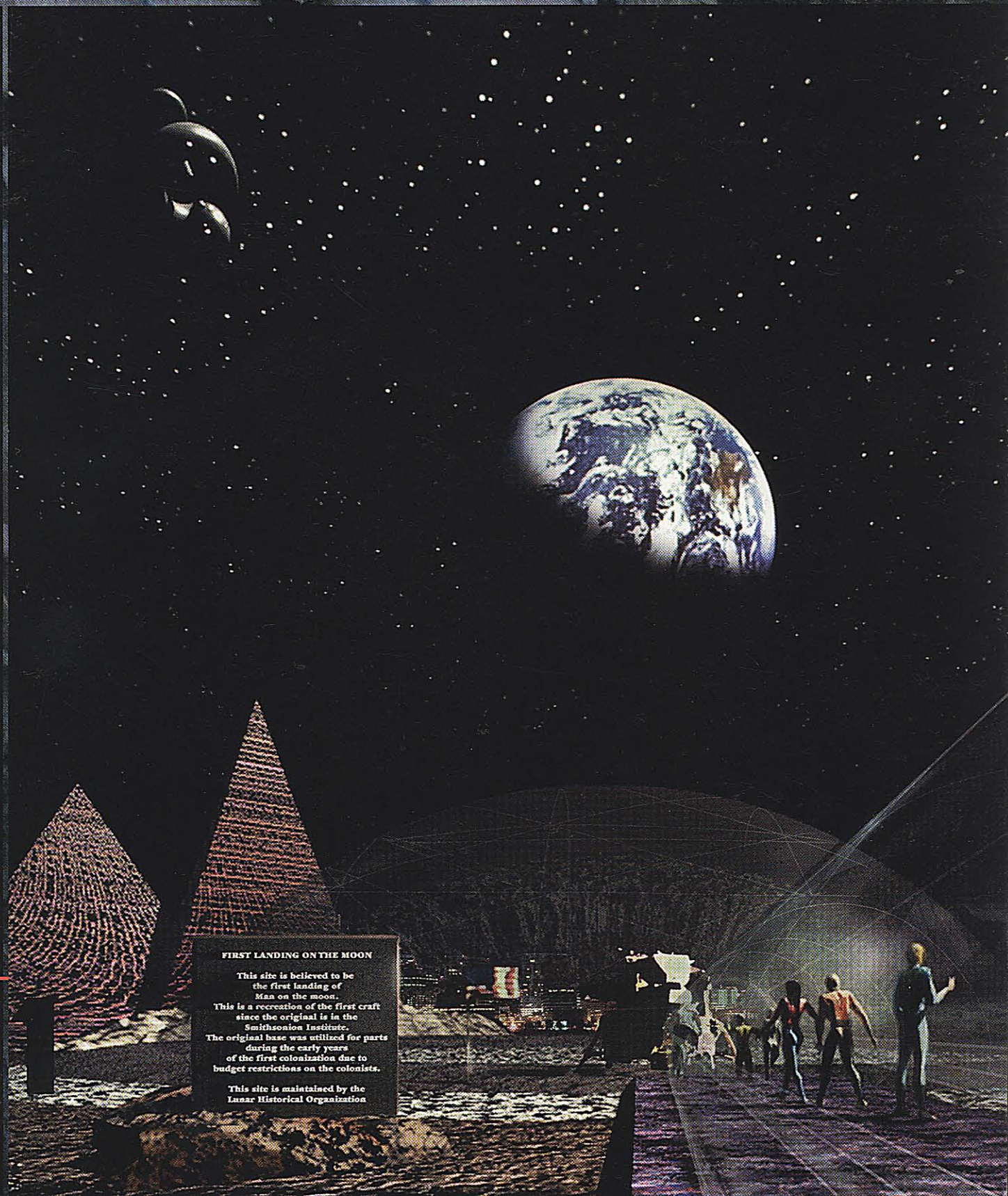


Children of Earth

The Solomani Rim in the New Era Vol. 2

\$6.50 U.S.

TRAVELLER CHRONICLE



FIRST LANDING ON THE MOON

This site is believed to be the first landing of Man on the moon. This is a recreation of the first craft since the original is in the Smithsonian Institute. The original base was utilized for parts during the early years of the first colonization due to budget restrictions on the colonists.

This site is maintained by the Lunar Historical Organization

The Traveller Chronicle

A Magazine Devoted to Traveller In All Of Its Forms

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The first part of a serialized novel by Terrence McInnes

All Solomani Rim information by Harold Hale

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Submissions: We are looking for good articles and illustrations for TTC. When submitting manuscripts and artwork enclose a stamped and self-addressed envelope with appropriate postage for return (if you want it returned). We also require that articles be presented on IBM compatible diskettes or be sent to us over the Internet (the preferred method).

Introduction to Children of Earth, Part 2

The Times They Are A Changing

As of the date I am typing this (August, 1996) Marc Miller's Traveller (also known to the terminally hip as 'T4') is either in a store near you or soon will be. Based to a large extent on the original Traveller rules c.1986, there are some additions, like a task resolution system, that help make T4 a more modern game mechanically speaking. At the same time, basic T4 provides introductory level players and referees a usable role-playing game that wouldn't overwhelm them with too much detail. The first milieu to use the T4 game mechanics revolves around the early days of the Third Imperium (Imperial year zero to be precise).

What does this mean for the Children of Earth setting? For now, Children of Earth (or 'COE' to the somewhat hip) will continue to be based in the game mechanics of Traveller: The New Era. There are two reasons for this: first, T4 *currently* does not have the level of complexity required--no vehicle design system, no small arms design system, etc.--these are necessary to create the unique arms and equipment used in the COE setting; and second, so much material has already been generated for Children of Earth using the TNE system, I felt that it was best to go ahead and release it "as is" rather than calling a time out for six months so that it can all be converted over to T4.

As time, the release of new Imperium Games Traveller products, and my learning curve permits, all the material generated for Children of Earth using the TNE game mechanics will be converted and released as a T4 sourcebook. I can promise no date when this will occur, as most of what must come together to make it happen is out of my hands. Those of you who are using or plan to use T4 game mechanics for your Traveller sessions should feel free to adapt the COE material that will appear in Traveller Chronicle for your use. If I can provide short T4 conversions for certain items along the way, I will.

For those of you who will be staying with the TNE game mechanics, please enjoy the material I have in store for you in coming issues. I pledge to give you more weaponry, vehicles, and other stuff designed from Fire, Fusion & Steel so that you can continue to run your campaigns (preferably COE campaigns--but then I'm biased) well into the future. We are the Keepers of the Flame.

Some of you have asked for adventure material using the COE setting. Well, I made an honest go at

having something ready for this issue, but circumstances did not permit it (What's Mea Culpa? Wasn't she married to Woody Allen?). Anyway, I promise to have some adventures in Traveller Chronicle #12, along with additional essays, the next installment of the Traveller Information Network, and the ever popular "much, much more".

What's In This Issue

This time around, the emphasis is on putting some "meat" on the "bones" of the sector and subsector data presented in the last issue. In this case, "meat" refers to the historical essays and other information that will give you a better sense of what is going on in the Solomani Rim, and how they got that way. With this information, you will be able to construct your own detailed scenarios involving the COE setting. There is also a TNE character generation sequence for Gabreelist priests and the Vegans. These character types are unique to the COE setting (there have always been Vegans in the Solomani Rim, but they were never officially NPCs or player characters). Additional character types unique to COE will be presented in the future.

Final Thoughts

I hope that you enjoy the Children of Earth setting. If you have any input, questions, comments (of a constructive nature), or you find what you think is errata, please feel free to e-mail me at hdhale@aol.com or send snail mail to my attention at Sword of the Knight Publications.

May the Divine Being ease your path through this life.

Harold Hale

Gabreelism

"I had the vision again during mediation. This time was more vivid than the last. I was surrounded by death and sorrow--the sorrow of a world dying: this world Earth. It all had something to do with computers. Why? What happens to the computers? I remember an invasion--is that what causes the computers to malfunction, an invasion? What kind of weapon would cause all the computers to malfunction at once?"

from the diary of
Dr. Gabrielle Annah Dahnara, Ph.D.
-4 NT/5645 AD/1128 IE

"I can offer you nothing--nothing but hope for the future and a better tomorrow through belief in the Divine Being....others ask you to sacrifice for the Party or the supreme leader. I ask only that you sacrifice for yourself and your fellow man. For I want no greater glory for what I do here, I am but a messenger."

Gabree-el Dahnara
from her "Call to the Faithful" sermon
delivered upon her return to Jerusalem
0 NT/5649 AD/1132 IE

"That which I have taught, the discipline that I have established, these will be your true masters after I have gone. Listen to Shoshanna and she will show you the way."

Priestess of the Faith Gabree-el Dahnara
from her final sermon delivered in Jerusalem
64 NT/5713 AD/1196 IE

Origins

Traditionally, Gabreelism was founded by Gabree-el Dahnara in Jerusalem on Terra (popularly known as Earth) in the Imperial year 1132, the year that she gave her famous "Call to the Faithful" speech. The New Terran Calendar uses this year as "year zero".

Gabree-el was born Gabrielle Annah Joachim. Her father, Dr. Karl Joachim, was a historian at the University of Alexandria and her mother, Almira Joachim, a computer technician with a corporation based in Cairo. Gabree-el had two brothers, Wilhelm and Lawrence, both of who died fighting for the Solomani Navy during the Second Solomani Rim War (1117-1130). She received her undergraduate degree at the University of California at Los Angeles (Los Angeles is where it is assumed she received her psionic training), and later received her Ph.D. in Middle Eastern Terran Religion from the University of Damascus, where she later became an associate professor. She met her husband Dassaq while visiting

Rome on holiday in 1123--they soon married and had a son, Daniel in 1125.

In 1128, she made public her famous prediction (actually it was a psionic vision--though she did not admit to it at the time) concerning the Collapse. Detained briefly by authorities (on grounds of inciting insurrection against the Solomani Military Government and inducing panic--charges later dropped, though it cost her professorship at Damascus), she was soon released. She spent her time afterward as the Chair of Antiquities and curator of the museum of the Terran Office of the Searchers for the One Faith based in Jerusalem.

Her psionic visions became all too true in 1130, as did others visions (later 'prophesies') about subsequent events. Her husband Dassaq was killed in the initial stages of the Collapse on Earth (something she hadn't foreseen), and she soon found herself leading the other Searchers for the One Faith members (her son among them) on an exodus out of Jerusalem, eventually ending up at the vast refugee camps on the outskirts of the forbidden city of Mecca. It was there in the refugee camps that Gabrielle formulated the groundwork for the new religion based on her husband's writings (which later came to be known as The Book of the Faith). In 1132 she led her followers back to Jerusalem where she changed the spelling of her name to 'Gabree-el' and established the One Faith, or as it became known, Gabreelism.

Sacred Texts

The texts considered sacred by adherents include The Book of the Faith, and the writings and teachings of Gabree-el as compiled in The Book of Gabree-el (recent printings of The Book of the Faith include The Book of Gabree-el as its final section). The writings and teachings of Shoshanna (the current Priestess of the Faith and Gabree-el's granddaughter) are also considered important, though somewhat less universally accepted.

The initial draft of The Book of the Faith was actually written by Gabree-el's husband Dassaq Dahnara (Chair of the Terran Office of the Searchers for the One Faith), who was killed during the Collapse. He had hoped that its message of tolerance and belief would unite humanity. The extent to which Gabree-el edited or re-wrote her husband's original work during the Meccan Exile is unknown, but it is generally believed that she did conduct some revisions.

The Book of the Faith is divided into 12 chapters, each one devoted to some broad topic, with 12 subdivisions which cover specific aspects of that topic. The significance of the number 12 to Dassaq or Gabree-el is unknown, though the fact that their son

Daniel was born on the 12th day of the 12th month may have been an inspiration. At one time scholars believed that a 13th chapter may have existed, but thus far no one has found any manuscripts or portions of manuscripts of this chapter.

Organization

Gabreelism is hierarchical in nature. At the top of the hierarchy is the Priestess of the Faith (sometimes known simply as 'The Priestess' or 'Prophetess', though the later term is now considered archaic by many adherents), whose role is to speak on all matters of faith and morality and who has absolute authority in all matters. Thus far there have been two women who have held the title: Gabree-el, who led the Faith from its beginnings until her death in 1196, and Shoshanna, Gabree-el's granddaughter and the current Priestess of the Faith.

Acting as senior advisors to the Priestess of the Faith is the Council of Twelve. These are priests of long service, many of whom lead distinguished careers before being selected personally by Gabree-el or Shoshanna to be part of the Council. In addition to their role as advisors, members of the Council of Twelve and their support staff also act as the "eyes and ears" of the Priestess of the Faith whenever she wants information on happenings outside of Jerusalem or wants a special errand of some sort performed (a member of the Council of Twelve it is said participated in the truce negotiations with the Dingir League).

Arrayed below the Priestess of the Faith and the Council of Twelve are various orders of priests, each of which has a specialized function. All orders have their own Executive Council, made up of a non-voting chairperson and 11 voting members, which reports directly to the Priestess of the Faith. Each Executive Council concerns itself with issues of a Faith-wide nature, and has a number of Planetary Councils (Terra actually has two because of its high population-- one for each hemisphere) which report to it. The Planetary Councils on the other hand administer the orders on a planet by planet basis, and have a number of subordinate councils (the number of levels depending on the planetary population) below them which deal with regional issues.

Priests

There are four regular (also known as clerical) orders and a special honorary order of priests within the Gabreelist Faith:

Order of Administrators: The order of priests responsible for keeping the Faith's administrative records, managing the Faith's property, and constituting the Faith's bureaucracy. It is the second largest of the orders, and the one from which most non-players characters will come from. Administrators can

be found in all starports and at the Faith's administrative centers and temples.

Order of Protectors: This order consists exclusively of psionically talented Gabreelists. Originally the priests of this order were recruited to deal with Solsec activities to suppress Gabreelism. Today they still provide primary security for the Priestess of the Faith, as well as other members of the Gabreelist hierarchy, the Faith's temples and those who come to worship there. They also screen all candidates to the priesthood, and conduct investigations of misconduct involving priests.

Order of Searchers: This is the scholarly order, who continue the research into the ultimate nature of the Divine Being begun by the Searchers for the One Faith. Their work takes them not only to the rare book archives of Terra, but to other worlds looking for answers as well. The honorary leader of this order is the Priestess of the Faith herself, though practically speaking the executive council of the order coordinates all research. It is the smallest of the clerical orders, and the most difficult order to enter.

Order of Teachers: The largest of all the clerical orders, it is made up of individuals who are responsible for converting non-believers and generally administering to the spiritual needs of the masses. Over the years they have evolved additional, though unofficial, duties--the most important of which is the monitoring government activities. As the ombudsman of the lower classes, they provide an important check on the government's power (or abuse of it).

Order of Crusaders: This is an honorary order open to all members of the Faith who have provided outstanding service to Gabreelist cause. Typically members of this order are military personnel, though civilian members of the community have also been made members. Only a member of the Council of Twelve or the Priestess of the Faith herself can designate someone to be a part of the order, though nominations can be issued by an executive council for consideration. Membership in the order entitles an individual to special privileges at Gabreelist temples and other facilities.

Within Gabreelism, all clergy (with the exception of The Priestess of the Faith and the honorary members of the Order of Crusaders) have the official title of 'priest' regardless of their gender. When addressing a junior ranking priest (those rank six or below), it is appropriate to use the term 'reverend' and their first or last name (which ever they prefer)--thus Priest, 2nd Level Michael Johnson would be addressed as 'Reverend Michael' or 'Reverend Johnson'. Priests of senior rank (seven or above) are referred to as

'monsignor', or if they are an active member of a leadership council (including the Council of Twelve), as 'councilor' and their last name--thus 'Monsignor Vasquez' or 'Councilor Evans'--it is considered inappropriate to refer to any senior ranking priest by their first name unless you are given permission. The Priestess of the Faith is the exception to this, and rules governing the appropriateness of names or titles has been determined by the individual themselves. The current Priestess of the Faith, Shoshanna, prefers 'Priestess of the Faith Shoshanna', 'Priestess Shoshanna', 'Your Grace', or 'Your Holiness'. She is sometimes referred to in Promethean writings as 'Prophetess Shoshanna', though this is not considered standard.

All clerical priests have special clothing that they wear to distinguish them from the public at large. In the case of seminary students this is a simple loose fitting knee-length gray tunic with matching gray pants. Junior ranking priests have several different "regulation" garments that they can wear based upon climate and comfort, all of which are light to medium brown in color. Senior ranking priest garments tend to more tailored and ornate than those of junior ranking priests and are dark brown (almost black) in color, with council members wearing bright orange tunics as a symbol of their position. Female priests of all ranks will sometimes wear long skirts in a color appropriate to their status. Priestess Shoshanna has opted for the same type flowing white robes trimmed in black and green and white head scarf that her grandmother wore during her lifetime, and always appears in public dressed in this manner.

The clerical priesthood is open to anyone who wants to apply, so long as they meet the proper criteria. The first of the requirements is the satisfactory completion of Confirmation. Confirmation involves four stages and is conducted by the Order of Protectors: a background check to confirm the information indicated in your application, a physical to determine your overall health, a psychological examination to determine mental fitness, and a psionic probe which is used to explore the individual's motivations for wanting to become a priest (this is done to find any underlying deception or problems not found by the other tests).

Those deemed worthy then go on to the Seminary. Seminaries can be found on all the worlds of the Terran Republic with a population of a million or more. Seminary School lasts for four years, during which time the individual is prepared for his or her duties as a priest. The emphasis of the instruction is on religious training, but also covers other subjects as well, including psionics, for those who are so gifted.

Toward the end of their final year of Seminary, the priest candidates decide which of the four clerical orders they would like to join. Not everyone is assigned to the first order on their list upon graduation

(particularly those applying to the Order of Searchers, for which there is stiff competition for slots), but priests are free to chose another order to serve in after four years of service.

All priests are permitted to marry and have children. Provisions are made by the Faith for the housing, food and medical care and other basic needs of the families of priests, and the spouses of priests are permitted to have careers in the community, so long as those careers to not go against the teachings of the Faith. Upon reaching the age of majority, the children of priests are given preference in gaining admission to the seminary, and are eligible for scholarships to approved universities.

Advancement in the priesthood is not automatic--competency exams are required periodically to move up to the next level, as are periodic psionic tests (this to ensure that corrupt priests are not promoted into positions of authority).

Membership in an order is guaranteed for life so long as the individual remains in good standing. An ethical code, the Code of Rosetti, governs the behavior of all priests, (including provisions for members of the Order of Crusaders). Those who violate the Code are subject to punishment, even expulsion from their order and the priesthood. Expelled clerical priests are subject to government monitoring, and can be imprisoned if they are psionically talented and are caught using their psionic talents for personal gain. A priest may also chose to leave the priesthood voluntarily. Those that chose to do so are not subject to the same kind of scrutiny that as expelled priests, but they are also subject to the same prohibition against the use of psionics.

At the age of 72, a priest can chose to retire. There are Gabreelist-sponsored facilities which cater to elderly priests and their special needs, though more active retired priests are free to travel using Faith-owned or Faith subsidized transportation. Many take advantage of this to go to other worlds within the Republic, where they can always find accommodations at any local temple.

Practice

Adherents pledge the commitment of their lives to the Divine Being, and promise to follow the teaching of the Priestess of the Faith. Beyond that, not much else is required, except that the individual contribute to the best of their ability to the Faith and to the community (whether that be monetarily--or preferably--through good works), and take time each day to mediate and reflect on the day's events.

To Gabreelists, the daily ritual of meditation and reflection is known as the Contemplation. Ideally, Contemplation is performed in quiet, comfortable surroundings. During the Contemplation, the individual stops all other activities, assumes a comfortable sitting position of the floor and clears their

mind of whatever may be going on at the moment. Prayers to the Divine Being are also conducted during the Contemplation, in which the individual asks for forgiveness of any transgressions, and asks for blessings for themselves and for others. The Contemplation should normally last at least 30 minutes, though it can take longer or shorter than this depending on the circumstances and the individual (persons in a combat zone for example, may not have this luxury), and is generally conducted at the end of the day--though many prefer to do it in the morning before starting their day.

Gabreelist spiritual centers are called temples. The facilities at a temple vary from region to region and world to world, but normally consist of the following: a Contemplation area, which is a large room with comfortable places to sit or recline (it is customary to remove one's shoes before entering); a series of cubicles where individuals can meet with a priest and receive guidance in the form of counseling services and religious instruction; a room where special rites are conducted by the priests; and an area devoted to living quarters for the priests that oversee the temple.

The largest temple and Gabreelism's spiritual hub is the Temple of Faith, which is located on the Mount of Olives in the old section of Jerusalem. It is a large multi-story structure constructed in such a manner so that the many archeological sites that reside beneath are undisturbed. Its Contemplation area, which can accommodate up to 5,000 worshipers at one time, is particularly known for its beauty and elegant simplicity. The residence of the Priestess of the Faith, the members of the Council of Twelve, and their families, many members of the Order of the Searchers and the Order of Administrators also work here in the administrative wing on a daily basis.

Only the Priestess of the Faith conducts formal sermons. These take place every Saturday afternoon (Jerusalem time) at the Temple of the Faith, and can last anywhere from a half hour to sometimes as long as two hours (as was the case when Shoshanna announced the truce with the Dingir League). Normally they consist entirely of religious instruction, but can also include prophecy (if the Priestess of the Faith sees fit to reveal a psionic vision), and any official proclamations concerning the Faith. All sermons are carried live by the local information networks on Earth, and copies of the sermons are shipped to all the other worlds within the Republic upon their conclusion. Other much less formal sermons are also routinely conducted during other times of the week (for those who wish to attend in person) at all temples, but they are more like prayer groups than lectures by clergy.

Divisions

In theory, Gabreelism is one united faith, with the Priestess Shoshanna as its leader. In reality, divisions

amongst the Gabreelists have formed over the past several years since Gabree-el's death. These divisions have become most visible with the appearance of sects within the Faith.

Individuals who belong to these sects believe Gabree-el to have been the Messiah, or in some cases, the Divine Being's last and greatest prophet. Some have even beatified her, and insist on calling her 'St. Gabree-el' in all their documents and teachings (followers of these sects will from time to time claim to have spotted Gabree-el at various locations and claim to have had conversations with her).

It is ironically on Prometheus that the largest of these sects exist. The most prominent of these is the Followers of Gabree-el the Messiah. The Followers claim that Gabree-el was a divine prophet who will one day return to establish a heavenly kingdom through out the Universe. Though they still recognize the leadership of Shoshanna, they are highly critical of any proclamation or pronouncement by her that they believe contradicts the teachings of Gabree-el (or at least their interpretation of it). Followers of Gabree-el the Messiah currently make up about ten percent of the Promethean population, and hold a number of high posts within the Gabreelist clergy on that world.

Extent

"He who controls the area controls the religion."
Latin Proverb

The spread of Gabreelism was rapid on Terra. By 1140, the year of Rosetti's missionary expedition to Prometheus, significant numbers of people in the Middle Eastern and North African regions of Terra had been converted. In 1160 (four years prior to the founding of the republic), they could be found on all the continents of Earth, and made up a majority of the population in the Eastern Coalition. Gabreelists can now be found throughout the Terran Republic (making up the vast majority of the population of Prometheus and over 50 percent of the population of Terra), on Terra's client worlds, and where ever Terran explorers and merchants venture in the Solomani Rim.

Missionary Activities

The Gabreelists have been very active in recruiting new members and any human, whether they are "natural", "genetically altered", or "cloned" is eligible. Gabreelist priests accompany all official Terran exploration, trade, and diplomatic missions in hopes of making new converts. While there have only been three major missionary specific expeditions (involving large numbers of priests and large amounts of resources) launched since the founding of the Faith--Rosetti's to Prometheus, Jeng's to Nusku and Santiago's to Lagash--many smaller ones involving a few priests at a time have taken place over the years. This was

particularly true during the Conquistador Era, when dozens of expeditions were sent out to the inhabited systems surrounding Terra. It is likely that this activity will be renewed in the future, as explorers begin to make contact with worlds that were once part of the Bootean Federation and points rimward.

One controversial aspect of missionary activity that has arisen recently is the recruitment of non-humans into the Faith. Gabree-el had a diplomatic solution to the problem--declare any non-human species that was judged to be "culturally human" and "naturally sentient beings" to be considered eligible for inclusion in the Faith. While this politically expedient definition works for the Terran Hiver colony (members of a major race, which so far as anyone know is on its way to being thoroughly "humanized"), and was eventually stretched to include the genetically "uplifted" sentient Dolphins, it does not work for the decidedly non-humanly cultured Vegans encountered during the coreward exploration by the Republic. Shoshanna has taken the Vegan question "under study", her delay perhaps a reflection of the serious divisions that official recognition of Vegan converts to Gabreelism could cause.

Beliefs

"Whoever believes in the Divine Being and does what is right shall know spiritual reward--they have nothing to fear or to regret."

from The Book of the Faith
Ch. 2, Section 5

"Do for others as you would have them do for you."
from The Book of the Faith
Ch. 4, Section 1

Special Rites

In addition to any other special rites from their original faith an individual may still observe, there are several other special rites which are unique to Gabreelism and are observed by most of its adherents.

"Call to the Faith Day" is celebrated every November 23rd (the day Gabree-el gave her first official sermon to the masses). On that day, all members of the Gabreelist Faith are expected to fast during daylight hours and attend group Contemplation meetings which last several hours. At sunset, those who gathered together for group Contemplation join in a celebration in which gifts are exchanged and a banquet is conducted with dishes that are prepared by the participants.

"Yaherzet" (the origin of this word is unknown--it is thought to be the name of an ancient ritual rediscovered by Gabree-el while doing research at Damascus) is performed on January 10th, and commemorates the anniversary of the Collapse on Earth. Family members gather together for the reciting of the Prayer for the

Dead (usually performed by the eldest person present) and the lighting of candles in memory of the dead.

A brief formal prayer, known as the Life Prayer, is conducted by a priest in a special ceremony for all newborn infants at the local temple. All friends and relatives of the parents are invited to attend and bring a gift for the child. A similar ceremony, the Acceptance, is conducted for children reaching the age of 12 (when Gabreelist children are ceremonially accepted into the Faith).

Purely Gabreelist marriage and funeral ceremonies (frequently these are modified according to individual tradition) are also conducted by priests, and are a study in contrasts. Wedding ceremonies are short and rather informal in nature, with a few friends and family of the couple in attendance. Funeral ceremonies on the other hand can be long, and rather extravagant, culminating in the ritual cremation of the deceased and the scattering of their ashes according to their wishes (or the wishes of the bereaved, if none were stated by the deceased).

Ethics

Gabreelism borrows heavily from the Judeo-Christian-Muslim traditions, but also includes influences from Buddhism, Taoism, the Philosophies of Merlna, Gaolyuism, and the Sanctaterra Movement. Because of its nature, Gabreelism is a rather tolerant on most ethical matters. There are certain principles that are considered universal, however, and everyone is expected to live by them. These are summed up in The Book of the Faith, and include such things as prohibitions on murder, incest, rape, theft, vandalism, and the like. Among the more unique provisions is a prohibition on the creation of artificial sentient life. All of the various universal principles have been codified into the Republic's legal system and penal codes.

A strong work ethic is emphasized in Gabreelism as is communal self-reliance. The Book of the Faith says, "those that are of able body and mind should earn that which is given to them by others", and this is reflected in the attitudes of the people. The ability to earn one's keep is a point of honor, and an individual who is down on his or her luck is much more likely to rely on the support of family or friends than to go to the government for assistance. This is where the Faith is able to provide invaluable assistance. Because of its special status with the masses (as a provider of hope, separate and apart from the government bureaucracy), priests are able to help many individuals who otherwise would not take assistance from "strangers". Numerous social programs, dealing with everything from teen counseling to health services, to the basic necessities (food, clothing, shelter) are provided by the Faith to its members. There are even programs on worlds within the Republic to assist local small manufacturers in rebuilding the technological base of their planet.

All this can be paid for by the Faith because of strict

tithing (ten percent of annual income). All citizens of the Republic must tithe to the Faith, even those who are not members. In most communities the assessment is taken out like regular income taxes, though it should be noted that the government never collects the money, instead the withholdings are sent directly to the Faith by the employer. Corporations must also tithe, but they are allowed to do work for the community themselves, provided they keep accurate records of their activities.

There are some perfectionist sects on Prometheus, which revolve around various cults of Gabree-el. In all cases they try to emulate what they believe to be what Gabree-el's lifestyle was while she was on Terra, and are intolerant to one degree or other of behavior they consider outside the norm, and may publicly scold someone or conduct protests because of it. So far the Faith and the government have tolerated these sects, though that toleration could end if they come unaccepting of the leadership of Shoshanna or begin to infringe grossly upon the rights of others.

Doctrine

Not all doctrine within Gabreelism is universal. There are allowances made for individual interpretation about such subjects as polygamy, birth control, appropriate attire, the use of certain technologies, and other issues. All however follow the teachings of the Priestess of the Faith, and hold certain dogma and precepts to be absolute--a summary of these appears below.

- There is but one God, known to the Gabreelists as the Divine Being. The Divine Being is known by many names--'Yahweh', 'Allah', 'Vishnu', 'Holy One', 'Gaia'--all of them equally valid as they are but one facet of the infinite facets of the same entity.

- The Divine Being is ageless and timeless, all-powerful and all-knowing of events both past and present and is neither male nor female. It cannot be seen by our eyes, but can be experienced and felt. Its existence cannot be proven purely by logic or scientifically--a leap of faith must be taken to bridge the gap between physical reality and of the Divine Being.

- That which we know as the Universe is actually the latest in an infinite series of universes, each being born, aging over billions of years, and dying away, only to be replaced by a new one. The constant in this endless cycle is the Divine Being, which is responsible for it.

- The Divine Being creates through evolution--thus mankind (and for that matter other races) is the result of millions of years of its work. The Divine Being did not create sentient creatures merely for its own amusement, but for some purpose that will not be revealed to us until we are joined with it. Beyond that,

it is futile to question to motives of the Divine Being, since we are incapable of understanding them beyond the most rudimentary level in our current state of existence.

- All naturally occurring sentient creatures (and some semi-sentient creatures) have a life spirit or soul. The soul survives the death of the body and is reincarnated in a new one. Existence consists of a cycle of births, lives, and deaths, so that the soul can gain the experience and the knowledge necessary for the Final Judgment at the end of this Universe. Those who are judged to be righteous will become holy and one with the Divine Being. Those souls who refuse to learn the lessons of existence will fail the Final Judgment and will cease to exist when this universe ends.

- Forces of light and darkness (results of the Divine Being's creation) permeate our universe, in a constant struggle with each other. Those that can accept that which is good and righteous will be looked upon favorably by the Divine Being, and their struggle to become holy will be eased. Those that choose to follow the forces of darkness will have their burdens increased and their way through their existence made more difficult.

- Prophets and holy persons are inspired by the Divine Being from time to time to reveal some portion of the lessons to be learned during our existence in this universe to the masses. Gabree-el was one of the Divine Being's prophets, as was Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, and others. By collecting their lessons together and understanding the common threads, we come closer to the Divine Being. There have also been false prophets, those influenced by the forces of evil in the Universe. The Rebellion Era was a time of false prophets, people who led humanity nearly to its doom.

- One can obtain forgiveness for transgressions (sometimes known as sins) through the Contemplation and prayer. Transgressions can vary in severity from a minor nuisance to severe. Words and thoughts are not in and of themselves transgressions--actions and deeds are.

- The ultimate fate of an individual is in his or her hands. The future is not fixed, but can be predicted or seen based upon the actions or events leading up to the time an event occurs. Not even the Divine Being controls the future beyond knowing when the Universe will end, because sentient creatures have free will, and a universe in which the future has already been predetermined makes freewill superfluous.

Taboos

Like most other religions, there are certain taboos

involving Gabreelism. Some of these, like the prohibition against sex with underaged children, are fairly universal through out Known Space. The most noteworthy of the Gabreelist taboos, however, involves the use and/or creation of artificial intelligence.

Gabreelists believe that only the Divine Being should create sentient life forms of any kind. This belief stems from their conviction that while mankind (or another sentient species) may be able to endow any creature or even a machine with sentience, only the Divine Being can endow them with a soul. The result of mankind's tinkering with the creation of artificially sentient mechanical lifeforms was the unleashing of millions of soulless sentient creatures (Virus) which have no reason to fear later divine retribution for their actions, and who became a tool of the evil forces that permeate the Universe. Virus may have destroyed nearly all the sentient races in Known Space, and could have very well destroyed others that are as of yet are unknown.

It is considered, therefore, morally justified not only to take steps to prohibit the creation of artificially sentient mechanical life, but to also seek out and terminate such life forms preemptively, before they can cause further destruction elsewhere in the Universe. To Gabreelists, they not only have a right to do this, but they also have a moral obligation.

Members of the Faith use similar reasoning for their beliefs regarding biologically based, artificially sentient lifeforms (sometimes known as "uplifted" races or species). Sentient Dolphins were nearly exterminated during the Terran Civil War because of their support for the Solomani Party which was initially judged as a sign of their "soullessness" (only a decree by Gabree-el at the end of the war proclaiming they did indeed have souls, rescued the remaining population). Thus far, no other uplifted races have been encountered by the Terrans in large numbers (a small number of non-human sentient primates known as Simians found on Iilike are closely monitored by the government), so it is likely that beliefs regarding other biologically based artificially sentient beings (the Solomani Confederation is known to have created dozens of them) will evolve over the next several decades as more such races are encountered.

Gabreelism and the Terran Republic Government

"There was a time when one did not know when the Faith ended and the State began...such as it was during the reign of Gabree-el. "

Anonymous Terran Historian

Gabreelism has had a major influence on Terran Republic law. In addition to the laws governing artificial sentient lifeforms, other aspects of the teaching of The Book of the Faith and the Book of Gabree-el have been incorporated into the Terran

Republic's legal statutes.

The government does nothing to discourage the public's fear and hatred of AI lifeforms. In fact, it routinely pays bounties to individuals who hunt down and kill sentient robots. There is even a special task force within the Terran Republic Navy, known popularly as the "Von Helsing Squadron", which is tasked with tracking vampire ships and destroying them. The exploits of the Von Helsing Squadron have been elevated to near heroic status within the Republic, and the task force routinely receives the best ships, the best equipment, and maximum publicity for their efforts.

Technically speaking, the Priestess of the Faith has no official role within the Republic's government, and there has been a certain amount of manipulation of public opinion over the years to insure that both institutions are thought of separately. As a practical matter, however, both Priestesses of the Faith and the rest of the Gabreelist hierarchy have been and are very much intimately involved in its operation.

Gabree-el had a primary role in organizing the Republic, and continued to have a very visible and influential presence thereafter as a member of the Republic's Executive Council until her death. She realized that to a large extent the success of the Eastern Coalition and the later Terran Republic depended upon her personal charisma and ability to get people of politically divergent points of view to agree on a course of action most beneficial to all concerned. By being part of the Executive Council, she could keep on top of developments and personally intervene before disputes could escalate out of control.

With the Republic now stable, Shoshanna has maintained a lower key (though no less influential) approach. While refraining from direct participation in the Executive Council, she maintains enough influence with her brother Jorge Dahnara and the other Executive Council members to insure that any actions she deems necessary are carried out. She is very careful to arrange meetings with government officials and representatives out of the public eye--the perception of a separation of religion and government by the people being extremely important to her even if in reality the line is often blurred.

Until recently, her primary concern was on improving the lot of the common people of the Republic--many public works projects such as the rebuilding of libraries, museums, and the like were initiated by the government at her request. The number of priests monitoring government activity on the local level has also been increased to help root out corruption within the bureaucracy (this effort parallels reforms made by Jorge Dahnara and the Executive Council to reform the civil service).

Shoshanna's vision of a new Vampire fleet attack on Terra prompted her to become more involved in interstellar affairs, and caused her to use her influence

with the Executive Council (over her brother's objections) to initiate a diplomatic mission to Dingir on the eve of a war with that world. She is also arranging for the Faith to sponsor additional exploration/missionary expeditions into the Wilds rimward. In that way perhaps, if Terra were indeed to become the victim of a massive Vampire ship assault, the message of Gabree-el could continue to exist amongst the stars.

Gabreelism and Terran Republic Society

Because of the Faith's strong influence over the Republic's government from the upper echelons to the local level, the perceived role it plays as a check on the power of government, the various programs it has instituted to reach out to people of all social levels, and its role as a spiritual leader for so many of the Republic's population, the Gabreelist Faith has an extremely powerful effect on Terran Republic society. There is virtually no place that someone can go on Terra or Prometheus without seeing some symbol of Gabreelism, whether it be a temple, the sighting of a priest walking down the street, or some reference to the Faith made by someone in passing.

This persuasiveness is not seen as something negative by the majority of the people within the Republic. They are happy with a system that they believe protects their freedom and looks out for their best interests. They recognize that what they live under is not a democracy in the truest sense of the word, but it essentially serves the same function. In some ways they consider it superior--there is no public haggling or backbiting over what direction government should take, no corrupt politicians who promise one thing to voters and deliver the opposite. The civil service bureaucracy is there to serve them, not the other way around.

Because of the religious taboos concerning artificial sentient life, the use of robots within the Terran Republic is far less than it naturally should be given the technological level of Earth. Indeed, more extreme members of the Faith have been known to seek out computers or robots that appear "too intelligent" and attempt to either destroy or disable them (much to the chagrin of their owners). Only on Kaguk can robot manufacturing facilities be found, and these concentrate on industrial models that can be easily hidden away from the public.

Products that are labeled "hand-made" bring premium prices wherever they are sold, even if their quality isn't as good as manufactured products produced by automated machines (many producers now employ humans in their factories to conduct final assembly and use this as a marketing ploy). Many companies in the service industry (restaurants, cleaning services, etc.) advertise the fact that they are a "human only" operation, and tout the advantages of using manual labor over machines.

Some jobs, however, cannot be handled by human hands alone, or they can't be done with nearly the degree of efficiency or safety as they can with robots. A number of ingenious ways have been found to include humans in the design of machines (including robotic types), thereby resulting in major advances in the fields of cybernetics and human-machine interaction. The battledress used by the Terran Republic armed forces, for example, is far more advanced than Terra's tech level would ordinarily make possible, and the Terran Marine Combat Walker is rapidly gaining a reputation as an excellent weapons platform, even when its performance is compared with similar contragrav-only AFVs.

There are no laws restricting freedom of religion within the Terran Republic. Both Gabree-el and Shoshanna have expressed their desire to their followers for tolerance of other "Children of the Divine Being". However, a degree of prejudice does exist against those who refuse to accept Shoshanna's spiritual leadership. This sometimes makes obtaining government jobs and contracts difficult for non-believers, particularly those who have expressed public contempt for the Faith or its leadership. In the public sector, the prejudice against non-believers is less pronounced, but takes on a very subtle form which the non-believer may not be aware of. This has led many non-believers to pay "lip service" to the Faith (pretending to be a Gabreelist), while at home doing as they please. This is particularly true on Kaguk, where there is an expression, "the Divine Being speaks through its profits", a play on a quote from The Book of the Faith.

Non-Gabreelist religious organizations must show that at least half of their profits and donations received are going to projects to improve the communities in which they are located or they are subject to standard corporate and property taxes. While this has proved burdensome to some, most of the other faiths within the Republic are cooperating, which has proved extremely valuable to recovery efforts on several worlds.

Gabreelism and Psionics

There was a psionics institute on Terra prior to the Rebellion Era. Located in Alexandria, Egypt, the institute was originally open to the public until the PsionicSuppressions drove it underground.

Gabree-el is known to have secretly visited a local cell of the institute during her days as a student in southern California. Though she tested as having extremely high psionics potential (a rating believed to be at least 10), she showed talent in only two areas, Self and a unique talent known as Psionic Time Travel (see separate article). Having received initial training at the institute, she went on to use her talent to her advantage as an expert on ancient religious artifacts.

After the Collapse, Gabree-el recruited surviving

members of the Psionics institute to be part of her security forces, participating in special covert counter-terrorism teams which worked to thwart Solomani plots against prominent Gabreelists. Known as the Protectors, initially they were not a priestly order, but evolved into that role over a period of years.

Today, all Gabreelist priests are tested for psionic potential and given initial training if they are psionically talented (1 in 20 priests tested have this ability). The Faith maintains a monopoly on psionics training, and its use is extremely rare outside of priesthood. Indeed, it is illegal for anyone but a Gabreelist priest to use psionics anywhere in the Terran Republic. There are two primary reasons for this--first, the public at large is still somewhat distrustful of psions (a distrust that fortunately does not extend to priests); second and more importantly, the leaders of the Faith (particularly Gabree-el and Shoshanna) realized some time ago that by maintaining control of psionics they had an enormous advantage in their efforts to maintain their power and influence within the Republic.

Why Did Gabreelism Succeed?

There were many factors which contributed to the success Gabreelism has enjoyed thus far. Some of the most important are discussed below:

- **Ease of Conversion.** Many people could essentially go on worshipping as before, with few adjustments in their practices. This was critical especially on Terra, which has a variety of extremely rich, complex and often diverse cultures despite many centuries of homogenization dating back prior to the Interstellar Wars.

- **The Failure of Solomani Party Leadership.** At a time when the Party leadership should have been attempting to gain control of the chaotic situation on Earth following the Collapse, it instead found itself paralyzed by factionalism, rivalries between competing power bases, and leadership that seemed unable or unwilling to grasp the enormity of the situation at hand. The masses found themselves left to their own devices, and more often than not, created new leadership to confront the dire situation. Tomas Evers, the last leader of the Solomani Party on Terra, managed to reunite much of the Party's machinery in later years, but his authoritarian style alienated many people who otherwise might have turned back to Party leadership.

- **The Neutralization of Solomani Security.** Had Solsec's extensive network of monitoring equipment, operatives (both covert and overt), and other intelligence assets been in place in the years following 1130, it is quite likely that Gabree-el would have been eliminated long before she and the anti-Solomani Party coalition had become a threat. The Collapse disrupted the Solsec's ability to monitor the populace (all but

ending it in most regions of Earth), and caused enough disruption within its ranks that many of its operatives found themselves more involved in fighting each other than watching out for threats to the Party's control.

- **Mass Communications.** The many planetary-wide information and entertainment nets present on Earth in the Rebellion Era were severely damaged by the Collapse. By 1132, they had been re-established in many areas on a regional or local basis (balkanization and infrastructure damage preventing anything on a larger scale). The ability of the Gabreelists to gain access to the various nets and to utilize them to reach into individual homes on a nightly basis had a major impact on its ability to convert the masses to the new faith and to win over support for the Eastern Coalition.

- **Gabree-el Dahnara as a political leader.** Gabreelism is more than just a religious movement--it is a political movement as well. This was especially true during the early years. No bit of aid to a friendly nation-state, no civic project for the masses, nothing that the government of the Eastern Coalition (and later Terran Republic) did of a positive nature went without the Faith being identified with it in some way (this was also true of recovery aid given to Prometheus and other worlds). Gabree-el's frequent speeches against the Solomani Party and its corruption made her the center of all anti-Solomani Party resistance, and the target of the Party's attacks, both verbal and physical. Her ability as a politician and diplomat won over valuable allies as the Terran Civil War progressed and helped to hold the Eastern Coalition together after it had won its victory over the Solomani Party.

- **The military success of the Eastern Coalition.** The mastery of Field Marshal Michael Roubik (known as the "General Who Never Lost a Battle") was a big part of this, but other successful Eastern Coalition commanders such as Fallon, Janota, and Ramirez also served with distinction for many years during the Terran Civil Wars. Military conquest helped to ease the proliferation of Gabreelism into regions of Earth (and elsewhere) it might not otherwise have penetrated.

- **A Sense of Hope.** At a time when it appeared that Earth was headed for a dark age from which it might take centuries to recover, Gabree-el and her followers appeared in the streets of Jerusalem. The message that Gabree-el delivered was simple yet extremely powerful-- it made people believe in themselves once again, and it gave them hope for a better future. It was in direct contrast to the apocalyptic cults and power hungry dictators that prevailed just after the Collapse.

Conclusion

Where people categorized themselves into Solomani and non-Solomani before, now people think of

themselves only as humans. Whether the journey of their ancestors took them many thousands of light years away, Gabree-el believed, or whether their ancestors had stayed on Terra from the beginning was of no importance--all were Children of Earth--and that was what really mattered. Even those who's origin is not of this world, but who are creations of the Divine Being, and have become a part of Earth's culture, should hear the message of the Priestess of the Faith and become a part of Gabreelism.

Spreading the message of Gabree-el took much hard work and sacrifice from the beginning, and there were times when it became necessary to take up arms in defense of the cause. This remains very much true today. Those who believe in the teachings of Gabree-el and Shoshanna will continue until all have heard the message, and the enemies of Gabreelism (and the evil forces that control them) have been vanquished from the Universe.

This last point has some interesting implications. Because Virus infected ships, robots, etc. have been so thoroughly demonized in Gabreelist teachings, there can never be peace between the Gabreelists (thus the Terran Republic) and any form of Virus. Any government that would willingly cooperate with a Virus would not only be considered an enemy, they would be considered a holy enemy--one who must recant or be utterly destroyed. This would make the Reformation Coalition an almost certain enemy of the Terran Republic (and possibly an ally of the Regency and the Soleean Empire), and sets the stage for many things to come in the future.

FAITH LEVEL DETERMINATION

Terran Republic characters and non-player characters are generated, for the most part, with the same attributes as characters in the rest of the Traveller universe. There is, however, one additional characteristic which is determined at the time of character generation, known as Faith Level.

Faith Level (or simply Faith), is a measure on a scale of 0 to 15 of how devout a character is with regard to the Gabreelist Faith, and how closely the character follows its tenants. It is generated using 2D6 and applying all applicable modifiers. Characters who are from Terra or Prometheus must roll for their Faith Level, unless they wish to declare 'Non-Believer' status. 'Non-Believers' are described below. Characters from other worlds in the Republic first roll 1D10. On a '2' or less they are considered 'Pagans' (described below)--otherwise they must roll for their Faith Level or declare their 'Non-Believer' status. Faith Level influences how a player character may react in certain situations, and how NPCs may react to player characters. Faith Level can also act as a positive modifier in a Willpower test.

Faith Level = 2D6 - 1

Modifiers:

If Homeworld = Prometheus: DM +3

If Homeworld = Kaguk: DM -2

If Homeworld = Terra and home continent Asia, South America, Africa: DM +1

If Homeworld = Terra and home continent Europe: DM -1

If Non-Human = DM -2

Note: Any result less than zero is treated as zero; any result higher than 15 is treated as 15.

Alternative Faith Level Determination: Those who have a level of faith in mind for their character, or feel uncomfortable having their faith level determined in a random manner, may negotiate a value with the referee.

High Faith Levels

Characters with high Faith Levels (10 and above) rigorously adhere to the teachings of the Gabreelist Faith. They frequently consult religious texts before making important decisions, quote passages from The Book of the Faith in their conversations, and at the highest levels, are prone to giving impromptu sermons about Gabree-el and her teachings in social situations.

Though Gabreelism teaches tolerance of other viewpoints, individuals with high Faith Levels are more likely to be intolerant of behavior they consider to be "immoral" or "improper" than others. This means they are subject to negative modifiers (determined by the referee) when dealing with people of significantly less Faith Level than themselves. They will also show a much higher degree of the prejudice against the use of robots and other high tech items discussed in the Gabreelism and Terran Republic Society section.

High levels of Faith can be of benefit to a character. In a situation where a Willpower task must be rolled, apply a positive die modifier equal to the character's Faith Level divided by four (round fractions down). This represents the character's ability to "lean on" their faith in times of frustration or personal crisis. Individuals demonstrating high Faith Levels receive positive modifiers (again determined by the referee) in their dealings with other high Faith Level characters, particularly Gabreelist priests.

Also, because of the Gabreelist belief in reincarnation, high Faith Level characters are more likely to take risks in combat. This is particularly true when that combat is against Virus infected machines, whether they be robots or Vampire ships. This is not to say that such characters are suicidal--it means that they are more likely to take actions that may result in his or her death (i.e. self-destruct a vessel rather than allow it to be captured by a Vampire ship). While there is no tangible modifier to any die roll that can be

attached to this aspect of High Faith characters, both players and referees should consider it as an additional motivation when role-playing a character or running a NPC.

Moderate Faith Levels

Individuals with Faith Levels 5 to 9 follow the basic practices of the Gabreelist Faith, but are more likely to be tolerant of alternative points of view or worship, and may in fact hold personal beliefs that contradict the Faith's teachings. These beliefs will not be of a radical nature, and rarely bring the individual to the point of being ostracized by the Gabreelist community (provided that they do not advocate such behavior in a public forums). Twentieth century examples would be a Muslim who occasionally has a glass of wine, or a Catholic that uses birth control devices. A moderate Faith Level Gabreelist may also on rare occasions engage in other more "sinful" behavior, but usually feels guilty about it afterward and seeks some form of forgiveness through Contemplation and/or from a local priest.

Low Faith Levels

Characters with lower levels (1 to 4) may share certain ethical principles with the Gabreelist Faith (ideas about proper behavior and treatment of others, the need for contemplation, and/or a belief in a supreme being), but only pay "lip service" to the actual practices of it, or may even reject the vast majority of the practices altogether. Such people are sometimes characterized as hypocrites, but can also include people who are devoutly religious, belong to another organized religion, and do not recognize the spiritual leadership of the Priestess of Faith or the Gabreelists. Other low Faith Level characters may be heretical individuals who claim to be Gabreelists, but have rejected some or all of the Priestess of Faith's teachings (i.e. a cult member on Prometheus who rejects Shoshanna as the Priestess of the Faith and instead continues to worship Gabree-el as a semi-deified prophetess).

Depending upon their religious orientation, individuals with low Faith Levels could potentially find life difficult in mainstream Terran Republic society. This is particularly true for individuals who have heretical beliefs, who will be the subject of prejudice and possibly government monitoring of their activities, especially if they espouse recognition of artificial sentient rights, or the overthrow of the Priestess of the Faith.

Pagans

Pagans are individuals who have not yet been exposed to the teachings of Gabree-el, Shoshanna or their followers, or at least exposed enough to them to form an opinion about them. Pagans remain so until an attempt is made to convert them. Pagans can be

Imperial or Solomani remnants who were only recently revived, individuals from outside the Terran Republic who have immigrated, persons who are just visiting such as traders or diplomats, people located in a remote region on a frontier world within the Republic (which includes almost every world except Terra and Prometheus), or even individuals on worlds outside the Terran Republic that have been visited by Gabreelist missionaries, traders, and explorers.

Pagan characters who live within the boundaries of the Terran Republic or its client states will have an attempt made to convert them once every 1D6 months. The nature of the conversion attempt can be everything from a formal visit by a Gabreelist priest, to a informational pamphlet handed out at a starport, to a Gabreelist sponsored broadcast, to a conversation with a Gabreelist friend that turns to the subject of religion. The frequency of attempts after the first can be adjusted by the referee depending upon the life style of the character in question (i.e. a free trader character who is gone for long periods of time from the Republic would have fewer attempts made to convert them). An attempt to convert a Pagan can be made by any Gabreelist priest (including NPCs, regardless of Faith Level), or any character that has a high Faith Level. Attempting to convert a Pagan to Gabreelism is a Formidable: Persuasion task, and will be even more difficult if the referee determines that the Pagan has a high level of faith in another religion or is a devout atheist (the referee may even decide to automatically assign a faith level of 4 or less to the Pagan if they wish, ending any further attempt at conversion). If successful, the Pagan character has been converted to Gabreelism, and rolls 2D6-1 (rerolling any result less than 5) to determine his or her Faith Level.

Non-Believers

These are individuals who have rejected Gabreelism and all other forms of deity worship. Non-Believers are generally atheists, those that reject the concept of a divine being on some form of philosophical principle. Nearly all atheists have strong opinions about what forms of behavior which they consider to be 'right' or 'wrong' (only truly sociopathic individuals rejects such concepts), but the structure of their belief system excludes the possibility of a supreme being.

Non-Believers are always treated as having a Faith Level of zero, and are subject to prejudice (or being prejudice) when dealing with certain individuals. This is particularly true in cases where the interaction is between a Non-Believer and someone of high Faith Level.

Non-Believer - High Faith Level Gabreelist Interaction

It is up to the individual referee to determine the immediate and subsequent reaction(s) an individual of high Faith Level might have upon learning that they

are dealing with a Non-Believer (or vice versa). Factors such as the intelligence, education, even Act/Bluff and Observation skills of one or both characters involved should be taken into consideration in determining reactions.

Examples Where Faith Level Is a Factor In Character Interaction

Example 1: It's Not Just Business

Peter, an individual that possess a Faith Level of 11, is attempting to negotiate a business deal with an NPC Kagukan merchant. During the course of the negotiations, Peter becomes aware that the merchant is a Non-Believer. The referee decides that Peter must make a Difficult roll against his education attribute to determine his reaction. Peter's education level is 8, and he rolls a 10, failing this test. The referee then makes a Formidable: Observation roll for the merchant, using Peter's Act/Bluff skill of 2 as a positive modifier to the die roll (reflecting Peter's attempt to hide his emotions) --the merchant, with an observation asset of 10 subsequently fails at this roll.

The referee determines that Peter is extremely unhappy dealing with the merchant, but was able to hide his discomfort with the merchant's beliefs during the negotiation session. If Peter were an NPC and the merchant a player character, it is very unlikely that Peter would ever do business with the merchant again (and may even break off negotiations if the deal hasn't been consummated yet). Had the merchant's Observation roll succeeded, he would have been able to detect Peter's discomfort and could have confronted him about it. If Peter was honest about why he felt uncomfortable, it is possible that the merchant could have concluded that Peter is a strong Gabreelist, and been subject to similar reaction rolls.

Example 2: The Devout Warrior

Carver, a Terran Republic Marine with a faith level of 12, encounters a sentient robot during a sweep of a planetside complex. While his orders are to bring back all robots for questioning, the referee determines that he must first make a roll against his education attribute to determine his actions. He fails, and instead fills the robot full of gauss rounds before dragging it back to his sergeant.

Crisis of Faith

Every once in a while in an individual's life, some traumatic event happens that changes their perspective on the Universe and their place in it. The event may cause someone to believe in a supreme being when they never have before, to change the way they worship, to reject the "orthodoxy" preached by their faith, even to question the existence of a supreme being

all together.

At the end of every term, roll 1D20. On a roll of '20', the individual has undergone a Crisis of Faith--an event that causes them to re-evaluate their faith (or lack of faith) in Gabreelism and its teachings. Roll a D10 and consult the table below:

Roll	Change to Faith Level	Roll	Change to Faith Level
1	1 Subtract	6	1 Add
2	2 Subtract	7	1 Add
3	2 Subtract	8	2 Add
4	2 Subtract	9	2 Add
5	1 Subtract	10	1 Add

The Job Factor: All characters have the option of making a saving throw to avoid any changes in their faith level (this reflects their natural psychological resistance a change in their belief system). It is an Average: Willpower task.

The referee and/or players should feel free to create a background story to explain any change in Faith Level implemented. Please note however at no time may Faith Level be forced below zero, nor may it be raised above 15.

When a Crisis of Faith results in a lowering of the Faith Level of a Gabreelist priest by three or more, there is the possibility they will leave the priesthood. Conduct an Average: Willpower check, and apply the number of Faith Levels lost as a negative modifier. If unsuccessful, the character (regardless of his or her standing within the Faith's hierarchy) leaves the priesthood and may never rejoin.

GABREELIST PRIEST CAREERS

Order of Administrators

Someone has to pay the bills and manage the considerable assets of the Faith, and you feel this is the best way that you can serve the Divine Being and your community.

Prerequisites: Gabreelist Seminary

First Term

Skills: Admin/Legal 2, Charm, Determination 2, Interaction 2, Perception.

Subsequent Terms

Skills: Admin/Legal, Charm, Determination, Interaction, Perception.

All Terms

Special Adventure: 6+ for Gun Combat, Language, Spacehand, Technician, Vehicle, Vice.

Promotion: 7+, DM+1 if EDU 6+, DM+1 if INT 8+.

Contacts: One per term, religious or government.

Other Effects: Two secondary activities are allowed per term.

Order of Protectors

You use your psionic talents and when necessary your martial arts skill to defend the Gabreelist temples and those who worship there. Your other duties include

providing protection for important members of the Faith's hierarchy, and screening of new priest candidates. On frontier worlds where Gabreelism is still taking root and faces opposition, you get to prove from time to time why it is unnecessary for you to carry a firearm.

Prerequisites: Gabreelist Seminary, PSI 5+.

First Term

Skills: STR+1, AGL+1, Melee 3, Determination, Acrobat, Perception.

Subsequent Terms

Skills: Acrobat, Charm, Determination, Interaction, Leadership, Melee 2, Perception 2.

All Terms

Special Duty: 8+ for Acrobat, Act/Bluff, Interaction, Intrusion, Medical, Perception, Slug Weapon (Pistol), Spacehand, Vice (Streetwise or Disguise only), 7+ for PSI+1.

Promotion: 6+, DM+1 if AGL 7+.

Contacts: One per term, religious, government or military.

Other Effects: Initiative determined as with military careers. If more than one term served, +1 to initiative.

Order of Searchers

Though Gabree-el declared the Faith to be that which will unite all of humanity (and other sentient creatures), research into the nature of the Divine Being continues. Whether you choose to look for that truth in ancient manuscripts, or in temples on far away planets is up to you.

Prerequisites: Gabreelist Seminary, INT 7+.

First Term

Skills: Five levels in any one specialty, plus a total of two levels in any electives.

Specialties: Fine Arts, Language, Social Science.

Electives: Computer, Instruction, Language, Leadership, Research.

Subsequent Terms

Skills: One level in Specialty, Charm, Determination, Interaction, Language, Perception, Technician.

All Terms

Special Adventure: 8+ for Acrobat, Explore, Gun Combat, Spacehand, Vice, Vehicle.

Promotion: 7+, DM+1 if INT 8+, DM+1 if EDU 8+.

Contacts: One per term, religious or academic.

Other Effects: +1 to EDU after 1st term. No promotion or special duty rolls made for 1st term.

Order of Teachers

To you falls the burden of teaching the Faith to non-believers and administering to the spiritual needs of those already converted. You are the backbone of Gabreelism, and the primary defender of the masses against what could potentially be an impersonal and autocratic government.

Prerequisites: Gabreelist Seminary

First Term

Skills: Persuasion, Psychology, Interaction 3, Charm.

Subsequent Terms

Skills: Act/Bluff, Charm, Determination, Interaction, Persuasion, Psychology.

All Terms

Special Mission: 8+ for Explore, Gun Combat, Medical, Melee, Spacehand, Vehicle, Vice.

Promotion: 8+, DM+1 if INT 7+.

Contacts: One per term, religious or government.

Other Effects: Two secondary activities are allowed per term.

Gabreelist Seminary

All those who wish to become a priest in the Gabreelist Faith must first attend the seminary. Because priests have such influence in the Republic's culture, and to avoid the possibility of malevolent individuals (such as a Solomani spy) infiltrating the ranks of the priesthood, all applicants are screened by psionically talented members of the Order of Protectors. Once screened, initiants then go through a rigorous course of study and training which culminates in their ordination. Gabreelist seminaries can be found on all the populated worlds of the Republic with populations of over a million.

Prerequisites: EDU 5+ or INT 7+, and Faith Level 6+. Exemption given to characters with INT 5+ if Faith Level 9+.

First Term

Skills: Leadership 2, Persuasion 2, Psychology 2, History 2, Psionics (see the Psionics Section of the TNE Manual).

Contacts: One Religious.

Other Effects: +1 to EDU (after all skills have been awarded). No secondary activities allowed while in the seminary. No commissions, promotions, or special duty rolls are made. No income is received while attending the seminary. Immediately upon entry into the seminary, the character undergoes psionic testing and evaluation (see Psionics Section of the TNE Manual).

Table of Ranks - Gabreelist Faith Hierarchy

R1	Novice Priest
R2	Priest (2nd Level)
R3	Priest (3rd Level)
R4	Priest (4th Level)
R5	Priest (5th Level)
R6	Archpriest
R7	Monsignor
R8	Regional Council Member
R9	Planetary Cofuncil Member
R10	Executive Council Member
R11	Member of the Council of Twelve

Children of Earth Timeline

<u>Old Terran</u>	<u>Imperial</u>	<u>New Terran</u>	<u>Event</u>
5633	1116	-16	Emperor Stephron deposed, Rebellion begins in the Third Imperium
5634	1117	-15	Terra besieged by Solomani Confederation forces
5634 to 5647	1117 to 1130	-15 to -2	Second Solomani Rim War; Solomani military occupation government on Terra
5635	1118	-14	Last Imperial pocket of resistance on Terra surrenders 001-1118; Imperial Marines begin guerrilla campaign
5644	1127	-5	Boris Gokhman appointed Archduke of Sol
5645	1128	-4	Gabrielle Dahnara makes public her psionic visions of the Collapse, arrested, later released
5647	1130	-2	Treaty of Altair signed; Virus released; Collapse begins
5648 to 5649	1131 to 1132	-1 to 0	The Chaos Time (Terra)
5649	1132	0	Gabree-el makes "Call to the Faith" speech in Jerusalem (founding date of Gabreelist movement)
5649 to 5660	1132 to 1143	0 to 11	First Phase of Terran Civil War
5650	1133	1	First Gabreelist priestly orders established
5654	1137	5	Treaty of Istanbul establishes the Eastern Coalition on Terra
5656	1139	7	Vampire raid on Singapore; Battle of Luna; Archduke Boris dies, succeeded by Tania Yau Dingir)
5659	1142	10	Rosetti Expedition to Prometheus system
5661	1144	12	Battle of Mars
5661 to 5663	1144 to 1146	12 to 14	Terrans send relief expedition to Prometheus system (Operation Pegasus)
5662	1145	13	Coup brings Tomas Evers to power in WEF
5663	1146	14	Battle of the Jovian Moons--Sol system declared Vampire ship free
5666	1149	17	Eastern Coalition Marines (later Terran Republic Marines) organized with headquarters in Tel Aviv
5668	1151	19	Construction begins on the Temple of the Faith in Jerusalem
5669	1152	20	First Dingir Parliament convened
5670	1153	21	Shoshanna Dahnara born
5673 to 5679	1156 to 1162	24 to 30	Unification War (second phase of Terran Civil War)
5674	1157	25	Madrid Massacre; Order of Protectors created
5677	1160	28	Dingir League founded
5679	1162	30	Last Solomani Party stronghold captured; Daniel Dahnara assassinated
5680	1163	31	Tomas Evers captured and executed
5681	1164	32	Terran Republic founded
5682	1165	33	Beauchamp Ministry begins; Prometheus system joins the Republic

5684	1167	35	Contact made with Kagukan merchants; Barnard system occupied
5685 to 5715	1168 to 1198	36 to 66	Conquistador Era (Terra)
5688	1171	39	Initial contact made between Dingir and Terra; Enrico Yau succeeds his mother Tania as Archduke of Sol
5690	1173	41	Junction system joins the Republic
5691	1174	42	Fenris system joins the Republic after coup overthrows TED
5692	1175	43	Beauchamp Reforms of Terran Republic government
5696	1179	47	Agidda system joins the Republic after Terran backed popular revolt
5697	1180	48	Nuksu, Hephaistos and Midway systems join the Republic
5698	1181	49	Terran Republic Naval forces occupy remaining "Outback" systems
5699	1182	50	Skirmish between Kagukan merchant vessel and a Republican naval patrol at Ember
5700	1183	51	Ishimshulgi, Ninhkur Sagga systems occupied by Republican naval forces
5701	1184	52	Beauchamp resigns as Prime Minister, replaced by Dasovich
5702	1185	53	Kaguk system joins the Terran Republic; Mukhaldim system occupied; Dasovich Reforms
5703	1186	54	Ys, Remulak systems join the Terran Republic; contact established with Chernozem, and Chrysolite systems
5704	1187	55	Sarpedon system occupied by Republican naval forces
5707	1190	58	Contact established between Dingir and Muan Gwi
5708	1191	59	Terran Republic interventions begin in the Vega subsector
5709	1192	60	Ishkur system turns down offer to join Terran Republic
5710	1193	61	Contact made with Arrukir, Ganesh, and Catania systems
5711	1194	62	Dasovich resigns as Prime Minister, replaced by Jorge Dahnara; Sirius and Markhashi systems occupied by Republican naval forces
5712	1195	63	First Dahnara Reforms
5713	1196	64	Gabree-el dies; Terran Republic outpost established on Arrukir
5714	1197	65	Shulimik and Iilike join the Terran Republic
5715	1198	66	Marine forces land on Lagash in support of Gabreelist factions; Mirabilis joins the Terran Republic
5716	1199	67	First Battle of Meshan
5717	1200	68	New Era begins in Old Expanses; Terrans make contact with Kukulcan, Caprice, and Culdee systems
5718	1201	69	Second Battle of Meshan; Quasi War between Dingir League and Terran Republic
5719	1202	70	Lagash system declared secured; exploration of Near Bootean Cluster by Terrans begins

New Era History

"Howl ye; for the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as a destruction from the Almighty.

Therefore shall all hands be faint, and every man's heart shall melt:

And they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be as flames.

Behold, the day of the Lord cometh, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate: and he shall destroy the sinners thereof out of it.

For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine.

And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible."

The Holy Bible (King James Version)
Old Testament
Isaiah 13:6-11

Introduction

The following is an excerpt from a condensed version of the "History of the Solomani Rim", a multi-volume work written by Dayle Wszoleka, a Gabreelist priest and historian on Ishkur in early 1202 (70 NT/5719 AD). This particular excerpt covers the period from just before the Collapse to the present day. For sake of simplicity, all dates used in the History are according to the Imperial Calendar (which is still used on Ishkur). To convert a particular date to the corresponding one on the New Terran Calendar, simply subtract 1132 from the Imperial Calendar date cited.

The Conclusion of the Solomani Era

The Solomani Rim was at peace in 1130, the Second Solomani Rim War (as the Rebellion was called in this region of space), having finally drawn to a close with a cease-fire and peace negotiations. As Virus was being released in Core Sector, delegates representing the Solomani Confederation government, the Rim Concordat (a pocket of Imperial space in the Solomani Rim nominally loyal to Lucan), the Daibei Federation, and Margaret's government in the Delphi Sector had just concluded a comprehensive peace treaty, the Treaty of Altair.

Five years earlier, it appeared that Imperial forces in the Solomani Rim were on the verge total defeat.

Their miraculous victory over the Solomani at Hsuilzish in 1126 and a subsequent Imperial counter-offensive that retook Dingir in 1127 proved once and for all to many Solomani moderates that attempting to reintegrate the entire Solomani Rim into the Confederation (or the entirety of any of the other sectors where the Solomani had invaded) was a lost cause. This tipped the scales of power within the Confederation government to the "Peace" Faction, which took control of the High Council at the beginning of 1128.

While it appeared that the Treaty of Altair might bring a lasting peace to the region, there were already signs that peace would be a short one--factional differences over Sentient Rights and the level of intervention of the central government into member-states' internal affairs were pushing the Solomani Confederation relentlessly toward the brink of civil war. In fact, even as the representatives of the member-states of the Peace Faction pushed for the Treaty of Altair on Home (the Confederation's capital), many of the Faction's Liberal and States Rights members were planning on recalling their military forces from the front so that they could be available for the coming conflict with the various hard-line conservative factions arrayed against them. Officers in the Solomani Confederation Navy plotted mutinies to seize naval vessels, and factions within the Navy's high command put friendly commanders in positions of power. There was even a secret attempt by Bootean members of the Solomani Confederation peace delegation to recruit the Vegan Polity into an alliance should war breakout again in the Solomani Rim (the Vegans politely refused the offer).

All of this was of course for nothing. Virus spread rapidly out from Core Sector, and engulfed not only Lucan's enemies, but the entire Solomani Rim and Solomani Confederation, without regard for the political views of its victims, or their beliefs regarding racial superiority.

Collapse

It was the destruction of the fall of the Second Imperium (also known as the Rule of Man), magnified on a horrific scale--and while the Second Imperium tore itself apart a few bricks at a time over an extended period, the Third Imperium exploded in a violent crescendo that engulfed not only the empire, but its neighbors as well. Only the Imperial holdings spinward of the Great Rift and its immediate neighbors got by relatively unscathed, and then only because of the heroic efforts of their armed forces and inhabitants.

The Solomani Rim, with its preponderance of high

technology, high population worlds, was particularly vulnerable to the effects of Virus. The Collapse touched every world in the sector to one degree or another. The populations of worlds like Ember or Meshan, escaped in the last working starships or simply died in place as their life support systems failed. Worlds with breathable atmospheres fared better--but better was relative--and billions died on these worlds as well. Infrastructure was wrecked. Factories and homes were destroyed. Tech levels fell precipitately. Disease from over crowded conditions on high population worlds and respiratory infections from the breathing of tainted air killed almost as many people as the initial Virus assault did. Many world governments, often missing key officials who were killed in the initial Virus onslaught, and unable to cope with the chaos, disintegrated. Those that did manage to survive did so because they established authoritarian systems in an effort to regain order. In some cases the systems they established became permanent.

In the years immediately following the initial Virus wave, petty dictators using relic technology managed to establish small kingdoms on other worlds. The most successful of these dictators were able to carve out sizable empires that eventually encompassed an entire world.

Some of worlds that managed to survive with a high level of technology found themselves faced with a new threat in the years to come--Vampire ships. Several such worlds in the Solomani Rim fell victim to their raids, though the level of Vampire ship activity has dropped off dramatically in later years in all but two subsectors. Gashurzid (Harlequin) and Atria (Banasdan) subsectors have seen steady levels of Vampire ship activity since they fall on the Vampire Highway to Cymbeline.

The Collapse On Terra

No one is certain the exact moment that Virus entered the Terran system. It is likely however that J-6 Solomani naval couriers from Meshan arriving with classified reports on mysterious starship malfunctions in other star systems were responsible for the initial contamination. Additional strains of Virus soon followed, brought in by starships from elsewhere in the Solomani Rim.

The first tangible evidence of Virus infection came when the Solomani heavy cruiser Exeter exploded in orbit over Europa while on a routine patrol of Jupiter, the result of a computer-induced cascade failure in the ship's main power plant. Two escort vessels, the William C. Floyd and the Miriam Ossana were heavily damaged by the Exeter before the explosion, victims of the Exeter's Virus-controlled missile and gun batteries. All armed forces in the Terran system were immediately placed on high alert--which unfortunately only served to spread Virus further, as it had already

penetrated the system defense computer network. Virus subsequently spread over into other government computers, and eventually into traffic control, environmental control, and other critical computer control systems throughout the Sol system.

The arrival of Virus to Earth began what has become known as the Chaos Time, during which even the most basic levels of civil and military authority broke down, and civilization retreated on all fronts. An accurate death toll from the Chaos Time is, for various reasons, impossible to come by, but it is believed that upwards of 9 billion individuals died within the first several weeks, and that by the end of 1131, the number had grown to over 14 billion, or about a third of the population. While Virus infected technology was a major killer, probably the biggest killers of this era were disease and starvation, brought on by inadequate shelter, virtually nonexistent sanitation (particularly in major urban areas), poor food distribution, and drought, flooding and other weather related problems brought on by the breakdown of the weather control satellite system. Technological levels briefly slipped to well below eight planetwide as Terra's industrial base was largely destroyed. Fortunately, enough relic manufacturing technology (some of it in museums) existed in most areas so that a new industrial base could be established at tech level 11-12 as the Chaos Time came to an end. Historians place the length of the Chaos Time at approximately one year, but in some regions it continued for much longer, almost until the re-establishment of world government in 1164.

The political order that began to emerge in 1132 was completely different from that had existed prior to the Chaos Time. While the Solomani Military Government had managed to reassert itself in a number of regions (particularly in Europe), it found itself to be only one of many competing factions. Even then, local commanders would only cooperate with Central Command only if it suited their local interests. They often ignored orders (orders they knew Central Command could no longer enforce), and declared their independence, deciding instead to ally themselves with a local dictator or set themselves up as warlords. Over the next two years Central Command made a number of attempts to quell some of the rebellions (most notably its disastrous expedition to Morocco), each time expending irreplaceable high technology for little or no gain.

By 1134, Central Command decided that, for now at least, re-establishing world government was an impossible task, and instead concentrated its resources on building a power base in Britain and northern France. The result was the dissolution of Central Command's military government and the creation of a new civil authority calling itself the Western European Federation, which also included in its government structure a number of Solomani Party and Solomani Security officials.

The Collapse On Dingir

Admiral Boris Gokhman, Archduke of Sol (appointed by Emperor Lucan in 1127, a man Admiral Gokhman had come to despise) and defacto leader of the Rim Concordat by virtue of the state of martial law that had existed since 1117, had a number of friends in the Naval Weapons Research Programs of the Third Imperium, and thus knew that the Virus weapon was being researched. Still, it came as much as a shock to him as it did everyone else at Imperial Naval Headquarters on Dingir that Virus had actually been released. Imperial naval couriers managed to give Gokhman 24 hours advanced warning of the Virus wave's arrival, and he put it to good use. All high ranking nobility and government officials on Dingir were ordered to immediately report to Naval Headquarters, where they were promptly placed in protective custody. Gokhman ordered all ships that could to ground themselves planetside and shut down all nonessential systems. He also placed all remaining Dingir system defense forces on a high state of alert, ordering them to stop all incoming vessels and destroy those that failed to comply.

Gokhman's efforts did not save Dingir from the bulk of the onslaught of Virus. Dingir suffered just as Terra did, with similar amounts of damage and loss of life. The important difference however was that Dingir's central government had survived largely intact. While there were disturbances that had to be quelled and much rebuilding to be done, Dingir's path back to interstellar status was a relatively peaceful one in the early years.

The Rise of Gabreelism On Terra

Traditionally, Gabreelism was founded by Gabree-el Dahnara in Jerusalem on Terra in 1132, the year that she gave her famous "Call to the Faithful" speech. The New Terran Calendar uses this year as "year zero".

Gabree-el was born Gabrielle Annah Joachim. An associate professor of Middle Eastern Terran Religion at the University of Damascus, she became notable prior to the Collapse for her public prediction (actually psionic vision) concerning the attack of a super weapon (as it turns out Virus) against Terra. Briefly jailed, she later became a member of the Searchers for the One Faith, a Solomani academic religious group, which her husband Dassaq had previously joined and became an influential member. Both Gabrielle and Dassaq lived with their son Daniel in Jerusalem at the time of the

Collapse. After Dassaq was killed in the initial stages of the Chaos Time, Gabrielle, literally carrying her son in her arms, gathered the remaining members of the Searchers and they fled to the vast refugee camps on the outskirts of the forbidden city of Mecca where they spent a year in exile.



It was in the refugee camps that Gabrielle formulated the groundwork for a new religion based on her husband's writings, a 12 chapter work that became known as The Book of the Faith. At the end of the Meccan Exile, she led her followers back to Jerusalem where she became known as 'Gabree-el' and established the One Faith, or as it is commonly referred to, Gabreelism. The title "Priest of the Faith" was bestowed upon her that same year by a council of her senior religious advisors, and a hierarchy of priestly titles was created.

At first the Gabreelists were just one of several competing factions within Jerusalem. Through diplomacy, religious conversion, and pure political skill, she was able to unite the city and soon control much of the surrounding countryside. By the end of 1133, the Gabreelists were solidly in control of all of Israel-Palestine, though their army faced threats from

practically every direction.

The Terran Civil War

As remnants of the Solomani Military Government, rebellious Solomani factions, anti-Solomani forces of various sorts, and local warlords began to compete for key agricultural, industrial and other strategic regions on Terra, civil war broke out on every continent, save for Antarctica, and even there skirmishes took place for control of the ruins of Shackleton and access to that frozen land's still considerable mineral wealth.

The fiercest battles early on took place in North America, particularly outside of Chicago (the Battle of Joliet, which claimed over 250,000 lives) and Phoenix (which left much of the San Paulo Downport in ruins). Other smaller, but nevertheless very significant battles led to a certain amount of consolidation in other parts of the world. The Battle of Nasik in India was particularly noteworthy during this time period, as it saw the first use of combat walkers, large legged vehicles armed and armored for use in combat. Because of the success of combat walkers in this battle, and the severe shortage of gravitic components and manufacturing facilities on Terra, versions of the combat walker soon found their way into many of the armies of the world.

Also of note are the campaigns of General Michael ("Iron Mike") Roubik. A convert to Gabreelism after a meeting with Gabree-el to discuss the hiring of Roubik's mercenary unit in 1133, the former Imperial Marine and anti-Solomani guerrilla was appointed later that year by Gabree-el to be the leader of her armed forces. Taking advantage of the weakened state of the technologically elevated dictators of the region who had just concluded an indecisive war (and the rapid spread of Gabreelism), Roubik was able win control of much of the Middle East for the Gabreelists in a series of lightning offensives. So fearsome was the reputation of the Gabreelist forces at the end of these campaigns, that in 1136 Roubik was able to capture intact the AECO Downport without firing a single shot.

A treaty negotiated in part by Gabree-el and her Foreign Minister Abram Goldstein, led to the formation of the Eastern Coalition in 1137. The Coalition included not only the Gabreelists, but other factions that controlled Asia Minor, the Caucasus Region, and most of southern and central Asia. With Roubik in command of the combined force, Coalition armies were able to complete the conquest of India (in some of the first combat walker vs. combat walker actions), all of southeast Asia, and drive into the heart of southern China, along the way freeing Nepal from the tyrannical rule of a Virus infected computer and its robot minions.

Through warfare, negotiation, alliance building and other forms of attrition, by the end of the 1130s the number of states on Terra had dwindled to ten. In

addition to the Eastern Coalition, there existed the Western European Federation (which held all of Europe west line running roughly from the mouth of the Vistula to the mouth of the Danube, Scandinavia, Iceland, Greenland and portions of Newfoundland in North America), the Slavic Republic (the remainder of Europe not controlled by the WEF, plus the Siberian Plains), the Pacific Alliance (Australia, New Zealand, and much of the southern and central Pacific Ocean), the Latin Confederation (all of South and Central America, including the Caribbean Islands), the North American Union (all of North America east of the Rockies, except for those portions occupied by the WEF), the East Asia Cooperative (northwestern Asia, including China north of the Yangtze, Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines) the Southern Africa League (all of Africa south of the Sahara including Madagascar), Atlantis (an alliance of off-shore Dolphin and human communities ranging from the Atlantic to the Pacific), and the Republic of Cascadia (all of North America west of the Rockies, including Alaska and the Hawaiian Islands, which had a similar cultural heritage).

Among these states existed a degree of mutual hostility, particularly between the WEF and the Eastern Coalition (one under the control of the Solomani Party, the other run by the increasingly anti-Solomani Gabreelists, who saw the discrimination against Gabreelist minorities in WEF territory as an attack on the Eastern Coalition itself), the Latin Confederation and Atlantis (the LC accused the pro-Solomani Party Atlantis of terroristic raids against its coastal cities because the Confederation tolerated Gabreelism), and the Slavic Republic and the East Asia Cooperative (both nominally sympathetic to the Solomani Party, though clandestine WEF support to the Slavic Republic in its skirmishes with the EAC soon caused the Cooperative to take a more neutral stand). It is likely that open warfare between one or more of these factions would have broken out, except for the beginning of the Vampire raids on Terra in 1139.

Terran Campaigns Against Virus

Lone Vampire ships had conducted raids on isolated targets on Terra since 1132, and had resulted in some minor damage. The first organized multi-ship Vampire raids on Terra were conducted in 1139 by a Vampire fleet operating out of what remained of the Theophilus naval base on Luna. The Vampire fleet raids represented a new kind of Virus threat, one that all factions realized had to be dealt with immediately, though they were able to do so initially with only varying degrees of cooperation and coordination.

All factions on Terra controlled at least a few armed starships and a number of planetary defense guns of various types, but these were used primarily for close orbit defense against other factions (operation of

unarmed or lightly armed merchant vessels was deemed foolhardy given the risks-though a few brave /insane souls are now known to have ventured out from time to time). This gave Vampire ships the ability operate freely through out the rest of the Terran system, scavenging for parts and developing bases from which they could strike.

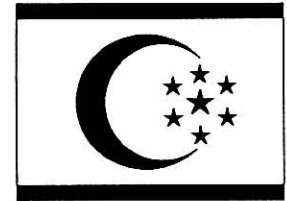
The Eastern Coalition city of Singapore was the first target of the Theophilus Vampire ships, and they inflicted severe damage on several of Singapore's arcologies, killing upwards of 50,000 people and injuring hundreds of thousands more. Eastern Coalition system defense craft responded immediately, but took heavy casualties when they attempted to over take the Vampire fleet as it made its way back to Luna. Several other attacks on other major cities in the Eastern Coalition followed (causing some speculation that the WEF may be involved), though none managed to do any significant damage. Sensing that one of their cities could be next, some of the Terran states (the East Asia Cooperative, Pacific Alliance, and Republic of Cascadia) immediately formed an anti-Virus alliance, which the Eastern Coalition and Latin Confederation were later asked to join. The Vancouver Alliance (named for the city in which the talks that lead to its founding took place) agreed to share naval intelligence on Vampire ship movements and to act on coordinating the defense of their portion of Terra against all Vampire attacks. The first action the Vancouver Alliance saw involved a join attack on the Theophilus naval base. Awkwardly planned and rather poorly executed, the attack nevertheless did manage to do significant damage to the naval facilities and forced the Vampire fleet to abandon Luna.

In time, the various state fleets learned to coordinate their actions better, and conducted a number of offensive actions. These culminated in the Battle of Mars in 1144, which was the largest such engagement since the Second Solomani Rim War. The Battle of Mars was a decisive Vancouver Alliance victory, and with it the immediate Vampire threat to Terra was put to an end.

The allies had little time to celebrate. Two years earlier, a Gabreelist priest named Rosetti had taken a small group of followers and a far trader and traveled to the Prometheus system to spread the Faith. Rosetti's group soon discovered that, like Terra, Prometheus had undergone a great deal of damage due to the effects of Virus. They also discovered that much of the human population of Prometheus was engaged in a war for control of the planet against a Vampire fleet, its robotic ground troops, and their allies. The introduction of Gabreelism to the human population helped to rally them in common cause, but the situation was still desperate when the leader of the human resistance, Kunissery Vaidyana, sent the last working starship in human possession on a mission to ask for help from the Terrans.

The Vancouver Alliance decided to act decisively in the conflict. The result was Operation Pegasus, which sent the bulk of the Alliance's naval assets on a relief mission to the Prometheus system. In the first phase, the Vampire ships that were harassing human forces from Prometheus orbit were to be driven off or destroyed. This would allow for the second phase, the landing of some 50,000 troops and some 500 combat walkers under the command of General Roubik, who was temporarily relieved of his command of the Eastern Coalition Army so that he could lead the force. Two years of hard fighting followed, but in the end, Prometheus had been spared occupation by Vampire forces. "The War Against the Machines" as it was sometimes popularly known made a hero of Roubik on two worlds, increased the acceptance of Gabreelism on Earth, and proved to be a major propaganda coup for the Eastern Coalition.

The Terran Republic symbol is essentially a modification of the symbol adopted by the Eastern Coalition upon its founding in 1137. It incorporates a number of themes from Terra's past. The crescent in particular was chosen because of its significance to the people's who inhabited the region where the Eastern Coalition was initially the strongest. The circle of small stars arrayed around the central larger star represent each of the various factions which came together in 1164 to form the Republic. These were: the Eastern Coalition, the Pacific Alliance, the Latin Confederation, the North American Union, the East Asia Cooperative, and the Republic of Cascadia. The central star itself is said to represent Sol, or perhaps Terra.



In civilian and official government applications (such as flags) the vertical bars are always included and all portions of the symbol are rendered in blue on a white background. Commercial spacecraft licensed by Terran Republic worlds are required by law to have an approved version of this symbol on their vessels, though merchants from Kaguk can be granted exemptions under special circumstances.

On military vehicles and spacecraft, the vertical bars above and below the crescent are excluded and the crescent and stars are rendered in black on vehicles and white on spacecraft respectively. Naval Scout landing party pennants (like the one featured on the cover) are narrower than the standard flag dimensions and have a split tail which is rendered in blue.

Desecration of the symbol of the Terran Republic in any of its official forms is against Terran Republic law, and is punishable by a fine of no less than Cr500 and/or 30 days in prison.

Unification War On Terra

While operations against Vampire ships continued in the Terra and Prometheus systems for several more years, tensions between the Eastern Coalition and its allies and the Western European Federation and its allies continued to build.

A coup in 1145 had brought to power Tomas Evers, a hard-line WEF Solomani Party leader. Evers had been a minor official within Solomani Security when the Collapse occurred, and by 1139 he had worked his way up to become the head of that agency throughout the WEF. Once firmly in control of the Western European Federation, he instituted a series of "reforms", which limited civil rights and institutionalized discrimination against Gabreelists. In 1151, operatives for the Solomani Party working on his instructions overthrew the government of the Slavic Republic, and replaced its elected leadership with a puppet dictator under Evers control. Two more coup attempts engineered by Evers, one in the North American Union (1152) and the other in the East Asian Cooperative (1154) failed, and resulting in the hardening of public opinion against the Solomani Party in those states.

In 1156, Evers ordered the "cleansing" of all territories under Solomani Party control of Gabreelists. This was to be accomplished through deportations, though it was noted by some at the time that the WEF and Slavic Republic had negotiated no agreements with any other state with regard to whether they were willing to accept them. The first of regions to be cleansed was the Iberian Peninsula, which had several concentrations of Gabreelists, the largest of which was in the ancient city of Madrid.

The Gabreelists in Madrid decided to take up arms and resist the deportations. What followed was a two month long siege, which ended when WEF army units stormed the main Gabreelist district, and killed everyone inside. Estimates of the death toll ranged from 20,000 to well over 100,000-the WEF did not keep detailed records of the incident, and it is believed that a significant percentage of the district's inhabitants escaped during the siege.

The incident, known popularly as the Madrid Massacre, immediately provoked a war with the Eastern Coalition. Michael Roubik, who since his hero's return from Prometheus had overseen a series of reforms within the Eastern Coalition's armed forces, including the creation of a separate Marine Corps (consisting of three divisions, many of them equipped with battledress and combat walkers that had been retrofitted with gravitic generators), was recalled to active duty to oversee the EC's war effort, and was given the title of Field Marshal.

As the conflict began, the Coalition found itself surrounded by enemies on three sides. Not only did it face the WEF, but the Slavic Republic, Southern Africa

League and Atlantis sided with the Federation as well. Initially only the Latin Confederation sided with the Coalition, but the Coalition was joined by other allies as the war progressed.

Roubik's first action was to attempt to knock the SAL out of the war, while holding firm against the WEF and Slavic Republic. To this end he used the Coalition's superior space assets to first, gain orbital supremacy, then conducted a three dimensional envelopment of SAL forces (this was the first use of the new Eastern Coalition Marines in combat). Though the WEF attempted to divert Roubik's attention by launching an offensive across the Caucasus Mountains (a drive that was halted at the Battle of Tbilisi), EC forces were able to capture the SAL capital of Kinshasa in less than three weeks, and entered Cape Town, where the government of the SAL finally surrendered a month after that.

Roubik then turned his attention toward the Slavic Republic on the first day of 1157. Feigning an offensive across the Strait of Gibraltar, he instead landed his Marine forces from orbit deep inside Slavic Republic territory and launched a massive invasion from southern Kazakhstan with the intent of linking up with the Marines at Samara on the Volga River. Unfortunately, heavier than expected resistance (an entire EC corps was decimated attempting to force its way through the Mugodzhary region) and a bitterly cold winter slowed his forces progress. Fearing that the Marines may run out of supplies before EC forces could achieve a linkup, he ordered the Marines to withdraw to the south. Breaking out of their encircled positions on the Volga, the Marines (with the help of devastating orbital artillery fire) pulverized five entire Slavic Republic Army divisions before linking up with the rest of the Eastern Coalition Army at Atyrau on the Caspian Sea. Elsewhere on the Kazakhstan/Russian front, more successful offensive actions by the Coalition resulted in the capture of the strategically important city of Omsk. The fall of Omsk forced Slavic Republic forces to withdraw from the Siberian plains for more secure positions to the west in the Ural Mountains.

Meanwhile, there were developments in the Latin Republic. Despite assistance from Coalition space forces, raiders from Atlantis and the WEF succeeded in devastating cities along the northeast coast of South America. Their missile attacks on Fortaleza in particular killed many thousands and had destroyed a number of key factories. Counter raids began in earnest in 1158. Targeting Atlantis' underwater population centers from orbit, Latin Republic missile boats successfully struck several arcologies, culminating in the total annihilation of the Sao Jorge complex in the Azores (1160), which resulted the deaths of over two million dolphins and humans. This ended the Atlantis raids on the Latin Republic, as Atlantis forces were forced to concentrate on defending their remaining

arcologies, and Latin Republic forces were becoming increasingly effective at combating the underwater tactics of the Atlanteans.

As the Eastern Coalition prepared for yet another offensive on the Slavic front in the early summer of 1158, the East Asian Cooperative entered the war on the side of the Eastern Coalition. Elections held in the

roughly north along the Volga River to Cheboksary, hence north to the Barents Sea. The WEF withdrew its forces in the Caucasus region to deal with the threat, and began shifting more and more of its forces in other regions eastward in anticipation of yet another offensive along the Slavic Front the following year.

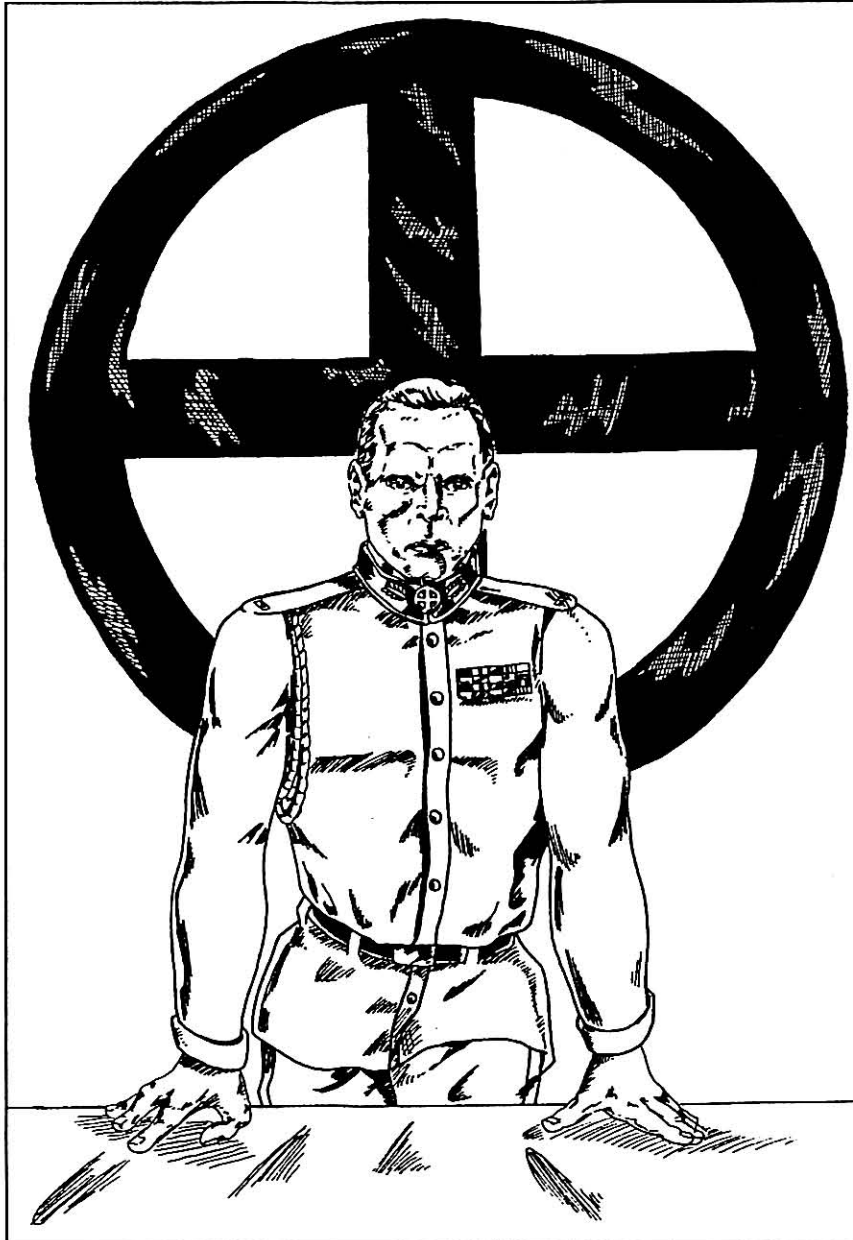
The offensive never materialized. While Coalition and Cooperative forces did conduct limited operations to bring them closer to Moscow, Roubik instead launched an offensive in the Balkans. Coalition Marine forces were withdrawn from the Slavic front and landed in Greece, where they quickly secured Athens and drove north into Serbia. The main line of attack went from the vicinity of Edirne northwest toward Belgrade. The WEF commander-in-chief of armed forces panicked, and ordered the immediate withdrawal of most the WEF's forces in Russia west to establish a new line of defense against the threat from the south. Operations continued through the rest of 1159 and early 1160, when the front once again stabilized. EC forces now occupied nearly all of the Balkans with the exception of portions of Croatia.

The Slavic Front, meanwhile, was nearly in a state of collapse. Slavic Republic officials secretly asked to meet with Coalition representatives to ask for terms, but before the meeting could take place, WEF Solsec agents captured the officials and executed them for treason. The remainder of the Slavic Republic was brought directly under WEF control by mid-summer, though many former Slavic Republic units surrendered to Coalition forces rather than be placed under control of WEF commanders.

It was at this point that the Republic of Cascadia and the Pacific Alliance entered the war on the side of the Eastern Coalition. These additional forces insured the final surrender of Atlantis by the end of 1160, and

cooperated in driving WEF forces from Greenland and Iceland.

By the end 1161, the war neared its final conclusion. A joint Eastern Coalition-East Asian Cooperative offensive in Russia succeeded in taking Moscow, and by late summer WEF forces had been driven all the way back to the Vistula. Romania fell, and Coalition forces on the Balkans Front soon found themselves on the outskirts of Budapest. Other EC forces took Sicily and Sardinia, and a surprise invasion of the Iberian



spring of that year brought a pro-Gabreelist, anti-Solomani Party faction into power, and the EAC was anxious to participate in the toppling of the Slavic Republic. Almost immediately, however, Atlantis and WEF forces struck the EAC's Pacific coast, and most of the Cooperative's forces had to be committed to combat this threat. The EAC was able, however, to commit several corps of fresh ground troops to the fight in Russia, and these proved to be decisive. The offensive of 1158 drove deep into Slavic Republic territory, stopping on a line from the Caspian Sea

Peninsula by a joint Latin Republic-Eastern Coalition task force nearly succeeded in reaching the Pyrenees by the end of the year. Coalition Marines sent to clear Scandinavia of WEF forces expected stiff resistance, but instead were greeted by cheering crowds holding EC flags.

In the spring of 1162, a delegation representing the alliance against the WEF met with representatives of that government to discuss surrender terms in the mountain city of Andorra. Per the instructions agreed to by the alliance, its ambassadors were to seek the unconditional surrender of all WEF forces. The WEF delegation refused, remaining defiant throughout the month long talks. The WEF lead negotiator, Charles Franck even made a last ditch secret appeal to some of the alliance ambassadors-drop the EC from the coalition and unite under WEF leadership for the sake of the "Solomani heritage" of Terra. A representative from the Latin Confederation, Lashuli Martinez, a woman of mixed Solomani-Vilani heritage was not impressed, and a shouting match ensued. The war resumed three days later.

Field Marshal Roubik was now in command of a force larger both in terms of personnel and firepower than had ever existed on the surface of Earth before, including the First Solomani Rim War. He immediately began issuing orders to put this war machine to use in the destruction of the WEF. Attacking across the Pyrenees from Spain and from Slovenia, anti-WEF alliance forces succeeded in cutting off large numbers of WEF troops in a massive pincer movement that met at Milan. All WEF forces in Italy surrendered soon after. An offensive in the east across the Vistula not only succeeded in bagging Warsaw, but Berlin soon after, though there was a lengthy period of house-to-house fighting in that city. In the north, a Coalition Marine force seized Denmark, though it had a difficult time attempting to drive south into Germany.

It was the Battle of Regensburg that proved to be the most decisive action of year. Threatened with encirclement at Vienna, 350,000 WEF troops (mostly consisting of lightly armored infantry and tracked, plasma gun armed tanks) withdrew up the Danube Valley into Bavaria. Arriving a mere three days ahead of them was an EC force of some 75,000 troops (equipped with battledress, combat walkers and a handful of attack speeders) which had just advanced through the Alps and captured Munich. With no where else to go, the WEF commander resolved to overrun the EC positions in and around Regensburg so that he could reestablish a defensive position in southern Germany. In an epic five day battle, saved for the EC due in no small part by the timely arrival of 25,000 EC reinforcements from Italy, the smaller Coalition force defeated the much larger WEF force, which retreated exhausted back down the Danube Valley and later surrendered to Coalition forces advancing from the

east. The Battle of Regensburg broke the back of the WEF's defenses in Germany. By autumn, all of mainland Europe was in the anti-WEF alliance's hands.

The problem confronting Roubik now was what to do about Britain, the last major WEF stronghold. Using nuclear weapons against the islands was out of the question-indeed both sides had refrained from using anything more than a few small neutron devices up to this point in the war, much to his relief. Rather than waiting until the next spring to conduct an offensive (which might give the remaining WEF forces time to reorganize), Roubik instead resolved to mount an immediate invasion. Using the Coalition Marines to conduct landings in Scotland from orbit as a distraction, Roubik put together a force of gravitic equipped troops pulled from a number of divisions and drove across the Channel into southern England. The maneuver caught the WEF forces totally by surprise, and London fell three days later. By the end of the year, additional Coalition troops landed on English soil, and the last of the WEF forces had surrendered.

Tomas Evers and his closest advisors in the WEF government were no where to be found, however. They had fled the day after London fell, and went into hiding in northern Canada.

Founding of the Dingir League

Archduke Gokhman served as the head of Dingir's provisional government for another nine years before dying in his sleep of natural causes in 1139. He was immediately succeeded by his long time chief of staff Admiral Tania Yau. Archduchess Tania proved to be a capable organizer and administrator, and she is given credit for helping Dingir's government transition from a purely military dictatorship to a quasi-feudal system in which local nobles had much more input into government decisions. In 1152, She called together prominent nobles from all over Dingir for the first Dingir Parliament, and worked with its leaders to make it a legitimate institution and not just a rubber stamp for her directives. The Articles of Parliament, which defined the powers of Parliament, resulted from that first session.

Also during this time Dingir suffered a number of Vampire fleet raids. The largest of these engagements occurred in 1147, and involved dozens of vessels fighting throughout the Dingir system (a battle that rivaled the Battle of Mars in both size and ferocity). Only through the bravery of the Dingirian Navy and the timely arrival of newly refurbished warships from Dingir's single class A starport facility was victory finally achieved.

By 1155, the Dingirian Navy had a sufficient number of jump capable ships that it could begin to sweep nearby star systems of Vampire ships. These sweeps lead to contact with other inhabited systems who desired protection from rogue Vampire ships and

high tech goods so that they could speed up the rebuilding their shattered worlds. The trade and defense pacts that were eventually established led to the founding of a new central government, the Dingir League (named for the ancient government of the Long Night Era), in 1160. The League was structured in a similar to Dingir's government, with the Archduchess as head of state, and a League Parliament made up of nobles and representatives from the member worlds.

A period of slow expansion began, along with very cautious exploration (Vampire ships were not particularly difficult to find along the jump-1 main that runs through much of the sector). By 1170, contact had

been made with Kagukan merchants. This was followed the next year by contact with a ship from the Terran Republic.

At first there was genuine excitement on Dingir about the fact that there was another interstellar state so nearby. It became apparent though that the Terrans were an aggressive, expansionistic power (at least in Dingirian eyes), and it appeared that they were a hard-line religious oligarchy to boot (again, from the Dingiran perspective). Archduchess Tania died before a decision could be made about how to react to the new perceived threat, but when her son Enrico took the throne, he issued directives that limited further contact

What's In a Name?

In the 70 years since the Collapse, word usage has evolved on Terra as it has elsewhere in the Solomani Rim. This is particularly true of the way people refer to themselves and describe others--below are some examples.

Children of Earth - Used by Gabreelist theologians to refer not only to humaniti, but also non-humans that currently inhabit Earth and call it their home. First used by Gabree-el during a sermon in Jerusalem in 1131.

Earth - Ancient name for the main world of the Terra system. Its origin predates starflight on Terra, and the word was in common usage until the end of the Long Night. Sometimes referenced in manuscripts since that time, it has enjoyed a surge in popularity since the Collaspe and the founding of the Terran Republic.

Humaniti - Collective name for all the various human races, including those that originated from Terra, the Vilani, Zhodani and others, including genetically manipulated types. As Gabreelism encourages the individual to think of all humans in collective terms, this word has seen increased use since the Collapse, while use of more specialized descriptive words such as Solomani have declined. Alternatively this word is spelled 'humanity'.

Solomani - This word was used prior to the Collapse on Terra to refer the members of the human race which developed there from the original human stock (as opposed to the Vilani, Zhodani and others which continued to develop elsewhere). Commonly, it also referred to members of the Solomani Party, whether they were residents of the Solomani Confederation or the Third Imperium. During the Terran Civil War, it became associated almost exclusively with those factions which sided with the Solomani Party on Terra. Since that time, it has become synonymous with those who would support totalitarianism and oppression in much the same way that the word 'Nazi' became associated with those concepts after Earth's Second World War. Today, citizens of the Terran Republic substitute other words for Solomani when speaking about the ethnicity of a particular person.

Note: Unaware of the negative meaning of that the word 'Solomani' had to Terrans, Dingirian ambassadors initially made the mistake of referring to Terrans as being 'Solomani'. This did nothing to improve relations between the two interstellar states.

Since then, 'Solomani' is still used by common citizens in the Dingir League to refer to the Terran Republic in a disparaging fashion.

Solomani Rim - The name of the sector in which the Terran Republic, Dingir League, etc. reside. With the decline of the use of the word Solomani and its rather negative connotations, citizens of the Terran Republic rarely use this phrase as the proper name of their sector. A shortened form, Sol Rim or sometimes Solrim, is used in government documents, though as of yet neither form has official status. Outside the Terran Republic, Solomani Rim is still in common usage.

Terra - The common name used during the Imperial Era for the main world of the Terra system. Though this name is still used on star charts and in official government documents, it is declining in popularity as Earth (an ancient name for the planet dating to pre-stellar times) gains wider acceptance.

Terran - A resident of, or a person who originates from, Terra (Earth). It is used not only to refer to people from Earth, but on an interstellar level, is used to refer to anyone who is a citizen of the Terran Republic, regardless of their world of origin.

with the Terrans (at least for the time being). This decision was supported by the League Parliament, which enacted laws forbidding Dingirian merchants from doing business with Terra.

Founding of the Terran Republic

The current government structure of the Republic was the brainchild of Daniel Dahnara, son of Gabree-el, who served as General Services Minister (1155-57), Justice Minister (1157-61) and briefly as Prime Minister (1161-62) of the Eastern Coalition before being assassinated by pro-Solomani terrorists in 1162 at the opening ceremonies for the Temple of the Faith in Jerusalem (the assassins were almost immediately linked to Tomas Evers). A popular and highly charismatic figure, he had been a leading advocate of Terran unification and had traveled extensively promoting his concept of a strong centralized civil service form of government, one that was efficient and responsive to the people's needs. His death triggered an outpouring of emotion on Terra, and signaled the end of what little pro-Solomani sympathy that remained in most regions.

Two people took up the cause of promoting Terran unity and Daniel's plan for a world government: Gabree-el Dahnara, his mother, who was serving at the time as a minister without portfolio in the Eastern Coalition cabinet, in addition to her spiritual duties as leader of the Gabreelist faith; and Louis Beauchamp, a close friend of Daniel who had worked with him in the General Services Ministry and later served as his assistant at the Justice Ministry. Beauchamp went on to serve as Justice Minister (1161-62) and Prime Minister of the Eastern Coalition (1162-1164).

While Gabree-el and Beauchamp worked in concert, each employed different methods in achieving their goal. Gabree-el made her appeals directly to the people, giving sermons and generally using the Faith as a tool to promote the concept of unification. She also met publicly with a number of popular figures, including Edward Lahtinen, leader of the Sentient Rights Movement. Beauchamp, on the other hand, preferred to work behind the scenes, negotiating with various national leaders throughout Terra, and carrying on a kind of quiet diplomacy which proved very successful, particularly after the incident involving the capture and execution of former Solomani Party leader Tomas Evers in late in 1163.

Gabree-el and Beauchamp's hard work finally paid off on 365-1164 when the Treaty of Miami created the Terran Republic. A five year transition period was declared, and Louis Beauchamp was named the Republic's first Prime Minister on the first day of 1165.

The first three years of Beauchamp's administration were rather turbulent. Soon after the Republic was declared, the leaders of Prometheus petitioned for admission. Not even completely set up for world rule,

the Republic had to rapidly transition itself into an interstellar government. Late in 1166, a revolt led by mercenary troops (many of whom were former soldiers who became unemployed when the world government was declared) had to be put down in Brazil. An extremely bloody affair, it led to the outlawing of organized mercenary and paramilitary forces on Terra, a ban that stands to this day. Some six months later, contact was made for the first time with Kagukan merchants at Barnard. Initially claiming ownership to all uninhabited worlds in the Sol subsector (including Barnard), the Kagukans were soon forced to recant most of their claims in the face of the Terran Republic Navy, which deployed squadrons to Barnard and other uninhabited systems in the Sol subsector to contest Kagukan claims.

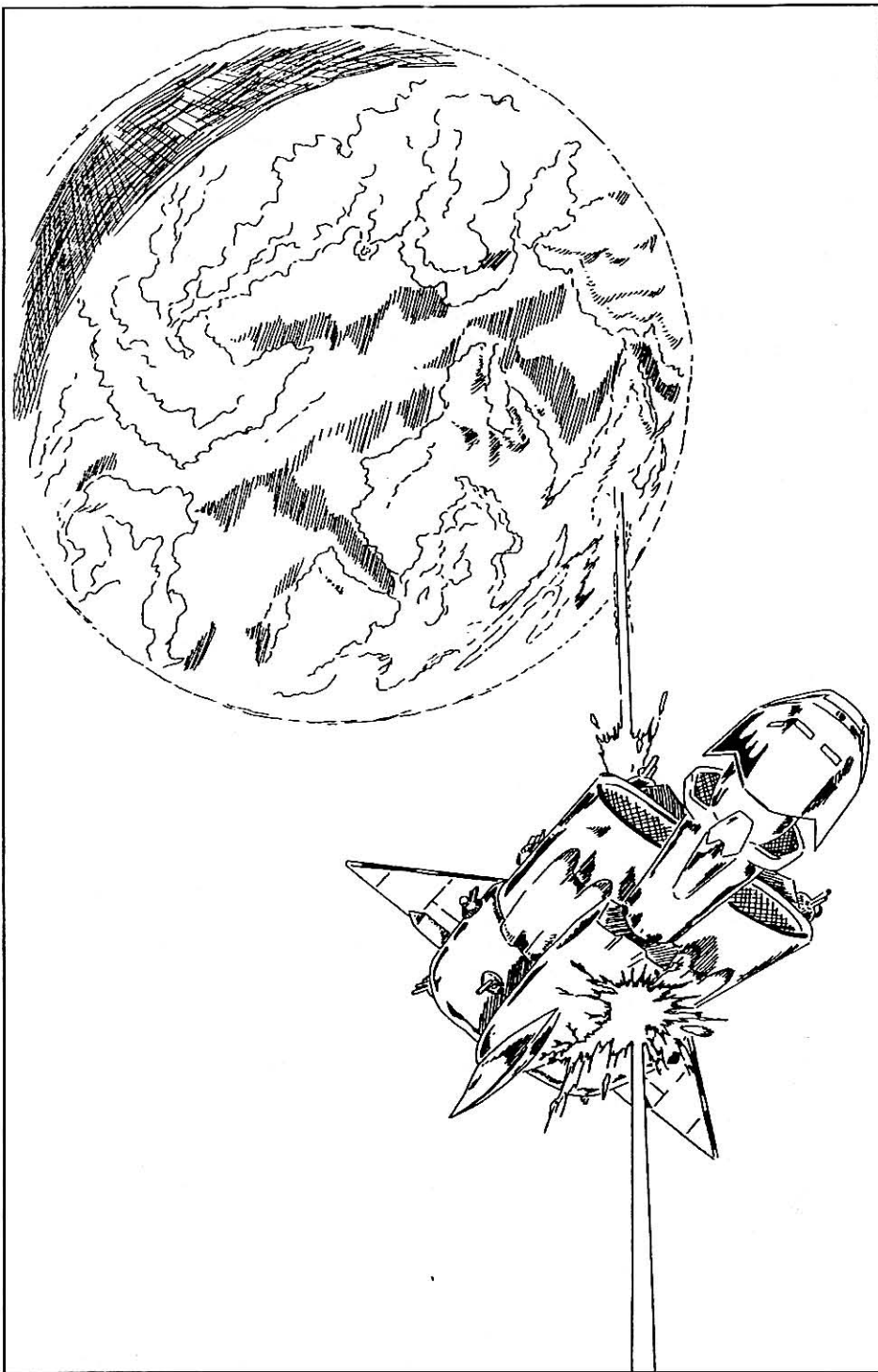
The Conquistador Era

In the years that followed, various official and not-so-official exploration/re-contact expeditions were sent out to some of the other neighboring inhabited worlds. Accompanied by Gabreelist priests, these expeditions were not always welcomed, and were soon escorted by small contingents of Terran Republic Marines, Gabreelist mercenaries from Prometheus, or simple armed irregulars who were looking for adventure. Some of these armed units participated in the overthrow of TEDs (technologically elevated dictators) and Virus controlled governments at the regional level. Their exploits became the stuff of legend back on Terra and Prometheus and thus give the Conquistador Era its name and rather infamous reputation, which harkened back to the deeds of the young, brash officers of the ancient Terran kingdom of Spain and the somewhat less ancient Terran Confederation.

Unfortunately, while their conquests may have delighted the mass back home, the reputation of the Conquistadors led to diplomatic problems. The initial meeting between vessels from Terra and Dingir occurred in 1171, a meeting brokered by Kagukan merchants. Almost immediately, the two sides agreed to a number of diplomatic and cultural exchanges. As the Dingirians found out more about the nature of Terra and its policies, however, they abruptly stopped the contacts and refused further official communication.

While Beauchamp's government, in particular the Defense Ministry, attempted to regulate the actions of the Conquistadors, they were only partly successful. While they could institute new regulations regarding the behavior of the official military forces off-world, they were unable to put into place effective measures regulating the behavior of other, unofficial military organizations operating outside the Terra or Prometheus star systems.

In 1175, Beauchamp instigated a number of reforms to the civil service system of the Republic. These



reassignment of some 500,000 government employees.

Beauchamp finally resigned as Prime Minister in 1184, after nearly 20 years in office. He was succeeded by Bradley W. Dasovich, who had served previously as the Treasury Minister. Known for his frugality in that post, he became infamous for his reforms as Prime Minister in 1185, which slashed funding to the AH&C (Arts, Humanities, and Cultural Affairs) Ministry and reduced the Navy Ministry's budget by fully one-third across the board. On the other hand, he was also instrumental in providing funding for infrastructure rebuilding projects throughout the Republic, and also created the Redevelopment Ministry, which was instrumental in raising the technological level of a number of worlds within the Republic.

Dasovich served as Prime Minister for ten years before he resigned in 1194. His resignation has been the subject of some controversy, as it is known that Shoshanna, Gabree-el's granddaughter and Priestess of the Faith in all but name at the time, disliked Dasovich and wanted the Republic's government to be taken in another direction. Whatever the circumstances, Dasovich left government quietly, and was soon recalled to serve as the head of the General Accounting and Auditing Ministry (GAAM) as the result of the reforms of 1195.

Dasovich was succeeded in the role of Prime Minister by Jorge Alee Dahnara, grandson of Gabree-el and Shoshanna's

brother. Jorge had served previously as an officer in the Terran Republic Marines, and had risen rapidly through the civil service ranks to become the head of the Security Intelligence Ministry in 1191. A leading proponent of Terran Republic expansion and exploration, his first act as Prime Minister was to insist on a doubling of the Navy Ministry's budget as part of his 1195 reforms of the Republic's civil service, something he won approval from the rest of the Executive Council for after much arm twisting. Smaller but substantial increases in the budgets of the other branches of the military soon followed, as well

became known as the Beauchamp Reforms, and they streamlined the rapidly growing bureaucracy, made it easier to dismiss incompetent employees, and eliminated much of the duplication of effort that had started taking place between ministries. The Beauchamp Reforms also institutionalized Gabree-el's role in the Terran Republic government, creating the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which she headed until her death in 1196. Reforms of the civil service similar to those conducted by Beauchamp have been carried out by the Prime Minister of the Republic every ten years since. The most massive of these reforms was conducted in 1195, and involved the elimination or

as increases in the budget of the Ministry of Research, Science and Technology, and the Security Intelligence Ministry. The result has been the construction of new naval facilities throughout the Terran Republic, including the building of a naval base at Agidda, and the expansion of the outpost system established under Beauchamp which provides the Republic with facilities for its armed forces (and Security Intelligence operatives) to operate from on the frontier.

Recent Terran Republic History

Gabree-el died on 202-1196, due to complications from Menickelly's Syndrome. She was succeeded by her granddaughter Shoshanna Dahnara-Avila. Shoshanna has demonstrated psionic talents similar to her grandmother, and was a natural choice to be the next Priestess of the Faith. Shoshanna's daughter Ellora has also shown psionic talent, and will likely succeed Shoshanna when the time comes.

Also in 1196, a Terran military outpost was constructed on Arrukir, partly to act as a base of operations for expansion into the Atria (Banasdan) subsector (the public reason), and to act as a base of operations for Terran Republic operatives in the Vega subsector (the covert reason). These operations continue in 1202. Ironically it is the policy on expansion into the Atria subsector that is the most controversial within the Executive Council, as the goal of the Vegan operations, preventing the Vegans from becoming a threat to the Republic, is well defined and agreed upon by all the members of the Executive Council. Three of the Executive Council members have expressed their desire to see the Republic's resources spent on rimward expansion, rather than on pushing deeper into former Imperial space. In particular they point to the worlds of the Near Bootean Cluster, which they fear may fall into Dingir League hands if the Republic becomes too preoccupied coreward. For his part, Jorge Dahnara wants to continue the Atria subsector operations, as they provide an excellent cover for the ongoing operation in the Vega subsector.

Terran Republic expansion into the Dingir subsector, and suspicions about Terran intervention in the Vega subsector precipitated confrontations between the Dingirian and Terran vessels in 1199 and again in 1201 at Meshan. The resulting Quasi War (1201) consisted of several inconclusive engagements, but was ended before full scale war broke out. Gabreelist priests were rumored to have participated in the negotiations, which concluded with both the Dingir League and Terran Republic renouncing any other expansion in the disputed region of the subsector. Tensions between the Dingir League and the Terran Republic remain high, but they are at least below the level of military conflict.

A large scale intervention was begun in 1198 on

behalf of friendly Lagashan Gabreelists in their efforts to seize control of their world from its indigenous rulers. Unlike previous "Conquistador" type operations in the past, the various national rulers on Lagash were not TEDs or Virus infected computers, but humans who could count on a large reserve of high tech relic technology, plus some additional mid-tech military equipment that had been built with relic industrial equipment. After some four bloody years, and a commitment of over 300,000 Terran Republic Marines to continuous operations (a figure which strained the logistical support capabilities of the Terran Republic Navy to the breaking point on several occasions), Lagash has been secured with the exception of a few trouble spots where guerrillas have taken to the wilderness. It is expected that all resistance will cease before the end of the year.

Recent Dingirian History

In 1190, the Dingirians had made contact with Muan Gwi and the Vegan worlds of the former Polity region. Trade relations were opened up soon after and a trade convoy route established, though the flow of goods between Dingir and Muan Gwi (and the resulting revenues) has never lived up to the expectations of either Dingirian speculators or Vegan merchants. The League has also become increasingly involved in the affairs of the human worlds in the old Vegan Autonomous District (a petition for the admission of Bellerophon into the Dingir League effective 001-1203 was recently approved by Archduke Enrico and the League Parliament) and aid is currently being given to the Vegan world of Hsuishlesh, which the League government press releases refers to as "a trusted Vegan ally" (notably excluding mention of Muan Gwi).

Troubles on the spin-rimward flank with pirates based out of Edaazun continue to be a source of worry for the League. Unable to logistically support sufficient forces to deal with the problem, the Dingirian Navy finally constructed a naval base in the vicinity at Duriim so that it can be used as a base of operations. Time will tell if this will finally put an end to Dingirian merchant ship losses in the Spinward Reach, which have been on the increase as of late.

Tensions with the Terran Republic, meanwhile, also continue. The Quasi War showed certain weaknesses in the Dingir League Navy (namely, too much of a reliance on rebuilt pre-Collapse vessels), weaknesses that will take time to correct. The League does not have the luxury now of ignoring the Terran Republic. It will have to be dealt with one way or another, and the League will continue attempt to build trade and defense alliances so that it can become too powerful for the Terrans (or a renewed Virus threat) to strike against.

Terran Information Network

Terra/Sol (1827 A867A89-C)

Date: 007-70

Tel-Aviv/Capital District

¶ In a Press conference held here today in the Operations Center of the Terran Republic Navy, Navy spokesperson Commander Rachael Calderon denied a Times News Service report that the Navy was covering up a recent incident between elements of the Terran Republic Second Fleet and a task force of the Dingirian Navy in the UV Ceti system.

¶ "While there have been a number of shooting incidents since our first encounter with the Dingirian Navy some three years ago, I can assure that there was no incident in the UV Ceti system that resulted in an exchange of fire or loss of live."

¶ When asked if this meant that Navy vessels did indeed enter the UV Ceti system in violation of treaty, Commander Calderon responded, "that means that elements of Second Fleet entered the UV Ceti system, and encountered Dingirian vessels....I do not care to characterize how the encounter came about. The Dingirians have received a satisfactory explanation of our actions there, and have not filed a formal complaint."

¶ When contacted by TIN, the Dingirian League Embassy said that it had no comment on the incident, but that "no formal complaint against the Terran presence in the UV Ceti system would be forthcoming."

Prometheus/Sol (2027 A785965-B)

Date: 015-70

New Osaka/Nippon District

¶ In ceremonies commemorating the 56th anniversary of the human forces victory over the A.I. Army, Governor Keneth Vaidyana today announced the completion of the Enrona Naval Shipyard, which will produce starships for the Terran Republic Navy. Owned by the Promethean government, the shipyard will be managed by StellarTech, a Terran defense contractor.

¶ "The shipyard, equipped to TL 12 standards, will primarily build support ships in the 500 to 5,000 ton range," said a Navy spokesman. Though some Columbus-class exploration vessels will also be retrofitted there from time to time."

¶ "The shipyard will bring in several thousand badly needed skilled labor jobs to Prometheus," said Governor Vaidyana. "My thanks go to the Navy for selecting Enrona for the construction of their vessels."

Nusku/Sol (1822 C56996C-7)

Date: 022-70

Mishulgild/Capital District

¶ A Gabreelist priest held a press conference here today to reveal what he called "the appalling conditions salvage workers are forced to live under at the Diirgash ruins because of SIU Salvage Inc.'s total disregard for worker safety."

¶ Diirgash is the site of the former planetary capital, some 40 km from Mishulgild.

¶ A spokesperson from the Governor's office here indicated that a complete investigation of the conditions at Diirgash would be conducted immediately.

¶ SIU Salvage had no comment on the priest's accusations.

Sayings From The Book Of Gabree-el

"Appreciate that which you have, do not let envy or jealousy overcome you."

"Remaining in touch with the Divine Being brings freedom from fear of death."

"In the cycle of birth and death, the journey of the soul continues through many bodies until the Universe is at an end. The only thing that changes is our circumstances. We are who we are throughout."

"Patience, like you body, must be exercised vigorously so that it will remain in condition."

"Death is but a transition."

"Destiny is nothing but what will happen if you cannot change your course in life."

"The only things that are certain are that you will live and that you will die--you are the master of what lies in between."

"Courage is found in everyone, as is fear. Learn to master the former and remain ignorant of the later."

"Contemplation will put you in touch with what you truly feel. It provides you with a pair of eyes for which to see your soul."

"Listen not to evil. Listen to your soul--it will lead you down the path of righteousness."

"Be true to yourself, your beliefs, and to those you care about. No one can ask anymore of you than that."

"All things in the Universe can be used for good or evil."

"Prophecy does not cause a thing happen."

"Sometimes the best thing to say is to say nothing."

"The strength of the body fades with age and sickness--the strength of the soul is eternal."

"Nothing that is good can be gained by the debasing of others."

"Manage yourself--then concern yourself with the habits of others."

"Question if you must, but then listen to the answers."

"The truest measure of wealth is not just the number of credits one can marshal."

"One does not become a priest in search of fame--any fame you achieve rightfully belongs to the Divine Being."

"Gold and platinum do not mend the soul, nor make up for the transgressions we make against others."

"The attire of the person gives no true accounting of their soul."

"Take life only to preserve the life of others."

"First understand, then judge. No justice can ever come from ignorance."

"Compassion and mercy have rewards we cannot measure on the largest computer."

"Be vigilante and remember the past. What has happened before, both good and bad, can happen again."

"It is possible to know anything, and yet understand nothing."

"Do not seek out revenge lightly--for it may consume you as easily as it consumes your enemies."

Aliens of Terra

Introduction

For our purposes, 'alien' is defined as any race of sentient creatures (including humans) who was not present on Earth the year jump drive was invented by the Terrans (-3563 NT/-2431 IE/2087 AD). This includes not only races such as the Hiver and Aslan, but Vilani who completed their development on Vland; and Dolphins, who though their ancestors were present on Earth, were not genetically manipulated to sentience until the Interstellar Wars. Also note that the races in this essay is only described in general terms—for a more in depth discussion, consult previous works by GDW, Imperium Games, Digest Group Publications, or read the essays that I have prepared that will appear in Traveller Chronicle over the next several issues.

Background

During the Solomani/Imperial Eras, representative members of dozens of races could be found at any given moment in the Terran system. They were attracted there not only out of curiosity (millions of travelers visited the various historical sites located there every year, making tourism a leading industry on Terra), but also for trade. Terra was known for producing excellent quality high tech goods, especially electronics and medical equipment. Some alien races did such a large amount of business on Terra, they established consulate offices or embassies to deal with interstellar trade issues and to provide services to their citizens who might require assistance. The Hivers in particular established a small colony to support their work with Terra's computer scientists and engineers. It is generally believed that the alien (both non-human and non-terrestrial human) population of Terra reached its height about 1100, when records indicate that several hundreds of million individuals resided in system on a temporary or permanent basis.

The Second Solomani Rim War (as the Final War was known in this region of space) turned much of the Sol subsector into a battle zone. This caused most of the transient alien merchant population to seek to do business elsewhere, and for all practical purposes completely dried up the tourist trade. Many embassies also shut down in 1117, their services no longer required or their operations moved to Home or Dingir. Late in the 1120's, the battle fronts stabilized into cease-fire lines, and trade and tourism (particularly with the Rimward alien races) began a slow recovery.

The Collapse cut the recovery short, and all but ended contact with other star systems, stranding

members of some alien races on Terra. The isolation was at its deepest during the first phase of the Terran Civil War (1131 - 1144), when there were but two officially recorded journeys by Terran starships out of the system, both to Prometheus.

In the period since reunification and the founding of the Republic, the Terrans have moved to rapidly reestablish a place for themselves on the interstellar scene. As their interstellar state continues to expand and explore, it is likely that additional alien races will once again be encountered and that these alien races will at some point visit Earth for friendly purposes.

Current Status

Of the Major Races (at least those traditionally classified as such), the Vilani, Hivers, Aslan still have a presence on Earth in the New Era. Only one non-human Minor Race currently resides in the Terran system - that of course being the Dolphins. Of human Minor Races present, many have been completely amalgamated into Terran society and are therefore indistinguishable from the native population except through genetic testing. A few of these races have maintained a degree of cultural and genetic uniqueness and they are discussed below.

The following is a list of the races that had a significant presence on Terra before the Collapse, and what became of that presence since.

The Major Races

Aslan

In 1130, several clans of the Aslan Hierate maintained a diplomatic presence on Terra. The primary purpose of these consulates officially was to provide aid to Aslan merchants visiting the system (or passing through to other regions), though it is now known that at least one clan was more concerned about conducting espionage activities against the Solomani Confederation than trade. A small Aslan trade colony consisting of about five thousand individuals of the Yerlyaruwo clan (which had good relations with the Solomani) also existed in Mexico City suburbs.

At the time of the Collapse, there were several trade convoys of various sizes (each from a different clan) in the Terran system. Those Aslan merchant ships that were not immediately affected by Virus managed to jump out system as the chaos began (and were never

seen again). Several vessels sustained significant damage due to attacks by rogue Virus-infected spacecraft (or panicked Solomani system defense forces) and had to land on Terra for repairs or be abandoned in orbit. The remaining vessels were destroyed with all hands aboard.

Survivors of the Collapse and the Chaos Time gathered near the site of the Yerlyaruiwo colony and established a new community there in which the various clan remnants united to create a new clan, the Hteaaoleah. The Hteaaoleah lived in the Latin Confederation for a number of years before attacks by armed gangs forced them to leave the region and migrate north. They were given asylum by the Republic of Cascadia and eventually settled in northeast Arizona.

Today the Hteaaoleah Aslan are a tight-knit community some 15,000 individuals, a handful of which have converted to Gabreelism (though their participation in the Faith is not officially recognized). Two Aslan males are members of the Terran Republic Marines. One is currently a cadet at the Marine Force Academy, while the other is a non-commissioned officer who participated in the campaign on Lagash.

Plans are underway to launch an Aslan-Human expedition which will determine if any Aslan worlds survived the Collapse. The expedition was scheduled to leave next year, but the current level of tensions between the Terran Republic and the Dingir League have caused an indefinite postponement.

Droyne

None of the various independent or Imperial Droyne worlds had an embassy on Terra in 1130, and none were engaged in trade with the Solomani of this region before the Collapse. Three dozen or so individual Droyne, employed by Solomani megacorporations, were scattered in various locations in the Terran system, the bulk of them on Mars. It is generally believed that several individual Droyne living on Terra did in fact survive the Collapse (there is historical documentation to this effect), and that the last of them died of old age some thirty years ago.

Hivers

The Hivers maintained extensive trade and diplomatic facilities on Terra, as the Hive Federation and the Solomani Confederation maintained a number of trade agreements. The largest of the Hiver holdings, the Vilgate (a Galanglic translation), was their electronics research and trade center. The Vilgate was built on land purchased on the eastern coast of Australia, north of Brisbane, and had an adjacent

residential zone which had grown to over 100,000 individuals by 1117.

After the Collapse, Hiver technicians from the Vilgate worked with human computer specialists to come up with a non-sentient form of Virus nicknamed "Dragon" which protects surviving computers and data nets from becoming infected. Dragon and its variants (Red Dragon, Bronze Dragon, etc., each of which is tailored for different computer sizes and has a different defense style) were subsequently shared by all factions on Earth, then distributed to other worlds as the Terrans made contact with them. During the Terran Civil War, the Hivers provided valuable technical assistance to the Pacific Alliance and later the Vancouver Alliance in its efforts against Vampire ships. The Unification War, however, saw the destruction of the technical and manufacturing facilities at Vilgate, which were subjected to bombardment by a marauding Atlantis wet navy vessel in 1160. Though much of the equipment lost at Vilgate was irreplaceable, the Hivers were able to adapt human technology to their needs, and construct a somewhat smaller research facility (the name of which roughly translates as "Little Vilgate") near the site of the old complex.

Today, the Hiver colony in Australia consists of some 250,000 individuals, more than double the pre-Collapse level. Much of this growth can be directly attributed to changes in Hiver society, which place a much higher priority on the survival of their larvae--to what extent these changes can be attributed to human contact or the instinct of their species to survive is unknown.

Xenosociologists who have studied the Hivers in recent years have noticed a growing rift between older, more established nests in the colony, and those established after the Collapse. Practically all the Hivers who have converted to Gabreelism (they refer to Gabree-el and Shoshanna as M. Gabree-el and M. Shoshanna) come from the newer nests, while the vast majority of those who want to maintain a separation from humans and eventually migrate trailing in search of what may be left of the Hive Federation come from the older nests. Other xenosociologists have suggested that the appearance of a schism may just be a Hiver "manipulation" for some unknown purpose. As xenosociologists rarely agree unanimously on anything, the correct answer is known only to the Hivers themselves, and they are mute on the subject.

K'kree

The K'kree maintained no permanent diplomatic or trade presence in the Terran system. Several K'kree starships carrying a delegation on its way to the Home system (the Solomani Capital) were passing through

the Terra system at the time of the Collapse. No record of their ultimate fate has been found, but it is believed they were the victim of a Virus-induced starship malfunction, or Vampire ship attack.

Vargr

Only about a hundred Vargr were in system when the Virus struck, all part of a trade and research station located near the AECO starport complex in northern Africa. Many were killed in the initial Virus attacks, and others were hunted down and executed during the Chaos Time. No Vargr have been reported to be alive on Earth in over 60 years.

Vilani

Many, many millions of individuals of varying mixed Vilani-Solomani heritage have settled on Earth over the approximately 3,500 years since the Terrans first made contact with the Vilani. They are visually indistinguishable from native Terrans, and only detailed genetic tests could determine where in the family tree of a particular person that someone had a Vilani ancestor.

Such determinations are superfluous on Earth in the New Era.

Several hundred thousand ethnically pure Vilani colonists did however settle in India during the Imperial/Solomani Eras and maintained a more or less separate culture and community apart from the native inhabitants. These colonies, the largest of which was in New Delhi, were subjected to racially-motivated, anti-Imperial attacks during the opening phases of the Second Solomani Rim War. Trapped on Earth by the Solomani occupation, the majority of the Vilani relocated to Pakistan, where they lived in isolated communities in the mountains.

Following the Collapse and the Chaos Time, the Vilani greeted the arrival of Eastern Coalition forces with open arms, and were early converts to Gabreelism because of its cosmopolitan nature and inclusiveness.

Ethnically-pure Vilani can still be found in small communities and neighborhoods scattered throughout the mountainous regions of Pakistan, though their numbers are dwindling over time as young Vilani move away to the major cities and intermarry with native Terrans.



Zhodani

The Zhodani maintained no official presence in the Terra system, though it is generally believed that their operatives had at various times infiltrated the Psionics Institute at Alexandria. Any Zhodani stranded on Earth have remained anonymous over the years, and have likely intermarried with the local population.

Minor Races

Cassildans

A minor human race contacted by the Terrans during the Second Imperium (Rule of Man). Their total fascination with all things Terran, and a belief that they were to play a significant role in Terran history, led

them in 605 to establish a colony on the coast of Lebanon near Tyre. By 1117, the colony, called New Cassilla, had grown to over 5 million inhabitants.

Cassilldians average some 2.1 meters in height, and are known for their mastery of the Scathra, a sword similar to the Japanese Katana. Both male and female Cassilldians excel at all forms of armed and unarmed martial arts. Because of the importance of carrying the Scathra in Cassilldan culture, they are exempt from the restrictions on Terra regarding the carrying of lethal weapons in public.

Early converts to Gabreelism, Cassilldians participated in all the various campaigns of the Eastern Coalition, including the Operation Pegasus expedition. An all Cassilldan Eastern Coalition Marine regiment provided security for Priestess Gabree-el during her reign (supplementing the security provided by the Order of Protectors). These troops were primarily responsible for hunting down Daniel Dahnara's assassins in the wake of the killings at the opening ceremonies of the Temple of the Faith. A Cassilldan honor guard (consisting of a battalion of Terran Republic Marines) continues to serve as armed security for the Temple of the Faith today, and large numbers of Cassilldians routinely volunteer to serve in the Terran Republic armed forces, particularly the Army and Marines.

Dolphins

GenAssist, a Solomani megacorporation, created the sentient form of dolphins that inhabit Earth during the Interstellar Wars. In time, the sentient form of dolphin supplanted the non-sentient form, which can still be found on a number of worlds colonized by the Terrans.

At the time of the Collapse, there were approximately three million Dolphins in Terra's oceans, living in underwater cities off the coasts of Africa, North and South America, and Asia. Suffering only minimal casualties from the Virus, they unfortunately backed the Western European Federation and were strong supporters of the Solomani Party of Atlantis during the Terran Civil War and the Unification War that followed. Many of the casualties inflicted on the Dolphins were in retaliation for their raids on Eastern Coalition and other factions' coastal facilities. Some of these punitive actions, particularly the North American Union's attack on the Dolphin enclaves off Bermuda bordered on mass murder. By 1163, there were fewer than a million and a half sentient dolphins remaining, a 50 percent reduction in their pre-Collapse population. The treaty that established the Terran Republic recognized the Dolphin's rights as citizens, and many Dolphins have been converted to Gabreelism in the past two decades,

conversions that have been recognized by the Faith.

Ithklur

Dozens of Ithklur Marines provided security for the Vilgate facility and the adjacent Hiver colony prior to the Collapse. They continued to serve this function through the Terran Civil War, though by 1150 their numbers were in decline because they lacked a sufficient breeding pool. Most of the remaining Ithklur died during the bombardment of the Vilgate. The surviving Ithklur continued to fulfill their security role for the Hivers until the last one was forced to retire in 1182. Today, there are still a half dozen elderly Ithklur living near Brisbane in a small retirement community. It is said that they enjoy watching Australian Rules Football, and have been known to travel to Sydney to take in a baseball game, though their infirmaries keep them from actually participating.

Za'tachk

Terra was also home to an experimental colony (several hundred individuals) in 1130 of Za'tachk, a minor race closely associated with the Hivers. The colony, based along side the Hiver settlements in Australia, was never large enough to have a self-sustaining population, and thus has slowly declined over the years. The current population includes around 250 individuals, all of whom work for the Hivers in some capacity.

The Vegans

"I remember the time of your great grandfathers and great grandmothers. I remember the madness that overcame your people and that destroyed almost everything that your people built. Can you truly say that you've learned anything from it? You build starships so that you can expand your meager empires, search for lost weapons and try to construct new ones in an effort to gain an advantage over each other. Undoubtedly you will succeed in these efforts--your people always seem to find a way. One day some of you may even get around to proclaiming a Fourth Imperium. But you will not be satisfied with this accomplishment. You will start bickering amongst yourselves again--as you always do--and will destroy yet another civilization. If there is such a thing as this "Divine Being" you keep talking about, I hope it has the foresight to see that you finish the job correctly this time, so that we may finally live in peace."

Tagishumyos

Muan Gwi Vegan ambassador to Terra

quote during an audience with a Terran Republic government official, 1199

"We have been the weak sister of the humans for far too long. We can continue to blame them for what has happened, or we can accept our share of the blame for it and build a new Vegan Polity--one that can stand on its own feet and doesn't have to rely on the charity of others."

Leshien Muir

Hsuishlesh Vegan Muisstag member

quote from a speech, 1195

Introduction

The Vegans are a sentient race originating on Muan Gwi (Solomani Rim 1717) and inhabiting a two subsector region of space centered roughly 12 parsecs coreward of Terra. Currently there are 18 worlds which have Vegan majorities or are entirely Vegan, and 6 worlds that have significant (more than 6 percent) Vegan minorities. They are named by humans after the bright star near their homeworld. Their name for themselves is Anishonao, which roughly translates as "people" or "intelligent beings".

Physiology

Vegans are upright, bipedal, and bilaterally symmetrical, averaging 2.2 meters in height. They are bisexual, homeothermic oxygen breathers with an average lifespan of over 200 years. Because of their low-gravity origin, they are physically quite weak, and

are unable to live on high gravity worlds.

The head serves both as a braincase and as sensory appendage. Auditory organs are located in the collar-like structure around the neck, and can pick up sounds fainter than the average human can. Despite external appearances to the contrary, Vegans have two eyes, located inside the hood-like fleshy structure which dominates the head. The paired eyes are covered by a transparent eyelid-like structure, which acts as a polarized light filter. This structure protects the eyes from glare, like built-in sunglasses, and also serves to keep windblown dust out of the eyes. This filter can be retracted when not needed. The eyes themselves are large, and pick up radiation well into the infrared portion of the spectrum (primitive Vegans hunted primarily at night after the desert had cooled). Since the skull is solidly fixed in place, a Vegan cannot turn its head, but the fleshy hood containing the eyes can turn through a large arc.

The mouth is a vertical slit in the upper thoracic region, with paired breathing/vocal slits on either side of it. Two mandibles are located inside the upper chest, and grind food between their opposing sets of teeth. Vegans can consume both animal and vegetable matter, a product of their omnivore origins. Like humans, they require minimum amounts of certain vitamins and minerals or eventually become sick and die.

Where the forearm and hand would be on a human, Vegans have three tentacles, which serve them as manipulative organs. The tentacles are extremely dexterous, and give Vegans better agility than the average human. Their legs end in broad, splayed feet, which prevent them from sinking into soft sand.

The urogenital opening is a vertical slit located ventrally in the lower abdomen. There are no external differences between the sexes, of which there are two (corresponding to "male" and "female"). All mature Vegans possess the same sexual organs, though certain significant internal sexual differences develop after initial coupling with a mate (each taking on the characteristics of the "sex" opposite of their partner). Homosexuality among Vegans is impossible, as one or the other of the partners will change to the opposite sex as appropriate. The changing from "male" to "female" or vice versa involves the rapid slowing down of the production of certain kinds of hormones and the rapid increase of production of certain others, both of which serve to trigger other internal changes. Thus a Vegan may retain the internal sexual characteristics of a "male" or "female" for its entire life, or if it has several different partners during its lifetime span (though Vegans tend toward monogamy), may change from one

gender to another and back again. Xenobiologists speculate that Vegans as a species may at one time have had two distinct sexes from birth like humans, and later evolved the ability to change sex in response to environmental factors, or perhaps a shortage of one particular sex in their past.

Vegans have a number of adaptations to the arid dry region of Muan Gwi where they developed. Their tall, thin bodies are designed for maximum radiation of heat. The torso is covered with a thick integument, whose convoluted surface is richly supplied with blood vessels. By increasing or decreasing the supply of blood to the integument, heat radiation from the torso can be regulated to optimum effect (more during the day, less at night). This arrangement obviates the necessity for sweating and its consequent water loss. All orifices of the body can be sealed to prevent unnecessary moisture loss.

Psychology and Sociology

The thought processes of Vegans are remarkably similar to those of humans, especially when you consider their extra-terrestrial origins. This is probably due to the fact that they had similar development patterns as a species. Proto-Vegans were hunter-gathers, as was early man. The Vegans also had problems uniting their planet (a process that wasn't completed until the Vilani Occupation) and are quite culturally diverse--unfortunately, they are also capable of the same kinds of prejudices and hatreds that have afflicted humanity for so long as well. They too have a sense of self-identity, of personal property, of kinship, and of the need for being rewarded for one's labor. Vegans differ, however, in several areas.

First, they do not comprehend humor in the same way that humans do. The prat falls and other physical humor that humans enjoy would likely cause a Vegan to make inquiries about the comedian's health. Vegan humor is very subtle, and rarely elicits a physical reaction of any sort even from other Vegans (thus the old Solomani joke about the Vegan stand-up comedian).

Second, though Vegans have written long, emotional works of lyrical poetry devoted to their particular tuhuir (the "Muyui Cuhlesh Shien" is considered one of the classics), they seemingly avoid the subject of romance or love in their literature. This is not because the Vegans are a dispassionate race--xenopsychological studies of the Vegans indicate this is far from the case--it would appear that, for whatever reason, discussions of interpersonal involvement particularly of an intimate nature are considered by Vegans to be taboo or just plain distasteful.

Third, Vegans do not treat members of the "opposite sex" any differently than members of their same sex. This is at least partially true because both sexes appear identical externally, and because at any given point, a

Vegan may themselves be "male" or "female". This mind set is sometimes extrapolated over to their dealing with humans, as Vegans have a difficult time comprehending the need for such things as separate bathing facilities or differences in dress (or the tailoring of clothes) between sexes among humans.

Fourth, extensive testing has revealed that Vegans do not have any particular psionic ability, though they are susceptible to certain forms of psionic manipulation (particularly for some reason by Droynes). Because of this, they are extremely suspicious of anyone whom they learn is psionically gifted, and will not trust anyone who uses such abilities in their presence, even if it is for the benefit of a Vegan.

Fifth, because of the physical changes that Vegans undergo when changing from "male" to "female" or vice versa, they must undergo a period of psychological adjustment, usually no more than a day or so, while their systems readjust to the different levels of hormones in their system. Vegans typically spend this time with close friends and/or family and a private celebration is held (frequently the new mate which caused the change in gender hosts the party). It is rare for a human to be invited to such event, but if they are, it is because the Vegan considers the human to be a particularly special friend.

The most important difference between humans and Vegans, however, is the role of the tuhuir. Tuhuir are part cultural entity, part philosophy, part religion (they have been compared by some scholars to the human Tao) and each has its own customs and traditions and its own interpretation of the proper way to live. A tuhuir can consist of anywhere from hundreds of individuals to hundreds of millions. A healthy tuhuir usually consists of several million Vegans, and its members are usually scattered literally all over the surface of a world. Although rare, heretical and rebellious tuhuir consisting of several to several dozen individuals do exist. Tuhuir are found throughout Vegan society at all levels. Some correspond to a particular occupation (teachers for example) or a lifestyle (one that believes in communal living). Sometimes a schism will occur in a tuhuir, over a particular issue. the Muisstag (the governing and mediating tuhuir which arose during the Vilani occupation) attempts to negotiate a peace and have the two parties patch up differences. Though successful on average over 95 percent of the time in reconciling the two sides, if the differences are unbridgeable, the Muisstag will work with them alleviate some of the bitterness that inevitably results.

When Vegans near the age of sexual maturity, they engage in a search, the Irrishtyoshun, for the proper tuhuir (proper for the individual that is, the chose is a purely personal one, and cultural taboos prevent parents from pressuring their children about the decision). The Irrishtyoshun may last for many years, though on average lasts between 2 and 4. In practice,

about 50 percent (the exact percentage varies with each tuhuir) of all Vegans end up entering the tuhuir of their parents; about one half of one percent decide to make the Irrishtyoshun a way of life. The choice of tuhuir is a permanent one--in the years of contact between humans of Vegans, there are only a handful of documented cases where an individual attempted to change tuhuirs, and in many of those cases the individual was later found to be mentally ill.

History Prior to the First Solomani Rim War (Prior to 990)

The Vegans have a long, rich written history which dates back thousands of years. A full accounting of all Vegan history would require numerous volumes--discussed here are what are considered the highlights of Vegan history by most historians.

Early History

The Vegans developed in the semi-arid deserts of Muan Gwi from nomadic omnivore stock. They developed sentience in response to climatic changes on their homeworld which resulted in it becoming warmer than it had been previously. The proto-Vegans, forced from the deserts by their now extreme daytime heat, became hunter-gathers living along the desert fringes.

Development from Stone Age tools to civilization progressed normally for the Vegans (there is no evidence of Ancients' intervention in Vegan development), and the first cities were constructed around -11,000. The development of the various tuhuir can be traced to this time, as different city-states developed their own laws and accepted customs. Each tuhuir initially corresponded to an individual city-state or region. As Vegan culture developed from the city-states to nations, the tuhuir represented the culture of a particular country. Empires encompassing several tuhuir were rare, and usually fell apart within a generation or two into civil war and chaos.

Muan Gwi was still very much balkanized when it was first contacted by Vilani Imperium scouts in -6035. Numerous regional conflicts were in progress at the time, and the major powers were still recovering from an only recently concluded world war (the second for the Vegans, in which both sides had nuclear weapons but did not employ them). At first frightened into near xenophobia by their meeting (Vegan beliefs at this time precluded the possibility of other sentient races), by the time the Vilani scouts left the region several years later, they parted on friendly terms with a number of the larger tuhuir.

Traders from a Vilani client-state world in the Diaspora Sector, followed up this first contact some 20 years later, hoping to open new markets for their products and create trading partners. As a good faith gesture to the Union of Anilzish (at the time, the most powerful of the tuhuir), the traders gave them the

technology of jump drive. Unfortunately, when the other major tuhuir on Muan Gwi found out about this, they formed an alliance and launched an invasion of Anilzish territory which resulted in a third world war. The war culminated in the destruction of the Anilzish capital with a neutron warhead device, and resulted in the deaths of several million Vegans. After the war, the allies (already splitting up into hostile factions over the disposition of Anilzish territory) shared the secret of jump technology amongst themselves, and soon had the first working Vegan starships constructed.

Unlike many other races, the Vegans did not rush lead long into space. It was several decades before the first starships even traveled to the outer portion of their star system, and at least a century before the first Vegan starship traveled to the nearest star, that being in the Muan Issler system. There are many explanations for this--money that perhaps could have gone to exploration was instead spent on the military application of space travel, the fear of retribution from other tuhuirs (just as that which befell the Union of Anilzish), but probably the best explanation is that the Vegans, being a rather conservative society at the time, lacked anything resembling a true pioneering spirit or need to explore like humans experience. They simply did not care what lay over the next horizon, so long as the place they were living in was comfortable and allowed them to lives in relative safety.

Vilani Occupation Era

By -4400, several of the larger Vegan tuhuir had established colonies on several nearby worlds. They had even fought their first large scale space battles, though these were contained to the Muan Gwi system proper. The First Imperium or Ziru Sirka, as the Vilani-controlled star empire was also known, had by this time extended its borders deep into the Solomani Rim. The Vilani had monitored Vegan development along their frontier for a number of years before deciding in -4404 that the Vegans should be absorbed into the empire. The decision was a pragmatic one--should the Vegans ever unite under strong leadership, they would constitute a major threat to stability along the rimward frontier. The Vilani administrator in charge in the operation, named Dilusha Shulgiasu (for whom a world was later named), began by making secret alliances with some of the smaller tuhuir on Muan Gwi, which he then manipulated into forming an alliance and attacking one of the larger tuhuir. After they were fully engaged in war, he then formed a new secret alliance with yet another large tuhuir which he convinced to attack the first group with which he had made an alliance. This game of shifting alliances and maneuvering continued until finally, one by one, all of the tuhuir on Muan Gwi and their colonies were weakened to the point that they could no longer effectively resist an Imperial advance into their space. The last independent Vegan colony, located on Muan

Kwoyen, fell into Vilani hands in -4315.

Life under Vilani rule was unpleasant for the Vegans, as they were placed under severe restrictions because of their resistance to adopting Vilani cultural norms. The restrictions were of the kind typically mandated for all races that resisted being integrated into the monolithic First Imperium. While they were not tortured or placed into slave labor camps, they were



not permitted to own starships, and could not travel between star systems without special permission. Individual rights were routinely infringed upon, and property rights were virtually non-existent. Generally if the Imperial government decided they wanted something, they took it without fair or adequate compensation.

One positive result of the Vilani occupation was the fusion of the various tuhuir into a single society. United in their dislike of the Vilani, and forced to integrate by Vilani governors who attempted to make sure that no one tuhuir had too many of their kind in one location (least they decide to revolt), the Vegans formed a secret underground tuhuir which traveled on Vilani starships and passed information back and forth between tuhuirs on Muan Gwi and other Vegan worlds. Members of the secret tuhuir, which came to be known as the Muisstag (or "uniters"), had their safety and secrecy guaranteed by all tuhuir.

The Interstellar War Era

The liberation from Vilani rule by Terran naval forces occurred in -2373, and to the Vegans, the Terrans with their emphasis on individual rights were welcomed with open arms. The Vegans were the first truly alien race the Terrans encountered in large numbers (the Vilani, the first race encountered, being human). The Muisstag tuhuir were employed extensively as liaisons between the Vegan population and Terran naval officers which acted as administrators for Muan Gwi and other Vegan worlds. They were ideally suited to this role, since they were probably the only tuhuir that was trusted completely by all Vegans due to the service they performed during the Vilani occupation. Many Muisstag members also soon found themselves given the additional duty of "honest broker" between quarreling tuhuir. The Vilani occupation may have integrated most of the Vegan population, but the rivalry and feuding that occurred between the various tuhuir before their occupation had only suppressed. On several occasions during the early years of the Terran occupation, Terran Confederation Marines had to be called in as peace keepers between tuhuir which were attempting to seize control of a

particular area which they claimed as ancestral lands. The Muisstag was able to negotiate settlements between the tuhuirs, and bring true peace to Muan Gwi and other Vegan worlds.

The Rule of Man Era

With the triumph of the Terrans over the First Imperium, the Vegans were given the opportunity to govern themselves. This had more to do with the shortage of Terran officers (who were being sent to act as administrators on recently conquered Vilani worlds) than any real benevolence on the Terran government's part. They still regarded the Vegans as trouble makers, but had little choice but to at least try to let the Vegans govern themselves. The Muisstag's role had by this point had evolved further still, and now many of its members served in the Terran Occupation Government as administrators and clerks. Terran military rule ended when the last Terran Governor, Admiral Josef Dziama, and his cabinet left Muan Gwi and the surrounding Vegan worlds in charge of the Muisstag members of his cabinet in -2215.

The Muisstag created the Vegan Polity, a civil service form of government which was in charge of the day to day running of the Vegan worlds (it would last from the end of the military occupation of Muan Gwi through the Long Night until the Vegan worlds became a part of the Third Imperium). During the Rule of Man Era (as the Second Imperium is also known), the Polity governed the region in the name of the Emperor, retaining both a small navy and an army made up of Vegans under the strict control of the Muisstag.

The Vegans were influenced greatly by the influx of Terran colonists that past through and sometimes settled in the region of the Vegan worlds during the Second Imperium. Vegan merchants, now once again able to ply the spacelanes in their own vessels, traveled as far as Terra in search of goods, and routinely did business with nearby human worlds, in particular the worlds of Flanders and Bellerophon. Lacking the Terran drive to spread amongst the stars, however, only a few new colony worlds were established during the Second Imperium, and Vegans rarely left the Polity on a permanent basis. The vast majority of those who did leave were Irrishtyoshun who made traveling amongst the stars their own personal form of tuhuir. Known as Irrishtyastra (a name that reflects Terran influence) some of them spent the remainder of their lives on starships, visiting as much of the Second Imperium as they could.

The Muisstag was able to keep the peace for the most part between the various tuhuir during this period, and institutionalized a number of reforms that were taking place as a result of the Terran influence. Membership in the various tuhuir (by now organized on a community level only) passed from being hereditary to being voluntary, though over 99 percent of Vegans still chose to join one, and individuals were allowed to

spend as much time as they liked studying the various tuhair before deciding on which one to belong. Other reforms which were also instituted included a ban on open tuhair conflict, and one which disallowed any tuhair claim to ancestor lands prior to the Vilani occupation.

As these changes were taking place in Vegan society, the Rule of Man began to slowly falter. The First Imperium was approaching the point of collapse when the war with the Terrans began, and though the infusion of new "Terran blood" had helped the existing interstellar infrastructure last a bit longer, by -1776, the Second Imperium was in rapid decline. While the Muisstag knew that the Second Imperium was in trouble (in addition to the usual official reports, periodically one of the Irrishtyastra would come back to Muan Gwi and tell of some difficulty another part of the empire--and these reports were increasing in severity and in number over the years), the twilight of the Rule of Man still caused a great deal hardship for the Vegans, as it did their human counterparts.

The Long Night Era

The Vegan Polity continued as a viable interstellar government long after the last communication was received from Hub, the capital of the Second Imperium. Some humans worlds (Flanders, Bellerophon, and Shulgiasu) even chose to join the Polity as autonomous members so that they could better survive the coming dark age. Though some worlds that were originally part of the Polity had to be evacuated because they lost the ability to sustain colonists, and many Polity worlds suffered from attacks by pirates and other depravities over the years, the government led by the Muisstag survived the Long Night intact and firmly in control of Vegan society.

Contact with scouts from the Third Imperium was made in 102. This was followed soon after by the resumption of interstellar trade between the largest states in the Solomani Rim. By 200, the trade routes had extended to encompass the entire sector. Because of its advantageous location between the Easter Concord and the Dingir League and Old Earth Union, the Polity prospered greatly from the renewed merchant activity.

The Imperial Era

By 553, the Third Imperium had expanded its borders until they reached into the Solomani Rim itself. That year an invitation was issued by the Imperial government for the Vegan Polity to join the Third Imperium.

While some members of the Muisstag worried what the loss of autonomy would mean to the Polity, the majority realized that the benefits of being a part of such a large interstellar government outweighed the negatives--and in the end they voted the Polity out of existence so that the individual worlds could become

a part of the Imperium. The Muisstag on each Vegan world continued to their job of administration and government under Imperial rule, and also served as ambassadors and messengers between Vegan worlds as they always had. Vegans were able to colonize new worlds outside the borders of the old Polity with the help of the Imperial government, and were provided with developmental assistance which allowed them raise the technological level of most Vegan worlds higher than it had ever been before. Muan Gwi, for example, went from TL 11 in 550 to TL 13 by 700.

The Solomani Occupation (704 - 990)

At first the creation of the Solomani Autonomous Region was regarded as positive by many Vegans. The Third Imperium had grown very large, and the attention once lavished by the Imperium on its rimward frontier was now being devoted elsewhere. Greater local autonomy meant to the Vegans that local leaders could have more authority to act, while at the same time retaining the benefits of collective security and large interstellar markets conferred by being part of the Imperium. Almost immediately, however, it became apparent to the Vegans that the Solomani did not see them as equal partners in the new government. No Vegans were asked to be a part of the Secretariat, and it wasn't until a number of Vegan worlds sent petitions of complaint to the Empress that a few seats were finally made available. The Vegan representatives found themselves consistently outvoted in the assembly with no other non-humans (or willing humans) with which to form a coalition. The vote to reorganize the Solomani Autonomous Region into the Solomani Confederation was a typical case. Of some 12 amendments guaranteeing non-human sentient rights offered by the Vegan representatives as additions to the new constitution, only one actually made it to the floor for a vote, and then it was defeated soundly.

Under the Solomani Confederation, human colonies were founded on Vegan worlds (sometimes displacing the Vegan population who lived in the area) to maintain influence, and Solomani human governors were installed on all Vegan worlds. The Muisstag still served within the new governments (filling all the positions in the bureaucracy), but all important positions were held by Solomani puppets.

It did not take long for an underground resistance movement to form, led of course by members of the Muisstag. So successful was this resistance that most of the new Solomani colonists were forced to live in walled compounds guarded by Solomani troops. Vegans representatives were sent to appeal to the Imperial government in an effort to address the problem of the Solomani occupation of Vegan worlds, but the delegation was never granted an audience with the Emperor. Finally, after a relatively minor incident

involving irregularities with the paperwork of a Vegan merchant vessel turned violent, the Vegans on a number of worlds including Muan Gwi revolted against their Solomani overlords in 932. On several Vegan worlds, including Tunshaon Tyo and Hsuishlesh, Vegans rebels actually managed to successfully force Solomani occupation forces to withdraw from the system. The Vegans' victory, however was short lived. A large fleet under the control of the Confederation moved in quickly to restore order, crushing the rebellion and killing thousands of Vegan rebels in the process.

The suppression of the Vegans was one of the major factors that led to Empress Margaret II to revoke the charter of the Solomani Autonomous District (and thus undermined the legitimacy of the Solomani Confederation) in 940. A small Imperial contingent was sent that year to the Vegan worlds to insure the evacuation of all Solomani colonists. The Imperial garrison stayed for three years, then withdrew coreward. The Solomani soon re-asserted their claim to the region, stationing warships in Vegan systems, and forcibly collecting tariffs from Vegan merchants. Peace negotiations between the Imperial government and the Solomani Confederation dragged on for year after fruitless year. Finally, after a Solomani ultimatum, war was declared by the Imperium.

The First Solomani Rim War and Its Aftermath (990 - 1002)

The early war years continued in a similar fashion to those just prior to it. Vegan merchant traffic was continually harassed by Solomani naval vessels, which imposed a limited blockade on all Vegan worlds. Solomani ground troops were conspicuous in their absence--the Vegan Revolt had shown that ground forces were just too vulnerable on Vegan high population worlds. The Vegans could do little to assist the Imperial war effort except bide their time and continue to tie up valuable Solomani naval resources used to enforce the blockade.

By 1001, victorious Imperial forces were driving into the heart of the Confederation, liberating Muan Gwi and other Vegan worlds on their way rimward. On each Vegan world they stopped, Imperial forces were given a warm reception by the local populace, and starports and other facilities were made available for repairs so that the Imperial fleets could continue on to Terra. Some Vegan starships even served as auxiliaries in the Imperial fleet after liberation, acting as scouts and armed escorts.

The Interwar Years (1002 - 1117)

The war ended with a cease-fire in 1002, with the yoke of Solomani domination removed, and the Polity

was reestablished as the Vegan Autonomous District. The District included some 31 systems, most of which contained Vegan worlds, but a few human ones as well. The Muisstag was put in charge of organizing the central government, which it modeled after the civil service system on Muan Gwi. During the Interwar Years, all Vegans worlds experienced tremendous economic growth and prosperity. Muan Gwi and several other worlds in the District progressed rapidly from TL 14 in 1000 to TL 15 by 1107. Though controversies would arise from time to time involving Vegans outside the District's borders, such as the mistreatment of Vegans on Ludmilla or the Waothan Petition Controversy involving the Vegan minority on Esperance, the presence of substantial Imperial naval forces rimward between the District and the remnants of the Solomani Confederation insured the peace within the District's borders.

The Second Solomani Rim War (1117 - 1130)

When Emperor Strephon was presumed assassinated in 1116, many Vegans hoped that peace could still be maintained with the Solomani. They found out rather quickly, however, that the Solomani government meant to retake all the territory they lost in the last war and not just Terra.

The Vegan Autonomous District was considered by the Third Imperium to be a vital forward base in their plans for resisting the Solomani incursions even before the war. This was due to three primary reasons: it was a high tech region capable of mass producing war material; it was a secure staging and rallying area for Imperial forces in case of war; and most importantly, because the Vegans considered themselves first and foremost loyal Imperials citizens whom the Emperor could count on in times of crisis. The Vegans viewed the Third Imperium as a tolerant, open society which respected the rights of all sentient creatures regardless of their species or origin. Their view of the Solomani was far different, and was based primarily on Solomani treatment of the Vegans in the days leading up to the First Solomani Rim War.

So it was that many Vegans served on the side of the Third Imperium during the Second Solomani Rim War. Vegan starships clashed with Solomani vessels all along the front in the Solomani Rim, and also served as ground troops on lower gravity worlds both in the defensive and offensive roles. Some Vegan ships were sent as part of an expeditionary fleet to the aid of anti-Solomani forces in the Daibe Sector, and served there with honor and distinction. Vegan naval and scout bases serviced both Vegan and Imperial starships, and provided logistical support. One Vegan naval officer, Ashwahtya Hsuan, gained notoriety as an excellent tactician and strategist and was eventually promoted to the rank of Fleet Admiral in the Imperial Navy.

As the war ground to a halt (due to the tremendous losses suffered on both sides), the economy of the Vegan Autonomous District slowly began to weaken, the result of Solomani raids on commercial shipping and the prolonged nature of the conflict itself. Many Vegans had died serving in the conflict, but the infrastructure of the high population worlds in the District (unlike some other regions of Third Imperium), was left basically intact. Had a formal cease-fire been declared (one was being negotiated in 1129), it was quite likely that the Vegans would have recovered from the war quickly and played a leading role in the recovery of the Third Imperium in this region of space. It was not to be, however.

The Effects of the Collapse

The Virus hit the Vegan Autonomous District without any warning. Many billions of Vegans died in the initial assaults (Vegan and Imperial computer standards were virtually identical except for language--this proved to be an easy obstacle for the Virus strains to overcome). Of equal importance was the damage to infrastructure on many Vegan worlds, which was so extensive, they were unable to recover and were plummeted into primitive conditions. The Muisstag suffered particularly heavy losses, since they as a group generally lived in the high tech cities and government centers most affected by the Virus' wrath.

In the wake of the Virus, starship travel between systems in the District stopped, as vessels that attempted to enter orbit around a world were almost always fired upon, regardless of any supposed humanitarian objectives its crew might claim, for fear it brought additional destruction from above. Here and there, heroes (some of the Muisstag, some of other tuhuirs) were able to save bits and pieces of Vegan civilization--a computer database, an outdated (by TL 15 standards) manufacturing system. Eventually Vegan technicians on Muan Gwi came up with a device able to detect Virus strains before they could infect new equipment. This development saved much high tech equipment and halted the Virus' destruction on that world.

Mainstream Vegan Culture and Society In the New Era

On a few Vegan worlds, civilization has managed to survive the ravages of the Virus more or less intact, though at a much lower technological level. Muan Gwi's tech level has dropped from its former high of TL 15 to a new tech level of 10 (the highest on all Vegan worlds). On other worlds, the decline in technology was so rapid and so deep, the Muisstag has changed from a more oligarchic civil service form of government, in which an executive council of Muisstag members made decisions, to a more authoritarian one,

in which a single individual (a Muisstag member) makes all executive decisions. Technically TEDs (Technologically-Elevated Dictators), their rule is not nearly as harsh as it would be on a comparable TED human world. Vegan TEDs on mainstream worlds generally retain control of high technology so that it can be better rationed, and only infrequently use it to keep the population in line.

In the years immediately following the Collapse, the Muisstag of Muan Gwi came to the conclusion that they must first rebuild their own world before they could help other Vegan worlds. Though a number of starships were retained in working order by the government, they were to be used for purposes of system defense and scouting only (scouting in the hopes that another "survivor" world could be located). The policy stayed in place until contact was made with scouts from Dingir in 1190. Trade relations with Dingir were soon established, and a jump-2 route through the Wilds surveyed. Some Muan Gwi merchants took the opportunity to also begin trade with other Vegan worlds, and the Muan Gwi government subsequently issued its Non-Intervention Proclamation in 1192. The Non-Intervention Proclamation prohibits Vegan merchants from knowingly intervening in the affairs of another world, or doing trade on a world which does not expressly allow off-worlders to do business there. The proclamation was somewhat controversial when it was issued (some Vegan merchants were already providing arms to friendly tuhuir on a number of worlds)--and as reports started coming back to Muan Gwi on the plight of off world Vegans, opposition to government policy arose.

There are several merchant oriented tuhuir on Muan Gwi which survived the years of restrictions on off-world trade, and now make up the core of the corporations that engage in trade with Dingir and other Vegan worlds. Many of the older members of these tuhuir were in the business before the Second Solomani Rim War, when the Third Imperium and the Vegan Autonomous District was still in existence. They remember how things used to be then, and want to see a return to "the good old days". Contrary to the rulings of the government on Muan Gwi (which is a unprecedented move in modern Vegan culture), they are secretly attempting to help the "fallen" Vegan worlds recover before they turn completely to barbarism.

Vegan Culture and Society On "Fallen" Worlds

"Fallen" Worlds are worlds on which the Muisstag no longer serves as its original function as mediator or leader, and the various tuhuir have resorted to kind of factionalism and conflict that characterized their early history. The vast majority of the older population, those capable of remembering the pre-Collapse Era on

Fallen Worlds are either dead, ignored, or imprisoned (or worse). TEDs of the worse kind are the norm on these worlds, and often several of them (in charge of various *tuhuir*) compete over whatever scraps of technology may be left over, without to regard to preservation or conversation. These conflicts serve to further drive down technological levels, and bring the Vegan inhabitants closer to the point of ending civilization altogether.

The debate over what to do about Fallen Worlds will soon reach a head on Muan Gwi. Those merchants who are covertly assisting Fallen Worlds are finding it more and more difficult to hide that aid from the eyes of the government, and periodically someone is arrested for running supplies to Vegans on a restricted world. The Muisstag itself is becoming increasingly divided over the Non-Intervention Proclamation, especially as they receive reports about the final decay of civilization on the worlds of their brethren, and indications of Terran interventions on Vegan worlds to trailing. There have even been cases within the last year of Muisstag members being accused of aiding and abetting merchants in circumventing the proclamation, though so far no one has been arrested.

The Muisstag of Hsuishlesh has decided that the time for debate has long since past. Hsuishlesh is a Vegan world spinward of Muan Gwi which managed to maintain its pre-Collapse Vegan culture despite a sharp decline in tech level from a pre-Collapse high of 15 down to 9 in 1190. The Muisstag of Hsuishlesh has begun acting whenever possible on Fallen Worlds on behalf of whatever *tuhuir* that is willing to work with them. The goal of these interventions is to re-establish Vegan culture as it was before the Collapse, or at least to stop the slide of these worlds into oblivion.

Unfortunately, they lack the ability to make an all out effort to carry through with this policy, due to a lack of starships and the ability to maintain them. Their alliance with the Dingir League (Dingir's economic and political federation) has allowed them to begin the task, but they need more in the way of resources--resources Muan Gwi could provide but won't.

Terran Republic Policy In the Vega Subsector

For their part, the Terran Republic's numerous interventions in the Vega subsector are motivated strictly by the realities of interstellar politics, and not by some anti-alien prejudice. Some Vegans on Arrukir have even accepted the Terran's new faith Gabreelism as part of their *tuhuir*, but no effort is being made at mass conversions (there is some question whether such efforts would be successful at any rate). Terran Republic policy is to employ covert Vegan operatives and Terran Republic Marine Force Recon elements in an attempt to keep Muan Gwi from growing too powerful by sabotaging its efforts at building trade

alliances on former Vegan Autonomous District worlds. This is being done on the assumption that a united Vegan population under Muan Gwi control would be a Dingir ally and therefore hostile to Terra. By supporting anti-Muan Gwi factions on Fallen Worlds, the Terran goal is not to destroy what is left of civilization on these worlds, but merely to make them hostile to Muan Gwi advances. They view the rise of Hsuishlesh with some concern, but as it appears that the reach of the Hsuishlesh government is severely limited, there are no plans to extend covert operations into the remainder of the former Vegan Autonomous District.

Dingir League Policy In the Former Vegan Autonomous District

The Dingirian government is driven primarily by economic motivations in its dealings with the Vegans worlds, with Vegan unity being a very minor issue. If a unified Vegan government would be open to trade with the Dingir League, they would be in favor of it--if it were hostile to Dingirian economic interests in the region, they would take steps similar to the Terrans and attempt to drive the Vegans apart.

Initially relations between Muan Gwi and Dingir were quite good as the Terran's feared. However, this relationship soured recently with the public announcement that Bellerophon would be joining the Dingir League in 1203. While the Muan Gwi government had no trouble with Dingirian merchants visiting these worlds, and the Dingir League providing them with assistance in rebuilding, both parties had an unwritten understanding that political union between either of these worlds and the Dingir League was out of the question.

Hsuishlesh had no such trouble with the Dingir government announcement. Then again, an agreement to provide long term assistance to Hsuishlesh was also recently announced by the Dingir League. While it is likely that the trade relationship between Dingir and Muan Gwi will continue into the future, it appears that the Dingirians have given up on forming any kind of anti-Terran military alliance with Muan Gwi for the time being given the current government's policies.

Conclusion

Whether the Vegans will become a substantial member of the interstellar community again is yet to be seen. Muan Gwi as begun constructing new TL 10 starships (mostly jump-1 merchant vessels), and is purchasing starships of higher tech levels from Dingir. In the short term, the strategic location of the Vegan worlds near two rival interstellar powers means that they will be both a player and a pawn in the diplomatic and political maneuvering in this region of space. The

challenges faced by the Vegans are greater than at any point in their history. At stake is the unity of their race, if it is ever to be unified again at all.

VEGAN TIMELINE

c. -11,000	Recorded history begins on Muan Gwi
c. -6300	Vegans achieve TL 9
-6015	Vegans receive jump drive from Vilani-influenced traders.
-4404	Vegan worlds absorbed by the First Imperium
-2408	First Interstellar War begins between Terra and the First Imperium
-2373	Muan Gwi over run by Terran forces
-2215	Vegan Polity formed
-1776	Second Imperium (Rule of Man) collapses
-1776 to -1526	Twilight
-1526 to -650	Long Night
0	Third Imperium founded
102	Contact made with scouts from the Third Imperium
553	Vegan worlds absorbed by Third Imperium; Vegan Polity dissolved
704	Solomani Autonomous Region (Solomani Sphere) formed
871	Solomani Sphere reorganized as Solomani Confederation within the Imperium
932	Vegan Revolt against Solomani crushed by Confederation forces
940	Solomani regional charter revoked
990 to 1002	First Solomani Rim War
1002	Vegan Autonomous District formed
1116	Emperor Strephon assassinated
1117 to 1130	Second Solomani Rim War
1130 to 1131	Virus spreads throughout the Vegan worlds
1190	Muan Gwi merchants make contact with Dingir scouts
1191	Kagukan merchant scavengers visit Muan Gwi
1195	Dingir - Cuchulain - Muan Gwi trade route established
1198	First official contact between Muan Gwi and Terran Republic
1202	Present day

Surviving Vegan Worlds and Worlds with Significant Vegan Minorities, c.1202

Lompoc 0918 D44466B-8 Ag Ni V:2 310 Wi K9V M5V

Cuchulain merchants regularly visit this world which has a 23 percent Vegan minority. The human TED of the world has shown a surprisingly enlightened view of outsiders and technology, though the types of technology he allows to his subjects is strictly regulated.

Cuchulain 0919 BA569CA-9 Hi V:1 723 Na G9V

Cuchulain survived the Collapse with comparatively minor damage in relation to other nearby worlds. When contacted by Dingir, Cuchulain was immediately offered membership in the Dingir League, but turned it down in favor of an independent course. Cuchulain Vegan merchants (and human merchants accompanied by Vegans assistants) can be found engaging in trade with most of the populated worlds in Cuchulain subsector of the former Vegan Autonomous District. Cuchulain maintains regular trade with Muan Gwi through the jump-2 route established to that world, as well as trade with the Dingir League and the independent world of Ishkur, where they sometimes interact with merchants from the Terran Republic.

Esperance 1116 X46889C-7 V:3 311 Wi A6V

On Esperance, the Collapse forced humans and Vegans into cooperating with each other, and today they live side-by-side in peace. Vegan culture has remained more or less intact on this world, though the natural desegregation that has taken place has tended to "humanize" it somewhat (and to lesser extent "Veganize" the human population). The situation here greatly contrasts with that in the nearby Ludmilla system, where the humans exterminated the Vegan minority in a bloody campaign following the Collapse.

Muan Irraudh 1119 X66A755-6 Wa Vg 600 Wi K6V M0V

Muan Irraudh has benefited from being on the trade route from Cuchulain to Muan Gwi. The ruling council of the world plans to establish a starport as soon as funding and technological assistance can be obtained.

Hsuishlesh 1120 X6449CC-A Hi In Vg B223 Wi G3V

This world is a trading partner with Dingir and Cuchulain, and hopes to reestablish itself as a true member of the interstellar community in the very near future. Currently no starport facilities exist on Hsuishlesh, but one is currently under construction (It will have an initial rating of 'C'). In the meantime, the Dingir League is "leasing" a battletender to the government of Hsuishlesh which acts as a temporary orbital starport facility. Hsuishlesh has also purchased a half dozen starships from Dingir which serve as diplomatic shuttles from star system to star system and

other conduct other "special assignments" (like the insertion of Hsuishlesh operatives into other Vegan systems). Vegan culture is quite strong here, and in contrast to the Vegans of Muan Gwi, so is the desire to intervene on "fallen" Vegan worlds so that pre-Collapse Vegan culture can be reintroduced. So far their efforts have been restricted to the Cuchulain subsector, though serious consideration is being given to expanding operations to the Vega subsector over the objections of the Muan Gwi government.

Tunshaon Tyo 1218 X554965-4 Hi Vg(f) B312 Wi M1V

Tunshaon Tyo is a high population "fallen" world, where society has reverted to the ways of the ancient Vegans, that is divided according to *tuhuir* into various nation-states. Two world wars and numerous other smaller conflicts over the last seventy years have left the planet divided between three major power blocs (controlled by TEDs) and several minor neutral ones. Agents from Hsuishlesh have made contact with several of the nation-states on Tunshaon Tyo in an attempt to establish relations, but have met with only limited success so far.

Hokchor 1417 X64756A-4 Ag Ni Vg(f) 702 Wi G0V M1V M5V

The TED of Hokchor, Antyssanudh (known as "The High Lord Ruler"), is currently engaged in a war with rebels being supplied by Hsuishlesh. Until recently Antyssanudh's forces have been successful in their campaigns against the rebels, but now things are going the rebels way. The turn in the High Lord Ruler's fortunes has been attributed by him to the introduction of chemical weapons into the rebels arsenal, though the rebels and their Hsuishlesh advisors deny this.

Muan Ialour 1418 X55676A-6 Ag Vg(f) 812 Wi G7V M2V

The TEDs of this world still retain much of the Vegan culture, but with a different twist. Only members of specific *tuhuir*s can live within any given TED's territory. If after the period of searching, an individual decides to join a particular *tuhuir*, and that *tuhuir* is in another territory, the individual must move to that territory.

Ninshien 1419 X59A88F-8 Wa Vg(f) 724 Wi G9V

The Vegans of this world follow a very strict interpretation of two very specific *tuhuir*. Any Vegan whose behavior does not strictly follow one or the other is subject to execution. Armed guards routinely roam the streets looking for violations, and have been known to shoot individuals on the spot for serious transgressions.

Oort 1511 X56386A-7 V:1(f) 524 Wi A1V A0D

Vegans make up 11 percent of the population on Oort. After the Collapse, isolated from other Vegans worlds, they have begun adapting the culture of the majority humans and are abandoning the ways of their brethren on other worlds. Fewer than half of the current generation Vegans speak Wahuaragz, the universal Vegan dialect.

Dzim Zhia Gwi 1515 X456967-0 Hi Vg(f) B900 Wi F8V M0V

The civilization of Dzim Zhia Gwi literally fell back to the Stone Age when the Virus hit. A few TEDs still have some high tech equipment in various regions of the world, but what they have is breaking down rapidly and there are no spare parts left to attempt repairs. Sanitation is almost unheard of in most of the broken down cities where Vegans crowd to scavenge, and it is but a matter of time before diseases break out that could wipe out a significant portion of the population.

Ewmiak 1516 X45296B-2 Hi Po Vg(f?) B305 Wi F8V

The TEDs of this world have refused all contact with outsiders, and have threatened to shoot down any starship that even enters orbit. It is unknown if they are prepared to back up their worlds with action, but so far no one has challenged them.

Tyudhuar 1619 D59976C-7 Vg 512 Wi G0V

Tyudhuar is a regular stopping point for merchants from Muan Gwi who desire weaponry not allowed by their world's relatively high law level. Though Tyudhuar is an extremely high law level planet itself, the TED of the world will sell practically anyone anything if a sufficient bribe is paid in advance. Operatives from Hsuishlesh have been known to visit here as well, though the nature of the cargo they take with them is a closely guarded secret.

Muan Gwi 1717 A456AC9-A Hi Vg 622 Na F2V

Muan Gwi is the homeworld of the Vegans. Though there was a great deal of damage caused by the Virus, enough of a lower tech infrastructure was retained so that the tech level could be stabilized before dropping below interstellar levels. Muan Gwi retained a small number of functional starships after the Collapse, and eventually regained contact with Dingir in 1190. Trade relations were reestablished soon afterward, and now regular merchant convoys travel the jump-2 route through the Wilds between Dingir and Muan Gwi. The appearance of the convoy always signals a period of intense speculative buying in the Muan Gwi commodities markets, as the nature cargoes is usually kept secret for security reasons. The government of Muan Gwi maintains a strict non-intervention policy in the internal affairs of other worlds. This policy has meant that many Vegan "fallen" worlds are still

controlled by individuals hostile to the old ways.

Hsuilzish 1718 E678765-6 Ag Vg(f) B705 Wi M1V

The TEDs of Hsuilzish are always looking for more high tech hardware so that they can better defend themselves from each other (or attack their rivals). To that end, they have welcomed regular trade with the Muan Gwi system, and each has established their own class 'E' starport. Unknowingly, in their efforts to "out TED the other TEDs" they are gradually raising the technological level of the populations they control. The Muan Gwi merchants, of course, never point this fact out, but are quick use "well so-and-so has one" when making a sales pitch for a new piece of equipment.

Tsamis 1814 E54796B-7 Hi In Vg(f) B413 Wi K1V

The situation on Tsamis is tragic a comedy of errors, as several merchant groups from Muan Gwi have, without each other's knowledge, been backing rival TEDs in an ongoing war there. Trade with Muan Gwi still continues for now, and human free traders based out of Menelaus recently arrived to assess what trade opportunities there may be on the world.

Muan Issler 1816 E35496E-2 Hi Vg(f) B134 Wi G7V

Muan Issler was one of the first systems visited by Muan Gwi explorers after the Collapse. Here a hodge-podge of tuteur-based nation-states struggle against each other in an effort to snatch the last bits of high technology from the ruins. In the process, they are destroying what's left of their civilization--the

worldwide technological level will soon slip below 2. The issue of what to do about the situation on Muan Issler has divided the Muan Gwi High Council, which currently still favors a non-interventionist policy. Some merchants, however, have found this policy to be unacceptable, and have set up their own class 'E' starport of the surface, where humanitarian supplies are brought in (along with the occasional weapon for use of the local pro-Muan Gwi TED which permits the starport to exist). The existence of the starport is "officially" not recognized by the Muan Gwi government, as the members of the Muisstag who found out about the facilities favor intervention, and have kept knowledge of the base secret from those who would order its dismantling.

Ashtagz Tyui 1818 E348667-7 Ag Ni Vg 903 Wi G6V

Ashtagz Tyui lies off the main trade route through the subsector, but Muan Gwi merchants still visit here on a fairly routine basis. A peaceful world, the inhabitants routinely trade agricultural products for higher tech merchandise. The governing TED plans to step down next year in favor of a high council system based on the Muan Gwi model.

Asterr Tyui 1917 D666967-9 Hi Vg 713 Wi K3V

The TED of this world is solidly loyal to the Muan Gwi government. Two attempts on the TED's life by "rebels" (Terran operatives) have both failed. Terran efforts are now being directed toward building a true rebel force, one which will overthrow the TED in favor of a more "democratic" (and pro-Terran) government. This world was also the site of an Imperial research

THE FIRST OFFICIAL ADVENTURE FOR MILIEU 0!

Sword of the Knight publications is expanding beyond the Traveller Chronicle to publish the first official adventure for Milieu 0. The adventure is currently under development by BITS (British Isles Traveller Support) as part of the 'CORE' Traveller writers group. The title CORE was chosen to represent the group's intention to produce material for all major Traveller eras from Milieu 0 to the Rebellion and beyond. CORE includes a number of writers who have made graced the pages of the Traveller Chronicle.

The adventure is entitled "The Long Way Home" and is based in Milieu 0 at the start of the expansion of the Third Imperium. The players are a mixed team dispatched to perform covert surveillance operations on selected worlds beyond the current Imperium's borders. However, the voyage will take them further than they ever imagined into danger and, perhaps, out again to safety. The scenario introduces a detailed area of space (including new aliens races) into the Milieu 0 setting, allowing the referee to set further adventures in this region. The adventure is expected to be launched in September at Euro Gen Con by BITS and will be available worldwide shortly after.

For more details, or to order your copy direct, contact Sword of the Knight!

station prior to the Collapse. Efforts are being made to determine the exact nature of the research that went on, but so far no one has even been able to find the site.

Hariksiat 2017 E34976C-5 Vg 120 Wi F0V M0V

The TED dictator of this world recently threw out the Muan Gwi merchants that established a class 'E' starport here some three years ago. The TED's new advisors (in actuality Terran Republic operatives) convinced the TED that the Muan Gwi merchants were plotting his overthrow in an attempt to gain a better trade treaty with a new TED. The Muan Gwi merchants appealed to the TED that this was not true, but to no avail.

Dzadwahtyan 2118 E78576A-4 Ag Vg(f) B423 Wi K3V M0V

This TED dominated world, divided along tuihir lines, has been visited by Muan Gwi merchants and Terran explorers within the past two months. Because of the world's low density (much makes it habitable for Vegans because of its proportionately lower gravity), most kinds of metals are scarce. This has hampered rebuilding efforts, as the stock of recyclable materials salvaged from the Collapse have all but dry up.

Muan Kwoyen 2218 X66696C-2 Hi Vg(f) B112 Wi G5V

A massive world war is currently underway on Muan Kwoyen, with several tuihir-based nation-states arrayed into three alliances competing for global domination. Terran Republic operatives (in reality Gabreelist Vegans from Arrukir) are aiding one power bloc (the Central Federation) in their efforts to resist invasions by hostile forces from the south and west. So far the operatives have been successful in their efforts, though the TEDs of the Central Federation are now almost completely dependent on Terran arms shipments.

Isseydo 2414 E24876A-5 Ag V:2 723 Wi K4V

Another isolated world with a significant Vegan minority, the Vegans of Isseydo like the rest of the world were contacted recently by Terran Republic deep space explorers. Free traders operating from Sathyos and Menelaus are the planet's only regular visitors. The TED of Isseydo, the Kantara, has several thousand Vegans which he retains as slaves. Humans or "free Vegans" caught hiding a runaway Vegan slave are subject to heavy fines and imprisonment (if human) or even death (if Vegan).

Arrukir 2420 C59A7A9-8 O Wa V:1(f) 700 Tc F7V

Arrukir is the site of a Terran outpost (Outpost Odysseus), and serves as both a jump off point for expeditions further coreward, and as a training center

for Vegan operatives in Terran employ. The conversion of Vegans on this world to Gabreelism has presented the Faith with a controversy. A vocal minority of priests of Arrukir wants to limit conversions to humans only, and has taken the matter to Terra for discussion. There is precedent for allowing other species into the Faith (Priestess Gabree-el granted special dispensations to both the sentient Dolphins of Terra and the culturally Terran Hivers), so it is expected that Priestess Shoshanna will do the same for the Vegans when the political climate is more favorable within the Faith.

Codes

N - Naval Base S - Scout Base O - Terran Outpost
C - Corsair Base Vg - Vegan World Vg(f) - "Fallen"
Vegan World V:x - Vegan minority present Tc - Terran Client State Na - Non-aligned Wi - Wilds

A Long Way Home

by Terrence McInnes

(Ed Note: Terry's story should not be confused with Andy Lilly's adventure, "The Long Way Home". They just both happened to pick real similar names for their stuff!)

Prolog

For decades the Wheel guarded the frontier in the chill blackness of interstellar space, The mighty artifact orbited a rogue planet, light years from any star, as the mighty interstellar Third Imperium fractured into factions killing each other for the Iridium Throne.

Like a dozen others built at strategic points near factional borders, the Wheel provided the Imperium with a secret base to fuel and refit battered naval units, and a secret supply point for troops guarding the frontier against foes attacking from rimward. The Wheel's crew mined frozen hydrogen that coated the surface of the rogue, then thawed and refined it for fuel. Beneath the hydrogen, they found heavy metals exposed when the rogue's primary went nova and cast the once great gas giant into deep space. The planet's heavy metal deposits provided the raw materials needed to fashion the replacement parts to repair the damaged naval vessels that called increasingly as the Final War ground on. Then, something happened...

Commander Farad Ishumshilgii was the senior controller on duty at the Wheel's docking hub when INS Reverie Indigo Echo hailed the station. The 60,000-ton cruiser appeared moderately damaged, and the ship's officer of the deck appeared surgically patched and scarred on Ishumshilgii's commo screen.

"Deep Space Station Beta this is Reverie Indigo Echo. Request permission to dock. We have wounded aboard and need damage repairs and replacement crew before we can jump again."

"Indigo from Beta," Ishumshilgii replied. "You are cleared to dock. Standby to upload docking maneuver parameters."

Ishumshilgii set up the datalink with the incoming warship and transferred the parameters. Everything appeared normal. The large vessel drew close to the docking cradle on the Wheel's central hub.

Ishumshilgii was checking the ship's closure rate on his displays when he suddenly noticed they did not update. He touched the reset keypad to force an update, but nothing happened. His board was locked up. He looked up toward the large viewport

overlooking the docking cradle. The last thing he saw in his life was the Indigo Reverie Echo bearing down on the Wheel in the last seconds before it obliterated the cradle and Ishumshilgii.

Imperial Marine Lieutenant Amy Romanovsky was on duty supervising the inventory of spare parts for her armored battalion's grav tanks in cargo bay Gamma 3 along the Wheel's outer rim. Stiffling a yawn, Romanovsky noted there were only 45 more minutes until evening chow. On the one hand, she was grateful her duties as a supply officer for a battalion held in deep space reserve kept her out of the vicious combat in nearby Diaspora Sector. On the other, the long inaction bored her silly. All she had to look forward to were endless days on the Wheel until, once again, the Emperor's forces got in over their heads on some godforsaken pesthole and her battalion had to come to the rescue.

Her boredom ended abruptly when a sudden sharp jolt sent her sprawling across the deck. Klaxons hooted crazily, red and amber warning lights flashed on the overhead, and the floods lighting the bay dimmed, surged, and went out entirely, leaving only dim battery-powered battle lanterns illuminating the cavernous space. Cold terror clutched Romanovsky's heart when the bay's interior doors clanged shut, turning the bay into a giant airlock. That only happened, she knew, when the outer doors were about to open to deep space. And then they swung open. Romanovsky's last images were those of stars as she was swept into the night...

Some did not die so fast. Lt. Commander Harris Jaimeson, his wife Leila, their three-year-old son Max, and infant daughter Shenandoah had gathered around the dinner table in their quarters. While located on a personnel deck deep within the station, the Jaimesons felt the same strange shock. As decompression alarms went off in the corridors, Jaimeson sealed their apartment's doorway. Although trapped within their quarters, Jaimeson assured his family that someone would become soon to lead them to safety. After all, the Wheel's weekly General Drills were practice for just such emergencies. Within minutes, the electricity failed. The lights went out and the ventilator fans died. Without electric heaters, the apartment slowly became colder. Battery-powered handlights relieved the darkness for a while until their batteries began to fail. Some decorative candles left over from Year End Day celebrations

helped as well, but they didn't last forever. The Jaimeson family put on as much clothing as they could wear, and then climbed into bed with every blanket piled on to conserve heat.

No one came. Hours went by and the air became increasingly foul. The family became more and more drowsy as the cold and carbon dioxide took their toll in the complete dark. They held each other tightly, trying not to lose each other in the blackness. But one by one, they slipped away....

Chapter 1 Home

Sean McKinnie could hear the surf boom about a klick to his left as he neared home. He was tired and so was Bright, the black and white eight-legged animal he rode. The soft rolling motion of the hippos mare nearly lulled him to sleep as Bright cantered along the dusty trail. It had been a long day, but a good one. Any day was a good day, Sean thought, when you didn't have to follow the southern end of a northbound herd of his family's native cattle. Instead of pushing the rather stupid and stubborn parkesbeests around their grazing range, Sean got permission from his father to take a day off and hunt in the Drakkensbergs south of the family ranch, part of his campaign to convince him to stay home, Sean thought. Sean bagged two large flying mammals with his longbow, now hidden carefully away among the baggage on Bright's mid-withers. His daily archery practice in the dales near the grazing range had certainly paid off, he thought. His family would have roast wanderer to celebrate the new week. Good results for a hunt that would be his last for a long time. After all, there won't be any wanderers hovering around the university.

Shooting his bow was his passion, his release from all the frustration and hard work of ranch life. His bow was made of hardwood with a steel core and parkesbeest gut strings. Great-Uncle Nathan had fashioned it with his own hands nearly 60 years ago and, after he was too old to shoot it, gave it to Sean for his 12th birthday. Owning the bow had its risks, though. If the monitors found it, Sean would wind up in the Emperor's cells for a long time.

Lucifer was low on the horizon behind him as Sean topped the last rise west of the ranch house. Speck, Lucifer's tiny red companion, was almost drowned in the yellow glare of the larger star. It would be dark soon; First Moon would not rise for almost two hours, and Second for not an hour more. However, the Rings glowed softly near the southern horizon. Great-Uncle Nathan claimed to have walked on Second in his youth, but the family put that to the ravings of a 90-year-old man. Sean wasn't so sure. Nathan's tales were

sometimes wild, but the old man had always been straight with the lad.

The ranch house at McKinnie's Haven was a rambling home for a large family, built low and snug against the chill winds off the northern sea. It had grown as the McKinnie family grew, first being home to his grandfather Malcom and his parents who were married when they were 21. A wing was added when his older brother Rory was born 10 years before Sean. Rory now lived in his own home near the south end of the ranch with his new wife Helena. His older sister Genevieve's arrival four years after Rory caused a second wing to be built. Genny lived in splendid solitude for seven years until Beth was born, moved into the girls' wing as soon as she was weaned. Sean was born 17 years ago, annoying his brother no end when he was moved into the boys' wing at age two. Various barns and outbuildings, including quarters for hired hands, completed the ranch complex. In spite of the tax collectors, it was one of the more prosperous ranches in the Arcolan Empire.

Sean stopped Bright for a moment atop the rise. He would be leaving in a few days, and it might be a long time before he would see the double sunset at his home. The journey to Arcolaburgh would take about three days overland, maybe a little less if the weather held dry. In any case, the return trip would be a long way home. Soon the stars would be out and Sean would once again wonder what was out there among them.

* * * * *

The Reformation Coalition Starship Immanuel Kant stepped out of jump space. Antennas and turrets extended from the rail-shaped starship. Box-like modules containing weapons and troops festooned her hull. Immanuel Kant had come to raid. Presently, her sensors detected no artificial objects in her sky. White-hot plasma poured from maneuver thrusters as the ship pivoted to a new heading, and her main thrust chambers fired. A gas giant, now just a light in the sky, was her immediate destination. After fueling, Kant would turn inward toward Lucifer and the earth-like planet known on Kant's charts as Fisher's World.

* * * * *

Sean urged Bright on toward the house. The wind was beginning to bite, and the smoke from the chimney promised an inviting fire. His mother was standing in the doorway, with her white hair drawn into a bun and a wide smile on her plump face. "Hurry up Sean, supper is getting cold. You can't keep harpy stew on the fire forever!"

"OK Mother, I'll be right there as soon as I take

care of Bright," he called.

Sean dismounted and led Bright to the barn. Furious barking and a charging gray and black figure greeted Sean at the barn door. "Hi Ranger, how are ya?," he asked the purebred Terran-descended German Shepherd. The large dog jumped up, placed his forepaws on Sean's shoulders, and proceeded to wash his face with a large wet tongue.

"OK, enough Boy. Time to get dinner." He unsaddled Bright and led her to her stall, filled her feed bin and made sure her water trough was full. Ranger and Sean then walked to the house where a nice meaty joint waited for the canine. Ranger deserved a good dinner; he was a working dog helping with the herds, not just a household pet.

Sean's family had gathered around the table by the time he walked through the door. The house was snug, furnished in dark wood, with paneled walls made from lighter woods. The large dining table paralleled the main room's long axis. It had been built by Grandfather Malcolm when the family homestead was first settled. A fireplace blazed in the middle of the long back wall opposite the entry hall. Sean was surprised to see the entire family around the table including Rory and his wife Helena.

"What's the occasion," Sean asked, as he sat down between Genny and Beth, and ladled a helping of stew onto his plate from the huge tureen at the center of the table.

"You're the occasion," Rory replied. "It's not every day that a McKinnie heads off to the university."

His father stood and embraced Sean. "I know I've opposed your leaving the ranch up to now. But now that you've been accepted by the university, you're the first of our family to get out from behind the plow for a long time," his father said.

"Make us proud. Learn to run a business; learn about the world. Maybe someday you can build that shipping line you've dreamed about."

"Aye, then you can ship the best parkesbeest meat on this continent from this ranch to customers all over the world," Rory added. "That'll make us both rich!"

"Now Rory," Helena interjected, "You don't own the ranch yet, even though you are running the spread."

"Take it easy, you two," his father said. "You'll own this place soon enough. Unless the Emperor's goons take it away from me first."

"I'll never let them do that, Dad. Not as long as I am still breathing."

Rory replied. "I'd rather die than let them take McKinnie's Haven."

"Rory, let's not talk about such dreadful stuff at dinner," said his sister Genny, her blue eyes

flashing beneath flame red hair. "This is a happy time. One of our own is going to the university. That's not happened for ages!

"Besides, you have to stop being a cowboy and be a gentleman. you'll have new responsibilities in about two months," Helena said, glancing down at her bulging belly.

"You're right. Let's talk about happier things.

"Genny, I haven't seen young Will around the house for a while. Are you two still seeing each other? He's sure to inherit the McGuire spread some day, and I know he would make a fine home for you."

Genny turned quiet at the mention of Will's name. After a moment, she said, "You didn't know he was drafted, did you?"

"No! When?"

"Just two days ago. The Emperor's press gang came to the McGuire ranch and took him away. His brother John said Will was going into the Imperial Cavalry, to ride in the invasion of Rivero. I may never see him again!"

Genny sobbed, rose to her feet and fled the room. Conversation dropped to an awkward silence.

"Gaia, I have a talent for putting my foot in it," muttered Rory.

After a couple of moments, Beth spoke up. "Sean, I'm going to miss you so much," she said. "Most of all I'm going to miss our walks together when you taught me about the plants, the animals, and the stars. You will come home, won't you?"

"Don't worry Sweet Face, I'll be here for Year End Day, and then again next summer so I can help Dad and Rory with the herding. Besides, you may see me at the university when it's your turn to go. I'll really be proud when I see you graduate as Doctor McKinnie."

"She's already a good doctor," said Rory. "Just yesterday she saved a parkesbeest calf and its mother out on the south range when the calf got hung up during birth. She reached right inside, turned the calf and unstuck its shoulder. Everything came out all right."

She's so much like Mother, Sean thought. She has the blonde hair Mom used to have and she runs to plumpness, too. Beth's bright and loves all of life. I hope she can keep her innocence for a few more years, anyway.

A loud banging on the front door suddenly interrupted the family supper.

The elder McKinnie stood painfully and hobbled over to the entry way. As he released the latch, he was rudely shoved aside by a large armed man. Others were visible in the courtyard behind them.

"McKinnie, you're late with your taxes. We're here to collect."

"But I paid half my proceeds from my last parkesbeest sale to His Majesty's collectors just

last month," Sean's father replied.

"That doesn't matter, you didn't pay the spring supplement for His Majesty's Forces defense against Rivero. We want 500 crowns, now!

"We know you're holding out, McKinnie. We know you've got it. And we're going to turn this place upside down until we find it."

The tax collector and his party then barged into the main room, opening drawers and cabinets, scattering utensils and smashing china as they looked for hidden funds. Frustrated when they didn't find any gold, they invaded the bedrooms, overturning dressers and wardrobes. Genny screamed as they entered her room, followed by rude cursing as she threw anything that was not nailed down at the invading men. Suddenly there was a shout of triumph from the master bedroom, saving Genny from worse.

The collector returned to the main room carrying a velvet bag. "There must be a thousand crowns in here," he shouted.

"That's my son's savings," the elder McKinnie said. "That's the money he's going to use to go to the university!"

"Not any more, it isn't. This now belongs to His Majesty's Government. 500 crowns in supplemental taxes, plus 500 crowns in penalties and collection fees."

The collector poured the coins on the table and counted them. He put all but five back into the bag, and the bag into his tunic. He picked up the five remaining crowns and threw them onto the floor at Sean's feet.

"Here kid, maybe this'll get you to Arcolaburgh." The collector laughed, turned, and strode out of the house with his men.

The family stood stunned. After a time, his father put his arm around Sean's shoulder.

"They didn't get everything," Sean's father said. "Come with me."

Father and son walked across the courtyard to the barn. They entered the wooden building and entered a vacant stall. His father handed Sean a shovel and directed him to remove a small pile of manure from the corner.

Once the floorboards were exposed, Sean's father lifted one and pulled out a burlap sack. Opening it, he lifted out a canvas sack, and opening that, removed a velvet bag.

"Here's 300 crowns. This is all I have. It should last you for a year or so. After that you'll have to work to stay in school. Work hard, make me proud, and let me know how you are doing."

Sean gulped back tears.

"I will Dad, I will. I'll come back and repay every crown. I promise."

The two held each other silently for a time.

"It's time we got back to the house, Sean. Your mother is going to wonder about what happened to us.

"OK."

The two walked slowly back toward the ranch house and joined the others who had been busy cleaning up the tax collectors' wreckage.

"Sean, just promise me this." Stay out of trouble with the Emperor's bureaucrats. I know they are harsh, but if you pay your taxes and mind your own business they will usually leave you alone."

"I'll do my best Dad, I just hate the thought of paying taxes to that evil bastard in the castle."

His mother's face whitened and her voice rose. "You'll say no such thing! Don't even think such a thing! That's what got your father caught up in

the Emperor's web. He talked too much at the wrong time! He thought honest farmers delivering grievances to his majesty would receive justice. Hah! Look at your father now! He once was as strong and straight as you. Now thanks to the cells and the rack, he'll never be that again. I don't want you to follow him there."

Sean bit his tongue. He knew his mother was right. He had to try to be a good subject in spite of the Emperor and his Iron Guards. That would be hard in Arcolaburgh where everybody seemed to love

his Godship. Some day he would have his own ship and sail to the lands and islands he'd heard about from passing travellers. Someday he would be out of the Emperor's grip and be a free man.

* * * * *

As Fisher's World rotated, bringing Arcola into a new day, Immanuel Kant approached the system's outer gas giant and established a parking orbit outside its radiation belts. A smaller, streamlined vessel detached herself from Kant's dorsal surface and blasted toward the planet's atmosphere.

Soon a thin, high keening sound filled the vessel's interior as she entered the gas giant's hydrogen/methane atmosphere. Diving deeper, the smaller ship began bucking from high altitude turbulence. Fuel scoops opened and a raw hydrogen/methane mix rammed into her holding tanks and liquefied by compression. The vessel's fuel refinery separated and discarded the methane as she pulled out of her dive and began her run

Soon a
thin, high
keening
sound
filled the
vessel's
interior...

back to Kant.

She returned some three hours later, and reattached herself to the mother ship; becoming once again Kant's main fuel tank. Kant's maneuver drive lit off and she headed in-system.

* * * * *

His Supreme Majesty the Emperor of Arcola Angus II Campbell had trouble sleeping. He hauled his heavy body from his bed in the imperial apartments high above the battlements of Castle Skye, and walked out onto a small balcony outside his bedroom. Arcolaburgh was asleep below; only the few dim lights of the night watch betrayed the city's presence.

The Guildsmen in his court had giving him troubling news late in the evening. They reported strange starships in his sky, ships their own vessels were not in a position to intercept. Indeed, more than two weeks would pass before another Guild ship would come to his world. Angus had enough to worry about already, with the invasion of Rivero about to begin and his plans to conquer all of Midshield at a critical point.

He glanced upward at the clear starry night sky. He remembered the first night he had looked upward and saw the first Guild ship arriving. It was a turning point in his life and in that of the Arcolan Empire. These wondrous people wanted him as an ally. At last he would be able to reach the pinnacle of power he so richly deserved. Power that eluded his father, who was too weak-kneed to collect enough taxes to run the Empire, let alone expand it. What wonderful weapons these people from the sky had brought to him! And merely in exchange for trade concessions and a concealed base for their ships. For this he could tolerate their strange speech and even stranger dress. He could even tolerate their lack of manners and lack of respect for his person and his court. These weapons kept his people in line and the taxes collected. Soon they would be vital instruments in his climb to greater power. He was sure he got the better part of the deal. But he was warned the sky held a threat, too. Star Vikings. And these new ships were certainly part of that. He had called out the Iron Guard's Special Troops and had deployed these special soldiers and their magical weapons against the danger from above. He would soon know if they were enough.

* * * * *

Sean saddled Bright two hours before Lucifer's dawn; he had been up for an hour already, and thanks to Fisher's World's soft ring light, he was able to pack clothes, books, food for the journey,

and very carefully, his bow. He checked his map of the north coast region in the pale light. With luck and good weather, he should reach Two Bridges and the Inn of the Crescent Moons by nightfall. He might only have to camp once, the following night, on the road before he reached Arcolaburgh and the university. He should find shelter for the third night at one of the many homesteads near the capital.

His family stood in the darkened forecourt in front of the main house. He silently embraced his family, mounted, and rode off. He looked back one last time and felt sadness fall like a night shadow's cloak. This was the first time he would be away from home by himself without his family.

For the first time in his life, he was lonely.

Chapter 2 Journeys

Immanuel Kant entered a close polar orbit around Fisher's World some 250 kilometers above the surface. Ship's sensors carefully scanned the surface and nearby space; the surface search for artifacts more advanced than iron age edged weapons and larger than a small ground car, the space for any other craft. Any other space vessel would be considered hostile. Kant was the only Reformation Coalition starship within 14 light years. Ship's crew readied the drop tubes and their capsules in the drop troop module while others fueled and service the winged landing craft docked to the troop carrier modules.

Kant was an ugly ship, but functional. Stripped of her modules and of Skate, her fueler which doubles as her main fuel tank, she would be nothing but a long thin rail housing a powerful meson gun, with a control bridge on one end and an engineering section at the other. To do anything but jump from star to star with her fueler and only a skeleton crew, Kant needed modules. Some contained additional fuel or weapons, others crew or troop quarters. Still others would hold a flight of fighters or landing boats, or act as hangars for subsidiary spacecraft such as an in-system cutter. If Kant were configured with cargo modules and quarters for passengers, she could serve as a star liner. If fighter hangars and missile bays were clipped to her hardpoints, Kant would serve admirably as a powerful warship. But she served mostly as a long-range exploration and interdiction vessel, working for the Reformation Coalition Exploratory Service, expanding the Coalition's sphere of knowledge and influence deeper toward the galactic core.

With laboratory modules attached, Kant could be a peaceful survey vessel. With sensor, troop carrier, drop troop, and small craft modules, she could insert covert agents or conduct a full scale

raid designed to knock out a local tyrant. If her masters wished, Kant could head for Old Earth, some 100 light years toward the galactic rim from her present position. However, the Coalition had business closer at hand to take care of first. Civilization and technology had to be restored to a war-blasted region, allies had to be acquired, and threats to the existence of the Coalition had to be dealt with. Civilization would be brought to the nearby worlds whether their rulers wanted it or not. That was Kant's first order of business-to bring down one of Fisher's World's petty tyrants so that another more benevolent ruler might ultimately unite the world below and bring it into the Reformation Coalition's growing alliance.

* * * * *

The first day on the road was uneventful. Sean encountered only an occasional ranch hand as he rode along. He was heading east parallel to the coast. That would bring him to Two Bridges, where the southern road connected with the coastal road, shortly after nightfall. Hopefully the Inn of the Crescent Moons would have room for him tonight. The suns had set and Sean was hungry. His progress was a little slower than he had hoped. He stopped along the roadside to water Bright from a small pond and to rest for a few minutes. The stars were just beginning to appear. Looking up, he noticed a moving star travelling rapidly from north to south across the heavens. At first, he thought it was a shooting star, but it never burned out. Chill fear gripped him for an instant. "What's that?" he thought. "I've never seen any thing like that before. Old Uncle Nathan once said that strange lights in the sky meant evil things are about to happen.

"That's just superstition, I'm sure. It must be a really big shooting star that will fall all the way to the ground." The Emperor's sword, he remembered, was supposed to be made from the metal of just such a shooting star. Time to stop thinking of such things and move on.

Later that night, Sean crossed the UMBER River and entered the trading town of Two Bridges located on a large island in the river. River craft lined the quay on the east bank. Huge wagons bringing trade goods from the south and west were pulled up before traders' warehouses along the waterfront street. A large cobblestone square lay where the east end of the bridge and the waterfront joined. Most days it was the principal market place for farmers from the area, selling their goods to both the townspeople and to merchants for shipment down river to the capital. The Inn of the Crescent Moons was located on the south side of the square. It was the largest hostelry in town,

catering to travellers, river traders, and farmers and ranchers with business in town. The inn contained dormitories for common folk, individual rooms for the more well off, and a tavern famed for its hospitality.

After Sean stabled Bright in the livery behind the inn, he walked into the tavern, arranged for a bunk in a dorm and seated himself before the fire. The tavern was packed with people, most with tankards of ale, others enjoying their evening meal. He ordered a piece of the roast that was on the spit over the fire along with some vegetables, and ate well. Camaraderie and laughter were in the air. So was 'baco smoke, and it made him cough as he moved toward the bar. Although he was tired, it was too early for bed, and he craved some company after his long solitary ride.

"What's the matter lad, can't ye stand the atmosphere?" A rotund, jovial man pointed the stem of his pipe at Sean and laughed.

"Not too easily in here," Sean admitted. "I don't have too much experience in taverns."

"Well, come set ye'r self down and get some. Fairly Baird is m' name. I'm a river rat, runnin' a sail barge on the UMBER between here and Arcolaport. And who are ye?"

"Sean McKinnie. My dad runs three thousand head of parkesbeests west of here. I've spent most of my growing years on hippos-back. I'll be moving on east in the morning. I've to be at the university in two days."

"Oh, a beest-poker turned student are ye? Fresh caught by the looks of it. Arcolaburgh 'tis an interesting place, all right. Ye'll see things there ye'll ne'er see elsewhere. And meet people ye'll ne'er meet elsewhere, neither."

The two ordered ales as Baird continued to chat. The foamy yeasty brew quickly went through Sean to his head, making him feel slightly dizzy. It also loosened his tongue.

"Tell me about Arcolaburgh and the sights you've seen," he asked Baird.

"Well, first there be the castle. It's on a hillside in the bend of the river. Ye can see it for kilometers as ye approach the city. It shines in the sunlight like no other I've seen. They won't be lettin' ye close enough though, t' see what the castle is made of. The Iron Guards they keep us away."

"What are the Guards like? I've heard of them before; they are supposed to be fearsome and none dare stand against them."

"Aye, that be true. They be a frightful bunch, marchin' an clankin' round the capital. No one dares make a move against 'em. If they can't scare off the peasants with their halberds, they'll call in their special squads who'll punch a hole through yer guts with their lightning guns.

"The university be near the bloody palace,"

Baird went on. "People say the best graduates are recruited into the palace and almost never come out. Tales tell of young men learnin' an praticin' the Emperor's black arts. Some join the Iron Guard. Others may eventually see daylight again as members of the Emperor's the Ministry of Industry pushin' new ways of makin' things, and shoving aside the good old ones. The rest? Who knows? No one's really sure."

Baird paused for a moment and another swallow. Sean sipped his ale. "The capital sounds like a strange and dangerous place," he said.

"These are strange times, my boy. Dangerous ones indeed," Baird replied. "The Emperor's troops are everywhere in the capital. Reserves have been called up and the press gangs are grabbing young men right off the street. Be careful lad, be very careful. Looks like His Majesty is going to try to grab a piece of Rivero."

"I've seen my own strangeness," said Sean. "Just tonight as I stopped along the road, I looked up and saw a moving light in the sky. Like a meteor that didn't burn out."

Baird looked at him intently, saying nothing for a long moment.

"I met a man once who had strange speech. He warned me that lights in the sky herald trouble. First you see one or two moving lights, then a shower of meteors land, sowing the ground with dragon's teeth. From these meteors spring fierce warriors that come to steal what they can carry and smash what they can't. This stranger called them Star Vikings."

"That's an interesting tale, Mr. Baird," said Sean. "And thanks for the warning about Arcolaburgh. But I can't let that stop me. The university is something I've dreamed about for years. Something that'll get me off the farm and maybe show me the rest of the world. Anyway, thanks for the information and the company, I'm grateful for both."

With that, Sean dropped enough coins on the table to pay for the drinks and headed for his bunk in the dorm. He was asleep as soon as he hit the mattress.

Sean slept later than he wanted. The suns were up when he awoke. They weren't the only things blazing. His head felt on fire, his mouth felt filled with sandpaper, and his stomach heaved worse than a hippos in heat. He was paying the price for the ale. He washed, dressed, paid the innkeeper for his bunk, and the livery boy for Bright's board. Soon they were swinging along the east-bound road, Sean dozing in the saddle and Bright keeping to the road by herself. It was going to be a long day on the road.

* * * * *

"Drop Stations! Drop Stations! All hands man your drop stations! All Marines lay to your drop tube bays and prepare to drop!" Deck plates rattled as squads of Marines left their berthing areas and raced to the troop carrier module drop tubes. Gunnery Sergeant Esteban "Red Dog" Rodriguez slipped the light battle dress' helmet over his head while Petty Officer 3rd Class "Stash" Stashinski clipped the life support backpack onto the sergeant's powered suit. Stash connected the fittings from the pack to the suit while Gunny Rodriguez ran a radio check on the tactical frequency. Satisfied, both men walked toward rows of coffin-like capsules lying in their drop tubes at a 45 degree angle. The Gunny's combat rifle, basic load of ammunition, and grenades were attached to webbing already in place in the capsules.

Stash helped Rodriguez into the capsule and fastened the webbing to his battle dress. He knocked on the Gunny's helmet twice. "Luck for the drop," he said as he slid the top third of the capsule over Rodriguez' head and shoulders, and sealed it in place. Gunny was in total darkness, cut off from every sensory input except for the transmissions on the communications net. Stash slapped the control switch which closed and depressurized the drop tube, and opened the tube's outer door.

"All Marines, this is Drop Control. 30 seconds to drop." Rodriguez waited in the darkness, barely able to wiggle in the tightly fastened webbing. His weight fled as the artificial gravity was cut off in the drop troop module. As assistant platoon leader of 1st Platoon, he'd be the last to drop. His platoon's job was to scout and secure a drop zone just outside the local technologically elevated dictator's capital city so that the assault landers could bring in 2nd platoon with its grav vehicles and heavy weapons. Both platoons would then advance on the castle, knock out the Teddy, and then head back to the DZ for extraction. Within a few days, the Exploratory Service would show up with a bootstrap team to replace the TED's government with something less xenophobic and warlike, and then gradually build up the local technology level to a point where interstellar contact and trade could develop.

"All Marines, this is Drop Control. Dropping....on five, four, three, two, one, MARK!" Rodriguez heard and felt a "thump!," then another "thump!," and another; each one sounding louder and feeling closer than the last. Then "THUMP!" and "WHAM!" as a tremendous downward jolt tried to separate his spine from the base of his skull. Next, nothing, no sound, no weight, as he fell free. He was falling blind,

relying on the ship's computers to have placed him on course for the drop zone. Soon, a thin whistling announced that the capsule had reached the upper atmosphere. Stabilizing fins deployed, steadying the capsule with its thick ablative base oriented toward the flight path. Rodriguez felt warm as the heat pulse built up outside and the heat shield burned. His weight returned, then increased to eight times normal draining blood from his brain and blacking him out momentarily as the g-suit bladders in his battle dress worked to hold his blood in his head and upper body. The capsule slowed, the heat pulse abated, and Rodriguez' weight began to return as he entered the thicker, lower atmosphere.

"WHAM!" Suddenly, explosive bolts split the capsule's outer shell away and Rodriguez could see again. He was dropping almost face down onto a moonlit, ringlit landscape 3000 meters below. He tongued helmet controls to call up a map on the inside of his helmet visor. It didn't match the terrain below; it looked like upper atmosphere winds had blown him off course.

He called up the locator display showing his platoon mates' radio beacons as flashing lights descending over the map. He clenched his jaw twice to key his suit radio to the command push. "Blackjack Six, this is Blackjack Five. You're not in a tight drop pattern, we're scattered all over! Looks like some idiot didn't expect any high altitude winds when they programmed the capsules' flight computers. This mission looks like a screwup from the word go."

"Don't get your shorts in knots, Red Dog. Just work on getting down in one piece," answered Lt. Wilhelmina "Willie" Bosch, his platoon leader. "We'll regroup at Rally Point Alpha after we hit dirt. This is not the first foulup the arses have gotten the Marines into."

At about 2000 meters, his drogue chute opened, slowing him and steadying him in an upright position. He noticed city lights off to the north. His team should be dropping right into the city, not into some woods clicks away. At 500 meters, he dumped the drogue and opened the main chute. Swinging gently, he pulled the shrouds to steer toward a clearing on his left, noted his wind drift, and then turned his chute so he was facing into the wind. The ground was coming up fast. He made sure his ankles were together and his knees bent. He thudded onto soft black ground, rolled forward once, then bounced to his feet, shaking off dirt clods from his armor. Quickly, Rodriguez unstrapped his rifle from his armor, checked its magazine, made sure the safety was off, and

headed for the tree line.

Rodriguez tried his communicator. "Blackjack Six this is Blackjack Five. Do you read?" Nothing came back but static. He bit down once, shifting to the general strike freq and tried again. Still nothing. "Willie' must be at least 12 kays away. "Damn these comms," he swore. "We need at least a ten kay short range, not three. We don't have time to screw around with this. Whichever rear echelon idiot designed these suits was never in action. We ought to drop the bastard on a hot DZ without a suit." He tried again. "Any Blackjack unit this is Blackjack Five transmitting blind. I'm down, safe, about five clicks southwest of Rally Point Alpha. I don't think anyone has seen me, and I'm heading for the rally point now. Any Blackjack unit, rendezvous at Alpha."

He was wrong about one detail. More than one pair of eyes had tracked his descent.

* * * * *

**Don't
get your
shorts in
knots,
Red Dog.**

Iron Guard Special Troops Section Leader Willie O'Bannon saw Rodriguez drift to ground under the parachute and waited under the trees with his crunch gun team. Special Troops had been alerted the night before to expect trouble. The starman at the castle had spotted a moving light in the sky, and guard detachments had been deployed to

cover the open spaces around Arcolaburgh. The starman told of raids on other worlds by these Star Vikings. "They'll kill your Emperor, destroy your government, and take over. Then they'll kill you!"

"The way to handle them is to hit them as they land. Don't let them get together and organize. They want you to think they are invincible, but they're not. These fine heavy rifles we have brought to you can penetrate their armor and kill them as dead as a fish in a can."

Well, that's what they said at the briefing. O'Bannon nudged Jocko Harris, his gunner. "Get 'im Jocko." Harris steadied the long, heavy rifle on its bipod, braced it against his shoulder as he held his breath and slowly squeezed the trigger.

Rodriguez was advancing slowly across the open meadow when the slug hit him with the combined effect of a sledge hammer, a blow torch, and a high speed drill. The heavy slug hit his armor over his chest, knocking him two meters backwards. The bullet penetrated and then ripped through Rodriguez' chest, smashing a rib into shards of gristle and bone, then ripping lung tissue to shreds as it passed one centimeter to the left of his heart and through his left lung before passing out the back of his suit. The impact stunned him

unconscious. Blood gushed from his chest and back through holes punched in his light battle dress. O'Bannon and Harris rose from their position and started toward Rodriguez to make sure he was dead.

* * * * *

Sean rode along in the gathering darkness. He expected to spend one more night on the road and be in Arcolaburgh in the morning. The day had been warm with clear skies. The evening brought welcome cool winds. The stars were appearing and it looked like it would be a pleasant night. He would have to camp soon, and the forests ahead promised shelter from the wind and wood for an evening fire.

Suddenly to the north, Sean saw a fiery streak in the sky, then another and another, each glowing more brightly as it streamed a tail of fire in the sky. Sean stopped Bright and looked upward, his mouth gaping open. A whole shower of stars was descending, at least one looked like it was coming down right on top of him. He dismounted, grapped Bright's bridle, and ran toward the cover of nearby trees. The falling stars began to explode, popping, crackling, and cascading showers of sparks as they disintegrated. Sean cowered beneath a tree, rolling himself into a ball. He had never been so frightened in his life. The noise soon stopped, and Sean's curiosity got the better of his fears. He looked up in time to see a large black man-like shape hanging beneath a large black cloud. The sky creature thumped to earth in the meadow in front of Sean's tree, shook itself, and got up. It had two arms and two legs, but didn't seem to be human. Portions of it glittered in the starlight. A hump protruded from its back. It had no neck. Its metallic head extended straight up from its shoulders. As it stood, one arm reached over the creature's shoulder, pulled a stick-like object from its back, then pointed it toward the trees beyond the meadow.

Suddenly from the trees beyond came a tremendous boom and flash of light. The creature was slammed backward off his feet. Fluid came pulsing from a hole in its front. The creature pawed feebly at its wound, then stopped. Two men came running from the woods opposite, one carrying a long large object. The men reached the creature. One drew a long knife from his belt and began slashing at the creature, but to no avail. The other twisted off its head and threw it away.

Sean was stunned to see a human face on the second, much smaller head that now protruded from the metal body. It's a starman, he suddenly realized, and the Iron Guard-- men his father often said were more evil than the Emperor's tax

collectors-- were going to kill him. He couldn't let that happen.

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