and their military strategies and tactics have integrated both viewpoints into a rather lethal whole. There is a strong preference for the Vilani to play the predictable heavy hammer, with the Ovaghoun leveraging their mental and physical agility to pull off some cunning stratagem, bolt-from-the-blue flanking manoeuvre, or slick deception to kick the enemy off-balance – and let the disciplined, tough Vilani soldiers first pound, then shatter the weak point, then methodically grind the enemy into dust. Whenever possible, the Ikonaz Vargr will take out the senior command of the enemy and/or elite units themselves, but they are willing on occasion to have highly trained & implicitly trusted Vilani earn that honour instead... if a greater prize can be seized elsewhere. The Referee can't go too far wrong if he keeps in mind "Vargr=Agility & Situational/Tactical Awareness, Vilani=Strength & Discipline".

A rather good illustration can be found in the 1990 movie "Red October", where a Russian sub commander has decided to defect, and the Russian Navy has decided not to let that happen:

"Hmm. Russian attack subs are now stationed off every East Coast port. We're up here. The New Jersey is moving up the coast while the Russians, aside from over 40 Bear Foxtrots, have a row of subs and several surface groups."

"That's a lot of firepower."

"For a rescue team, yes. There's something else strange. They're using sonar as if they're looking for something, but nobody's listening."

"What do you mean?"

"At their speed they could run over my daughter's stereo and not hear it. They're not searching for Ramius. They're driving him."

"Driving him where? What do you mean?"

[Points to the Russian subs waiting for Ramius near the American ports.]

"The hounds to the hunters. Your sub captain's going to make it to America. He's going to die within sight of it."

Just insert elite Ovaghoun Vargr killers as the subs waiting for Ramius, and the reliable Vilani as the massive forces driving him forward, and you have a good basic model for 10-25% of Ikonaz military strategy – vary and season to taste.

Rroz Fhikhtrovsh

UPP 4C6A95, Age 30, Irilitok Vargr

Skills: Sculpture-4, Vacc Suit-2, Persuasion-2, History-1, Infighting-1, Zero-G-1, Wheeled Vehicle-1, Small Blade-1, Sensor Ops-1, Eletronics-1, Mechanical-1, Handgun-0, Grav Vehicle-0

Languages: Modern Vilani, Rrakfugk (an Irilitok Vargr tongue, common within the Asimikigir Confederation – the senior member of the Julian Protectorate.)

Visual: A brown/black furred Vargr, Fhikhtrovsh's Irilitok breeding – big eyes, short snout, more upright posture, friendly temperament – is somewhat soften and burred by the Ovaghoun side of her lineage. Despite her looks and her Ovaghoun name, her *smell* is definitely Irilitok – and so that's how the Ikonaz treat her. She insists on dressing as a high-charisma Vargr she would be at home, ignoring the painful local mockery the local Ovaghoun throw at her in return. Her body and face are slowly accumulating a collection of scars, souvenirs when the mockery gets more aggressive than usual... but her ears and tail remain whole, a grim source of personal pride.

In addition to a ceramic double-claw (treat as a small knife), Fhikhtrovsh is never without her translator (to talk to the Ikonaz Vilani-speaking locals).

Opening theme: Pat Metheny Group, "Follow Me"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKdoaQNPcQs>



Fhikhtrovsh's village in the skies of Asimikigir, 980 Imperial.

This graphic is titled "Skycity" © Camille Kuo.

See her work at <http://camilkuo.deviantart.com/art/Wonderland-25216701>

Back Home

Fhikhtrovsh is not native to the Rukadukaz Republic; her home (and her human Panet⁶¹) is back on the capital of the Julian Protectorate (and the Asimikigir Confederation) Asimikigir/Amdukan (in 993 and 1105: A684A87-E). In an interstellar culture where the Vargr and the humans live in harmony – without one dominating the other, as in the Rukadukaz Republic – Fhikhtrovsh grew into a famous sculptor, using various fast-growing crystals, metal filaments, and low-G/zero-G environments as the raw materials for her popular art. Despite her substantial wealth and acclaim, Fhikhtrovsh prefers to work as a crewman on tramps and small interface lines. Driven by the trade winds, she eventually entered the Rukadukaz Republic, ready and eager for new experiences...

Reaching Out

...which she has lived to regret. Her usually high charisma levels (peg it at about A) is not nearly as high as it would be back in the core of the Protectorate, as the typical hostility/unfriendly neglect the Ovaghoun have to the local Irilitok is amplified by magnitudes when facing a high-charisma Irilitok.⁶² Understanding something of how the Ovaghoun think, Fhikhtrovsh decided to settle on the strongly Ikonaz world of Vekhaetak, to act as an ambassador and bring peace between the Ovaghoun and the Irilitok. Vekhaetak is a relatively low-tech world, where the Ikonaz inhabitants – mainly Ovaghoun packs and their Vilani aids and serving families – depend on Ikonaz subsidies and

⁶¹ For more on Panets, please see *Stellar Reaches* #4, page 10.

⁶² A similar analogy can be made, if an aristocratic, high-charisma Ikonaz Vargr – comfortable with commanding humans and Vargr alike – resided in the Imperial Empty Quarter. It's a good thing that humans can't easily read Vargr body language; if they could, such a Vargr wouldn't last a day on some Solomani-dominated worlds and cities. The psychological reasons for the racial hostility are outlined in "Tribe vs. Tribe in the Empty Quarter", *Stellar Reaches* #18. Capsule summary: the human-serving Irilitok resemble the human-imitating Ovaghoun a little too close for comfort, like a twisted, mocking mirror...

transfers to finance their TL-E living standards. With a reputation for humility compared to their immensely proud and wealthy relatives back on Ikon, it seemed to be a good place to feel out the possibility of reconciliation.

Rejected

To make a long story short, it didn't happen. The Ovaghoun ignored what Fhikhtrovsh was saying, and instead focused on who she was – and they didn't like what they saw. Not one little bit.

Despite her money, despite her reputation at home, all the locals seem to be interested in was tearing her down. They haven't out rightly tried to kill her, at least not yet... but this is a zero law level world, and more than once, Fhikhtrovsh has been jumped and mauled a bit before being let go. Now, she goes nowhere without her handy double-claw... but she avoids going out when the crowds are too thick, or when they smell wrong.

Despair... and Hope

Fhikhtrovsh can see where this is going, and the ability of her reputation and her fame to shield her throat and her life looks thinner and thinner. She sent out an urgent message to her pack, her various ex-mates and grown pups, and her Panet to get over here and give her a hand: but it's a long journey, and a lot can happen in the months before any of them arrive. A covert local Vilani ally has promised to find a ship to get her off-world: Fhikhtrovsh certainly has the money to pay, but the three times there was a deal, it was suddenly called off at the last minute.

But at last, she has caught a break. Amazingly, there's an independent world, Halla, dominated by a Solomani upper class that has taken up Asimikigir customs and culture, which are more than willing to take her in, and would pay richly for her art. And – her Vilani friend added – there's an independent Imperial trader, due to arrive soon⁶³, who would be happy to accept the bundles of cash Fhikhtrovsh is willing to pay to get her to Halla pronto. If she can hold out for just a few more weeks...

Closing theme: Pat Metheny Group, "The Truth Will Always Be"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6qSJtWt3qI>



At the starport, waiting... Nulinad, 993 Imperial. This graphic is titled "Ore Haulers" © Jeremiah Humphries.

See his work at <http://j-humphries.deviantart.com/art/Ore-Haulers-336231643>

⁶³ a.k.a. "The PC as the cavalry, once again..."

From the Blog

Preface

I have a habit of coming up with some new idea, or a new viewpoint, and writing it in the Stellar Reaches blog, www.stellarreaches.com. Enough of these little notes have accumulated to built up an entire article in the fanzine: so lets get started!

The following excerpts have been edited and redacted from the original posting, You can now insert YouTube videos into Word 2013 documents; but I have chosen not to.

As I am adding posts to this blog on an ongoing basis, I had to pick a starting point and work backwards from there: thus, Sept 1, 2013 is the start date, with May 7, 2013 the cut-off date. Unfortunately, this excludes interesting posts like the Sept 8 post, on the [Lewis Model of Cultures](#). Or [the use of the Endless](#) as a model of the Ancients.

I also had to hammer down the focus, to “explicit pointers on the culture of the Empty Quarter.” This was to filter out the large pile of science-oriented articles, like [About People in Traveller](#) (on the size of possible lifeforms).

Such is life.

[Sept 1, 2013](#)

This post has no sci-fi scenes: instead, these are videos that get more into the heart of roleplaying. After all, the spaceships and robots are just props, tools to show what’s really going on.

[Excerpts from the movie [Seven Samurai](#)]

One video is on the difference between real warriors and posers. There are quite a lot of posers in the poor-but-prideful Imperial Six Subsectors, and even more in the Charisma-driven, Vargr-dominant Rukadukaz Republic. But posers don’t come through when the chips are down, so it’s important for PCs to spot the difference.

If you do you job, and if you do it well, you get to lose the right way. There aren’t any grand battles or

clashing fleets in the Empty Quarter, not even in a time where much of the Imperial military is embroiled in the most massive galactic war since the Final War of the Ancients. Instead, there’s banditry, raiders, and piracy – and the limited forces that local worlds and communities can scrounge together.

[Aside: at least the local cultures are not fighting each other! Pirates are temporary, but your neighbour is always there...]

[Excerpts from the movie [Twenty-four Eyes](#)]

Behind even fascist states like the Hegemony of Lorean (or Imperial Japan) lie a lot of dead men, and the sad women who loved them. Not so much in the Third Imperium: the chains of obligation there are more familial, feudal and clannish than in the style of the Total State.

Yes, I admit that these men are singing of the joys on dying for the Emperor. But Imperial Japan – with one race, one state religion, one tongue, and a very close-knit history and culture – makes a very poor model for the multicultural, multilingual, polytheistic Third Imperium.

It’s not even a good fit for the Hegemony of Lorean – where there are two ruling races (Arzula and Damlaerite), one low-profile supporting race (Vilani, offstage in the Star’s End sector), one widespread servant race (Irlitok Vargr), and two lower races (‘Beta humaniti’ and the hated Suedzuk Vargr). But the Arzula have a culture that resembles this on the worlds they dominate.

The sad scene of a mother telling her children that their father would never come home was a common scene in the Hegemony, after the end of the Era of Horror. Not so common today. But the memory lingers, and every Hegemonio family has far darker tales from that grim era.

[Excerpt from the movie [Ran](#)]

Never mind the not-so-hot acting, the grainy film, and the poor sound. When your hometown is being overrun by pirates and raiders, it’s going to feel like this.

Fortunately, the pirates in 993 are not so strong to bring this kind of ruin to the major worlds. Even most towns on most minor worlds don't have anything worth stealing in the Six Subsectors. But if you do have something... watch out!

(Never mind the Suedzuk pirates, who have been known to slaughter small towns and settlements just because it brings them joy.)

[August 22, 2013](#)

A demographic map pinpointing the location and race of every American can be found here:
<http://demographics.coopercenter.org/DotMap/index.html>

When you're done playing with it -
"Ain't it awesome what technology can do today?"
"I hear the NSA has one that updates your current location in real time, too!"
- head back here.

OK, let's **Travellerize** it!

The Imperium doesn't really keep these demographic maps on an organized basis, as they just aren't interested in individual data. Imperial granularity tends to centre on the individual sovereign world as the fundamental basis of the Imperium, not the single sophont.

Of course, individual world governments, corporations, etc have their own policies.

The Solomani Confederation sees things very differently. While politically it is an association of various individual worlds and small interstellar governments, at the very core it is a race-based organization. Legally, every single pure-race Solomani is automatically a member of the Solomani Party, and so is under the Party's protection.

So, it is certainly possible that there are racial demographic maps on every single planet within the Confederation. But the legend is fundamentally different. The Party holds in-house racial differences – black, white, asian, etc – to be interesting, but secondary information. The core of the census is between pureblood Solomani (light blue dots: the Party has a soft spot for that colour) and all other sophonts (a range of colours).

The Secretariat – the representative legislature of the Solomani Confederation – and certain Supervisory Committees can be absolute maelstroms of infighting, shouting matches, fistfights, and the occasional duel when it comes to the "all other sophonts" dots.

Should there be special colours for 95% – 99.99% pure Solomani?

How about 50.01% Solomani?

What about humaniti? Pure Vilani? Mixed Vilani?

Terran-descended races? Terran-uplifted races? Vargr? Artificial pureblooded Solomani races?

And yes, small wars have been fought over these issues – and more than once. The Party has been able to stifle the larger outbreaks, though: all the major Party leaders have had ample experience in herding together the highly independently-minded races, cultures, etc that make up the Solomani.

(The term 'herding cats' has fallen out of favour ever since the Aslan Border Wars.)

[August 18, 2013](#)

Perhaps they are not very creative socially or culturally, but to be the kind of powerhouses they are described in GURPS: Interstellar Wars, they gotta have something!

[Youtube Math video on why $0.999 = 1$]

(..which probably helped them in inventing the jump engine, BTW...)

[July 26, 2013](#)

Tough Times: When Nobles and Worlds Feel the Squeeze

Introduction

I finished up *The Last Days of Big Law: You Can't Imagine the Terror When the Money Dries Up* and a reflection on Detroit. Tough stuff.

I always felt that the Empty Quarter was traditionally the Imperial Sector where dreams went to die. This isn't really true anymore: even with the threat of the Shadow Cartel and the absence of the Imperial Navy, things are definitely better than usual in the entire sector. The Muslims and the Hindus of the Six Subsectors have largely shifted their focus from

sectarian fighting to money-making, and the Hegemony is clearly less brutal than in earlier years – Tsosoe notwithstanding.

On the other hand, even in a time when small dreams are growing anew – despite the efforts of the Cartel to subvert and wither them – there are a few places where the money is drying up. Imperial Nobles are not in the same plight as modern lawyers, but there are various lesser aristocrats – usually, those involved in interstellar trade & commerce – who are feeling the bite of declining trade. Minor groups of foreign adventurers, unattached to any major tribe in the region, are seeing their business dry up: there is increasing pressure to choose a side, or face problems from all sides.

The closest thing to a true Detroit financially is the system of Belumar, under insistent attack from pirates. But the problem is temporary: one day, someday, the Navy will return, and the pirates will flee. Uduis is more of a spiritual cousin of Detroit, but – despite their great impoverishment and criminal issues, the social divides there are softer: not human vs Vargr, but some humans and some Vargr against other groups of humans and Vargr. And even here, the world is basically united with some squabbling against off-worlders, rather than divided against each other.

Still, there are definitely quotes from both articles that are asking to be refitted to the Traveller Universe.

Coming Noble Trouble

“Stable” is not the way anyone would describe a legal career today. In the past decade, twelve major firms with more than 1,000 partners between them have collapsed entirely. The surviving lawyers live in fear of suffering a similar fate, driving them to ever-more humiliating lengths to edge out rivals for business. “They were cold-calling,” says the lawyer whose firm once turned down no-name clients. And the competition isn’t just external. Partners routinely make pitches behind the backs of colleagues with ties to a client. They hoard work for themselves even when it requires the expertise of a fellow partner. They seize credit for business that younger colleagues bring in.

And then there are the indignities inflicted on new lawyers, known as associates. The odds are increasingly long that a recent law-school grad will find a job. Five years ago, during a

recession, American law schools produced 43,600 graduates and 75 percent had positions as lawyers within nine months. Last year, the numbers were 46,500 and 64 percent. In addition to the emotional toll unemployment exacts, it is often financially ruinous. The average law student graduates \$100,000 in debt.

Translating this into Noble culture: “Sophonts who were accustomed to a life of privilege and comfort start feeling the screws tighten and tighten – and begin to hear some bones break and snap.” Most of the real anti-Solomani purges were lightly sidestepped by local Nobles, who had no hesitation in cutting ties to the Party. A greater deal of pain occurred during the Panos Settlement of 873 (Stellar Reaches #12) which, combined with the failure of the Hebrin Rebellion, broke Arab Noble dominance forever: but that was over a century ago.

The Nobles who feel pain now suffer directly to the more stringent, anti-corruption practices of Sector Duke Dethwabtakewebwakawa. The local culture is face-oriented, and geared to leveraging personal relationships, but the Sector Duke wants everything done strictly by the book. The details of what happened to that spare 50 million credits never mattered before: but it does now, with some powerful Solomani families facing a bitter humiliation before the Bwap Duke, and in the public eye. The Sector Duke’s detailed eye for the money, his partial blindness to off-the-books intrigue and informal alliances, and his underestimation of Solomani pride, their thirst for revenge, and hatred of the Other, is building up to something big and bad.

(And even now, there is an endless drive to subvert and/or undercut many of the Sector Duke’s bureaucratic rules and regulatory minutiae. Moreover, as a bureaucrat on the top of a huge bureaucratic pyramid, Sector Duke Dethwabtakewebwakawa is reliant on a steady flow of accurate, detailed information, something that cannot be depended on in an interstellar Civil Service riven with bribes, family connections, and tribal alliances...)

The strong support of Emperor Gavin and the favour of his Vilani allies protect him even now, but the list of hostile local Nobles continues to grow and the number of his allies slowly shrink outside of his core Bwap & Vilani backers.

Coming Planetary Trouble

I know an old woman who hasn't opened her windows in a decade, afraid that what's outside will climb inside. Inside, there is the stale odor of dead air.

I know another woman who called me about a corpse lying outside her window for six and a half hours. This was because of cutbacks at the morgue. No dignity in death here. They do it better in Baghdad.

The latest trend? When a person is murdered, he is thrown into an abandoned house, and it is set on fire. There are tens of thousands to choose from.

I know of an 11-year-old boy who was shot, the bullet going clean through his arm. The cops stuffed him in the back of a squad car and rushed him to the hospital. That's how we do it. There was no ambulance available. About two-thirds of the city's fleet is broken on an average day.

I know a cop who drives around in a squad car with holes in the floorboards. There is no computer, no air-conditioning, the odometer reading 147,000 miles. His bulletproof vest has expired. His pay has been cut 10 percent.

I knew a firefighter who died in a fire, but not from the fire. He died when the roof of an abandoned house collapsed on him and his brethren could not find him because his homing alarm was broken and did not sound. He suffocated.

In our town, the 911 dispatch system recently went down for 15 hours, and no one seemed to give a damn. When the system is running, the average wait is 58 minutes. Firefighters can't use hydraulic ladders on fire trucks to do their jobs unless there is an "immediate threat to life." In a fire — imagine that. The ladders haven't been inspected in years.

If this were New York, these stories would have ricocheted around the world. But this is Detroit and, of course, nobody gives a damn. Even here people have been conditioned to accept these things as normal, a nuisance, the buzz of a fly.

At one time, this description of grim, steady decline can be echoed across many worlds of the Empty Quarter,

with only a few word changes here and there. Things are actually better now on many worlds, and perhaps the Six Subsectors will finally see the surge of prosperity after the current Rim War has ended, and the Navy returns to guard the spacelanes.

But for now, things are going the wrong way in some — not all, not even most — worlds. The Cartel sometimes manages to strangle or weaken trade, and that means the money and the tools needed for living also gets squeezed. They are facing a lot of resistance compared to the Imperial Civil War era, so there is still a great deal of trade to be had: but everyone is more careful with who they talk to, more likely to 'double-up for safety'.

The Cartel squeeze is still imperfect, as of 993. A lack of infighting among the local worlds — especially along the Hindu/Islam and Solomani/Vilani divides — means the pirates rarely get things all their own way, and sometimes face a unified response that they must back down on. But the Shadow Cartel fingers continues to probe for weak spots...

What remains unspoken is what happens when the high-tech Vargr raiders of the Rukadukaz Republic begin the feast — a dreaded force, which only the Imperial Navy can match. A Navy that is hundreds of parsecs away now, and likely to remain distant for years to come.

[July 3, 2013](#)

Graffiti Found in a Tidy Vilani Ghetto

"Obey the Rules"

Yes, there really are Vilani ghettos, especially in Solomani-dominant worlds, and definitely within the Terran Confederation. As of 993 — during the Solomani Rim War — these areas are rabidly pro-Imperial just about everywhere in Charted Space.

Why do these ghettos exist?

Ghettos can be voluntary, as two separate peoples choose to live in different areas, to reduce the chance of conflict. They are more likely to be economic, as Group A simply can't afford to live with Group B due to housing prices. It is also possible that they are legally enforced, as Group A bans Group B from living outside of their zone.

Autonomy

The Vilani are generally hardworking, law-abiding, tradition-minded conformists who like the corporate life, and as such are unlikely to be kept out of the nice neighbourhoods because of financial issues. They may choose to live separately from other sophonts, to more easily build a consensus and better live the traditional life amongst themselves. This is fairly common on the more pluralistic worlds of the Imperium, where the Vilani make up a substantial minority, but are not powerful enough to build a pro-Vilani political/cultural consensus. If they can't get everyone to conform, then they will simply conform amongst themselves.

It is possible that this could lead to a breakdown in planetary unity. But – as the Vilani have 1) the money for the political bribes, 2) values a single unified front when facing outsiders – what has proven a more common resolution is that the Vilani recognize a single planetary government, but regional independence on cultural/religious/financial issues (but not racial issues: cultural conformity is the demand, not pure bloodlines or the One Race doctrines that the Solomani love). Quebec in Canada is a fair analogy, or the autonomous provinces of Spain for a multinational model. But not that of China: that's just a thin mask for Han dominance.

(Incidentally, fake autonomy is a very common tactic among the Solomani. Worlds where the Vilani openly call the shots don't bother with such flimsy pretences.)

The Vilani, like the Solomani (and every other superculture and Major Race less the Droyne), are unrelenting expansionists. On the one hand, they don't have a large indigenous area to call their own – excluding the Vilani Cultural Region. On the other hand, they have a pervasive influence within the Third Imperium, the most powerful interstellar state in existence. Moreover, their influence is on the rise, and – in 993 – the Imperium is openly at war with the Solomani Confederation. Also, they have a strong hand in several of the largest megacorporations around – the real power behind many Ducal and Baronial thrones, and very influential within the Iridium Throne. This network of interstellar power can make itself felt on any world with a large Vilani minority.

What this means is that, when the world government decides to get its hands on the wealth of the Vilani in the name of Unity/Equality/Freedom/Whatever, there's going to be a fight. Off-world forces are likely to get involved. And the Vilani may well win.

Ghettos

The Vilani are not always in a position to have their own chunk of land on a given world. In the Imperium, they may feel comfortable enough with the Mixed Vilani that dominate the Imperium to broadly merge with the mainstream. Or, the "autonomous Vilani district" isn't really that distinct from the rest of the world, as a majority of the population endorse much or all of Vilani culture, such as the paternalistic corporate life, the preference for consensus-based conflict resolution, etc.

In a highly Solomani region like the Empty Quarter, the Vilani may be forced into certain city districts, either as a separate caste (a la India) or as dhimmi (a la Arabia). The Vilani are good with money, so they tend to rise to a high-status caste among the East Indians. They have zero intention of abandoning their religion, language, or traditions, so they tend to be quite well-armed among the Arabs.

(The Vilani look out for the Vilani, and there are several regional successful Vilani worlds within the Six Subsectors, so outsider assistance is a factor here. On the other hand, the megacorporations are weaker in the Six Subsectors than elsewhere – there simply isn't much profit in being here.)

The Vilani and the Bwap get along famously, and are quite likely to argue bureaucratic minutiae just for fun. Vilani ghettos here are mainly for environmental reasons, to avoid the Bwap environmental preference for stifling humidity. On the other side of the Lesser Rift, the Vilani are honoured members of the Hegemony of Lorean: they really just have neighbourhoods and quarters here, not true ghettos. As they are aligned with the Hegemon, they are against the local insurgents, so these areas are well-guarded on hostile worlds. But outside of the military, they are not often found in Beta Quadrant: they prefer to remain in their part of Star's End sector, where they have near-complete dominance.

The Vilani within the Rukadukaz Republic culturally dominate everything in sight. Since they got the crushing cultural victory they always seek, there are no true Vilani ghettos: there are just Vilani wearing Vilani robes, and Vargr wearing Vilani robes. In the eyes of the Vilani, the race of the bureaucrat is a minor detail: it is the Tradition that matters.

[June 21, 2013](#)

The Industrial Revolution of the Middle Ages

Let's say it once again: low-tech does not mean mindlessly ignorant.

Quoted from Goodwin on Lew, quoted from the Bionic Mosquito, quoted from the Medieval Machine:

The medieval period witnessed one of the more rapid advances in the introduction of machinery in European history. This could not be accomplished without the effective taming of energy. The most common method was the mill – primarily water but also wind. These mills would grind corn, crush olives, tan leather, make paper, etc. While the Romans utilized the mill, it was not nearly to the extent utilized in these later periods. The relationship is inverse to the use of slaves in the economy – the increasing use of the mill corresponded with the drastic reduction of slavery during the Middle Ages.

“Don't use slaves... use water instead!” “Great idea in Europe, not so good in the dry worlds of the Empty Quarter...” “I don't hear the Bwap complaining!”

Mining

Mining was an important aspect of the medieval economy. The most important subset was stone quarrying, which the author suggests was more important possibly than all other forms of mining combined.

[...]

Mining was also important to the development and use of iron. The use of iron was increased greatly during the medieval period, replacing bronze which was more heavily used during Roman times. Every medieval village had its iron smith – it was common practice for every horse and plough animal to be shod.

When settling a world, you are going to need to find some mineral and stone deposits. Even with nanotech, 3D printing, transmutation, and all the rest – which is not available in the 1970s sci-fi universe of Traveller – it could still be cheaper/energy efficient to just dig it out.

The Pre-Renaissance Renaissance Man

One of the more highly valued professions in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was that of the architect-engineers, so-called, as there was no real distinction at the time between what are today multiple professions.

An individual in this field would have the skills of the architect, structural engineer, various specialties of mechanical engineering, and the general contractor. He was considered the master of all phases of the construction project.

Gimpel offers brief glimpses into several examples of this and other types of highly skilled individuals. Most notable of these examples is Roger Bacon. Among many other accomplishments, Bacon wrote of great ships and flying machines – not unlike the letter from Leonardo to the Duke of Milan. Bacon is referred to specifically in one of Leonardo's notebooks.

Low-tech, ignorant, yet curious explorers nosing around your starship may not stay low-tech and ignorant for long. Something to remember when visiting the impoverished Empty Quarter.

Time Waits for the Medieval Man

The medieval mind was inventive and mechanically minded, as has been demonstrated by various examples throughout this book. Gimpel attributes this to the medieval belief in progress, “a concept unknown to the classical world.” He quotes Bernard of Chartres:

“We are as dwarfs mounted on the shoulders of giants, so that although we perceive many more things than they, it is not because our vision is more piercing or our stature higher, but because we are carried and elevated higher thanks to their gigantic size.” (Page 147-148)

Such attitudes led men to accept inventions as normal, and to assume that new inventions would continue to come forth. Priests would sing the praises of inventions in church.

One invention stands out above the rest, that of the mechanical clock. The Near East and Far East previously knew of sun dials and water-driven clocks. While it is often considered a

fool's errand to identify in history the first inventor of something, there is much that points to the (non-water-driven) mechanical clock having been invented in the monasteries of the Middle Ages.

Gimpel cites Lewis Mumford, who sees in the mechanical clock the key invention of the entire industrial revolution:

"The clock, not the steam engine, is the key machine of the modern industrial age.... In its relationship to determinable quantities of energy, to standardization, to automatic action, and finally to its own special product, the clock has been the foremost machine in modern technics...." (Page 149)

This is a problem in the Empty Quarter. Sure, they have time-pieces, from water clocks to atomic clocks. But the culture still largely runs on Arab Time, or Indian Time. (Things are different in the Vargr/Vilani Rukadukaz Republic and the Hegemony of Lorean.) Technology is not as important as your time preference; owning lots of stuff and technological gadgets is no substitute for self-discipline, low time preference, and a pro-progress vision of the future.

The "Dark" in the Dark Ages

There is a stereotype of the Middle Ages, encompassed in the term "Dark Ages." While the term has fallen out of favor with scholars, "Dark Ages" still paints a picture within the mainstream community: war, famine, plague, and religious intolerance including witch hunts.

This stereotype finds its roots in the fourteenth century – toward the end of the period of the Middle Ages. Gimpel describes the Condemnation of 1277 as the beginning of the end for technological advancement and intellectual questioning that marked the Middle Ages. Bishop Tempier condemned "219 execrable errors which certain students of the Faculty of the Arts have the temerity to study and discuss in the schools." (Page 182-183)

In so doing he slowed the progress of science and reason in Paris – the Athens of the thirteenth century. (Page 183)

With the condemnation, Gimpel describes the beginning of witch hunts and burnings – something unknown to Europe for much of the preceding centuries. Obviously, the exploration of new ideas would be relatively subdued in such an environment.

Additional major shocks occurred: a devastating famine in 1315 – 1317; the Hundred Years' War began in 1337 (a war between the by now centralized kingdoms of England and France – and not involving the still relatively decentralized central and eastern European lands); and the Black Death, from 1347 – 1350.

Most interesting is Gimpel's description of currency devaluation by Philip the Fair of France, beginning in 1294. Philip was instrumental in turning France from a feudal society to a centralized state (apparently he felt that William's descendants needed a proper enemy).

War and religious intolerance has certainly held back the Empty Quarter in her history. Anti-psionic hatred and racial strife has had its say as well. Right at this moment (993 Imperial) piracy, theft, and murder in the star lanes are weakening the bonds of trade.

Still, it just isn't as bad as it was during the Imperial Civil Wars or the Julian War. That's progress, of a sort.

[June 19, 2013](#)

First, a little tale about DriveSavers to set the scene.

[Waits a bit.]

Now, let's fit this TL 9 recovery shop into the Imperial Empty Quarter.

First, where can we put it? I suggest a location with a large enough market – say, more than 10 million sophonts – to support it. There are a fair number of Imperial TL 9 systems with this population and above:

Hebrin, Gudina, Eninsish, Arakaad, Lukaau, Cooke, Rajan, Ababat, Indara, Sibikaar

Now, what unusual things can we throw at this unassuming workplace, perhaps not too dissimilar from where Dear Reader works?

Vargr raiders break in from orbit, searching for data pointing to a prime treasure trove. I hope that it's the rather civilized Ikonaz pirates, instead of the Blood Vargr...

The system military hands off a typical TL 11 drive from a captured Vargr raider for your team to put together, and if possible decrypt. Breaking into a computer drive two tech levels above your grade is going to be fun, nevermind the fantasy of cracking that encryption level. But if the Chinese – not known for their cutting edge technology – can pull off all sorts of U.S. fishing expeditions, maybe you can too, with a little lateral thinking...

And the typically semi-chaotic Vargr are not known for their strict information discipline. This does not help much with the Vilani-trained Ovaghoun, who often DO take a disciplined view of information security.

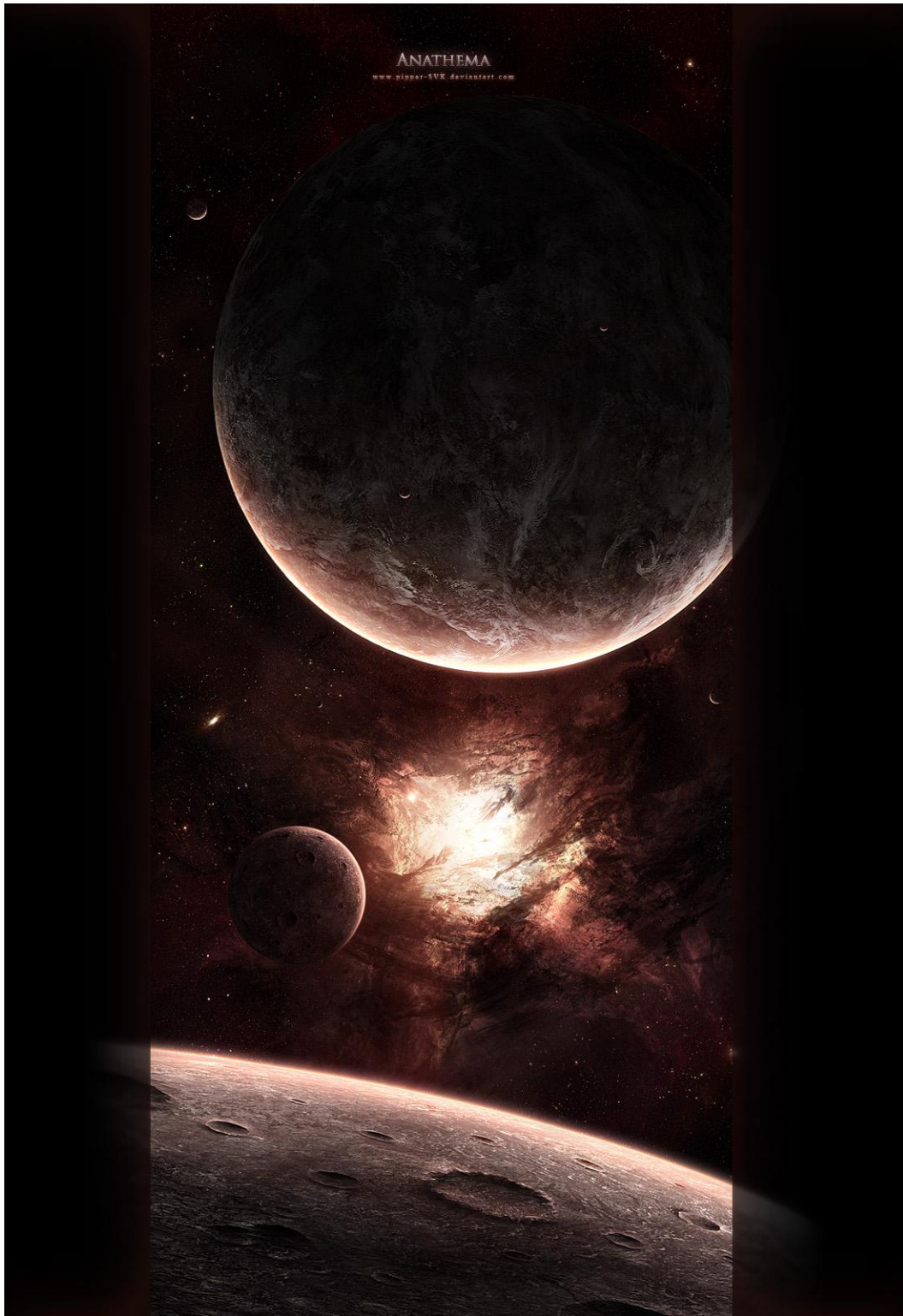
- (On Solomani worlds) After some serious financial setbacks – a Vargr raid, new high-tech competition, the collapse of a bank and much of the business' financial reserves, declining demand and a local recession-depression, a ray of hope appears. A distinguished gentleman makes a discreet offer to the PCs business owners/security officers/top techs. He has a few friends who admire the PCs work, and are willing to help push them to the next level in data recovery. In return, they either
 1. have a few jobs that needs to be handled 'on the side', outside of regular channels and/or
 2. want to insure that a few highly talented technicians are hired – technicians that were previously rejected due to suspected SolSec connections.

Remind the PCs that this could be the only way to save the business, and come back to beat the competition.

(Referee: SolSec may well be willing to shove the PCs company into bankruptcy, and then buy the company's assets for a song. If the PCs have no connection with

the Imperial government, they may then choose to offer the PCs their old jobs back, 'with new management'. As the Imperium is at war with the Solomani Confederation at this time, the SolSec agent(s) can't afford to break cover: even the passive support of certain Nobles will quickly evaporate if they are caught in the spotlight. The PCs had better be prepared for retaliation before they even threaten to spill the beans.)

- To get those fat government contracts, your top-flight data centre needs to retain its security clearance. (Especially on the high-law-level Eninsish asteroids; Arakaad, a planet on a permanent war footing since the Vargr Pillaging; or the Ababat government, with it's close connections to both the Imperial Navy and the Muslim Brotherhood.) But one day, doing government work, you discover some pretty dark doings on one of their hard drives. What kind of price are the PCs willing to pay to get public attention on it? Because there WILL be a price...
- A Vargr TL 9 drive is provided for the PCs data recovery centre to bring back to life by the end of the week, before the trader moves on to new markets. The TL is OK, and nothing is encrypted – but the standards and formats used are like nothing your team has ever seen. "Hey – I found a manual! Anyone here can read... whatever this is? How about these two other Vargr-looking frantic doodling languages? Anyone? Anyone?" How do you approach the problem? What shortcuts do you use, and when do you insist on doing things the slow way?
- The 'Shadow Cartel' has taken an interest in the kind of work you are doing, and have prepared an offer you can't refuse. You don't know if it's just a bunch of thugs using the Cartel's name, a competitor trying to push you off the cliff, or the real deal. What



Travellers should look out of their window more often.

This graphic is titled "Anathema" © Gabriel Gadoš.

See his work at <http://pipper-svk.deviantart.com/art/Anathema-93252144>

now? Can you trust law enforcement, or have they been corrupted by Cartel money – or fearful of Cartel warships and plasma-armed air/rafts? If they can't do anything, how about the local Imperial Noble? And if Proper Authority can help you, it's time to turn to Alternative Measures – but which one? The American Indian mercenaries? The Muslim Brotherhood? The Bwap Guardians of Order? The Vilani? Perhaps the cyborg militants of Hebrin can provide a hand – but at a price.... (and aren't they supposed to be with the Cartel?) Or hold your nose, and spend the cash to build your own private corporate army, or at least a few properly equipped platoons?

[June 19, 2013](#)

Princes, Paupers, and Sir Francis Drake

(Boring but necessary preamble at the top, cool stuff at the bottom.)

Princes and Paupers

CHAPTER I. The birth of the Prince and the Pauper.

In the ancient city of London, on a certain autumn day in the second quarter of the sixteenth century, a boy was born to a poor family of the name of Canty, who did not want him. On the same day another English child was born to a rich family of the name of Tudor, who did want him. All England wanted him too. England had so longed for him, and hoped for him, and prayed God for him, that, now that he was really come, the people went nearly mad for joy. Mere acquaintances hugged and kissed each other and cried. Everybody took a holiday, and high and low, rich and poor, feasted and danced and sang, and got very mellow; and they kept this up for days and nights together. By day, London was a sight to see, with gay banners waving from every balcony and housetop, and splendid pageants marching along. By night, it was again a sight to see, with its great bonfires at every corner, and its troops of revellers making merry around them. There was no talk in all England but of the new baby, Edward Tudor, Prince of Wales, who lay lapped in silks and satins, unconscious of all this fuss, and not knowing that great lords and ladies were

tending him and watching over him—and not caring, either. But there was no talk about the other baby, Tom Canty, lapped in his poor rags, except among the family of paupers whom he had just come to trouble with his presence.

It is surprisingly, how useful works set in the 16th century can be for a science-fiction story set in the 55th century. Princes will still be born; their birth will still be a cause of great celebration in their kingdoms; and there will still be paupers, whose occasion for birth will not quite be so celebrated.

Yes, I am making some assumptions: for one, that there will be an aristocracy in the future. Well, a good case can be made that the days of monarchy died in World War I. On the other hand, Pareto's Law is going to be active in the far future, just as much as in the distant past. Traveller makes the reasonable assumption that the basic structure of power in the past will be much the same in the future, with a few label switcheroos – scientists for priests, the Party for the Peerage, etc.

Formalities Matter in Court

Now, it's up to the Referee to decide on the flavour of the culture in a given world. Cold-eyed essentialists tend to believe that 'power is power, and how it justify themselves is beside the point.' But this is fundamentally false: it really does matter what the justifications are, at least to the PCs. To contact the local Imperial Noble, do they have to wait months for an appointment? Put their ticket in a lottery? Pay a flat fee to a functionary? Pay a huge bribe to a Noble family member? Make their case before a media circus? Serve in the noble's military for a year and a day? Complete a quest? Convert to the True Faith? Prove that they have at least four years of honourable service in the Emperor's forces? ("And one more minute to speak with His Lordship for every additional year of service.")

And don't forget the consequences of ignoring the rules. For example, Queen Esther fasted three days before entering the presence of King Xerxes: and when he saw her, he was pleased enough to extend his sceptre to her, allowing her to speak. Note that she was his wife, and she still was gambling with her life to meet him without an invitation:

All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, he has but one law: put

all to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days.

Without a doubt, there will be Travellers who will despise these formalities. But the forms and the formalities are important, as they underscore the status of the Imperial Lord. The higher the Noble, the stronger this rule holds: HE commands, YOU obey. Challenging this in the very face of the Imperial Noble is a direct attack against his right to rule – and depending on the political environment, the survival of his family – and There Will Be Consequences.

True: some Nobles are less strict about this than other Nobles, depending on the culture and the personality of the Noble in question. But all demand a certain level of respect, and disrespect simply must be punished, or the Noble will either find his orders ignored, or he will be replaced by someone who does command and enforce respect. Also: while Nobles have proven to be remarkably adept at gathering planetary powers, they generally don't rule a world as a formal part of their Imperial domain: they control their fief, the planetary starport, and are the Imperial judges and masters of nearby space outside of the 100-diameter zone of the main world.

Referee Headwork

Details matter in the story that is told: it fleshes out the world for the PCs as they travel in it. For example, here are some questions to answer, if you want to retrofit Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper* to Traveller universe.

- What does it mean to be a Prince? What does it mean to be a Pauper? How massive is the social distance between them? The technological distance?
- Is it even possible for a Pauper to successfully pretend to be a Prince? If so, how?
- Is the Prince and the Pauper even the same species? The same culture? The same religion? Do they speak the same language?
- Is there a ritual that permits this? In many cultures, a kind of role reversal is permitted once a year, where some lucky pauper gets to be prince for a day.
- What if the Prince wants to go slumming? What if he drops the rights and responsibilities for a day or a year? Is this even possible? Also: A Lord of an uninhabited moon who plays the pauper for a year is in a far different position

than the youngest son of a dynasty ruling a TL F world of billions who plays the pauper for a day. The first will have hardly any impact at all: the second could easily be a scandal that rocks the subsector.

The Fun Stuff

Mental Experiment #1: place the early modern Kingdom of England on a low-tech world of the Imperium. Make the PCs the hired high-tech servants of this planetary kingdom.

Remember: You can't change just one thing. The crypto-Tutor dynasty is going to insist on having those marvellous high-tech toys, but keeping them working is a different matter. Most likely, they are going to make a massive technological leap, in the style of African nations that moved directly from mailmen on horseback to microwave towers and cell phones. The source of electricity for the entire kingdom can be a clapped-out starship with a working power plant. (With some local nobles valuing their secret portable solar panels and batteries more highly than their 5,000-man TL 3 personal army.)

Mental Experiment #2: If the Vilani Empire chose to nose around a few more parsecs rimward, they may well have chosen to bring in those noisy and unruly TL 3 Terrans onboard, if only to expand the market. But as their local representative, they would not have chosen to work with those tiny, factious, and far too innovative kingdoms of Europe. Instead, they would have built an alliance with the Ming Dynasty, masters of the largest and wealthiest empire on Earth, with a culture that is a far better fit with the Vilani culture.

Now, set the PCs as compatriots of Sir Francis Drake, who – like their Ruling Lady, Queen Elizabeth – have some serious problems with this setup, and have decided to change a few things. Without getting the proper permissions.

(Referee bonus points if you can work into the campaign Jesuit missionaries and Oda Nobunaga. Funding for the venture will be provided curtesy of the Spanish, as always.)

[June 8, 2013](#)

1) Movie time 2) Loners

Wandering Asteroids and the Imperium

The TL 8/9 space culture depicted will have a more difficult time than the average TL 12 Imperial world, and, given enough lead time, even a dirt-poor TL 3 system can just call up the Imperial Navy, a Starmerc, or (sometimes) an energetic wandering free trader to handle the problem.

Of course, the Referee could still insert difficulties. For example, a pure Solomani Imperial world of 993 could have real difficulties flagging down an Imperial ship to do some steady tugging, as 1) most of the Imperial Navy is busy elsewhere and 2) most of the pure Solomani Naval officers & crew are currently fighting under a different flag, and the large number of Vilani/Mixed Vilani spacers still around are very resentful of the Solomani, and are quite willing to let certain requests “get lost in the paperwork”.

A Friend in Need

In the Imperial Empty Quarter, there is a long and strong tradition of ‘we look out for ourselves’, so the Hindus, Muslims, and American Indians (and the Bwaps, the Vilani, and the Kikhushegi believers) all have their own unofficially aligned forces who can protect their worlds.

(Not so long ago, they were officially aligned, and more than willing to wage high-tech tribal wars against each other. This definitely included the Muslim Arab-aligned local Imperial military – it was fairly restrained in what it could actively do, but definitely biased in its actions, rulings and activities.)

It is the poor and alone singletons who have to worry the most about rogue asteroids the most (and rogue pirates, rogue plagues, rogue nobles...). In 993, the premiere example in the Six Subsectors are Chinese-dominated Shuiku: Sashar also has few friends. The other unique Imperial systems – Cooke, Rommel, Ushmigad, Rasu, are capable of defending themselves.

They have to be, in this part of the Imperium.

The Unique

Surogota is a special case. It is a true loner, entirely populated by a small population of arachnoid sophonts. The local lifeforms are very hostile, and render the world uncolonizable. The sophonts are too few to have caused any trouble, and so they have no powerful enemies with long memories. (A huge benefit this part of space!) Moreover, they are too poor – and the

planets lifeforms too hostile – to make it a worthwhile object for piracy.

(There is something worth stealing: the Surgotans themselves. They are quite skilled in medical treatment, and there are people who would like to steal and enslave one for their services. Still, looking for these biotech masters in a biological hellzone, on their own turf, is simply begging for a nasty and sudden death.

In a tough neighbourhood, even the weaklings keep a few dirty shivs on their person.)

Finally, the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service has a paternalistic interest in the survival of small and weak cultures, an instinct that the Imperial hierarchy supports. Long ago, the IISS chased down and destroyed the very few asteroids or comets which had a high probability of impacting their small part of the world.

[June 7, 2013](#)

DeleteMe, Inception Services, and a Certain Vargr Contact

DeleteMe is a service that – for a reasonable fee – removes your presence from the Internet.

This is a function that every PC should have on speed dial. Any reasonable Referee should be ready and willing to teach the Traveller PC why he should be able to contact them at a moment’s notice.

Naturally, Traveller being Traveller, there should be Internet deletion “special services” that can reach those difficult-to-reach spots, such as Imperial Ministry of Justice databases and closed Noble servers. At a reasonable price.

(Which these services plan to just take the money and run, which are baits set by the MoJ, and which actually deliver? That’s for the Referee to know, and the PCs to find out all on their own. I hope they like surprises...)

Psions being psions, there can also be “unusual deletion services” that reach into the targets mind and selectively erase unfortunate memories. I will let you guess just how illegal this kind of work is in the strongly anti-psion Third Imperium.

Other psions provide extraction and inception services, depending on the client's reliability and ability to pay. While money is important, client discretion is just as valuable: the MoJ of 993 does not take kindly to their existence, and – even if you are a teleporting mindreader – you really don't want to get on any of their lists.

(The Imperium of 1105 – running two secret Psionic Institutes herself – is rather more tolerant of psions than the hardcore Imperium of 993.)

Thoe'r'kurga'ongoe

UPP 79BADB, age 31, Ovaghoun Vargr

Skills: Streetwise – 3, Interview – 2, Grav Vehicle – 2, Computer – 2, Forgery – 2, Jack-o-Trades- 2, Intrusion – 1, Linguistics – 1, Grav Belt – 1, Handgun – 0

Languages: Ikonaz Vilani (Vargr Pronunciation), Anglic (Transform Dialect)

Dress:

Thoe'r'kurga'ongoe (his friends call him Thoe-grr) dresses only in the latest Vargr fashions of Ikon. As he currently resides on Imperial Nulinad, it takes months for these high-tech threads to arrive at his penthouse suite. Even so, he makes every effort to dress like the high-charisma Vargr he is.

Services:

Thoe-grr and his network of associates, contacts, and allies help to remove unwanted information from inconvenient databases across the Imperial Empty Quarter, specializing in TL E Imperial databases. At the right price, he can contact someone willing to dive in the run-of-the-mill TL B databases as well. Because of the low-tech nature of many worlds of the Imperial Empty Quarter, he knows experienced professionals who can alter TL 6 computer tape drives, TL 5 punch cards, and even TL 3 wax seals.

Before he built his network six years ago, he was a member of a Ikonaz Vargr criminal ring which disintegrated due to internal power struggles. Thanks to chance and a certain unsavoury but necessary choice, he was one of the few survivors of that disaster.

Now, he is the head of his own discreet deletion service, enjoying unofficial (but very real) legal immunity due to providing assistance to the planetary government of Nulinad, assistance that is better than the Imperium remain blissfully unaware of.

The Shadow Cartel:

Thoe-grr is one of the regular contractors of the Shadow Cartel, and has enjoyed the financial awards that a friend of the Cartel has. Unfortunately, the Cartel is slowly but surely squeezing him for more work at lower prices. Thoe-grr wants to teaching the Cartel that he is an independent operator, not some bought lackey: but while he has the brains, he doesn't have the muscle to make the lesson stick.

This is where the PCs come in...

[May 31, 2013](#)

The Future: Tailoring Web Searches

"It will be very hard for people to watch or consume something that has not in some sense been tailored for them." – Eric Schmidt, Google

It's rather hard for Referee's to model tailoring: he will have to think what is the personality of my PC?" and, when the PC does a search on a computer, give the PC what he thinks the PC wants.

Advise for PCs: On Law A+, TL 8+ systems, don't do any searches for "psionics". To a lesser extent – say, Law C systems – "Solomani Party" isn't particularly wise either in the 1105 Imperium. It's waving a red flag in the 993 Imperium, where the Emperor is at war with the Solomani Confederation, and billions of Solomani are in internment camps.

If you must, do it on the various privacy-focused undernets. The Referee should make it a struggle to find these undernets on high-level law worlds, but widely known and available on low-level law worlds.

On low law-level worlds – especially law level 1 or 0 – you can get away with a lot publicly. (Note that very few or none of these worlds are Vilani-dominated, so looking for Solomani info is quite easy.) But sometimes, prudence is a necessity, especially when it comes to psionics: here, it is the general population that hates it, and you may well run into non-governmental groups with a good grasp of technology, some money, and some muscle.

The Imperium is not a police state, and to the cost-conscious Nobility, such things are just too expensive and inefficient to run; so there won't be men with Imperial uniforms watching your every move online. But, there will certainly be police-state worlds to look out for.

Also, the Imperium just doesn't have the personnel to set an online watch for most persons of interest. Even with data vacuuming, somebody has to actually sort through all of that junk, kick out the numerous red herrings, and get the gold. These people are very expensive, and tend to be restricted to active, violent, 'clear and present dangers' to the Imperium. But if the PCs really angered a really powerful individual, they had better be prepared to pay the price for it...

But frankly, that depends on the Noble/Corporation/NGO. Some like to mislead you with false information and fake friends; other prefer to send killers; still others like to wrap you in red tape; others set up honey traps and plant incriminating evidence; and there are always opponents who simply want to buy you off. Not too many specialize in building an online profile of your activities before acting, but they do exist....

[May 25, 2013](#)

The many roads to Vland...

An excerpt from Zero Hedge:

- Deference to authority. Studies have shown that people defer to authority, particularly during extreme crises. Stanley Milgram conducted the most famous experiment into this in 1963. The context for the experiment was that after World War Two, many wondered how ordinary people could commit unspeakable crimes. Milgram sought to test this in a laboratory to see how far people would go when an authority figure ordered them to hurt another human being. The shocking answer was: very far. While an extreme example, the lesson for investors is that many people will often do what an authority figures tells them to do, either overtly or otherwise.
- Conformity, or the herd principle. The best-known study on this was done by Solomon Asch in the 1950s showing that people will deny evidence from their own eyes to fit in with others. This suggests that groups exert a tremendous influence over individual decision making.
- Group conformity. A corollary of the above is that people conform more strongly with others that are in the same group as them. If your an economist, you're more likely to

conform with the thinking and actions of other economists.

- Cultural conformity. Collectivist cultures, particularly in Asia, are more conformist in their behaviour. This is because non-conformity is seen as deviance. Average conformity rates range from 25-58% in collectivist cultures compared with 14-39% in so-called individualist cultures. This explains much about Japan...
- Adherence to social norms. Other people affect us even when they're not there. Studies by Robert Cialdini suggest that most people are strongly influenced by thinking about how others would behave in the same situation, particularly if they're unsure how to act. For instance, a decision about whether we buy into the stock market is often influenced by society's view of such a purchase. That makes for bad investing!

Ah, the joys of Vilani culture!

[May 23, 2013](#)

Google X, and the Imperial Research Centre

The Imperium has a fair number of research stations across her territory. To get a feel of what could be going on there – besides the usual military stuff – a recent article on Google [X], Google's research lab, could be of interest.

A few excerpts:

Last February, Astro Teller, the director of Google's (GOOG) secretive research lab, Google X, went to seek approval from Chief Executive Officer Larry Page for an unlikely acquisition. Teller was proposing that Google buy Makani Power, a startup that develops wind turbines mounted on unmanned, fixed-wing aircraft tethered to the ground like a kite. The startup, Teller told Page, was seeing promising results, and, he added proudly, its prototypes had survived all recent tests intact.

Page approved Google X's acquisition of Makani, which was being completed for an undisclosed amount at press time. He also had a demand. "He said we could have the budget and the people to go do this," Teller says, "but

that we had to make sure to crash at least five of the devices in the near future.”

As the polymath engineers and scientists who work there are fond of saying, Google X is the search giant’s factory for moonshots, those million-to-one scientific bets that require generous amounts of capital, massive leaps of faith, and a willingness to break things. Google X (the official spelling is Google [x]) is home to the self-driving car initiative and the Internet-connected eyeglasses, Google Glass, among other improbable projects.

The PCs should be helpful in the “breaking things” category...

Google X seeks to be an heir to the classic research labs, such as the -Manhattan Project, which created the first atomic bomb, and Bletchley Park, where code breakers cracked German ciphers and gave birth to modern cryptography. After the war, the spirit of these efforts was captured in pastoral corporate settings: AT&T’s (T) Bell Labs and Xerox (XRX) PARC, for example, became synonym-mous with breakthroughs (the transistor and the personal computer among them) and the inability of each company to capitalize on them.

That was last century. NASA’s budget has been clipped by 11 percent since 1990. Companies are pulling back on basic research as well, preferring to buy disruptive innovation when they see it in startups. “I’m pessimistic,” says John Seely Brown, the former director of PARC. “It’s shocking how much research is no longer being done. We have no understanding of how fast China is catching up. I think we are a very complacent nation.”

NOT good for the country. I don’t believe that scientific advances can be stopped even if all the big labs were shut down, and it could be beneficial to break out of the “centralized corporate lab” mindset, but it still doesn’t smell right.

In the Imperium, I have no doubt that it’s the huge megacorporations, with the Imperium and some of the wealthier families, that are the major drivers of innovation. Quite a lot of the work done involves small creative companies being snapped up when they start getting profitable.

In the old days, the Vilani love of patents could stomp out innovation. For example, it was Kodak that invented the digital camera – but, to preserve their film business, they decided to suppress it. In the classic Ziru Sirka, the megacorporate equivalent of Kodak could take out a patent on it, then work to stomp out any competitor from developing the technology. (Vilani patents don’t expire.)

Thrun had grown disenchanted with the pace of academia, where professors are motivated to publish papers rather than build products. He started the self-driving car project at Google in early 2009. Page and Brin gave him a target: Build one that could flawlessly drive 1,000 miles of open California highways and serpentine city streets. Thrun and his team of a dozen engineers met that goal in 15 months. Their car successfully navigated the jammed streets of Los Angeles and Silicon Valley, and the lower span of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, where the car had no GPS reception.

The Imperium does not permit unmanned jumpships to operate in her space. I wonder if the Solomani Confederation could steal a march on the Imperium in this area. It could completely eliminate misjumps, which is a major drain on interstellar commerce...

In its early years, Thrun’s intuition and Page’s and Brin’s interests guided the agenda. It was Teller who first articulated X’s mission, in a conversation with Page. Teller was trying to put more definition behind the lab’s purpose and asked Page, Were they a research center? No, that sounded boring, Page -responded. Were they an incubator for new com-pa-nies? No.

Finally Teller asked, “Are we taking moonshots?” Page replied, “Yes, that’s it.”

This could well be the reason for Imperial Research Centres. Moonshot projects that proclaim the power of the Imperium – much as the original moonshot strengthened the power and reputation of the United States (while sending a message to the Soviet Union). The Emperor or the Armed Forces may well be interested in certain unique concerns that they want investigated “in-house”. Or the Scouts could be on some wild goose chase, and need the labs to either prove or disprove their strange theories...

Teller has turned his sky's-the-limit thinking into Google X's most visible export. Last March he spoke at the South By Southwest Interactive conference in Austin, Tex., telling a packed auditorium, "The world is not limited by IQ. We are all limited by bravery and creativity."

I happen to believe this... but I would add selfishness as well. We can't always be brave, creative, or selfless – and it isn't even wise to always be so. But, we should push the limits.

When he's not evangelizing for Google X, Teller spends much of his time surveying new ideas for the lab. Absurdity is not a barrier to consideration. Teller and colleagues say they've spent time contemplating levitation and teleportation. The latter was nixed as an area for further study in part because any unique item that you would want to teleport—a Picasso, say—would have to be completely destroyed before it could be reconstituted on the other end.

Well, that wouldn't stop the Imperium. But it would limit the applications...

For now, X will take on two or three new moonshots a year. "If there's an enormous problem with the world, and we can convince ourselves that over some long but not unreasonable period of time we can make that problem go away, then we don't need a business plan," Teller says. "We should be focused on making the world a better place, and once we do that, the money will come back and find us."

I wonder if the Imperium is quite so broadminded. Probably not: vast empires work to preserve themselves, first and foremost. But sometimes, they can surprise.

[April 28, 2013](#)

Movie Night: On The Beach (with wordy afterward)

Executive Summary: It would be rather interesting, having a 1950s Australia interact with a sprawling interstellar empire, bargaining to rebuild their world.

[YouTube Video: On the Beach]

Lengthy Afterward, with Traveller Applications: In this movie, a world is starting to die after a major nuclear war has unleashed a wave of heavy radioactive fallout. It started with a nuclear war in the northern hemisphere, but the wave of atomic poison continues to move south, and will eventually kill all life on earth.

From the kinda-realistic Traveller perspective, I doubt this would occur, although it could with heavy usage of cobalt nuclear weapons, or gamma-ray armed warships attacking a world with a thin or no atmosphere. What's far more interesting is the calm, peaceable, fatalistic way the planet's inhabitants handle their impending doom. Believing that it is pointless to head south and attempt to evade the fallout, everyone simply relaxes, enjoys the Australian sun, and when the time comes swallows the government-supplied suicide pills. Of course, I believe that neither the Arabs & East Indians of the 1950s, nor their distant descendants in the Empty Quarter, would give up that easily. But the Vilani? The Bwap?

If I ever did adapt the movie, I'd let the more southern regions of the planet survive, using only the standard hydrogen/thermonuclear weapon: but they'd still have to deal with fallout. Modern warhead yields have made cheaper kiloton warheads popular, as modern targeting technology permits more precise placement (megaton warheads remain deployed). Effects of a nuclear winter would be downplayed, but the pain of communication and transportation disruption would be serious.

Adventures would focus on the interstellar response to the disaster; major Imperial law enforcement action, as it is illegal for local governments to have nuclear weapons (never mind use them); and helping the survivors get back on their feet. There are various private groups that will remove fallout and damp the radioactivity, for a price. Biosphere repair is available, but at an even higher price. How the locals pay for it will be up to them.

The local Ducal family may well help out, but again only on a quid pro quo basis: few Imperials are going to be sympathetic if you ruin a perfectly good world for some airy-fairy religio-ideological reason, and even the racialists (see: Solomani) and corporate warriors (see: Vilani) prefer a go-slow approach: less Germany 1942, more Anglo settlers of Texas 1820s.

The most likely result for such a world in the Imperial Empty Quarter would be to sell the northern hemisphere to a wealthy concern, allowing them to settle the land in return for cleaning up the mess. But,

many Emptyheaded systems are quite nationalistic/xenophobic, and will prefer to let the radioactive regions rot than allow outworlders to settle it, even if they promise to get rid of the radiation in return for settler's rights. Few traders are interested in raiding the radioactive ruins of a 1950s-tech world, but the refined metal of the dead cities might be profitable if scrubbed of radiation.

[May 7, 2013](#)

Proof: Vargr in Medieval Europe

Looking at the sci-fi speculations of the middle ages, it looks like the hard-core medieval Christians would insist that "Yes, the Vargr DO have souls!"

Somebody needs to get them hooked up with the Solomani: it would be interesting to see which hard-core fanatic persuades who. I'm rooting for the Medieval folks myself, if only to see zero-tech pale people outmuscle a sprawling interstellar empire of brown-skinned types enthralled with their own superiority, using nothing more than their Latin bibles, rock-hard determination, and the soil of Terra ground underneath their fingernails.

"You call yourself a Son of Terra? You weren't even born here! I never went father than three miles from my native village, I have been a farmer-slave to Mother Earth for the entirety of my life, and I know far more about the Will of God than you ever will!"

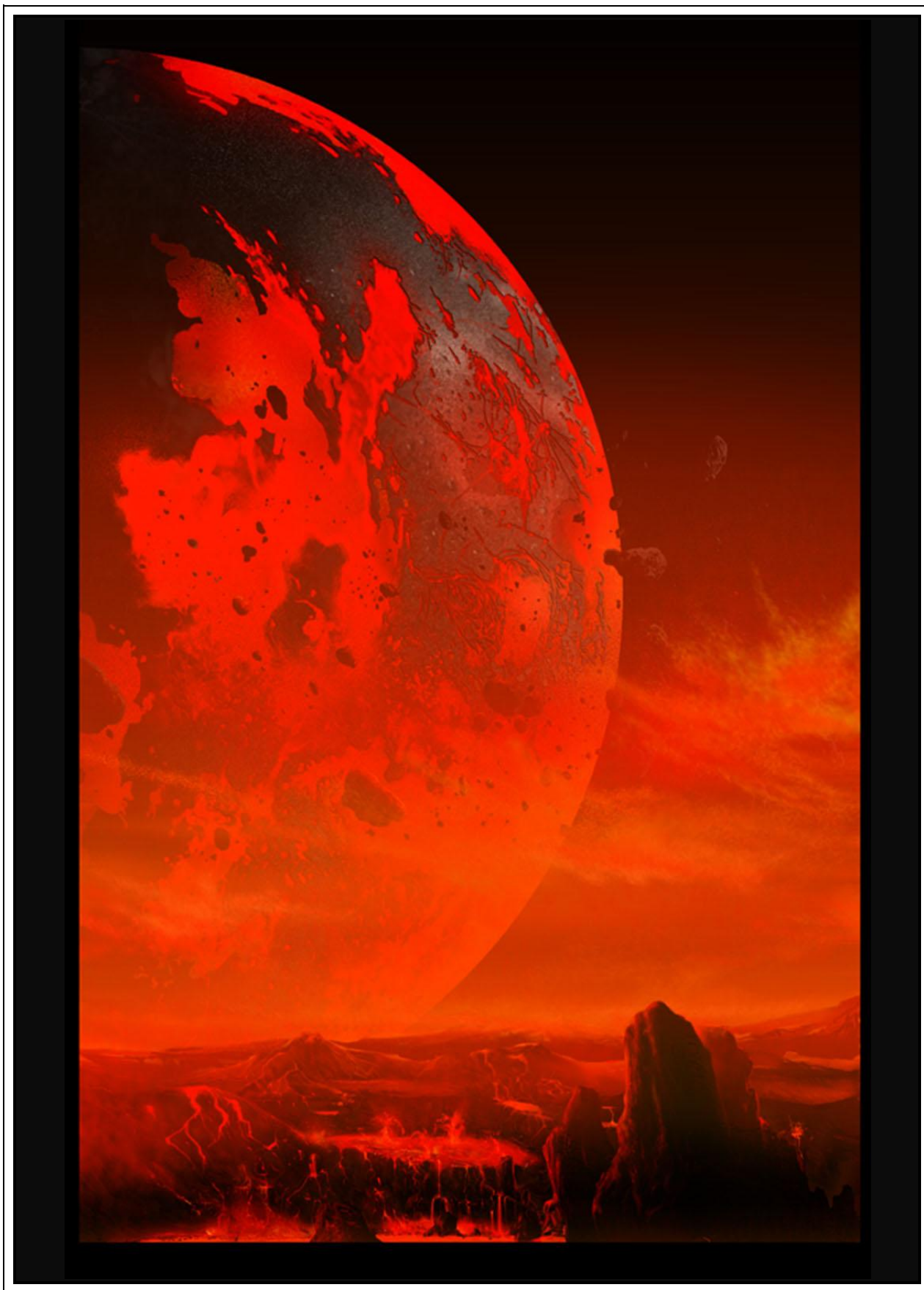
"Solomani Morality? What's that about? Pouring down the fire of the sun from on high because God made you in one shape, and God made the other guy in another shape? Do you think that pleases the Prince of Peace? DO YOU?"

Bonus points if the Medieval folk turn the Solomani Confederation into the weirdest Christian theocracy of all time.

Referee: that picture of the dog-headed people in middle-ages Europe is screaming for a crazy adventure in the Traveller Universe. Perhaps you should be the one to write it, run it, and publish it!

(Following graphic: *An interesting site for an adventure, if you ask me. The barren world of Satara, Kaanada system, 993 Imperial.* This graphic is titled "New Moon" © Bill Carr.

See his work at <http://bc1967.cgsociety.org>)



Adventure: *The Parable of St. Ram*



The young Muhanid Mourad, on his journey to become the famous Kikhushi theologian Areaseth. With his pack robot Makin, he has set out on a trek to the starport ruins of his native world of Askaath. In AD 3320 (-1200 Imperial), deep in the Long Night, local humaniti was plateauing after a sharp recovery curve in this part of the Empty Quarter, with a lively economic recovery and even STL ramscoops on advanced Hebrin, and the slow and sporadic return of technological skill on even the poorest worlds – so long as they survived the Vargr Pillaging. This graphic is titled “Tracks” © Sandara.

See her work at <http://sandara.deviantart.com/art/Tracks-397516234>

It Was a Dark and Very Long Night...

This adventure is set in a time long before the usual Solomani Rim War era **Stellar Reaches** usually focuses on. This time period, referred to as ‘the Long Night’, lasted about 1700 years, covering the period between the collapse of the Second Imperium and the rise of the Third.

By this time, AD 3320 (the Imperial dating system hasn’t been invented yet), the worst of the Vargr Pillaging had become only a bitter memory: Vargr raiders were no longer found in this corner of space – or any other jump-capable starship, for that matter. For centuries, all interstellar contact was by radio and laser, but STL ramscoops from Hebrin were again braving the eternal night of the stars, starting in 2981. As of 3320, jumpdrive technology had yet to be regained regionally, but a Hebrinite ramscoop – manned by a crew of traders, scientists, Sunni Islamic missionaries, and

a few highly-trained men-at-arms – might visit a notable world once a generation, and a transmitted message from the stars more often than that.⁶⁴

The PCs in this adventure have never even imagined leaving their native world of Askaath (In AD 3320: X665873-4). The most powerful empires on Askaath at this time were centred on the western shores of the Sea of Filaments, and controlled about 20% of the planetary surface at the time. The PCs are born and bred far from the most distant outposts of these Westsea empires,

⁶⁴ Note that the humans had their network, and the (generally higher-tech, but weaker in numbers and military muscle) Bwap had their own interstellar network. Most importantly, the Bwap had retained more technology than men did, including (on Marhaban) the secret to jumpdrive and a few precious jumpships, covertly put to work (see: “UFOs”). As the date is 3320, the xenophobic and envy-driven Bwap purges (31st – 38th centuries) were still rolling on, unpredictably but ferociously: but does not affect the PCs in this adventure.

near the southern pole of Askaath, and have yet to see a working firearm. Members of a TL 2 nomadic horse-riding culture, dependent on the livestock they herd from one pasture to another, the stars are only a source of fear and dread, as the home of killers with the heads of wolves. The Rule of Man, abode of the gods, was long ago devoured by the wolf-headed demons; the Turnik-speaking men of the Golden Grass must flee with their herds, if they hope to survive the fire-breathing steel dragons that the wolves live in. So goes the sacred tales: and many still believe in them, inscribed in stone pillars set before every worship circle and druidic college.

The Doomwatch

The PCs are members of the Doomwatch, a small group of three to six men, always led by a female druid, who investigates claims of the return of the killers from the skies. Their duty, should they verify their return, is not to fight the demons, but to give warning to the druids and the bannermen of the nomadic clans. Using smoke signals, sacred TL 3 fireworks, mirror signalling, and trained messenger 'birds'⁶⁵, the warning will spread throughout the vast expanse of the Golden Grass in just a few days. They are based in the Blackwood Camp, a village centred on druidic worship and study.

The PCs are armed with good swords, padded cloth armour, a short bow with 20 arrows, two spears, and two javelins each. They are also trained in the use of all this equipment, and are all good riders, having been riding horses since the age of four. As religious warriors, the PCs have been trained to read and write in the local language of Turnik: PCs with an intelligence of 12+ are also able to read (but not speak) the sacred language of Ing Lish. They also know a lot of religious lore regarding the wolf-headed demons: the historical legends of their attacks are fairly reliable, so they know the wolf-heads have magic-powered flying carriages, and have short javelins that – instead of being thrown – spit fire and unseen death with the sound of thunder.

⁶⁵ OK, so the 'birds' are more like huge, bug-eyed dragonflies. Don't sweat the details: at least the horses the PCs ride are real horses, and the 'cattle' they herd – more than 80% moose, genetically speaking – do behave like real cattle, sort of...

While the druidess that leads them is armed with a mysterious glowing sword, the lead PC carried one of those firesticks the demons carry. No druid has managed to get the thing to spit death, and neither has the PC, but who knows: if they play with it enough, they might get the magic to work properly!⁶⁶

It has been many long years since the wolf-heads and their steel dragons have cursed the Golden Grass, and the Doomwatch have to occasionally face a bit of ridicule from the populace. As it is, they have spent far more time fighting brigands, avenging attacks on the druids, and protecting the sacred groves from vandals than practicing scouting and skirmishing tactics against the demons. Only the occasional false alarm is left to remind them of their original mission: that, and the odd space vision from the druidess, usually tied with smoking certain herbs native to the planet.

A Star Falls on the World

As the long winter settles on the land, one of the messenger 'birds' buzzes around before landing near the PCs, camped in the woods. It bears a message, directing the PCs to investigate a glowing star that has fallen high in the O-ten Mountains, above the Stationcrater Valley. After grouching about being sent on another wild cattle chase – instead of getting real action, like hunting bandits – the PCs saddle up.

The Referee may throw a predator or two at the PCs in their eleven-day journey,⁶⁷ but by and large the real dangers are environmental, not the wildlife. All the PCs know their woodcraft, but their survival skills are geared to the endless plains of the Golden Grass and the cold flat deserts that border their homeland, not the mountainous terrain of the far north. The O-two and O-five ridges aren't too bad for seasoned horsemen, but the O-nine and O-ten ranges are Serious Business: it's likely that their horses will break a leg; that they will be caught without shelter in a heavy blizzard, with limited food in their packs and not much to forage locally (for men or for horse); that they will waste time on dead-end paths as the

⁶⁶ One day, an explorer or intrepid trader from one of the TL 4 empires will show the PCs the importance of ammunition. But that day hasn't arrived yet...

⁶⁷ For details on riding distances, see http://www.wwestra.com/horses/history_travel.htm

temperature gets colder, and the winds more cutting. And the PCs – born and bred on prairies that stretch to the horizons – have never even *heard* of an avalanche or a rockslide...

The PCs who get to the Stationcrater Valley will recognize it as they come down the ridge immediately facing it: there are still steel debris sticking out of the crater, where a Rule of Man space station came crashing down after a wolf-head strike in the Last Age of the Gods. As they pass the holy site in silence, they now have to spot the little green/blue glint that is their destination (it's much easier to locate at night, or when the mountain range is wrapped in shadow during sunset). Fortunately, there are several broad and

accessible ways up the mountain, making the final push up the O-ten range far more forgiving than the highlands the PCs have previously passed. Up here, though, there's nothing for the horses to eat, and only snow for water.

Before pressing on, the PCs – led by the druidess – should confer on just what they plan to do as they near where the killers, their firesticks, and their steel dragon are likely perched. Again: the PCs have never seen a firearm, but they know that it shouts and it kills and maims with an invisible punch. Although they bear swords and arrows and perhaps daggers, slings and bolos, they know that they are just to observe and report, not fight a battle they would most likely lose.



The druidess leads the PCs to the crash site, sword in hand. AD 3320 (-1200 Imperial).

This graphic is titled "Seed" © Sandara. See her work at <http://sandara.deviantart.com/art/seed-270439282>

The crater stands in mute testimony on the dangers the magic-welding demons hold for all men of the Golden Grass. If even the Old Gods could be felled by them, then mere mortals like themselves best be cautious.

The Space Flower

As the PCs ride cautiously to the strange light, it becomes obvious that this object doesn't resemble any of the great-finned dragons laboriously drawn on parchment by the druids of the Blackwood Camp (and carefully memorized by the PCs). Instead, it resembles a kind of flower... a metal

flower, glowing with the same green-blue light that the druidess' sword has!

Questioning the druidess leads to no good answers: she knows that her sword is holy, from no worldly metal, but how the metal was found or the sword forged, she has no idea. The druidess who gave it to her claimed that it dated back even to the Time of the Gods, but this assertion always

seemed false to her: everyone knows that the Old Gods did not have swords, but had their own firesticks just like the wolf-headed demons did!⁶⁸

Investigating the flower, the druidess and the PCs find a strange mechanical egg set in the middle of the flower. But before they can take the egg, a pack of wolves (not wolf-headed Vargr raiders) start nosing around. Fortunately, they are wary of humans, and can be scared off or fought off well enough by the PC band.⁶⁹

After retrieving the egg for druidic study, the PCs have to plan what they are to do next. They certainly found something strange from the skies, but it wasn't the wolf-heads they were looking for. If they PCs wish, they can continue to risk life and limb (and starvation and avalanches) looking for the demons from space – but won't find them here. When they are ready, they head home.

The Fight: Blood and Smoke

It is while on their way home that they see in the distance a column of smoke, emerging from something that crashed into the world. They may approach, or elude it as they desire.

If they elude it, there are no results in this adventure. But if the Referee sets a campaign with the Doomwatch, they then hear of rumours of wolf-heads stalking the barren wastes of the O highlands, especially between the O-two and O-six ranges. They may bear firesticks, but reports are uncertain: the PCs are to find the real story, and report back to the Blackwood Camp. If – and only if – the wolf-heads have no firesticks or dragon, may the PCs attempt to capture or kill them.

If the PCs decide to ride to the column of smoke, they will eventually see the crashed starship clearly. Sharp reports will be heard: the PCs have

⁶⁸ Firearm technology is available to the distant TL 4 Westsea empires on the planet: but saltpeter is in short supply on this world, and only a few local scientists and sniper/assassins have access to it. Right now on this world, finding a solid source of niter would make a man wealthier than finding a gold mine... Naturally, the people of the Golden Grass knows nothing about this: but they might should Westsea expeditions hire a few snipers along with their halberd, sword, and poleaxe soldiery. (Cannon of course is non-existent at this time.)

⁶⁹ If anyone told the Doomwatch that men *deliberately* seeded these wolves on the world, they would have laughed them to scorn.

been trained to respect the invisible death, so they will know to avoid making themselves a clear target.

The Referee needs to decide if the Vargr involved are Blood Vargr (“We’re just here for the killing... and a little stealing... but mainly the killing”) or Ikonaz (Ovaghoun Vargr – who follow Vilani culture – and their Vilani servants and aides). The fight goes differently, depending on the opponent.

If the foe are Suedzuk...

Details

The PCs face 2D6 surviving Blood Vargr raiders, with only a limited amount of rifles and ammunition. This crew is the victim of a misjump, and has been cast far from the human worlds of Beta Quadrant, the Empty Quarter, currently dominated by the Suedzuk Vargr, famous for their blood-red tinged fur (and exceptionally violent/paranoid attitudes). Their jump engine and power plant never fully recovered from the misjump, and their wounded ship finally gave up the ghost as they entered Askaath, where the PCs are located.

The Vargr have enough ammunition for 10 rounds of combat (one minute): they have Regular morale and training, so the PCs lives are most definitely in danger here (and their horses may well be shot out from under them). Afterwards, though, the Vargr have only their claws (natural or steel), daggers, and teeth. When they run out of ammo, they will know that they are going to die, and they prefer to die fighting. The PCs who successfully evaded the Vargr fire can charge on their horses, using their spears, arrows, and swords to cut down the survivors.

The PCs may attempt to capture instead of kill. The Vargr will not co-operate, but they may feign surrender to get a human close enough for a killing strike to the throat or the belly. The Vargr are agile, but not particularly strong, so they may be successfully wrestled to the ground and have their muzzled, paws, and legs stoutly tied together.

Glory

The actual *capture* of a wolf-headed demon from blackest space will guarantee permanent renown and fame to the PCs involved. Children will be named after them long after the Third Imperium is founded, and their tale will grow to be part of the local starlore.

The *killing* of the space invaders will earn a lot of respect to the PCs, and songs will be sung of their deed for several generations. Many historians of the Imperium yet to come will dispute their existence, but conclusive evidence will be uncovered – at the site where the Vargr raider crashed – that will definitely prove that they truly lived, and were not just mythical heroes of the Long Night.

If the PCs successfully flee after suffering heavy casualties, they will eventually be sent with a fresh force of Doomwatch riders, to finish the job

properly. It is quite likely that a captain of a local clan will join the PCs, with his own force of a dozen armed riders or so.

If the PCs die to the last man, their brother Doomwatches eventually burns their bodies on a funeral pyre, and their names inscribed in the druidic rolls of the Honoured Dead. More than a thousand years from now, when Imperial researchers examine the relics of this long-lost world, they might puzzle over their names inscribed on a memory stele in a long forgotten language before moving on to the next puzzle.



The wolves arrive for the kill: but the helpless egg is not alone...
AD 3320 (-1200 Imperial). This graphic is titled "Seed2" © Sandara. See her work at <http://sandara.deviantart.com/art/seed2-337696052>

If the foe are Ikonaz...

Details

The PCs face 2D6 surviving Ikonaz raiders – both Vargr and Vilani - with only a limited amount of rifles and ammunition. This crew is the victim of a misjump, and has been cast far from the Ikonaz Sphere of Alpha Quadrant, the Empty Quarter. Their jump engine and power plant never fully recovered from the misjump, and their wounded ship finally gave up the ghost as they entered Askaath, where the PCs are located.

The Ikonaz have enough ammunition for 10 rounds of combat (one minute): they have Regular morale and training, so the PCs lives are most definitely in danger here (and their horses may well be shot out from under them). Afterwards, though, the Vargr have only their claws (natural or steel), daggers, and teeth: the Vilani only have their fists and daggers. When they run out of ammo, they will know that they are going to die, and so will prefer to surrender if they can. The PCs who successfully evaded the Ikonaz fire can charge on their horses, using their spears, arrows, and swords to cut down the survivors: but the druidess – if she survived the

initial clash – will order the PCs to cease fire and accept the surrender. Disobedience to a direct order from a druid are grounds for dismissal from the Doomwatch, at the very least.

The captured crewmen cannot speak the PC's native language of Turnik, or read or write in Ing Lish. None of the PCs know Ikonaz, or Old High Vilani: not even the most learned of the druids of the Golden Grass know of these tongues. Still, some communication is possible by body gestures. After the PCs have handed over the prisoners in their home base of the Blackwood Camp, the adventure is over: but the Referee may determine what happens to them. Perhaps the prisoners are ceremonially killed in thanks to the Old Gods, and their corpses offered in a burnt offering to the woods or carefully dissected by 'late medieval/early renaissance' druids. Or they may be treated well, taught to speak in Turnik (and/or the more brainy druids can earn the dual-species Ikonaz language), and the tales of the tamed demons carefully enrolled into the druidic library.

Glory

The actual *capture* of these demons from space will initially gain the PCs great renown. Some of this fame will stick with the PCs for a lifetime: but because these prisoners are a lot more civilized than the Blood Vargr, the end result is not so much the conquest of evil, but a strange new discovery. If the visitors are not killed, but instead communication is established (with good treatment, and with improved fluency in a shared language), then an expanded view of the universe around them is gained, instead of just a straight-up victory over alien invaders.

The very fact that the human Vilani are willing servants under the wolf-headed demons will send major shockwaves in druidic theology. Expect at least a good century of debate (at least!) as religious teachings are adjusted to fit the new reality.

Incidentally, the planetary population of Askaath (the world this adventure is set) are Terran Arabs who have forgotten Terra, Arabia, and even Islam, by this point in time: they have no recollection on what a Vilani is. So either

- “The wolf-heads are obviously alien, and so are obviously evil: but the fake people only show their alienness in subtle ways,

and so are obviously the more dangerous, more corrupting threat facing us.”

...or...

- “The wolf-heads have minds, and act like beings who can reason and avoid needless destruction, not as wild animals or demons. And they work with humans who *willingly* serve them: this does not make the wolf-heads good, but certainly, they are not simply evil.”

Which attitude becomes the dominant one among the senior druid leadership will be heavily influenced by the words of the PCs.

If the prisoners are well-treated enough, and if a shared language can be built, the intellectual rewards for the PC's people are immense. The prisoners are willing to speak candidly of their home, to speak of life in a true interstellar civilization (ruled by conquering Vargr, themselves being conquered by a Vilani culture they deeply admire), and even attempt to share their technical knowledge – but none of the survivors are scientists, or trained technical exchange/uplift specialists.⁷⁰

The *killing* of the space invaders is a lot easier than *learning* from them, and the bards care far more for violent deeds than thoughtful consideration. Many historians of the Imperium yet to come will dispute their existence, but conclusive evidence will be uncovered – at the site where the Ikonic raider crashed – that will definitely prove that they truly lived, and were not just myths of the Long Night. The mix of human and Vargr bones in the crash site will eventually draw a wealthy, high-tech team of Vargr & Vilani ritualists from Ikon, who have come to give the proper Vilani rites to the dead ancestors.

If the PCs successfully flee after suffering heavy casualties, they will eventually be sent with a fresh force of Doomwatch riders, to finish the job properly. It is quite likely that a captain of a local clan will join the PCs, with his own force of a dozen armed riders or so.

⁷⁰ How would *you* teach scientific principles, religious scriptures (...or Vilani traditions...), or modern Western history to 12th century nomadic horsemen – whose language you have the most flimsy of grasps on?

If the PCs die to the last man, their bodies are eventually found and burned on a funeral pyre by their brother Doom-guards, and their names inscribed in the druidic rolls of the Honoured Dead. More than a thousand years from now, when

Imperial researchers examine the relics of this long-lost world, they might puzzle over their names inscribed on a memory stele in a long forgotten language before moving on to the next puzzle.



Part of the O-ranges of Askaath. This graphic is titled "Seed2" © Mathieu.

See his work at <http://md-arts.deviantart.com/art/Unrestricted-Mountain-Stock-X-345624216>

Appendix: From History to Legend

When this campaign is over, I am assuming that the PCs will want to return to regular Imperial Rim War-era roleplaying. I suggest that the story of what the PCs did here be reflected back to the PCs of the Far Future in a recognizable way, in one of the religious texts of the Kikhushegi. This would be in one of three forms:

- A parable of Good vs Evil (the Suedzuk encounter),
- A parable on the Triumph of Wisdom over War (the Ikonaz are spared),
- A parable of the Tragedy of War (the Ikonaz are killed – and perhaps even their Vilani servants – as they are not distinguished from their blood-thirsty Suedzuk cousins).

This would be a (locally famous) Kikhushegi parable, "The Parable of St. Ram", of the Book of Areaseth, in The Commentaries of the Rimward Stars. Exactly who 'St. Ram' is, I leave to the Referee: perhaps one of the PCs, perhaps the unnamed druidess, perhaps one of the Vilani crewmen (nonhumans cannot become saints within the Solomani-influenced Kikhushegi religion), or even someone completely different.

The **Kikhushegi** viewpoint: There is but One God: but the laws of Good and Evil for men, need not apply to the other souls that the Almighty has wrought. So, we have no right to judge other species by human standards, for good or ill."

The **Vilani** viewpoint: "One Tradition for all minds, everywhere: regardless of race, regardless of biology, regardless of deity!"

The **Solomani** viewpoint: “The Laws of God apply *only* to those made in His Image. All other sophonts are simply not His concern, unless they harm His People.”

The **Vargr** viewpoint (third person here): Only a small minority of the Vargr believe in an omnipotent, omniscient deity: but those who do see the *definitive* Apex Predator. There is only one possible result from meeting such a being – death.

Certain interpretations of the parable remain consistent though: “A low tech force, led by a woman with a glowing sword, defends an alien egg from wolves.” Details to be debated thousands of years in the future include:

- Are the wolves just normal wolves, or Vargr? Is it not obvious that the egg represent the nonhuman sophont, attacked by the sophonts of Terra – human and Vargr alike?
- Perhaps the druidess defending the alien egg was not Solomani, but really a Mixed Vilani who didn’t know her long-lost origins? And certainly, the very fact that she was ‘a woman with a sword’ marks her as more Vilani-culture than Terran-culture⁷¹...
- The parable of St. Ram does not mention what happened to the egg! This is something that a modern Imperial archaeological expedition should uncover: and I know the right believing Noble/ Industrial tycoon to ask for funding and support...

Appendix: From Solomani Islam to Mixed Vilani Kikhushegi

As a Vilani off-shoot of Islam, Kikhushegi recognizes the authority of the Quran and the Bible: but as these are *later* than the respective Vilani texts, they are by definition *less authoritative*. “The older the religious belief, the older the text, the more sacred it is,” and Vilani belief systems are clearly older than any Terran religion.

And yet, Kikhushegi is not a branch of Vilani Ritualism or Ancestor Worship. Unlike the Vilani

⁷¹ The key driver for Vilani equality between the sexes was not the Solomani concepts of democracy or egalitarianism.. it was the early Vilani discovery of *electricity*.

beliefs, it is strictly monotheistic, believes in linear time (rather than cyclic time), and sees their single Creator God as the Final Judge of all sophonts as well. Both heaven and hell are taught to be eternal states, rather than temporary forms of being⁷²: and the universe is seen as moving to a Final Destiny, instead of a cycle of birth-collapse-rebirth. A form of resurrection of the dead – a concept completely alien to the standard Vilani doctrines – is also available to the uniquely devout and faithful to the Creator and Judge of All. Even the rituals have a strongly Islamic flavour, instead of the standard Vilani practices.

While not as pointedly anthropocentric as the Solomani religions, non-humans are not permitted to join the Kikhushegi religion proper, but are instead expected to subscribe to an allied belief system, the poly-sophont Shirga Mysteries. Many core beliefs and practices are shared between Kikhushegi and Shirga believers, and as of 993 the Shirga religion is growing quite strongly among non-humans in the Six Subsectors, even as the Kikhushegi religion stagnates, or even slightly declines in numbers.

Appendix: Story-weaving

One of the major forces shaping the early development of Kikhushegi were the conflicting views on non-human sophonts. The Muslims, much like their Christian and Jewish brethren (and, of course, agnostic Solomani Party racial doctrine), assume the supremacy of Man over all, and Solomani Men over other men. The Vilani put the stress on Right Behaviour rather than Right Ancestry, and are quite willing to accept nonhumans as equals – so long as they Conform to Vilani behavioural and thought patterns.

The Kikhushegi decided to split the difference, in a manner of speaking. Nonhumans are assumed to have eternal significance and worth in the eyes of the Creator God; but their path leads along a different road than the path for humans. They must find their own way to their own Paradise: but if asked, we humans can certainly help them along the way, as we are both under the same God.

⁷² Vilani religious authorities vary greatly on the question of reincarnation; belief in heaven and hell is uncommon in Vilani circles, but not unheard of thanks to centuries of Terran, then Solomani influence.



A 993 Imperial computer model of what would become the Shrine of St. Ram, located on the spot of the Blackwood Camp mentioned in the Parable of St. Ram, over 2000 years ago. With this model – proudly designed on native-built TL 8 computers – the shrine will be built after the local starlanes are again safe for the transport of the needed materials and skilled tradesmen.

This graphic is titled “Temple of Zen” © Zenuel Mesadon. See his work at <http://xxdarkonexx.deviantart.com/art/Temple-of-Zen-198903367>

While this was written into religious law and doctrine – including what would later become the Kikhushegi Hadiths – several Kikhushi shugilii⁷³

⁷³“Sacred cooks”: the analogue of a purity-focused priestly caste in Solomani cultures, the shugilii caste alone can lawfully refine poisonous Vilani organic matter into living bread and meat for the masses, even in high-tech Vilani cultures. In Vilani-influenced Kikhushegi, the shugilii retain their food functions, but also control ‘spiritual food’ – the kind of legends, tales, and songs it is lawful to treasure and meditate on, being free of spiritual poison – as well as ‘physical food’. Since the development of technological personality adjustment and rewriting, certain shugilii castes have been in charge of

were instructed to create stories to more naturally propagate these truths, in imitation of the enduring stories, parables, and proverbs of the Christian Bible. (Other Kikhushi texts would follow the “law code” model of the Quran, and the “circular hymn/tale”, “paradigmatic model” and the “analectic model” framework of the Vilani classics).

promoting Healthy Thought as well: but never fear, official procedure is ALWAYS followed.

Eventually, a series of parables, organized in two cycles were written. These stories were grounded in old tales that are believed to be historically true, and have been as verified as much as possible by respected archaeologists and historians. One cycle of these stories, the Parable of St. Ram, was written by Areaseth himself, and is part of the Book of Areaseth, written during the Long Night.

One of the most famous theologian/bards of the Lazisari sect of Islam – then vigorously reshaping itself into the Kikhushegi religion – Areaseth gathered the various tales transmitted to Hebrin by Kikhushi and Moslem travellers by radio and laser, further redistributed the material to scholars on-world and off-world (including Sunni Hebrin), and began to weave this data into stories that would last generations, conveying the basic historical facts of the matter from a Kikhushi viewpoint.⁷⁴

Appendix: The Afterlife

The afterlife as the Abode of the Ancestors is very important to the Vilani mind: whenever the dead are punished or rewarded in the afterlife is not nearly as important. The Vilani – an ever-pragmatic people – do not worship because of reverence, but in respect of tradition, in dread of the unknown, and/or in order to get something from the spirit world.

Their pragmatism naturally leads them to destruction: “There is a way that seems good to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” Still, like the Moslems, the (fictional) Vilani (and their cultural kin like the Kikhushegi) are better off than Western atheists⁷⁵: they have a reason to prefer life to death, a belief in objective reality, a fixed law code – “unpredictable law is just another word for tyranny” – and enough hope in the future

⁷⁴ While Kikhushegi has no independent religious text – using ancient Vilani and Solomani ones (the Holy Bible and the Quran) instead – it does have several authoritative *commentaries* on these texts. Much like the Jewish Talmud or the Catholic tradition (or the American Constitution, for that matter), the commentaries holds greater *functional* authority in the life of a believer than the actual text does. “Never mind what the words say... so long as I get to decide what the words mean, what ideas should be emphasized (or simply read in), and what beliefs should be discarded!”

⁷⁵ *Eastern* atheism – in the style of Buddhism and certain forms of Hinduism – is a different kettle of fish, and is not addressed here.

to willingly sacrifice in the here and now to benefit unseen future generations.

This is opposed to the modern vision of the inevitable heat death of the universe (and thus the futility of life: “In the long run, we are all dead. Any other claim is nothing but a religious delusion!”) the abandonment of Law in the name of Power & Pleasure⁷⁶ and the loss of faith in either Progress (a Biblical concept) or Stability (the traditional goal of the Ancient Greeks, the Ancient Egyptians, the Indus Civilizations... and the Vilani of Traveller).

Reflections on the Far Future: Paradise

It has been claimed that supernatural religions are primarily focused on the afterlife of the individual. This is supposed to be a major flaw, compared with naturalistic religions, with their focus on the State as the source of National Healing and Salvation.

I see it as a feature myself, as the modern State is innately evil in its bureaucratic drive for power without responsibility.⁷⁷

The dream of Universal Equality in a Universal Empire is gone now. Roughly 20,000 Afghans were able to defy a nation with half the military spending in the world – and this was before the days of cheap 3D printed weaponry. Neither the million-strong army of Chinese censors, nor the \$52 Billion+ spent yearly on the NSA, can stop the future from happening. Not even the lawyers can do that, as open-source Android continues to undermine lawyer-backed Apple.⁷⁸

Biotech can do a lot to improve our lives. The 3D Printer is an amazing invention, and will only continue to develop in the coming decades. I believe that some form of Cold Fusion/LENR/

⁷⁶ ...and to control the black population: see “Forty Years A’Wandering”, <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=18-04-015-v>

⁷⁷ A nice little article from North fits in here, illustrating how bureaucracy leads to the emasculation of boys at school and responsibility-avoiding men in life: “Schools without Tag” <https://www.garynorth.com/members/login.cfm?hpage=11758.cfm> Fortunately, the bureaucratic drive to bankruptcy puts an end to the process... eventually. (Waves to von Mises)

⁷⁸ See <http://teapartyeconomist.com/2013/11/13/android-patent-free-competition/>

New Fire⁷⁹ is on its way to mass production... and even if not, just the continued development of solar power and environmentally friendly coal plants will do just fine.

All of these are just material tools, though. They may be used to increase wealth, but not bring about Paradise.

Mindwiping and personality construction can do it, for Vilani definitions of Paradise (read: comprehensive conformity). If your vision of Paradise involves 72 virgins, you will be able to take your pick of virtual reality or androids in a few decades. If your definition of happiness is strictly materialistic – such and such electrical impulses at such and such a part of your brain – the perfect gizmo for you will arrive before the end of the 21st century. And if you just want company, easy sex, lots of beer, a full belly, and a roof over your head... even the death of the Welfare State won't stop the progress of scientific advancement, leading to overwhelming material abundance from kicking in afterwards – for everyone. A true Heaven on Earth, for any reasonable materialist – and the solid majority of religious folk – willing to let go of the desire to control all men, everywhere, For Their Own Good.

All the pleasures you want... all the food... all the health... the ability to make any material good you desire... what else could you dream of?

I'm waiting for something else, myself. For one thing, I suspect that men simply will not let go of the lust for power over others, even given every possible material desire – and even if violent action only has a 1% chance of success.

And – within a century or a millennium – when all armies are disbanded, and violence force is something only short-sighted primitives indulge in? There are always lies and deceit, cruel weapons that will be useful for quite a long time to come.

Reflections on the Far Future: Politics

Even the most righteous man has some flaw; even the most godly and noble among us has some crippling sin that will hold him back from complete

⁷⁹ I like to keep in touch with <http://www.e-catworld.com> - now joined by <http://futuringworld.com>

excellence. As technology increases, so will our power: and the amount of evil and sin that can be tolerated will continue to decrease and decrease. By analogy, a bladesmith making swords in 1400 could tolerate greater flaws, weaker standards and more weapon mistreatment than a gunsmith in 1900 – or a builder of hovering warbots in 2100.

So, I believe that there will come a time when a future society that can create and destroy almost anything at will, will simply not be able to tolerate **any** wickedness. In the future, serious destructive power will be available to anyone willing to make a moderate effort, so everyone must be extremely ethical & righteous.⁸⁰ And no, by 2100, decency by 99.9999% of the population simply won't be good enough...

This culture will not have the ability to save itself or enforce the required morality without turning to political tools that have repeatedly failed, over and over and over again. Some are clearly better than others – libertarianism yes, totalitarianism no – but not one can meet the level of perfection needed. Killing and enslaving minds will be as useful as Stalinism; fake gods like the Culture Minds will be as worthless as today's Rule by Certified Experts.

Of course, as a Christian I believe that our hearts must change. Neighbour must help neighbour, but this act of love must be done voluntarily, or it is less than worthless. "Theft by majority vote" just isn't going to cut it, as effective resistance to Authority grows drastically easier, while society becomes far more difficult to control. Political Masters with promises to Save Us are becoming as obsolete as the horse empires and Chinese mandarins, regardless of their religious, scientific, or egalitarian cover story.

But discipling, teaching, changing hearts, one by one, neighbour to neighbour, without the illusion of political power as a quick-fix saviour – without the demonic blasphemy of Masters claiming to serve God while only serving Themselves – that will work. Yes, it's a long, hard, tough road. But it's the only one left to us.

⁸⁰ Consider: how much damage could twelve men do in the middle ages, compared to today? (Hint: 9/11). Now, extend this a few decades, with sophisticated widespread knowledge and ever-cheaper technology, and useful if weak AI...

System Flags of the Empty Quarter



The standard of House Lentuli, a powerful dynasty of the early Third Imperium. Despite the extinction of the House, there remains a widespread sentimental attachment to this dynasty across the Six Subsectors; an important subsector remains named after them; and the most locally beloved of all the Emperors, Anguistus, hails from this dynasty.⁸¹ This is also the flag of Sabira, a world dedicated to the memory of this great Imperial dynasty.

Artist: Adrian Iorga, www.adiorga.tumblr.com; Link: <http://driq.deviantart.com/art/WW-Logo-217821349>

Preface

There's a lot of flags here, courtesy of the "Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 License", and Public Domain material. All flags are attributed to their creator with their tag/name and a link.

Overview

There are three large starnations within the Empty Quarter – the Third Imperium, the Rukadukaz Republic (a full member-state of the Julian Protectorate), and the Hegemony of Lorean (an Associate Member of the Protectorate). All three four interstellar powers have official symbols, as opposed to official flags: the Imperial Sunburst, the Julian Helm (patterned after the Ancient Greek helmets), the Double-claws of the Ikonaz (a version is currently used by the Rukadukaz Republic), and the Encircled Starship of the Hegemony of Lorean.

None of these flags are depicted below. Perhaps another time.

⁸¹ There is a rumour that occasionally resurfaces in certain illegal circles, that Regent Arbella – among the greatest of the Emperors, who ended the Imperial Civil War and founded the current Alkhalikoi Dynasty – had all surviving members of the Lentuli Dynasty killed during her 'search' for them. While this writer assumes such rumours to be false, you may choose otherwise: hard evidence of this would lead to widespread discontent and anti-Imperial discontent in the Imperial Empty Quarter, which reveres the Lentuli Dynasty. If this rumour is proven true, and a legitimate member of the Lentuli resurfaces (after four centuries!), all sorts of consequences kick in... in the middle of a major war against the Solomani.

The Rukadukaz Republic

The Republic is dominated by the Vargr, who being colourblind generally used oddly-coloured flags⁸²: but this is NOT true of the Streamers of the Republic. As the Vargr – originating from canine stock – have the equivalent of deuteranopia colour-blindness, the Streamers use both the human (i.e.: Ikonaz Vilani)⁸³ and Vargr colours.

(Only the blue and yellow colours are equally shared between humaniti and the Vargr. Vargr “purple” is a bit washed out, but not too bad. Green looks like a dark yellow, and red and orange are perceived as similar dull shades of yellow – a pity. The Blood Vargr – with their red-tinged pelt – probably can’t tell what’s all the excitement about when a human sees them: but they know enough to fight ~~or run~~.)

For example, when used during wartime, the tails of the streamers are blood-red: yet the Ikonaz Vargr can’t see the ‘red’. They just know that red is a powerful colour in the eyes of all humans – Solomani, Vilani, Zhodani, even the hated Yileans and Arzula – and so they get their servants to use that colour for the same reasons they use human skulls in their pirate symbols: “It’s all about the charisma!”⁸⁴ It also implicitly recognizes the importance of the Vilani in Ikonaz culture, and in a real way symbolizes the ‘sharing’ of charisma between the Ikonaz Vargr and the Ikonaz Vilani in the Republic.

No Republican flags are depicted in this article, due to a lack of ‘pennant’, ‘streamer’ or ‘banner’ flags available to the writer. Due to Vilani cultural influence, scent is deliberately downplayed as a territorial marker among the Ovaghoun, unlike most Vargr.

The Hegemony of Lorean

Most of the Hegemony of Lorean is only slowly shifting to proper cloth flags: for a very long time, red-flecked Suedzuk Vargr pelts were used as the flags of various worlds and organizations, sewn into various shapes and patterns. Only the financial pressure of the Menderes Corporation – closely allied with the Julian government, which is grounded in human-Vargr amity – has driven the Loreans to *officially* abandon the use of Vargr pelts as flags among its member worlds and organizations... excepting the Home Systems, in Arzul Sector. The Empty Quarter systems, which dislike Hegemonic rule and look favourably on Imperial culture, have been among the first to take up Imperial styles of flags – made of cloth, not skin.

Vargr-ruled worlds within the Hegemony of Lorean do maintain flags, but only to avoid shame when compared with human-ruled systems. Amongst themselves, and below the radar of the humans, the Vargr worlds of the Hegemony maintain a set of specific scents attached to each world (if Irilitok Vargr) or pack (if Suedzuk Vargr). This scent is especially strongest at their starports and central government palaces, legislatures, courts, and military installations. (As canine descendants, the Vargr can smell far better than they can see.)

The Third Imperium

The Vilani, with their strong emphasis on unity, didn’t tolerate sub-national territorial symbols before the Nth Interstellar War and the fall of the Ziru Sirka: a good analogue is the People’s Republic of China, with only a few official flags, almost all tied to national organizations, not cities or provinces. (Hong Kong and Macau excepted). However, the few enduring heretical movements within the Ziru Sirka favoured variations of stars

⁸² For an example of a colour-blind flag, see the flag of Null Island, <http://www.nullisland.com/flag.html> Note that up to 8% of all men, and 0.5% of all women, of Northern European ancestry are colour-blind. A nice selection of rainbows, modeling the effect of colour-blindness, can be found here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Color_blindness#Classification

⁸³ Be careful here: while the Vilani are humans (ignoring the claims of the Solomani Party for the moment), how they classify colours can easily differ from Solomani norms. For example, the Japanese word ao (あお) includes both “blue” and “green”, which are separated in English-speaking cultures: and both groups are as Solomani as they come (despite one language belonging to a nation being even more ‘racially pure’ than the most demanding Party standards, and the other language linking an outrageously mish mashed hodgepodge of wildly divergent Solomani races – and stands at the root of Imperial Anglic, as well!)

⁸⁴ Interestingly, there is an analogous story in regard to the Imperial Sunburst, as told in the Imperial Encyclopedia, page 28-29. Buy your copy here: <http://www.rpgnow.com/product/429/MT--MegaTraveller-Imperial-Encyclopedia?it=1>

on a black or blue sky as their symbol: this created an unusual level of sympathy, when meeting with American star traders from the Terran Confederation. There is currently a limited controversy on who has the best claim on the stars-on-a-field symbol first, with the Vilani having far older artefacts than the Solomani, but the Solomani having clear precedence in official usage: the Vilani have a strong respect for *official* status.

After the Rule of Man was established, the Vilani (already deep in decadence) had great difficulty adjusting to ~~Solomani~~ Terran norms; but one of first changes to be broadly accepted was the use of local flags and symbology. The most aggressive Vilani didn't want to lack a local symbol or flag to rally around, but couldn't use the black & red Vilani Oval: according to Vilani tradition, it was available for use only by the Emperor, and the anti-Terran groups simply could not violate tradition, the very reason for their existence! Moreover, it annoyed the hard-core traditionalists that the Terran systems all had local flags to display their pride, but the Vilani had none.

During the second half of the Rule of Man – when the rule of the Terran Emperors was clearly fraying apart – the most respected Vilani families finally took up the Terran custom of flags to rally their forces behind (more often than not, as they led Vilani rebellions against Terran ruling houses). Soon enough, the less august Vilani followed suit. By the time the Long Night was over, the Vilani had become as proud in their nationalistic flag-waving as the ~~Terrans~~ Solomani were.

Balkanized Worlds

When the world's government is divided, the flag shown is that of the most powerful military power or military alliance on that planet (i.e. either the United States of America, or NATO in 2013), and not any multinational organization without taxation, legislative or military authority (i.e. the United Nations). Be advised that the strongest unified military power is not *necessarily* a nation: corporations, religious organizations, gangs & pirates, mercenaries, adventurous Imperial nobles, even science councils and life support unions have all attained this position at various worlds and various times. However, it is *usually* an ordinary system-state, world-state, or nation-state that has the highest military rank on a given world.

Also, I will suggest that giving different parts of a world different flags adds to the flavour and the history of any given world. This can even be true in one-world governments, where different planets, asteroids, and sections of a world (provinces, states, districts, prefectures, cities... or even religions, races, corporations, and clans) have their own flag. Some states, such as today's China, suppress such symbols in the name of unity: such suppression would be just another reason for a fight in the Six Subsectors.

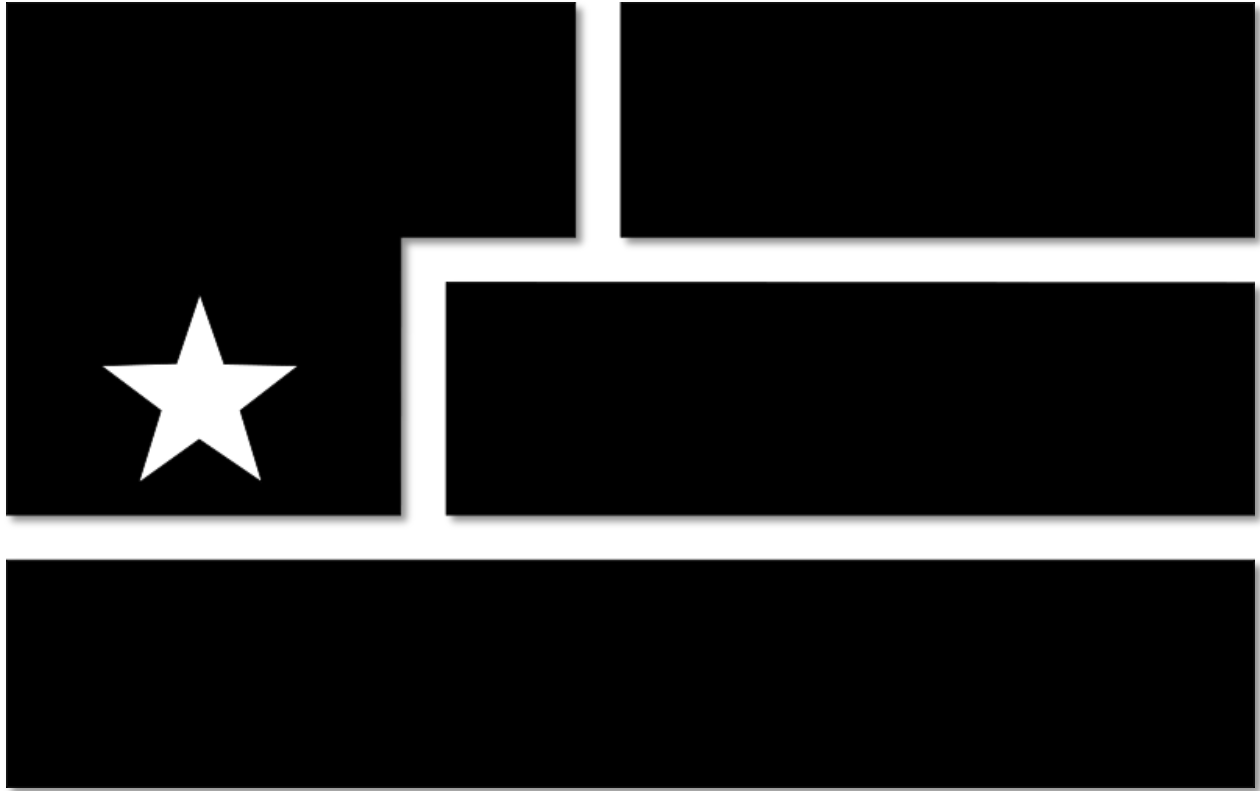
Why All This Effort for Flags?

Mainly, to increase the ability of the setting to hook Players and Referees alike. A flag suggests a history for the world, a spirit that rules the orb. This emotional and visual like speaks more to the PCs than the more factual – but less evocative and imaginative – UWPs that are listed.

Even Referees have to think carefully, to interpret what the UWP – an alphanumeric tag, like B00097C-D – actually means. (In this case, the centre of the system population is a heavily inhabited asteroid belt, with a good starport (unable to make its own FTL starships, but able to make lesser spaceships) billions of people, balkanized into various sovereign governments, with a lot of restrictive rules verging on the frankly oppressive, with a rather good technological base.) Unless you have been playing Traveller for far too long, the UWP is simply meaningless at first glance.

In contrast, show a picture of the Stars and Stripes, the Union Jack, etc., and you get an immediate reaction. People have *died* for flags, but no one has died for a cryptic alphanumeric string. So, giving a world a flag helps with bringing a world to life, for the PCs and their universe. These bright and interesting symbols not only spark loyalty, patriotism and love in real life, but are also totems for the community, the world, even (in the case of the Imperial Starburst) a statistically significant portion of the galactic arm. Their sheer number and variety suggests the complexity and depth of the local region of space. Finally and certainly not least, flags help spark the imagination of Referees and Players alike, while pushing up the verisimilitude of the setting nicely.

Ushmigad



Artist: Vasil; Link: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Art_Is_Resistance.svg

(It should be noted that this flag is actually a TL 14 object, with the four pieces of the flag held together by a form of electromagnetism. The fabric itself has some very unusual properties... which is left for the Referee to describe.)

Pramas



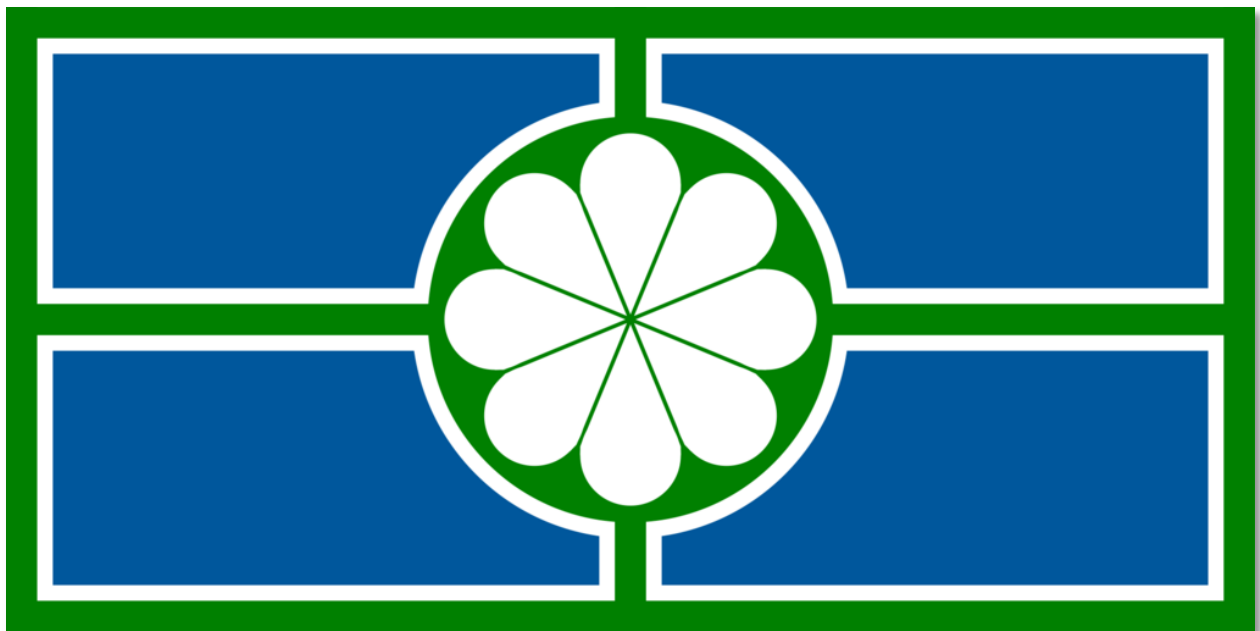
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Wesaswek



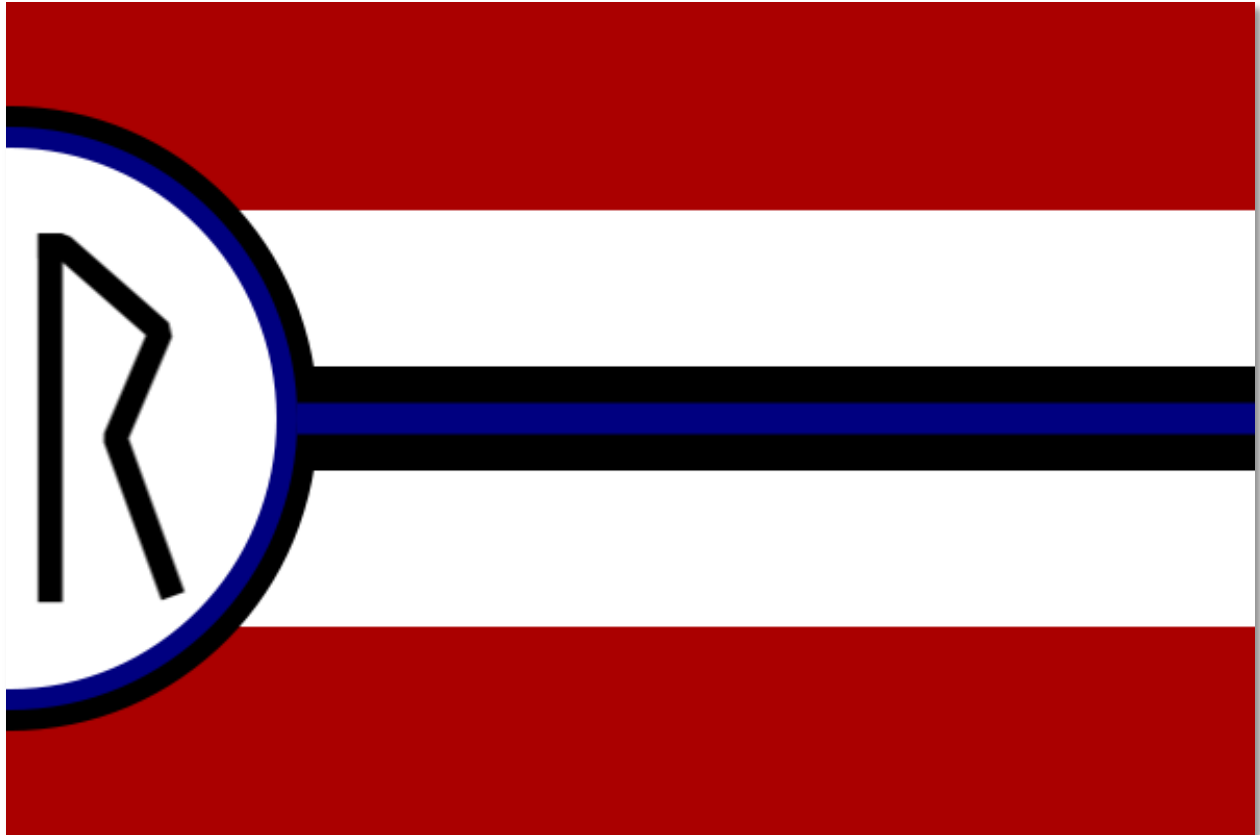
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Marhaban



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Rasu



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Gobi



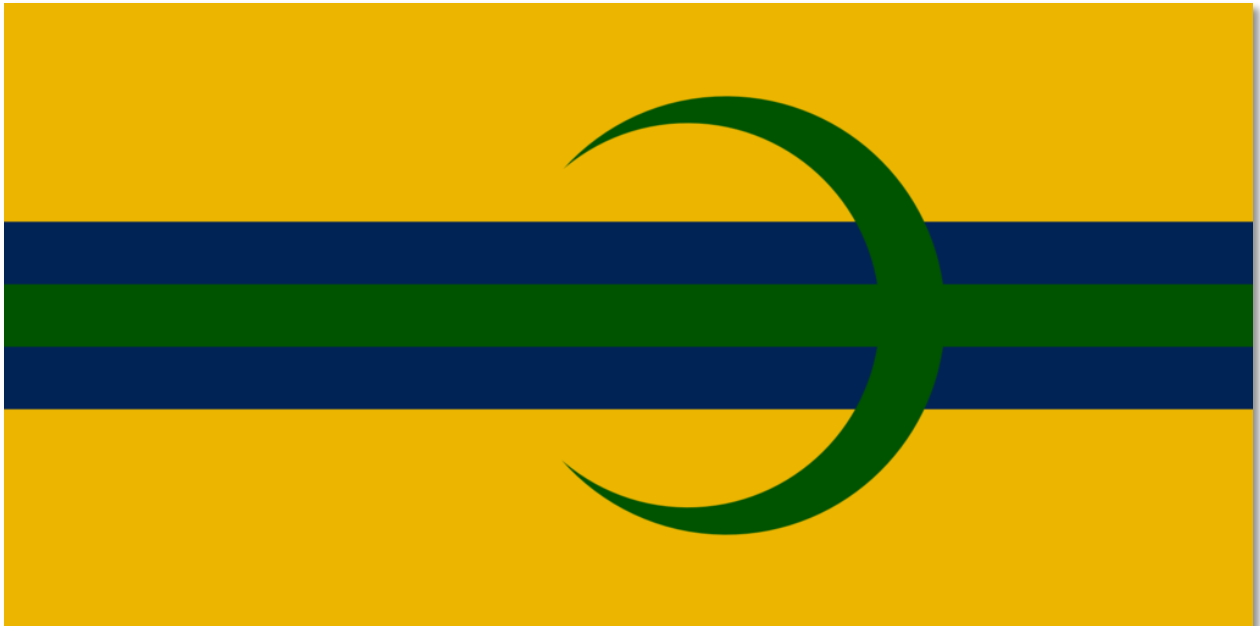
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Tokitre



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Lazisar



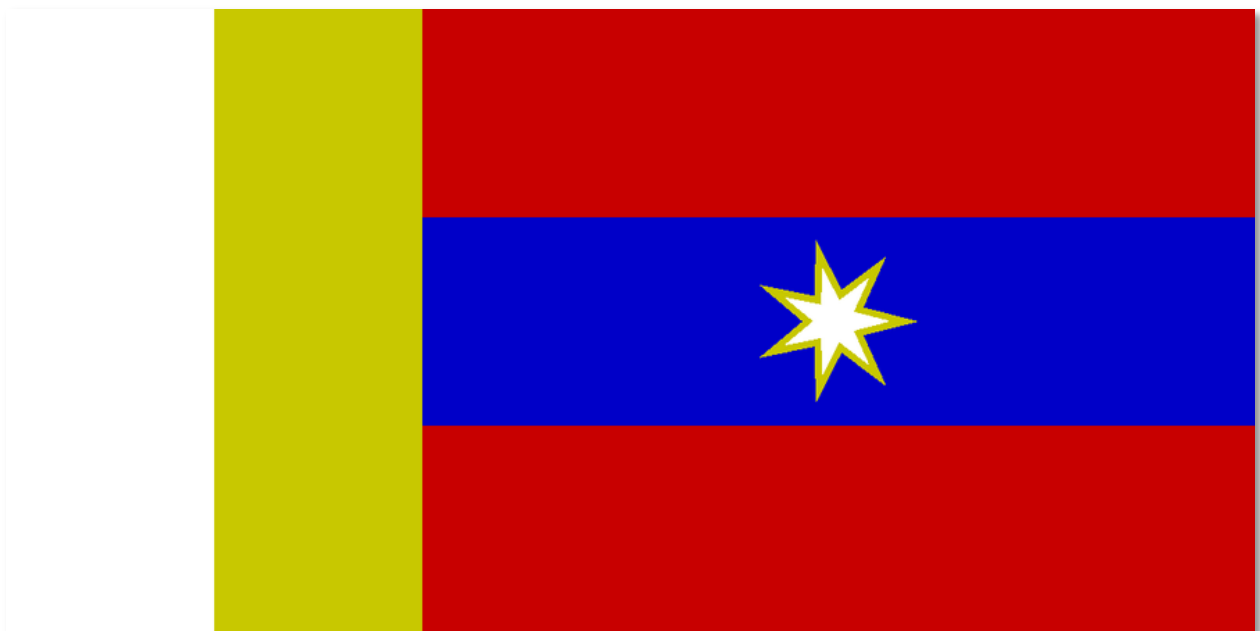
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Pamushgar



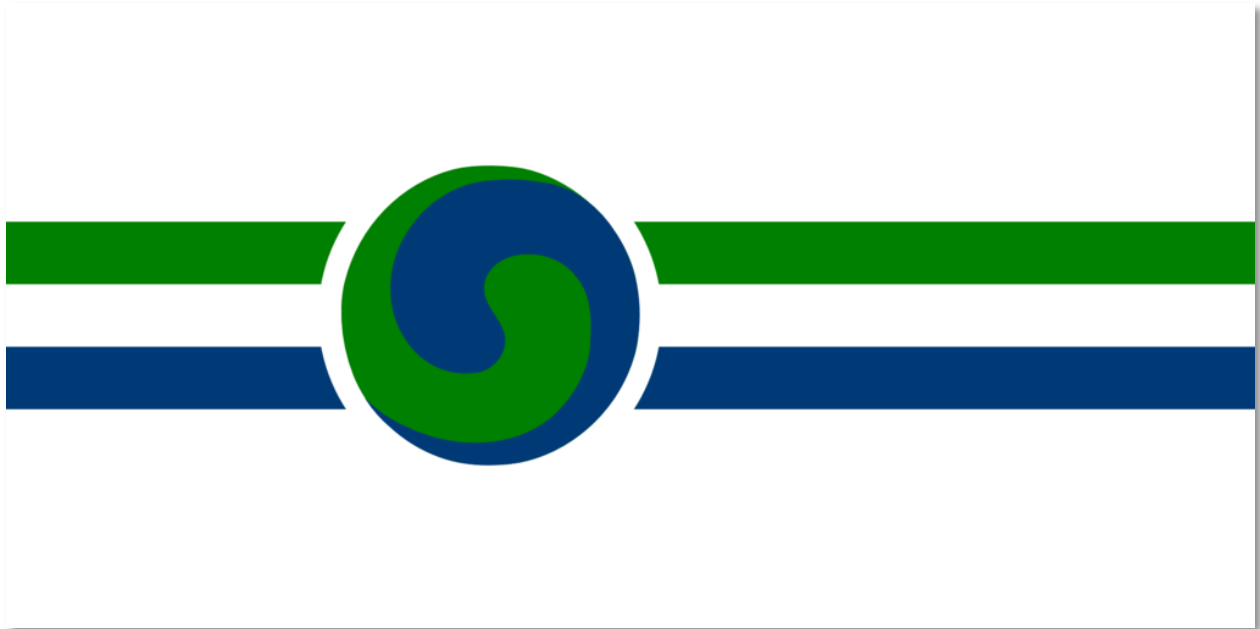
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Zuethun



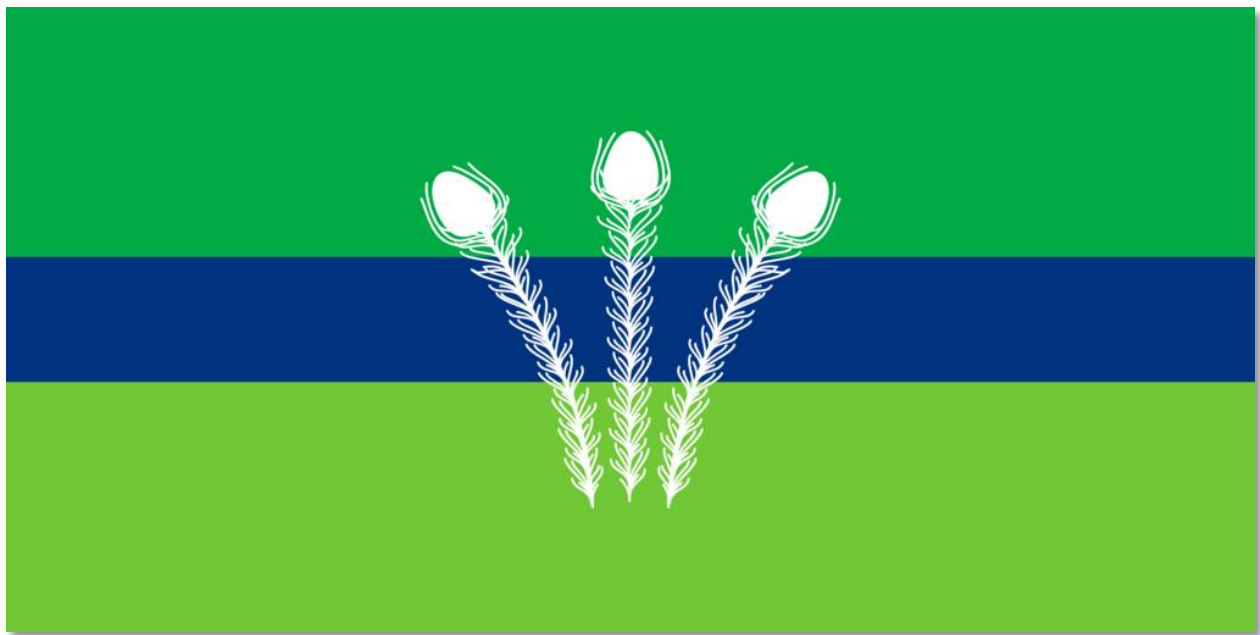
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Ka-aswa



Artist: Levente Szekeres, Link: <http://deathpwnie.deviantart.com/art/Earth-II-347438210>

Perpethwe



Artist: Levente Szekeres, Link: <http://deathpwnie.deviantart.com/art/Burma-158439500>

Enola



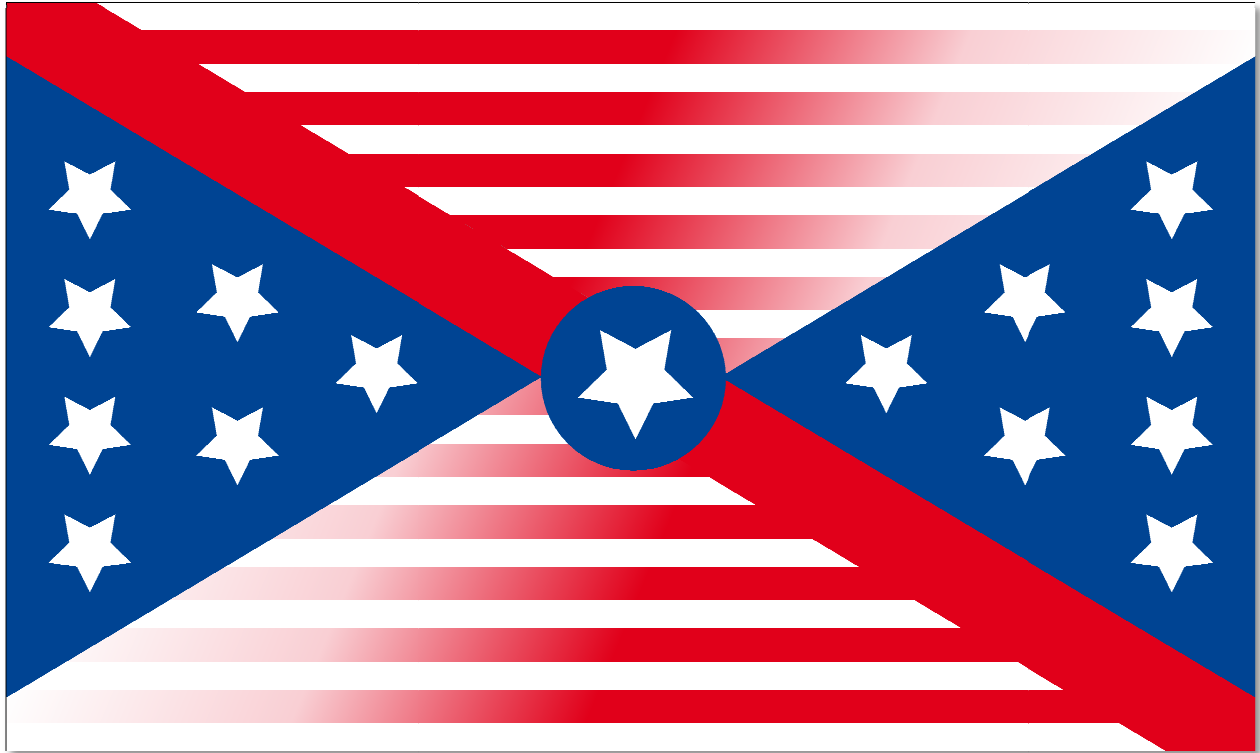
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Fathwaas



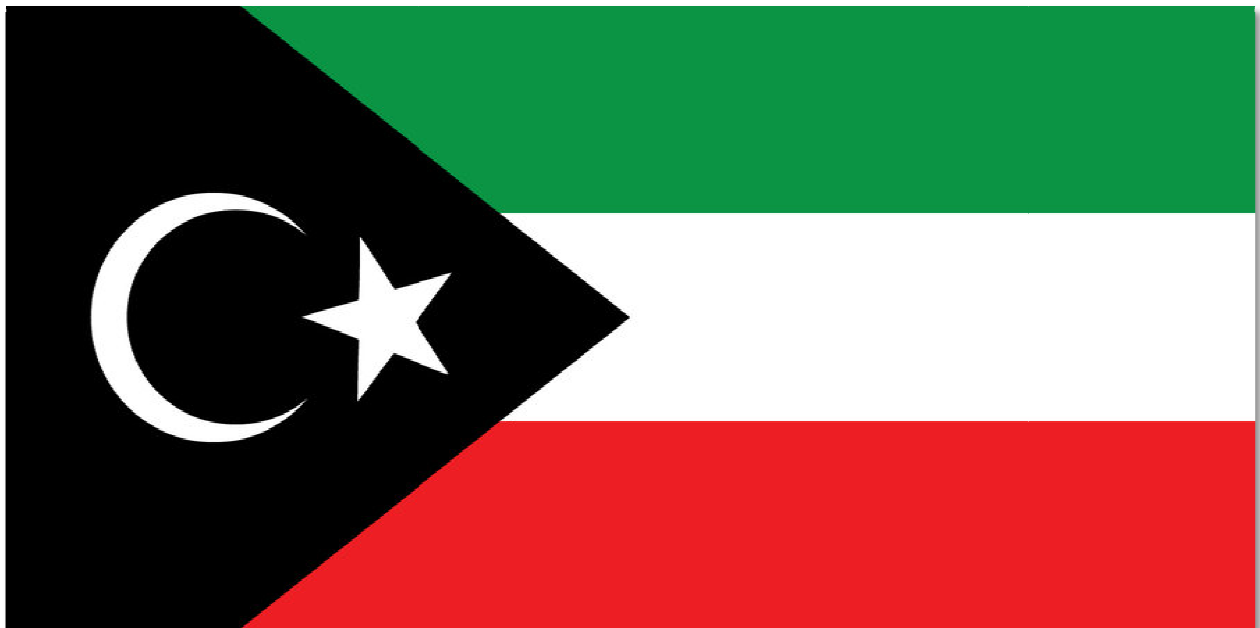
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Lakea



Artist: fexes, Link: <http://fexes.deviantart.com/art/Confederated-American-States-140982763>

Anata



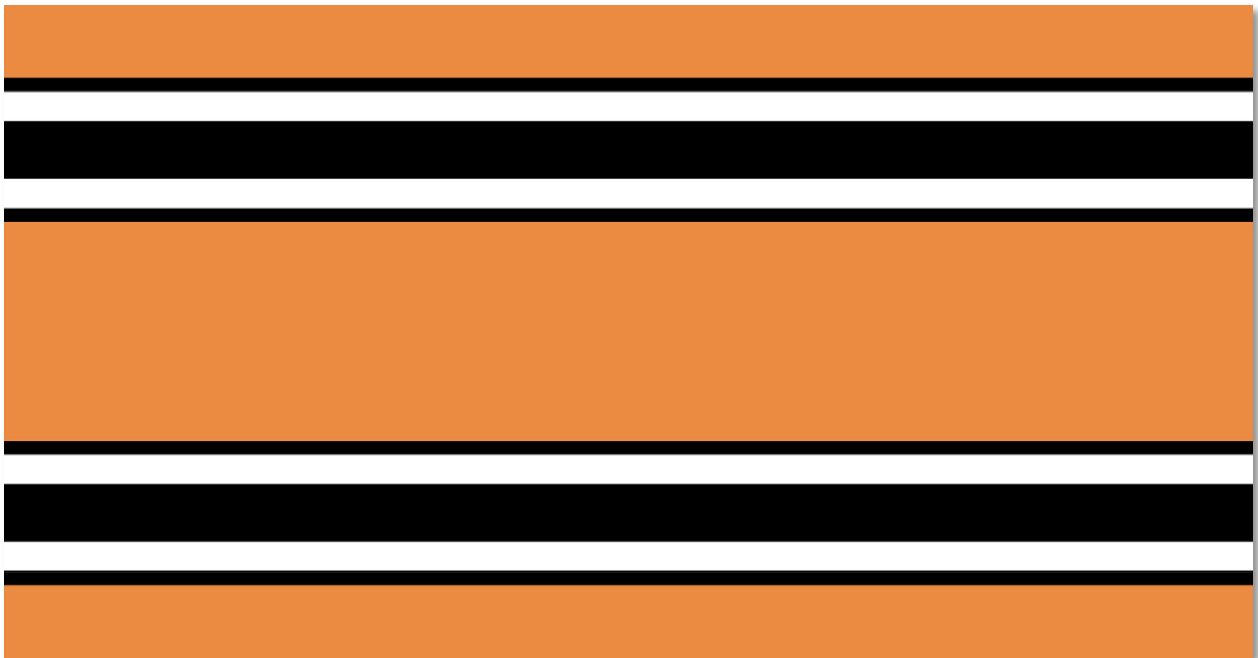
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Kawatas



Artist: Leonardo Piccioni de Almeida, Link: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_the_Zhuang_people.svg

Irash



Artist: William Ridha Perung, Link: <http://nederbird.deviantart.com/art/Republic-of-Hyderabad-187305167>

Nulinad



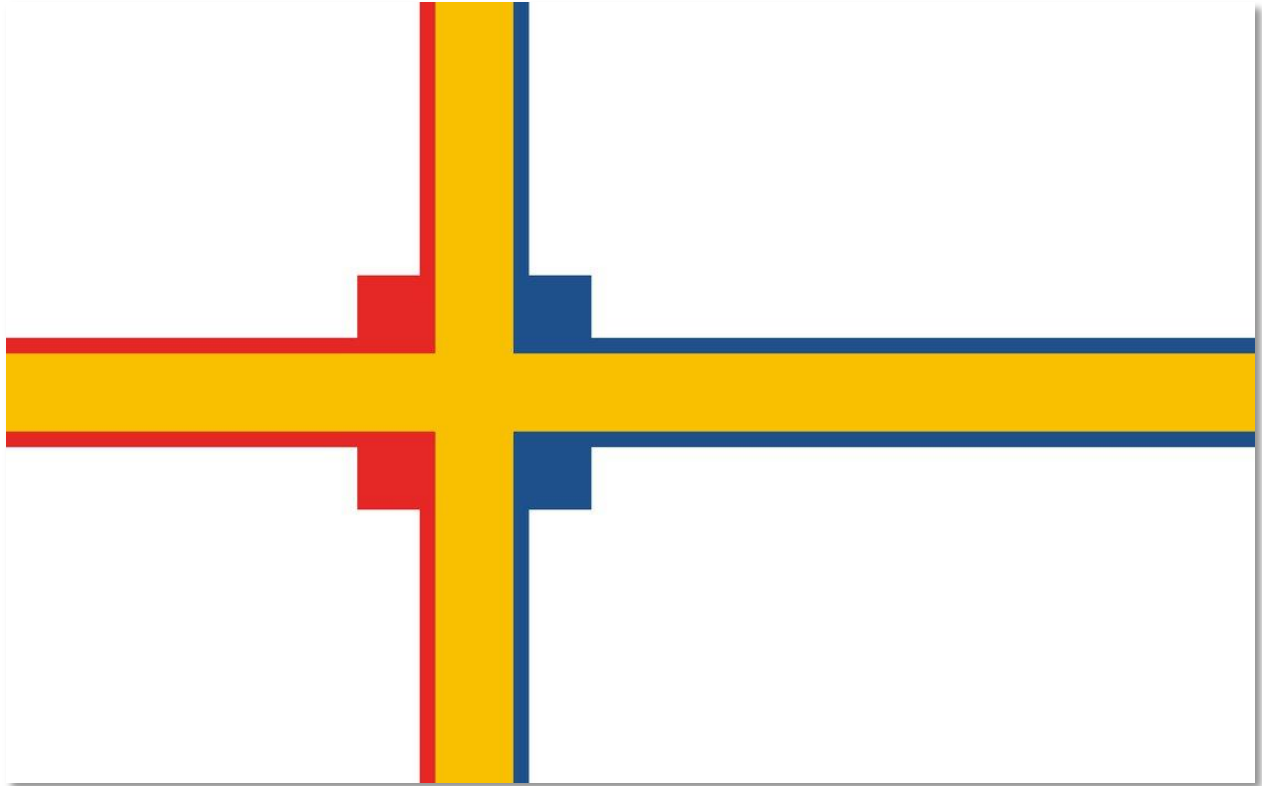
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Rommel



Artist: Neethis, Link: <http://neethis.deviantart.com/art/Prussian-Commonwealth-flag-126745909>

Dyani



Artist: PM, Link: <http://digitalismismycause.deviantart.com/art/Scandinavian-Union-Flag-ALTERNATE-2-406624977>

Dumkashga



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Yashodhan



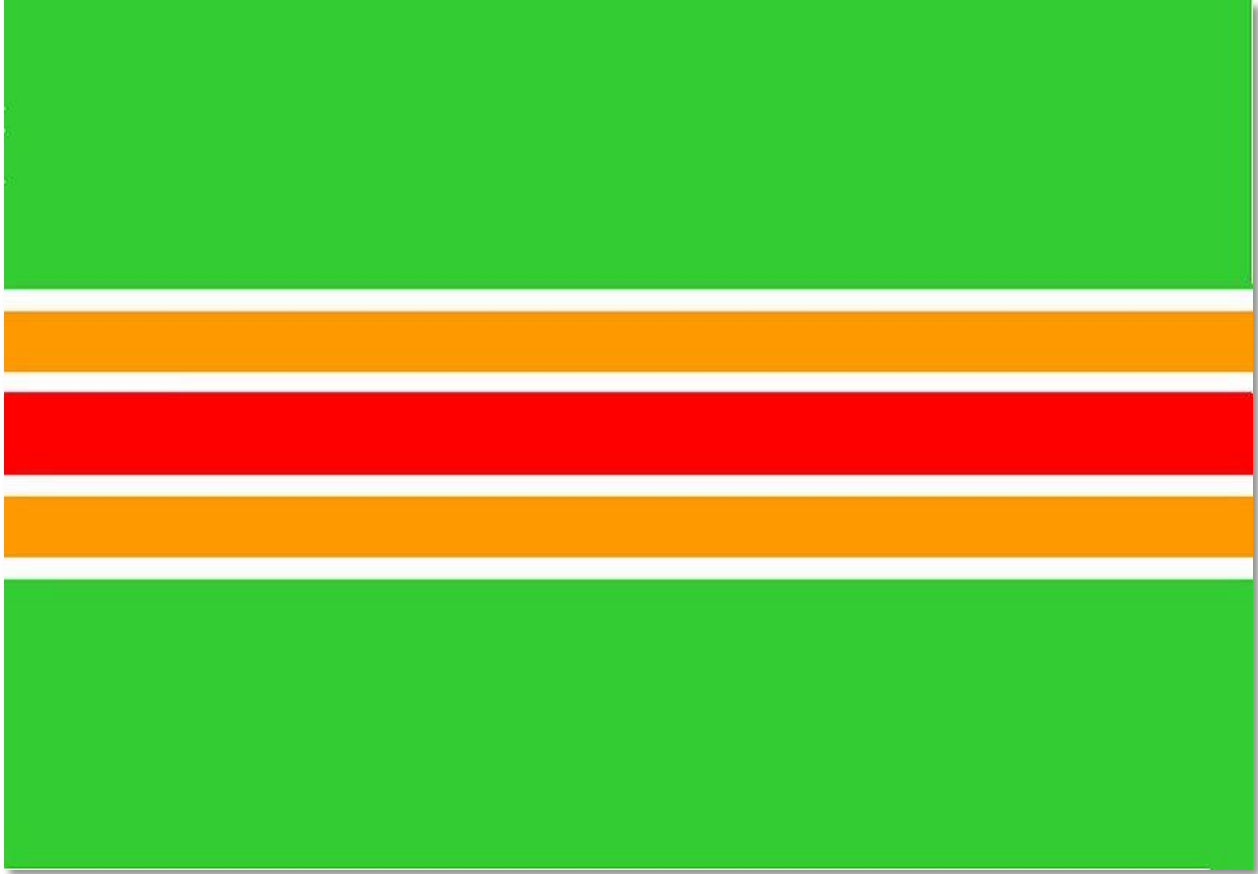
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Shuiku



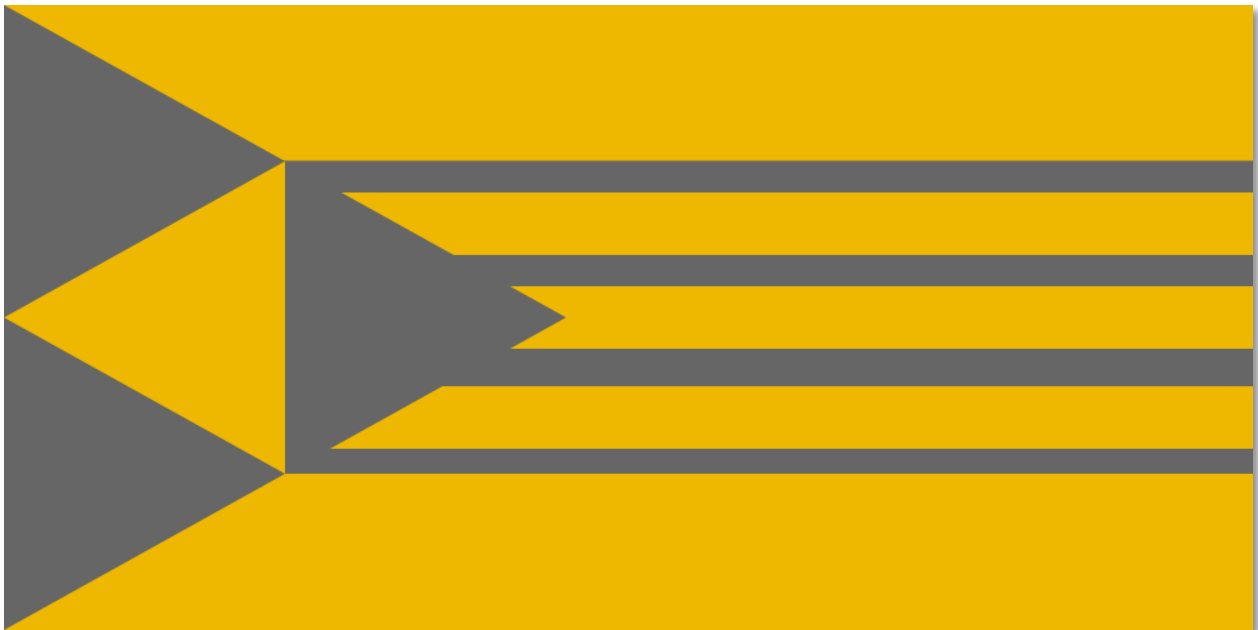
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Datawo



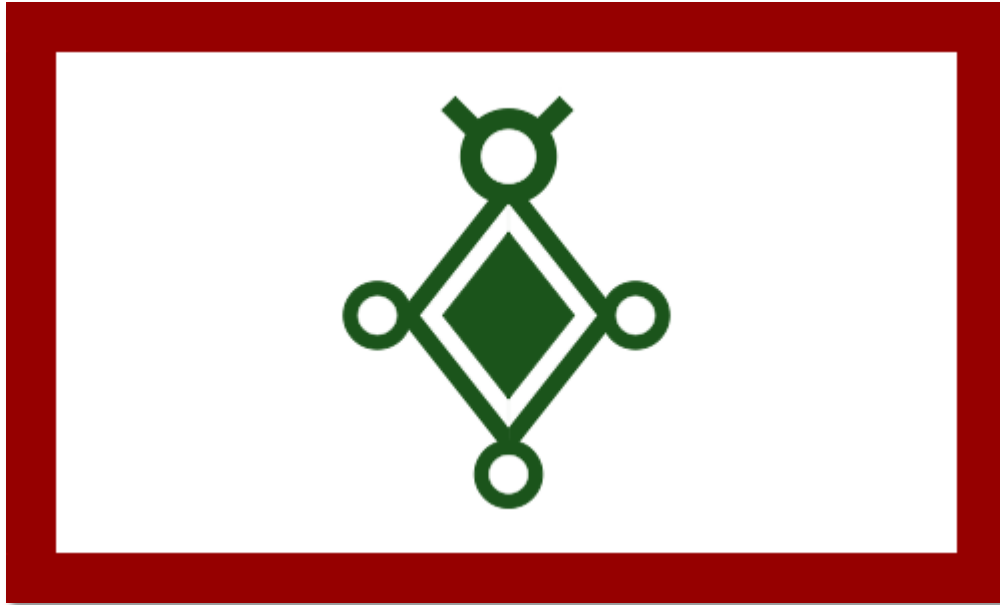
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Irilikhokh



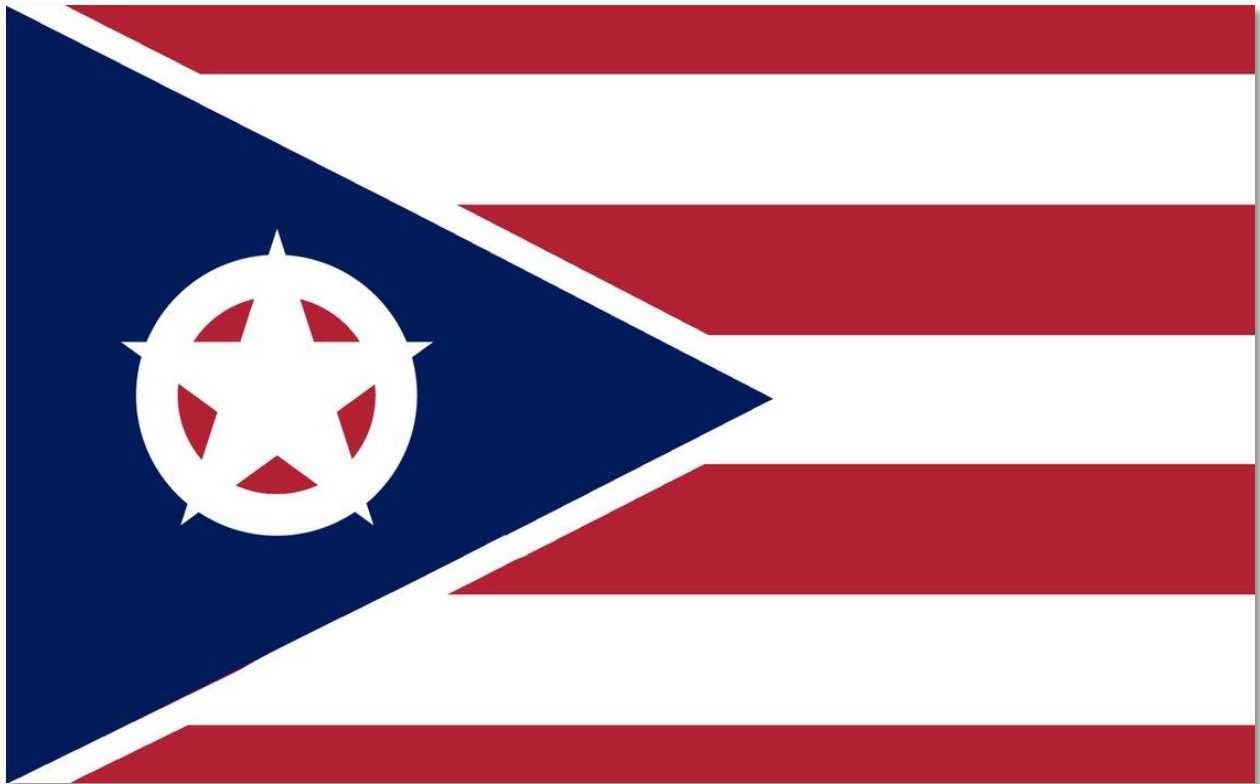
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Gudina



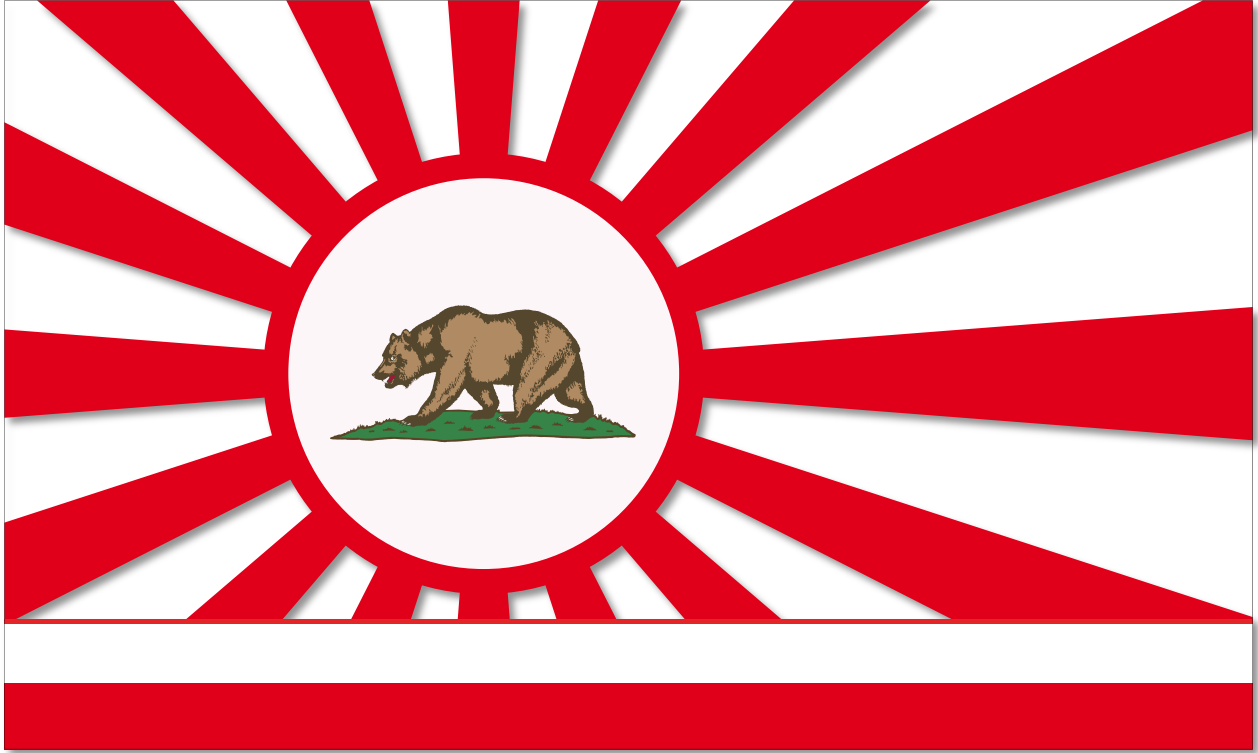
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Lawinger



Artist: DetectiveP, Link: <http://detectivep.deviantart.com/art/Flag-of-the-Ottawa-Republic-277536035>

Liamea



Artist: fexes, Link: <http://fexes.deviantart.com/art/California-Free-State-140983437>

Paweba



Artist: Zifker, Link: <http://zifker.deviantart.com/art/United-Republic-of-Terra-115545048>

Lukaau



Artist: SoaringAven, Link: <http://soaringaven.deviantart.com/art/Slaveria-flag-397031858>

En Passante



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Reshiigani



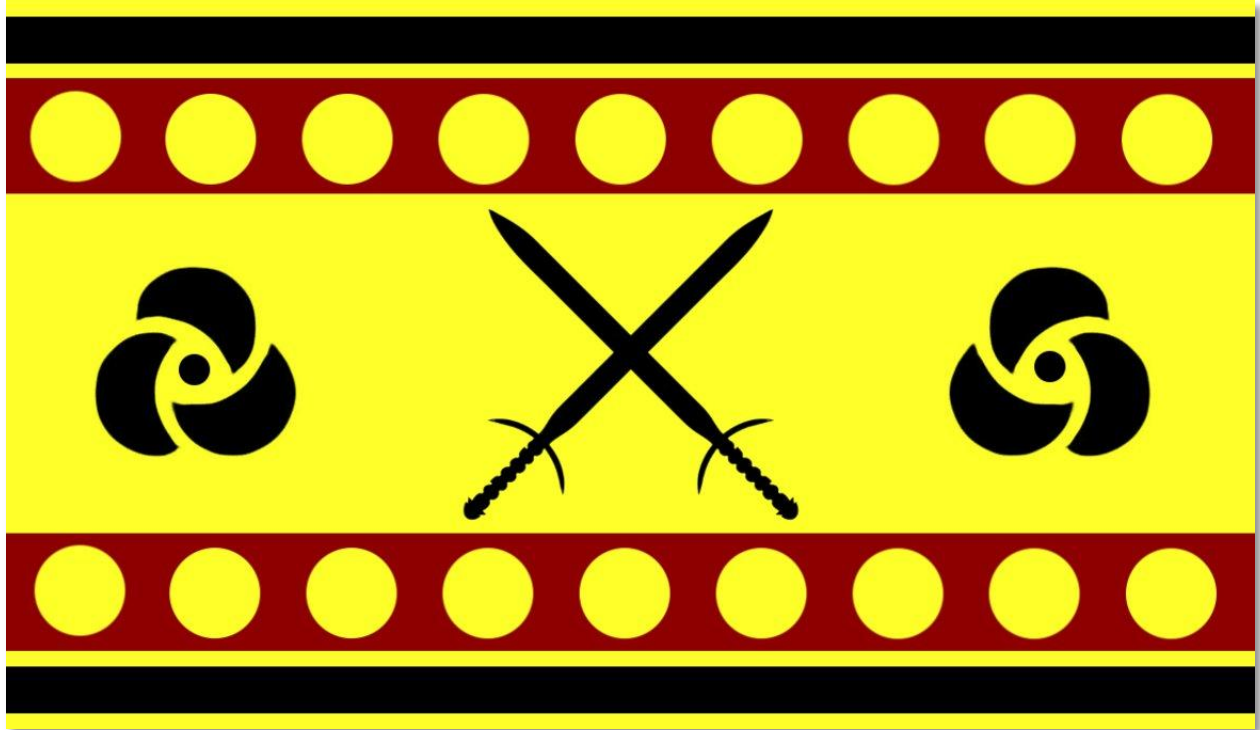
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Eninsish



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Arakaad



Artist: Nils Nicolai, Link: <http://rarayn.deviantart.com/art/Proshao-Flag-278394010>

Hebrin



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Nisaga



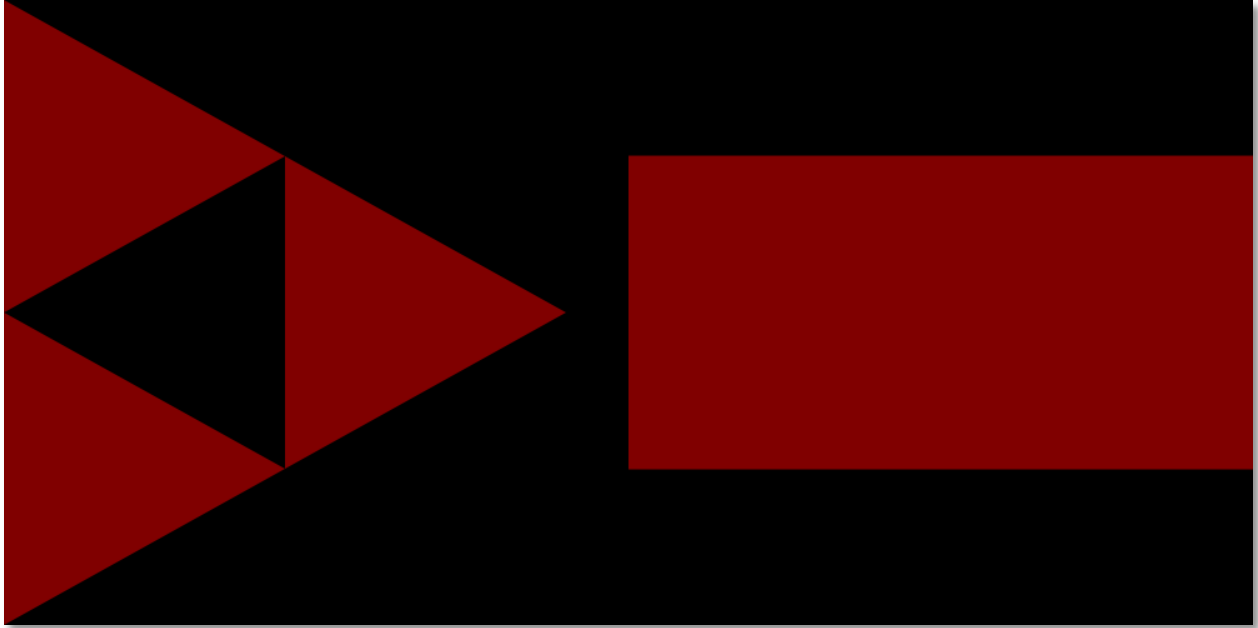
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Aghurtuekh



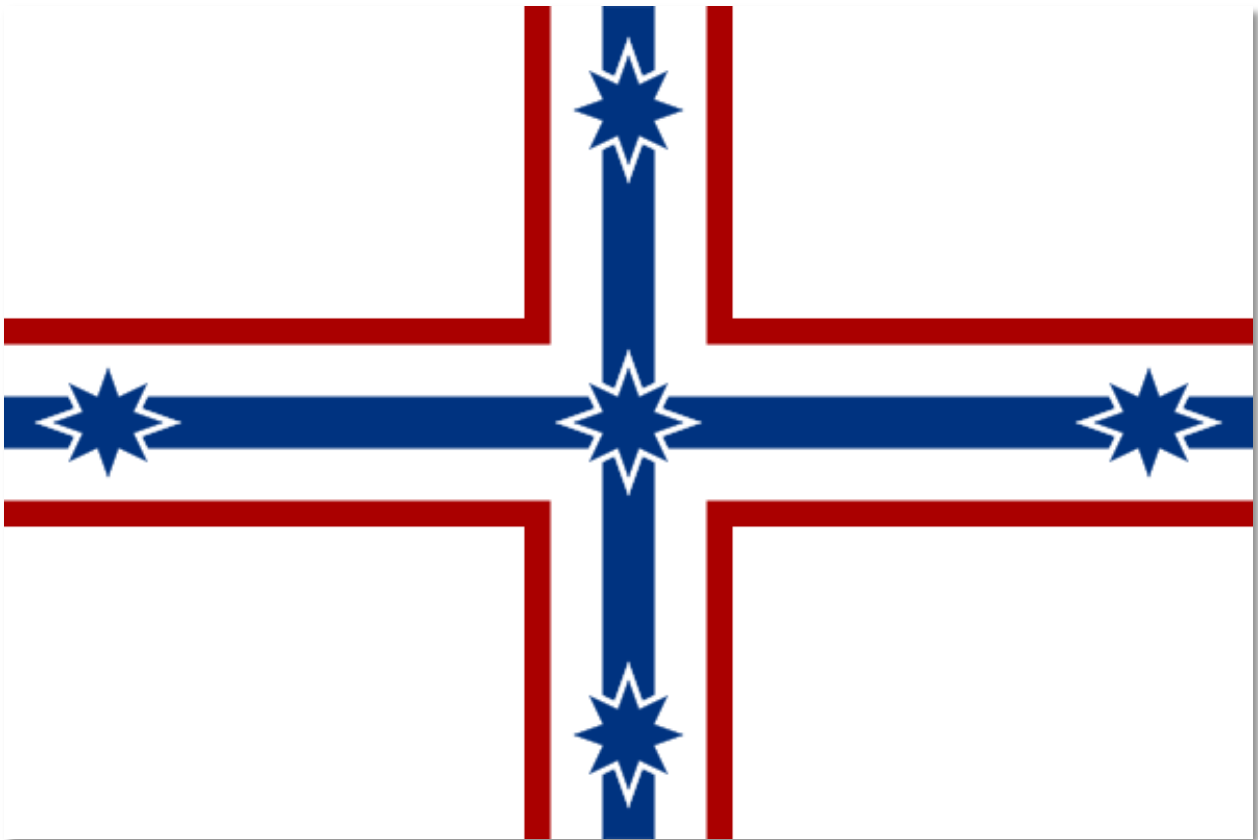
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Aerstou



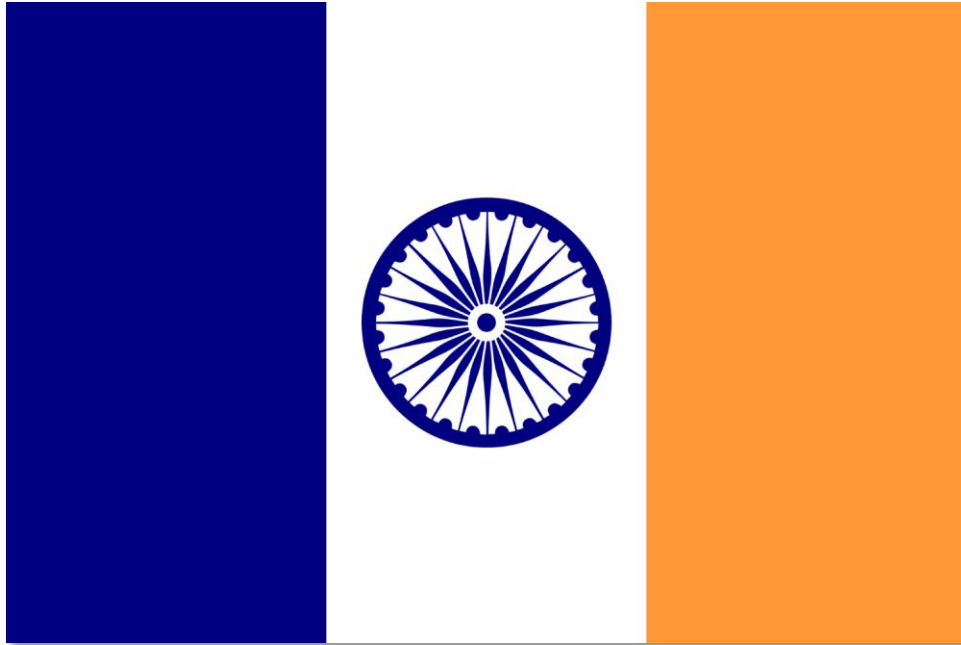
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Cooke



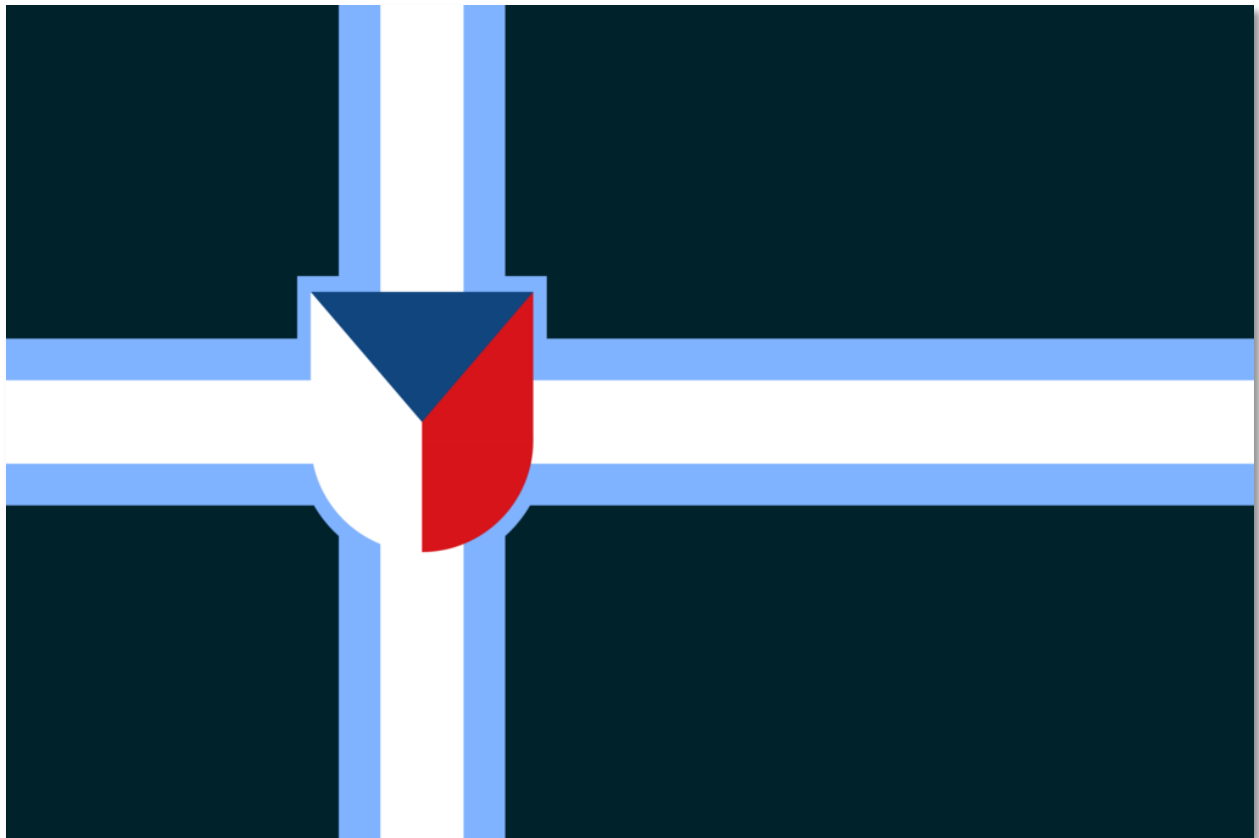
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Rajan



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Pugaash



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Chimalis



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Ababat



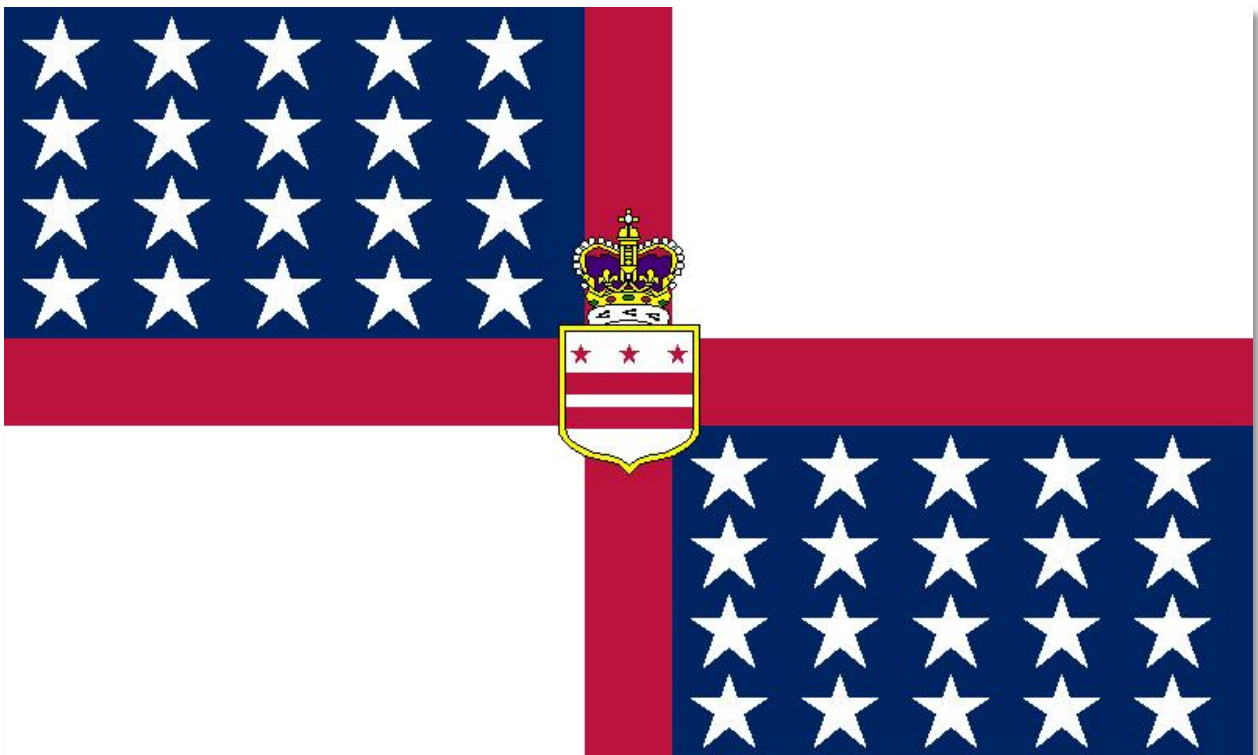
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Aleshanee



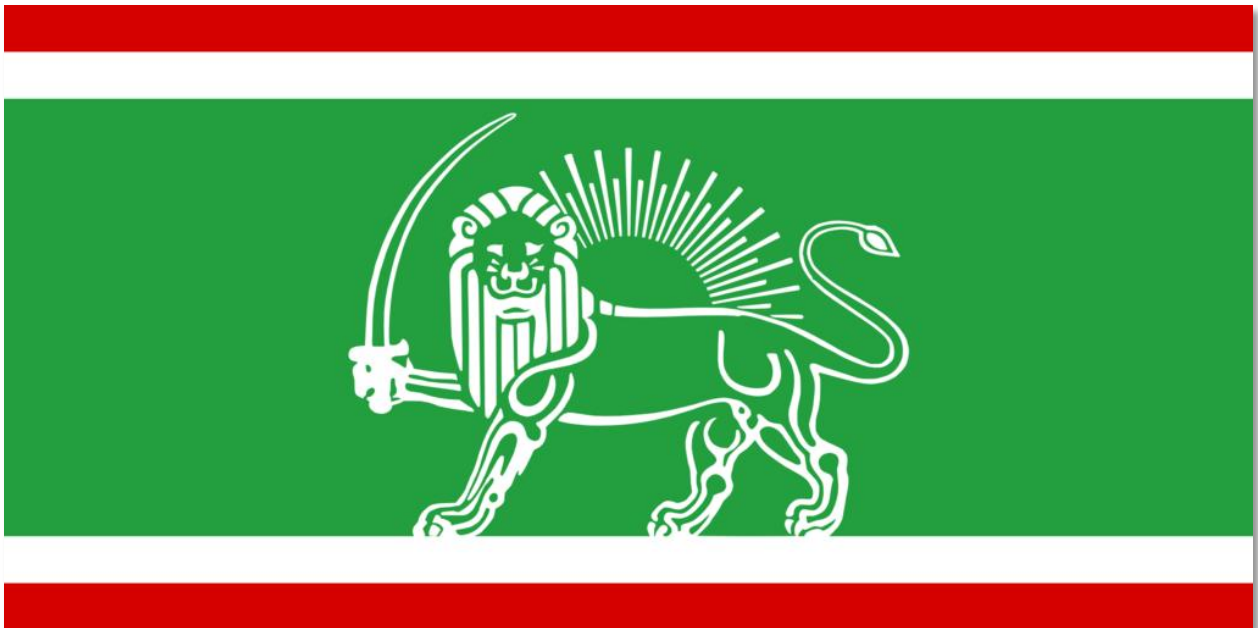
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Siblikaar



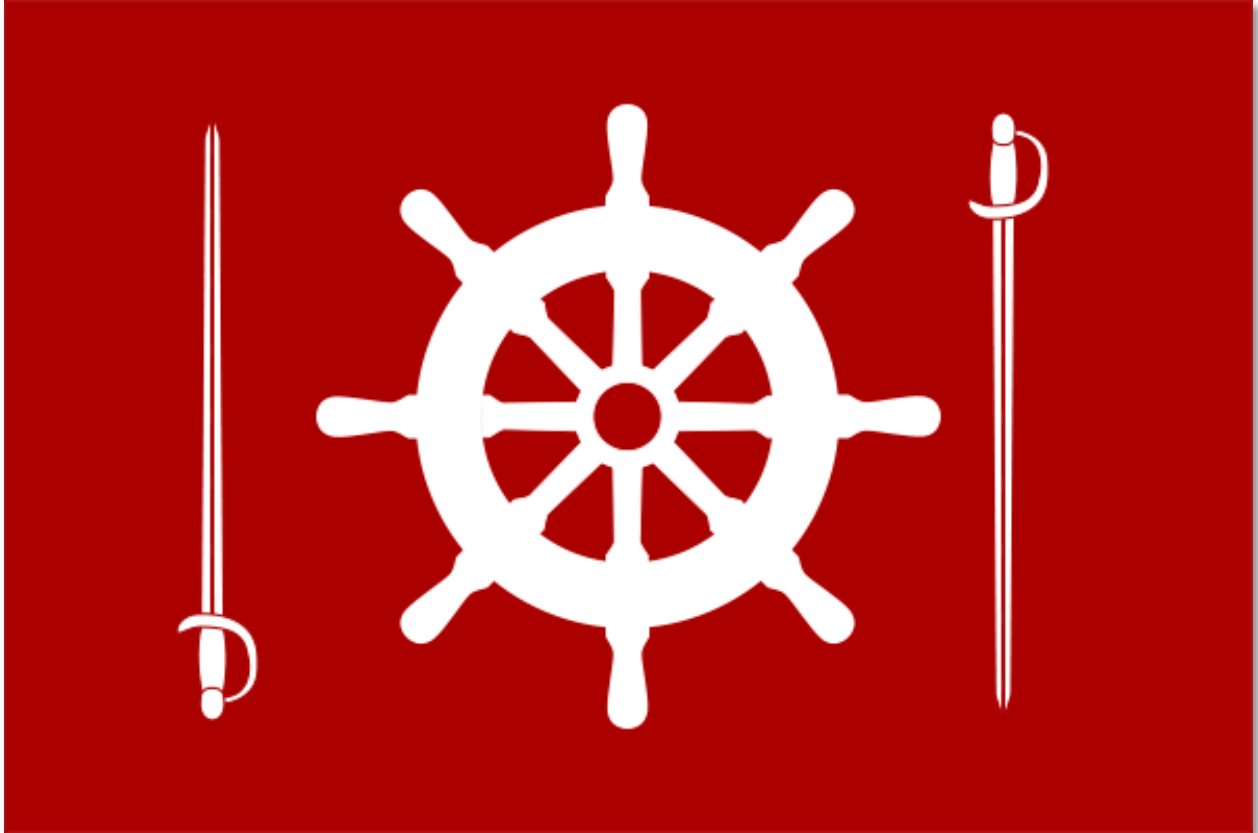
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Sashar



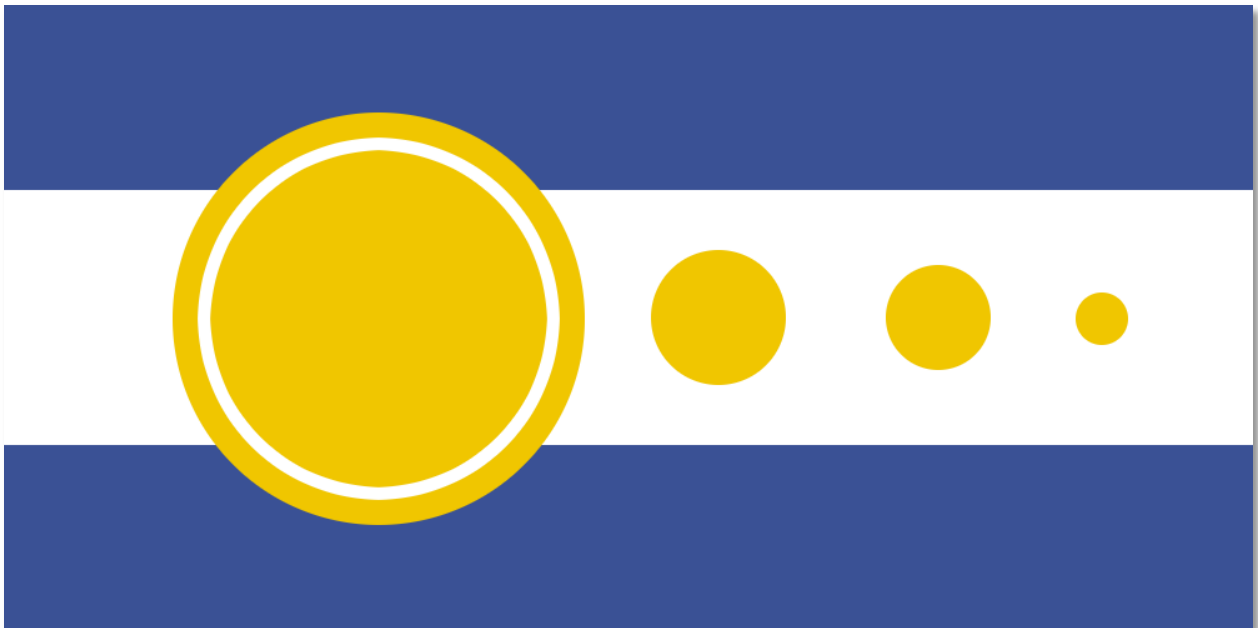
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Niketan



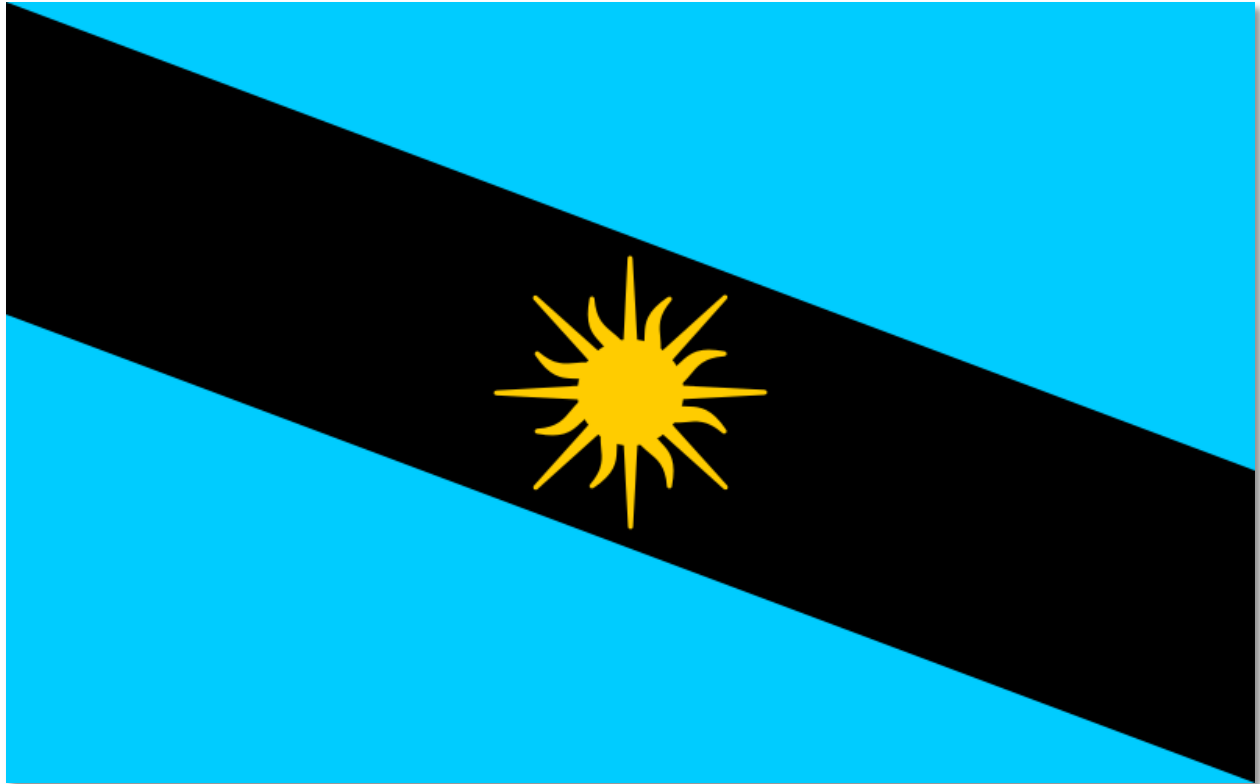
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Gimushi



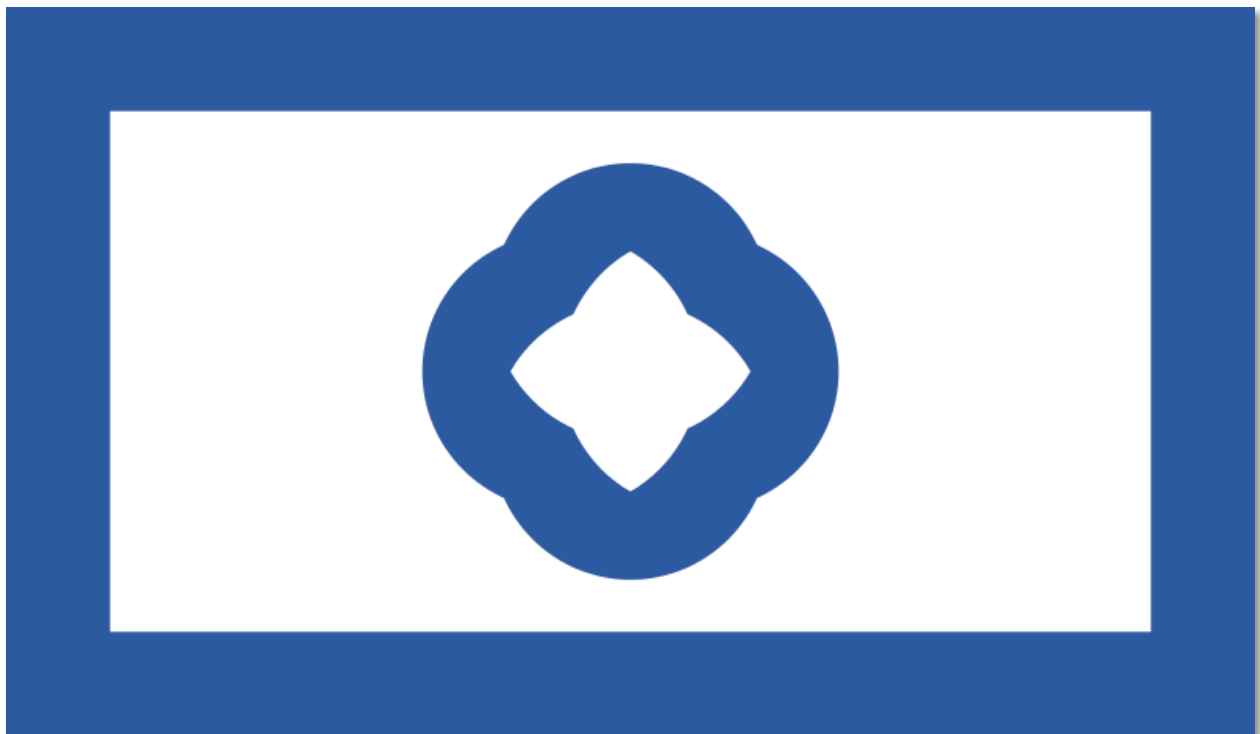
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Indara



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Managa



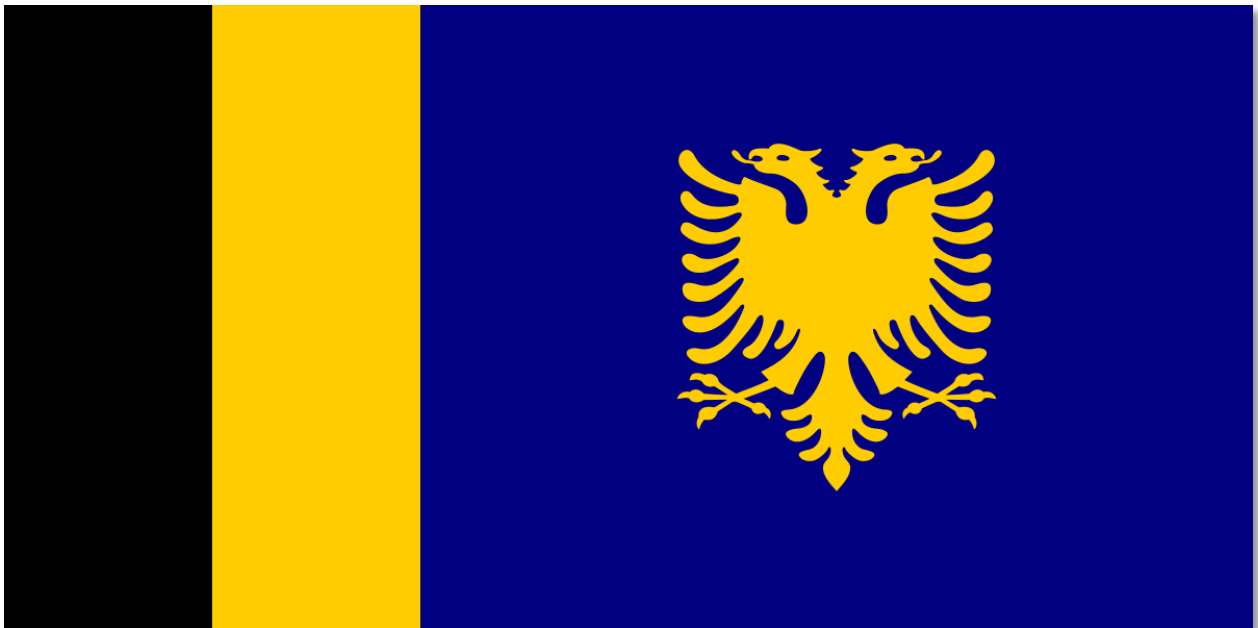
Artist: LuxorCZ, Link: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Slin.svg

Faiza



Artist: Nils Nicolai, Link: <http://federalrepublic.deviantart.com/art/Tripolitania-and-Cyrenaica-265071418>

Zukhisa



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Bravo



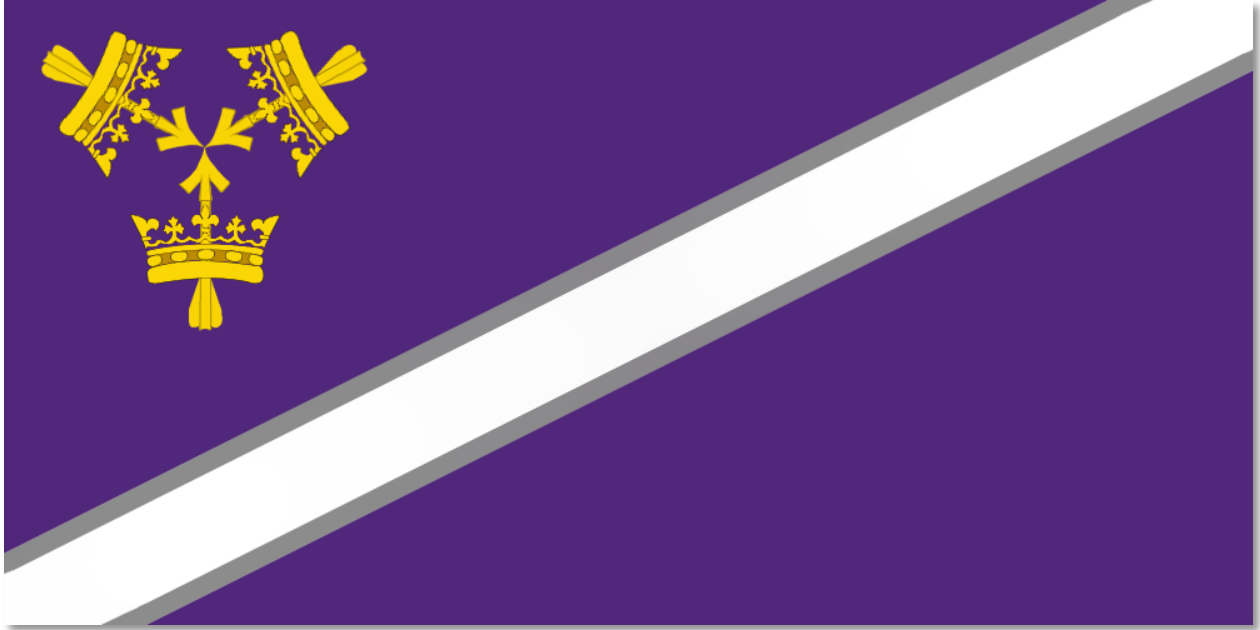
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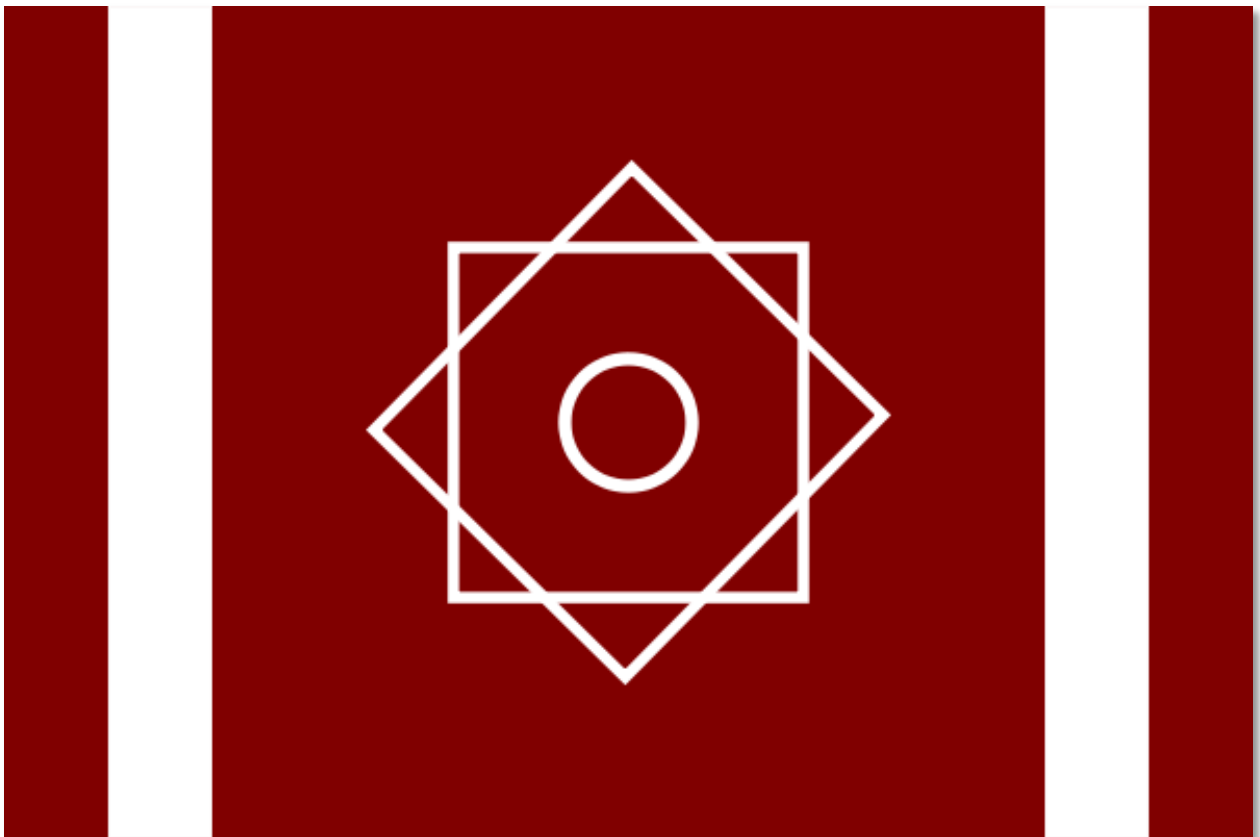
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Turley



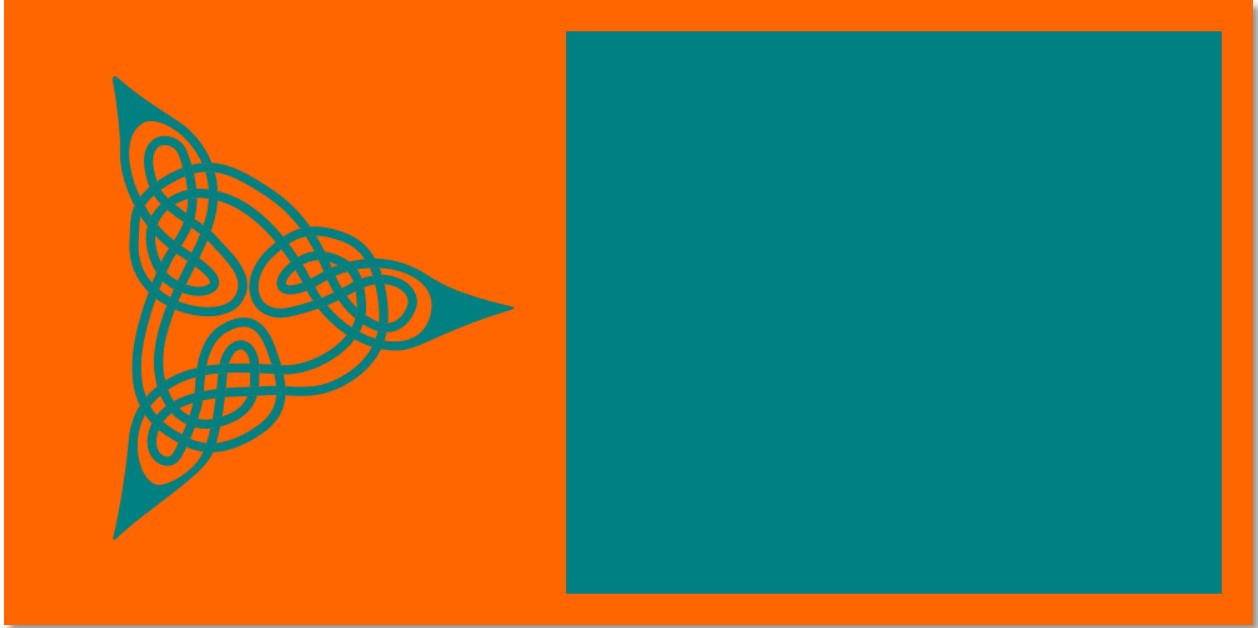
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Sandardin



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Tapendra



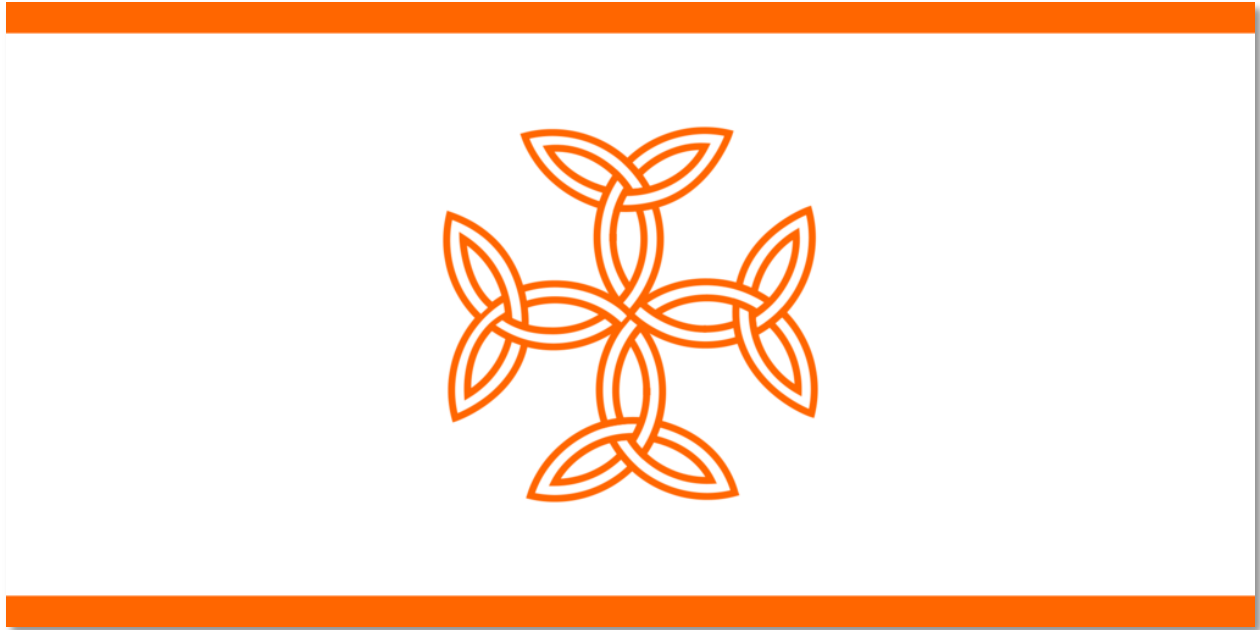
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Udusis



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Mirammon



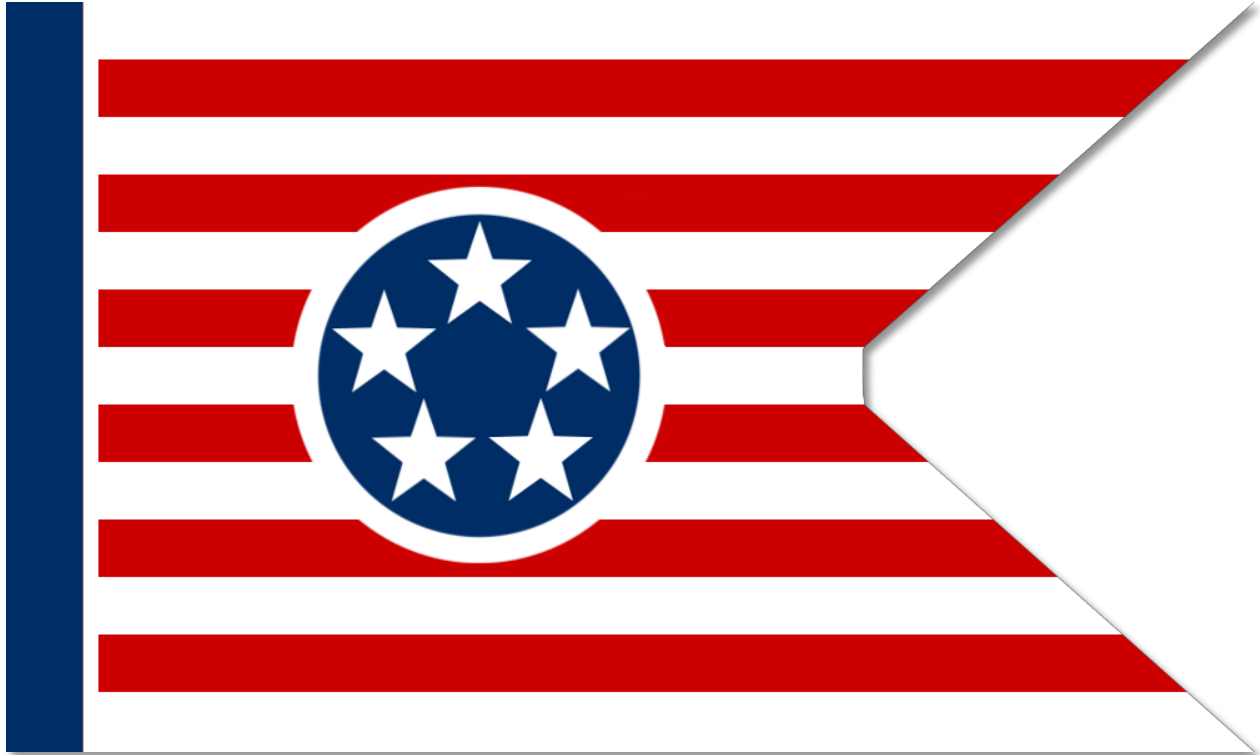
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Kiskiishga



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Takoda



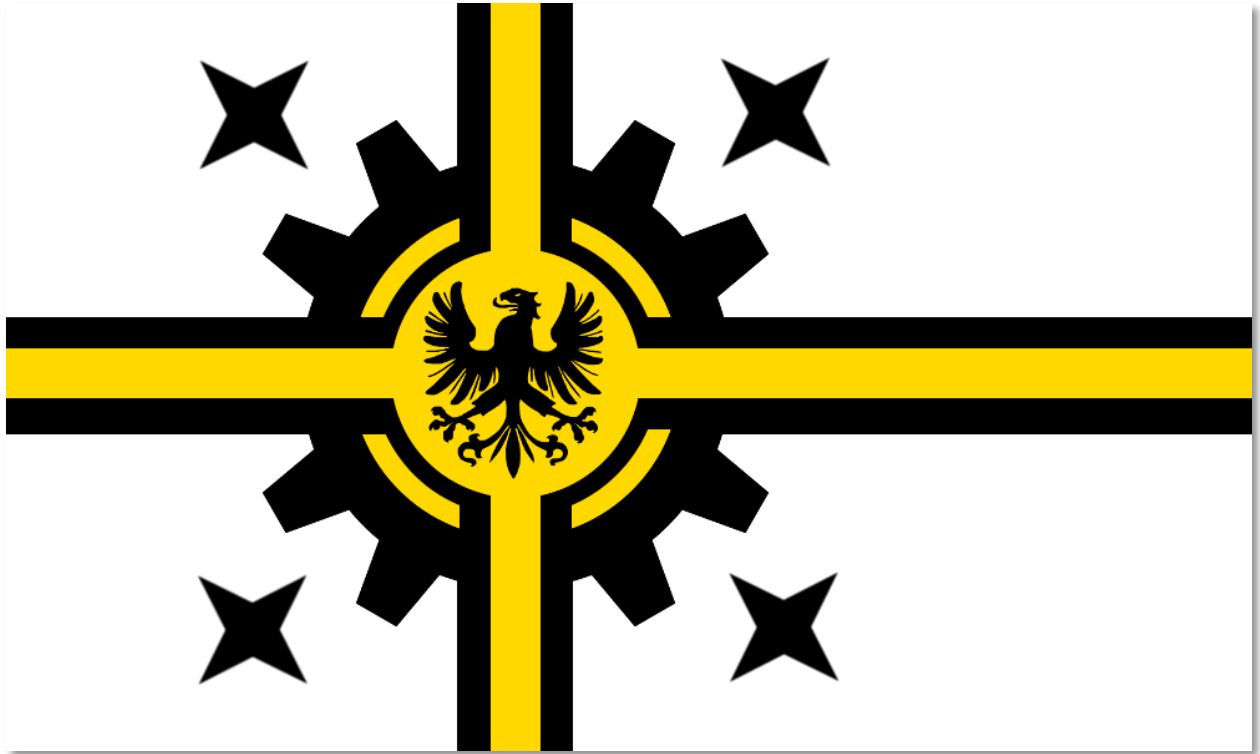
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lisdirrii



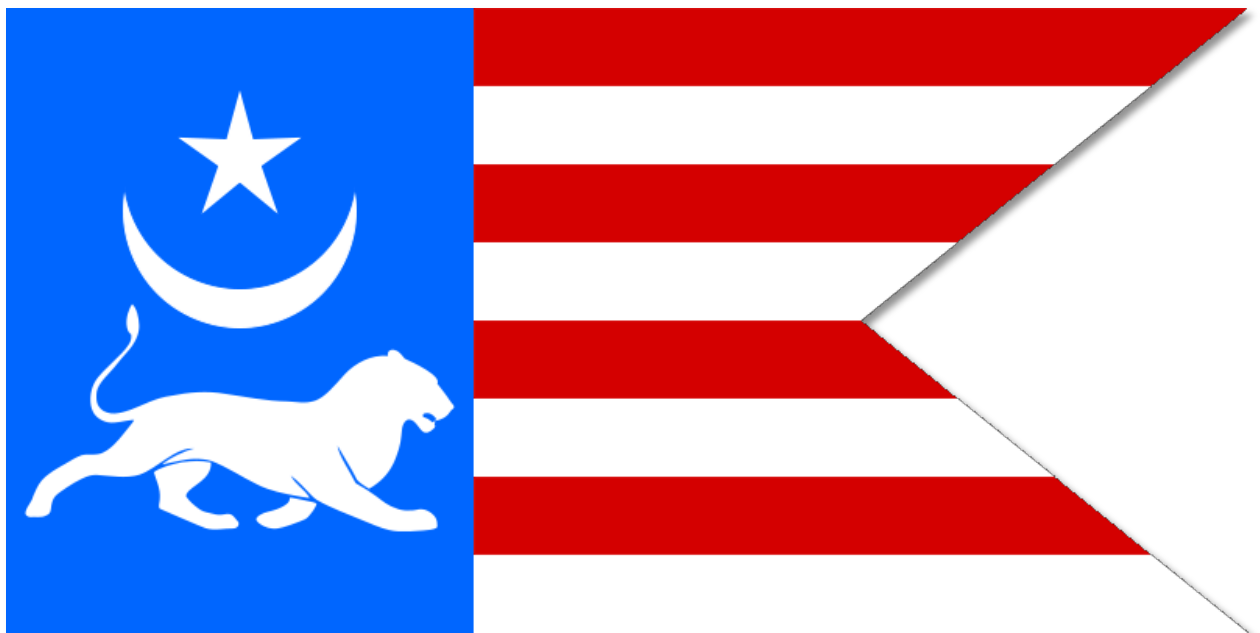
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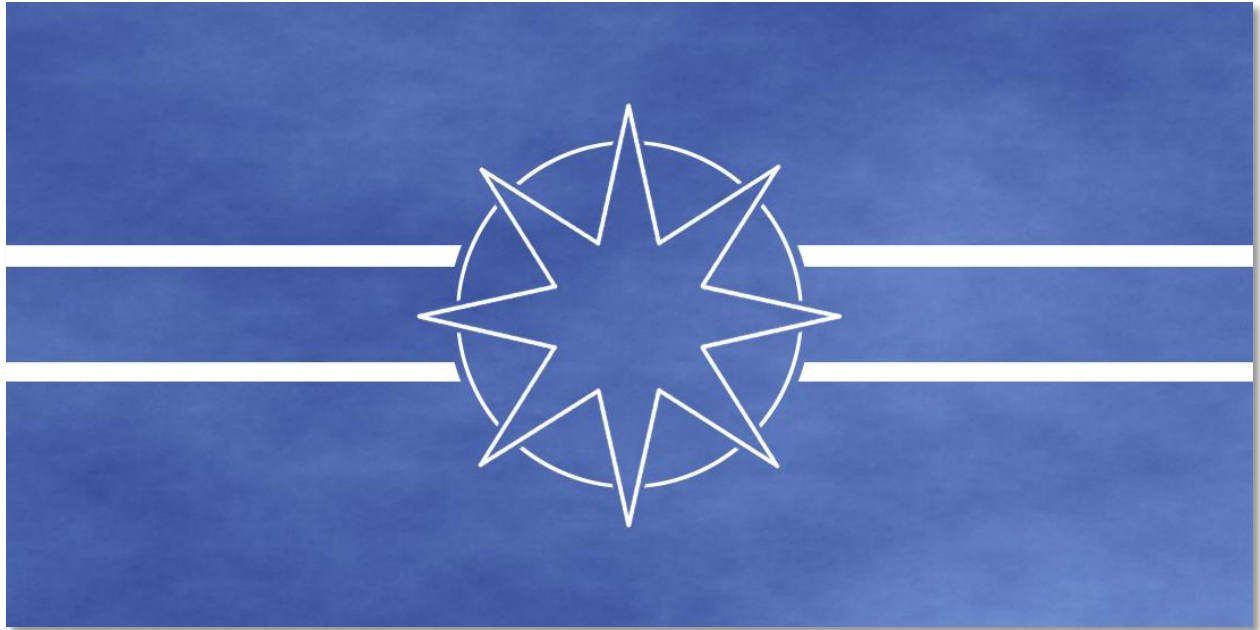
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Cotan



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Tsosoe



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Uzola



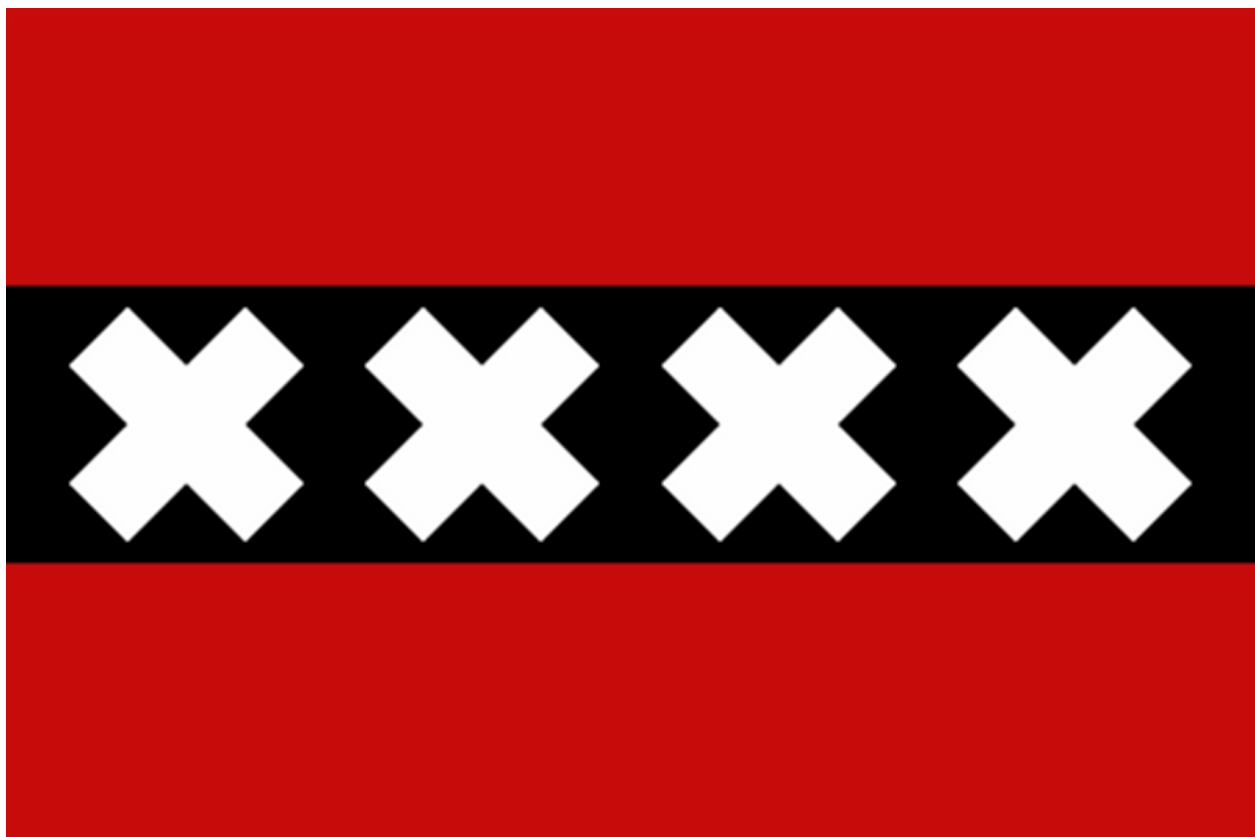
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Flange



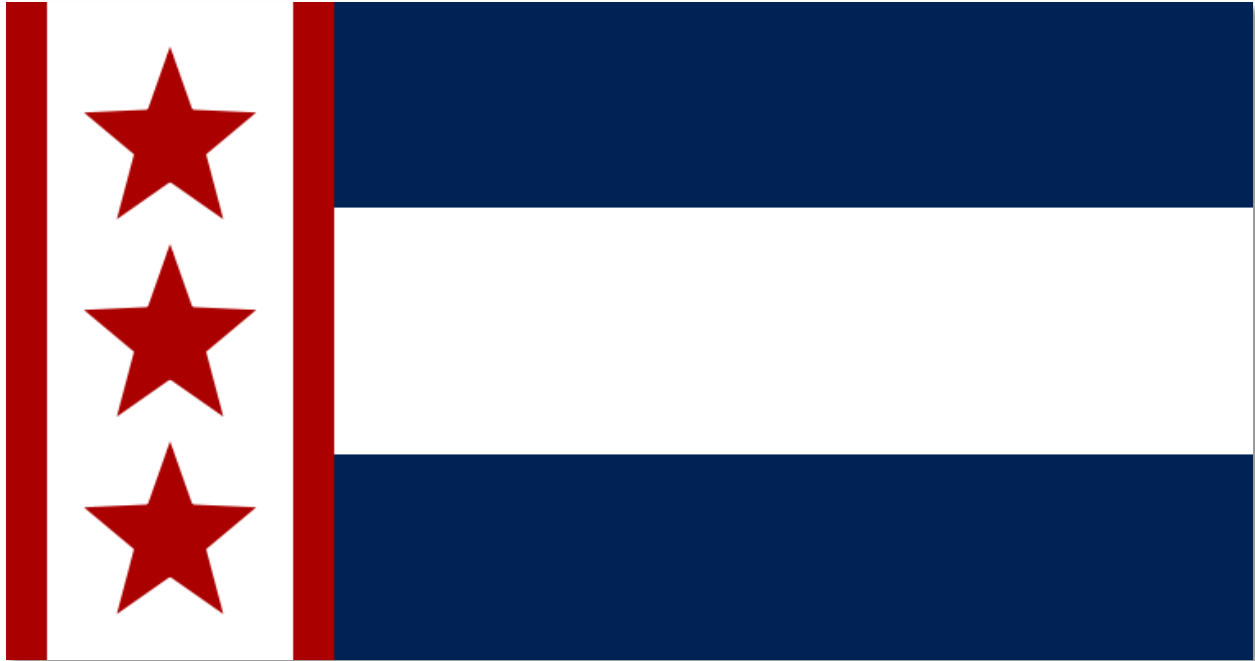
Artist: Levente Szekeres, Link: <http://deathpwnie.deviantart.com/art/Flag-of-Ossiar-120578951>

Justince



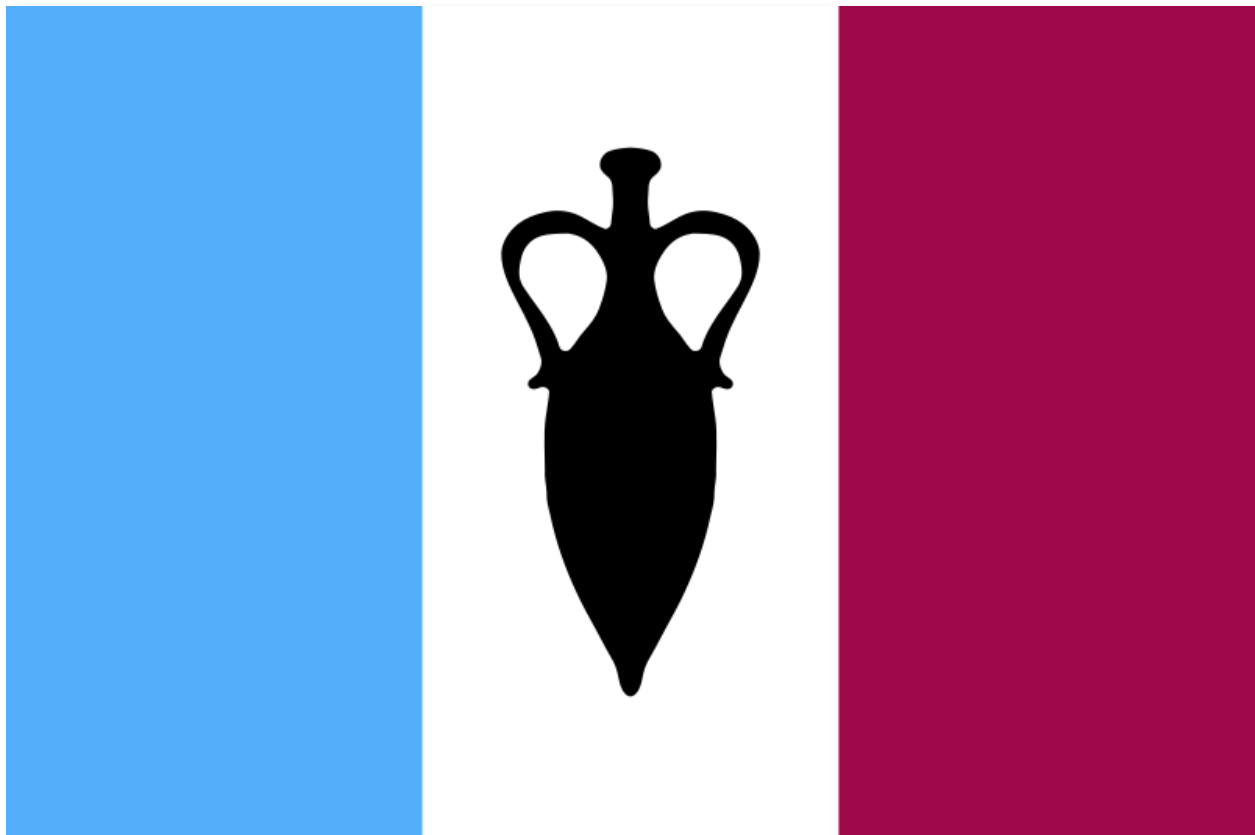
Artist: Neethis, Link: <http://neethis.deviantart.com/art/Amsterdam-Remnant-Flag-148837034>

Reskhuda



Artist: Nils Nicolai, Link: <http://federalrepublic.deviantart.com/art/Commonwealth-of-Virginia-1-209586790>

Gagakam



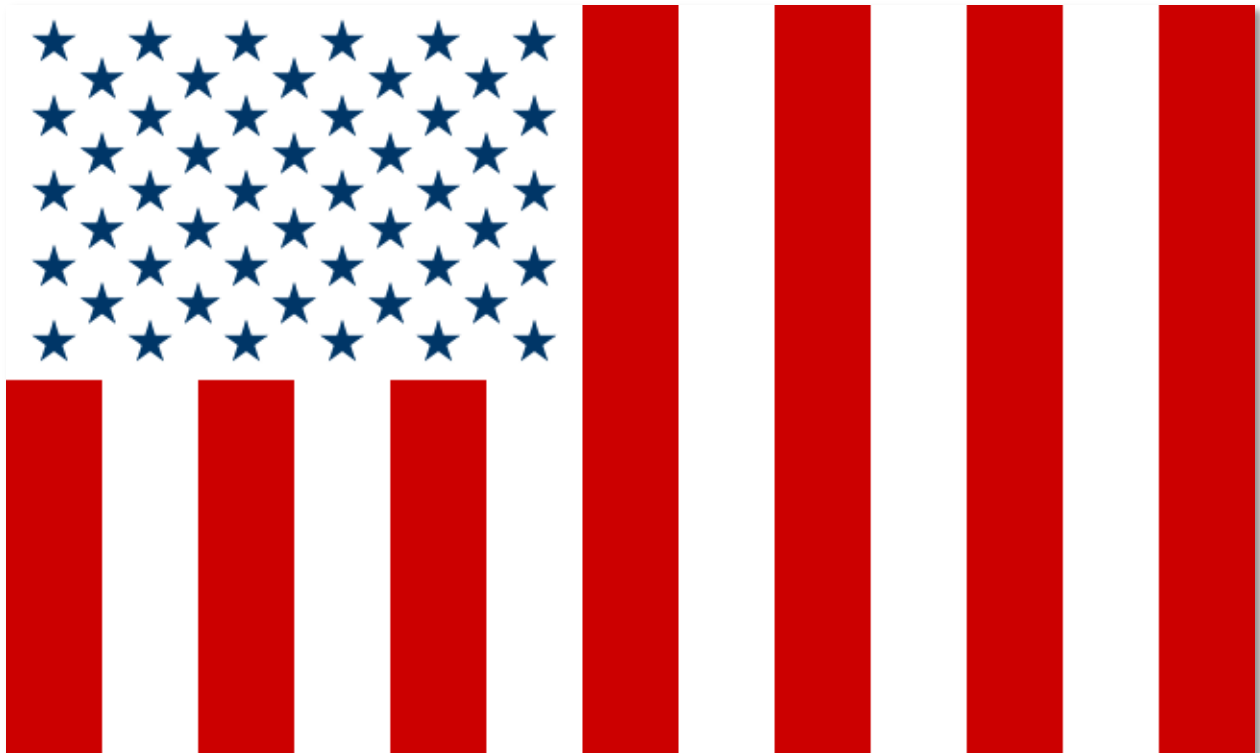
Artist: N@ldo, Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_Groland.jpg

Kaanada



Artist: Jed, Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Porto_Claro.svg

Saffron



Artist: Alkari, Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:United_States_civil_flag.svg

Usdaki



Artist: Ian Kniel, Link: <http://aurikan.deviantart.com/art/The-flag-of-Auron-82395399>

Ragidlam



Artist: Nils Nicolai, Link: <http://federalrepublic.deviantart.com/art/Morocco-259932126>

Maarkhuda



Artist: Levente Szekeres, Link: <http://deathpwnie.deviantart.com/art/Turks-and-Caicos-188421171>

Orchard



Artist: Neethis, Link: <http://neethis.deviantart.com/art/Tropico-flag-143937767>

Abuish



Artist: Ryan Christopher Hartigan,

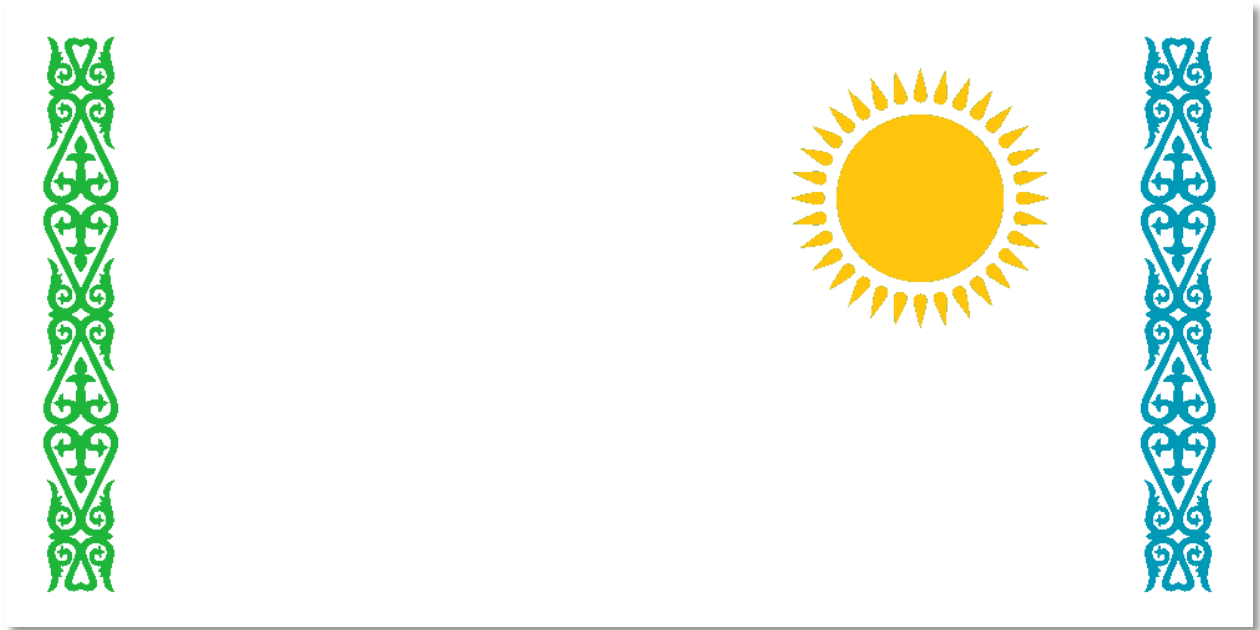
Link: <http://paladinofthesun.deviantart.com/art/Flag-of-the-Kingdom-of-Crimea-291522242>

Kirluan



Artist: Luis Salcedo, Link: <http://cybereaglewarrior.deviantart.com/art/Hashemite-Kingdom-of-Galilee-324582613>

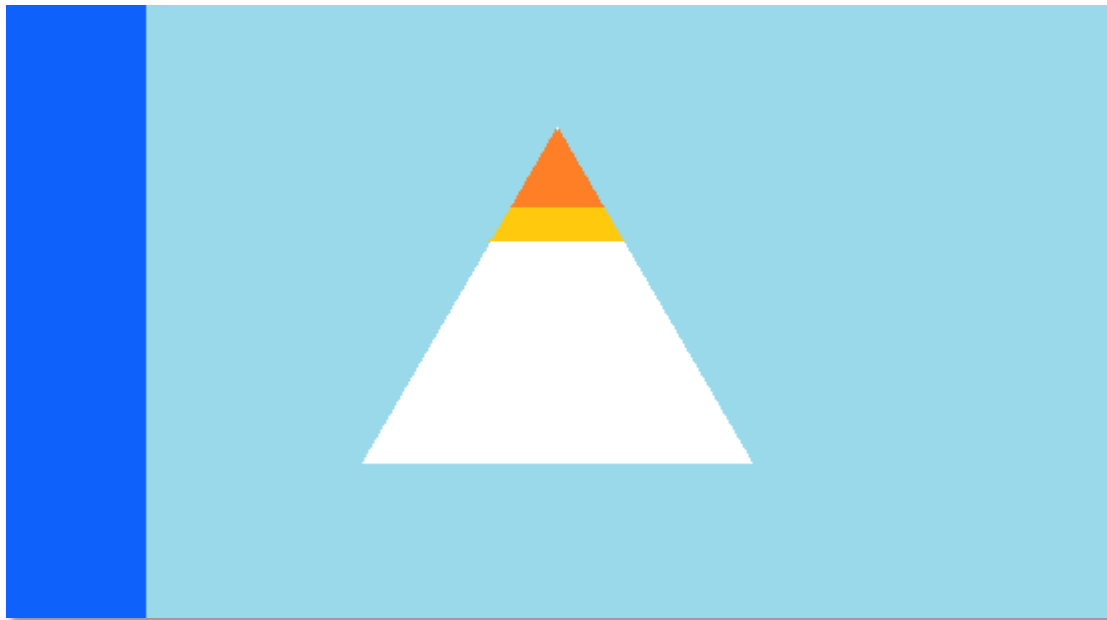
Akiar



Artist: Ryan Christopher Hartigan,

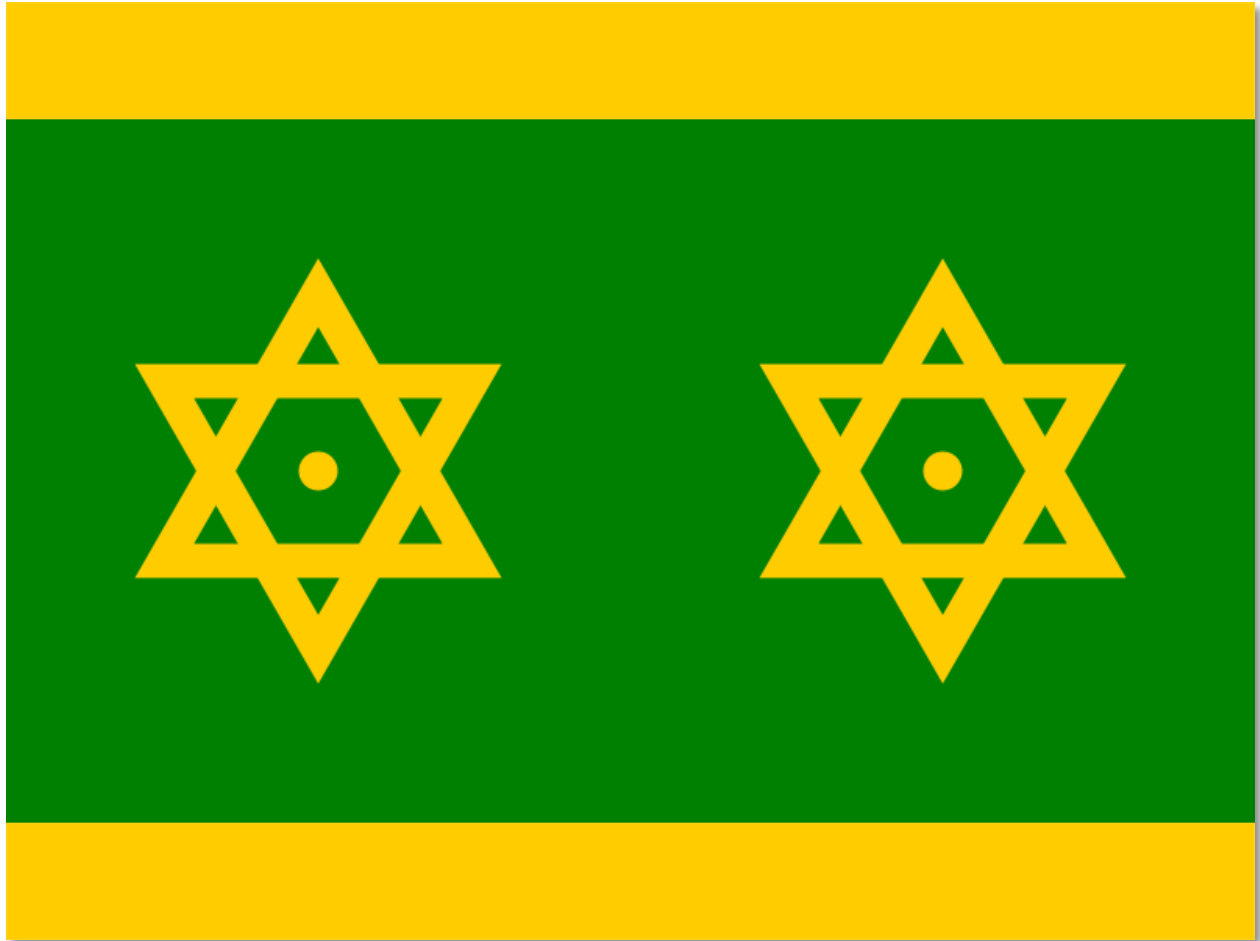
Link: <http://paladinofthesun.deviantart.com/art/Flag-of-Zinteil-294829509>

Ardamashii



Artist: Haydenthefirst, Link: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_the_Kingdom_of_Andala.png

Mordecai



Artist: Nils Nicolai, Link: <http://federalrepublic.deviantart.com/art/HDSH-BBYT-283034994>

Bishop



Artist: Neethis, Link: <http://neethis.deviantart.com/art/HW-flag-of-England-1066-1097-201821874>

Belumar



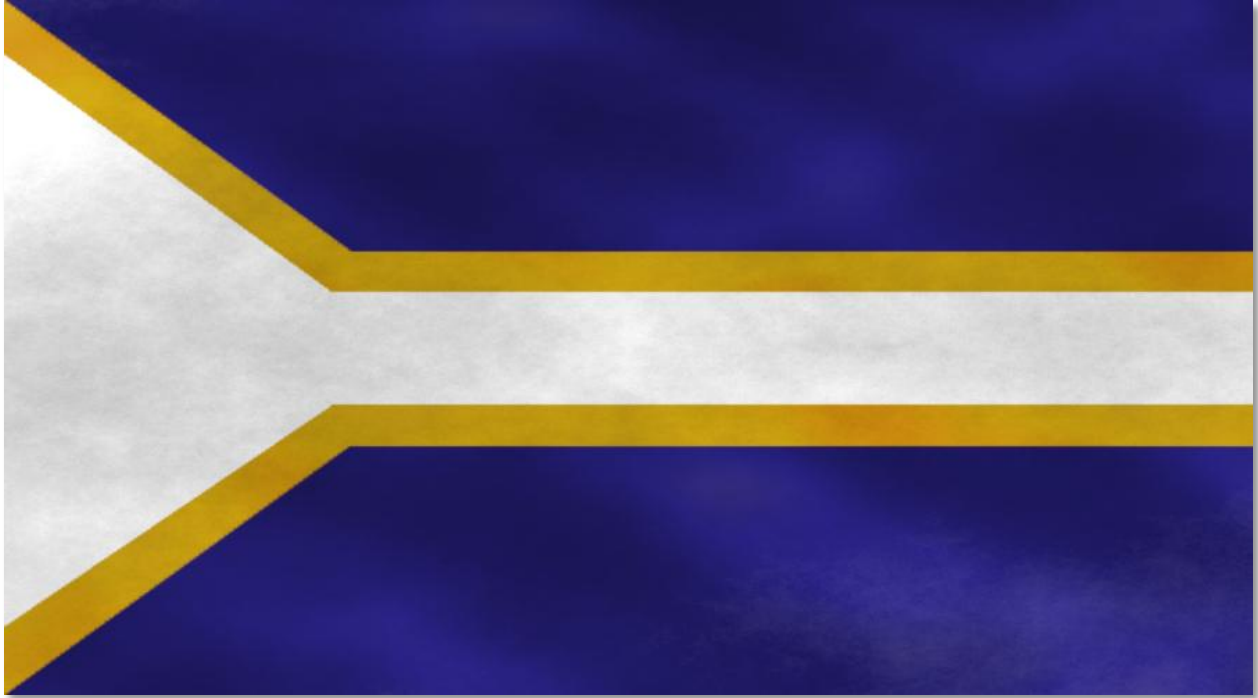
Artist: Rarayan, Link: <http://rarayn.deviantart.com/art/Peloponnesian-Empire-Flag-278491783>

Sambra



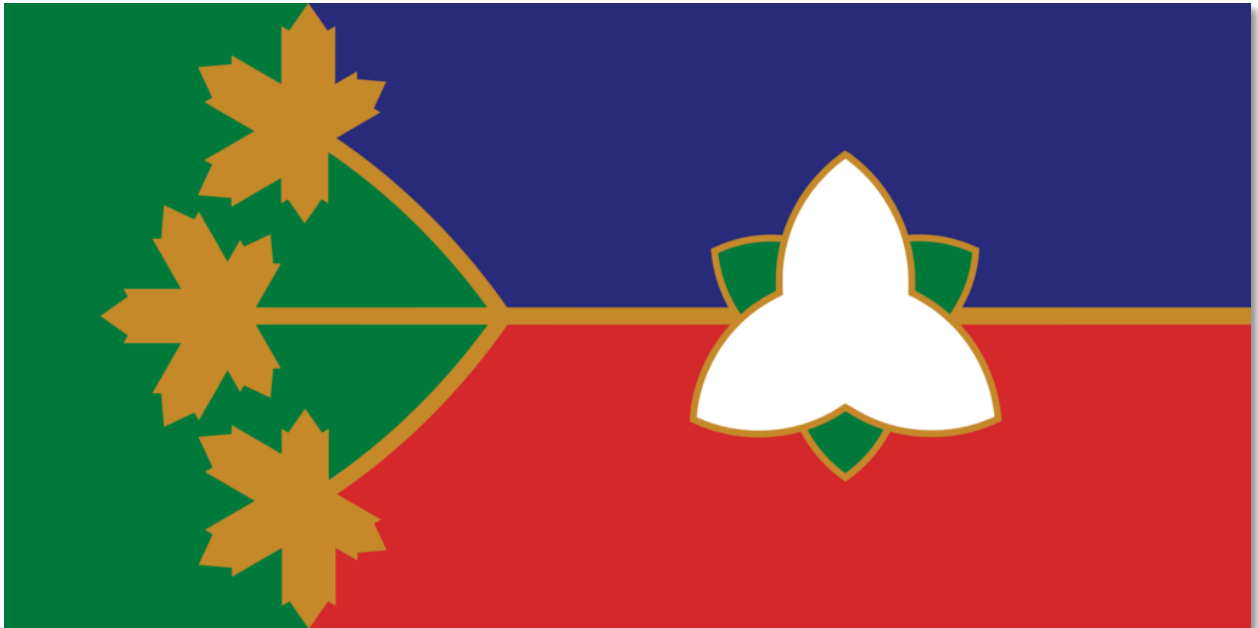
Artist: SoaringAven, Link: <http://soaringaven.deviantart.com/art/Kingdom-of-Bohemia-flag-361560160>

Upkugi



Artist: Neethis, Link: <http://neethis.deviantart.com/art/Bretonia-Freelancer-flag-140477292>

Tapawa



Artist: Levente Szekeres, Link: <http://deathpwnie.deviantart.com/art/Ontario-149630540>

Notable Imperial Systems outside of the Empty Quarter

There are two particular systems that have a strong impact on the Empty Quarter, excluding the political centres of Capital/Sylea (Third Imperium), Asimikigir (Julian Protectorate) and Damlaer (Hegemony of Lorean). Shamokin is a very powerful world, with a high population and high technology. It is the effective source of what few high-tech goods the Imperial Six Subsectors can get its hands on. In 993 Imperial, Shamokin also happens to own two colonies within the Imperial Empty Quarter – Urduaan and Jaleel.

Of course, the coreward side of the Lesser Rift can access either Ikon – an immensely powerful, Vargr-ruled world within the Empty Quarter – or Damlaer, the high-tech centre of the Hegemony, located not far from its Empty Quarter holdings.

Shamokin⁸⁵

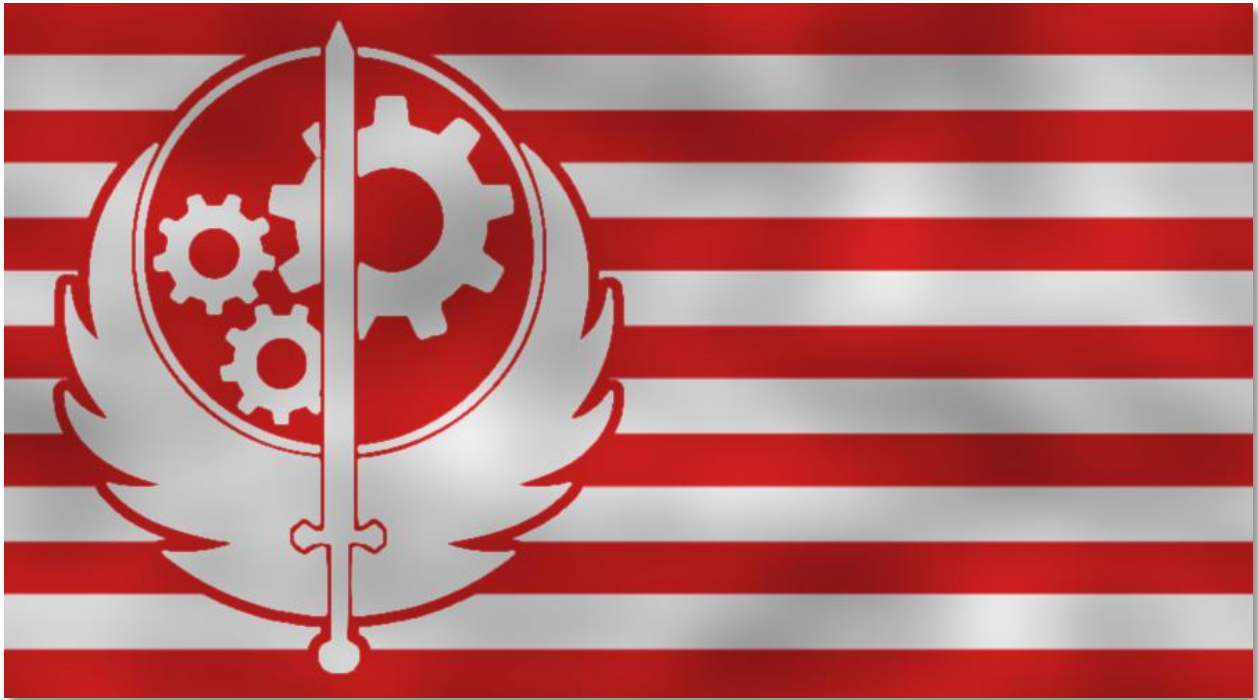


Artist: SoaringAven, Link: <http://soaringaven.deviantart.com/art/Laeria-and-Vold-flag-version-2-405960978>

⁸⁵ Note that, by 1105 Imperial, Shamokin would be renamed Didshep.

In contrast, the typical Imperial Emptyhead has a hate/envy relationship with Antares system, in the neighbouring Antares Sector. Antares – both the system and the sector – is of importance to the entire Imperium, and is the ruling throneworld of the Vargr Archduke of the Domain of Antares. To say that this grates on the generally impoverished, politically irrelevant, strongly humanistic, highly anti-Vargr Solomani population within the Six Subsectors is to put it very mildly.

Antares

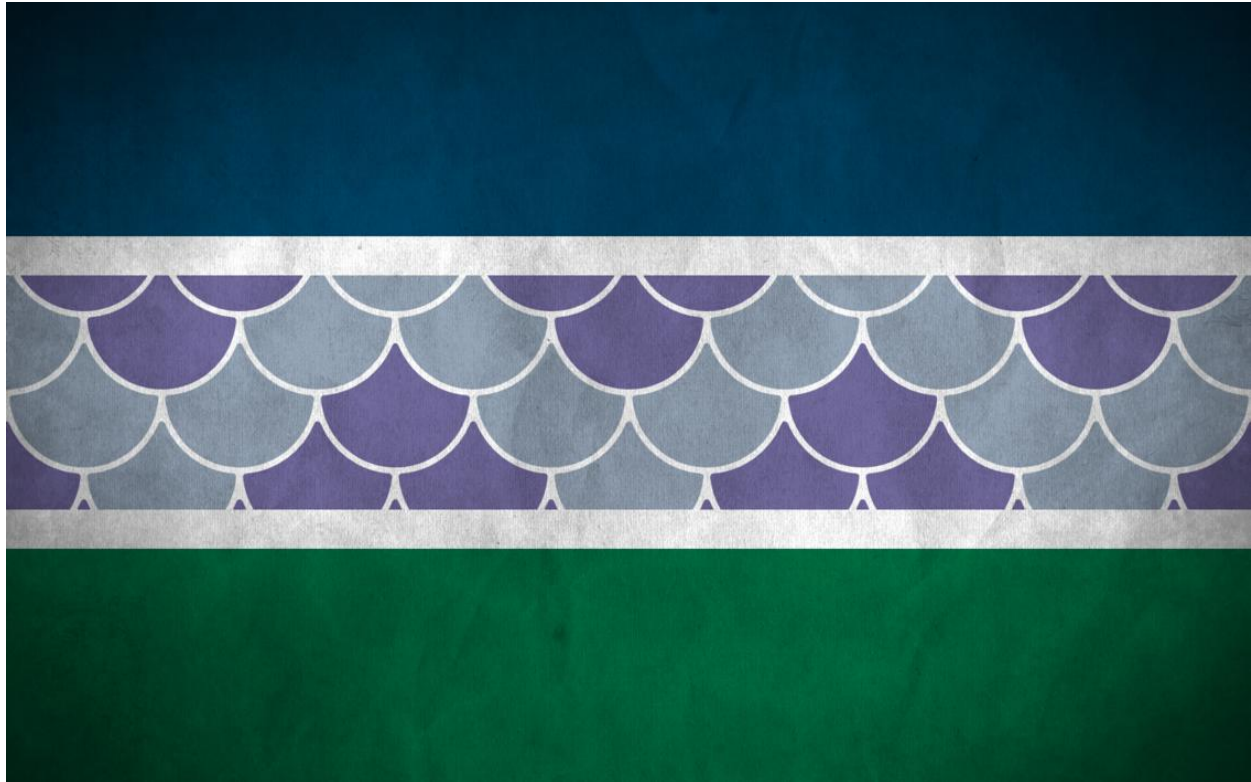


Artist: Neethis, Link: <http://neethis.deviantart.com/art/Brotherhood-Of-Steel-flag-131121829>

Household Flags of Notable Imperial Families Houses

**Flag of Dethwabtakebwebwakawa
Sector Duke & Duke Lentuli**

-e-a-a-athwako-ep,



Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Flags-of-Touhou-Wakasagihime-386040802>

Note on Flag Usage

It should be noted that the flags of the various Ducal Houses also serve as the formal flags of their demesnes. For example, it is the flag of Peo-e-a-a-athwako-ep, as the family that rules the Empty Quarter, which hangs from the roof of the Leshandi Mekharm, the great hall in the Imperial Palace that leads to the Octagon, a.k.a. the Throne Room of the Third Imperium⁸⁶.

Note on Bud-lineage

All but one of the noble families listed here can be found in **Stellar Reaches #20**.

Bud-lineage U'r U'r Katai is the only Noble House (for odd definitions of 'House') not listed in **Stellar Reaches #20**. During the year 993 Imperial, Emperor Gavin will make the surprise announcement of the enfeoffment of U'r U'r Katai, a respected liaison between the Imperium and the Surogotans, as Baron of Surogota. This marks a 'coming of age' for the species, as a Surogotan will bear the Imperial Mandate for the first time in the multiple millennia of living under the three human Imperia.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ See **Traveller's Digest**, #9, page 27. There are quite a number of unrecognized *commoner* flags for the Six Imperial Sectors, but they are not displayed here.

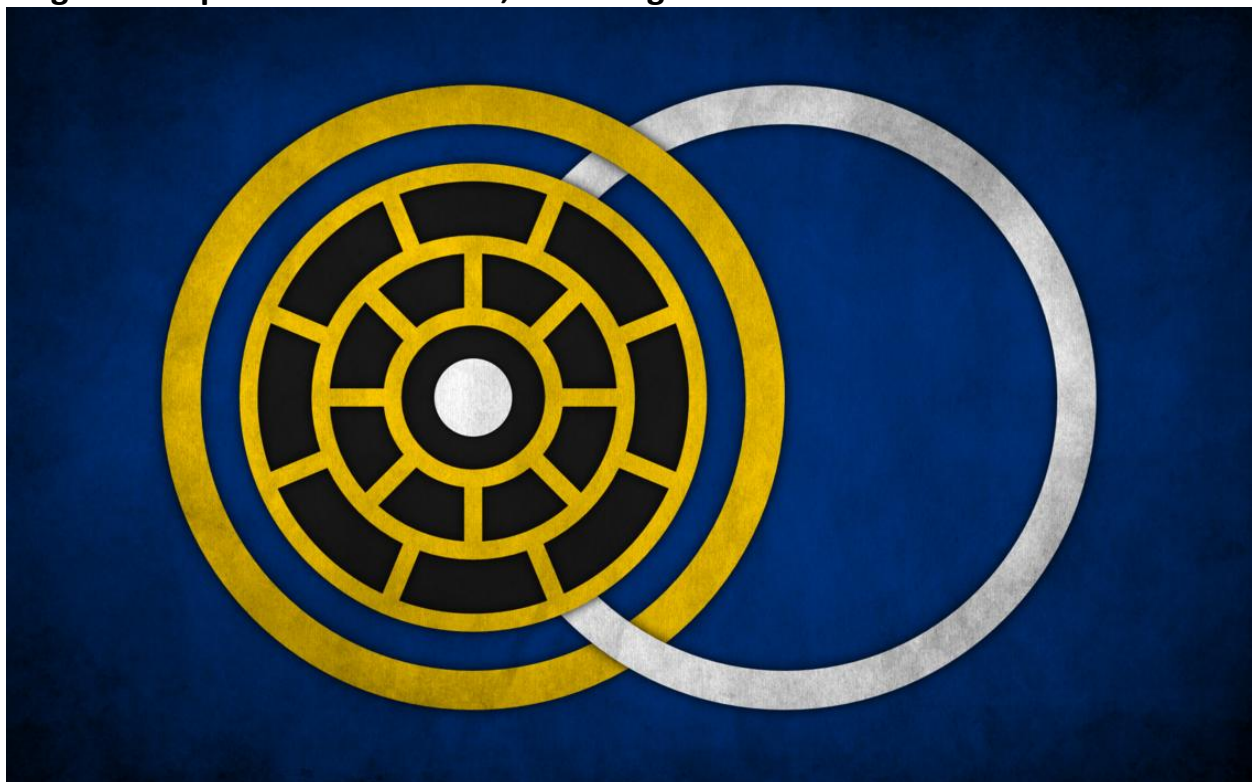
⁸⁷ "But the Vilani aren't really..."
"WILL YOU JUST SHUT UP!?"

Flag of Aved of House Kumuu, Duke Nulinad



Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Flags-of-Touhou-Shou-Toramaru-325977630>

Flag of Anoop of House Dwivedi, Duke Yogesh



Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Flags-of-Touhou-Ichirin-Kumoi-399455627>

Flag of Piel of House Segundat, Duke Gimushi



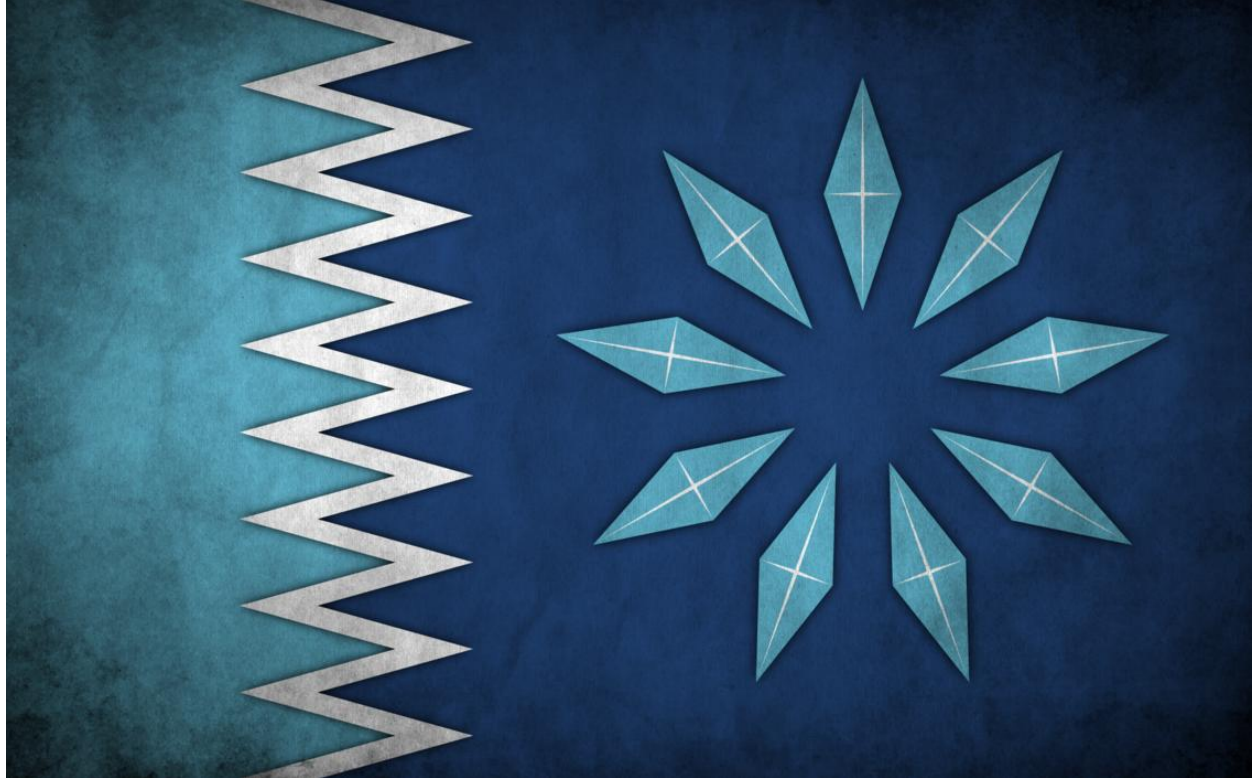
Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Flags-of-Touhou-Seija-Kijin-394911869>

Flag of Saqr of House Temiz, Duke Hebrin; Hadad of House Temiz, Count Hebrin



Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Flags-of-Touhou-Kasen-Ibaraki-386749705>

Flag of Ojal of House Chandratre, Duchess Udusis, Viscountess Irash



Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Flags-of-Touhou-Cirno-389359925>

Flag of Watwa-wabko

, Count Marhaban



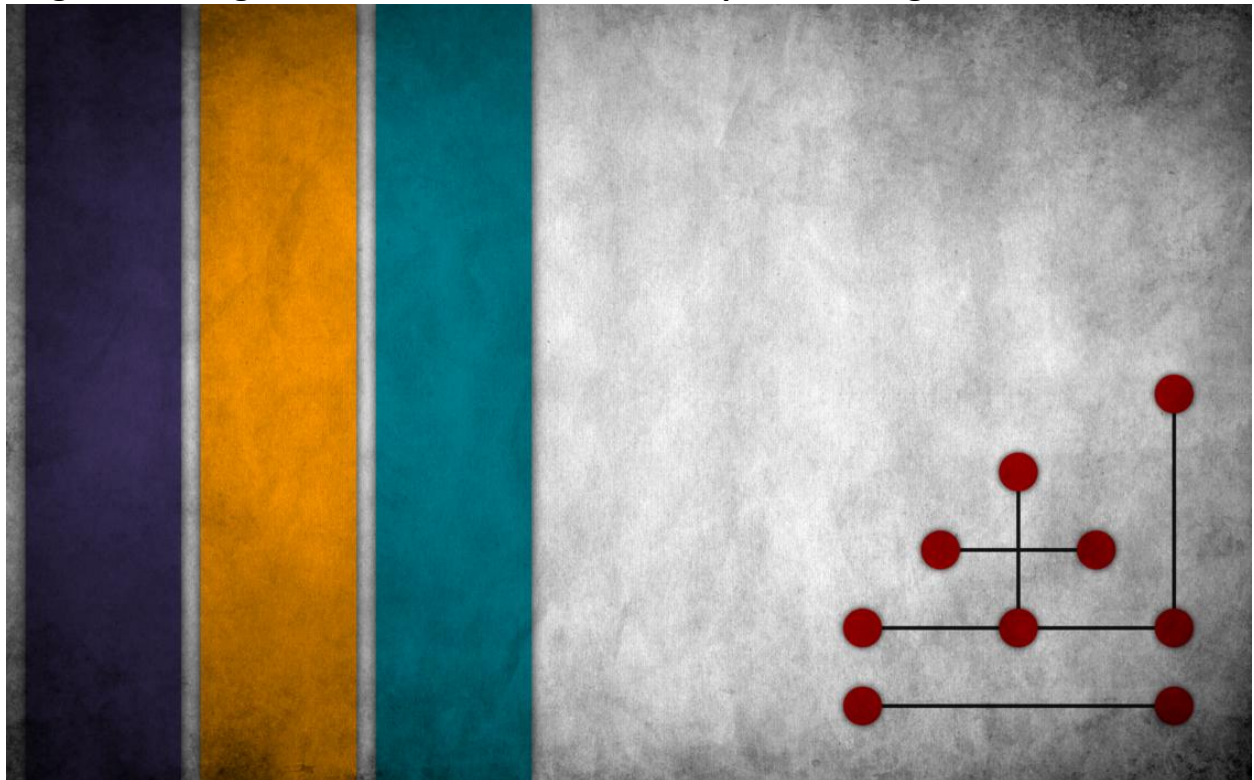
Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Flags-of-Touhou-Daiyousei-394581586>

Flag of Otro of House Lesiasi, Count Lazisar



Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Original-Flag-15-405833691>

Flag of Akuushgu of House Isishamsadar, Marquis Pamushgar



Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Flags-of-Touhou-Mononobe-no-Futo-314768083>

Flag of Yasmin of House Mai, Baroness Charity



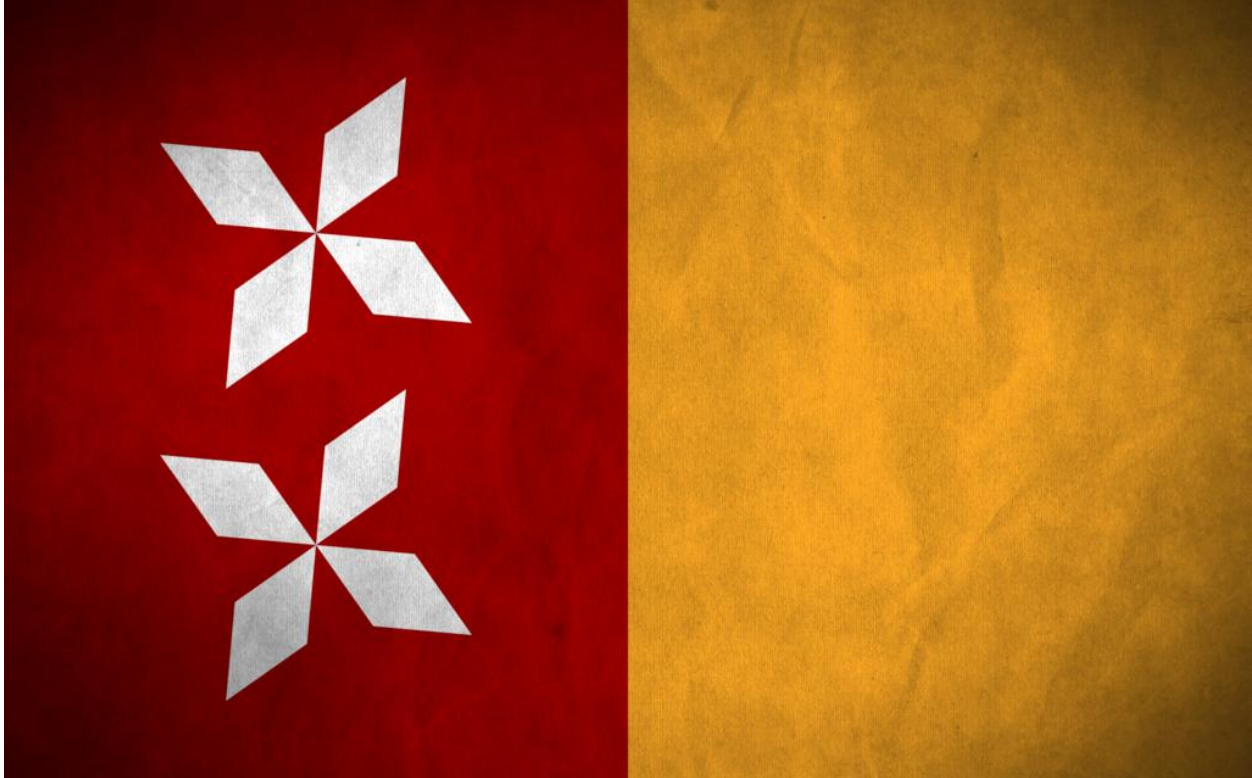
Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Flags-of-Touhou-Rin-Kaenbyou-392278301>

Flag of Jaya of House Arunachalam, Baroness Daruka



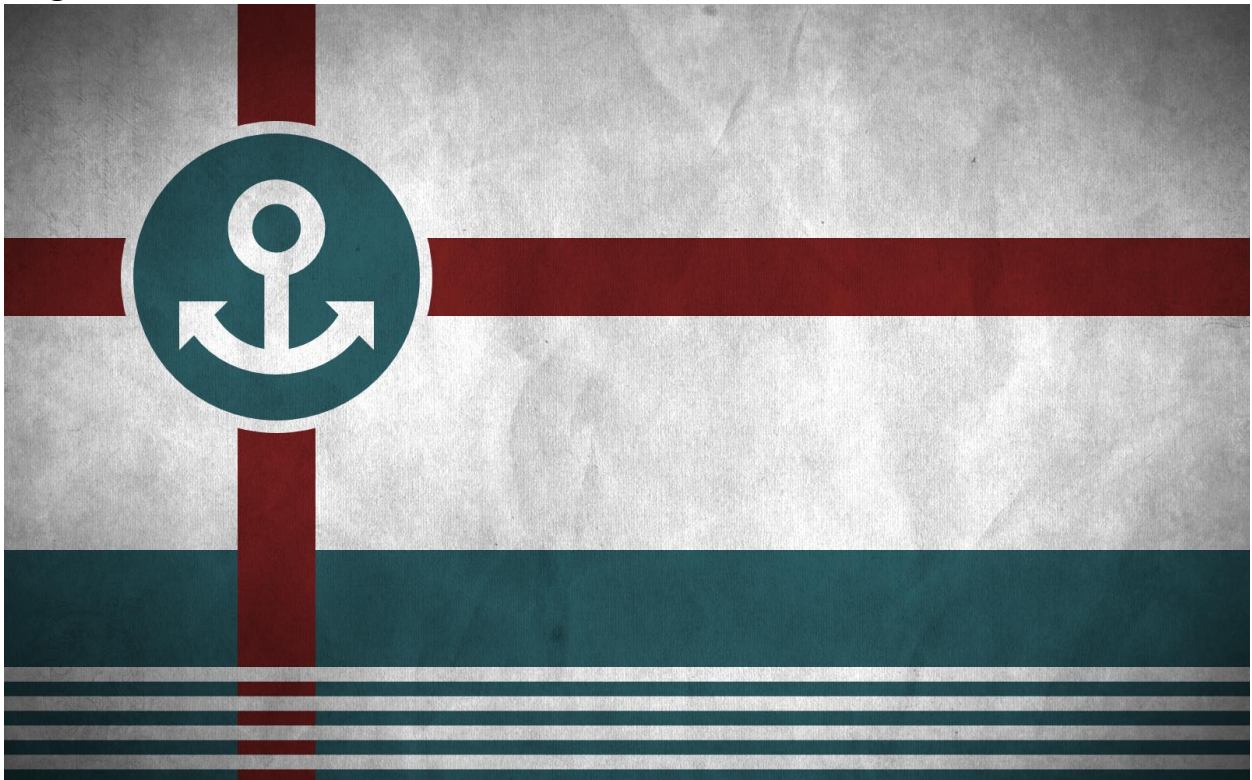
Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Flags-of-Touhou-Minoriko-Aki-394911855>

Flag of of House Georgeton, Baron Gobi



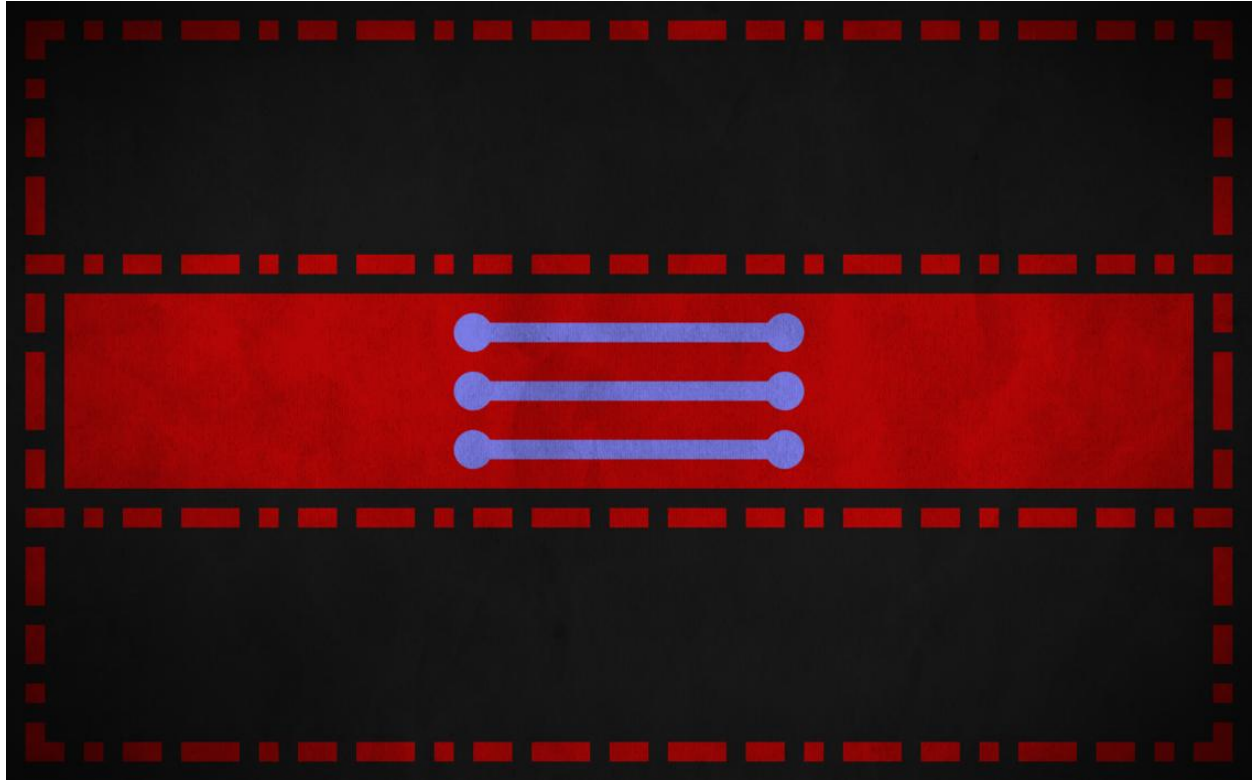
Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Original-Flag-13-Dual-Flag-324005880>

Flag of Ravit of House bahadur, Baron Indara



Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Flags-of-Touhou-Minamitsu-Murasa-384284543>

Flag of Doris , **Baroness Rommel**



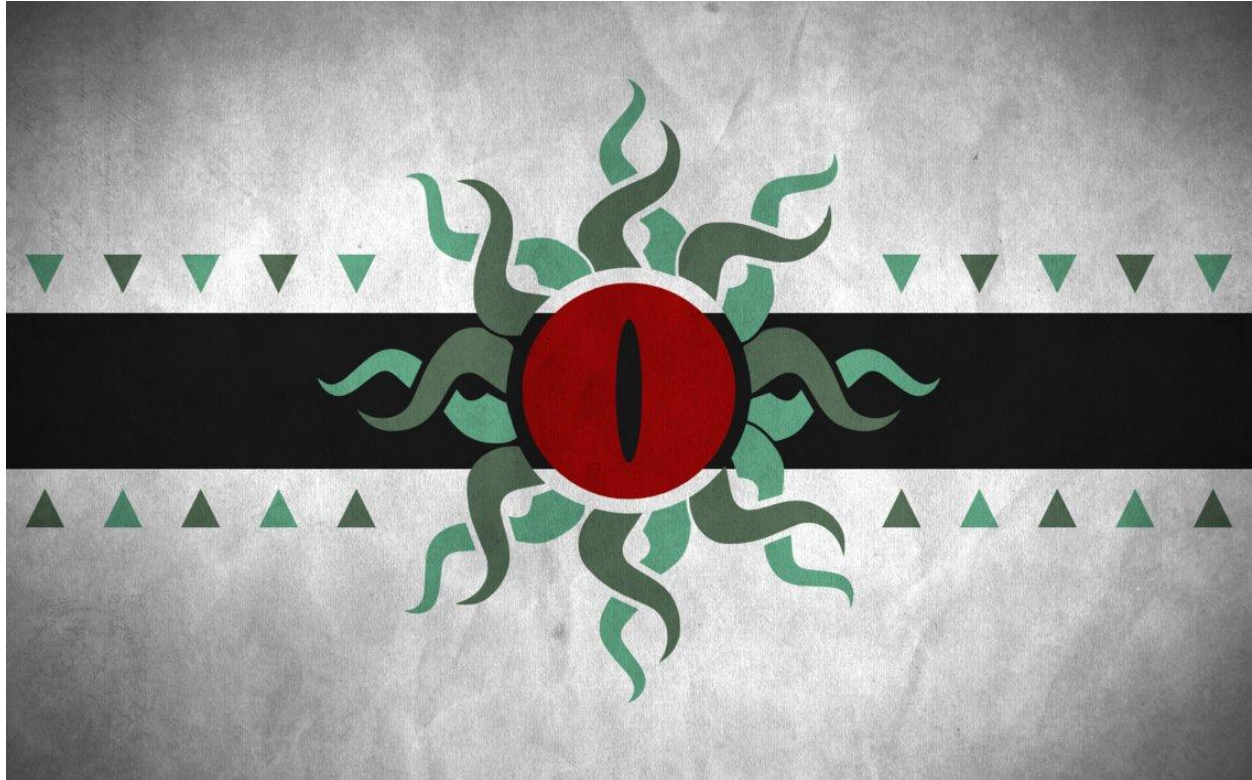
Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Flags-of-Touhou-Sekibanki-386040809>

Flag of Jatin of House Lurgadagig, Baron Vipian



Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Flags-of-Touhou-Hong-Meiling-397304257>

Flag of Iggugakhis of House Uragshykhikhi, Baroness Ushmigad



Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Flags-of-Touhou-Utsuho-Reiuj-364618599>

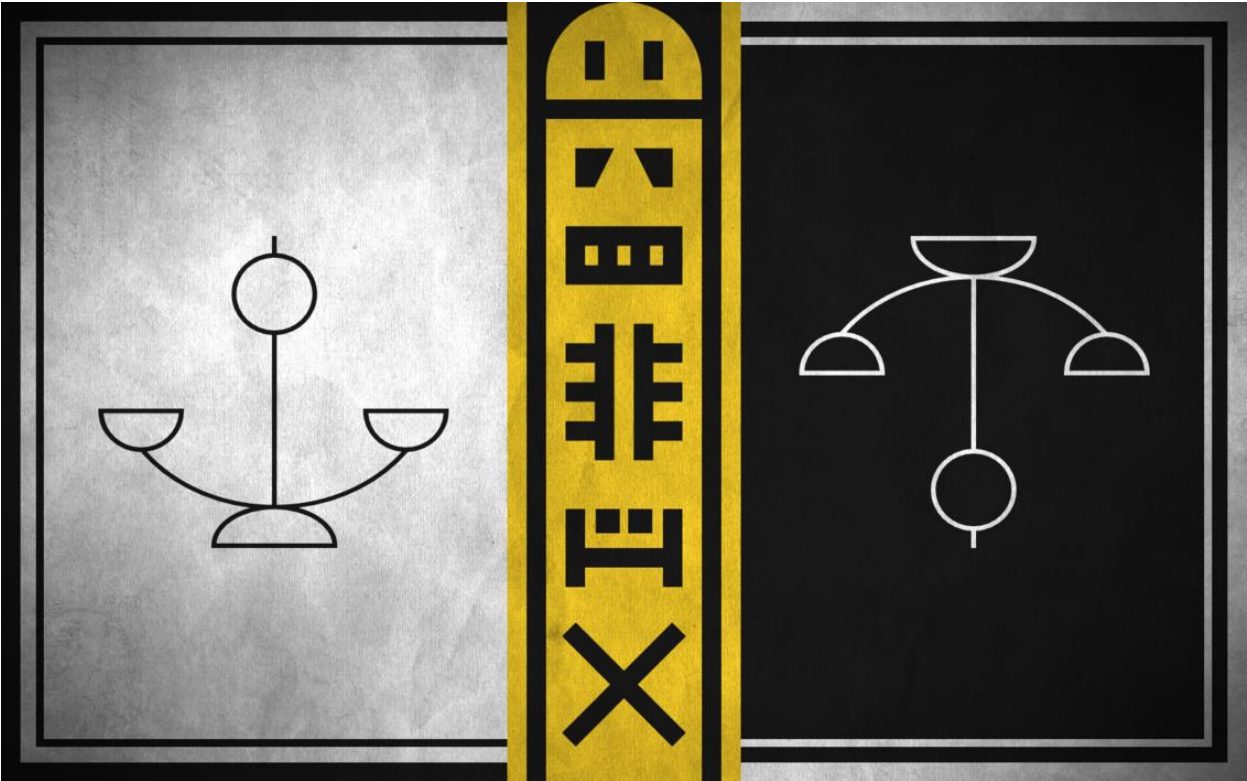
Flag of Urxossak of Bud-lineage U'r U'r Katai, Baron Surogota



Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Flags-of-Touhou-Yamame-Kurodani-399455686>

Other Flags and Symbols of Note

Iper'mar Nation



Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Flags-of-Touhou-Eiki-Shiki-Yamaxanadu-383772930>

This nomadic group of technological elitists are expanded on in **Stellar Reaches** #5, “Minor Races of Charted Space: The Iper'mar”

Tap-a-wewaka-atapas, the Bwap Guardians of Order



Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/SCP-Foundation-288878145>

This is the Bwap organization holding back the pirates across much of Bwap space. As the law enforcement/military arm of the Bwap, they acknowledge and respect the rule of the Emperor, and submit to his authority.

Depending on the properly filed and formatted documentation, as always.

The Banner of Union

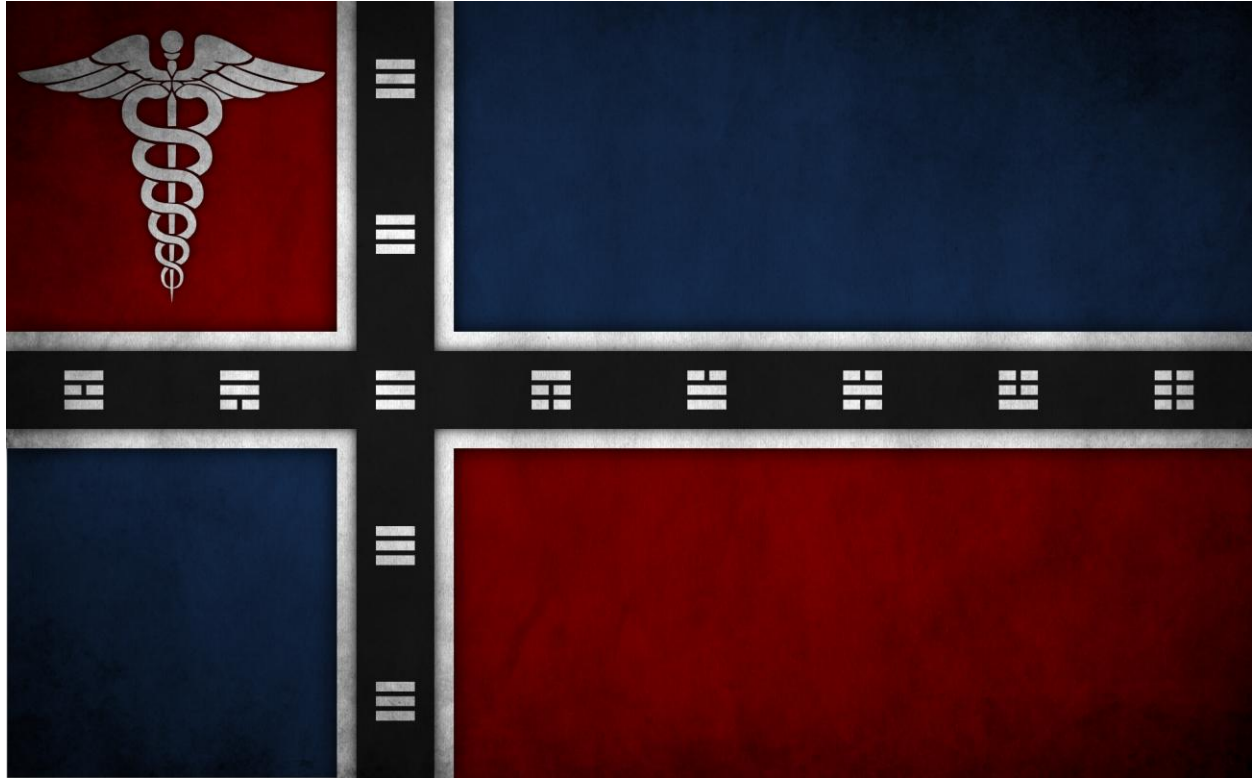


Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Custom-Flag-2-Wolf-257479524>

As the war banner of American Indians within the Empty Quarter, use of this flag has not been authorized... yet. Various mercenaries and braves remain under their own authority, and have not been placed under a single ethn-national command. If serious pirate raids strike American Indian worlds, a pan-tribal council is likely to bring all the military forces and associated mercenary groups under one authority, to better defend their worlds and families.

A major Vargr incursion would require high-tech weaponry to repel, and such ships (and the training to use them) are not easily found in the Imperial Six Subsectors. Assorted mercenary groups are keeping an eye out for such equipment, as they could easily make the difference between life and death for their homeworlds.

Charity LIC



Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Flags-of-Touhou-Eirin-Yagokoro-389359911>

Charity LIC is an important interstellar medical services corporation, found on both sides of the Lesser Rift. These people have pull in more Noble, Corporate and Military circles than you can imagine. Tread carefully.

Shadow Cartel



Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Custom-Flag-1-257478548>

Recent raids on known Shadow Cartel strongholds – especially the successful strikes of Hebrin – has uncovered formal flags bearing Shadow Cartel symbols. It is unknown if this implies political goals for the Cartel, or if the flags are only for unit cohesion.

Pirate Symbols, pre-Solomani Rim War



Artist: SPB, Link: <http://stratomunchkin.deviantart.com/art/Space-Pirate-Emblem-Comparison-400176668>

Before the start of the Solomani Rim War – and the withdrawal of the Sector Fleet – these were the traditional symbols of Imperial pirates, showing their ‘rank’ as determined by their respect within the pirating community. From left to right: “No-Nothin”, “Heavy Hitter”, “Dreaded”. The rise of the Shadow Cartel has broken the old ways, but some pirates refuse to kneel, and still use the old symbols. (See **Stellar Reaches** #14, page 61, “Crewboss Waddah bin ‘Ubadiyah a;’Beja” for the story of one of these men.)

The Shield of Pamushgar



Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/The-Wings-of-Freedom-411781232>

Mercenaries and starmercs in the employ of the Marquis Pamusghar are permitted to fly this flag while in his service. (Only family Household forces are allowed to fly the Marquis' own flag.)

Association of Hope



Artist: GreatPaperWolf, Link: <http://greatpaperwolf.deviantart.com/art/Custom-Flag-10-Dove-257483896>

Note: this flag is not flown by any military unit, but ships of the Association of Hope (founded by Sir Andrew Sandia; see **Stellar Reaches** #21, page 30-31, for more details) may be armed with sandcasters, decoys, and other non-destructive weapons.

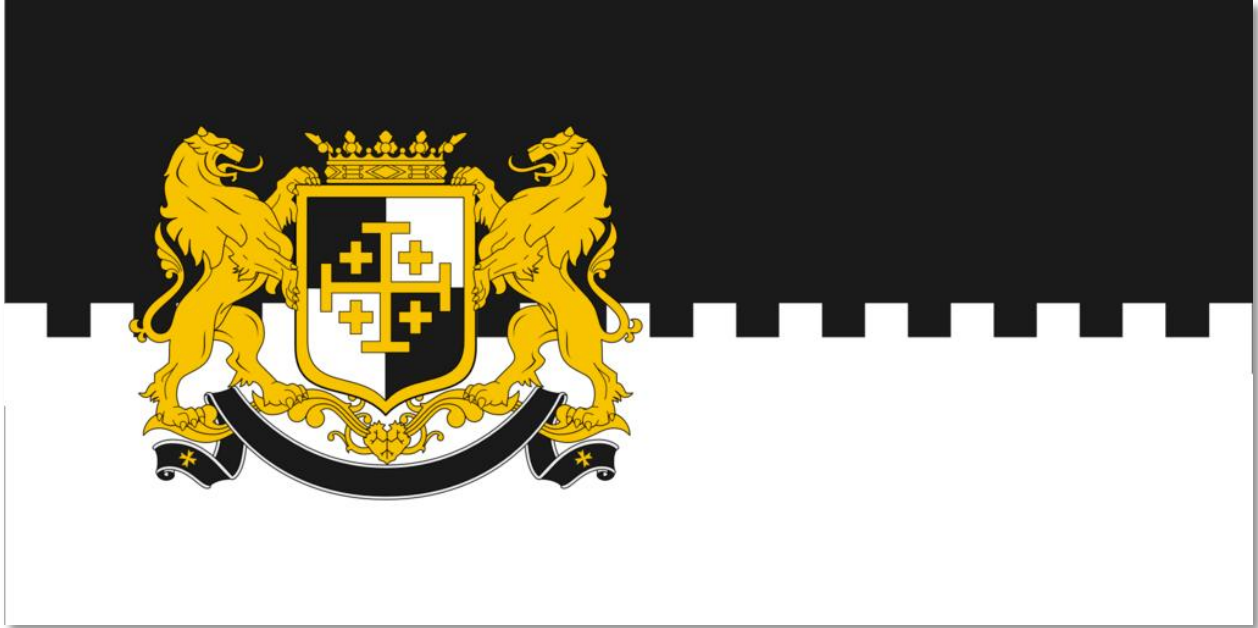
The Muslim Brotherhood



Artist: Levente Szekeres, Link: <http://deathpwnie.deviantart.com/art/Yemen-203128544>

The Muslim Brotherhood can be found throughout much of Imperial Space, including the Empty Quarter. Generally involved in charity, educational, political, and paramilitary activity, they are currently engaged in building up an Islamic response to current pirate incursions within the Empty Quarter.

The Most Serene Order of the Queen of Heaven – War Ensign



Artist: Levente Szekeres, Link: <http://deathpwnie.deviantart.com/art/War-Ensign-of-Jerusalem-280823518>

The Tokitre-based, Imperial Catholic, women-only Order provides both Blessed Guides (lay preachers) and Shining Swords (defenders of sacred sites, and bodyguards for local clergy). Additional details are available in **Stellar Reaches #8**, “Campaign Seed; Sacred Mission”.

To uphold the feudal obligations they have sworn before the Emperor, various military assets are being transferred to Imperial authority, notably the NJ Borm Battle Cruiser: these vessels ‘fly’ the War Ensign of their religious order.

Alternate Universe: When Power is Impotent

Guns are not Power

An article from The Nation⁸⁸ suggested a possible alternate view of the Six Subsectors: a region where Imperial Authority is a lot more theoretical than actual. Respect fades when the money and the guns of the metropolis – a.k.a. the Imperial Centre – are insufficient/unable to get the results it wants.

In the universe I write in, the Imperium is competently managed within the sector. Imperial might is coupled with the willingness to use it, and both are tied to a consistent, predicable policy that local authorities can trust and respect. Even with the Imperial Navy gone, the local centres of power are all pro-Imperial to a greater or lesser degree, and the legitimacy and the authority of the Iridium Throne is unquestioned.⁸⁹

This can be drastically revised or ignored, if the Referee wills it. Perhaps the Imperium has been pushing Bwap and Vilani too aggressively above the other local cultures, and when the big guns are pulled out, Solomani vengeance beings. Or again, the Imperium has been pushing up megacorporate interests over local hostility; and the shallow roots of megacorporate power are revealed to be what they are, when Imperial attention is drawn elsewhere.

You can even set up a rerun of current American policy in the Middle East... or Soviet policy in Afghanistan... or British policy on the NorthWestern Frontier, “The *original* Frontier Wars”.⁹⁰ Nearly all Traveller players are from the West, so nearly all are prone to make the same errors of arrogance and pride that Western powers have been making since the Battle of Teutoburger Wald.

Precisely how the PCs trip up – underestimating the hostility of the locals, misunderstanding the complex local politics, overestimating their technical superiority, focusing on the symptoms rather than the fundamentals, mistaking foes for friends, a poor understanding of what money *cannot* buy, assuming they have more time than they really have, or getting too closely bound to a misbehaving ally *waves to 1914 Serbia* – is not as important as seeing how quickly the PCs can recover from their mistakes. Learning from their mistakes is rare enough to be worthy of a great reward after they leave the sector. Perhaps leaving the sector *is* the reward!

The Referee can also play up the “ignorant, impoverished, incompetent religious racist fanatics” angle nice and strong. Playing to the Players pride and casual assumptions is the easiest way to position them *just so*...

⁸⁸ “A World in Which No One Is Listening to the Planet’s Sole Superpower”, <http://www.thenation.com/article/176409/world-which-no-one-listening-planets-sole-superpower>

⁸⁹ The authority of the Bwap Sector Duke, not so much. In addition to the race angle, he’s itching for a proper purge of local corruption, but that would step on a **lot** of powerful toes – and start a sequence of events that will end badly for all concerned.

⁹⁰ Actually, the Imperial-Zhodani Wars better fit the Roman-Parthian wars, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman-Parthian_Wars, than the British India Frontier Wars, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_history_of_the_North-West_Frontier. But, the British wars better fit the Six Subsectors, especially if you assume a hostile Julian Protectorate endlessly smuggling in arms, money, and technology, instead of the friendly one I assume in “Official Traveller”

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