

PLAYERS' INTRODUCTION

TO

FLAT BLACK

A science-fiction setting
for RPG adventures and campaigns
on a thousand exotic worlds

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GENRE

Flat Black is a setting for science fiction role-playing games. It was designed for SF adventures on exotic planets with idiosyncratic human societies that provide distinctive environments and present unique challenges. In a typical adventure the player characters come to an unfamiliar world for some purpose such as an investigation, mission, or heist. The world's social and physical oddities become apparent through a series of strange incidents and colourful encounters. They present obstacles and a chance to explore. The PCs first struggle with the local peculiarities, then come to understand them, and at last adapt to, circumvent, or exploit them to overcome their opposition and achieve their goal.

The player characters in a *Flat Black* campaign may be ordinary decent people who get shenanigans thrust upon them. Or they may be professionals of skulduggery possessing complementary sets of very particular skills. Either way they rely on skill and resourcefulness in their adventures, not on psychic powers. They use futuristic equipment, tools, and weapons, but not overwhelming handwavium such as teleporters, spy-rays, or stun beams. They deal with—or are—humans and parahumans who behave strangely for cultural reasons, rather than AI robots or all-but-human aliens. They take part in personal exploits such as investigations, capers, clandestine ops, spying, troubleshooting in the field: thrillers, and mysteries rather than naval operations in space. *Flat Black* is not for space opera but for planetary adventure.

ASTROGRAPHY

The place of *Flat Black* is the region within 175 light-years of Sol and the ruins of Earth. This sphere contains a thousand planets and moons inhabited by humans and parahumans, besides habitats in space. A few of

these worlds have alien sophonts living on them, but these “autochthones” are disadvantaged in technology and economic development, and are as un-humanlike as octopuses or starfish.

The region within 70 light-years of Sol is called “the **Core**”. It contains the 68 worlds that were settled first and had most time to attract settlers, and undergo population growth and economic development, before Earth was destroyed. Half are rich and advanced; the rest are more or less poor and backward, but seldom underpopulated.

Between 70 and 145 light-years from Sol is the **Periphery**. It contains 557 worlds settled from Earth—later and over shorter spans than the Core worlds were. Less populous and developed when Earth was destroyed, worlds of the Periphery tend still to be backward and sparsely-populated.

Beyond 145 light-years from Sol is the **Fringe**, which contains 375 worlds settled within the last fifty years. They have frontiersy immigrant societies and most are growing rapidly.

Interstellar travel occurs at about 1,000 times the speed of light, so it typically takes 5–6 days to go from a world to its nearest neighbour, and nine weeks from the centre to the frontier of settlement.

HISTORY

The date is 606 *ab Tellurae destructa*, which is equivalent to AD 2959.

AD 2095–2353 was the **Age of Migration**. Pioneers and settlers from Earth travelled to other star systems to establish and settle colonies on a wide range of schemes. Their colony ships were propelled at the speed of light by “flingers” that remained behind; they had no faster-than-light transport or communications.

On the 18th of April 2353 **Earth was destroyed** by a catalytic thermonuclear (CT) explosion. No-one knows what caused it, but a disastrous experiment in FTL propulsion is plausible.

1–342 ATD was the **Age of Isolation**. After receiving their last settlers and supplies from Earth (which took decades to arrive at the more distant worlds), colonies flourished or struggled alone. They developed social and political idiosyncrasies, and let their roots on Earth fade into history

In 342 ATD Tomito **Eichberger**, a physicist of of the colony Mayflower (Chi Draconis V), **invented a faster-than-light drive** for starships. He rapidly grew very rich from trade.

370–432 ATD was the **Age of Piracy**. “Pirates” in starships with knock-off Eichberger drives competed in trade and also did a lot of very damaging things to vulnerable colonies. In 417 Eichberger vested his fortune in a foundation to stop the abuses and repair the damage. The Eichberger Foundation formed a Space Patrol and a Bounty Hunters’ Agency.

In 431 a pirate named Jorj Bertillon **destroyed Mayflower** with a catalytic thermonuclear warhead. In 432 the Space Patrol retaliated, destroying Bertillon’s base of power, the colony Orinoco, with a CT warhead.

431–495 ATD was the **Formation Wars**, which ended in a stalemate. In 495 the Foundation and the leading colonies signed the Treaty of Luna, which established the Empire to rule space and prevent future wars, mass killings, and abuses of FTL travel.

110 years later, the Empire is accepted as the legitimate government of interstellar space, but the colonies jealously guard their right of independent self-determination.

TECHNOLOGY

Flat Black has limited technology based mostly on a projection of known science. There are no psychic powers, immaterial minds, energy beings, transcendence, teleportation, force-fields, spy-rays, sleep beams, or solid

“holograms”. “True” AI, brain copying, mind simulation, and treatments that change an adult’s body plan are technically feasible but not available commercially, because there isn’t enough demand to make them affordably.

On the other hand there are two sci-fi enabling devices: an **Eichberger drive** allows a starship to travel at 1,000 times the speed of light; a **catalytic thermonuclear (CT) bomb** destroys a world by making its air and water undergo nuclear fusion.

Every colony, even the poorest, has access to a vast legacy of **off-patent inventions and designs** from Old Earth. Most products are made to standard designs using standard parts; different brands’ products are much the same.

There are **no matter compilers**, and versatile nano-fabricators are prohibitively slow. Intricate components are printed in layers by a succession of jigs, like stereotype printing. This manufacturing is cheap, but only for huge production runs. It’s used to make standard components for assembly.

The nanomachines that assemble designer molecules are effectively artificial enzymes &c. Microscopic robots are effectively designer bacteria. They are more efficient and precise than natural ones, but subject to similar limitations. **Nanotechnology is biotechnology.**

Computers, operating systems, and digital networks have been mature technology for nine hundred years. System and network security has won out over remote crackers, and encoders have beaten decoders in cryptography, but if a black hat gets physical access to your computer or your code keys they can still read everything. The high-tech successor of a smart-phone and personal computer is almost ubiquitous even on rather poor worlds. They sit in the breast pockets of rather ordinary people, running digital assistants/companions that listen with a microphone and

watch through the camera, and have been constantly updating for all their owners' adult lives.

Mental function turns out to consist not of applying a single faculty of intelligence to different tasks, but of assembling separate cognitive processes for each task from a toolbox of cognitive faculties. **Artificial intelligences** are designed for various perceptual, motor, analytical, strategic, and design purposes. The engineers never find that this calls for the same array of cognitive faculties that evolved to flourish in the human ancestral environment. Consequently, there are no AIs that are the least bit humanlike, even in humanoid robots.

Agriculture employs designer crop plants, deep-rooted perennials that function as solar-powered nanotech chemical engineering factories. Plants produce foodstuffs, drugs, dyes, adhesives, fuels, high-spec fibres, and feedstocks for chemical industry, and present packets or spools on stalks for easy harvesting. Livestock is best thought of as biological robots, though it includes some types that “harvest crops” by grazing, and grow masses of meat that can be removed without harming them.

Tissues, organs, and members for use in surgical grafting may be made by 3-D printing with cultured cells and other material. The same process can be used to make **biorobots**: biological machines that were made, not grown. The more sophisticated approach is to design the ontogeny for an **artificial organism** to grow from a single cell, encode that in DNA, insert it into a zygote, and gestate the robot in an **exowomb**. That's more difficult, but a cheaper way to produce large production runs.

Surgery often involves grafting organs or members made by 3-D tissue printing. It is capable of repairing any non-fatal injury, and is used for elective **body modification**. Giving people horns, claws, or scales is superficial. Surgery can change the the size and form of body parts; sex reassignment is completely satisfactory. But attempts to change the body

plan—e.g. to add more limbs or senses—after early infancy don't turn out well, because of sensor and motor limitations in the brain. Few patients are happy to have their brains modified to overcome this hurdle.

Cyborg tools, weapons, and sensors can be implanted, but seldom are. A sensorium jack and a cyborg link have slight advantages over a Visor (AR/VR glasses) and wearable controls; pretty much everything else **works better outside the body**. The only modification that is really common is that players of vigorous sports get their bodies reinforced against impacts and wrenching injuries. Soldiers and police get further reinforcement to protect their circulation, CNS, and vital organs from penetrating, cutting, and concussive injuries. Further protection still is possible, but it is conspicuous and uncomfortable; nearly everyone prefers protective clothing to sub-dermal armour.

Brains, embodying minds, can be assembled synapse by synapse. The technology is used to restore function after brain injuries. It could in principle be used to “wire in” artificial sensory and motor cortex areas for extra limbs, or make a copy of a brain that had been mapped with sufficient resolution. Few legal systems, doctors, or customers believe that such copying offers a continuity of identity. Use of the method is rare.

Neurotech offers a less invasive method of changing people's minds. Guiding fields and carefully-chosen stimuli are used to control drug/nanomachines that adjust synapse potentials. Neurotech is used to treat serious mental illness and “rehabilitate” felons (and dissidents), but many people question that identity survives even that. Less controversially, neurotechn scanners can observe neural function in detail during various tasks and in response to diagnostic stimuli. The person's loyalties, affections, resentments, and a myriad dimensions of personality can be calculated from the results. Reliable, but not quick or cheap, this technology is used for testing recruits when the stakes are high.

Medicine has access to a vast array of very specific drugs, and it is routine work to create a specific antibiotic or synthetic vaccine for a given bacterial or viral pathogen. Routine care and regular treatment with “Eugerione” effectively halves the rate of ageing. In rich societies people take Eugerione from about age twenty, are still able to work at 120, and can survive to 180 or 200. Cutting-edge anagathics has for some years offered an expensive treatment that halts physical ageing completely.

Superficial treatments are available that will semi-permanently suppress the growth of hair on treated skin, or cause it to grow hair of a set length and texture, fur, or wool. Similar treatments can induce and alter the production of skin pigment as desired. Tattoos can be applied by high-res printers. “Skintone” applied by inkjet printers superficially dyes the skin in sometimes brilliant colours.

Designer bacteria etc. are available for the mouth, nasal cavity, gut, vagina, and various areas of the skin. These prevent certain infections and diseases (such as tinea, acne, gastric ulcer, tooth decay, and some STDs), and produce a chosen odour. The gut flora aid digestion, and improve weight control. Such microbiomes require some maintenance, especially after antibiotic treatment.

Many everyday items and interior finishes have **self-cleaning surfaces**. Underwear, linings, and soft furnishings are often made of fibres that destroy dander and micro-organisms, and catalyse toxins, reducing them to simple gases, water, and a trace of salts. This property, especially combined with the actions of cleaning robots, is the curse of crime-scene investigators.

Surveillance systems (where installed) record faces, bodily proportions, and gait for identification. People sometimes wear masks and modify their gait with weights on their wrists and feet and splines across their joints in efforts to prevent recognition.

Interstellar shipping of weapons is banned, so weapons tech is limited by the sophistication of local manufacturing: **archaic weapons** are common on poor worlds. On developed ones they shoot you with lasers, or use electromagnetic small-arms to fire explosives made of high energy-density materials. Indiscriminate weapons and independent armed robots are also banned.

Stun weapons are marginally effective and not really harmless.

Psychoengineering is a discipline based on advanced developmental psychology, used to design curriculums and courses of formative experiences for children. Properly implemented, these promote the formation of the intended character. This doesn't produce robot-like humans, but it is capable of producing strong ethical principles, intense loyalties, and high levels of diligence, resilience, honesty, courage, temperance, humaneness—or the corresponding weaknesses and vices—in a large proportion of people.

Social engineering is a discipline based on advanced economics and social dynamics. Societies and programs of reform can be designed that will work as intended, if they can be implemented.

INTERSTELLAR TRAVEL

Travellers in *Flat Black* get into space in fusion-powered shuttles that use water as a cheap propellant. This is inexpensive (less than five crowns each way, with baggage) where the gravity and escape velocity are low, where constant comings and goings keep the shuttles full and busy, and where the traffic is sufficient to justify the construction of orbital up-ports as well as ground ports to service the shuttles.

The interstellar liners belong to Spaceways, the Imperial interstellar transport monopoly. They are not built to land and cannot take off from a

planet. Ships are kept extremely secure because a stolen or hijacked interstellar ship would be a potential terrorist catastrophe.

Departing orbit, a starship must accelerate to the joint escape velocity of the world and its star, which takes about an hour at half a gee, depending on the masses of the planet and star and the orbit of the planet. On achieving escape velocity the starship engages its Eichberger drive and enters a state in which it is cut off from the rest of the universe, which is called being “in warp”.

Starships in warp cover interstellar distances at about **1,000 times the speed of light**, so journeys take days or weeks. A trip from a colony to its nearest neighbour typically takes five to six days. A trip from the centre to the edge of the human sphere takes nine weeks.

Ships arrive at rest with respect to the destination star, and must take a few hours at half a gee to make orbit around the planet.

Interstellar travel is slow, but not terribly expensive. The fare depends on the stars and worlds, but is typically about $\text{€}(8 + 8/\text{ly})$ in a couchette or shared stateroom. Bunkroom travel costs half that; a luxury suite is quadruple.

People with small incomes are deterred by the fares, people with large wages rates by the travel times. Few travel often. Those who do make up a glamorous social set, the *Cosmopole* or *Demi-monde*. The *Cosmopole* has its own manners and social customs, which are used when travelling and rarely otherwise.

THE COLONIES

There are **a thousand inhabited planets and moons** with a total population of 842 billion. Fewer than a billion people live in space habitats.

The worlds are physically diverse. Their stars range from M0 to A5. **Gravity** ranges from 0.45 g_{\oplus} to 1.58 g_{\oplus} . Average **temperatures** range from -12 °C to 60 °C. **Atmospheres** range from 0.24 bar of 40% O₂ to 11.4 bar of 85% He. The driest world is 8% covered by oceans; the three wettest have less than ½% dry land. Apparent days vary from 10.4 hours to 48 hours; about 100 worlds are tidally locked to their stars so as to have no day and night.

The societies on these worlds are even more diverse. The **oldest is 856 years old**; ten new ones were established last year. Disregarding new worlds with only recent arrivals, **population** ranges from 9.9 million to 21.5 billion, **population density** from 0.044 to 132 people/km².

Different colonies have every known **form of government**: monarchy and dictatorship, aristocracy and oligarchy, isocracy and ochlocracy, direct and representative democracy, feudal and bureaucratic hierarchy, theocracy, plutocratic kleptocracy, anarchy, chaos, and civil war. Many worlds have several colonies on them, each with a separate government and sometimes a distinctive society. The laws vary. Their enforcement varies. Courts vary. Punishments vary.

Different colonies employ every known **type of economy**: hunting and gathering, swiddening, nomadism, pelagic fishing, corvée agriculture, slavery, agricultural and industrial manorialism, market capitalism, redistributive capitalism, distributism, technocratic dirigism, bureaucratic collectivism, syndicalism, post-labour communism and post-labour capitalism. None of them is *the answer*.

The degree of **economic development** varies tremendously. No world is truly low tech—all have at least high-tech crops and the materials and medicines those crops produce—but some amount to extremely poor parts of the ultra-tech economy. The ten poorest colonies can only manage production methods comparable to the workshops of Iron Age craftsmen,

and struggle to afford critical imports. The six most developed worlds (“the Suite”) achieve a division of labour that is only possible with an interstellar market of a hundred billion consumers, and make products more sophisticated than Old Earth ever managed.

Social structures are madly varied. **Families** may be nuclear, or if extended may be matrilineal or patrilineal, polygynous, polyandrous, or based on line or group marriages; they may be different in different social strata, or not exist at all. **Households** may consist of a single family or contain many, or need not be family based at all. In some societies everyone lives in barracks, in others, everyone lives alone. Some colonies have different household types for different social strata, life stages, occupational castes, or genders. On some worlds the **social unit** (in which people participate in social life) is the family or clan, in others the neighbourhood, the workplace, the age association, the occupational guild, or a more-or-less formal club with or without an ostensible main purpose.

Along with structural variation, colonies also have distinctive **quirks and social features**. Some have dress codes. Some are nudist. Many have nudity taboos of various strengths and extents—it may be required (and perhaps sufficient) to wear a veil or mask, or to conceal everything from the neck down. Body modification has an important significance in some cultures; in some it is used to effect a metamorphosis between life stages. Many societies have distinctive sports, crafts, performing arts etc., which may be pervasive. Some colonies have religions—or ritual and ethical systems effectively equivalent to religions. Some have elaborate formal manners. Some have gift-giving customs. Some have duelling codes. Some practice ahimsa. Some practice cannibalism.

Each society has different **values and taboos**, which are often unstated. Where it is expected that people will try to get ahead materially, ambition attracts sympathy; it is a social value. Where it is discreditable to outdo

one's peers or to exceed one's proper station, ambition is a taboo. Societies value or disparage achievement, career, conformity, creativity, fame, grandeur, love, modesty, popularity, power, progeny, reputation, "respect" (i.e. deference), sexual prolificity, sporting prowess, vigour, wealth, wisdom, a "whole" life, a "good" death, a grand tomb.... People strive for what their society values, and expect others to seek them. They disguise and hide breaking taboos.

One universal is **parochialism**. Almost everyone feels that the customs of their people are human nature, and their taboos are moral law. Everyone knows that other worlds and societies exist—they learn about them at school and in sensational media. But most people never take an interstellar trip in their lives, and few travel frequently. Other worlds don't seem important or even feel real; accounts of their customs are mentally filed as trivial exoticism, no more consequential than fantasy.

Colonial Sovereignty

Each inhabited world is home to one or more independent colonies, and each colony has its own government and peculiar institutions. The colonies are sovereign over their territories up to the maximum altitude of aerodynamic flight (the Kármán line), and their governments guard jealousy against any possible attempt by a powerful cosmopolitan interstellar government to reform away their privileges and the colony's way of life. The legislative power of the Empire is vested in the Imperial Senate, where the senators are canny diplomats appointed by colonies' governments to protect their interests. So Imperial officials in colonial territory have only the immunities and authority that the colonial government agrees to or that are provided by an act of the Senate—and the Senate passes few such acts.

What few Imperial laws apply in the colonies are enforced by the Imperial Law Enforcement Authority and Imperial district courts. ILEA is run by an independent commission not subject to the Imperial executive. The judges in each Imperial district court are appointed by the government of the colony that corresponds to their district, to protect its liberties and peculiar institutions.

Colonial Space Habitats

Advanced colonies need space habitats for orbital industry and asteroid mining, and spaceships to serve them. Colonies that rule a whole world (or that are at peace with their neighbours and co-operate on unified orbital traffic control) have a right to place satellites and habitats in orbit around their worlds, and to operate ships within their world's Hill sphere slower than escape speed. Colonial customs and law apply to such ships and within such habitats, but the Imperial Navy gets to inspect them for weapons and FTL drives.

Anything beyond the world's Hill sphere or moving faster its escape speed may be built and operate on Imperial sufferance, with no protection of colonial independence. Ships and their officers require Imperial licences. Habitats require Imperial charters. Such charters routinely provide for self-government under the colonies' laws and customs, but that is a delegation of Imperial jurisdiction, not an extension of the colony. Imperial authorities can forbid obnoxious practices in such habitats and intervene without permission from the Senate.

The Suite

Six colonies are so rich and highly developed, have institutions so favourable to industry and trade, and use interstellar trade so effectively to reach vast markets, that they have been able to exploit economies of scale

wider than were achievable on Old Earth. They make and export products and components that were never commercially available before. Pundits call them “the Suite”.

Aeneas specialises in power generation and storage. **Esbouvier** does ecological engineering and innovative artificial organisms. **Iter** makes special materials, such as ones with micro-electro-mechanical surfaces. **Seeonee** specialises in molecular biology as nanotech. **Tau Ceti** makes cutting-edge photonics: things that emit, absorb, and detect radiation. **Todos Santos** specialises in neurotechnics, psychoengineering, and artificial cognition. The Empire is sometimes considered to be “the transport sector of the Suite”.

The Suite has no institutions nor formal membership. Nevertheless some colonies complain of being excluded from it.

Languages

99% of people speak dialects of Standard, a language that evolved out of international standard business English as the global language on Earth. A few languages that were regional standards in the 23rd century have roles on certain colonies of that early vintage (Arabic on Hegira, Putonghua on Xin Tian Di, Malay on Persatuan) or have clear influences on the dialects there (Hindustani and Bengali on Navabharata, Spanish on Paraíso, Malay on Fureidis, Hebrew on Covenant).

Race

Centuries of intermarriage on Old Earth before and during the Age of Emigration blended the old racial distinctions into a post-racial blur. Some colonies have developed ethnic and racial distinctions of their own, but these are novelties, not survivals of the races and nations of Old Earth. Most differences of racial appearance are the result of historical germ-line

genetic engineering. Some colonies have a designer “type”; some have several distinct parahuman species on them.

Religions

Neuroscience has had a complete explanation of cognitive phenomena for 800 years, so belief in souls or spirits is no longer defensible. That leaves nothing for gods to be, or that might pass to an afterlife. So it is no longer usual for people to profess a frankly religious belief or to adhere to an admitted religion.

Nevertheless, humans still seek transcendental experiences and a sense of community and purpose from congregations, rituals, and dogmas. So many people adhere to ethical systems, political causes, and programs of self-improvement that provide a sense of purpose and moral certainty. And many people take part in congregational singing, dancing, or exercise classes, or attend secular rituals, concerts, or sporting events, for the emotional recharge that those give them.

Money

Most colonies have their own currency, though some do without and some use commodities as money (e.g. gold or silver specie). Most money is digital, even on quite backward worlds, but cash does survive.

The interstellar standard for prices and payment is the **Imperial crown**, which is issued by the Universal Bank. The purchasing power of €1 *in the Suite or Imperial Direct Jurisdiction* is 1 SVU (ForeSight)—about A\$9 at 2020 prices—but real exchange rates vary with development level. A crown is worth much more in poor colonies.

Imperial crowns have value because traders, travellers, and migrants need them to pay freight and fares, and to buy land on new worlds.

Intelligent Autochthones

Twenty-three worlds in the Core and Periphery have surviving populations of “autochthones”: native inhabitants with behaviour at least as sophisticated as palaeolithic humans. 27 worlds had autochthones now extinct. In the Fringe are 44 worlds that were not settled because they have autochthones. Few of these populations are numerous; none is industrial.

Most autochthones are not humanoid in their general body-plan. Biochemically and genetically they are more different from a human than an oak-tree is. Though they think as well as humans, their minds are nothing like human minds. Some members of a few species can get by okay in human society; some even work for the Empire. A few have human friends, but none can have a human lover, and they cannot form mixed families.

COLONIES YOU HAVE HEARD OF

Aeneas

(β Comae Berenices IV). 0.88 D_☉, 0.78 g_☉, 3 °C, 88% water, 0.26 bar. 1.27 billion pop. Economy: 8.5 (the Suite).

People on Aeneas attach themselves to “styles”: fandom groups each associated with a pastime, sports team, band, aesthetic movement.... One's style determines one's costume, grooming, body alterations, social activities, and to some extent social mores, but not place of employment, nor residence.... The crowdscape on Aeneas is a gorgeous mosaic of people in striking dress &c.

Each person receives a “distribution” of vocational training, land, and real or financial capital when they reach adulthood, on which they are expected to support themselves for life. Distributions are of equal value, and adapted to the talents and inclinations of the recipient, but somehow

the offspring of the ruling class tend to get training &c. that will equip them for management and prestigious occupations.

Aeneas is governed on the parliamentary system, with world, regional &c. parliaments selected randomly from “qualified” citizens.

Arcolais

(HD 33866 V). 0.81 D_⊕, 0.88 g_⊕, 8 °C, 85% water, 0.98 bar. 71.9 million pop. Economy: 5.5 (communications).

Arcolais is obsessed with visual arts. By no means everyone is an artist, but art rather than literature or STEM is the core subject at school, galleries are important social spaces, exhibitions are popular events, and the ruling class proclaim their prestige by owning important collections and commissioning major works. Art classes are a common social and spiritual observance; art teachers, gallery owners, critics, and curators form a socially influential hierarchy culminating in the president of the Academy of Art.

The government is a parliamentary republic with limited franchise, unequal representation, and dodgy elections. Office is dominated by the families and protégés of wealthy aristocrats. Politics is marked by an increasingly bitter and unscrupulous struggle to defend the traditional hierarchies against economic and political reform, civil liberties, sex, drugs, free dress, divorce, and *performing* arts.

Beleriand

(Gliese 857 V). 0.81 D_⊕, 0.76 g_⊕, -1 °C, 61% water, 0.89 bar. 441 million pop. Economy: 6.5 (biofab).

Many settlers here used germ-line genemods to make themselves into elves, dwarves, dúnedain, hobbits, merfolk &c. Others contented themselves with surgical modifications. The result was a multiple races not capable of interbreeding safely; these have withdrawn into separate neighbourhoods and districts. Families arrange marriages to ensure safe

breeding and to control inheritances. There is a despised class of interbred “orcs”, many with genetic disorders.

Most wealth is held by the heads of families, with informal conventions governing the support and allowances given to dependents before inheritance. Wages are low and declining, so people find it important to manage their wealth providently, keep the favour of the heads of their families, and marry prudently.

Beleriand is a federal republic with presidential executives, troubled by plutocratic trends. Many government responsibilities are borne remarkably low in the federal hierarchy, by counties and towns.

Esbouvier

(Sigma Boëtis V). 0.68 D_⊕, 0.68 g_⊕, 18 °C, 70% water, 0.90 bar. 4.17 billion pop. Economy: 8.5 (the Suite)

The people of Esbouvier are parahumans of a range of types specialised by occupation and climate. They are bred in exowombs and raised in “development centres”, all engineered to flourish and be happy in the roles they were made to occupy.

There are no families nor marriage on Esbouvier. Accommodations are sybaritic, but all individual, as though everyone lived alone in a luxury hotel room. Conditioning and convention are designed to suppress the formation of couples and to promote participation in group activities and in audiences and congregations. Participative team sports, orchestras, and congregation singing are important on Esbouvier.

Goldendawn

(HD 83517 V). 0.92 D_⊕, 1.04 g_⊕, 8 °C, 72% water, 1.44 bar. 2.22 billion pop. Economy: 7 (MEMS).

Most flourishing of the first tranche of new worlds, opened for settlement in 557 ATD, Goldendawn is coming up for independence next year. Its constitutional convention is unexpectedly contentious. The

decisions made here and the choice of Goldendawn's senator will set interstellar precedents. Shadowy forces from off-world are suspected of interference.

For now Goldendawn is a federal isocratic republic with a diverse society. Immigrants adhere to their native cultures, their children intermarry and are creating an eclectic fusion. Political parties contend over multiculturalism, cultural eclecticism, and the possibility of engineering a new society.

Haudensaunee

(Gliese 827.1 II). 1.28 D_{\oplus} , 1.17 g_{\oplus} , 7 °C, 47% water, 2.20 bar. 895 million pop. Economy: 1.5 (iron age).

Haudensaunee is tide-locked, but cool enough that the sunlit face is temperate. Its people descended from terraformers whose following settlers never arrived. They live mostly on plants and animals that were engineered to proliferate, not to be crops.

In the arable coastlands, peasants engage in manorial agriculture to support monasteries of druggie ascetics. Abbots rule on the claim that they are the directors of the terraforming program. Workers are lodged in dormitories and fed in refectories. Sexual relations are informal. Children are raised in crèches.

Nomad “companies” of the arid hinterland are led by “captains” with “mates” as their deputies and nominated successors. Followers abandon captains to who lead them into misfortune, and join the bands of leaders of repute or found their own. Rich nomads practice polygyny.

Both peoples practise “Action Meditation”, an observance that involves psychedelic drugs, ecstatic dancing and drumming, and dancing on a diagram of moral and spiritual symbols.

Women are repressed in both societies.

Kemet

(58 Eridani IV). 0.77 D_{\oplus} , 0.69 g_{\oplus} , 11 °C, 87% water, 0.78 bar. 1.44 billion pop. Economy: 4 (Industrial Revolution.).

The law on Kemet requires everyone to follow the occupation of their parents; custom enjoins them to marry within their family's occupational group. The resulting castes have withdrawn into separate neighbourhoods and developed distinctive cuisine, costume, jargon etc. Some control valuable economic rights or manage critical inheritances, others are very poor. The administrative and military castes dominate a nominally democratic republic.

People on Kemet set great store in having a lasting memorial to survive their deaths. The very rich spend fortunes on grand mausoleums. Families perform frequent memorial rituals as displays of wealth and piety, and to draw attention to their forebears' glorious tombs.

A secretive religious faction on Kemet believes that the dead in the afterlife are obliged to be the servants of their killers. Fanatical believers murder prolific murderers and other desirable servants to become feudal overlords in the afterlife.

Ladon

(Gliese 728 II). 0.89 D_{\oplus} , 0.87 g_{\oplus} , 24 °C, 22% water, 0.85 bar. 1.92 billion people. Economy: 8 (Old Earth).

Ladon is tide-locked, warm, and dry. Crops require an exotic biochemistry to flourish on the sunlit face. The people live in the twilight zone or in air-conditioned homesteads and "plexes".

The land and robot factories on Ladon belong to a state collective, which provides a comfortable income to all members. Only a minority of people choose to work, though the wages are fairly high. Society is separating into two mutually contemptuous classes: "bludgers" and "drudgers". Drudgers control the powerful civil service.

Most bludgers on Ladon occupy their time with dilettantism, scholarship, and sports, and participate in creative collaborations. A large minority are given to obsessive fandom and grotesque fads. A significant number indulge in reckless thrill-seeking, vandalism, assault, and even rape, out of sheer anomie.

Drudgers are developing an exclusive society with behavioural shibboleths, and withdrawing to working-class neighbourhoods that are inaccessible by public transport. They invest their savings off-world.

Lowrie

(HD 1893 III). 0.99 D_{\oplus} , 0.97 g_{\oplus} , 21 °C, 55% water, 0.64 bar. 9.9 million pop. Economy: 2.5 (mediæval).

Following the collapse of its republic and half a generation of coups and civil war. Lowrie is ruled by a dictator, Melanie Komao. Slavery has been abolished, landed estates confiscated and distributed among the former slaves and serfs who worked them. Quite a lot of wealth has stuck to the fingers of Komao's key supporters, who are just emerging as a new ruling class.

The year of Lowrie is 0.586 Earth years, but a community can only hold the grand midsummer rite of “prom” when a youth of each sex has turned thirty since the last prom. A set of people who came of age at the same prom is called a “form”. Forms are a traditional unit of mutual assistance and joint responsibility on Lowrie.

Lowrieans practice nudism except where practicality requires clothes, value physical beauty, and wear tattoos to commemorate important experiences. Since the revolution all adults have worn dirks—going armed was formerly a privilege of the nobility. Lowrieans greatly admire the ability to endure pain; there are contests....

The assistance services of the Empire's Colonial Office have large projects on Lowrie, extending the arable land, and establishing a teaching hospital and agricultural, engineering, and teachers' colleges.

Maldives

(HD 83983 IIb). 0.56 D_{\oplus} , 0.49 g_{\oplus} , 4 °C, 85% water, 0.51 bar. 35.4 million pop. Economy: 5 (electronics).

The only inhabited moon in the human sphere, Maldives is one of the first tranche of colonies settled after the Compromise of '84, Maldives is being set up to give future support to the Colonies' Rights faction in the Senate. Ostensibly inspired by Plato's Republic, it is being set up to become a rigidly stratified plutocratic oligarchy reinforced with psychoengineering in class-segregated schools.

For now, Maldives is a technocratic command economy ruled by the Maldives Terraformation Co., and functioning as a place of exile for several repressive colonies. Over half the immigrants are convicts (including dissidents) being "rehabilitated" as indentured workers. The managers are intent on establishing wide estates and rich industrial fiefs. Their high-handed behaviour annoys free settlers and the native-born, who grow resentful.

Margulis

(HD 361 IV). 1.15 D_{\oplus} , 0.93 g_{\oplus} , 20 °C, 55% water, 0.64 bar. 21.5 billion pop. Economy: 7 (MEMS).

Margulis is thickly set with "arcologies", each devoted to a communal factory or farm, and occupied by a "sorority" of related women with their husbands and children. Common sororities are run by senior women with their husbands as executive officers. Each parsonage, deanery, diocese, province, primacy, realm, and the globe itself is ruled by the husbands of its ruling sorority. The parson, dean, bishop, archbishop, primate, patriarch,

or pontiff of a ruling family appoints one of his sons-in-law (&c.) “camerlengo” to be his deputy and designated successor.

Sororities are exogamous. Young men either make unambitious local marriages or spend some years acquiring the skills and fame that will make them eligible husbands for the rich and powerful. Men are driven to be flamboyant, competitive, and masterly; women, to be elegant, prudent, and sagacious.

Nahal

(HD223084 IV). 0.87 D_{\oplus} , 0.85 g_{\oplus} , 20 °C, 90% water, 1.02 bar. 344 million pop. Economy: 4 (Industrial Revolution.)

Nahal is a lawless anarchy: even killing is permitted if it is done openly. Peace and liberty are maintained by the custom of shooting frauds, thieves, tyrants, and anyone who resorts to force without just cause. About 15% of deaths result from homicide.

Owing to genetic engineering by the first settlers about 80% of boys born on Nahal are hard to distinguish from girls until puberty. Nahalese put little stock in male or female sex. Instead their two gender roles are (1) the tattooed, armed, and outgoing “reb” who stakes his life on his good name, and risks being shot for respect, and (2) the meek and non-combatant “strey”, lacking tattoos and sidearm, whose life is not at stake and whose place is in the home. Both roles are open to any sex. Nahalese profess not to care about the sex of romantic partners, but consider sexual conduct between two rebs perverted.

Shipping and pelagic fishing are prestigious sources of wealth on Nahal. Dashing sea-captains and daring seamen are admired.

Navabharata

(β Hydri VI, Central Sector). 1.06 D_{\oplus} , 0.96 g_{\oplus} , 27 °C, 80% water, 1.53 bar. 1.37 billion pop. Economy: 3.5 (Enlightenment).

Young adults of the ruling class on Navabharata travel to more advanced worlds for professional training and to get themselves modified into striking forms. Returning home, they rule as gods and perform routine miracles with high-tech skills and imported equipment, each divine dynasty running a tiny country with a manorial economy.

The working class worship their rulers with elaborate and gorgeous ritual. But in times of misfortune, or when their lords grow feeble, they think it proper to kill and eat their failing gods. Some realms have a ritual proof of fitness or some form of “flight of the king”. Some realms allow a substitutional sacrifice, or the gods perform one deceitfully. Sometimes rebels actually eat the rich.

New Fujian

(HD 215812 IV). 0.64 D_⊕, 0.61 g_⊕, 29 °C, 80% water, 0.98 bar. 1.05 billion pop. Economy: 6.5 (biofab)

People on New Fujian use special treatments and body modification to put themselves through “metamorphoses” defining six life stages with corresponding social roles: háizi, instar, imago, junior, senior, héshang. A family consists of a senior married to a junior, their háizi children, and an imago of the same sex as the senior serving as apprentice spouse. Instars live in boarding schools, héshang are monks.

All the land and most of the capital belong to monasteries. The monasteries run local governments, supplying education and training, medical services, courts, roads &c. free of charge, while the monks work as teachers, judges, and government officials. Wealthy, prestigious monasteries accept applicants who have fulfilled their earlier roles with merit.

New Fujianese have enough medical tech to favour some very violent sports, such as live-blade knife fighting. Bouts are sometimes eroticised.

Paradise V

(HD 214385 IV). 0.86 D_{\oplus} , 0.82 g_{\oplus} , 17 °C, 97% water, 0.69 bar. 972 million pop. Economy: 6 (photonics).

The people of Paradise V are nuts for a healthy lifestyle, physical training, and sports. They adore a toned athletic physique, but scorn any “cheating” means of achieving one. Everyone is expected to be always in strenuous training, except when injured.

Intense romantic friendships with “mates” of the same sex are expected. Marriage, is a pragmatic family affair, strictly heterosexual, in which tender but not passionate love is expected to develop.

This is a world of densely-settled islands (and much maritime activity). Each island or group has an elected chieftain as its ceremonial monarch. The Paramount Chief, appoints a chieftain of opposite sex and a different home island to be his or her successor. The governments are parliamentary.

Seeonee

(v-2 Lupi IV). 0.54 D_{\oplus} , 0.49 g_{\oplus} , 7 °C, 80% water, 0.65 bar. 1.88 billion pop. Economy: 8.5 (the Suite)

Society on Seeonee is made up of a multitude of formal cliques, to which an applicant must be elected by the members. New cliques may be formed freely, but most important property belongs to old ones. Youth cliques are locally based and supervised by adults. Adults’ cliques amount to student bodies, faculties, the work-forces of particular enterprises or departments, ship’s crews, repertory companies, or even paramilitary units. But they are not just occupational: cliques conduct social events and regular congregational activities.

Most cliques have formal and traditional qualifications for membership. The career of an ambitious person consists of acquiring and demonstrating the abilities, accomplishments, and character traits required by a

succession of increasingly wealthy and powerful cliques. Cliques in government amount to a self-perpetuating meritocratic technocracy.

The people of Seeonee set great store by physical beauty. They favour sports and games that involve pitting oneself or a group against a challenge; competitive sports are less prominent..

Sehausie

(HD 217343 IV). 0.93 D_{\oplus} , 0.98 g_{\oplus} , 23 °C, 70% water, 0.93 bar. 749 million pop. Economy: 2.5 (mediaeval).

The Imperial Sector HQ for Pisces Austrinus Sector orbits Sehausie. That has made the former backwater into something of a hub. The monarchy, once feeble, is using the rent it receives for Imperial marines bases to increase its power at the expense of the aristocracy. Other spending enriches the commercial and industrial middle class, and tends to raise wages.

Society on Sehausie is strongly stratified, with sumptuary laws grading diet, the size and style of homes, the degree of nudity and richness of ornament, the wearing of perfumes, and the carrying of weapons. Aristocrats maintain a pretence of being warrior-troubadours; they cling to ancient privileges and are prone to punish impertinence with violence.

Succession to estates and feudal offices is tanistic (incumbents nominate their successors from among candidates qualified by birth) and unrestricted by sex or gender. Households are often polyamorous, but ought not to include members of widely different social level.

Many important customs on Sehausie involve the use of psychedelic drugs to produce oracular dreams and trances, or combined with music, dance, and ceremony to induce shared transcendental states.

Sparta

(Gliese 4291 III). 0.83 D_{\oplus} , 1.0 g_{\oplus} , 18 °C, 78% water, 1.8 bar. 660 million pop. Economy: 4.0 (Industrial Revolution).

On Sparta women and their dependent children form matrilineal *communes*, which occupy large “homesteads”, amounting sometimes to palaces. Boys are adopted during adolescence into *unions* of unrelated men, some itinerant and others occupying “temporary” structures in interstitial locations. Cohabitation of men and women is forbidden, and long-term relations are taboo. Men dress gorgeously, and display their charms and prowess (and gifts they might give) like lekking grouse. Women may accept such offers as they choose, ostensibly only for one-night stands.

Land belongs to communes, which subsist on rents, agriculture, etc. Poor communes must add value to their produce by labour, and may resort to tacit prostitution. Fishing, commerce, skilled trades, and professional occupations belong to particular unions, many of which own fishing grounds, local monopolies, and other valuable privileges. Some unions amount to trade guilds, others to large firms, and others to departments of the government. Poor unions must supply labour for farming and mining.

Tau Ceti

(τ Ceti III). 0.87 D_{\oplus} , 0.79 g_{\oplus} , 11 °C, 84% water, 0.64 bar. 5.9 billion pop. Economy: 8.5 (the Suite).

First colony established, Tau Ceti is noted for high culture, stylish dress, and gourmet cuisine. Every neighbourhood has a cultural institution, such as a theatre or museum, with a venerable tradition. The University of Eridu on Tau Ceti is the oldest in the universe, most famous among Tau Ceti’s universities of interstellar fame.

Tau Cetians are under social pressure to take part in local cultural activities and to do everything (including strive and achieve) a “just right” amount: neither more nor less than their neighbours. Tau Ceti taxes the income of land and capital and pays a large wage supplement to workers under 80, beside providing lavish public services. Saving for retirement is

compulsory. Life on Tau Ceti is safe and comfortable, but constrained and unexciting.

By a legal fiction there are eight independent colonies on Tau Ceti with different forms of government. In fact the world is governed by a confederation of technocratic bureaucracies.

Todos Santos

(ψ -5 Aurigae V). 0.73 D_{\oplus} , 0.75 g_{\oplus} , 13 °C, 76% water, 0.74 bar. 2.87 billion pop. Economy: 8.5 (the Suite).

On Todos Santos people use neurotechnics freely to make themselves honest, diligent, resilient, ethical etc. It is normal to display certified personality profiles to prospective lovers, employers, and voters. The strict ethics of Todos Santos doctors, lawyers, counsellors, psychotechs, psychoengineers, social engineers &c. are famous, and make them highly employable.

Todos Santos is a unitary representative republic with a highly taxed market economy and a universal basic income. People work hard without high wages because they are just that diligent. Todos Santos politicians are honest and public-spirited: candidates publish certificates.

Toutatis

(HD 210144 IV). 0.56 D_{\oplus} , 0.50 g_{\oplus} , 13 °C, 90% water, 0.34 bar. 206 million pop. Economy: 4 (Industrial Revolution.).

A spin:orbit resonance gives Toutatis an apparent day of 8,159 hours. The polar regions' steady twilight favour permanent settlement and industry. Elsewhere day and night are as long as seasons, hot and cold, favouring migratory plantation agriculture.

Patriarchal extended families occupy large climate-proof homesteads, or more often ships in which the family migrates from harvest to harvest. The patriarchs have despotic powers, arranging marriages and even ordering the exposure of infants. Poor and weak families owe tribute and loyalty to

more powerful ones in a feudal hierarchy, supporting each other in frequent disputes and brawls over land and harvest, fish-traps, insults, and acts of piracy.

Toutatis is in the throes of drastic change. Over fifty years King Sejonna II “the Rescuer” has “re”-imposed a bureaucratic monarchy on the former agrarian feudalism, “recovering” and “restoring” royal revenues and courts. Slavery has been abolished, an urban working class is developing, merchants and industrialists are growing rich. The feudal magnates are agitated, and threaten resistance to the king and his professional navy and army.

THE EMPIRE

The Empire was founded 110 years ago by the **Treaty of Luna**, to govern space, promote trade, stop war and mass killings, and prevent abuse of FTL travel. It subsumed the assets and staff of the earlier Eichberger Foundation; critics see it as the Foundation triumphant over the colonies. The Imperial Senate was intended to control the executive by the power of the pursestrings, but it never enacted a tax nor passed an appropriation. Lacking tax revenues, the Imperial government supports itself on the profits of the **Eichberger Trust**, which owns monopolies on interstellar transport and the development of new worlds for real estate, besides lucrative interests in banking, interstellar commerce, and orbital manufacturing. This revenue gives the executive an unintended independence.

The executive power of the Empire is vested in the **Imperial Council**, which is self-perpetuating by co-optation. It has always chosen eminent Imperial servants to join it. For thirty years it has co-opted only graduates of the Imperial Candidates Program, heirs of the Imperial Family raised from infancy to rule and experienced in Imperial service. The council acts

as a board of directors to set policy. It elects one of its members as **Emperor** to chair its meetings and be head of state. The Emperor acts on the advice of the Imperial Council to appoint a councillor younger than 110 as **Secretary-General** and head of government.

The legislative power is vested in the **Imperial Senate**, which consists of one senator from each colony. Most senators are appointed by the colony's government, and are canny protectors of their appointers' interests. To pass the Senate a bill needs the votes of senators representing a majority of the colonies and a majority of the population. The Senate makes few laws for the executive to execute.

Depending on their colony's values and how much their colony fears Imperial intervention, senators generally support one of four factions. The **Responsible Government** movement ("Feds") supports bills that would force democratic and liberal reforms on other colonies and the Empire. It promotes Imperial interventions against repressive governments. The **Public Safety** faction ("Jackals") promotes bills to improve government and reduce corruption, and interventions against kleptocracy and state violence, but mistrusts democracy. The **Colonies' Rights** movement ("League of Repressive Autocracies") opposes bills that would extend Imperial authority, and most interventions, but promotes material aid and Imperial efforts to prevent revolutionary violence. The **Economic Justice** movement ("Levellers") campaigns for more economic aid with fewer conditions.

Imperial fanaticism

The antecedents of the Imperial Service were among Eichberger's Space Patrol, survivors of the destruction of Mayflower, and volunteers for their cause during the Formation Wars. They established it with a cadre of personnel who were strongly motivated to prevent mass slaughter, the use

of CT weapons, and other abuses of FTL technology. Using psychoengineering to raise offspring and neurotech to select recruits who shared their values and drive, they perpetuated an Imperial Service that is filled with diligent, honest staff who are utterly dedicated to the cause of preventing mass deaths and other FTL-induced disasters.

Imperial servants are inclined to believe that their work saves lives *en masse*, that anything else is less worthy, and that anyone not co-operating is morally suspect. They tend to be uncompromising, and often disdain rival values such as civil liberties, social justice, material prosperity, social order, cultural heritage, Nature, art, truth, and justice.

Branches of the Imperial Service

The **Imperial Navy** enforces the Empire's control of space, monitors colonial assets and activities in space, and sometimes provides orbital fire support to Imperial operations and allies on the ground. Naval Intelligence looks for signs of research or construction of WMD or FTL transport.

The **Imperial Marines** Corps consists of 450,000 special operations troops in 227 regiments, with largely robotic support. They board and inspect things in space, guard Imperial enclaves, and perform commando and counterterrorist operations at need. Imperial marines provide cadre for peace-keeping operations, but are not trained nor equipped for frontal combat against high-tech troops.

The **Colonial Office** conducts quasi-diplomatic relations with the colonies and does most of the aid work. It includes the Agricultural Service, Civil Engineering Service, Economic Advisory Service, Public Health Service, Public Education Service, Social Engineering Advisory Service, Technology Transfer Service, Terraforming Service &c.

The **Home Office** builds Imperial orbital habitats, and places to live and work in Imperial enclaves. It supplies air, water, food, education, health

care, public safety, recreation facilities and so on in Imperial direct jurisdiction.

The **Imperial Office** manages policy, standards, planning, the budget, intelligence, the census and statistics, the Secret Service, the Palace staff, and secretariat for the Imperial Council.

The **Imperial Law Enforcement Authority** has special powers to enforce Imperial laws even in the colonies. It is staffed by Imperial servants but controlled by an independent commission.

The **Imperial Judiciary** is independent of both the Council and the Senate, with the **Paramount Court of the Empire** at the top of the hierarchy. Imperial district court judges are appointed by, and often partial towards, colonial governments, but the higher courts are honest and impartial.

Imperial Direct Jurisdiction

The Empire houses most of its employees and their families in orbital habitats or in extraterritorial enclaves on planets, where it supplies infrastructure, workplaces, housing, public places, recreational facilities, air, water, food, schools, hospitals, and the usual public services of government through its Home Office. This constitutes Imperial Direct Jurisdiction. Colonials rarely visit IDJ, and their depictions of it in fiction and drama are wrong.

Imperial habitats are safe, secure, clean, comfortable, and extremely pleasant. There are a lot of children. There is no poverty and no great wealth. Everyone has fulfilling work, and everyone is honest and philanthropic. Among themselves and off duty, Imperials are care-free, relaxed, informal, and affable, sometimes flamboyant and even lascivious. Dancing and live music are popular.

Imperial enclaves & residences

The Empire assigns a **resident** minister to each colony as a quasi-diplomatic representative to its government and to co-ordinate and supervise its activities and programs there. Each colony supplies an extraterritorial enclave for the Imperial resident to occupy and for the headquarters of the Empire's local operations. The facilities in this enclave are termed the **Imperial Residence** in [the colony], and are run as a locality of Imperial Direct Jurisdiction.

The Imperial residence always includes or is contiguous with the spaceport or a ground facility of an orbital port. It also includes the chambers of the Imperial district court, and the detention and corrections facilities of ILEA.

On worlds or in systems where there are several colonies the Empire assigns a **resident-general** to supervise the resident ministers (or to act as resident to several insignificant colonies). It prefers residents-general to reside in orbital habitats where possible, so as not to favour one colony.

Sector HQs

The Empire maintains **sector headquarters** orbiting twenty well-spaced colonies 100–120 light-years from Sol. There is little need for these to co-ordinate Imperial programs on different worlds; they act as reinforcements depots and centres for supervision, recruitment, and training. Each SHQ includes the palace and offices of the Imperial **high commissioner** in charge of the sector, the HQs of a sector fleet of the Imperial Navy and a division of the Imperial marines (with bases and orbital facilities for the sector reserve squadron and reserve brigade), also the sector courts of appeals and common pleas, a division of ILEA commanded by a deputy commissioner for justice, and an “agency” for the representative of each colony in the sector. Besides those, each SHQ has a campus of the Imperial University, a campus of the Naval Academy, an

ILEA academy, a training base for Imperial marines, and boarding schools for children of Imperial servants on remote postings.

The main feature of each SHQ is an Oberth cylinder 13.2 km long, having 100 square km of landscaped parks and monumental architecture as its interior. The population is about half a million, with most of the residences and offices “under ground”. SHQs are named after naval ports on Old Earth. The sectors are named after the constellations that their SHQs are in.

The Capital

The capital of the Empire is a collection of facilities in orbit around the ruins of Earth. The best-known of these is the **New Capitol**, an enormous Oberth cylinder 42 km long, with a thousand square kilometres of city and parks on its inner surface and a population of three million. This houses the central government and high command of the Empire and also the Sector headquarters of Central Sector.

The old Capitol, now called the **Palace**, is a 16-km Oberth cylinder that the government outgrew, now set aside for the Imperial Office, the Marines Academy, and the Imperial Family.

The Imperial Family

The descendants of Tomitomo Eichberger and the founding members of the Imperial Council have no formal legal privileges. But in practice they get to enrol their children in the Members’ Crèche in the Imperial Palace, which feeds the Palatine School. These are the places where the psychoengineering of the Imperial Candidates Program is carried out. At fourteen the graduates of the Palatine School scatter to normal lyceums, and so on, but they have been raised to rule, and with thirty to sixty years of experience are considered for co-optation to the Imperial Council.

Each Imperial heir is assigned a “huscarl” to be their orderly and bodyguard for life. If an heir is appointed to the Imperial Council their huscarl becomes chief of their Secret Service bodyguard detail. The background of huscarls is secret; they seem to be raised in the Palace.

By custom graduates of the Palatine School are styled as “lord”, Imperial councillors as “prince”, and the president of the Imperial Council as “Emperor”. They are not given medals for bravery or conspicuous service, but these are sometimes awarded to their huscarls instead.

INTERSTELLAR NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS

The Empire opposes any other government having interstellar scope. And the cultural and commercial circumstances do not favour multi-colonial companies or franchise chains, except in banking and trade. But there are interstellar NGOs pursuing assorted agendas, some of which are discreetly funded and influenced by colonial governments, or even infiltrated by clandestine agencies.

Prominent NGOs such as those listed below have members, offices, and employees on most populous developed worlds. But these are seldom skilled enough to do anything difficult, resolute enough to do anything strenuous or dangerous, or bold enough to confront opposition. NGOs therefore employ skilled and daring “effectives” as field agents, troubleshooters, and sometimes clandestine operators. Like Imperial servants, small teams of effectives are given big jobs and wide initiative. Anything that goes wrong is blamed on rogues.

The Alliance for Independent Development runs a large program for short-term volunteer aid workers, and brokers development assistance for poor colonies free from meddlesome Imperial conditions. It is a front for

rich governments in the Colonies' Rights faction, sometimes covering clandestine operations.

Amnesty researches, publicises, advocates for, and sometimes discreetly rescues prisoners of conscience, pestering tyrants and secretly staging jail-breaks and rescues.

The **Association for the Advancement of Artificial Persons** advocates for the liberty, civil rights, political equality, and reproductive rights of androids, uplifts, parahumans, and digital sapiences. It is supported by, and believed to provide cover for agents of, Esbouvier.

The **College of Archivists**, which historians and sociologists strive to qualify for, gathers and preserves records of all sorts, prizing diaries and interviews. To promote candour in informants it keeps secret archives and publishes a confidential journal. It steals and hides information.

Democracy Unlimited advocates for democratic reforms, promotes best practice in electoral methods, and supplies election monitors. It is discreetly supported by some colonies in the Responsible Government faction, and is accused of conducting clandestine operations.

The **Ethnological Society** promotes the practice of participant ethnography, organising field work for aspiring members, and sometimes helping them out of difficulties. It maintains marvellous collections of anthropological material, and is sometimes accused of promoting superstition in order to study it.

GreenWar campaigns to protect wildlife and wilderness. It opposes projects that will damage or alter biomes (even ones resulting from past terraforming), such as terraforming projects on new worlds. GreenWar has been accused of terrorist attacks on New Worlds Realty.

Human Heritage strives to record and conserve cultural treasures of art, literature, drama, architecture &c. It organises exchanges, exhibitions,

and tours, and tries to protect artists and performers and their artistic freedom.

The **Humanity League** campaigns to protect non-combatants in war and prisoners of war, provides medical services &c., and organises relief in disaster zones and other humanitarian crises. Respected and influential, it enjoys almost official status, and its logo (a red handprint on white) is a recognised badge of neutrality.

The **Institute** campaigns against the creation of artificial persons such as intelligent androids, parahumans, and digital sapiences. It also opposes the use of social engineering to create “unnatural” social environments, and even opposes the construction of orbital habitats.

The **Interstellar Brigades** monitors ideological wars, collects and reports accurate accounts of what occurs in them, and helps interstellar volunteers reach the sides they want to fight on. The Empire is not amused.

The **Œuvre of the King of Prussia** opposes research, development, and use of immortality treatments, fearing that wealth and power would concentrate in the hands of immortal tyrants. It has been accused of terrorism.

The **Planned Progress League** advocates for technocracy and the use of social engineering and psychoengineering to create just societies with happy populations. It provides advisors to reform movements. The PPL is discreetly supported by governments in the Public Safety faction.

The **Reporter’s Guild** advocates for professional standards in journalism and like endeavours. It accredits ethical reporters and aggregators, defends the freedom of reporting, and provides quasi-consular support to its insured members in difficulties.

The **Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Autochtones** strives to publicise the plights and improve the treatment of alien sophonts, particularly those on planets settled by humans.

The **Sons of Patrick Henry** campaign against slavery, serfdom, and like institutions, also mass incarceration. Some rogue effectives attack tyrannical trends in government.

Uterior Technical Consulting LLC is an interstellar employment agency that specialises in finding opportunities for qualified and experienced experts in military training, leadership, military engineering, and supply. And tries to get them out safely if their employers lose.