



Decados FIEFS



Imperial Survey **5**

FADING SUNS™

DESTINY MANIFEST

My fellow Knights of the Quest, you all know me, Sir Klimenty Decados, one of the youngest of my family to serve as a knight of the Imperial Phoenix. I know that because I am new to the service of the Emperor, and because of the history of strife between my family and that of his Majesty, many consider my loyalties dubious. However, even such proud champions as you must admit the confidence evinced in me by His Most Gracious Majesty. For I have been chosen, among all of this august Company, to author this critical volume of the Imperial Survey, and to relate my journeys across the worlds of the house that bore me. I may laugh, for no other choice could truly be made; I believe that I am one of the few Questing Knights born of the House of the Mantis who still enjoys the esteem of his family. Prince Hynam himself, exalted ruler of the Decados and a firm supporter of the Empire, gave his blessing to my voyage and my penmanship.

Mine is an oft-maligned house, called capricious, tyrannical and deviant, while in fact it is possibly the most noble and civilized family of all the jumpweb. Despite my family's history with the Hawkwoods, we have nothing but the utmost respect, loyalty and even affection towards our new Emperor. He has succeeded where countless generations of Decados have failed: he has brought peace and pros-

perity to the Known Worlds. The noble privilege of warfare has been righteously directed against the barbarian aggressors who cause the Empire such grief. The Church busies itself with healing the wounds of the Emperor Wars and the investigation of Republican and alien heresies. The League has reformed bonds of commerce between planets and star systems many jumps apart, unifying humanity in a way unheard-of in a millennium. It is a glorious vision that has come to pass, and although my house shall not lead, the Decados do endeavor to be a valuable part of this effort.

Together, my entourage and I have seen and documented much in the name of our Emperor. It is my deepest wish that this volume may prove an example to my kinsmen, to you brave Questing Knights, and to countless others working toward reconciliation and unity in the Empire. I have tried my utmost to remain impartial and objective, but one's loyalty to one's liege can be powerful enough to subtly alter the tone of any work. I hope all those who read my words might forgive me this failing.

Sir Klimenty Decados

Each man possesses but one unbreakable loyalty; all others are but trivia.

— *The Ducal Manifesto*, maxim 15

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Severus

Venomous Bloom

Severus. Site of the rebirth of House Decados and glorious home to that house. Severus is a jewel of emerald and sapphire spinning through the heavens around a rose-tinted sun, its polar regions lightly tinged with soft white from ever-present mists. From space, Tsaritsyn and Jakovgrad, largest of the great fortress-cities, are visible amidst the green of the lush Severan jungles. With appropriate magnification and a keen eye, the dark, thick exhaust plumes from the mining and smelting operations in Chobor-Zemsky can be seen, and one may even detect the signs of an Ascorbite hive or two, if one knows where to look and what to look for. Severus can be a dangerous — even deadly — place to the uninformed, but the planet and its people offer a wealth of pleasures to those capable of dealing with their idiosyncrasies.

History

Severus was initially discovered and surveyed in 2610 by ships allied with an independent corporation specializing in planetary exploration. Orbital reconnaissance revealed the planet's enormous mineral wealth, a thriving biosphere and a promise of vast opportunity. The tale of humanity's first landing is a fable known to any peasant child: the Ascorbite host that welcomed the new arrivals, the aliens' mute fascination while scientists sampled and studied, the famous warning, "Beware the Amen'ta. They will devour your soft skin and your space vessel as well," and the hull rat swarm that consumed ship and crew alike. Without the scouting team's report, the employing corporation was forced to sell the rights to Severus at a loss, without announcing the planet's potential dangers to its buyer, House Gloucester, who then introduced human settlement to the world.

During the early period of Severus's colonization, the native Ascorbites' sentience was still unknown. It was not conclusively accepted until the wreckage of the original zaibatsu survey ship was discovered deep in the jungles of Leshiy, along with the record of the crew's First Contact and subsequent annihilation. Thus, humanity lived on Severus for over a century and a half before formal communications were made with the native insectoids. A few xenologists and other researchers arrived on Severus to study the mysterious creatures, but the bulk of such scientists went instead to Velisamil, lured by the more promising and less taciturn Ur-Obun.

In 2818, House Decados revealed itself to the universe as heir to the now-defunct Gloucesters. As new owner of

Severus Traits

Cathedral: Orthodox

Agora: Charioteers/Muster

Garrison: 7 (much of the fleet is in deep space)

Capital: Tsaritsyn

Jumps: 3

Adjacent Worlds: Cadavus (dayside), Cadiz (nightside), De Moley (parallel)

Solar System: Vinoush'ok (0.73 AU), Severus (1.34 AU; Edenya), Svarog (5.13 AU; Makosh, Svaroglich), Cronus (17.62 AU), Fin-1 (32.18 AU), Fin-2 (38.49 AU), Jumpgate (51.68 AU)

Tech: 6

Human Population: 1.95 billion

Ascorbite Population: 30 million (Decados estimate; unknown reliability)

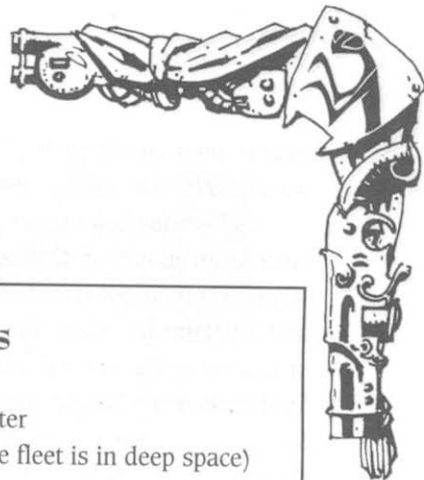
Other Aliens: About 200,000 (mostly Hironem)

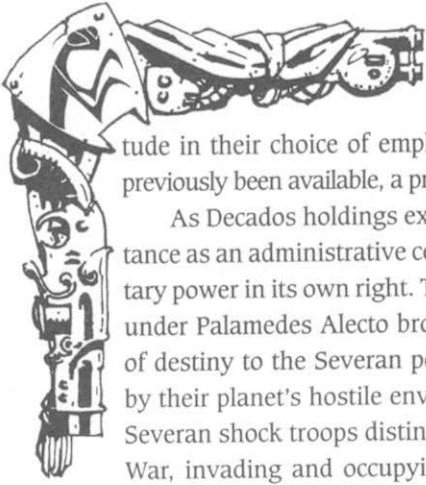
Resources: Gems, fossil fuels, precious metals, exotic lifeforms.

Exports: Mineral wealth, petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals (many of which are illegal or proscribed on other worlds), fish, and politics.

Landscape: Most of Severus is hot, dark and humid, except for the polar regions, which are temperate, darker, more humid and blanketed with a constant mist. Warm oceans cover over 80% of the planet's surface and teem with life. There are three continents (Carpathia, Leshiy, Rhodesland) and one major island chain, the Voydanoy Archipelago. Most of these landmasses are blanketed with ancient Severan jungles, although there are grassy plains in northern Varangia, the Transvaal region of Leshiy, and along the western coast of South Rhodesland. Rich mountain ranges extend across Carpathia, southern Varangia and Mistanza in southeastern Rhodesland. The planet's low axial tilt (only 15°) means seasonal variances are minimal, but swift oceanic currents moderate temperatures in most regions to tropical levels. Only certain inland regions experience temperatures high enough to threaten human survival.

Gloucester properties on Severus and off-world, the Decados began a long era of prosperity for both humans and aliens under their stewardship. They greatly expanded human settlements, welcoming colonists who sought to build a new world as well as refugees fleeing regimes that denied their basic rights. Severus allowed these people much greater lati-





tude in their choice of employment and lifestyle than had previously been available, a practice that continues to this day.

As Decados holdings expanded, Severus gained importance as an administrative centre and an economic and military power in its own right. The establishment of the Church under Palamedes Alecto brought a new courage and sense of destiny to the Severan people, intimidated as they were by their planet's hostile environment and enigmatic aliens. Severan shock troops distinguished themselves in the Ukar War, invading and occupying Kordeth's surface capital of Darurgin and even capturing the Nadakira warlord to end the war itself. Severus continued to develop both commercially and militarily for centuries, surviving near-constant assaults from hostile houses.

The Second Republic was a chaotic time for Severus. Massive, poorly controlled immigration from more central Republican worlds strained planetary services to the breaking point — and often well past it. Hoards of brazen prospectors invaded the planet, seeking the near-legendary mineral wealth that Severus promised, braving the deep wilds in search of it. Additionally, Severus became an important way-station on the way to frontier worlds past Mazdak (now called De Moley by some) and the Vau worlds beyond Cadiz.

All this created a kind of frontier mentality on Severus, where lawlessness was rampant and innocent people lived in fear. The power of the Second Republic was weak so far from Byzantium Secundus and their laws were often merely words on paper. It was House Decados who took upon itself the responsibility of maintaining public order, employing their own resources and personnel to reinforce the founding Republican laws. Thus, when the Republic inevitably collapsed, Severus suffered little damage compared to other worlds, secure as it was under House Decados's tender guardianship.

The New Dark Ages were aptly named on Severus, as its once-rich orange sun shifted its light to a dim, dark red. Though House Decados gained much political respect for its part in liberating New Istanbul from the Second Republic, elsewhere the house faced one of the darkest hours in its history as jumpgates closed and data was purged, sealing off much of its territory from the Known Worlds. None of these Lost Worlds have yet been rediscovered. On Severus, fierce intertribal warfare broke out between different Ascorbite factions, with many fighting for the Decados and many more fighting against them. Fear of possible invasion from the Ascorbiters seized the human cities. Desperate Republican citizens turned to House Decados for shelter and *en masse* swore eternal fealty to the Mantis Banner, accepting Generational Contracts in exchange for protection. From that day forward, Severus has never wavered in its loyalty to its rightful rulers.

In the centuries since, House Decados has had its share

of defeats. Vladimir inflicted a humiliating blow, while the Vau have always been a source of anxiety. Constant strife with the Hawkwoods has cost both houses dearly, from the New Caspian massacre to the unfortunate acquisition of Gwynneth by the Hawkwoods. Internal struggles threatened to tear the family apart from within, culminating in the Great Assassins War which caused the deaths of nearly a tenth of the Decados nobility. Prince Hiram's own claim to the Imperial throne was withdrawn in the face of overwhelming opposition from Alexius's forces, especially after the massive Decados losses incurred at the Siege of Jericho.

Since the Emperor's ascendance, Severus has reestablished itself as a major mercantile power, as the Empire has much demand for its wares. Severan gemstones, minerals and pharmaceuticals are valued commodities on many worlds. Now, its people embark on a new quest in a time of peace and prosperity. The mines are productive. The Ascorbiters are quiet, save for conflicts among their own kind. Decados nobles once again engage in their traditional pastimes, free from the distractions of overt warfare. Always looking to the horizon, Prince Hiram has dispatched much of the planetary defence fleet toward deep space, hoping perhaps to rediscover some of the Decados worlds lost so long ago. This is indeed a wondrous time to be on Severus.

Solar System

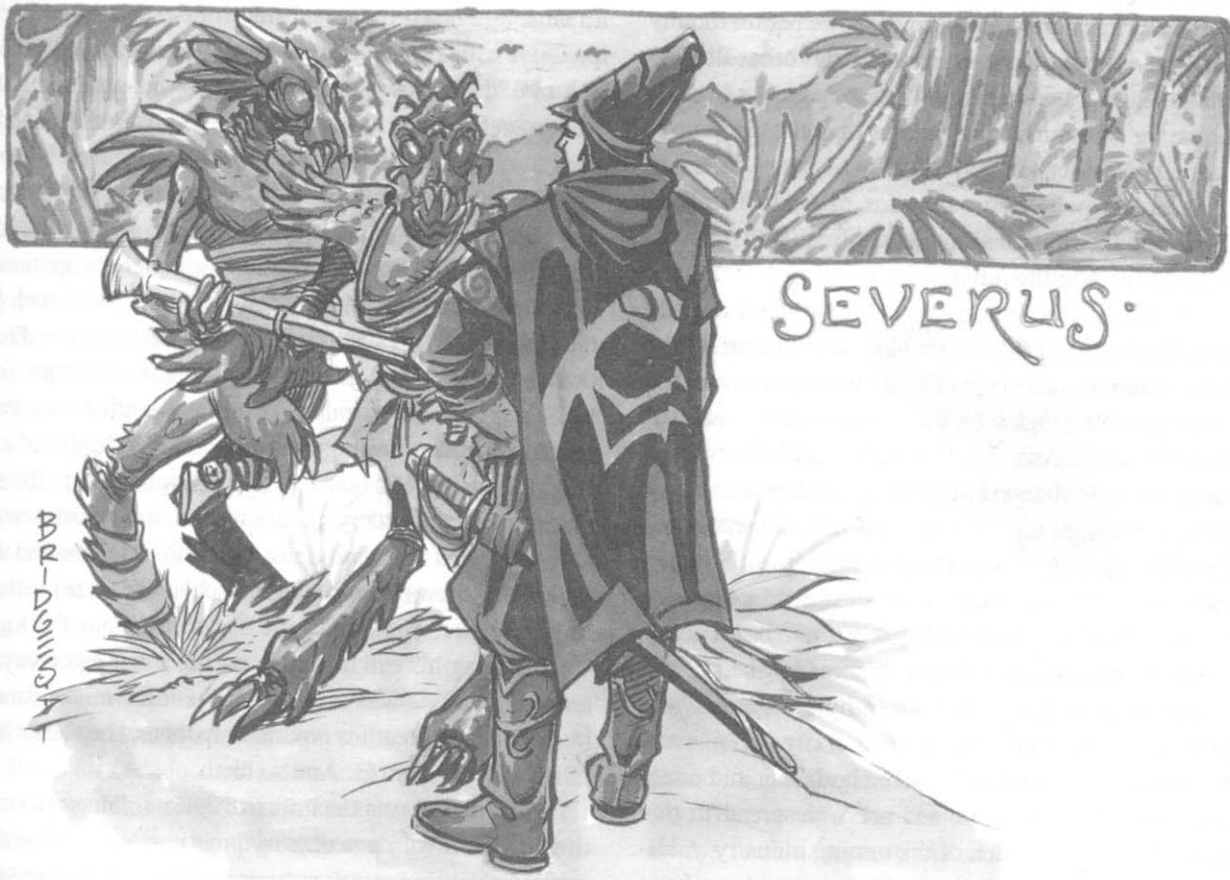
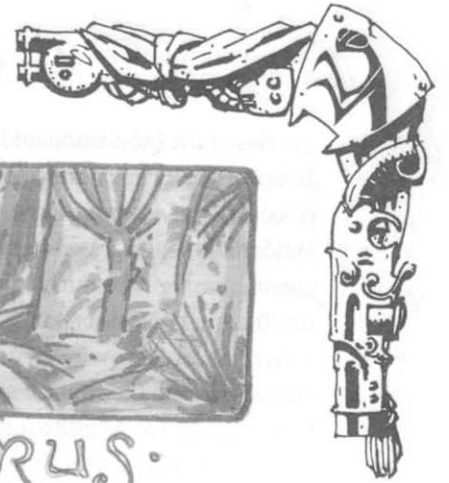
Vinoush'ok: Severus's sister planet, of similar size, but with no atmosphere. Although rich in rare minerals, surface temperatures vary in the extreme between day and night, making mining operations unfeasible. No permanent human structures have ever been erected.

Severus: Severus is the second planet in the system and is the only planet capable of supporting life. There is one moon, Edenya, which was terraformed during the Second Republic. After the Fall, the Jakovian Agency altered the engines' environmental settings and seeded the moon with the most dangerous flora and fauna Severus had to offer, along with a few other select organisms from other worlds. Edenya's surface was covered with a lethal jungle, to be used as a training camp for the elite Kossack soldiers.

Svarog: The largest planet in the system, characterized by its fierce storms and thousands of moonlets. It is a gaseous world but no data exists on anything but its uppermost atmosphere, since the storms destroy all probes. Svarog's moonlets are mostly barren, though records exist of a few rich moons that delivered lucrative wealth during the Second Republic.

Cronus: A smaller gaseous world, once a minor astronomical curiosity. Cronus's atmosphere is calm compared to the tempests of Svarog. Little exists of any interest on or orbiting this world, but its moons remain an esoteric scientific curiosity for their unusual orbital patterns.





Fin-1 and Fin-2: Both are small, barren balls of ice. They were probably originally satellites that escaped the orbit of Cronus or Svarog.

People & Places

The people of Severus display a wealth of unique culture and sophistication. Even the lowliest peasants and miners are avid observers of the planet's news and entertainment media. On a world where fiefs can instantly change hands at the whim of the Prince, where noble vendettas can change weekly and where the constant fear of possible Ascorbite aggression looms over many communities, the inhabitants of Severus are told all they need to know by the Decados-sponsored network of town criers and electronic media. The sober Severan serfs and freemen can be apathetic towards off-world events, as the concerns of their own planet keep them fully occupied. The jovial Decados nobility is an entirely different matter, continually caught-up in interplanetary and Imperial politics.

Leshiy

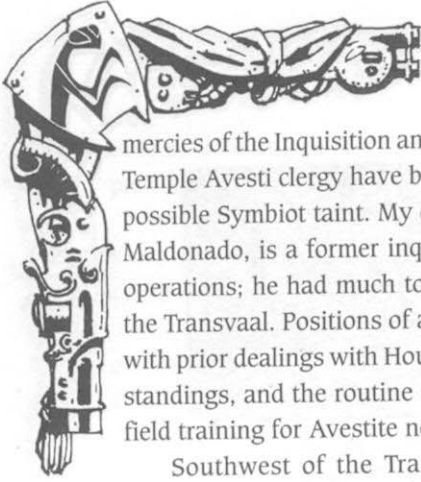
The continent of Leshiy covers most of Severus' equatorial region and is the long-time fief of the Decados Princes from its capital city, Tsaritsyn. The western portion of the continent is called the Transvaal, which is mostly savannah, with a high mountain range along the Varangian south

coast. Very few Ascorbites can be found in this region, preferring the shelter of the jungles to these wide, open spaces. The eastern part of Leshiy (erroneously termed Central Leshiy) is blanketed by dense jungle and coastal marshland, broken only by a few fortified settlements and the capital city itself. The southeastern coastland is part of a complicated network of inlets, narrow passages and small islands called the Vi'kro Tan'doda by the Ascorbites.

The Transvaal is the agricultural heartland of Severus, dotted with vast plantations of potatoes, millirice, megawheat and the famous Severan corn, each fief ruled by minor Decados lords. This region was the first to be colonized by House Gloucester, and the Decados nobles of this area — while somewhat provincial — are the most traditional of the entire house. The Transvaalite nobles are well-known for engaging in frequent duels, formal vendettas and even armed warfare against their neighbors over minor slights and centuries-old ancestral grudges. From the regional capital at New Capetown, Countess Illyana Usupova Decados keeps a watchful eye and a firm hand on the feuding nobility, to ensure that their conflicts do not escalate out of hand. Unfortunately, they once did.

In 4993, Baronet Harald Ivanovitch Decados was revealed to have employed Xyll Warbeasts in ravaging the lands of his enemies. Harald was delivered to the tender





mercies of the Inquisition and, at Countess Illyana's request, Temple Avesti clergy have been scouring the region for any possible Symbiot taint. My own confessor, Brother Ricardo Maldonado, is a former inquisitor with experience in such operations; he had much to say about the investigation in the Transvaal. Positions of authority are reserved for clergy with prior dealings with House Decados, to avoid misunderstandings, and the routine searches are frequently used as field training for Avestite novitiates.

Southwest of the Transvaal is the subcontinent of Varangia, the fief of Earl Igor Decados, also known as the Iron Bear. Varangia was originally dominated by one of the most impenetrable jungles on the entire planet, inhabited by extremely hostile Ascorbites who often raided estates in the Transvaal. This changed in 4159, when Decados forces firebombed the entire subcontinent, invaded and eradicated the Ascorbite cities there and settled the region with human colonists. The Perun Line was established, a 15-mile-wide swath of land along northern Varangia saturated with heavy herbicides, preventing the jungles from spreading south. The area is now largely grassland, broken by strip-mines, the southern mountains and by the sprawling city of Domovoy, which extends deep into the plains and both over and under the mountains. Muster operations are widespread in this region, as they control much of the mining industry. Additionally, Chainer gangs based out of Domovoy have been suspected of occasional slave-raids on plantations in the Transvaal. Relations between Countess Illyana and Earl Igor are less than cosy.

Central Leshiy is the region which off-worlders believe is the very essence of Severus. All human settlements here are heavily fortified, and Tsaritsyn itself is one of the most heavily defended cities in all of the Empire. Because urban land is so precious, the architectural style here is quite vertical, with towers that extend high into the sky and deep under the ground. Noble estates shine with beautiful colored everlights. Freemen neighborhoods are lit with electric lamps powered by the Severan Energy Cartel. Poorer neighborhoods are often dark, shadows broken only by torchlight from households. A simple way to evaluate the monetary success of a community is by its light sources.

Between the human communities is the untamed Severan wilderness, though this area is also home to numerous villages of Ascorbites and at least seven of their underground Tunos cities. The local Ascorbites are organized in a kind of nationality, called the Mi'tlazzh, and are likely as civilized as Ascorbites are capable of being. The Mi'tlazzh trade often with humanity, exchanging fish, meat and certain rare plant life for prized Decados industrial products. They have learned to carve crude wooden or chitinous canoes for travelling along the Vi'kro Tan'doda, though they pay well for Decados plasteel hulls. The more prosperous

communities have purchased clear plexiglass tanks, needed to tame and breed the larval stage of the ashtati, a Severan predator with keen tracking senses. A few gifted Ascorbites even build their own primitive blunderbusses in imitation of human firearms, though most prefer to purchase modern shotguns and modify the grips to suit their own unique articulation. I understand that such weaponsmiths are considered tainted by most Ascorbites, and live away from the main Tunos. Their craft is learned as Tan'zhom apprentices and carried on afterwards throughout life. Most such hermits likely learned their craft from humans, either directly or indirectly through generations of apprenticeships.

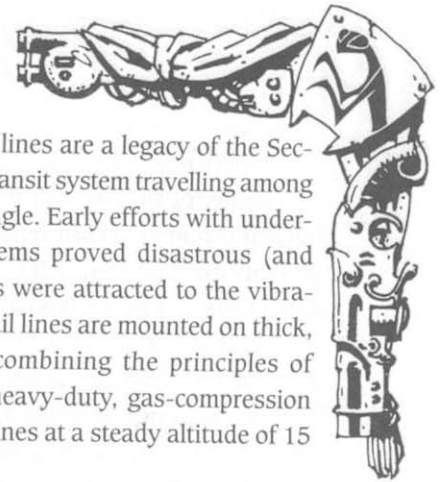
The ruler of Central Leshiy is none other than Prince Hiram himself, cunning and manipulative leader of all of House Decados. His hospitality and festivities are the stuff of infamy, a true litany of dissolution and decadence. The man tried and failed to defeat my lord Alexius and even now surely brews some diabolical scheme to seize the throne of the Empire. Mantis League assassins scour the Known Worlds doing his evil work. His corruption is legendary. His arachnid chassis was a gift from the lords of Gehenne for his service. He breathes noxious vapors and he shoots lightning from his nostrils. And so forth.

Actually, I found the Prince to be something of a simple, tired old man with a necessary prosthesis, one of excellent quality according to my partner, Sir Qinto of House Shelit. During my audience with him, the Prince was distant, perhaps confused. I fear that the head of my family is finally succumbing to his age, complicated by his notoriously excessive Selchakah habit. Many of his policies of late have been indicative of his slowing down. He has engaged in few formal vendettas of late, and has stripped no nobles of their fiefs in years. Still, bear in mind that Hiram remains a Decados, and is likely quite capable of maintaining such a ruse for his own benefit.

Tsaritsyn

The capital of Leshiy, of Severus, and of all the Decados fiefdoms, Tsaritsyn stretches from the edges of the Buorka Region to the northeast coast of Central Leshiy and to the shores of the Vi'kro Tan'doda. Home to more than 300 million people, Tsaritsyn is terribly crowded. The city is actually composed of dozens of neighboring forts clustered around the ancient walls of Old Tsaritsyn and amalgamated under a single administration, ruled by Prince Hiram's seneschal, the eminent Omar Mugabe, formerly an esteemed director among the Reeves. Shaded by the high towers and city walls, Tsaritsyn would be permanently cloaked in darkness if not for the myriad sources of illumination that dot the city. The city boasts such important features as the planetary spaceport and the Great Hall of the Mantis, headquarters of the Order of the Mantis. At the heart of Old Tsaritsyn is the opulent Royal Manse Novykh Decados, or simply Manse





Decados to off-worlders, residence of the Prince of the house.

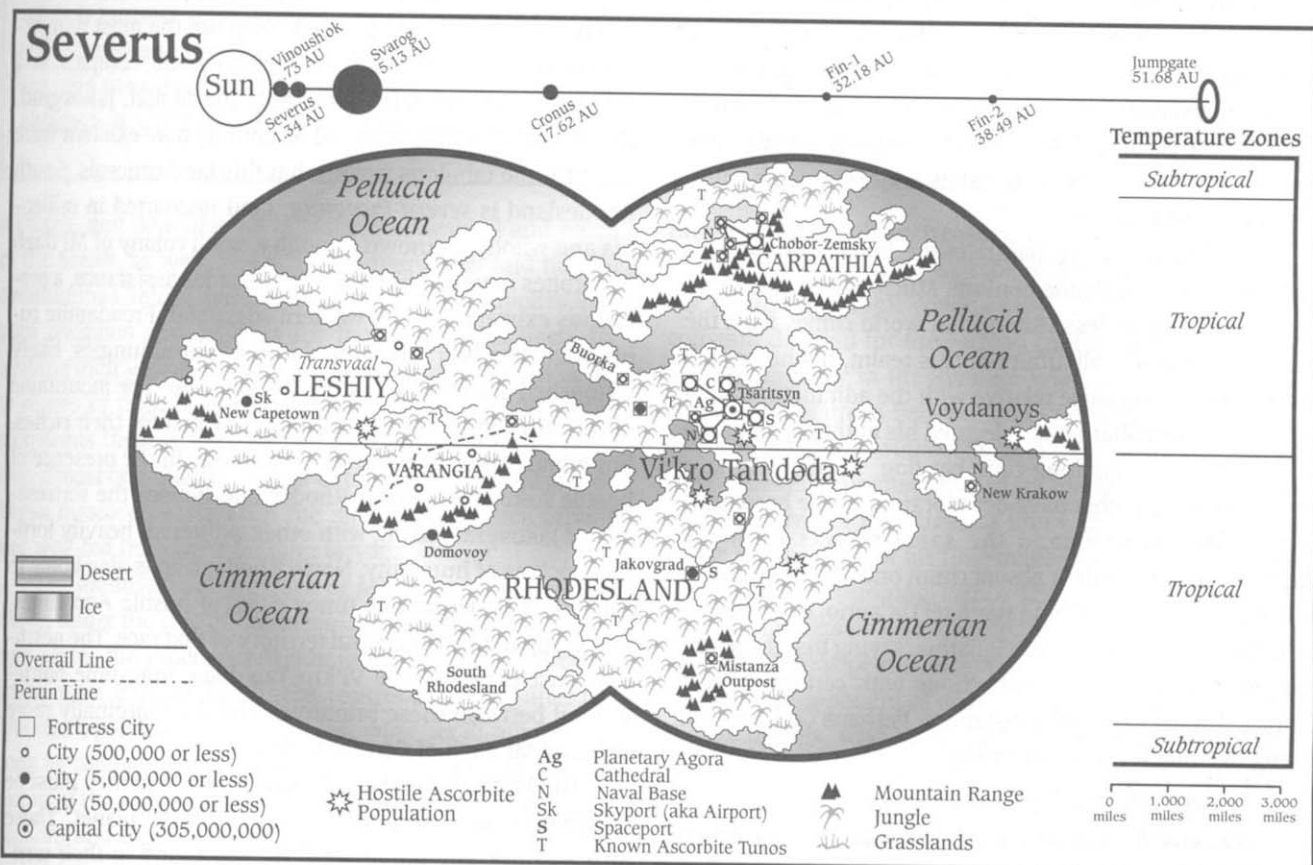
The Royal Manse is quite familiar to me, as I spent a few months of my childhood there being tutored in off-world politics and inter-house relations by Baronet Edvard Decados, a younger half-cousin of Prince Hyram. The manse fairly towers over the city like a glowing Emyrean Palace, radiant with crystal spires and everlights. The illumination is indeed impressive, lighting the surrounding area in a perpetual, gentle evening. From its towers one can view all the way to the jungles surrounding Old Tsaritsyn.

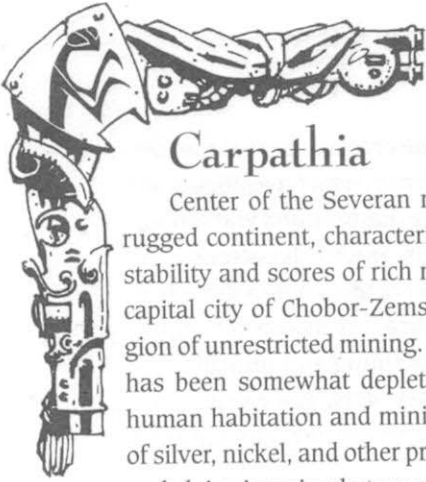
One notable area is the section dubbed Little Turaz, a small, outlying fort of the city with a large population of Hironem. These aliens were rejected by their own kind for associating overmuch with aliens (even such as we humans!), and are dubbed Illu, or outsiders, by their conservative culture. Some are veterans of the Emperor Wars or their offspring, while some were diplomats or envoys who became too comfortable outside the confines of their God-King's realm. Little Turaz is a place where the Hironem's heathen tongue is heard as commonly as Urthish, and here the unfortunate aliens are allowed to wallow in the simplicity of their own primitive culture.

Travel for Decados nobles between the forts comprising the city is usually by flitter or air yacht, high over the jungle. Each fort maintains a small airstrip specifically for this purpose. Commoners must normally rely on the overrail system

linking the forts. The overrail lines are a legacy of the Second Republic, an urban mass transit system travelling among the treetops of the Severan jungle. Early efforts with underground and surface-rail systems proved disastrous (and expensive) when shriva herds were attracted to the vibrations along the ground. Overrail lines are mounted on thick, shock-absorption columns, combining the principles of Vautech repulsor plates and heavy-duty, gas-compression cylinders to maintain the rail lines at a steady altitude of 15 metres above the ground.

When the overrails were first built, there was a significant question of how to defend their suspension columns in the jungle from intrusive local wildlife. Early experimentation with automated defences proved both unfeasible and ineffective, and long-term posting of human guards was hazardous in the extreme. In the end, an agreement was reached with several local groups of Ascorbite, whereby they would ensure the protection of the columns in exchange for unlimited use of the overrail system itself. Special steerage cars for Ascorbite passengers were designed and employed, one such car attached to each train. Since its inception the overrail system has never been used by any Ascorbite, but they continue to successfully defend it to this day. The steerage cars are still attached to each train, but always remain empty. None can say why.





Carpathia

Center of the Severan mining industry, Carpathia is a rugged continent, characterized by recurrent geological instability and scores of rich mountain chains. Except for the capital city of Chobor-Zemsky, this is a largely lawless region of unrestricted mining. The mineral wealth of Carpathia has been somewhat depleted after thousands of years of human habitation and mining, but there are still rich veins of silver, nickel, and other precious metals to be found. Feuds and claim-jumping between minor Decados noble entrepreneurs, Muster mining bosses and independent operators are not uncommon, exacerbated by frequent earthquakes capable of burying claim-markers, entire mines and bodies. There are few serfs; most of the populace are freemen, eking a meager living out of the mines and other related industries without the protection of a noble guardian.

Scattered intermittently throughout the continent are small Ascorbite communities whose members often provide cheap (or enslaved) labor in the mines. The local Ascorbites also call themselves Mi'tlazzh, though they are nowhere near as civilized as their brethren in Central Leshiy, and are mainly fit only to work in the mines or as guards against intrusive wildlife coming near the city of Chobor-Zemsky.

Carpathia is also the only region on Severus that holds any significant number of Eskatonic priests. These priests claim that the magnitude and vigor of the continent's mining operations have destabilized the regions ley-lines, as they call them. These ley-lines, according to the Eskatonics, are shifted in unpredictable ways, causing the tremendous geological instability experienced by the continent. Though I myself have personal issues with the Eskatonic Order, it is possible that their outlandish claims may bear some truth. It is not for me to decide.

The noble lord of Carpathia is the famous Count Enis Sharn, also ruler of Pandemonium. Much of his experience dealing with the lawless Hub of that world comes from the chaotic and free-for-all affairs of this realm, his home fief. Unable to trust any close relative with the administration of Carpathia, Count Sharn has delegated his authority to Baron Ignatius Masseri, his long-time lap-dog. Needless to say, conditions in Carpathia have deteriorated, as the baron has been unable to command the same respect from the Carpathian people as their absent count once did. My Scraver travelling companion, Genin Raphael DiCaprio, claimed that he had already heard of Baron Ignatius, saying that the baron had less than legitimate connections with certain Scraver families dealing in illegal substances. Perhaps Count Sharn is long overdue for a homecoming.

Chobor-Zemsky

A scattered fortress-city much like Tsaritsyn, but much smaller, both in size and in population (though my rather

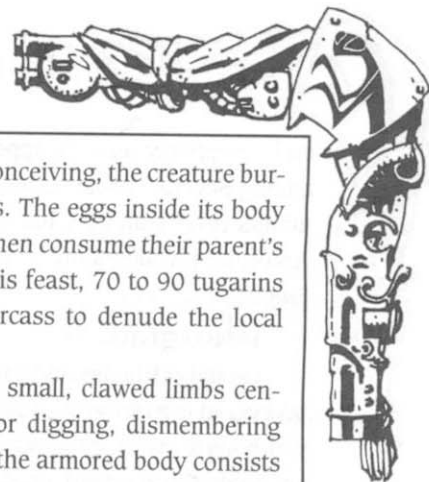
naive confessor, Brother Ricardo, still managed to get lost). Most of the inhabitants of this city are freemen by birth, and the population of serfs is detrimentally low. Most of the city is based around the mining industry and fields relating to it, such as smelting, equipment manufacturing and recreation for rowdy miners. Many illicit activities are available in this city, most of which are not suitable for the fragile souls of the commonality. In fact, much of this city seems like a throwback to the days of the Second Republic, when Severus was a frontier planet and law was a matter of opinion backed by weapons. Baron Ignatius does little to control the situation, instead handing much of the responsibility for law enforcement to lieutenants from his own house. Decados guards have expressed to me their considerable frustration at the baron's refusal to allow them to enforce the law to the best of their ability, placing unfair restrictions on investigative questioning and household searches. No one in the city dares criticize the baron for fear of his many informants, and when asked, people force a smile and reassure that the baron only looks after their best interests. Though mining productivity has increased, this has been offset by the need to pay the workers unfairly high wages, deeply cutting into profits that rightly belong to House Decados.

Rhodesland

The least-populated continent on Severus, Rhodesland is an area where the dominance of the human race is still in dispute. The jungles of this continent are the most dangerous on the planet; the fortress-cities are small, compact, and extremely well-defended, especially the capital, Jakovgrad. Human habitation here would be entirely non-existent were it not for the fabulous wealth that this land conceals. South Rhodesland is *severa incognita*, land uncharted in millenia and wholly unknown, though a small colony of Mi'tlazzh Ascorbites have established, with Decados assistance, a precarious existence on the western coastland. Preadamite ruins have also been discovered in the central jungles, likely untouched since their creators left long ago. The mountains of Mistanza in the southeast are renowned for their riches, but mining there is extremely hazardous in the presence of hostile Ascorbites. North Rhodesland houses the fortress-city of Jakovgrad, along with other, scattered, heavily fortified pockets of humanity. North Rhodesland is also home to numerous underground Tunos cities of hostile Ascorbites, and is apparently the central territory of that race. The northern coast is part of the Vi'kro Tan'doda, long-time battleground between these primitives and the marginally more civilized Mi'tlazzh of Central Leshiy.

The Mi'tlazzh call these foes *Bokalo'o*, and they must be the foulest, most vicious Ascorbites on the planet. These beasts attack any unprotected human found in their territory. Unfortunately, they are far more numerous than the





Tugarins

Great, dark-skinned elephant-like beasts, tugarins are the largest animals treading Severan soil and are found across the planet, though they are most common to Varangia, Rhodesland (they practically dominate the southern continent), and the more remote regions of the Transvaal. Feared by human farmers, tugarins are constantly eating, eventually attaining masses of almost 25 tons and heights of 4 meters (13 ft) at the shoulder. The tugarin, however, is merely the larval stage for a much larger creature — the tugarin serpent, a massive subterranean worm reaching lengths of up to 120 metres (400 feet) and a mass of 400 tons! Tugarins are important to Ascorbites, who feed off their blood and use their flesh to house their *arme'tova* young. One reason the numbers of Mi'tlazzh in Central Leshiy are low is the lack of tugarins, causing them to venture where the beasts are more common — perilous Varangia, home of the Iron Bear.

Description: Tugarins are massive, heavily carapaced creatures that walk on 12 thick legs. Their herds can run at considerable speeds, leaving a trail of destruction behind them. Their mouths are very strong, able to consume even the most heavily armored of Severan vegetation. They have no horns, but have six smaller limbs used for digging. A tugarin lives approximately 19 years before undergoing metamorphosis to the adult serpent form, when it burrows underground and prepares itself for the transformation. The change is remarkably rapid, requiring only a few days. It emerges as a small tugarin serpent, although it will take nearly a century before it is large

enough to birth young. After conceiving, the creature burrows near the surface and dies. The eggs inside its body hatch into large maggots that then consume their parent's body. After eight months of this feast, 70 to 90 tugarins emerge from their birthing carcass to denude the local vegetation.

A tugarin serpent has six small, clawed limbs centered about its mouth, used for digging, dismembering and rock breaking. The rest of the armored body consists mainly of massive wombs. They are quite slow, able to travel a mere 4-5 kilometers underground per day. Even so, these beasts are nearly indestructible due to their vast bulk, armor and redundant vital organ systems; it is far easier to find and destroy a birthing carcass than to kill a living tugarin serpent. The more wealthy manors among the Decados agricultural fiefs often employ ultrasonic scanners for this purpose before the offspring emerge, often contrary to conservation agreements with the Ascorbites. However, even at this most vulnerable stage, tugarin maggots are dangerous. Ravenous and carnivorous, they are capable of rending an armored human.

The traits below are for the voracious tugarin young.

Body: Strength 17, Dexterity 4, Endurance 12

Mind: Wits 1 (untrainable), Perception 2

Natural Skills: Vigor 4

Weapons: Tusks 7

Maneuvers: Charge 9+2 per 3m (initiative -2), trample 8 (-2 initiative)

Armor: 8+8d

Vitality: -10/-8/-8/-6/-6/-4/-4/-2/-2/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0/0

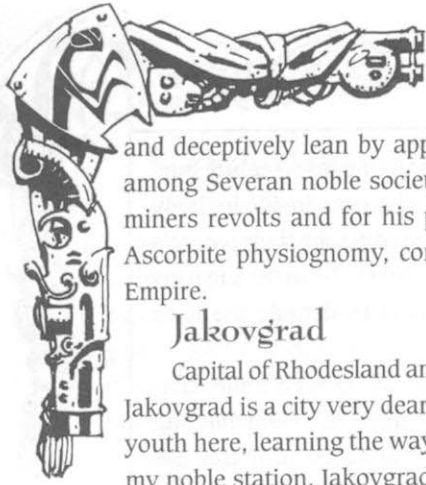
Mi'tlazzh, and dominate all of North Rhodesland and much of the South, as well. The Bokalo'o frequently raid human communities, mines and caravans. They seize supplies, human weapons and captives for food — and as hosts for birthing their young. In addition, South Rhodesland is home to scores of tugarin herds, and an estimated 3000 of the monstrous tugarin serpents can be found within this territory, almost one-quarter of their entire number on the planet. These massive beasts keep the savage Ascorbites prolific and well-fed from their hulking larvae.

The mountainous province of Mistanza was, until recently, under the rule of Countess Carmetha Decados, but is now under the independent administration of the Brother Battle order. Brother Battle took control of the fief after the countess's political fortunes fell following her ill-advised actions as commander of the Stigmata Garrison. The mining output of the region is almost half of the entire planet's production, and House Decados receives its fair share of the profits via export tariffs; the remainder contributes to the

Brother Battle's military treasury. The order maintains a small outpost for the protection of the mines, but also as a training ground for jungle commandos. Such specialists are in constant demand for the Kurgan conflict and are ready for any contingency in the Symbiot Wars, even a possible incursion to the green hell-world of Chernobog.

The Mistanza outpost is commanded by the Brother Battle Master-Administrator Moses Tomas. A stern and iron-willed veteran of the Stigmata Front, the Master-Administrator spends most of his time managing the mines and unsuccessfully petitioning Prince Hiram, the Patriarch and Master Claudius of De Moley for permission and resources with which to wipe his territory clean of the Ascorbites. He is a famous opponent of alien rights, especially concerning the Ascorbites, who he accuses of demon worship. I actually had the honor of meeting the Master-Administrator during my quest, and I found him to be hard and driven, equally adept at the efficient management of the Mistanza mines and in command against Ascorbite aggression. Tall





and deceptively lean by appearance, he is much respected among Severan noble society for his quick containment of miners revolts and for his practical medical knowledge of Ascorbite physiognomy, considered to be foremost in the Empire.

Jakovgrad

Capital of Rhodesland and center of the Jakovian Agency, Jakovgrad is a city very dear to my heart. I spent most of my youth here, learning the ways of my house and the duties of my noble station. Jakovgrad is enclosed in a single circle of fortification. Aside from Stigmata's Darmak Station, I doubt there is a single city in the Empire as heavily defended as Jakovgrad. Still, this is a city besieged by fear. Hostile Ascorbites have been known to slip past the watchful sentries and commit predatory murder on rich and poor alike. Every resident of Jakovgrad fears when an occasional bright city light suddenly vanishes, for Ascorbite intrusions only occur in darkness. Constantly occupied with their off-world operations, the Jakovian Agency is hard-pressed to defend their own backyard, and most of their agents here are raw recruits or are of advanced age. Despite their efforts, there are paranoid conspiracy theorists that accuse the Jakovian Agency itself of being responsible for the disappearance of suspected dissidents, using the Ascorbites as scapegoats for their secret activities.

I am socially familiar with most of the nobles involved in Jakovian operations within Jakovgrad itself, though not in any official capacity. Contrary to public opinion, most Decados nobles are not directly involved in Jakovian intelligence operations. My connection to the Jakovians is primarily via Duchess Nadia herself, and only limited information reaches me due to my nearly landless status.

Duchess Nadia Decados was my own foster-mother and had a great hand in my upbringing, so I make no apologies for my affection and loyalty to her. She is indeed a remarkable woman, almost a century old and still strikingly attractive thanks to a regimen of longevity treatments and Genetech talent. She is exceptionally skilled in cybernetic aesthetics, an aptitude she applies to herself on numerous occasions as the mood takes her, creating new features and figures. For the most formal occasions, she appears displaying delicately wrought synthflesh grafts, colorfully and daintily pigmented, accented by the black of a demure yet stunning gown. I fear I may offend her by revealing overmuch about her dress, as she does like to surprise her guests. Finally, in addition to her social responsibilities, the duchess is also the head of the Jakovian Agency, a task she no doubt carries out with exceptional competence.

The Vi'kro Tan'doda

Consisting of the south coast of Central Leshiy, the north coast of North Rhodesland and the Voydanoy Archipelago,

the Vi'kro Tan'doda is an unpredictable battlefield between the Mi'tlazh and Bokalo'o nations of Ascorbites. Few human settlements have developed in these regions due to the constant threat of Ascorbite warfare; only the most critical and heavily fortified of cities can survive here. This war is an ongoing, low-intensity tribal struggle which has extended as far east as the shores of the Transvaal (though in that region, Ascorbites are killed on sight by Countess Illyana's militia) and as far west as the edges of Varangia (where the Ascorbites become fodder for the Iron Bear's famous safaris). The Mi'tlazh are better armed than their enemies, often employing trained ashtati predators and human-crafted shotguns (an Ascorbite-made blunderbuss is of little use against Ascorbite chitin, especially those clad in Abar leaf) but the Bokalo'o seem to be more numerous and more familiar with the terrain. Though the Bokalo'o do not use boats, the tidal changes create periods where islands are joined by land bridges that can be walked, offsetting some of the enormous Mi'tlazh naval advantage produced by their use of canoes. Additionally, some Bokalo'o warriors have been reported to carry fabled Arbat'a crystal swords, effective even against a tough Ascorbite carapace. It is not known how long the conflict has raged, but since neither side has directly or indirectly threatened any major settlements or noble estates, Prince Hiram has chosen to remain cautiously uninvolved until conditions absolutely demand it.

Despite the dangerous conflict in the region, House Decados must maintain a constant presence here, as it is a primary producer of the famed opiate poppy. This is the critical ingredient in manufacturing Selchakah, an immensely popular drug among the Decados nobility and other houses, and a useful painkiller on the barbarian and Symbiot fronts. Poppy collection is strictly controlled by the Jakovian Agency; House Decados refuses to risk the poppy's depletion, as occurred in Leshiy. My entourage and I joined a foraging expedition into the Vi'kro Tan'doda, led by the formidable Kossack Lieutenant Riktor, who has served in this capacity for over a decade. Ishbi-Benob, my beautiful white Vorox bodyguard, remarked on the similarities and differences the jungles held with her mental image of her native homeworld of Ungavorox, which she has never seen. I think that she enjoyed our time here.

New Krakow

In the midst of the Vi'kro Tan'doda is the city of New Krakow, capital of the Voydanoy island chain that extends from Central Leshiy to the western shore of the Transvaal. In actuality, New Krakow is in command of very little save its own environs. The island of New Krakow was flattened by orbital bombardment to destroy the jungle and provide a strategically important wet-naval base. In addition, New Krakow houses some vital Genetech labs catering to a wide assortment of Decados clientele.



Cadavus

World in Pain

One of the poorest worlds in all the Empire, Cadavus is a tragic planet, a tangible reminder of the sins of humanity. Cadavus has been the site of ongoing rebellions for centuries now — few planets can claim such a long history of bloodshed and pain. From space, Cadavus appears much as its inhabitants see it: a cold, barren and dusty ball of dirt, with the only lush vegetation located in the polar regions. Otherwise, most of the plant life exists only in some of the deep valleys, shielded from the frigid windstorms. Drinkable water is scarce, as much of the oceans are corrupted by heavy radioactive contamination. Cadavus is a world that House Decados has come to care for like a crippled child: desperate and in pain, but reassured by the presence of a loving parent.

History

Cadavus's history is a litany of chaos, but much of it is sadly lost to posterity. Over the centuries records have been destroyed, hidden, lost and dubiously "discovered" to the point that undisputable facts are rare. Reliable archives are uncommon, and those that exist are in private noble collections, often of questionable worth. In researching the history of Cadavus, I was forced to rely primarily on private collections of historical documents, incomplete and poorly maintained by local minor gentry. Bear in mind that I am no trained scholar in this field, and my knowledge is little better than that of a layman.

Humanity's first arrival on what is now Cadavus was sometime in the 24th century by Sathraist pilots seeking refuge from Urth's central authorities. They named it Sonatath, at that time a lush world, thriving with life — in sharp contrast to the barrenness of today. Unfortunately for the Sathraists, zaibatsu scouts from Urth discovered the new jumprouete only 20 years later and their forces arrived to claim the new world. There was a brief war over Sonatath, which forced the Sathraists to flee and disappear into the jumpgate, never to be heard from again. Modern historians suspect that these first Cadavans may be the ancestors of House Masseri, which would make their recent settlement all the more ironic.

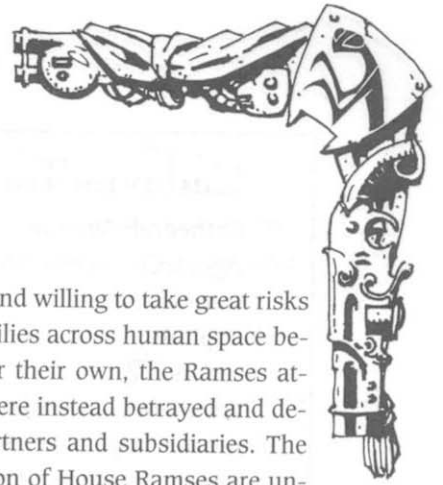
Sonatath was purchased by a zaibatsu corporation called Ramses Solid Ventures. The planet was far more than it could have hoped for. In addition to its new lifeforms, the planet also bore significant mineral wealth. Under direct corporate control, mining colonies and plantations peppered the surface of the planet. Ramses was a family business,

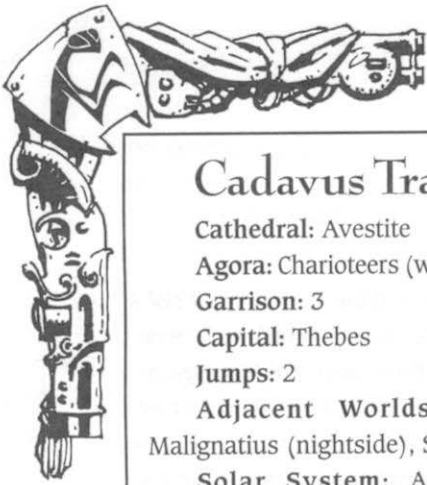
small but extremely wealthy, and willing to take great risks for a profit. As new noble families across human space began claiming entire worlds for their own, the Ramses attempted to do the same, but were instead betrayed and destroyed by their corporate partners and subsidiaries. The circumstances of the destruction of House Ramses are unclear, but they led to decades of political chaos. At least one other corporate family here attempted to claim noble status but failed to hold power. Sonatath was finally won in a savage guerilla conflict by partisans funded by a commercial coalition on Criticorum.

For the next thousand years, the planet changed hands dozens of times, either through invasions from the stars or by revolutions from the planetary populace. No regime lasted long enough to secure itself, and each such conflict took its toll on the fragile world. The worst of these was in 3293, when a desperate House O'Niell resorted to heavy nuclear bombardment to defend itself against Li Halan invaders, creating a winter of nearly 10 years and wiping out almost all natural life on the planet. Only the life in the polar regions survived, already accustomed to long winters. This was how the planet reached its present state and earned its present name — Cadavus, the dead world.

It was during this period that the Universal Church newly established itself across the jumpweb. Cadavus had gained early note for the Prophet's confrontation against the antinomist Durargo in Chroniculae III, 6:12-18. The tale of the epic battle later attracted missionaries, holy warriors and disreputable fanatics from a hundred faiths to Cadavus to seek any unholy threat that might still infest the wounded planet. Instead, they found each other, and the world exploded into religious conflict. House Koprul, rulers at the time, abandoned the planet for safer worlds. Eventually, most of the religious fervor on Cadavus died down, but the casualties from the violence were horrendous. Many of the survivors fled to the wastelands, eking out a meager living and eventually forming the myriad monasteries that still dot the landscape to this day.

During the Second Republic Cadavus came under the control of the Criticorum-based Bashshar Corporation, bringing the planet into the al-Malik sphere of influence. Some of the present al-Malik estates on Cadavus date back to this time and maintain continuous records which, though often biased, make research into the planet's history far less difficult. The Bashshar Corporation strove to repair much of the ecological damage that Cadavus had suffered during its centuries of warfare. It also introduced a massive level of mining and industrialization, creating vast company towns to





Cadavus Traits

Cathedral: Avestite

Agora: Charioteers (with a strong Scraver presence)

Garrison: 3

Capital: Thebes

Jumps: 2

Adjacent Worlds: Criticorum (dayside), Malignatius (nightside), Severus (nightside)

Solar System: Atum (0.28 AU; Khepri), Gendenwitha (0.96 AU, Sosondowah), Cadavus (1.26 AU; Joh, Chons), Ati-bon (3.31 AU), Damballa (9.80 AU), Kauket (32.26 AU), Jumpgate (44.82 AU), Bacalou (51.03 AU)

Tech: 4

Human Population: 600,000

Alien Population: 50+

Resources: Some nickel, aluminum, iron, fossilized fuels, all now mostly depleted.

Exports: Minerals, fossilized fuels, refined metals, slaves.

Landscape: Most of Cadavus is a frozen wasteland, scoured clean by the fierce apophis windstorms. Great mountain ranges, many of which are volcanic, are scattered across these wastes. These mountains once attracted hopeful miners but are now exhausted. Only the polar regions retain healthy ecosystems. The planet suffers from a severe axial tilt, affecting the entire planet in unusual ways. Water is relatively scarce, with oceans comprising a mere 10% of the planet's surface. The shallow Medicadavan Sea extends across most of the equatorial regions, although shorelines often shift after a fierce storm. The Agwe Sea is in the north, extending into the Ayizan wilderness that covers the north pole. The south pole is dominated by Locko, the last pristine wilderness on the planet. Cities are mostly restricted to the river valleys or the shores of the Agwe, since the Medicadavan is badly contaminated with radiation. The oceans are relatively warm, heated by widespread volcanic vents.

house its workers. Toward the end of the Republic, the planet became known for violent worker revolts and savage repression as working conditions suffered from neglect and corporate sabotage. As the Republic collapsed, an organization of egalitarian workers and low-level managers defeated the corporate security forces and seized control of the planet's administrative centers, declaring a new, communist government. This was also the period of the fading of Cadavus's sun, which reduced the amount of heat the planet received.

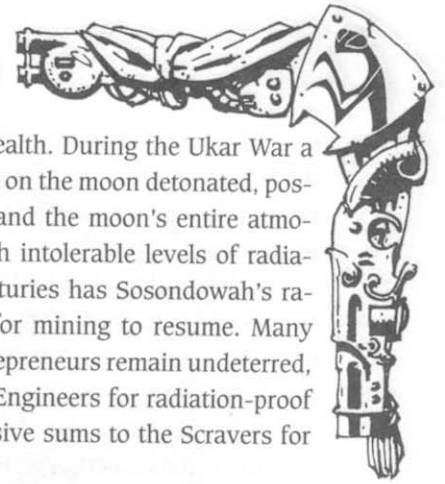
The rest of the universe did not react well to the news

of the Cadavan Revolution. House al-Malik's attempts to retake the planet were near constant, and neighboring House Decados arrived and occupied the planet to administer its industries and protect them from al-Malik retaliation. Unfortunately, some recalcitrant rebels saw the Decados as invaders no better than their former masters, and cowardly bombed the baronial manse at Thebes, killing dozens of innocent courtiers and servants and nearly killing Baroness Ivana Decados herself. Enraged, Baroness Ivana vowed to crush the world with the entire weight of the Decados military from Severus. In desperation, the rebels seized some few ships, broke the blockade to reach the jumpgate and shut it down before Decados reinforcements arrived. Cadavus became a Lost World.

Cadavus reappeared to the Known Worlds some 70 years later, when a Charioteer exploratory vessel from Criticorum discovered the reactivation of the jumprouete. The minor House Aviz purchased the route for an exorbitant amount, and found a planet long-suffering from neglect. Republican terraforming engines were ruined beyond repair, the mines were depleted, industry was in shambles, agriculture was nearly non-existent, and entire ecosystems had been ruined by the sun's change. Humanity was reduced to a fearful existence in the polar regions and the valleys along the Agwe coast, and the Aviz found that at last the Cadavan people were willing to accept noble rule. House Aviz began a program to rebuild the shattered infrastructure, only to be cut short by an invasion from House Trusnikron. The ancient pattern of conquest and reconquest reasserted itself and Cadavus once again fell into the misery of war.

It was the Church that brought a lasting peace to Cadavus. By 4272 successive warfare, colonization and industrialization had maimed the planet to the brink of total devastation, so that the Patriarch declared the noble class unfit to govern so fragile a world as Cadavus. Church fleets arrived and the resident Hazat were forced to remove themselves from the planet. Cadavus came under direct Church control. To steady the precarious balance of life, the entire polar regions of Locko and the Aziyan were declared fallow, so that they might begin the healing process free of the threats of a chaotic humanity. The Ayizan's protected status was only withdrawn in the 50th century to allow the refugee House Masseri to settle there.

The Church governed Cadavus well for nearly 200 years, returning the populace to a simpler way of life, free from the demands of industry. Unfortunately, this created a great deal of unrest, as so much of the populace had lived off the mines or in the polar regions. The result was continuing social problems, sporadic revolts, widespread crime, and poverty above all. In the end, desperate, the Church turned the planet over to the newly converted Li Halan, who enforced the peace with an iron fist within a velvet glove, until Halvor Li Halan's



disastrous seizure of the Imperial Throne.

Part of the Li Halan's peace settlement after Halvor's death was the cession of Cadavus to the regency. Like Stigmata, Cadavus was ruled by governors appointed by the regent, to be replaced whenever political winds changed. Every Royal House, as well as several minor houses, administered Cadavus at some point during this regency period. Due to the temporary nature of their presence, most houses took this opportunity for quick, short-term resource extraction operations rather than the long-term development currently being advanced by my family. Fragile forests were harvested to destruction. The few stable fertile farmlands were cultivated until desertified. Entire species were poached to extinction, a holocaust from which the Cadavan ecosystem has yet to recover. Only the protected polar regions survived.

The modern Decados administration of Cadavus began in 4969, when my house invaded the Cadavus system seeking a cell of Hawkwood-backed terrorists responsible for the firebombing of the Transvaalite Palace on Severus. Initially, there was a short war between House Decados and the League over possession of the Cadavus system, but the League withdrew its claim quickly, as its regency grant was not proving as profitable as it had expected. Since then, House Decados has introduced pilgrimages to Cadavus, as the monasteries are of considerable spiritual value to many. The planet's people are left largely undisturbed, busy with the concerns of survival on a difficult world. The Decados rulers only reveal themselves to collect a moderate taxation and to repress those levels of violence that exceed the people's tolerance.

Despite the light hand of Decados rule, unrest is again rampant as elements of the population attempt to advance their own agendas with terrorism, usually by battling other terrorist factions. The Mechanique Agro Organization desires the reintroduction of terraforming technologies to create a viable agricultural base for the planet. The Collectivist Honor Elite seeks the expulsion of all off-world domination in favor of a self-governing egalitarian society. The Movement of Anti-Royalist Xenocrats is a quasi-mystical order entirely opposed to the rights of high birth. Duke Franz and Duchess Ursula, rulers of Cadavus, bear the grave responsibility of protecting the planet from itself.

Solar System

Atum: The closest planet to the sun, Atum is a barren world, orbited by Khepri, a moon almost as large as the planet itself. Astronomers believe that the two were originally one planet, rent asunder by a cosmic collision or other major event.

Gendenwitha: A red planet, Gendenwitha is easily visible in the Cadavus evening and morning skies. There is little of value on this planet, though Sosondowah, its moon,

bears considerable mineral wealth. During the Ukar War a number of old nuclear reactors on the moon detonated, possibly due to Ukari sabotage, and the moon's entire atmosphere was contaminated with intolerable levels of radiation. Only in the last few centuries has Sosondowah's radioactivity declined enough for mining to resume. Many Muster and Reeve mining entrepreneurs remain undeterred, paying exorbitant fees to the Engineers for radiation-proof energy shields, or less-expensive sums to the Scravers for their cheap lead shielding.

Cadavus: Cadavus has two small moons, Joh and Chons. Chons is the larger, and houses a Xanthippe moonhaven that often sells its power surplus to the planet below.

Ati-bon: A small world made almost entirely of ice, Ati-bon is frequently visited by Prospectors guilders for its water, which is dearly needed on Cadavus.

Damballa: Easily the largest planet in the system, Damballa is a Jovian world with a great many rings and moons. Pirates have been known to establish temporary bases on these moons.

Kauket: A smaller gas giant with an extremely violent internal atmosphere, Kauket is a dangerous navigational hazard when its orbit brings it near the jumpgate. Occasional atmospheric storms sometimes flare out into space, endangering nearby ships. The planet has no satellites, which is unusual for an orb its size. Theories state that the planet's storms make orbits unstable, and any satellites have been expelled away from Kauket or swallowed by the planet's atmosphere.

Bacalou: A small world, Bacalou lies on the other side of the jumpgate. No successful survey has ever been made of this world.

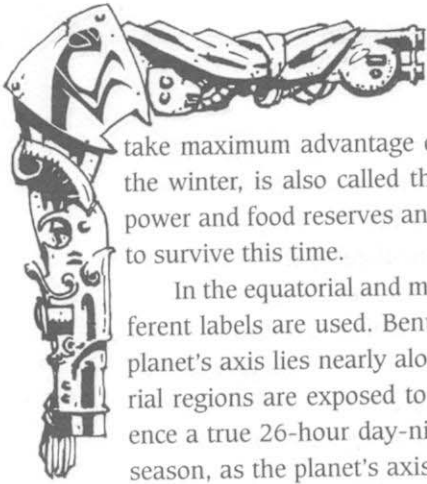
People & Places

The Cadavan peoples are a hardy lot, sometimes overly violent and usually suspicious of strangers, especially off-worlders. Many Cadavans are irrationally opposed to any group, be it house, Church or guild, which attempts to control their lives. Still, none will ever fault their determination to improve their lot in life and to survive the harsh world they call home. The Decados nobility of Cadavus are some of the most well-traveled and socially connected, as they often seek positions as ambassadors to other houses. Additionally, the presence of Temple Avesti has made these nobles the most conservative of their house, at least in public.

The Yearly Cycle

Cadavus' extreme axial tilt (88°) produces a number of unusual conditions in both the natural environment and the people of the planet. In the polar regions and their outskirts, there are only two seasons. Demira, the summer, is also called the "Long Day" that lasts for months. During this time, activity is feverish, as both animals and humans attempt to





take maximum advantage of the heat and light. Demiset, the winter, is also called the "Long Night." Cities rely on power and food reserves and occasionally interstellar trade to survive this time.

In the equatorial and mid-latitude regions, entirely different labels are used. Benu is the calm season, when the planet's axis lies nearly along its orbital path. The equatorial regions are exposed to direct sunlight, and so experience a true 26-hour day-night cycle. Apophis is the storm season, as the planet's axis lies perpendicular to its orbital path, so that one hemisphere is exposed to constant sunlight while the other is in shadow. During this time, fierce windstorms assault the non-polar regions. Many communities retreat for months into underground shelters, large cities maintain massive windbreakers, and the smallest villages move *en masse* to seek shelter in larger communities, producing horribly overcrowded conditions.

Numid

Numid comprises the region north of the Medicadavan Sea between the Shadda Mountains to the east and the Sierra de Bacoruco to the west, south of the Ayizan polar region. The central part of Numid is known as the Numidian Badlands, and is almost barren of life, barring the occasional discovery of once dormant and ravenous Severan hull rats. These vermin were accidentally imported from Severus by Decados ships and have survived and multiplied in Numid, causing some trouble among the inhabitants. Along the western edge of the region, extending partially into the Sierra de Bacoruco, is the wide Diapis river basin, which hosts Thebes, the planet's largest city. The south coast has a few unhealthy fishing villages, which are constantly troubled by cases of radiation poisoning from their tainted fish. Along the fringes of the Diapis basin and the Ayizan there are a number of largely self-sufficient monasteries. Infrequent trade caravans from Thebes and New Daishan are often their only link to the rest of the universe. During our time here, my confessor, Brother Ricardo, and the Scraver, Raphael DiCaprio, joined a four-month caravan. They returned with no end of praise for the faith and dedication of the monks and of their fine trade goods, which would fetch a fine price off-world.

The Shadda Mountains to the east are volcanically active, periodically erupting clouds of smoke and ash. As soon as the benu season begins and the weather clears, great bands of miners and landless farmers rush to the region seeking any valuable minerals eruptions may have produced from deep in the planet's mantle. Farmers know that volcanic ash is an excellent fertilizer for many crops, so they plant temporary fields, ready to flee before the cold windstorms of the apophis return. What results is the hasty erection of transient boomtowns that last for only a few months. These

scrounging operations are often threatened by terrorist guerrillas, such as the Front for Impartial Democracy and Environmental Liberty. Though risky, such ventures are lucrative if events go well, so the Scravvers have frequently funded the mining and farming expeditions in exchange for a portion of the profits, if any.

Ruling over all of Cadavus are Duke Franz Decados and his wife and first cousin, the Duchess Ursula. These two are also direct rulers of Numid. Having enjoyed the ducal couple's company, I fear that they may not be the best rulers Cadavus could hope for. However, much of the day-to-day administration of their fief is conducted by their respected vassal, the Count Andrei Mandin Decados of Keirnova. Former Severan nobles from the Transvaal, Franz and Ursula were rewarded with this fief by Prince Hiram for their actions in the Emperor Wars. It is rumored that the world is actually an exile for their alleged participation in an attempted covert coup against the Prince. At any rate, the two clearly miss their homeland and its people. Unlike people in the Transvaal, Cadavans have little inbred loyalty to House Decados. Such loyalty must be earned, and the rebellious aggression of much of Cadavus must be crushed until that loyalty develops. Duke Franz is a gaunt, sallow man, and seems unable to endure the burden of ruling this sad world and the actions into which its people force him. Always hungry for distractions, he spends much of his time entertaining guests, and no noble visiting Cadavus is unwelcome in his home. Duchess Ursula has grown bitter and hard, and some of her comments have indirectly criticized the Decados Way. Still, that having been said, both husband and wife are kind hosts and extremely knowledgeable about the latest in Imperial politics, Cadavan terrorist activities and Decados court gossip.

Thebes

The largest city on Cadavus and capital of the planet, Thebes is a dangerous and unpredictable city. At different times, thebes appears to be alternately an overcrowded tenement fairly teeming with needy masses or a half-empty ghost town littered with abandoned buildings. Indeed, Thebes is truly both. During the benu season most of the city is empty, as traders, farmers, miners and herdsmen leave the city to tend to their work abroad while the sun yet shines. Entire districts are abandoned for the season, and scavengers and looters forage for anything left behind. When the apophis arrives, the city is filled to overcapacity, as everyone in the region returns to weather the storms in relative safety. Plagues and famine are not unknown during this time of year, as the masses of refugees tax the city's resources to their limit.

There are a number of Avestite missions within the city. During both phases of the city's existence, the resident monks and pilgrims are constantly busy. The Avestites act both to





CADAVUS.



comfort the spirit and to protect the bodies of the faithful, serving as defenders of public order as well as caretakers of the soul. This was the environment that produced my own dear confessor, Brother Ricardo, whose compassion and understanding are a fine example to others. Many hard, zealous Avestite novitiates arrive fresh from Pyre, and must learn the arts of compromise and insight to survive on these streets. Once they leave, these monks are renowned off-world for their courage and fairness.

Thebes partly lies in the valley of the Diapis River, below the peaks of the Sierra de Bacoruco and near the shores of the Agwe Sea. The Agwe provides a great deal of food for the city, and Theban fishermen are known as both cautious and skilled seamen. The Sierra provides vital protection from the apophis and so is legally protected from mining, which might threaten the shelter of the city. Needless to say, not all residents agree with the ban. Indeed, dozens of dissident groups, both non-violent and otherwise, have members in this city, and there are often incidents of conflict between them. The wise do not visit certain sections of the city at night.

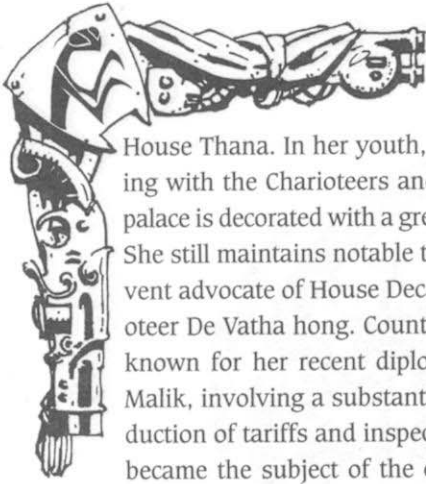
Hyksos

The province of Hyksos lies south of the Medicadavan Sea, and is completely circumscribed by the Grandmont Mountains. Sheltered by the mountains and nourished by

the tributaries of the Nile Beta River, Hyksos is some of the most fertile and valuable land on the planet outside of the polar regions. Farmers maintain their own underground shelters to weather the comparatively mild apophis. Mining is less common, as the mountains are not volcanically active and have been largely stripped of wealth. To the south, part of Hyksos extends into the polar region of Locko. This passage is patrolled by Decados rangers and Avestite monks, guarding Locko against trespassers.

The western bank of the Nile Beta is part of the famous Grimson Protectorate, which extends to the Grandmonts in the west and south. Countess Elena has set apart this land for the house's demobilized Grimson veterans of the Emperor Wars. Here these genetically engineered warriors may live in peace, with only nominal obligations to their Decados overlords and creators. In exchange for access to the high-tech medical facilities of Luxor and protection from persecution, fair taxes are collected. In addition, all Grimson children must be inspected by Decados Genetechs for unviable Changes and possible combat potential. Like any other Decados subjects, Grimsons are also subject to conscription at any time.

The ruler of Hyksos is the Countess Elena Decados, known far and wide as the most beautiful woman in the Decados worlds, and rumored to possess ancestry among



House Thana. In her youth, she spent several years traveling with the Charioteers and seeing many worlds, and her palace is decorated with a great many mementos of that time. She still maintains notable ties with that guild, and is a fervent advocate of House Decados's close ties with the Charioteer De Vatha hong. Countess Elena has also become well known for her recent diplomatic dealings with House al-Malik, involving a substantial increase of trade and the reduction of tariffs and inspections. My pilot, Jeanne Hillaire, became the subject of the countess's interest, as it seems they have common acquaintances on Byzantium Secundus.

Luxor

Capital of Hyksos, Luxor is easily the most technologically advanced city on Cadavus, as befits its countess. This is especially true concerning medical technologies. Treatment for radiation poisoning is easily accessible, since many cases occur this close to the Medicadavan Sea. These treatments can be expensive, and so are often beyond the means of the poor, who live in lead-lined buildings to stave off radiation. As a consequence, lead poisoning is very common among the poor, but since its treatment is far less expensive than that for radiation, it is merely an accepted part of life. Clinics especially designed for Grimsons can also be found here. The Apothecaries Guild is very powerful in this city, and constantly attempts to discredit the few Amaltheans in the region.

Luxor's people are somewhat less hostile than those of the rest of the planet: comparatively mild factionalism, a strong Avestite presence and anxiety about the neighboring Grimson Protectorate have created an extremely pro-human atmosphere, with a strong antipathy toward aliens, the *Changed and psychics*. There is some ill feeling about Countess Elena's protection of her Grimson veterans. Humans may enjoy some wonderful hospitality, but aliens are advised to avoid this city entirely. In fact, my Vorox bodyguard, Ishbi-Benob, was forced to kill a number of assailants who accosted her alone at night. If such people were willing to assault an armed Vorox in the entourage of a Questing Knight, they would have little hesitation in attacking any alien at all.

Sudania

The vast region known as Sudania covers most of Cadavus's southern hemisphere, excluding only Locko and Hyksos. This is an uncommonly barren region, subject to fierce and frigid apophis windstorms. Minerals are extremely scarce, and mining is limited to scrounging amid the Shadda Mountains, much as in Numid. Such operations are constantly threatened both by nature and by human sabotage. Very little can exist for long in the wastes, and human habitation is densely concentrated about the region's capital city of Vesta.

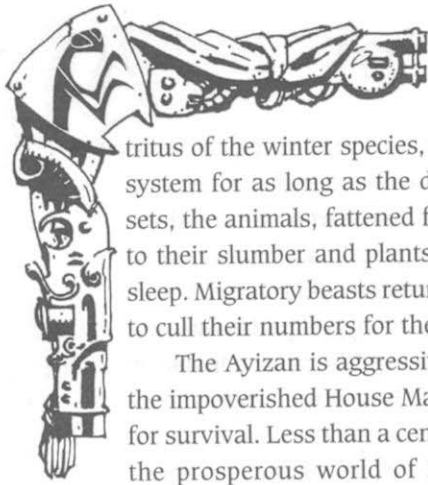
Sudania is a chaotic land, as guerrilla activity is common in these wastes. Violent acts of terrorism and sabotage are common in the temporary scrounger mines and plantations along the southwestern Shadda Mountains. Sudania also borders Locko, the fertile polar region protected by Church edicts from sentient habitation and exploitation. Of course, there are always a number of squatters and vagrants making their way to the green land, but the few who evade Trusnikron patrols usually die from exposure or predation.

There are a few known monasteries in Sudania, hidden along the edges of the Grandmonts and the Shadda Mountains; they live on their own gardens and herds, fed by scarce mountain streams. Many of these monasteries have had little contact with the outside universe for centuries, and have developed unique and possibly dangerous ideologies. The worst such is the legendary Temple of the Communion, an infamous monastery dedicated to Sathraism. Rumors have alternately placed it deep within Locko's wilderness, hidden in the Eastern Grandmonts, and on the shores of the southeastern Medicadavan. No report has ever been confirmed, though there are always paranoid fears that Sathraist psychic infiltrators would suppress any such revelation.

However, the most famous monastery whose existence has been confirmed is the House of the Eternal Flame, on Sudania's western edge, on the shores of the radiation-tainted Medicadavan Sea. These monks live simple, low-tech lives, constantly suffering from the poison they ingest with every drink of water and every morsel of fish. The monks accept such illness as part of a mortification of the flesh, as they attempt to distance themselves from their corporeal needs. Many outsiders consider the monks quite mad to endure such suffering, but the monks attest that the very fact of the monastery's continued existence is a sign of the Pancreator's blessing. Despite its high mortality rate, the House of the Eternal Flame draws scores of priests and pilgrims from a dozen worlds to test their faith against the radioactive embers.

Lord of Sudania and the Lucise Marches is Vis-Marquis Kovann Trusnikron, a foul-tempered, ill-mannered, prejudicial, arrogant, boorish young upstart. Though none will question the ability of his troops in maintaining order and protecting Locko from intruders, Lord Kovann is not a subject I enjoy discussing. Apparently the boy lost his father to a Decados raid that violated some trifling technicality of the Treaty of Thebes governing relations between Houses Decados and Trusnikron on Cadavus. Since then, Lord Kovann has harbored an immature grudge against the Decados and does as much as possible to vex that house without directly violating the Treaty. This includes the exceedingly poor hospitality I enjoyed in his company.





tritus of the winter species, creates a vibrant, thriving ecosystem for as long as the day lasts. When the sun finally sets, the animals, fattened from months of gluttony, return to their slumber and plants shed their leaves for the long sleep. Migratory beasts return, devouring dormant lifeforms to cull their numbers for the next season.

The Ayizan is aggressively defended and governed by the impoverished House Masseri, bound to House Decados for survival. Less than a century ago this proud house ruled the prosperous world of Daishan. Unfortunately, their jumpgate led to the hell-world of Chernobog, home of the Symbiot threat. Daishan was invaded and House Masseri evacuated. Only the brave and kind people of Cadavus offered the Masseri sanctuary. The noble house made its home here, building a prosperous community and declaring the Ayizan to be its sovereign fief, with the approval of the Church and the acquiescence of House Decados. Both factions believed that, had House Masseri been compromised by Symbiosis, then their taint could be more easily purged on barren Cadavus than elsewhere.

Masseri trackers patrol the wilderness of the Ayizan, always on the alert for poachers, unwanted settlers or invaders. During the Emperor Wars, House Masseri was twice forced to arms to defend this, their last holding: the first time against House Trusnikron, the second against House al-Malik. In both cases, Masseri commandos distinguished themselves against larger and more powerful foes, using their knowledge of the terrain and savage guerrilla tactics to good effect. There are critics who claim that such strategies are unbecoming a noble house, but their results are effective: since their arrival, no force has managed to violate the Masseri fief for long. I believe that, although they may often fail to live up to their titles, the Masseri should be counted among the most valuable allies that House Decados possesses.

The Ayizan is ruled by the head of House Masseri himself, the Marquis Claudio Masseri, last human ruler of the now-Symbiot world of Daishan. It was this proud noble who led the Masseri refugees from their world. His people wandered for years in space before being allowed to settle on Cadavus. Claudio is a bitter man, bearing fully the hurt of his house at the loss of its treasured world. He is understandably poorly-tempered and often a poor host, repelling even members of his own family to the point that they renounce their impoverished fiefs and seek new opportunities elsewhere among the stars, some of them in the service of House Decados, who is glad to welcome them. Despite his

social shortcomings, the marquis is an able ruler, protecting the Ayizan from intruders by any means necessary.

New Daishan

As its name suggests, New Daishan is the capital of the Masseri fief of the Ayizan. Though officially considered to be a city for administrative purposes, New Daishan is actually little more than a trappers' outpost, a way station for trade from Thebes. The city did manage to defend itself from an al-Malik army during the Emperor Wars, repelling their assault using a surprising number of advanced artillery weapons, brought with the Masseri as they fled their rule of Daishan. New Daishan is an open city, free of the storms of the apophis that plague the southern climes. Instead, its people must contend with scorching heat and frigid cold, adapting to difficult conditions as best they can. These people are a hardy breed, toughened by their environment and largely sheltered from the political struggles of the rest of their world. Many sport the Masseri house emblem, tattooed onto their flesh to show their servile status. Still, compared with much of the rest of the planet, these are a fortunate people.

Locko

Locko is the region of the south pole of Cadavus, the last remaining virginal wilderness on the planet, protected by two noble houses and by the edicts of the Universal Church. Although similar to the Ayizan in many ways, Locko is home to a much greater diversity of flora and fauna, such as the beautiful and intricate medla tree which, during the dark and cold months of the demiset, becomes carnivorous, trapping unlucky beasts within its tangled branches and roots, tearing their carcasses asunder and digesting them in its warm heartwood, prized by woodworkers for its beautiful, rich color. Another are the little carib lizards, beasts who are only active during the weeks of twilight between the demiset and demira, devouring any animal too groggy from the change to defend itself against their swarms.

Although Locko is monitored on all sides by Decados, Avestite and Trusnikron forces, desperate homesteaders occasionally breach its borders. Few survive for long. The weather and dangerous wildlife erase any trace of these criminal settlers. Still, most Cadavan commoners believe Locko to be a semi-mythical realm of lushness and ease, providing gifts from the world itself. Each person lost to Locko's wilds simply creates more myths about the beautiful land that draws and keeps so many.



Malignatius

Faith and Ire

The white orb of Malignatius is a new addition to House Decados's holdings, having long suffered under the thumb of Li Halan ideological oppression. Since its liberation by House Decados, Malignatius has experienced a proliferation of new and old faiths, each contributing to the richness of the planet's culture. Although conflicts have arisen between the disparate groups, the presence of Decados overlords has ensured that they do not disturb the overall harmony of the planet.

History

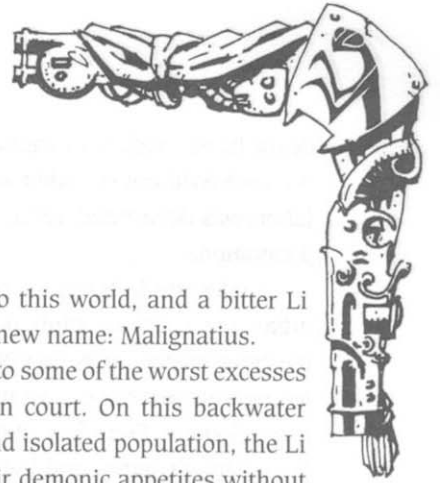
Very little is definitively known about the early history of Malignatius. Planetary records of that time are scarce and are recorded in a language even the most skilled Church and League scholars have been unable to decipher. All that is certain is that Malignatius was first colonized sometime between 2450 and 2550 by settlers from Holy Terra itself. These colonists established small, independent settlements across the planet, even in areas usually considered inhospitable to human life.

Some Gjarti communities on the planet have long oral histories of their origins. According to Ishbi-Benob, herself a native of Malignatius, the Gjarti tradition holds that the planet was originally known as Chauchu, settled by groups of Urthish communities fleeing the economic marginalization inflicted upon them by the godless capitalism of the First Republic. These communities supposedly pooled the meager resources of thousands of village councils to legally purchase settlement rights on the arctic world. I would suggest that such an unlikely tale might indeed be true, for while settlers and zaibatsu corporations raced for lush Aylon and Gwynneth, icy Chauchu was likely cheaply acquired. The planet's new inhabitants largely withdrew from interstellar politics, occupying themselves mainly with exploring their home and only rarely emerging to trade their animal products with neighbouring worlds under the guise of free traders.

House Li Halan invaded and conquered Chauchu in the early 30th century, at which point reliable written records of the world begin. Ground-up ulik tusk, perfumed aarlubeast fat and tuktuvak pelts had become sought-after items on many planets, and House Li Halan desired control of what was becoming an increasingly lucrative enterprise. The Li Halan spent decades attempting to unify the scattered settlements of the planet under their rule but met with fierce resistance from the natives and from the weather itself. Accustomed to the arid climate of Kish, the Li Halan

had great difficulty adapting to this world, and a bitter Li Halan poet gave the planet its new name: Malignatius.

Malignatius became home to some of the worst excesses of the pre-conversion Li Halan court. On this backwater world, with such a scattered and isolated population, the Li Halan were free to indulge their demonic appetites without concern for political repercussions. Princess Theodora in particular gained an evil reputation for her deeds on Malignatius: She released a bio-engineered virus to wipe out most of the tuktuvak herds, buffalo-like animals whose fur was prized offworld. Tuktuvak meat was also a staple of rural community diets. The resulting famine among the common folk was meant as a sacrifice to her dark deities — each



Malignatius Traits

Cathedral: Orthodox

Agora: Charioteers (with illicit support from the Children of Zuran)

Garrison: 7

Capital: New Jakovgrad

Jumps: 3

Adjacent Worlds: Cadavus (dayside), Kish (dayside), Cadiz (nightside), Istakhr (parallel)

Solar System: Angakok (0.17 AU), Anadyr (1.54 AU; Quikil), Malignatius (1.94 AU; Julka), Arsanerit (9.26 AU), Quinkinnaqu (20.49 AU), Jumpgate (33.82 AU)

Tech: 5

Human Population: 22 million

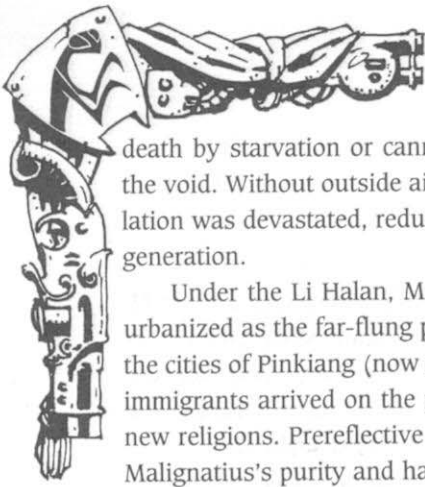
Alien Population: 950,000 (mostly Vorox)

Resources: Game animals, prisons.

Exports: Animal products (furs, ivory, fat, meat), vodka.

Landscape: Malignatius is widely known as the coldest world in the Empire. Ice sheet and tundra cover more than half of the planet's landmasses. The planet has three major continents: Alakshak is the largest, Nunaat the most temperate, and New Tibet the south polar landmass. Sea travel is dangerous, as only the Beringa Ocean does not freeze in winter, and icebergs are a constant hazard. Most travel over water is by air, either by flutter or by airship. Malignatius has an unusually slow rate of rotation, so that a full day-night cycle equals about 11 Urthish days. By the accommodations of the Universal Church, Restday rituals take place each day of sunrise and sunset.





death by starvation or cannibalism sending power across the void. Without outside aid or relief, Malignatius's population was devastated, reduced by two-fifths in less than a generation.

Under the Li Halan, Malignatius slowly became more urbanized as the far-flung population concentrated around the cities of Pinkiang (now New Jakovgrad) and Aola. New immigrants arrived on the planet, bringing new ideas and new religions. Prereflective monks found special appeal in Malignatius's purity and harshness. Zuranist communities came and went, stirring up trouble in their wakes. Gjarti beliefs were syncretized with the ancient traditions of the most rural settlements and of the new monasteries. The Universal Church grew popular among communities living in fear of their demon lords, while the Amaltheans gained many followers whenever they appeared on the planet, but the Li Halan overlords harshly suppressed their immigration and preaching. Conflicts between these religions were infrequent — it seemed that the planet had enough room for all, for the Li Halan kept the power of the Orthodoxy over others in check.

The Second Republic was not a good time for Malignatius, by then an economically unimportant world. The planet's proximity to richer worlds such as Kish and Istakhr harmed its ability to compete in the interstellar marketplace. Cheaply manufactured, synthetic products undercut Malignatian exports, and the planet descended into poverty. Even the massive Republican welfare system could do little, for many among the planet's rural inhabitants were not registered on the government's rolls. Still, as the Republic collapsed, the people of Malignatius were among its most desperate supporters. This was not out of loyalty to ineffectual Republican ideals, but out fear for the possible return of the demonic Li Halan overlords of legend.

These fears were well founded, for the Li Halan did indeed return with a vengeance. Again, Malignatius became a playground for the base desires of that decadent house. Li Halan nobles inflicted upon the downtrodden world unspeakable acts of depravity in the coming centuries. These years saw a slow, continuous influx of newcomers to Malignatius, as religious freethinkers fled the now near-absolute power of the Universal Church Orthodoxy. Most notable among these sects were the Eskatonic Order, the Preceptors and the Incarnates, members of which arrived in large numbers. Malignatius offered possibilities for small, self-sufficient communities of any creed. The environment was harsh, but this was no deterrent to willing and determined homesteaders.

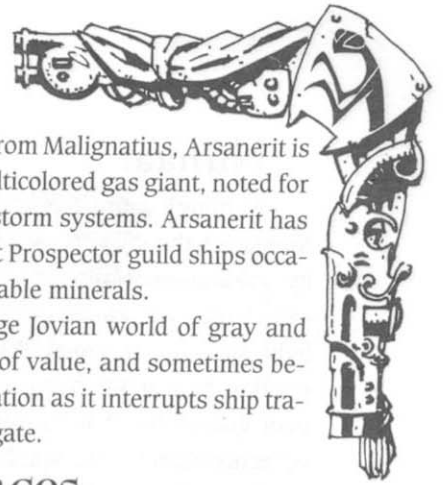
Then, in 4414, an abrupt about-face in house policy under Prince Rikard Cardano "the Red Demon" Li Halan brought about a complete alteration of the character of the house and of the style of its rule. Taxes were reduced, reforms took place in herd management, commerce and local

government, and social services were introduced for the first time in centuries. However, the shelter that Malignatius provided to its many diverse faiths was withdrawn, and forced conversions and Church-instigated pogroms became the order of the day. Many followers of the now-outlawed faiths fled into the wildernesses, far from the authority of both house and Church. Many such émigrés did not survive, especially the predominantly urban Incarnates, while the Preceptors gained a great deal of respect by teaching survival skills to many unversed refugees. Those under the direct rule of the Li Halan who refused the Orthodox faith risked discrimination, exclusion and political oppression. Although the Orthodoxy was never the majority sect among the populace here, its members consistently enjoyed preferential status in the eyes of the Li Halan nobility.

The Emperor Wars brought great changes to Malignatius, more than perhaps any other planet in the Empire. While the bulk of Li Halan troops were away subjugating the League world of Rampart, Malignatius's defences were weak, and the world was ripe for liberation by House Decados. The Decados attack force comprised the bulk of the house fleet and elite ground forces, whose usual enemy, House al-Malik, was occupied defending against Symbiot aggression, as well as Countess Carmetha Decados's Stigmata Garrison. Jakovian Kossacks and Screaming Dervishes infiltrated and sabotaged defences before masses of mobilized peasant infantry swept over the defenders. Grimsons and Cybercorps were then deployed to protect Decados lands, subjects and troops from the depredations of the residual Li Halan forces, including Vorox Commandos. Most of these Vorox had reverted to a feral state and had to be destroyed, and many cubs were adopted into Decados households. The conquest of Malignatius took less than five years, but violence from Li Halan units in hiding continued for years afterward.

Once Decados rule on Malignatius was secure, a number of reforms were introduced. The tyrannical and stifling oppression of non-Orthodox religious groups was halted, and freedom of belief came once more to Malignatius. A large number of Orthodox clergy on the planet were investigated and found to be involved in a host of activities unbecoming their blessed offices. Many fled off-world to escape justice. Those related by blood to House Li Halan were often discovered to be Manja worshippers, and soon faced the fire of the Inquisition.

Due to such irresponsibility and corruption, Malignatius was left without proper spiritual guidance for a time, and that void was filled with a wide variety of means. Many communities renounced the Urth Orthodoxy in favor of the beliefs of their ancestors, be they Incarnate, Gjarti or Preceptor. A mishmash of ancient creeds spread from the Refuge City of Khemta. All manner of Hesychasts emerged to preach from across the planet — some sombre, gloomy



doomsayers, some smiling, whimsical world-lovers, and some wild-eyed, froth-mouthed, raving lunatics. Brother Lazio Urtana is only the most widely known of these. This chaotic spiritual landscape has occasionally been a source of trouble for the new lords of Malignatius, but that is a price that House Decados is willing to pay for its gifts to its subjects.

Solar System

Angakok: A small, rocky, barren planet. Angakok's orbit brings it very close to the system's sun, Niqirtsuituq, so that the planet's surface is often semi-molten. Among the pagans of Malignatius, Angakok has great religious significance as the "Keeper of the Sun."

Anadyr: A pale, reddish planet whose orbit brings it very close to Malignatius's own path through the heavens. Anadyr's appearance in Malignatian skies is seen as a bad omen, mitigated by the proximity of its only moon, Quikil. Anadyr was once rich with useful metals but was exhausted during the Second Republic.

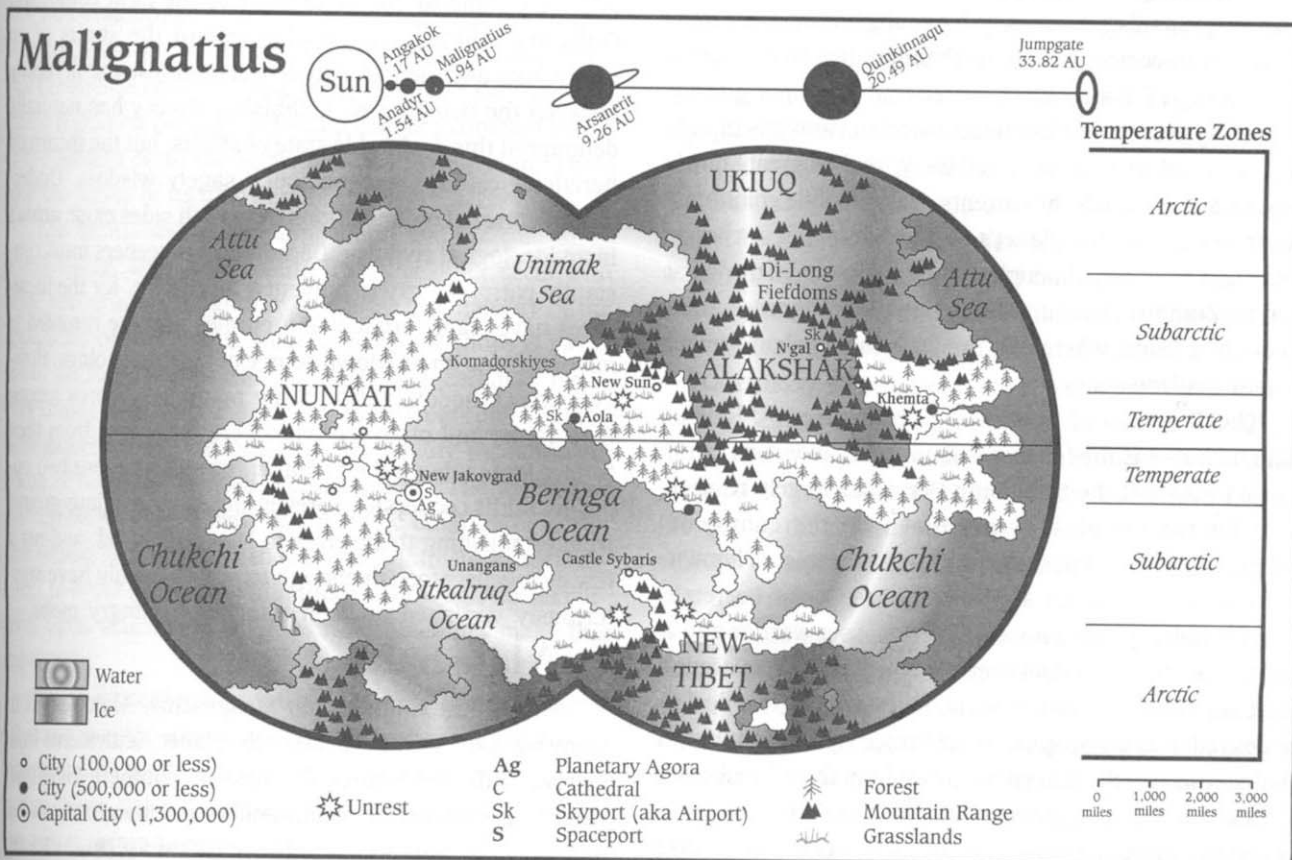
Malignatius: Malignatius's only moon is Julka, host to the most notorious and feared of the Decados gulags, the Atshen Internment Center. Convicts are shipped to Atshen's subterranean complex and left to live or die on their own. Periodic food shipments are nowhere near sufficient and rumors of cannibalism are whispered across the Decados worlds.

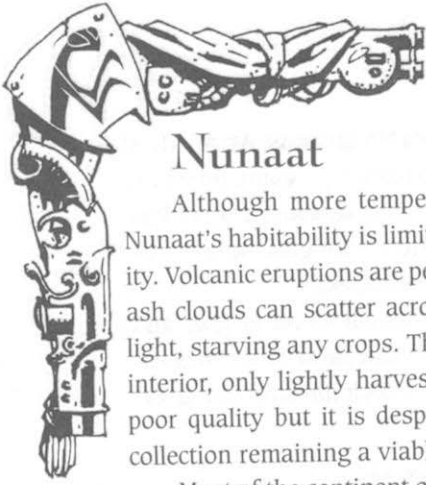
Arsanerit: Easily visible from Malignatius, Arsanerit is a magnificently ringed and multicolored gas giant, noted for the beauty of its atmospheric storm systems. Arsanerit has many moons, mostly of ice, but Prospector guild ships occasionally discover veins of valuable minerals.

Quinkinnaqu: A very large Jovian world of gray and purple, Quinkinnaqu has little of value, and sometimes becomes a mild obstacle to navigation as it interrupts ship trajectories to and from the jumpgate.

People & Places

Malignatians are a difficult groups to categorize, so diverse are the range of characteristics they display, but their single common trait is a fervent, unique faith they each feel they must share with all other people on the planet — at any cost. That the faith of the heathen is just as firm as any other is irrelevant. Most Malignatians are brazen and opinionated, and can be impertinent in their missionary zeal. Nonetheless, there is a valid cause for their concern: the recent purge within the Universal Church has left it too weak to maintain its control of outlying communities. Paganism and even prereflective cults are rampant beyond the fringes of civilized lands. Yet, having visited such remote settlements, I find that there is an enchantment to the timeless purity of the ways of life. It is a pity that so much of Malignatius is divided, for its peoples have much to learn from one another.





Nunaat

Although more temperate than most of the planet, Nunaat's habitability is limited by its mild geologic instability. Volcanic eruptions are periodic along the west coast, and ash clouds can scatter across the continent to block sunlight, starving any crops. Thick boreal forests dominate the interior, only lightly harvested for lumber. This wood is of poor quality but it is desperately needed on Cadavus, its collection remaining a viable enterprise.

Most of the continent of Nunaat is a sparsely populated wilderness. Small hesychast monasteries and lumber and trapping communities — both human and Vorox — are the extent of sentient habitation outside the city of New Jakovgrad and its environs. Nunaat was long the centre of Li Halan power on Malignatius, and thus has a more Orthodox character than most other regions. Due to its relatively homogenous population, Nunaat is the most politically stable region on the world. Indeed, in some of the smaller communities, even members of officially sanctioned sects — such as the Eskatonics or Avestites — are unwelcome. Zuranist caravans have been known to both trade and thieve the Orthodox settlements before moving on, beyond the reach of retribution.

Malignatian Zuranists are, by necessity, a nomadic people. Although a few bands are fortunate enough to enjoy the protection of some younger Decados nobles, most exist in constant danger of oppression. More conservative Decados dislike the Zuranists immensely, for young boyars-to-be from our family have been known to abandon their lives of class and privilege for a reckless, unfettered life among these wandering people. The Zuranists travel in caravans of old-fashioned, lighter-than-air dirigibles. With their great knowledge of Malignatius's air currents, these mobile communities travel all over the planet's surface, dropping anchor to barter and "forage." Although usually able to avoid the worst storms, Zuranist communities must periodically seek shelter on the ground, where they are vulnerable to harassment by local settlements.

The Duchess of Nunaat — and indeed, of all of Malignatius — is the famous Valentina Decados, war heroine and leader of the Screaming Dervishes largely responsible for the Decados victory that won the continent. Valentina's exploits during the Emperor Wars are well known, and her military tactics are now studied at the Lucretzia Decados Military Academy on Severus. As a warrior and a leader, Valentina is without peer. As a duchess of the Decados court and ruler of an entire world, she leaves a great deal to be desired. It is my suspicion that Prince Hiram sent her to Malignatius merely to keep her away from the refined court on Severus. Fiery, aggressive and vicious, Valentina is an awkward dinner companion, constantly seeking an excuse

for a fight, and the Vorox servants of her household are little better. The administration of Malignatius is largely left to the lesser Decados nobility and to the Van Gelders, a minor house based largely on this world. Valentina is unhappily wed to the priggish Petya Torensen, whose efforts at decorum are a subject of ridicule in the duchess's household.

A notable power on Malignatius is its new archbishop, Ivar Gorecy Decados. Once a young scion of House Decados itself, Ivar chose seminary over knighthood, and eventually became a respected confessor and a feared inquisitor on the streets of Tsaritsyn on Severus. Rising to the position of bishop of Old Tsaritsyn, Ivar became an influential voice in the Severus Bishopric council, skilled at interpreting doctrine with regard to Tsaritsyn's crowded conditions and the morality of House Decados's unique culture. Ivar was a logical choice for the planetary see of Malignatius, as his family ties to House Decados refute any possible inappropriate relationship with the Li Halan.

New Jakovgrad

The capital of Malignatius since the days of the Li Halan, New Jakovgrad is a divided city. Since the departure of House Li Halan, New Jakovgrad has become home to a large community of Incarnates, either recent converts or long-time secret worshippers. The notorious Incarnate preacher, Annika Dominikas, once gave sermons on the streets here, avoiding Li Halan forces with her follower's help. At present, Incarnates comprise almost one-third of the city's population and have come to dominate most of the local commerce. Orthodox believers are shifting toward the status of an underclass, and there is a great deal of unrest and ill feeling between the two groups. Archbishop Gorecy has naturally denounced this deplorable state of affairs, but the Incarnate heretics gleefully disregard such sagely wisdom. Underground terrorist organizations from both sides exist, armies in an ideological civil war. Decados peacekeepers must constantly patrol the city to prevent a bloodbath, for the Incarnates have some formidable theurgies and are rumored to have access to an unknown source of high technology. However, the Orthodox faithful count many local Vorox among their ranks and often receive covert assistance from their former lords among the Li Halan. Ironically, these two opposing faiths cooperate in preventing other religious groups from establishing themselves in New Jakovgrad, and not a few evangelists foolish enough to preach openly have mysteriously vanished or been attacked by angry mobs.

Alakshak

The largest continent on Malignatius, Alakshak is in many ways the spiritual heart of the planet. Settlements from myriad faiths are scattered across its southern coastline, while primitive, ancient communities and monasteries exist untouched by time well into the northern ice sheet. South-



ern Alakshak is dominated mostly by Incarnates, Preceptors and Amaltheans, most of whom arrived during the Emperor Wars, and the power of the Orthodoxy is weak here. Due to conflicts between these groups, this is easily the least stable region on the planet. Evangelism is a constant threat to the leaders of all the sects, and can ravage entire cities with the fervor of its followers.

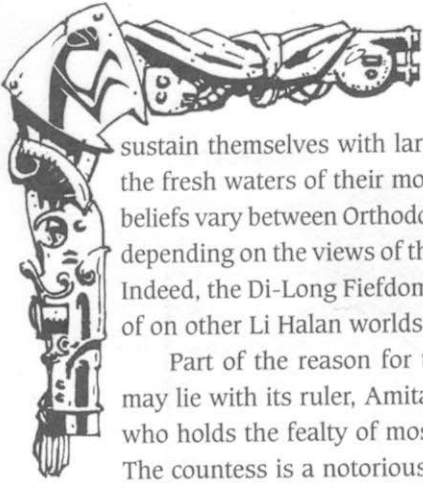
The Incarnates are the largest sect and are constantly proselytising, seeking converts from the other sects with some successes. Though they comprise the majority of the population of some cities, their Council of Bishops is based out of the town of New Sun. Much of the Incarnates' influence comes from the support they enjoy from converts they have gained among the local Decados nobility, including the baron of New Sun himself, Petra Decados. The Incarnates are currently feuding with the nomadic Children of Zuran and refuse to trade with them. The Zuranists in turn attempt to avoid Incarnate communities, although the air currents upon which their airships ride sometimes make this impossible.

The Preceptors are an influential sect, as almost every other group in the region owes them for their very survival. Preceptors taught the skills of wilderness survival to many fleeing the tyranny of Li Halan Orthodoxy long ago, so the Preceptors presently enjoy the respect of almost every group

on the continent. Their numbers are never large, however, since they are usually the first to be targeted by anti-technology preachers and waves of religious hysteria that periodically sweep the planet. Preceptor communities are usually quite prosperous, since their faithful often act as middlemen between the Incarnates and the Children of Zuran.

Sanctuary Aeon is a new addition to the religious landscape of Malignatius, its members having arrived during the wars between the Li Halan and the Decados to tend the wounded. Although respected for their acts of compassion, the sect is not entirely trusted due to their association with the Orthodoxy. In particular, the Amaltheans suffer from a moral dilemma regarding the Children of Zuran. Although the Zuranists require Amalthean care as much as any other group, they avoid acts of penance and refuse to give up their lifestyle of theft. Thus, the Amaltheans are divided as to whether to tend to the Zuranists or whether to withhold their care until the rogues morally improve.

Civilization, such as it is on Malignatius, reaches its limits in northern Alakshak with the last bastion of Li Halan power on the planet, the Di-Long Fiefdoms. House Decados was never able to break the natural defenses afforded by the mountainous terrain; these strongholds remain secure and independent of Decados authority. Technology levels are quite high compared to the rest of the planet; these fiefs



sustain themselves with large hydroponic facilities, fed by the fresh waters of their mountain streams. Local religious beliefs vary between Orthodoxy and far less acceptable sects, depending on the views of the individual local Li Halan lord. Indeed, the Di-Long Fiefdoms are rife with heresy unheard-of on other Li Halan worlds.

Part of the reason for the region's tragic moral decay may lie with its ruler, Amita Li Halan, Countess of Llangh, who holds the fealty of most of the local Li Halan nobility. The countess is a notorious apostate, dedicated to the perverse Manja cult of ancestor worship. By Li Halan standards, her religious conduct is shocking, but her immense political power extends well beyond the Malignatius system, protecting her from prosecution. The countess is a dangerous and disruptive force in planetary politics; her agents are a constant source of trouble to Van Gelder and Decados authorities in southern Alakshak.

North of the Di-long Fiefdoms, Alakshak extends into Malignatius's arctic circle. This region is known as Ukiuq, a barren land of tundra and ice shelves. On most worlds, such a region would be uninhabited, but not so on Malignatius. This land is home to many of the oldest communities on the planet, predating the Universal Church itself. Their beliefs are a form of Gjarti, its tenets concerned simply with survival in a harsh land. These people subsist by hunting and fishing, as their land is unsuited for agriculture. Many bands are nomadic, following the herds of tuktuvak and other beasts that provide food, clothing and tools from their bodies. These folk most well remember the ancient Li Halan, and Princess Theodora's crime has not been forgotten. It has become a custom that no one is allowed to starve to death, for that would feed the demon patrons of Theodora Li Halan; these folk feed complete strangers rather than allow them to die of hunger. This custom should not be abused, however, for if a person is perceived as greedy or slothful, there is no taboo against ending their hunger by killing them.

Others groups are settled, non-nomadic; this is more common among the coastal communities. In addition to fish, the coastal people often herd lappins, marine mammals bred into domesticity for meat and fur. These communities are often attacked by the aarlubeasts, immense cetaceans who hunt the lappins. Aarlubeasts in turn are hunted by humanity for meat and for the oil of their fat. These creatures can be dangerously clever, and the most ancient individuals have displayed controversial signs of intelligence. Some few have actually become "ship-hunters," attacking ocean-going vessels and even airships to devour their cargo and crew. The Zuranists tell a tale of Balena Grandoté, an aarlubeast that would leap high out of the ocean to tear Zuranist zeppelins from the sky. According to the legends, a survivor of such an attack, Captain Omri Joram, dedicated his life to hunting the creature. In the end, he failed to slay the beast at the

cost of his ship and his life, and the lives of the better part of his crew.

A variety of monasteries are lightly strewn about Ukiuq, dedicated to lives of contemplation. Most are Gjartin in character, but some are Eskatonic, Hesychastic or from far older traditions. These monastic communities are usually self-sufficient and keep to themselves, but a number of the dangerous preachers who have caused the most damage in southern Alakshak have hailed from these remote monasteries.

Duke Lev Decados is ostensible ruler over all of Alakshak, including Ukiuq. In actuality, rule has been delegated to the Marquis Zarachia Van Gelder, head of that minor household. Duke Lev himself has not been seen for almost two years, having disappeared from his palace unexpectedly. His whereabouts are unknown, but it is certain that he is alive, for messages bearing the duke's seal and signature occasionally arrive at the palace, bearing instructions for his proxies in government and assuring his people of his continued survival. Attempts have been made to trace these messages, but to no avail. Rumors have the duke in an Ukiuq monastery, with a Zuranist caravan or in an Amalthean hospice. Some believe the duke never left his fief, suspecting that he merely spies on his subjects firsthand. Before his disappearance, the duke was in good standing as a member of the Universal Church and was an instrumental figure in the prosecution of corrupt Orthodox clergymen after the Decados liberation of the world.

As *de facto* ruler of Alakshak, Marquis Zarachia is neither feared nor loved. He is an able administrator who is periodically forced to arbitrate between opposing religious groups. Many among the populace, however, question just how active the marquis's governance really is. Only decrees from the absent Duke Lev are announced publicly; Marquis Zarachia's initiatives are proclaimed less loudly. The marquis' stated goal is to maintain the fief until the return of Duke Lev, and to this end he has striven to ensure that Decados interests are well protected against evangelical fervor and Li Halan infiltration. Given his family's reputation, it is no surprise that many suspect Van Gelder agents abound across Alakshak, but there is no proof to support this.

Aola

Administrative capital of Alakshak, Aola is centre of House Van Gelder's power. Visually, Aola is an ugly city, with simple, blockish buildings constructed to conserve as much heat as possible. Older parts of the city are actually underground. As I visited, Aola was in a state of turmoil. Formerly dominated by followers of the Preceptor sect, the city is now split between the wild Eskatonic preacher Hope Evans and Sister Mari Sulla, a devotee of the popular Brother Lazio Urtana. Confrontations between these two flocks have become more violent of late, and the city is a fission-plant waiting to explode.

Neo-Kiew

Site of the final battles for the conquest of Malignatius, Neo-Kiew's stability remains fragile due to Li Halan and Hazat residual forces. Until recently, the city was uniformly Orthodox in character, being invaluable to pilgrims as the site of the martyrdom of Saint Maya the Scorned Woman. However, new ideas from the Incarnates and Preceptors are taking effect among the populace, with dangerous results. Neo-Kiew must be administered as a police state under the famous Kossack Commander Pyotr, who has held the post since the city's conquest at the bidding of his former superior, Captain Sergei, now in the service of the Emperor. Due to the commander's sterling efforts, public disturbances have been ably suppressed, and Prince Hiram has even considered granting Pyotr a knighthood — an almost unheard-of phenomenon among House Decados.

Khemta

With the near-destruction of Yintraï on Criticorum, Khemta is now the greatest of the Cities of Refuge. Having rejected noble rule long ago, Khemta is ostensibly governed by an elected mayor. In reality, the elections are doctored to maintain the mayor's power. This is the elegant and ruthless Seron Haie of House Thana, who has ruled Khemta for nearly seventy years. Haie enjoys close ties to both the Scravers and the Reeves and is an adept negotiator, particularly when dealing with the powerful criminal elements within his city. House Decados has supported him for decades, and he and my house have a cordial and polite relationship.

Khemta suffers from the depredations of many criminal gangs, which engage in extortion, murder, theft and smuggling. But these selfsame ruffians are also the first to defend the city if a threat should arise. These gangs have fought against Li Halan soldiers and Incarnate zealots, and are dangerous opponents in urban combat. The largest of these gangs is called the Demon Host, and controls the city barricades and much of its slums. Its members sport emblems of dark allegiance upon their dress or tattooed on their flesh, and purport to answer to an authority beyond the reaches of the Celestial Sun. Actually, their pretensions of Antinomy are quite humorous, though it is best not to mention this to them. Its leader is a cunning, enormous tough named Zig "Jotan" Drickssen, wanted by the Hazat, the Church, the Imperial Eye, the League and House Li Halan for various offences committed before arriving in Khemta. A small psychic coven exists openly in Khemta, calling itself the Invisible Path. It is rumored to be connected to a similar group of occultists on Manitou.

New Tibet

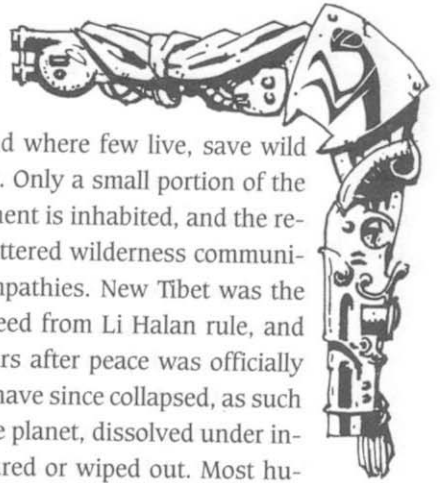
Ah, New Tibet! Home of ice, snow and little else to speak of. My own family's fief in exile is deep in the interior, a

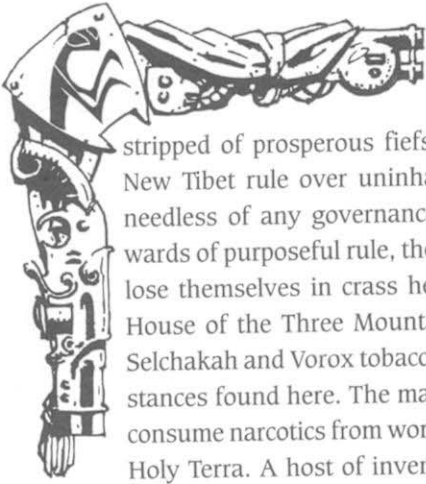
worthless chunk of frozen land where few live, save wild herd beasts and ulik predators. Only a small portion of the northern coastline of the continent is inhabited, and the region is home only to a few scattered wilderness communities suspected of Li Halan sympathies. New Tibet was the last part of the planet to be freed from Li Halan rule, and guerrilla skirmishes lasted years after peace was officially declared. Such partisan efforts have since collapsed, as such groups have either since left the planet, dissolved under internal pressures, or been captured or wiped out. Most human inhabitants of this region are Orthodox. However, without the Li Halan presence to enforce their faith, many are reverting to the pagan beliefs of their ancestors. Unfortunately, New Tibet has also become home to several packs of feral Vorox and their *angerak* families, former Li Halan soldiers. These bestial aliens have become dangerous brigands, living off the marquis' game animals and raiding human settlements. The former Baroness Garahagayah, once a prominent captain among the Li Halan forces, leads the largest pack. A sizable bounty exists on this outlaw leader's head, and a number of Muster and freelance Ashtati have unsuccessfully attempted to collect it, usually with fatal results.

Since New Tibet lacks large cities or even large towns, its administrative capital is at the residence of its noble lord, the Marquis Gennady Decados. Overlooking the cold Itkalruq Ocean from a high cliff along the Neadak Peninsula is Castle Sybaris, home of the marquis and of all of the unfortunate lords of New Tibet. The castle is a forbidding structure, made almost entirely of low-tech materials. Three-meter-thick stone walls, iron doors, iron cannon and mortar, crossbowmen and a few young Vorox archers are its defences, while underground shelters defend against possible bombardment. Marquis Gennady must always maintain the castle defences, for there is the constant threat of hostilities from the feral Vorox. The castle was abandoned in the time of the Li Halan, but the marquis reopened it as a residence on his new lands.

Within the castle, simple electric lights illuminate the halls and staterooms. Servant quarters are lit with candles of aarlubeast fat, quite inexpensive here. Wind traps and alcohol-powered generators are the extent of the castle's energy sources. Electric heaters vie with ancient fireplaces to provide heat, and artificial refrigeration is non-existent. Functional plumbing is limited to the quarters of only the highest nobles and most important guests, and all others must rely on servants for such conveniences as chamberpot removal and hot water baths. Indeed, these are the most primitive conditions that such a prominent Decados lord has been forced to endure in living memory.

Among the scores of Decados nobles housed in Castle Sybaris, the mood is at once both jovial and sullen. Punished for various indiscretions against Prince Hiram and





stripped of prosperous fiefs on other worlds, the lords of New Tibet rule over uninhabited wastes that are entirely needless of any governance. Bereft of the duties and rewards of purposeful rule, these tragic nobles have chosen to lose themselves in crass hedonism more becoming of the House of the Three Mountains than such as we. Severan Selchakah and Vorox tobacco are among the less exotic substances found here. The marquis and his guests constantly consume narcotics from worlds as distant as Kordeth or even Holy Terra. A host of inventive cocktails have been developed for experienced users, and if you should happen to visit good Lord Gennady's home, I highly recommend the concoction dubbed "Leila's Bliss." Any brave noble with a stout heart and a strong constitution would be welcome here, though he might endure some good-natured ribbing if he comes without gifts for the festivities.

One long-term resident is my own younger brother, Baronet Nikita Decados, who represents my interests among this dissolute court, the last refuge of our family line. Before I took up this quest I was heir to the Marquisate of Rusaddir, on Cadiz. However, by a disgraceful error in judgement, my birth-mother cost our entire house dearly in certain dealings with the Vau of Manitou during the Emperor Wars. Our family lands were stripped and we were exiled to rule a barren strip of New Tibetan land under the fealty of Marquis Gennady. My birth-mother died shortly thereafter from a degenerative illness, and Nikita assumed my title when I entered the service of the Emperor. Our reunion was bitter-sweet; he is not the same man I left behind. At least I may take comfort in the brief solace and amusement he enjoyed among the members of my entourage.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the unusual nature of this court, Castle Sybaris is a remarkable place from which to gather information on Decados family gossip and Imperial affairs. Many of the landless nobles within have retained some covert connections to their former fiefs, and I suspect a few others of using the castle as a base for their Jakovian operations. Still, there is a sense of fellowship to be found that is rare among my family; with little to lose, these nobles trust and support each other to a remarkable degree. A friend of my brother's, the Lady Svetlana Gosinya Decados, was kind enough to arrange a new pilot for me after the tragic death of my dear Jeanne Hillaire, the victim of an unfortunate overdose. I hope that her friends on Byzantium Secundus will forgive me, but pending the publication of this volume I have assumed responsibility for the disposition of her belongings and correspondences, which will be properly delivered to her peasant family on Grail. Our new

pilot is Mr. Paulo De Vatha, who has an excellent reputation on the Decados worlds and is quite familiar with its starlanes.

Marquis Gennady himself is the first cousin of Countess Illyana of the Transvaal. He was, until recently, an earl of that realm, until a devastating Church investigation brought him afoul of Prince Hiram. Charges of Manja worship were laid against the earl and against many Transvaalite nobles. Although the accusations against him proved false, the damage to his reputation was done. The Prince stripped Gennady of his title and fief, and sent him to the newly conquered planet of Malignatius, to rule as marquis over its most desolate wastes far from the wonders of Severus, and where Li Halan sympathies and feral Vorox aggression must constantly be kept at bay. Despite his hardship, the marquis is a most remarkable man. As I dictate this passage, he slumbers under the influence of a unique blend of opiates and hallucinogens, sprawled upon the bodies of a dozen dozing revellers — including those of my own aide and bodyguard and, until a few moment ago, my own. How Brother Ricardo would scold me should he have seen me in such a state! And yet, now I recall that my confessor was a great source of entertainment as he berated the marquis and his guests while they caroused, though he himself was quite... but I digress. Though he revels no less than his guests, the marquis is also an avid player in house vendettas and has survived a number of Mantis League assassins. How he balances such merrymaking with the Decados brand of intrigue and yet still breathes, I cannot hazard to guess.

Major Islands

There are two major island chains on Malignatius: the Komadorskiyes and the Unangans, and both are mostly barren. Lying between Nunaat and Alakshak in the Bering Ocean, the Komadorskiyes are largely uninhabited and are ruled as part of the continent of Nunaat. A few are home to villages sustaining themselves by the herding of lappins and the hunting of aarlubeasts, and some are used as temporary encampments by wandering Children of Zuran. The Unangans are much the same, and are administered as part of New Tibet. Orthodox herding communities live on the Unangans, tending herds of kwisheep and farming potatoes with which to brew their famous vodka. The kwisheep are a variant of Urthish sheep stock, having been genetically modified during the time of the Second Republic to better survive the frigid climes of Malignatius. Marquis Gennady frequently confiscates Unangan vodka, both for his guests' refreshment and as a fuel for his electric generators.



Cadiz

Unseen Touch

Of all the worlds under the banner of the Mantis, none is such an enigma as Cadiz. Inhabited by an alien race under possible Vau influence, home to some of the greatest of Decados intrigues and carpeted with half-finished Second Republic megalopoli now much reclaimed by ancient wilderness, few can claim to truly understand the planet and its ways. Cadiz is the world of the downtrodden, the forgotten, and the shame of the Second Republic's gross lack of foresight, but it conceals priceless secrets within its ruins. Much of the planet's society is infiltrated by Imperial, guild, noble and Church agents, all seeking an edge on the secrets of aliens both on the planet and those a mere jump away on Vrill-Ya and Manitou. All of these have discovered the cardinal rule of Cadiz: Each question answered merely poses further questions. The riddle of Cadiz will never be solved, but there is great joy and opportunity in the attempt.

History

The history of the planet Cadiz begins long before the arrival of humanity on its friendly surface, for the indigenous sentients, the Hironem, possess centuries of written records prior to their first contact with the humans from the stars. Indeed, although the dynasty of Shamash the God-King extends back for thousands of years, his rule was not always absolute. When House Gloucester arrived on Cadiz, the God-King had only conquered the entire planet three centuries earlier. Prior to that time, various nations of Hironem existed across the world, many of them exhibiting beliefs antithetical to the present-day conservative government of Turaz. Most of the history that follows was uncovered by my old friend Sir Michael Basque, Cadiz's most prominent scholar on the questionable study of pre-human Hironem history.

Legends of divine origin notwithstanding, the effective recorded history of the Hironem begins slightly over two millennia before contact with humanity. Hironem civilization is far older, but no earlier records are available, as the great city-states of Nahrezaz were destroyed in some savage cataclysm, now believed an aftermath to the wars of the Ur or the Vau. Accounts of these nations' rebuilding efforts comprise the earliest known written records on Cadiz, and the history of Cadiz before this time has become the stuff of legend, the "God-Times." Civilization began anew, and each tribe of Hironem worshipped local deities that would eventually develop into the Four Gods recognized today by the Sibanzi priests of Turaz. According to Sir Michael, the

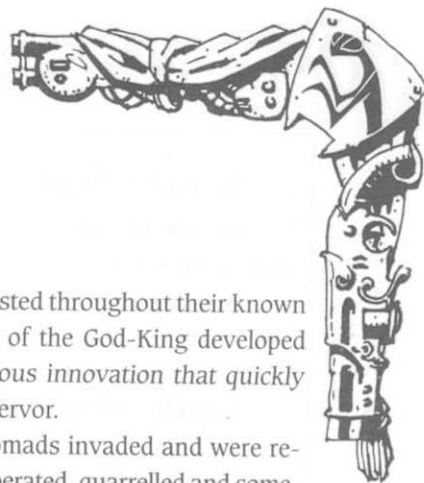
Hironem's caste system has existed throughout their known history, but the modern office of the God-King developed from a minor kingdom's religious innovation that quickly swept the entire species in its fervor.

Kingdoms rose and fell, nomads invaded and were repelled or assimilated, castes cooperated, quarrelled and sometimes fought openly. Hironem history is long, dull and of little interest to the sensible scholar, though Sir Michael would disagree. Occasionally, xeno-historians claim Vau interference in the Hironem's development, perceiving their hand in such events as the comet which destroyed a powerful imperial capital in the Urthish 20th century, or the unlikely coincidences which aided in the suppression of a warrior-caste rebellion only a few decades before humanity's arrival on Cadiz. Some even suggest that ancient Vau explorers introduced the castes, or that the Hironem mimicked them from that race.

During their time alone on their world, the Hironem made great strides. Technologically, advances based off the Hironem's esoteric beliefs made for the creation of unusual devices, producing such phenomena as the Kigazi warriors' unique duelling pistols and culminating in a manned landing on Cadiz's moon. Theories abound as to how many Hironem advances were genuinely Hironem and how many were gifts from the Vau. In any case, Turaz expanded its rule beyond the continent of Sabtah, settling the continent of Murciyah and subjugating its primitive local inhabitants. Turaz faced crisis with a dispute over the succession to the throne of the God-King, and later a major Sibanzi-caste rebellion, but the empire endured to witness the arrival of humanity.

The first human settlers on Cadiz were from the Nasrid branch of House Gloucester, recently incorporated by diplomatic marriage into that house. Detecting the extent of Hironem habitation from orbit, the Gloucesters settled in the far north of the continent of Murciyah, far from the centre of alien power. My friend Sir Michael tells me that some confusion exists concerning the date of Cadiz's human colonization, as well as the First Contact with the Hironem. Local records exist as far back as 2682, predating even the revelation of Shantor sapience on Shaprut. However, I suspect that the insidious Gloucesters may have altered such records in some perverse attempt to gain prestige among the Diasporan world governments and noble houses.

Early relations between the newcomers and the natives were limited to trade agreements of Hironem land in exchange for human technology. Initially, the lands traded were uninhabited and inhospitable to the Hironem, but soon





Cadiz Traits

Cathedral: Orthodox (influenced by Brother Battle and Sanctuary Aeon)

Agora: Scravers (allied in some regions to the minor House Basque)

Garrison: 6

Capital: Elibyrge

Jumps: 4

Adjacent Worlds: Severus (dayside), Malignatius (dayside), Vrill-Ya (nightside), Manitou (parallel)

Solar System: Cadiz (0.88 AU; Persus), Tarshish (1.45 AU), Hammon (12.37 AU), Sucellus (18.14 - 38.87 AU), Jumpgate (34.09 AU)

Tech: 5 (some TL7 or 8 Vautech is intermittently available)

Human Population: 800 million

Alien Population: 60 million Hironem (about 60% live on the Turaz reservation)

Resources: Agriculture, Vautech trade, empty urban zones.

Exports: Grain and other foodstuffs, Vautech, scavenged building materials.

Landscape: Cadiz's climate was once very similar to that of Holy Terra, and so escaped the terraforming that was so rampant across the rest of the Known Worlds. Since the fading of its sun just before the end of the Second Republic, Cadiz's average temperature has risen by about five degrees centigrade. Rainfall has increased and the overall water level has risen, swamping low-lying areas and flooding rivers. A number of areas have become desert, baked under the oversized sun. At present, Cadiz's surface is still over 75% water and increasing. The major landmasses are divided into three continents and a few islands. Huge, sprawling cities of once-spectacular Second Republic architecture cover wide patches of the planet's surface, although they are now mostly abandoned and reclaimed by the wilderness. Human communities tend to congregate in specific regions of their ancient cities, leaving the sparsely inhabited remainders to decay.

enough many inhabited regions suddenly became human property, creating a serious question of the legality of Hironem squatters and refugees. There were also internal disputes over whether the Sibanzi had authority to barter independently of the will of the God-King. Still, the land transactions continued, and by 2818 House Gloucester held legal claim over almost all of Cadiz, and the once-great Turaz was reduced to the equatorial region of Sabtah. Hironem residents on new Gloucester lands were forced to either re-

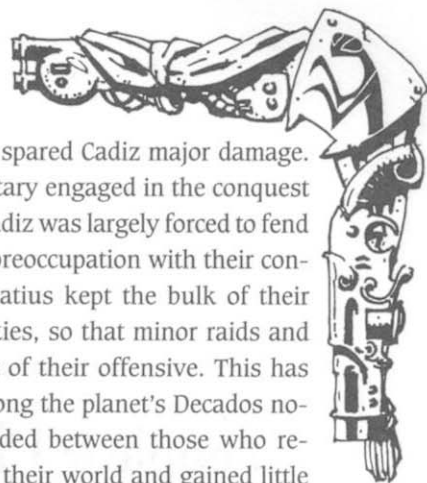
locate their diminished kingdom, or to become the subjects of House Gloucester.

With the fall of the Gloucesters, the ascendant House Decados became heir to the Gloucester lands and soon attempted to establish friendly relations with the Hironem. Unfortunately, the exploitative Gloucester policies had alienated the Hironem against humanity and so destabilized their society that the Decados faced the serious possibility of an alien insurrection. When the violence inevitably did break out, it was the skilled diplomacy of Baron Edom Decados that carried the day, and established the modern borders of the reservation of Turaz. The existence of the Hironem was finally revealed to the rest of humanity, that the universe might witness the righteous and just treatment of the alien rebels at the hands of Decados justice.

The early years of Decados rule on Cadiz witnessed the normalization of relations with the Hironem, and the arrival of new immigrants to homestead the planet. Cadiz quickly became the breadbasket of the Decados worlds, providing needed foodstuffs to Decados holdings on Severus and elsewhere. Those Hironem choosing to remain outside the confines of Turaz adjusted to their new rulers, many accepting Generational Contracts and becoming serfs. The ancient caste system of the Hironem remained, after a fashion: Sibanzi often became advisors to Decados nobles, Warriors served among the house guards, and Makers worked beside human laborers in the fields.

The disastrous First Contact between humanity and the Vau on Apschai had a dramatic effect on Cadiz. As human patriots courageously skirmished against Vau forces on Apschai, a single Vau warship was seen in the skies above Cadiz, a silent warning of the aliens' ability to strike human colonies at will. Prior to this action it was not even known that Cadiz bordered the Vau worlds, so the planet's defences were sparse. Terrified human communities erupted into chaotic riots. The God-King adopted an official stance of neutrality, but individual Sibanzi outside of Turaz nonetheless dispatched Warriors both to assist and to sabotage human defence efforts. Masses of human refugees fled Cadiz and its attackers, departing for less dangerous worlds. Eventually, peace with the Vau was achieved by the efforts of the Prophet and the Justinian diplomat Benjamin Verden, and a semblance of normality returned to Cadiz, although the planet's siege mentality lasted for centuries afterward.

During the time of the Second Republic, Cadiz enjoyed both its proudest moment and its greatest humiliation. Selected by the Republican Senate as a meeting place to receive Vau diplomats, Cadiz was to be transformed into the pride of human space. It would be a world of beautiful cities with gleaming spires, of garden paradises with wildlife from a hundred worlds, and a prosperous, peaceful populace fed and sheltered by the bounty of the Republic. New immi-



grants arrived from across human space: merchants seeking the riches promised by human-Vau trade, priests from diverse faiths hoping to establish missions and gain converts among the Vau, while diplomats, bureaucrats and intelligence agents came to the world to manage relations with the powerful aliens.

Unfortunately, the fickle Vau envoys chose instead to meet their human peers on the Vau world of Vrill-Ya, a single jump away. This decision ruined Cadiz, as the vast investments of time and resources the world had enjoyed abruptly ceased. Cadiz was left as an only half-completed and expensive curiosity. Many of the new immigrants fled, seeking other opportunities far from the disappointment of Cadiz. Many more stayed, having spent the last of their funds to reach the remote world, now unable to afford passage off-planet. Large sections of half-completed cities were abandoned while others became miserable slums, home to the discarded victims of the Second Republic's broken promises.

Inevitably, the Republic itself collapsed, destroyed by the fundamental flaws upon which it was built. No world escaped the ensuing chaos unscathed, but Cadiz suffered more than most. Much of the urban populace depended on the Republican welfare system to survive, and with its failure, the cities of Cadiz experienced anarchy on a massive scale, exacerbated by mass panic over the sudden fading of Cadiz's sun. Many human settlements scattered, establishing new communities in abandoned sections of the massive cities, or even leaving the cities altogether for a more traditional, agrarian existence. In some cases, this caused tensions with Turaz, as desperate human refugees ignored Turaz's borders during their migrations. This unrest was eventually subdued at great cost by heroic peacekeepers from House Decados. Houses Van Gelder and Li Halan established extensive fiefs on the planet during this tumultuous period, becoming a powerful faction in the planetary economy as urban land speculators and slumlords.

Over the next several centuries, Decados rulers largely neglected Cadiz as the Mantis House reeled from the disappearance of many of its worlds. Cadiz's value as a food production world was decimated by the abrupt fading of its sun, which significantly increased the amount of heat the planet received, making deserts out of fertile farm districts and flooding coastal regions. Human-Hironem relations again deteriorated when Turaz faced population pressures as their own lands changed with the sun's shift. A few, isolated skirmishes occurred, though such conflicts were sanctioned by neither the central authorities of Turaz nor by House Decados. Cadiz for centuries remained far from the chaotic politics of the houses, Church and League, concerned mainly with the looming presence of the Vau, far away beyond the jumpgate and yet too near for much comfort, their influence — if any — among the Hironem unknown.

The recent Emperor Wars spared Cadiz major damage. With most of the Decados military engaged in the conquest of Cadavus and Malignatius, Cadiz was largely forced to fend for itself. Only the Li Halan's preoccupation with their conflicts on Rampart and Malignatius kept the bulk of their military might from Cadiz's skies, so that minor raids and bombardment were the extent of their offensive. This has caused something of a rift among the planet's Decados nobility, which has become divided between those who remained on Cadiz to safeguard their world and gained little glory as a consequence, and those who abandoned their duties at home for the call of battle against the house's enemies.

Now, with the victorious Alexius Hawkwood secure on the Imperial Throne, Cadiz's future looks bright. Duchess Salandra Decados enjoys good possibilities as the future Empress of the Known Worlds, and her homeworld of Cadiz will surely share in her glory. Imperial protection would be greatly welcome, as the Vau threat becomes more active than it has been in generations. Agents of the Imperial Eye have long maintained a strong presence on this world, both to observe the looming question of the Vau and the Hironem, and to monitor the doings of the elusive and deadly House Van Gelder. Still, no matter how many spies, scholars, priests and xenophiles hope otherwise, Cadiz is, and shall ever remain, ultimately unknown.

Solar System

Cadiz: The closest planet to its ancient sun, Cadiz has one moon, Persus, which bears a thin, toxic atmosphere. Upon its surface lies Gibraltar Base, an aged station from the days of Gloucester rule. Gibraltar Base serves as a second-rate dockyard for Decados ships in need of repair, salvage or decommission. The far side of Persus displays hints of a prehistoric landing by the Hironem or possibly some other sentient race, such as the Vau. Beneath the lunar surface, a network of tunnels and caverns has been detected. The extent of this network is unknown, as is its purpose. Landing anywhere on Persus is restricted to Decados military authority.

Tarshish: A stark, arid world only slightly larger than Cadiz, initial terraforming operations were underway until the Fall of the Second Republic. A few descendants of survivors from that time still exist, eking out an existence on and under the planet's barren surface. These primitives aggressively attack all off-worlders they encounter.

In orbit about Tarshish is the famous Vau derelict, the *Katerina*, used every three years for the *Katerina Run* sporting event under the auspices of Marquise Olga Svanfeld Decados. The *Katerina* has been the subject of dozens of scientific studies, but many have failed to return with any useful data and many more have failed to return at all. Thus the *Katerina* is usually left to drift alone in space, until the





hoards of competitors arrive once more to test their mettle against her secrets.

Hammon: A perilous though beautiful gas giant, Hammon is seldom approached. The planet is orbited by a multitude of moons and its chaotic magnetic field can affect all but the most heavily shielded equipment.

Sucellus: A barren ball of ice and dust, Sucellus's elliptical orbit lies partially beyond the orbit of the jumpgate.

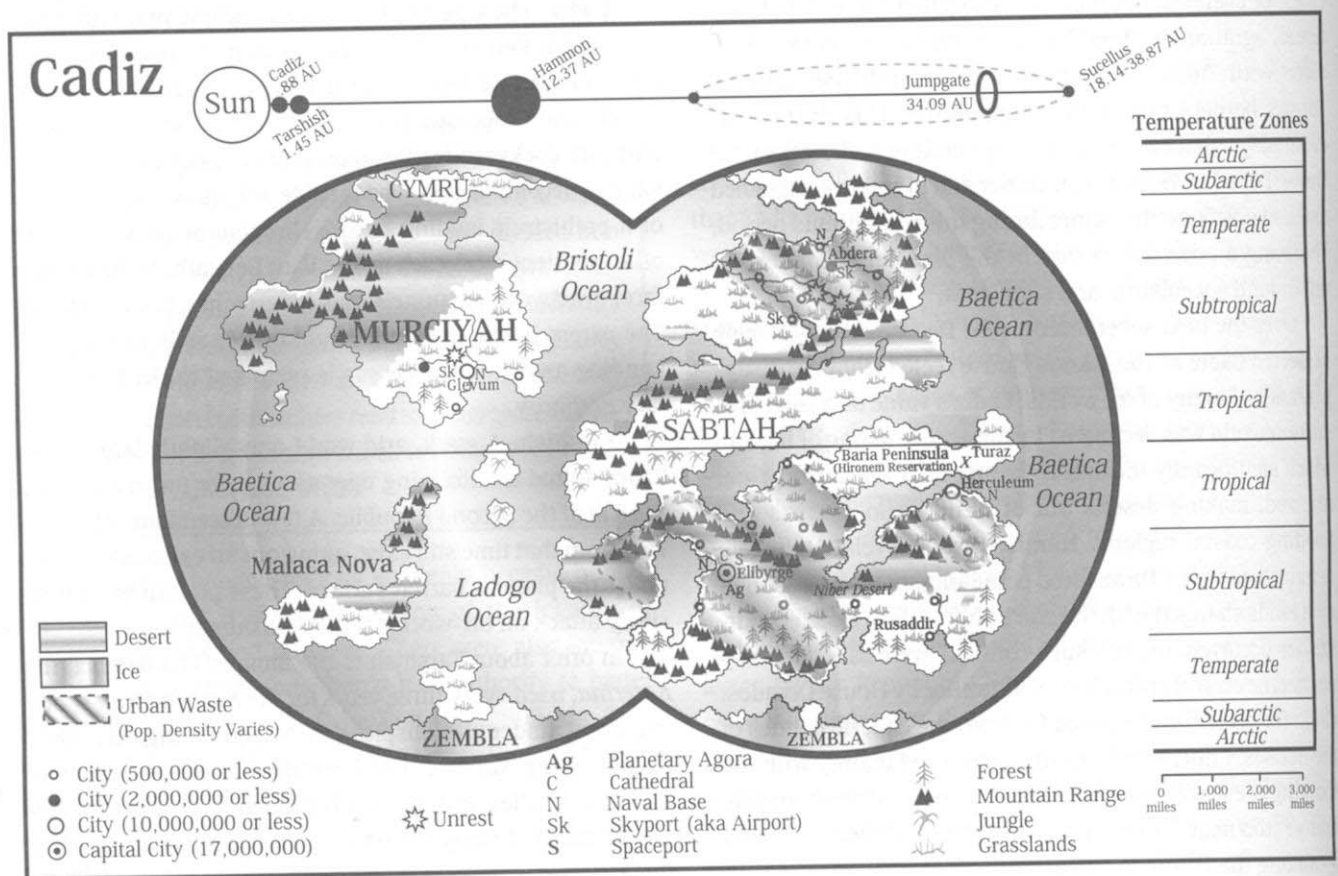
People & Places

Most mysterious of the Decados worlds, Cadiz's people are a study in contradictions. Living on a world where the amazing has become so common, the people of Cadiz often seem naturally jaded and blasé, residing in their spectacular cities that have fallen to ruin. Cadiz's people are famous for their hospitality, constantly seeking news of the wider universe and eagerly welcoming off-world merchants and researchers. However, traditional prejudices against certain local groups are strong; poor Hironem or known rogues should not walk alone at night. The nobles of Cadiz reflect this mindset in their fierce feuds with close associates, while constantly courting visitors from off-world. My partner, Sir Qinto, was quite the celebrity as we frequented the planet's social life; Shelit family members are rare and exotic this far from Kurga. The noble soirées of Cadiz are frequent and enjoyable, so long as one remembers the relative poverty and paranoia of the local aristocracy.

Murciyah

Murciyah belies the common view of Cadiz, being pastoral, semi-prosperous and inhabited almost entirely by humans. The original seat of Gloucester, and later Decados planetary government, Murciyah was avoided by the Second Republic's otherwise worldwide urbanization program. Even at the height of its power the Republican Senate feared the great potential of the Decados family, and kept Murciyah at arm's length. It was hoped that by ignoring the Decados domination of Murciyah, the house could be kept away from the expected negotiations with the Vau. Ironically, this discriminatory neglect of the entire region would benefit it in the long term, as the rest of the planet, overly-urbanized and with an inadequate food supply, faced periods of devastating famine while Murciyah remained self-sufficient.

Before the fading of Cadiz's sun, Murciyah was a cooler region of the planet, and thus sparsely inhabited by the Hironem. At present, Murciyah's temperature remains below the planetary average, but the continent has become extraordinarily fertile and lush. Because of this, Murciyah is now the unwilling host to thousands of Hironem refugees displaced from their homes in Turaz by the planets' rising tides and spreading deserts. The few, local Hironem were a forgotten underclass for centuries, but the new arrivals' lack of experience with humanity's inherent superiority has sparked a number of incidents that might threaten the sta-





bility of the region. During my visit, tensions were quite high due to the recent beating of an adolescent Sibanzi scion by a gang of human toughs. Sibanzi representatives have accused human authorities of lacking enthusiasm in their investigation, and of suppressing their own inquiries into the matter.

An unofficial arm of the security forces is the Vanguard, a knightly order with a mid-sized chapter house in the region. This group is dedicated to the protection of humanity against alien aggression, a cause doubly served both as an early line of defence against the Vau and as a deterrent to Hironem dissidence. Naturally, the Vanguard's presence is a constant point of contention to Hironem racial representatives, who continually accuse the group of overzealous brutality, hostile attitudes and of instigating far more violence than they prevent. The planetary chapter head is Dame Agatha Van Gelder, a veteran of the Emperor Wars and several armed confrontations with local Hironem. She is firm, disciplined and utterly without hesitation in the performance of her duty.

Ruling Murciyah is the infamous Duke Stephan Svanfeld of House Decados, widely known and ridiculed for his ill-fated and short love affair with the Duchess Salandra Decados. Prior to that episode, the duke enjoyed a reputation as a versatile paramour, favoring women, men, boys, and aliens of several species. The duke still maintains small estates on Byzantium Secundus, Leagueheim, Shaprut, Aylon and other worlds. Since his disgrace, Duke Stephan has become something of a recluse, devoting most of his time to esoteric religious studies and family histories. In recent years, the duke has even gained some note as a genealogist, and has become much valued to his house in this respect. Additionally, his political and military acumen are widely respected by the Li Halan, against whom he skirmished on the Manitou Front during the Emperor Wars. Much of the good trade relations between Icon and Cadiz are due to Duke Stephan's diplomacy, and both the Decados and the Li Halan are mindful of this debt. Of late, there has emerged gossip alleging that the duke has far from withdrawn from public society, and implications that the once-famous paramour has merely focused his abilities toward a new goal: Sister Theafana al-Malik.

Sabtah

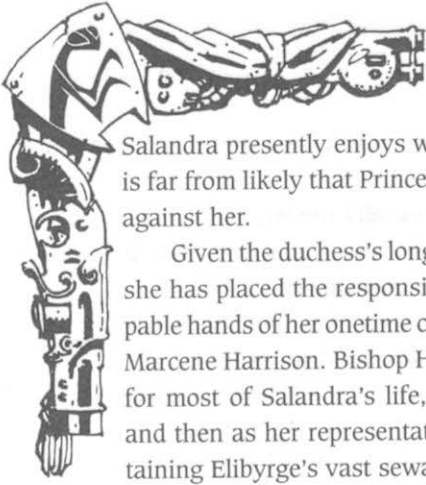
Sabtah is easily the largest continent on Cadiz and is the seat of Decados power on this world, home to the massive Second Republican megalopoli of Elibyrge, Herculeum, Abdera and Rusaddir, and the great Hironem reservation of Turaz. Sabtah was long ago the unfortunate recipient of the Second Republic's spurt of urbanization, and as a consequence rivals Leagueheim, Criticorum and Byzantium Secundus itself in the length and breadth of its urban sprawls.

Most of what wilderness exists is but the overgrown remnants of the huge city parks established by the Second Republic long ago. Only the region under the legal control of Turaz maintains its original vegetation, which has since gradually spread into the under-populated cities.

Because of the over-urbanization of the continent and its reclamation by the planet's wilds, the cities of Sabtah are remarkable in appearance. Ornate, once-beautiful Second Republican spires slowly decay, their apartments — once meant for only the most distinguished of Republican dignitaries and wealthiest of merchants — now inhabited by impoverished squatters. Far below on the streets, roving gangs of humans and Hironem vie for control of sparsely inhabited urban wastelands. Internal city walls are erected around sectors directly controlled by the nobility, and Amalthean hospices dot the vast city landscapes — protected, threatened and desperately needed by the struggling street folk. Various gang lords rule scattered regions, occasionally backed by a more powerful faction, such as a guild, Church sect or intelligence agency; these realms are as miniature fiefs unto themselves. As the wilderness encroaches, some buildings are wrapped in sheaths of vegetation as the flora of Cadiz climbs high to seek the sunlight it craves.

Agriculture among these communities has taken a unique form due to the unusual conditions they face. Since there is so little flat, arable land within the vast cities, these urban peasants plant their crops on the roofs of the high Republican towers, laboriously carrying fertile soil far from the ground below, while the less destitute enjoy the fruits of hydroponic gardens. Ancient and massive vine structures are carefully cultivated for Cadiz's large and famous grapes — as often a subsistence crop among the locals as a source of wine. Livestock is limited to chickens, gheil and other fowl that can be trusted not to panic at the sight of the heights at which they are kept.

The ruler of Cadiz is none other than Duchess Salandra Decados herself, a well-known figure at the Imperial Court of Byzantium Secundus. The duchess is something of an icon among the ruling families of Cadiz, being the ambassador of our backwater world to the Imperial Throne — and to the Imperial bedchamber as well. Duchess Salandra helped to defend Cadiz both against rival claimants and against House Li Halan, employing rapier, courtly intrigue, and the occasional Mantis League assassin to good effect. Among the commoners, she is both adored and feared, for she controls one of the most superb networks of informants extant, an expansion of Jakovian Agency activities on this world. It is whispered that the agents on Cadiz are no longer completely under the control of Duchess Nadia, head of the Jakovian Agency from Severus. I attempt no disservice to my mentor in declaring this, but it should come to her attention that such things are said. Still, given the favor Duchess



Salandra presently enjoys with His Majesty the Emperor, it is far from likely that Prince Hiram should make any move against her.

Given the duchess's long absence from her fief and duty, she has placed the responsibility for Cadiz's rule in the capable hands of her onetime confessor, the Bishop of Elibyrge, Marcene Harrison. Bishop Harrison has served the duchess for most of Salandra's life, first as a childhood confessor and then as her representative to the Purgers guild, maintaining Elibyrge's vast sewage network. She also tended to the souls of these odiferous guilders and remains well informed as to the goings-on of their operations. Bishop Harrison is a popular deputy to Duchess Salandra, and her loyalty is absolute. On many occasions, the bishop has been known to extol the piety and faith of her former young charge, often revealing anecdotes of Salandra's young life to demonstrate her essential humanity. As an administrator, Bishop Harrison is extremely effective within the limits of the vast city of Elibyrge, but her power is questionable outside of its boundaries. Herculeum, in particular, is quite independent of her rule, as that city's high proportion of Hironem residents present a factor she is hard-pressed to control.

One notable faction in Sabtah is the minor House Basque, a family granted noble status by House Decados centuries ago. The Basques have had a long scholarly tradition dating back to the time of the Second Republic. Among the Basque family were notable engineers, historians, scientists and lawyers, but with the Fall, they signed Generational Contracts to ensure the protection of their offspring by House Decados. The Basques' tradition of high education continued, however, and the family incorporated itself into the Decados Genetech Cartel, eventually rising to the status of freemen. During the first Emperor Wars, the Basques gained their present renown as natural combat pilots, enhanced by their scholarly upbringing, and served with honor on the Li Halan and Van Gelder fronts, earning hereditary knighthood. Head of the small house is Karlus Basque, a veteran fighter pilot of the early Emperor Wars during the time of Darius Hawkwood, and an able think machine technician trained by the Supreme Order of Engineers. House Basque holds small fiefs in most of northern Sabtah, but it holds a disproportionate amount of influence in Herculeum, where a diplomatic marriage into the local Liu Scraver family has proven quite beneficial.

Elibyrge

Capital city of the planet, Elibyrge might more precisely be described as two cities at once. The first and most visible is the central core, the densely populated remainder of the Second Republican spires that once spanned the region, housing the planetary spaceport, agora, archdiocese, and the Ducal Manse. This region has abundant power, plumbing

and other high-tech conveniences, products of a supremely efficient network of machinery built by the Second Republic specifically to require little maintenance. Even after a thousand years, Elibyrge still boasts the most advanced urban infrastructure of any city within a jump's distance, excepting only the unknown Vau cities on Vrill-Ya and Manitou. Here, only the poorest of serfs or the homeless lack quick and inexpensive access to such utilities, which are beyond the means of even most freemen in Cadiz's other cities. The Purgers guild maintains these systems in a cooperative effort with the local Energy Cartel and the Supreme Order of Engineers, all coordinated by the Harrison Scraver family. Pristine Second Republic architecture is kept clean of overgrowth and decay, making central Elibyrge one of the most beautiful cities in the Known Worlds.

Beyond the tall walls surrounding the city core is the vast suburban sprawl, created long ago to house the throngs of citizens necessary to run the vast diplomatic and xenological machinery of Vau relations. Now sparsely populated and much reclaimed by the wilderness, outer Elibyrge is a confusing mishmash of maxicrete and greenery, of elegance and ruin. Inhabited mostly by peasants, this is the only region in Sabtah that equates to a pastoral countryside. None of the luxuries of the core exist in this region, except those that can be stolen. Many small communities do just that, accessing the sewage and power systems to glean unnoticed services. My Scraver aide, Mr. DiCaprio, informs me that his guild likely offers such services to the peasantry against local Church law, but since this supplementary income has retrained any increase in Scraver fees to the central core, my house has likely tolerated it for some time.

Scattered about the edges of Elibyrge are numerous small Van Gelder estates, the bulk of their holdings apart from those on Malignatius. These fiefs vary immensely in prosperity and security, from those barely surviving in the face of urban brigands, to those enjoying solid defenses and economic security. Mostly agricultural, some of these lands have declined due to the global climatic change while others have benefited, creating considerable political infighting in House Van Gelder. Although the notorious Van Gelder methods of infiltration and subterfuge have been employed within the house itself, they have often proven far more useful in pitting local turf lords against each other, away from Van Gelder-ruled sections of the city. The most powerful member of the family on the planet is Baroness Eldanna Van Gelder, who has ably managed disputes between her relatives — or minimized collateral damage when resolutions could not be reached.

At the northern edge of the city limits, situated squarely at the strategic Edom's Isthmus, a large community has developed around the local Amalthean hospital and seminary, the largest such in all the Decados realms. Tending to hu-



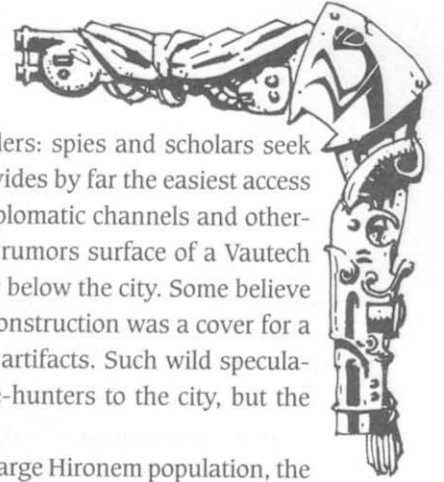
mans and aliens alike, the Amaltheans have become the *de facto* rulers of the region, tolerated by Bishop Harrison and staunchly supported by House Basque. Administrating the community is Brother Raul Cruz, formerly an Avestite and an agent of the Inquisitorial Synod. Brother Raul is known both for compassion and courage, having defended his community several times from armed bandits. A year ago, a squad of Decados Screaming Dervishes, their minds lost to their Urges, attempted to assassinate Brother Raul. None of the attackers survived.

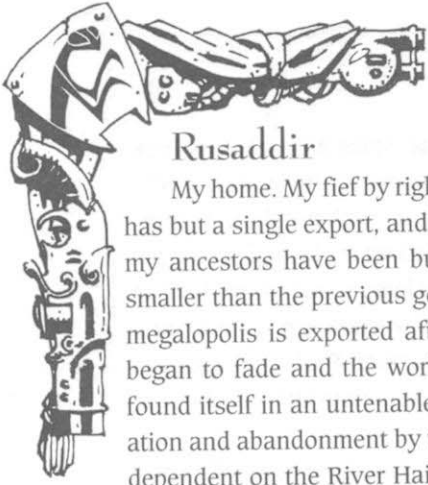
Herculeum

Herculeum straddles both sides of the Bastetan Canal, bordering the long wall of Turaz along the Baria Peninsula, still contested between Houses Li Halan and Basque. This megalopolis was originally constructed to be a coastal resort city, with easy access to the novel alien reservation to the north. Herculeum possesses its own spaceport, though it is little used and minimally maintained by the Li Halan. Herculeum is a feat of aquatic engineering, extending both above and below the ocean surface, with support pillars all the way to the sea floor a kilometer below. Since its construction, the rising tides have put much of the ancient city underwater, although some sections are still habitable, having been built with such an eventuality in mind. Herculeum's tourist industry is no longer what it once was, but the city

still attracts its share of travelers: spies and scholars seek the Hironem, and this city provides by far the easiest access to Turaz, both via standard diplomatic channels and otherwise. Additionally, occasional rumors surface of a Vautech cache buried in the ocean floor below the city. Some believe the true purpose of the city's construction was a cover for a research facility studying Vau artifacts. Such wild speculations bring their own treasure-hunters to the city, but the wise pay them no heed.

Herculeum itself boasts a large Hironem population, the largest on the planet outside of their reservation. Due to their proximity to the realm of their God-King, these aliens have retained far more of their traditional customs than those spread elsewhere across the planet. The traditional caste system remains intact, and managed to integrate itself into the mixed human-alien society. Sibanzi serve as advisors to noble courts and as community leaders for their people. Warriors are often found in house militias in segregated units, carrying out peacekeeping duties alongside human soldiers. Makers provide their wares to both human and Hironem customers, and Illu have been noted among the Purgers and Scravers guilds. Aside from the occasional minor brawl, inter-species strife is rare, for House Basque keeps most rogues in line by employing Scraver-style tactics to good effect.





Rusaddir

My home. My fief by right. My poor, dying city. Rusaddir has but a single export, and that is Rusaddir. For centuries, my ancestors have been but stewards, each ruling a city smaller than the previous generation's, as one piece of this megalopolis is exported after another. When Cadiz's sun began to fade and the world's climate changed, Rusaddir found itself in an untenable position. The fiasco of its creation and abandonment by the Second Republic left the city dependent on the River Haitak for its entire existence. The Haitak once brought fertile soil with its yearly flood, but now it brings nothing but toxins from the fringes of Herculeum and Elibyrge. Peasants die daily from the water they drink and from the grueling work of dismantling their ancient homes for export as building materials on other worlds. Conditions here are so horrendous that the peasants willingly sell themselves into slavery to the Muster in the hopes of passage off-world and eventual escape.

Administrating this tragedy is Baron Fyodor Sharn, a cousin to the Count of Pandemonium. The baron gained his fief by virtue of his administrative experience in the Carpathian mining industry, none of which is properly applicable here. Most of the time, the baron can be found among the social whirl of Elibyrge, while a succession of short-lived Muster guildmembers administers his fief. They are invariably terminated when the baron becomes dissatisfied with an aspect of their work, be it slow output, high costs, excessive corruption or even worker discontent. I have maintained some connections to Rusaddir's security apparatus despite my exile, and believe that I can be of some service in solving the city's problems.

Abdera

A vast urban sprawl lost in chaos, Abdera has been without central rule since the days of the first Emperor Wars, when Van Gelder orbital bombardment destroyed the administrative core of the city. Its ancient spaceport facilities were left to ruin, to be used only infrequently by unsavory elements of humanity. Various dukes and duchesses of Cadiz have periodically attempted to rebuild and restore order in this city, with little success. Abdera has become a sea of minor fiefs, petty Hironem strongholds and criminal and psychic safehouses, all divided by largely uninhabited urban wastes. Neither the Church nor the guilds have much of a presence in Abdera, save for Scraver archeological expeditions and a few brave Amalthean missions. There are constant roving groups of bandits, both human and alien, and the region is often compared to the farthest peripheries of Elibyrge. If any one group rules Abdera it is the Castenda branch of the Hazat, who gained a great deal of influence in the region during the Emperor Wars.

Malaca Nova

Over 2000 years ago, Malaca Nova was to be the greatest island resort of the Second Republic's ambassadorial world to the Vau. Instead, it has been reduced to nothing. Malaca Nova never had a large indigenous population and this was further reduced by House Gloucester, which decimated it in a violent land-grab. The last Hironem here were deported by the Second Republic during its ill-fated planetary development program. The beautiful coastal cities were barely inhabited and far from complete when the Republic abandoned the world, and the islands themselves contained little of interest to House Decados. With no landing facilities and its distance from the planetary capital at Elibyrge, Malaca Nova was far too remote for any redevelopment to be cost-effective. Even the Scravers are uninterested in the Second Republican ruins, as similar ruins can be explored and salvaged far more easily from the megalopoli of Sabtah.

And so the islands were abandoned, their few human inhabitants allowed to descend into primitivism and ignorance. The only signs of civilization are a few small noble retreats, mostly belonging to the Li Halan and Van Gelders. An Orthodox Church mission exists and attempts to spread the Prophet's word among these primitives, but usually spreads only diseases among a people too long sundered from the rest of humanity. From what I understand from Brother Ricardo's conversations with the local priest, their religion seems to be an animistic debasement of the Prophet's teachings, dimly remembered down the millennia of isolation. Still, their tribal artwork bears disturbing imagery that could be ascribed to Vau influence. Brother Ricardo and I agree that an Inquisitorial inspection might be in order.

Cymru and Zembla

The two polar regions of Cadiz have been little explored over the centuries. All parties — human and alien — summarily judged them worthless. Cymru, the northern polar region, is connected via land bridges to both Murciyah and Sabtah, while Zembla, the southern pole, is an isolated continent. Since the creation of the Vau Embassy on the antarctic continent of Thule on Byzantium Secundus, a great many prospectors, field researchers and others have scoured Cadiz's icecaps for traces of any similar installations on this planet. No traces of the Vau were discovered, but fossil fuel deposits have been revealed in both regions. Seizing direct control of the situation, Prince Hiram himself has opened a bidding war between several off-world factions for mining privileges to these finds. Interested parties include the Muster, Scravers, Houses Justinian and Juandaastas, and several minor guilds. It is likely that these two regions shall be welcoming new arrivals quite soon.

Other Holdings

Manitou

Ah, Manitou! Beyond the Severan fortress-cities there are few locales with such a variety of sights to behold, people to meet and tastes to savor. Such a world as it is, there is little wonder that House Decados has had no small hand in its development. It was we who defended Manitou during the early conflicts following First Contact with the Vau, and we who led Manitou in revolt against the Second Republic during the time of the Fall. House Decados defended Manitou's people against Li Halan exploitation during the Emperor Wars of Vladimir Alecto, and House Decados remains the most powerful noble house on the planet to this very day. The Decados value their lands here for the privacy they grant, beyond the harsh scrutiny of the Inquisition, and for the strange and wonderful peoples and aliens residing on the world. I think that even the Vau must love Manitou, for they have chosen to share it with us freely and mingle with humanity as on no other planet in the universe.

I cannot pretend impartiality: I have fallen in love with this world as well as on this world. When I began my quest, Prince Hiram promised me the lands that now lie before me, upon my departure from the Emperor's service. It is a green and verdant valley in a beautifully strange forest, with a shimmering river waiting to bear my name: the River of Clemency. I shall have a small manse, self-sufficient with good facilities, only two days' ride to the planetary spaceport and its surrounding communities, which serve as the only semblance of central government on this frontier world. And I have met *her*... and her name is Shaia.

Shaia is a pagan, proud and bold, with traditions harking to before the foundation of Mother Church herself, but I cannot fault her for that. Her people are nomads, wandering between human and Vau lands with impunity, raiding and trading in items they can barely comprehend. Shaia has led her band since the death of her elder sister, killed in a territorial dispute with a psychic coven in some unknown land years ago, and she is a warrior, given power by her god Vritra. Her band surprised my party on our way from my future holdings and we were captured without so much as a blaster shot. But Shaia was offended by the metal in Sir Qinto's visage and took it from him, along with his life. She would have seen us all killed but for the taste of Selchakah I gave her, and then she was mine forever. Panceator help

me, when this volume is complete I shall return here, claim my lands and bring this pagan into the Church as my bride. As for my friend Qinto, I shall miss him dearly, but I know that the best part of him shall always be with me.

Pandemonium and Iver

Pandemonium has been much in the public eye of late, being the site of numerous dramatic revelations concerning the nearby Lost World of Iver and the survival of the ancient House Chauki. As such, I feel little need to repeat information already widely known, of a world little worth visiting save for pilgrimages to its magnificent cathedral, still under construction in the badlands outside the Hub.

Of greater import is Iver itself. On this subject I can unfortunately report very little with certainty — Inquisitorial frigates guarded the egress from Iver's jumpgate, entirely unwilling to allow my ship passage. After rudely boarding and searching my vessel, these fanatics took offense to the presence of certain Decados cultural items intended for my personal use, and then had the audacity to imply that I, a knight of the Empire, might bear unsavory intentions toward Iver, as though I were some lowly mendicant! I urge the Emperor and the Order of the Phoenix to note the poor attitude of these Churchmen toward the Empire and its representatives. Thus, I am reduced to rumor until some Questing Knight enjoys a greater success than I in gaining access to this long-sundered world.

House Decados has laid adamant claim to Iver since its discovery, as its only entry lies via the jumpgate in the Decados system of Pandemonium. In particular, Count Enis Sharn has been eagerly hoping to recoup some of the losses Pandemonium has inflicted upon him by making a new Decados fief of the planet, and he has considerable support among some of the lesser Decados families. Furthermore, the count and his allies hope to protect the world against inevitable Hazat aggression as they seek to destroy the last traces of the Chauki lineage. From all reports, Iver is troubled indeed, suffering from widespread Republicanism and a heretical sect in control of the planetary diocese. Its noble rulers are pressed by the bloodthirsty Hazat and by the planet's senate, which has thrived in the face of all political logic. For its own good, the last of House Chauki must take shelter under the Mantis's wing, and together wisely rule this strange world in the name of the Emperor.

Decados

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