

Sample file



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Dedication:

To all the writers and artists who helped reveal the far-flung worlds of **Fading Suns** in all its previous editions and books. You are all saints and true servants of the Pancreator.

And to Greg Stafford (1948-2018), mythmaker. **Fading Suns** wouldn't exist without the immeasurable influence of Greg's worlds and games.

Pilgrims:

It is truly the end of history, it seems. Judgment is near. Yet, I cannot accept that we are to be rewarded for sitting still and waiting for death. If that were so, why did the Prophet say: "A sun must burn to birth light. When your passion burns, you give off light." Perhaps the suns die because we lack passion. Passion for life, for the struggle necessary to unlock the Mystery. We are bored with everything, having accomplished all. History has returned to the point at which it began.

Or perhaps the answer still waits for us. Perhaps the dying suns are our spur to greatness, a necessary quest on which we will finally understand ourselves and our place in the universe.

— Guiseppe Alustro, *My Time Among the Stars*



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ALUSTRO'S
JOURNAL

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ALUSTRO'S JOURNAL: ASCENDANCE

Revered Syneculla Lanquetot,

I am writing to allay your suspicions about me. In your letter, you expressed concern about my presence at my uncle's forthcoming coronation as Patriarch of the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun. I am apparently seen by some in the Church hierarchy (in your words) as a "vagrant of questionable ideology." I admit that this brings a smile to my face. The fact that I am thought of at all in such circles is something, at least.

I shall attempt to ease your misgivings. I greatly respect your newly appointed role as Syneculla. It must be a staggering job to vet all who would deal with the Patriarch. It was not easy on your predecessor, and I sincerely pray it proves no burden to you. I do remember you, of course, from our sole brief meeting years ago on Byzantium Secundus, when Uncle Marcus was archbishop. You disapproved of me then: Guiseppe Alustro, the disobedient nephew who gallivanted across the stars and even published accounts of his adventures. A scandal! But I knew you were protecting my uncle. He would not have chosen you as his Syneculla if he did not trust you to the bone.

And so here we are, soon to meet again, this time on Holy Terra. How could I not come to the enthronement of Patriarch Marcus Aurelius Palamon? It is not every day that one's dear uncle — my sole family after the death of my mother — ascends to the ministry of every single soul in the Known Worlds.

To help ease your concerns, know that my reputation as a far traveler is behind me — "vagrant" no more. I have spent the last ten years planetbound on Midian. For a time, I was even the bishop of our local cathedral. Yes, I administered to the faith, not as mendicant but as friar.

I mention this to exhibit that I am no longer the itinerant wanderer, although I suppose the news causes you misgivings of a different sort: an Eskatonic running a Li Halan cathedral? What fresh heresy is this? "Questionable ideology," indeed. I jest, but I also know it does make you nervous, for my order is rife with mysticism and esoteric praxis, when what good, simple folk need is tradition and dogma. But I did say "for a time." My tenure was not long-lasting. I do not have the gift of administration. While I believe my flock liked me, they did not enjoy my sermons. Too much of wonder and the stars, it would seem, and not enough endurance and duty.

I'm sure you've read my published journals. They aren't exactly common, but I have no doubt that, despite my uncle's displeasure at my adventures, he kept a collection of them. I often waxed effusive about the possibilities that await us out there,

waiting among the stars that were once our inheritance, if we could only put aside our fears and muster hope for the future — faith in the Pancreator's plan. I cannot believe, as many do, that He intends for us a dwindling fate, a slow death as the stars fade, growing cold century by century until our suns are but cinders.

We are meant for more than mewling. It is our destiny to reach beyond what we know, finding the answer to the mystery of the growing darkness and bringing light to what is hidden.

But I am lecturing you as I have done with my uncle. You have served the Imperial Court for years as liaison to the Church. I cannot imagine in all your time there that some of Emperor Alexius' dreams have not rubbed off on you. He knows that we must reclaim our heritage among worlds now lost to us. My Lady answered his call and joined the Company of the Phoenix, and I followed her as Cohort — as did all our crew.

I have seen so much. Many things I could not write about in my journals, much less publish in the public portions. This universe is full of wonders. And terrors. I admit that my planetbound years have not all been a curse. They provided me a necessary balm from some of the horrors we encountered.

I am no fool. I understand why the Church restricts our access to the stars and to the technology we need to attain them. Our own hubris has nearly undone us many times before in the past. It's not just the arrogance of the Second Republic, but the way we truck with forces unseen: The lurking Dark, seeking to tarnish our souls. The line between the science of our ancestors and the occult was unclear even at the height of the Republic, as humankind sought to peer deeply into the workings of the universe and discovered that our own darkest urges stared back.

Was this the undoing of the Ancients, the Pre-Adamites who seeded the stars before our kind left the Eden of Holy Terra? Did their own sins turn upon them? If so, we must be doubly careful not to repeat their mistakes. But how can we know if we don't study them? One of the basic tenets of the Eskatonic Order is that knowledge is a lamp that can chase away the Dark — even knowledge the Orthodoxy forbids. That point of contention is one of many between our orders.

Forgive me. I once again divert into argument, when my aim is to assuage your concerns about my attendance at my uncle's ascendance. I cannot counter your doubt with dishonesty; I must present myself as I am.

In your letter to me, you asked for a full accounting of my time since I last published my travels. "Published," of course, is a colorful way to refer to my

rather obscure audience. It was not me they wanted to hear about in my accounts, but my Lady, Erian Li Halan. Now she is Baroness Erian Li Halan of Odeya.

As you surely surmised, my journals did not always tell the full stories of our exploits. I could not name all the names or mention every nearly heretical enterprise we engaged in. But I suspect you pieced together from my last published entry, many years ago, that we intended to search for the fabled planet of Yathrib. Clues pointed us to Holy Terra, and we were prepared to go straight there to unravel the mystery of Yathrib's lost jumprouete coordinates. Imagine being the first to once more visit that legendary planet where the Prophet first saw the Holy Flame. Is there any place more sacred? And yet, we are barred from it by ignorance.

But we did not go to Holy Terra. Our journey was interrupted by a pirate fleet bought and paid for by my Lady's brother, Baron Inami. We were boarded and kidnapped, brought forcefully back to Midian in our own ship!

Despite Julia and Sanjuk's short-lived attempt to reclaim control of our ship, we arrived at the Barony of Odeya in chains. We were marched from our ship to Inami's estate, there to suffer whatever punishment he envisioned for us. I imagined that Erian would give her brother what he really wanted: a duel to the death. They would clash swords back and forth across the battlements, each taking the measure of the other, their energy shields sparking each time a blow failed to slip through. Eventually, Inami would tire, for he was a glutton and Erian was toned by her travails. His guard would slip and Erian's blade would find his heart. As he collapsed, his people would rise up in a cheer for the death of the tyrant.

My reverie was broken by gasps of shock as we rounded the hills and the manse came within sight. Smoke curled from its high tower. We were marched double time through the gate and into the yard.

There we saw dogs licking at two bodies lying broken in the rushes. Drying blood coated fine clothing. Baron Inami and his son Goro. Dead.

People appeared all around us, brandishing hay forks and knives. Inami's serfs. One among them, an old woman, recognized Erian. She cried in joy and fell before her, claiming that the Pancreator had delivered their true lord to them.

Seeing which way the wind was blowing, our captors tried to flee, but the peasants overwhelmed them, wrestling them to the ground. They extracted the keys to our bindings, released us, and then bound the pirates with their own chains.

The story came out: During our journey back, the people finally rose up against Inami and his years

of cruel rule. In his arrogance, he had assumed that his hired criminal army would protect him, but they saw the lay of the land and deserted with much of his wealth stuffed into their doublets and saddled to their horses.

Inami and his son, the unfortunate and lumbering Goro, found themselves fighting their own people, backed into the manse's tower. Somehow, whether on purpose or by accident, a fire erupted and sent the peasants fleeing, trapping Inami and Goro at the top. Their only escape lay in leaping from the parapet. While it is possible to survive a fall from that height, although not without injury, both nobles had stuffed their own doublets with as much of the house treasures as they could carry. They landed in hay but were punctured by the cups, coins, and jewels they had crammed tightly to their torsos — killed by greed.

My romantic dream of Erian's final confrontation evaporated in the muck. With Inami dead, along with his sole heir, the estate fell to Lady Erian. Our adventures among the stars were over.

My Lady had a fief to manage, and a difficult one at that. Inami had left it in a sorry state, rife with crime syndicates. He had constantly borrowed money from them, and they acted like they owned the place. Convincing them otherwise was a trying and dangerous task, one that took many years. They did, however, prove to be the saving grace of the revolting peasants. By law, many of those peasants deserved death for what they'd done, but they had rescued my Lady and proved, over and over again in the coming trials, that they stood by her and not the syndicates. For their service in her war against the criminal invaders, she pardoned them.

Some would frown at this, but the Li Halan way seeks peace under heaven. Inami had disturbed the natural order; the seed of discord grew from his storehouse. To counter his years of bad faith, Lady Erian introduced mercy — when it was deserved. The syndicates got none of it. They eventually balanced their ledgers and realized the Barony of Odeya was no longer conducive to profit. They left. My Lady's war was over.

Yet the cost was high. Much of her family's riches and heirlooms were missing, and a whole year of crops were lost. My Lady was forced to seek help from Duchess Fativa in Kemerovo, as well as the Reeves guild's coffers, for loans to keep the fief running.

But she had the Resurgent, her starship, and her loyal crew. My Lady stayed to rule her fief, along with me as her confessor and spiritual advisor and Cardanzo as her steadfast bodyguard. The rest of our fellows took to the trade routes, hoping to turn the small resources of my Lady's fief into profitable

ventures. While crops were the main resource, there were still some precious metals in the nearby foothills. Inami had failed to exploit them, but my Lady now began that endeavor. Julia Abrams, our Charioteer pilot, proved herself to be quite the merchant trader, aided by our engineer, Sanjuk, and our beloved Onggangarak, a one-man (one-vorox!) stevedore crew.

My Lady tasked me with restoring the spiritual health of the community; the years of Inami's vain rule had wounded it. I wish I could report my miraculous success, but as I alluded to earlier in this missive, alas, I have no talent for it. They liked me well enough but in a pitying way. I begged my Lady to relieve me of this duty for the sake of her peoples' happiness, and she reluctantly agreed. We soon received an Orthodox priest from Santo Alecto. Deacon Elizabeth Lin Wu has proven a fine administrator of souls, albeit a boring one.

Happily, the Resurgent returned from one of its trade missions bearing a great gift: General Hanmei Usaki Li Halan, Erian's uncle. You almost certainly have met him at some official Imperial function or another. Perhaps you even visited his estate outside of Ventriddi on Byzantium Secundus. He is very old now and wanted to see once again the Garden Worlds of his youth. He left his manse in the hands of his cousins to come and help Erian reconcile her fief. This, more than anything I can tell you, stands as testament to my Lady's character. He is her uncle, yes, but he is also a legendarily upstanding soldier. His faith in her should, I hope, go some ways to justifying her faith in me.

His presence by her side has often made me think of my uncle. I wonder what he is feeling as he assumes his high station. I have not heard directly from him since the aftermath of his contentious election, and that was only his letter of invitation to me and my Lady, along with your letter of inquiry. He will not have an easy time ordering the faithful in these times. The near schism Hezekiah left us with will only grow worse. Too many people were traumatized by the technological arms race of the Emperor Wars, and their children are demanding a harder line on the use of technology. Hezekiah's rumored use of longevity serums did little to fend off accusations of hypocrisy against the Church, even in light of the Doctrine of the Privilege of Martyrs.

My uncle will be tempted to respond with harsh measures. I hope your counsel can temper this. I admit that I do not know where you stand on this issue, but from what I have heard of your time in the Imperial Court, you are well aware of the necessity of easing restrictions in this new time, as we take our first steps into barbarian space.

I have been to Hargard, although only as a way station for a journey deeper into Vuldrok space. Now it has come within the fold of the Known Worlds, as the dowry of our new Empress. It is incumbent upon us to increase our technical resources, not restrain them. Unfortunately, this primarily means acquiring military tech, so we may put down the revolt on Ostmark and withstand the reinforcements that will arrive from the resisting Star-Nations. But I pray it will also mean instead increased trade and increased goodwill between strangers, now allied by marriage.

More than any time in the last decade, I yearn for the stars. I have been to the Star-Nations! I know their people! I could do so much good there.

I know that my Lady also feels the pull of the moment: the need for the Questing Knights — her old order — to pave the way for Alexius' reign. She tires of fief management. She was not bred to it, and her adventurous life cannot be easily folded away into the family trunk with the heirlooms of her glory days. There is pressure on her to marry and produce an heir, but I know her heart says not yet. There is still much to do, much to achieve.

My uncle's invitation came as a great relief to her. Finally, an excuse to leave Midian! It is only for a few weeks, of course — there and back — but that, for now, is enough.

Perhaps, on the way back, we shall take a detour, visiting her old comrades in the Company of the Phoenix on Byzantium Secundus. I intend to seek a favor from my uncle, you see: an audience that I know he can arrange. I want my Lady to meet her.

Princess Aurora. Our new star.

I can scarce imagine setting eyes upon her. My reason tells me she is just a child, like any other. But my heart tells that she is our grace, our blessing, our future. She is ascendant over us all. How can the stars die while her eyes brim with light?

In this babe's hands rests the continuity of her father's quest to reclaim our heritage, flung across many planets. We shall unite our lost worlds under the banner of the Phoenix. What was burned will yet rise again.

Well, I have rambled, and now I have no time to edit this letter. It must go out on the courier ship, which leaves imminently.

But I shall follow soon behind it. Not in the Resurgent, as I expected, but in our new, larger ship: The Gakko, an Imperial Lekaf expedition ship. This is another gift from General Usaki, provided with significant assistance from Consul Quan Shu Romani of the Reeves. It comes as a loan on very generous terms — terms which, I write to my embarrassment, are meant not for Erian but for me. I was quite naïve about it at first, until Julia took me aside and “wised”

me up. As nephew of the new Patriarch, people already wish to butter me up for favors. The loan of the Lekaf is but the first. I protested and demanded that Erian refuse the loan, but she finds it all amusing, much to my frustration. General Usaki merely spoke in his usual idiom of parables: "The gifter of the horse cannot claim virtue for his giving when the horse has already bolted from the barn." I have no idea what he means by this.

I do know that I tremble every time I think about our coming journey. To rise once more into the sky! I have packed my bags, repacked them, and packed them again. It has been too long. What if I forget something essential? Onggark laughs at me, although I can tell he is glad that he will get to travel with me again.

The messenger is at my door, demanding that they must leave now. I hope I have bared enough of myself to at least convince you I am no conspirator, although I might be a fool. I sincerely look forward to meeting you in person on Holy Terra, although my journey from here to there will be a matter of weeks yet.

Then I will set foot upon the Cradle World and thank the Pancreator for the birth planet he once gave to us. And when we leave, I will thank Him again for the worlds he has yet to give us.

*Yours,
Giuseppe Alastro
Barony of Obeya
Midian*

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ZEBULON THE PROPHET

INTRODUCTION

Hail Zebulon, greatest of us all. Pilgrim, it is to the Prophet that we pray when the Dark grows deepest and all hope is lost. Like a lamp in the night, he shows us the way back into the Light.

None have seen the Light as did Zebulon, who removed from our eyes the blindfold that the Dark had placed upon us during our long, hard trials from the dirt to the stars. "In 2723, the Prophet saw the Holy Flame." On that far-flung world, now lost to us, he saw in full the Pancreator's radiance, and it shone ever forth from the Pancreator's brow.

Humans on their cradle world of Holy Terra had known glimpses of this Light, dimly seen in visions in elder ages. Only now, only through Zebulon's eyes, was it revealed in full glory: the primal star that burns at the center of all existence, the pole around which all the galaxies orbit.

We walk in the Prophet's footsteps on the trail he blazed through the stellar spaces, traveling along the routes he sanctified with his death, seeking, ever seeking, for some spark of that original Light that he did witness: the Flame Eternal.

Pray for Zebulon's return, that he might bring forth the Light and reignite the stars forever and ever, Universe without end.

— Charioteer Captain Zelina Hamid-Sandor, *The Pilgrim's Path: How to Read the Omega Gospels*

Once upon a future time, we went to the stars.

We rose up from our home planet and spread far and wide across the vast night, finding new homes on distant soil. We met other sentient beings, alien species whose worlds we colonized. Countless experiments in different societies, cultures, governments, and religions culminated in the Second Republic, the fabled technological utopia that science fiction tales had imagined.

Then the stars began to fade.

In the dimming light, our endeavor died. The greatest of civilizations collapsed, leaving ignorance and fear on hundreds of worlds. Where once we had looked to the heavens with hope and longing, now we cast our gazes downward in penance for the collective sin that had caused the suns to darken.

At the dawn of the sixth millennium, it seems that history is over. In the Dark Age ruins, we who had once mastered the secret physics of the universe now toil as serfs under the rule of vain nobles. Power-hungry priests seek dominion over our lives. Greedy merchant guilds, controlling the last of our technology, grow rich from bartering our needs and wants. And out among the darkening stars, enigmatic alien empires with agendas too paradoxical to fathom plot to inherit the remains.

Into this slow demise, following a tumultuous war, an emperor has arisen. Under Emperor Alexis' banner and years of peace, we have begun to hope again. Only a few of us will act on this hope. Fewer still will break the grip of custom and law and once more seize the stars — and renew our destiny.

A Futuristic Passion Play

Fading Suns is a space-fantasy roleplaying game, which means that there are starships, blasters, powered armor, alien species, and weird science. But there are also many elements from traditional fantasy gaming: heroic characters and struggles, a feudal sociopolitical structure (noble lords, high priests, headstrong merchants), powerful artifacts, and great mysteries. And there is horror: monsters and maddening discoveries.

Fading Suns has everything a roleplaying universe needs in order to tell stories of such varied and exotic themes. These kinds of stories can be found anywhere — throughout human history, in our own world here and now, and in the imagined future of our heroes. Players have described this game as having a "kitchen sink" setting, in that it includes "everything but the kitchen sink" — anything imaginable.

Players take the roles of noble knights, mystical priests, resourceful merchants, lone wolves, odd aliens, space "barbarians" from the outworlds, secret psychics, cyborgs, and crafty spies. They ride in starships to tread worlds old and new, rediscovering what was lost after the Fall of the Second Republic. And everywhere, the haunting presence of the unseen and inscrutable alien species that came before them remains — wielders of the miraculous super-science that leads them to the distant stars.

Like all games, **Fading Suns** is meant to be 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. We call **Fading Suns** a passion play, a saga about the triumphs and tragedies of its characters that takes place in an imagined future. Many stories can be told here, everything 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 primary theme is Questing. We look to the stars and imagine exploring them one day. The same is true of humans and aliens three millennia from now. Sojourns into space are not just physical challenges; they're spiritual pursuits. Wherever there are mysteries to be delved, religion rises to meet them. Unlike certain sci-fi visions of purely rational and technocratic futures, **Fading Suns** posits that we humans are never fully without spiritual speculations. Whether it's the superstitions of the fearful populace, the scriptures of a spacefaring Church, or unexplainable psychic powers and mystical rituals, in **Fading Suns**, the farther out we go, the less we really know.

When and Where

Fading Suns takes place exactly 3000 years into the future. This edition is being published in 2020, so our future history is current to the year 5020.

The setting is the Known Worlds of the Phoenix Empire. These planets remain connected to one another through *jumpgates*. Many worlds were lost after the Fall, their jumpgate connections sealed. This existing web of travel routes is called the *jumpweb*. The *Jumpweb of the Known Worlds* map shows the panoply of worlds that serve as the main stages for our passion play.

People can't simply create a route from one solar system to another on a whim. The routes are baked into the gates, part of alien technology that has yet to be fully understood. Hence, a world like Grail has only two routes connecting it: to and from Pyre and Rampart. The central Imperial world of Byzantium Secundus has *eight* routes leading to and from it. All jumproads lead (eventually) to the throne.

Each world is ruled by a noble house, although a few are run by one of the Church orders or a Merchant League guild. A growing number of them are claimed by the Emperor.

Off the map are the barbarian worlds, mostly former remnants of the Second Republic that are still poorly understood by Known Worlders after their 1000-year absence from the center of power. Only now is the Empire beginning to encroach again into these worlds.

Alien empires on the borders are at best neutral and at worst hostile. The Vau Hegemony is far more technically advanced than the Empire, but so far, it has kept its borders mostly sealed from humans. Known Worlders fear that they are pawns in some ancient chess game the vau are playing for eventual ownership of all space. The symbiots are shapechanging creatures that can convert humans to their hive society; they are fought tooth, claw, and blaster by humans to prevent them from entering and contaminating the Known Worlds.



The Core Books

Fading Suns first appeared in 1996 as a roleplaying game book and a computer strategy game called *Emperor of the Fading Suns*. A line of sourcebooks followed over the next years, introducing new aspects of the setting.

There have been three other editions of the main rulebook; this one is the long-awaited fourth edition, bridging the gap of years since the last sourcebooks were published. It's all you need to begin playing **Fading Suns**.

It consists of three volumes:

- **Universe Book** — The book you're reading now introduces the setting and its worlds.
- **Character Book** — A second volume provides the rules of play, as well as character creation.
- **Gamemaster Book** — The third book has rules for the gamemaster (which are a bit different from the players' rules), as well as numerous NPCs, including creatures, occult monsters, a sample setting (the world of Hargard), and a beginning drama (set on Hargard).

Look out for many forthcoming **Fading Suns** sourcebooks from Ulisses North America on a variety of topics, including many of the factions and alien species that we simply could not fit into the core books.

Roleplaying Explained

Fading Suns is aimed at players who have played roleplaying game (RPGs) before, but if you're new to the artform and hobby, don't worry. All the rules you need are contained in the three core books.

More specifically, these books present the **Fading Suns** setting as a *tabletop* roleplaying game. This means you and your friends gather around a table to play together. You can see and interact with each other, and the table gives you a place to put your character sheets (showing the rules that govern your characters), your 20-sided dice, and your victory-point tokens (see *Tools*, below).

One of you is the gamemaster. You're like the director of a play. You're also its chief playwright, but the players also help write the script as you play, improvising their character's reactions to the situations you put them into. Unlike the players, who each take the role of a single character, you take the role of the rest of the characters in the universe, everyone from the simple barman who serves the players' characters drinks in a tavern to the sly and indefatigable rival who has dogged the troupe's steps for years. It's all explained more in **Chapter 1: Rules** in the **Character Book**, as well as in **Chapter 1: Drama** in the **Gamemaster Book**.

The first step in learning to play **Fading Suns** is reading the three core books. Each chapter reveals more information about the setting and the rules of the game. **Chapter 4: Playing the Game** in the **Gamemaster Book** provides a step-by-step example of play, showing you how it all goes down.

TOOLS

Each player should have a single 20-sided die of their own. (They could all share a die, but that gets unwieldy.) In most hobby stores or online, you can find 20-sided dice; you can also get a special **Fading Suns** 20-sider from Ulisses.

In addition, you'll want tokens to represent the piles of victory points you'll be collecting — and spending — as gameplay proceeds. Everybody will earn individual piles of points from the dice rolls they make, which they'll draw from a central reservoir called the *well*, so you'll want a lot of tokens and a bowl to keep them in. Each player might also want their own small bowl. Ulisses provides tokens specifically made for **Fading Suns**, but you could substitute, in a pinch, anything from small coins to paper clips to jelly beans.

Finally, you'll want paper, pencils or pens, perhaps an electronic device, and — most important of all — imagination.





SAINT HORACE THE LEARNED MAN