

INTRODUCTION TO

FADING SUNS

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It is the dawn of the sixth millennium and the skies are darkening, for the suns themselves are fading. Humans reached the stars long ago, building a Republic of high technology and universal emancipation — and then squandered it, fought over it, and finally lost it. A new Dark Age has descended on humanity, for the greatest of civilizations has fallen and even the stars die. Now, feudal lords rule the Known Worlds, vying for power with fanatic priests and scheming guilds.

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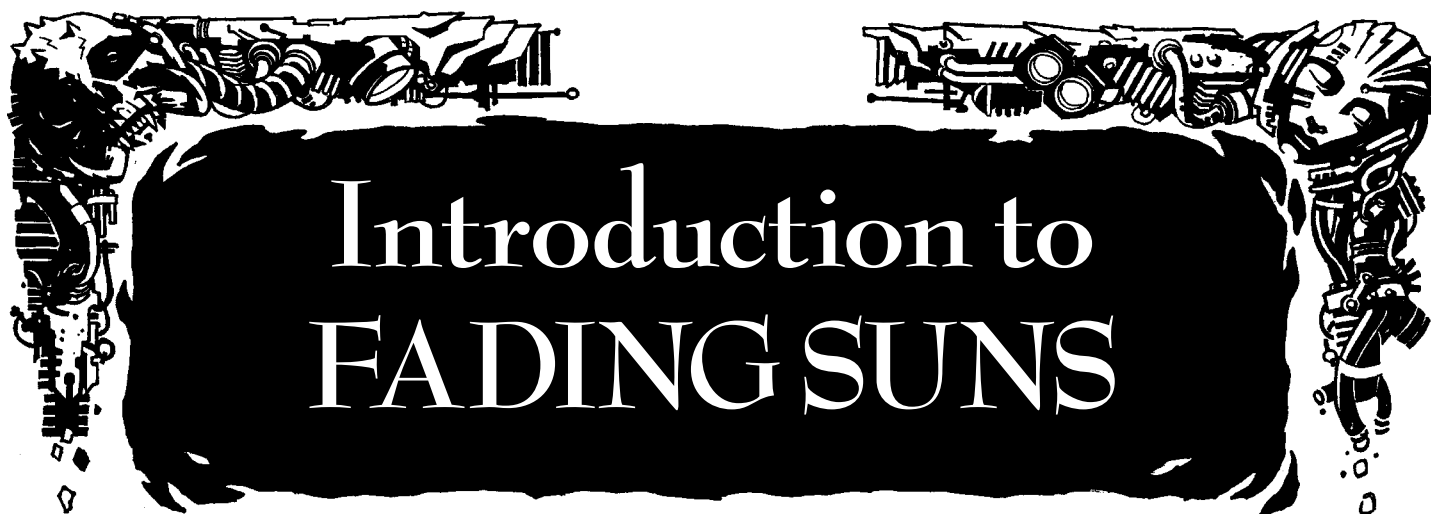
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A Futuristic Passion Play

Once the suns shone brightly, beacons in the vast night of space, calling humanity onward. The stars were symbols of humanity's vast potential, a purpose and destiny revealed in progress, inciting an exodus of unlimited growth to the distant stars. Once people looked to the heavens with hope and longing in their eyes.

Then the suns — and the hope — began to fade.

It is the beginning of the sixth millennium after Christ and history has come to an end. Humanity's greatest civilization has fallen, leaving ignorance and fear scattered among the ruins of many worlds. A new Dark Age is upon humanity and few believe in renewal and progress anymore. Now there is only waiting. Waiting for a slow death as the age-old stars fade to cinders and the souls of the sinful are called to Final Judgment.

But not all believe in this destiny. A leader has arisen, an emperor sworn to unite the worlds of Human Space together again under one banner. To ignite hope once more in people's hearts.

It is a monumental task, for most people have already given up and fallen into the ways of the past, playing serfs to feudal lords. What is hope to them now but a falsehood which leads to pain? Better to leave the hard decisions to their masters and let the Church console their souls.

There are enemies everywhere, those who seek to selfishly profit from humanity's demise: vain nobles ruling far-flung worlds, power-hungry priests who seek dominion over the lives of men, the greedy merchant guilds growing rich from bartering humanity's needs and wants. They are not alone. Others are out there among the darkening stars, alien races angry with humankind for age-old slavery, and enigmatic alien empires with agendas too paradoxical to fathom.

It is in such a universe that individual men and women must live. Only a few of them will question. Fewer still will

act on their questions and seek answers, ways to break the grip of custom and law. To free themselves and once more seize the stars — and their destiny.

Fading Suns Science Fiction Roleplaying

Fading Suns is a roleplaying game, a highly imaginative activity which can provide hours of fun and a means of creative expression. **Fading Suns** is primarily a game about heroes and the dramatic conflicts they encounter, from palace intrigues to cliffhanging combats. It provides a framework for players to create games from any perspective they desire. If they want to play soldiers who fight evil with guns and fists, the rules are here. If they want to play merchants who prefer diplomacy to violence, or priests wrestling with a metaphysical crisis, rules and helpful dramatic hints are also provided. **Fading Suns** is whatever the players want it to be.

Fading Suns is primarily a science fiction game, which means that there are starships, blasters, powered armor, alien races, and weird science. But there are also many elements of traditional fantasy gaming: heroic characters and struggles, a feudal sociopolitical structure (noble lords, high priests and headstrong merchants), powerful artifacts and great mysteries. And there is horror: monsters and maddening discoveries revealing terrifying metaphysical truths.

In short, **Fading Suns** is a game which has everything a roleplaying universe needs in order to tell stories of such varied and exotic themes as can be found anywhere — in our very own world here and now.

Like all games, **Fading Suns** should be entertaining and fun to play. But roleplaying games can be more than mere pastimes. The players can strive for the same artistic goals as the author of a novel, a film or a play. **Fading Suns** is a passion play of sorts, taking place in an imagined future.

Many possible stories can be told here, from galaxy-spanning epics to the most personal of tales.

Like medieval passion plays, **Fading Suns** deals with grand themes universal to human experience. Its main theme is the Seeking. This is the mythological role all heroes play: the knight on quest, seeking power to vanquish his enemies or the secrets of self-discovery. Success or failure on this quest is not as important as the insights learned while on it.

The atmosphere of the dramas played out in **Fading Suns** is one of tragic ignorance. Civilization is in decline, and superstition and fear are everywhere. New ideas and frontiers are spurned by a nervous populace, fearful of change for the harm it brings. But it is just this sort of willful ignorance that keeps civilization from rising again. It is such fear that keeps hope buried and great challenges from being met. The player characters represent the heroes who can break the bonds of this ignorance and bring something new and great to their culture, to reawaken and invigorate life.

Without further ado, we give you a glimpse into the tumultuous fate of humankind four millennia from now....

History

The chronicle of humanity's history among the stars is a long one, stretching over two millennia. It is not a quiet

story. From the greedy planet-grabbing of early colonists to the bloody battles of the Emperor Wars, humans have rarely slept peacefully in the void. They have prospered, suffered defeat, and dared to hope again. And they have not traveled down the paths of history alone; aliens walk among them, with long histories and destinies of their own to complete.

First Republic

Humanity first reached the stars under the auspices of the First Republic, a one-world government run by the "zaibatsu": greedy mercantile barons whose corporate states replaced the nations of the earth. The zaibatsu colonized the solar system in search of new sources of wealth and mineral resources. At the edge of the solar system they found the jumpgate.

This ancient artifact of alien manufacture baffled and awed humanity. It took many years of research to unlock even the most basic secrets of its technology, but its main function was clear: it opened portals to distant star systems. Diligent scientists constructed the first jump drive, an engine installed on a spaceship which could propel the ship through the gate, transporting it instantly into foreign space light years away.

The exodus began.

At first, the zaibatsu carefully controlled the manufacture and ownership of jump ships and reaped the resources of the new worlds and solar systems. But once anarchists leaked the secret of the technology to all, nobody could keep back the vast wave of people seeking to escape corporate tyranny and claim worlds of their own. The First Republic collapsed in a civil war over ever-expanding territory and diminishing loyalties.

Diaspora

The new universe of Human Space was made up of fractured, planetary nations, some democratic, some totalitarian. Many of the original rulers of these worlds created dynasties which would last for millennia: the first noble houses to rule the stars. But years of political and social experiments yielded only chaos and strife between worlds. Into this dangerous universe came the Prophet, a man with a vision of Creation he claimed was gifted to him by God, whom he called the Pancreator. The Prophet gathered disciples and followers about him and performed many miracles. A humanity desperate for unity and hope looked to the Prophet for their answers.

During this time, humanity met its first sentient race, the ungulate Shantor. At first, they were thought to be merely clever horselike beings. But it was soon realized how intelligent they were — and how dangerous. Another sentient race, the Ukar, were gifted with psychic powers — powers which they used to goad the Shantor into a bloody revolt.



Experiencing the Sathra Effect



Zebulon the Prophet

By the time the truth behind the Shantor's rage was discovered, it was too late to reform the beasts in humanity's eyes: the "dangerous and uncontrollable" Shantor were enslaved and moved to reservations across the Known Worlds, breaking up their families and culture.

The following Ukar War united humanity against another star-faring race, one inimicable to human interests. With the aid of the Ukar's cousin race, the Obun, humanity gained ground in their galactic war. Finally, Palamedes Alecto, follower of the Prophet, led the newly formed Universal Church of the Celestial Sun against the Ukar on their homeworld. Humanity was victorious, and the place of the Church in future politics and martial power was cemented.

Humanity marched across new worlds and subjugated the sentients living upon them, most of whom were incapable of star travel and thus considered inferior.

Until the Vau.

Humanity met more than its match when it subjugated a peaceful race of gardeners known as the G'nesh. When their overlords arrived from unknown worlds in vastly superior starships with devastating energy weapons, humans had no choice but to fall back and go no further. Luckily, the Vau were non-expansionistic, and pursued no vendetta against humanity. As long as they were left alone, they would cause no trouble — or so most humans believed. But enig-

matic "gifts" and lore from the Vau over the centuries have been curiously effective at starting conflicts among humans.

Second Republic

Eventually, with the unity provided by the Church and economic interests heralded by mercantile leaders, the Second Republic was born, a democratic government which eventually spanned all the worlds of Human Space. Under its auspices, an unprecedented era of prosperity and high technology was initiated. It seemed that there were no limits to human development, no secrets which could not be unlocked by the power of the human mind, along with a little ingenuity and grit.

But power eventually seems to coalesce into the hands of a few, especially when the people are no longer vigilant. The noble houses of the Diaspora, still rich but now relegated to meaningless roles, hungered for the vast power they once had and plotted against the Republic. They were aided by a new millennialism and apocalyptic fever, for scientists had discovered a new, dread phenomenon: the suns were fading. The stars grew dim and no one knew why.

The government could not calm the fears of all the worlds, and the untimely crash of the welfare computer system caused riots in every major city on every planet. Rebels rose up and with lightning speed, claimed the central government on Byzantium Secundus. The nobles joined together with the Church to free the capital. Victorious, they refused to return power to the senators and instead seized power for themselves. This ushered in a new age for humanity: a Dark Age of feudal lords, fanatic priests and scheming guilds.

New Dark Ages

The new lords of the Known Worlds quickly began to war upon one another, with only the largest, most cunning or richest houses rising to prominence, while many others were destroyed. In this chaos, the common people were left defenseless. In desperation, many signed generational contracts with the noble houses, swearing fealty to their local lords for themselves and their children to come. At first, the Church fought such indenture, but it eventually adopted such contracts itself when they proved the only reliable means to raise armies against rivals — and the Church was just as combative and martial as the nobles.

The corporations of the Second Republic were left with little of the spoils. With their holdings seized or signed over forcefully, they had little overt power. But a conglomeration of these corporations banded together to form the Merchant League, and rewrote their charters to form guilds rather than corporations. Guilds could more easily control membership and advancement within their ranks. In addition, the League maintained their secret technological patents, often paying for this privilege with the death of many agents charged



Heroes of the New Feudalism...

with wiping such data from computers the universe over lest it fall into the hands of the noble lords.

Without the means to repair their starships and high-tech weaponry, the nobles and the Church could not long stand. After a vicious campaign against the guilds failed to free the League's secrets, the lords had little choice but to admit the merchant guilds into the halls of power. Even the Church was forced to concede their power, and issued a Patriarchal Bull allowing only them (along with the nobles and priests) to use certain proscribed high-technologies. Once these scientific secrets were kept from the people, the Known Worlds' descent into a feudal society was complete: only the upper classes moved among the stars; the peasants lived and died on the planets where they were born.

But the Known Worlds were not the only words of Human Space. During the Fall of the Second Republic, many planets were lost, their jump coordinates stolen or the jumpgates sealed. After centuries of absence, some of these worlds reappeared, heralded by barbarian hordes who swept into the Known Worlds, wreaking havoc and looting noble lands.

Only a powerful coalition of nobles could defend against the scattered barbarian clans, and only a master tactician could form such a coalition. This man was Vladimir, whose campaign against the barbarians propelled him to power.

After his victory against the raiders, he declared himself the first Emperor of the Known Worlds. A campaign of pacification convinced the noble houses to accept his rule.

But upon his coronation day, when he placed the crown upon his head, he mysteriously died in a sudden conflagration. His coalition fell apart, and house fell upon house, each blaming the others for the death of Vladimir. Eventually, peace was secured again, sealed with Vladimir's reforms: all the houses, sects and guilds would vote equally to choose a noble to become Regent, to rule until a new Emperor could be decided upon.

It would be nearly half a millennium before an Emperor was again chosen, and only after nearly 40 years of violent war. The Emperor Wars lasted for two generations, and saw a greater rise in technology than any time since the Second Republic. But it was war tech: powerful killing machines, chemical weapons, fusion bombs and other means of destruction. Finally, one man was victorious: Alexius Hawkwood, the new Emperor of the Fading Suns.

In his newly-forged reign — now but six years old — peace has finally come. The jumproutes are open again, and pilgrims can travel safely to other worlds. Merchants can once more ply the starlanes, selling exotic goods to people who have not seen them within their grandfathers' lifetimes. And adventure awaits, for Alexius has called for a great quest: to explore the stars, discover the lost worlds of the Second Republic, and solve the mystery of the fading suns.

Characters

Player characters in **Fading Suns** can come from many different backgrounds, but three factions in particular are prominent and powerful enough to allow their members to adventure freely across the Known Worlds: the noble houses, the Church and the Merchant League.

The Noble Houses

Of the many noble houses throughout the Known Worlds, five have achieved prominence and effectively rule most of Human Space — under their new Emperor, of course. The Emperor Wars took a toll on many of these houses: the losers now struggle to regain lost lands or power, while the victors fight to ensure that their rivals stay down.

The life of a noble is not the leisurely idyll one might expect: there are fiefs to manage, rivals to crush and wars to wage. While there is much power to be gained, there is always the risk of humiliation or loss of holdings and position. It is no wonder that they know how to party: their gala affairs are lavish and awe-inspiring — but also rife with intrigue, innuendo, back-stabbing and even sword dueling. To escape such pressures, noble sons and daughters often take to the stars with only a small entourage of friends and

retainers, to better know the worlds they wish to one day rule.

The five major houses (called the Royal Houses) are:

House Hawkwood: Prideful yet honorable, the Hawkwoods have seen one of their own take the Emperor's throne. While Alexius Hawkwood has since distanced himself from his family to appear more impartial, the Hawkwoods take such political setbacks with stoicism — the same fierce perseverance with which they beat back the barbarian raiders to their worlds. A Hawkwood does not give up. House Hawkwood is more beloved by its vassals than any other house, for they treat them fairly and with justice.

House Decados: Slimy, cunning and extremely successful, the Decados have risen to power through treachery and an uncanny understanding of their rivals — helped in no small part, no doubt, by their vast, invisible intelligence network. While the other families accuse them of a number of crimes, the Decados are here to stay and thus must be dealt with on their own terms. Decados vassals despise their lords but are kept in line through fear or the promise of power for those who make good quislings.

The Hazat: Hot-blooded and intense, the martial Hazat know how to field an army but are also no strangers to intrigue. When they can calm the vicious infighting from family to family, they can present a formidable front against rivals from other houses. Left with less land after the wars

than they began with, they now pursue a campaign against a barbarian world, seeking new lands outside of the Empire. Hazat vassals are loyal, for they know that sacrifices for their lords are often rewarded.

House Li Halan: This pious and disciplined family was once the worst behaved of all nobles. Their immoral exploits are legendary, as is the tale of their overnight conversion to the Church. They now pursue the scriptures as fanatically as they once chased pleasure. While other nobles may snicker at the faithful lords, they more often fear the Li Halan, for this family has proved implacable on both the battlefield and at court. Their vassals are fiercely loyal, for they know their place as vassals in the Pancreator's plan.

House al-Malik: The exotic and inscrutable al-Malik are often accused of being mere merchants, for their ties to the League are well known. But they have proven their noble legerdemain many times, through the acquisition of land and a unique understanding of human nature and politics. It is very hard to pull one over on an al-Malik, but it is likewise hard for them to resist the lure of a good adventure or challenge. Vassals of this family are well-treated and return the respect with solid service.

The Church

Although the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun may present a unified front for the faithful of the Known Worlds, its cathedrals are rife with sectarianism. While the Patriarch has rule over all aspects of the Church, it is often difficult to manage the actions of priests the universe over. Many sects and orders have arisen, powerful enough to earn official status from a reluctant Orthodoxy. Even more heresies have arisen, forcing the Patriarch to spend his time hunting heretics rather than unifying the present sects.

A priest's life is often a trying one: If it's not local disasters or famines he must try to relieve, it's occult threats to the faith, from demon possessions, zombie plagues or malicious psychics. Church magical rites are quite effective, regardless of whether they are considered merely a form of psychic power by the more skeptical.

The five major sects/orders ordained by the Church are:

Urth Orthodox: The largest sect, it is the Orthodoxy that most people associate with the Church. Its priests can be found on all worlds, from the ostentatious bishops of the capital cities to the more humble parish priests in the most poverty-stricken fiefs. While the Orthodoxy has gained a reputation for their cunning political maneuvers, most priests know little of such things, being entirely too busy protecting the souls of the simple faithful. While many may spurn the Orthodoxy for its martial role in the Emperor Wars, when tragedy strikes, it is the Orthodoxy they return to for consolation.

Brother Battle: This order of monk knights is the most



A noble of House Li Halan...

elite fighting unit in the Known Worlds, surpassing even the Emperor's Phoenix Guard in martial prowess. Originally initiated to protect pilgrims and pursue heretics, the order is now chartered by noble houses, Church sects and even guilds to perform elite military operations on many worlds, including the deadly Stigmata Front against the Symbiot alien invaders. Despite rumors of heresy and usury within their ranks, everyone wants a Brother Battle monk by their side in times of trouble.

Eskatonic Order: These hermetic sages are often thought of as wizards by the common folk, but the nobles and guildsmen know them for the kooks they often are. While there are many within the order who possess profound wisdom and learning, there are just as many who are obsessed with the end of the universe and who stand on street corners telling everyone about it. Once considered a heresy by the Orthodoxy, the Eskatonics were admitted into the fold when their theurgical rites proved effective against the Symbiots.

Temple Avesti: Dreaded inquisitors. The Avestites long ago seized most of the seats on the Inquisitorial Synod, and have since then made it their duty to search the Known Worlds for signs of heresy, demonism and any other threat to the faithful. Their illiteracy, fear of learning and dogmatic adherence to certain extreme scriptures makes them feared and hated throughout Human Space. But they are obeyed



Temple Avesti inquisitors

nonetheless. Only the most fanatic and ascetic initiates are admitted to this sect.

Sanctuary Aeon: Healers and compassionate mystics. Everybody loves the priests and priestesses of Sanctuary Aeon, followers of Saint Amalthea. When an Amalthean comes to town, there is always someone willing to provide hospitality for her. Indeed, so beloved by the commoners are they that when one was once accused of witchcraft by an Avestite, the Avestite was seized by the populace and burned at the stake instead.

The Merchant League

The remnants of the Second Republic mega-corporations can be found among the many guilds of the Merchant League. It is the League which controls high-technology: invention, manufacture and distribution. It is the guilds who pilot noble starships or repair Church think machines. If any one of these factions were to anger them, a League blockade would quickly end the argument.

The guilds gladly accept their role as second class citizens at the royal soirees, for they know that there is little profit to be made arguing over the best or worst dressed. They instead charge high dollar for the privilege of hiring a guild specialist — and their enforcers ensure that only the guild specializes in certain skills and tech; black marketers and tech counterfeiters are thrown from airlocks.

While the guilds are numerous, only five have risen to intergalactic prominence and regularly travel the jumpweb in the employ of nobles, priests or other guildsmen:

Charioteers: Star pilots and merchants marine, this intrepid guild is what most people think of when they imagine the Merchant League, for it is the Charioteer merchants with their exotic, traveling medicine shows who are most often seen by the commoners. They own the star lanes — literally. Without their secret jumpcode technology, travel through jumpgates would be impossible. In addition, the best pilots come from this guild.

Engineers: High technology is rare in the Dark Ages, and most people fear it, for as the Church teaches, it is the symbol of human hubris which brought down the Republic. Few dare to delve into its secrets anymore, and those that do are considered mad — like the Engineers. These strange technicians often modify their bodies with cybertech, becoming more machine than human. While they creep out the commoners and disgust the priests, everyone knows just how valuable their lore is in maintaining intergalactic power and communication.

Scravens: If you can't find what you're looking for legally, chances are the Scravens can get it — for a price. Scravens specialize in all sorts of activities normally viewed as anti-social (but often fun): gambling, black market goods and even thievery. Of course, they deny it all, hiding behind



An Engineer makes a discovery...

the guise of a salvage and reclamation guild. Since they possess blackmail on just about every major official — even bishops — little is done against them.

The Muster: Professional soldiers, these mercenaries are essential to most military operations throughout the Known Worlds. Even the Brothers Battle rely on their orbital artillery support, and most noble houses have hired them to either assault their rivals or quell rebellions. But soldiery is not the only labor this guild contracts; they specialize in all sorts of trained help: cooks, technicians, animal trainers, butlers, etc. In fact, it's very dangerous to hire trained labor without contracting this guild — their enforcers ensure that they get the largest and juiciest contracts.

Reeves: Somebody's got to do the paperwork, and this job is left to the Reeves. They do it quite well. So well that they are the de facto bankers of the Known Worlds and probably one of the richest factions in the universe — although few realize just how rich they've become through their loans to noble houses. Just about everybody owes the Reeves, and when one comes calling on favors, few dare deny him.

Aliens

There are a number of sentient races within the Known Worlds: the simian Gannok, the ungulate Shantor, the avian Etyri, amphibian Oro'ym, insectoid Ascorbites and the rep-

tilian Hironem. But three other races have achieved the most freedom of movement and self-determination:

Ur-Obun: This peaceful, philosophical race, like their Ur-Ukar cousins, claim deep Anunnaki involvement in their history. The Anunnaki (the ancient race who built the jumpgates) apparently engineered the two races' fates, separating them onto different worlds before they disappeared from history. The Obun are given positions of respect as councilors and advisors in Known Worlds society. However, while they are treated politely, their advice is often considered naive by the militant human culture. Nonetheless, an Ur-Obun became one of the Prophet's disciples, and is honored by an Obun sect of the Church.

Ur-Ukar: Due to their initial hostile dealings with humanity, the Ukari are now a broken race. Their homeworld is owned by the League, who reap it for its mineral resources, selling the spoils off-world to noble houses. They have been removed from their ancestral, subterranean lands and herded into tight caves in poverty. Few humans care what happens to them. A resistance movement has responded with terrorist tactics, and has taken its war of hatred to other worlds. Nonetheless, the League values them for their shady, underworld skills.

Vorox: Huge carnivorous, multi-limbed beasts, the Vorox are new to civilization. That they achieved sentience



A Vorox at war

at all on their toxic jungle world is a wonder. That they have come as far as they have since is a tribute to their adaptability and powerful attributes — valuable qualities in the Known Worlds. They are most often trained as elite shock troops by noble houses, but many have joined the League to see the stars firsthand.

Enemies

There are many dangers in the universe of the **Fading Suns**, not the least of which are humans themselves. The intrigues and conspiracies of the noble houses, Church and League are enough to keep most people occupied for a lifetime. The post-war years have seen an increase in such covert activity, for few dare to openly disturb the peace. The Emperor has his hands full trying to cement his rule against internal malcontents and external alien and barbarian empires.

Among the more dangerous, non-human threats out there are:

The Vau: This technologically superior alien empire has so far-proved little threat — as long as humans stay on their side of the border. The few times Vau ambassadors have parleyed with humans, trouble has resulted, although in forms hard to trace back to the Vau. For instance, the Vau “gifted” humanity with the jumpcoordinates to reach a previously lost world called Pandemonium. This world in turn

revealed coordinates to another lost world called Iver. A cold war for the spoils of these new worlds began; the Vau’s present has proven most troublesome.

If the Vau were to expand into Human Space, no one is sure if they could be halted, for their tech is impressive. Human’s stole their own knowledge about energy shields and blasters from early Vau encounters. It is theorized that the Vau know far more about these fields than has been revealed.

Symbiots: A greater threat to Known Worlds hegemony, however, are the Symbiots, parasitic entities attempting to break through into Human Space and possess its inhabitants, turning them into hive mind slaves — or so the propaganda goes. In truth, nobody really knows what the Symbiots want or even just what they are. Everybody does know that they are dangerous and inimicable to human goals. Rumor of a Symbiot infestation is enough to bring a squad of Church inquisitors with flamerguns, ready to burn first and ask questions later.

Demons: The Church claims that demons exist and can possess people to perform their nefarious deeds in this world. The sad thing is that this seems to be true. Even the most rational scientists must admit to the reality of *something* out there, something often unseen but seemingly hostile. These entities, demons or aliens or whatever, can so far only be combated by Church theurgy and miracles of faith.

Rules

Now that you’ve read up on the setting and the people who populate it, let’s take a look at how **Fading Suns** helps players and gamemasters run games set in this fascinating and adventurous universe.

First, we present character creation and some sample characters. Then, the rules are described, explaining how the numbers on the character sheet are translated into dramatic actions. Then, a sample drama is provided; a gamemaster can run two players through this explanatory adventure.

Dice

Fading Suns uses dice to determine the outcome of situations where luck plays a role. Most rolls are resolved using a 20-sided die, but some rolls (damage, armor) use the familiar six-sided dice used in many board games. 20-sided dice can be found in most comic and hobby stores — anywhere that roleplaying games are sold.

Character Creation

So, what kind of character do you want to play? In **Fading Suns**, the choice is up to you. Your character’s abilities are not subject to the whim of fickle dice — **Fading Suns** players can choose what traits their character possesses. Each



A Vau mandarin

trait has a point cost. The player is allowed a number of points with which to pick and choose those traits he wishes his character to possess. Is the character nimble and agile? Buy levels in Dexterity. Is he smart and robust? Buy Wits and Endurance. Is he a psychic? Buy Psi and some psychic powers. The **Fading Suns** rulebook gives guidelines on the standard traits found among each faction or character role, but these are guidelines only. In the end, the choice is yours.

Sample Characters

The following pages provides two sample characters who can be used by beginning player characters or as NPCs for the gamemaster in the sample drama at the end of this book.

**Sir Galen Trevor
Hawkwood**

The Trevors once ruled a large fief on Criticorum, but lost it all to the al-Malik during the Emperor Wars. Young Galen Hawkwood is barely



old enough to remember playing in the family mansion before he was whisked away to a starship and rocketed to distant relatives on Byzantium Secundus.

He was an angry lad, always getting into fights with other noble children who taunted him for his lack of fine clothing or land upon which to go riding. Shuffled from relative to relative, Galen eventually found himself under the absentee patronage of his mother's uncle, a inveterate drunk who spent most of his time passed out. Without strong role models, Galen sought friends in the seedy districts nearby, and learned well the ways of thieves and scoundrels.

[illegible]

Upon his day of majority, he left his scattered family behind and pledged fealty to Emperor Alexius — his last hope for fame and glory was with the Questing Knights. One among that company took pity upon him, recognizing in his strong physique and fervor the makings of a good knight. He spoke for the lad, and Galen was inducted soon after.

He has had a number of adventures so far, although they took the form of rescuing rich merchants from bandits or beautiful noble ladies from less-fitting paramours than himself. He yearns for a proper quest, a true calling off-world where he can win riches and fame as a knight of the Empire. He just hopes that his close friends among the seedier guilds, such as Chief Hally Saintsbane, don't come to the notice of his fellow knights...

Chief Hally Saintsbane

Hally's parents were runaway serfs who had found their way into Byzantium Secundus's Holy City and into each others arms — for one night, at least. Hally

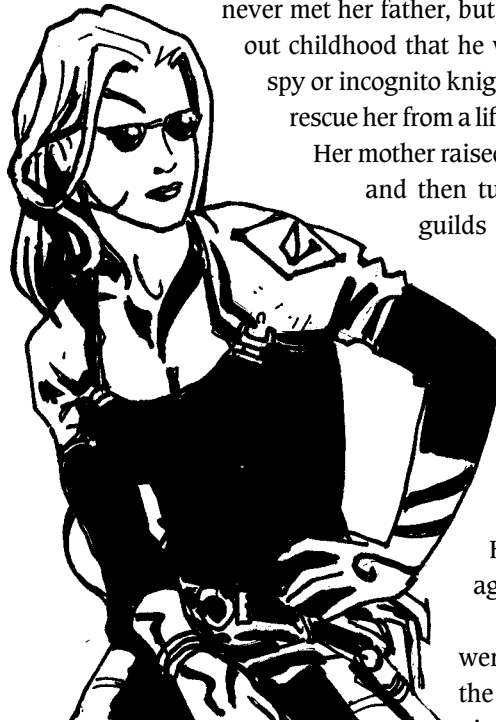
never met her father, but had dreams throughout childhood that he was actually a master spy or incognito knight who would one day rescue her from a life of poverty and crime.

Her mother raised her until she was 10, and then turned her over to the guilds in return for a small pittance of firebirds —

enough to live for a year in squalor, though. At least she wouldn't have to work back-breaking labor for the Church anymore.

Hally never saw her again.

Her new parents were the Scravers. Only the toughest or most cunning survive in their field



Name: Chief Hally Saintsbane Gender: Female Age: 16		Race: Human Alliance: Scravers Rank: Chief		LEARNED SKILLS <i>LVL</i> Focus 2 Gambling 2 Inquiry 3 Knavery 6 Lockpicking 2 Lore (Underworld) 1 Read Urthtech 1 Sleight of Hand 2 Speak Scraver Cant 6 Streetwise 6 Tech Redemption (Mech) 2 Think Machine 1	
CHARACTERISTICS Body Strength (3) 7 Dexterity (3) 7 Endurance (3) 5 MIND Wits (3) 5 Perception (3) 8 Tech (3) 4 SPIRIT Extrovert (3) / Passion (1) / Faith (1) /		NATURAL SKILLS Charm (3) Dodge (3) 5 Fight (3) Impress (3) 5 Melee (3) Observe (3) 8 Shoot (3) 6 Sneak (3) 6 Vigor (3)		ARMOR Studded leather 5d	
BLESSINGS/CURSES +/- <i>Trait Situation</i> +2 Gamble Lucky at cards -2 Calm Possessive		BENEFICES/AFFLICTIONS <i>Type Pts</i> 78 firebirds cash (after buying Mech Tools, Thieves Keys, knife and other listed equipment)		COMBAT <i>Action</i> Blaster pistol Palm laser STR bonus: +1d <i>Init Goal DMG RNG</i> 13 7d 10/20 13 3d 5/10	
OCCULT Psi 3 / Theurgy / Powers/Rites Sensitivity Darksense Subtle Sight		SHOTS FIRED <i>(10 /clip)</i> 1-2 0 3-5 +1 6-8 +2 9-11 +3 12-14 +4 15-17 +5 18 +6 Critical SUCCESS = x2		VICTORY CHART <i>Successes Pts</i> 1-2 0 3-5 +1 6-8 +2 9-11 +3 12-14 +4 15-17 +5 18 +6 Critical SUCCESS = x2	
VITALITY Wound penalties: -10 -8 -6 -4 -2		WYRD			

of business, so Hally had to give up daydreams quickly and learn to pull her own weight or be jettisoned. She had a talent for lying and the street savvy to support it, so she was trained as a decoy who would distract merchants or passersby while cutpurses had their way with the person's valuables. Eventually, however, she graduated to break-ins and burglary.

Dissatisfied with mere crime, Hally set about kissing up to the real Scravers whenever she could — the relic hunters and artifact hounds. Her work paid off and she got a promotion and a license to scrounge. Now, she just needs a way off-planet so she can practice her new profession. Maybe that weird knight she knows, the Questing Knight who walks the walk and talks the talk. He seems genuine street, not like a lot of the wannabes from the palaces. Maybe he's got some way out of here...

Oh, and there's one thing she hasn't told her bosses about yet — she's psychic. She gives off mild static electricitylike shocks to anyone close to her when she uses her powers.

Traits

All **Fading Suns** characters are defined by trait ratings — the names and numbers on the character sheets. For human characters, trait ratings generally range from 1 to 10, though aliens and other nonhuman entities can have higher or lower ratings. These 1 to 10 ratings measure characters' innate ability or prowess with their traits, and basically correspond to the classic, informal 1 to 10 scale used to measure athletic performances, product quality, potential significant others' (or innocent bystanders') desirability, etc. Basically, having a 1 in a trait indicates that the character is either naturally inept or a rank beginner, while having a 10 means that the character has achieved near-perfection or total mastery of the trait. So, a character with a 1 in Dexterity is a real klutz (virtually an invalid, in fact), while a character with a 10 is one of the universe's finest athletes. Likewise, a character with a 1 in Xenobiology is a beginning student, while a character with a Xenobiology rating of 10 is a universally respected, Einstein-class savant of alien lore.

Sir Galen Trevor Hawkwood as an "8" Melee skill — that puts him close to the upper levels of human development in fencing and hand-to-hand weapons use. Chief Hally Saintsbane, on the other hand, has a "3" Melee — the average for an untrained person.

Trait ratings are used to determine the outcome of actions. Obviously, the higher a character's trait ratings, the better that character will be at actions corresponding to those traits. A weak character has a chance to budge a heavy trapdoor, but a strong character will have a much better chance and will probably perform the feat in far less time.

Characters have two major types of traits: characteris-

tics and skills. Characteristics represent a character's natural, inborn capabilities, whether physical, mental or emotional: strength, dexterity, wits, and even passion. Skills represent a character's learned or trained abilities: shooting a gun, charming an audience, painting a picture, inventing a device, etc. Each of these types of traits is rated from 1 to 10.

Goal Roll

Whenever the outcome of an action is in doubt, the gamemaster calls for a goal roll. This roll is made using one 20-sided die. The player (or gamemaster, in the case of gamemaster characters and environmental phenomena) must roll a score on this die that is equal to or less than the assigned goal number.

A player's base goal number is determined by adding the character's relevant characteristic trait rating to his skill trait rating. Thus, if Hally Saintsbane wanted to fire a pistol at a foe with her Dexterity characteristic of 7 and a Shoot skill of 6, the player would need to roll "13" or less on the 20-sided die.

Things aren't always that simple, however. In many cases, the goal roll is adjusted up or down by situational modifiers. Consider the case of the aforementioned pistol shot. All other things being equal, it's easier to hit a dinosaur-sized foe than a rabbit-sized one. Thus, the gamemaster might assign a bonus to the player's roll if his character was trying to shoot a rampaging T. Rex, and might assign a penalty if the character was firing at a speeding jackrabbit.

Any die roll equal to or less than the goal number indicates a success, but a player whose action succeeds should remember the exact number rolled; this is important for calculating the subsequent effect roll (see below).

Effects of Success

Unlike many roleplaying games, **Fading Suns** measures the degree of success a character achieves in his endeavors. It's not just a matter of hitting or missing — how well one hits is important. For instance, the better one hits in combat, the more damage one inflicts on a foe. It's not just a matter of the weapon's lethality — a character's skill and luck also counts.

The goal roll, above, determines whether a character's action succeeds or fails. If the action fails, that's that; go on to the next character. If an action succeeds, however, the player must still determine how well the action succeeds. Consider the pistol shot described above. There's a big difference between grazing a foe in the shoulder and blasting fiery doom straight through his left eye to incinerate his brain pan and send the shards of his charbroiled skull spraying hither and yon — even though both results are, technically, successful shots. The number rolled on the goal roll is

Victory Chart

Successes	Victory Pts/ Damage Dice	Accomplishment
1-2	1 / +0	Barely satisfactory
3-5	1 / +1	Mediocre
6-8	2 / +2	Pretty good
9-11	3 / +3	Good job
12-14	4 / +4	Excellent
15-17	5 / +5	Brilliant
18	6 / +6	Virtuoso performance

the number of successes scored. These successes can be used directly to gauge how poorly or how well a character succeeded in a task: the more successes, the better the character did at the task. However, the number of possible successes (from 1 to 18*) leaves a lot of room for interpretation. For some situations, such as rolls to determine weapon damage or how well a complementary skill aided in another person's task, a smaller scale is more useful. To make things a little easier, **Fading Suns** successes translate directly into "victory points," which can be calculated by consulting the Victory Chart (above). For most actions, the player can simply consult the Victory Chart to determine the level of success. One victory point is minimal — the character squeaked



The heat of battle...

through by the skin of her teeth. Two victory points indicate a decent job — onlookers will accept the feat as satisfactory, though they certainly won't be awestruck. Five or six victory points indicate a virtuoso performance, and so on.

* A roll of "19" is considered an automatic failure, while a roll of "20" is a critical failure. A roll of "1" is an automatic success, no matter what the actual goal number is. Rolling the goal number exactly is a critical success — double the victory dice!

An Example Action

Sir Galen Trevor Hawkwood finds himself — after a night of drinking and boasting at a noble soiree — called upon by his fellow nobles to tell of his dashing exploits. He begins to tell — in rather exaggerated fashion, with booming voice — of the time he rescued a fair maiden from the clutches of a uncouth, would-be paramour, and the crowd falls silent. The gamemaster asks Galen's player to make a goal roll using his Extrovert characteristic and his Impress skill.

Galen's Extrovert rating is 6, and his Impress rating is 5 (he's a somewhat dashing figure on the noble scene). Thus, the goal roll would normally be 11. However, the gamemaster gleefully informs Galen's player that the task is a demanding one and levies a -4 penalty to Galen's roll: Galen's doing this off the cuff, he's a little drunk, and it's a skeptical crowd. The goal roll is thus 7.

Galen's player grits his teeth and makes the roll. Luckily, he scores a "6" — a success. Consulting the Victory Chart, the player sees that 6 translates into two victory points — okay, but not wonderful. Galen's tale will definitely not live in the annals of noble history, but the gamemaster tells the player that Galen entertains his peers and catches the eye of a mildly appreciative, moderately attractive maiden.

Effect Dice

Certain feats, such as combat, require a few more variables. These sorts of rolls are resolved with "effect dice," which can represent a weapon's damage or a suit of armor's protective value. Since there are more dice rolled than with the goal roll, effect dice are rolled with six-sided dice — it is easier to roll a lot of six-siders than a bunch of 20-siders. Results of 1, 2, 3 or 4 are successful; results of 5 or 6 are failures. Each successful die generates one point: a "wound" point in the case of damage or an "armor" point in the case of armor.

Wound points are applied against the target's Vitality rating, but only after accounting for any armor or other protection he may be wearing — each armor point subtracts one wound point before damage is applied. The number of dice actually rolled varies with weapon damage or armor value. For instance, Hally's blaster pistol does 7 dice of damage.

There is another variable to consider with damage dice — the effectiveness of a character's blow. Victory points

gained on the attack goal roll are converted into damage dice, called “victory dice.” Victory points convert to victory dice on a 1-for-1 basis.

A player does not have to use the entire number of victory dice generated from victory points — she may choose to “pull her punch” by using as few as one die. The weapon dice must still be used in full, however — it’s impossible to “be gentle” with a greatsword!

After being hit, a target can roll his armor dice (if any); each successful die equals one armor point. Since no goal roll is made (skill is not involved), victory dice are not added to armor dice. (Energy shields are another form of personal protection, but they represent a special case.)

(An effect die roll can also be made using a d20, if no six-sided dice are available. The goal number is 13 or less for each die.)

An Example Combat Action

Sir Galen had no idea that the maiden he was flirting with has a jealous and drunken paramour in the crowd. As he exits the hall for a breather, flush with his tall-tale telling success success, the angry fellow suddenly appears and swings his fist at Galen. Normally, a slap with a glove would be the proper way to introduce a challenge, but this fellow has been drinking, and has mistaken the villain in Galen’s tale for himself. The perceived insult is too much, and he forgets all noble propriety in his rage.

The attacker makes a goal roll, adding his Dexterity 4 and his Fight 6 to get a result of 10 — he must roll this or less on a 20-sided die. The result is a “7” — a success with two victory points (see the Victory Chart). His fist normally inflicts two dice of damage, but with the victory dice from his attack, he gets to roll four dice (his two victory points convert directly into damage dice). He rolls these dice — six-siders this time — with results of 2, 6, 3 and 4 — three successful dice, which translates to three wound points.

Galen is not wearing armor (it would be uncouth to bring armor to a ball) and his energy shield’s fusion cel is out of charges — so he takes the full three points to his Vitality. Galen reels backwards, his jaw throbbing in pain. Before the attacker can land another blow, the house guards arrive



A mystic of the Eskatonic Order

and escort the belligerent boyfriend from the grounds, immune to his pleas for leniency. The maiden, hearing the commotion, rushes out and sees poor Galen wiping blood from his chin. She moves to comfort him. While Galen will have a bruise in the morning, the evening is not a total loss....

Summary

There are, of course, more details, including optional rules for those players seeking more complexity: martial arts actions, fencing actions, “accenting” rolls (pulling punches or giving it all you’ve got), and many more. Complete rules are provided in the **Fading Suns** rulebook, while additional helpful rules can be found in each **Fading Suns** supplement.

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