



GODS  
KICKSTARTER UPDATE  
NOVEMBER 2020

# THE EMPIRE OF THE BLACK SUN





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## A Deadly Light

Before the disappearance of the Gods and the Night of the Black Sun, two alliances of city-states, Taegea and Viridia, held hegemony over most of the eastern Wildlands. Disputes between their component cities were frequent, but the pacts and alliances between them ensured that no full-scale war erupted. The proudest of those city-states was called Lux, which means "Light". Lux was proud of its art, its literature, and its architecture; its neighbors respected and envied its patrician families, whose influence reached all of Viridia and even parts of Taegea. To the Viridis and Taegeans, Lux rivaled legendary Babel and it seemed certain that it would one day surpass it.

Then, the Black Sun shone throughout the world and despair took all, until the Oracle prophesied that the Gods would come back to Lux after a millennium and all would be well again. For more than a century, the Republic of Lux lived for this powerful idea and its promise of hope.

That hope was dashed in the very place of its birth by those who tended its flame. The mighty Caelius family raised a temple to the One God, the Templum Primaris, at the top of Cradle Mount. Above this temple, a colossal black cube, the Vox Aedes appeared and the Caelii entombed in it a pure, white-haired child descended from the Oracle. After a brief and bloody coup, the Caelii proclaimed the end of the Republic and made Augustus Caelius Severus, the head of their family, into the first Emperor of Lux.

## THE CASTI, THE SLAUGHTERED LIGHT

This powerful family of the Republic of Lux was known for its platinum blond hair and it is said that the Oracle was born of their line, which only served to increase their notoriety.

When the Caelii eradicated the Casti and sacrificed their last descendant to the One God, they strove to erase the memory of their rivals. Hope endures in the hearts of humankind, however, and even in the heart of darkness, the smallest light can shine.

Despite centuries of effort, neither the Emperors of Lux nor the Cult have managed to completely silence the stories told of the Casti and their tragic line. One might think that their fate would serve as a warning to the people of Lux and finish breaking them to the yoke, but even in the heart of the capital, some still see the slaughter of the Casti as evidence that the first Emperor and his followers were deathly afraid of the fair-haired bloodline, for what else but abject terror would motivate those who speak of the omnipotence of the One to feel threatened by a little boy?

Augustus reigned for less than a year before he was assassinated by his son, Marcus Brutus, who took the throne and gave audience to Adrah, the prophet of the One God. Adrah and the Emperor spoke for six days and six nights and the Cult of the Black Sun was proclaimed the religion of the Empire.

Since the birth of the Empire of the Black Sun, its power has steadily grown, especially in the last generation. Preachers of the One accompany the legions and while they are courteous to those who welcome them, only a fool would not see that their goal is nothing less than complete control of all peoples and their very souls. For a long time, the legions and zealots marched as one to carry out this enormous task and the power of the Empire and the Cult were linked. Now, things go even further, and the Emperor and the Cult work hand in hand to catch the rest of the world in a pincer of both strength of arms and religious conversion.

## Iron-Will'd Architects

Fertile plains surround Lux, making it the richest city state in Viridia even before the proclamation of the Empire. The very name of the region was synonymous with abundance and fertility, as in Viri (Now Imperi) "Viride" means "green". In order to trade with the surrounding peoples at first and to expand its influence later, the Empire went ahead with colossal construction projects to make the land more easily passable. The Clamors Hills were hollowed out with tunnels, the dirt trails were turned into stone roads, and long stone bridges were built over the valleys. For more than a century, Luxean architects and engineers developed their talents in the motherland and when they reached new plains in the West and South, they laid down wide paved roads to allow a constant flow of people and goods. This architectural genius is one of the main reasons for the rise of the Empire, especially in the Frontier.

## The Bloody Throne

Death has overshadowed the history of Luxean Emperors since their inception as rulers. Many of the first Emperors died suddenly by knife or poison until the Cult managed to give the office and the person of the Emperor a more sacred character. Even without these "misadventures" the accession to the throne is always a gory affair. When an Emperor dies, his male children are brought together for the Successia, the rite of succession. They are locked in a room with various weapons and the doors only open when a single survivor is left. This surviving child is the new Emperor.

Nero Crassus Primus ascended the throne in 902 DA and brought a new, murderous twist to the process of succession. His father, Augustus Laevinus Quintus was in the throes of dementia and was convinced he had been given the gift of eternal life by the One; as such he decided he needed no

## IMPERIAL ROADS

Luxean paved roads are instantly recognizable from their pristine state as the slaves and soldiers of the Empire work tirelessly to maintain them. All imperial roads lead to Lux and are patrolled by its armies, and tolls and state-sponsored hostels bring in the funds necessary for their maintenance. The impaled corpses of rebels and blasphemers are exposed at busy crossroads and bridges for public edification. Foreigners are most familiar with the two main roads that extend far beyond the borders of the Empire and cross the Wildlands.

To the South, the Via Sacra has linked Lux and Sabaah-of-Celestial-Gardens for generations and it passes through the free city of Kuuma. It used to be called the Via Imperatora but Emperor Nero, having decreed the supremacy of the Cult over public matters, has seen fit to rename it.

To the North, the Via Vesper crosses the northern Frontier to allow merchants to reach the Western part of the continent. At its inception, the Via Vesper was supposed to reach Altaron, the Avhoragean capital, but it now ends some days before the border of Avhorage itself. Since the ascension of Emperor Nero Crassus Primus, preachers and armies have replaced trade caravans and the further west they go on the Via Vesper, the more they risk being attacked by hostile tribes and peoples of the Frontier as well as Avhoragean knights of the orders of the Wolf, Hawk and Elm.

heirs and had all his sons poisoned. The morbidly obese prince Nero survived the poison and led a troop of elite warriors of the Cult to wipe out Augustus and his praetorian guard. Nero killed his father himself and hurled him from the throne, declaring himself the new Emperor and high priest of the Black Sun. Nero enacted changes in Imperial society, fusing the power of the office of the Emperor and that of the Cult completely for the first time since the Empire's founding.

The new ruler launched the Dark Pilgrimages, in which the black legions and the preachers of the One redoubled their efforts to convert or conquer, comforted in their belief that the new Emperor was the divine instrument that would usher the arrival of the One. In the span of a generation, the Empire of the Black Sun made more converts and sent more missionaries than in the rest of its history combined.

## The Appearance of Plurality

The Empire of the Black Sun openly wishes to unite the whole world in adoration to the One. While its dogma states that all men are equal in the eyes of God, in practice, this is decidedly not the case. One only has to look at the way the Empire treats the people of the Wildlands to see that this equality is a complete sham. The people of Tουλhe are treated like primitives and servants because of their dark skin, which the Luxeans see as a sign that the One marked them to serve the Empire. The riders of the Horde and the nomads of the Frontier are seen as barbarians and mongrel thugs only fit to be enslaved or exterminated. The peoples of the West, with their higher incidence of fair hair, are seen as an affront to the One, and it is seen as a reminder of the pale hair of the Casti who are synonymous with the Republic and the prophecy that the Empire attempts to stop from becoming reality at all costs.

According to Luxean standards, skin must be pale and hair dark; ideally black. Many dye their hair or shave their head and wear a wig to conform to this ideal and there are many creams and powders used to hide redness or tanning, or

### THE IMPERIAL TONGUE

The decades that followed the founding of the Empire saw both the rise of the Cult and the reforging of Luxean society with the ambition to erase any trace of the "dark ages" that preceded the Empire of the Black Sun. The old Viri language was retooled and local dialects were stamped out mercilessly save for a few loan words that endure in the vocabulary of Imperi, the imperial language. The scribes of the Cult and the imperial censors spent centuries destroying texts that were deemed embarrassing to the Empire or that could weaken its hold on power. Conversely, they also translated into Imperi those texts deemed inoffensive or useful. Ancient texts in the old Viri tongue are now very rare and highly prized by collectors and clandestine scholars who take great care to not be discovered. The Luxeans have literally rewritten their history and even in the best patrician families and places of learning, it is rare to find someone who doesn't believe that old Viridia was a collection of barbaric settlements living in ignorance and filth. According to its new history, the Empire allowed the rise of civilization and the very existence of the old Republic is completely ignored by most Luxeans, with the few who know about it imagining some primitive and barbaric version of the hated republic of Thalos. The truth is a persistent thing, however, and some know much more than they let on of real Luxean history.

simply to make the face even paler. Physical appearance is paramount in the Empire and the more one is close to its ideal, the more they are assumed to be virtuous and worthy of serving the One. Conversely, the further one is from the standards of beauty, the more they are assumed to be wicked and seen as someone only to be used. A certain pragmatism is evident in the treatment of converts; new and foreign believers are highly esteemed as having turned away from the wickedness of their peers and embraced the truth of the One of their own free will. It is said that they will take a place of honor at the side of the One when he will cleanse the world of its lies. The founder of the powerful Quintilius family was himself a disgruntled rider of the Horde who betrayed his own and converted. Outside of such cases, however, there is genuine racial segregation and prejudice in the hierarchy of the Empire and even more in the Cult itself. The Council of Five who head the Cult as well as all their direct subalterns are all examples of the Luxean physical ideal.

Having fair hair, especially blond, is a major disadvantage in Luxean society, to the point where one might have trouble finding a spouse and will be treated with condescension or outright scorn wherever they go, to say nothing of the fact that the Cult always needs fresh blood on its altars...

## Industry and Trade in Service of Ambition

The great patrician families of the Empire hold dominion over its government and its economy and own most of the arable land, mines and crafting businesses, as well as many caravans and most warehouses. Shopkeepers, craftsmen and farmers can only ever hope to prosper under them with little to no hope of upwards mobility. Slavery is ubiquitous and hereditary and even citizens who fall from grace will have all their descendants born into servitude.

The Empire is prosperous and trades mainly with Babel, the nine cities of Ool, as well as with the merchant-princes of Fakhari and the Divided Kingdoms in a lesser capacity. Patricians have no problem paying heavy taxes on their trade revenue to support the legions and the many bribes that the Cult pays to weasel its way into the palaces and courts of the Wildlands. It is a strange idea to outsiders, but the economic ambition of rich Luxeans is a form of patriotism and even piety for them, as it allows them to contribute to the greatness and power of their nation and the spread of its religion. While some Luxeans appreciate foreign baubles, fabrics and jewels as well as Fakhari spices, the bulk of Lux's import is in food and raw materials. Merchant houses of the Empire export very little. Agriculture and the exploitation and transformation of ores, wood, and stone are very developed and important in the Empire. All trade and industry is therefore geared to keep the Empire's legions well fed, well equipped and ready to conquer.

## A Stable and Rigid Society

Stability, safety, faith and obedience are the main values of Luxean society, which is divided into three strata under the Emperor. The patricians are the old families that used to lead the Republic and act as both the aristocracy and the upper hierarchy of the Cult. The Imperial Citizens are the most numerous social group in Lux. Proud and devout, they are all followers of the One and are considered his blessed children; they are the numbers without which the Empire could not endure, much less expand. The best way for a citizen to improve their situation is to join the clergy of the One or the legions. If rise through the ranks and serve well in either organization, they might petition a patrician to sponsor them to join the aristocracy.

## The Reign of the Austere and the Colorless

Imperial architecture is a testament to Lux's desire for order and power. Buildings are square, with large porches and imposing columns. Curves are rare and gardens are neat and orderly, as if to try and break nature itself to the yoke of empire. In Lux proper, Siides, the black flowers blessed by the One, are ubiquitous, growing around tall, carefully manicured cypresses. Statues are made according to strict rules to evoke poise, strength and cool detachment. White, silver, gray and black are the shades favored by imperial citizens for everything. Togas and robes are an immaculate white, jewelry is silver or obsidian, marble is white or black, and even private houses are decorated without bright colors. One might use pastels, such as in a scarf, veil or tablecloth, but white, black and their derivatives still dominate. Gold is sometimes used to decorate the breastplates of officers and the reliefs of temples, but that's the extent of its use.

Tunics, togas, and bracciae are the mainstays of the male Luxean wardrobe. Women wear flowing folded robes called stolae, which are intricately draped around the body. Clothes are usually a single color but the edge of sleeves are sometimes decorated with geometric patterns. The law forbids (under pain of death) hiding one's face under any circumstance, unless one is a high priest of the Cult. Patricians are easily recognized by the silver chain they wear at the wrist, with a small plaque engraved with their family name. Slaves always wear an iron collar that serves as both a reminder of their status as well as a way to chain them easily.

Noisy or ostentatious art is rare in Lux and there are simply no street artists, concerts or holidays not religious in nature. Music, which favors wind instruments, is airy and austere and paintings are realistic and devoid of bright colors. Luxean theater is sober in form but its verses are complex and multi-layered, leaving much room for double-entendres, plays on words and diverging interpretations, despite the fact that it is meant to educate and influence the citizenry's opinions in favor of the Cult. Poetry is often abstract and more concerned with creating ingenious rhymes and rhythms

than evoking ideas or sensations. The rare poets who write something more intellectual and meaningful (and therefore subversive) are quickly ignored, exiled, or worse. The whole of Luxean culture seems to have been made in order to channel and negate strong emotions or reactions so that nothing will move or impassion the citizens other than the rites of the Cult of the Black Sun.

### SOBRIETY AND DEBAUCHERY

Luxeans society shows a facade of austerity and restraint, with public manifestations of joy, street performances and public drunkenness being forbidden and severely punished. Behind this thin veneer and the concealment of closed doors, however, innumerable orgies of drink and the pleasures of the flesh take place in taverns and the salons of the patricians. Hidden from view by thick walls and the cover of night, Luxeans can satisfy their every vice. Gladiatorial combat is about the only public display permitted by the Cult, who dedicates every death to the glory of the One, and are extremely prized by the people of Lux. Violent death is a welcome distraction to the jaded citizens of Lux and the older provinces. The Great Arena of Lux and most of the other, smaller venues all around the Empire are always full and are the only places where public assembly is permitted outside of the ceremonies of the Cult. The gladiators are mostly slaves but some citizens choose to test their strength and wits in the arena, for the winnings are potentially massive. Some particularly skilled gladiators are approached by the legions to become fighting instructors.

## The Laws of the One

When he took power, Nero Crassus Primus declared that the laws of the Cult would supersede those previously in use in the Empire. In a few short years, the complex legal system was reformed and made into a structure centered around order, stability, security, power and devotion that governs most aspects of daily life. There are two taxes in the Empire, one for the Empire itself and a collection for the church. Those who cannot pay either of those must serve for a year as a temple servant or legionnaire, which puts poor citizens in a situation not dissimilar to that of the slaves, as they can rarely afford to pay both taxes or improve their station. They are still protected by the law, however, while slaves can be mistreated, mutilated or killed freely without legal recourse. In the worst cases, the owner might demand financial compensation to the offending party but no thought is given to the slave's well-being.

Crimes against a citizen are severely punished by torture, enslavement, mutilation, or death on the altar of the altar of the One. Officially, the law also punishes excesses and vice but hypocrisy reigns supreme in the Cult and it is more than willing to turn a blind eye to the crimes of those who have power and money.

Luxean tribunals are strict and harsh, at least to those who cannot afford bribes or do not show ostentatious piety. Order in the cities of the Empire is enforced by the lictors, a local militia under the control of the imperial magistracy. Lictors are tasked with watching the walls and gates of a city, patrolling the streets, arresting criminals and providing the muscle for raids conducted by the magistrates or the priests of the Order of the Eye. Many officers of the lictorate are former legionaries.

More than a third of the higher civil servants and magistrates of the Empire are members of the clergy of the Cult of the Black Sun. Officially, the priests of the One can only preside over trials on religious matters but their power is impressive and far-reaching, especially since the Emperor himself is a priest of the Black Sun. Beyond the legal sphere, the complete hegemony of the Cult on the citizens' spiritual life bleeds into civic duties and rights. The Cult baptizes all newborns and reserves the right to kill those it deems impure or unholy for whatever reason. Priests of the Cult preside over weddings, which are always austere, joyless affairs and they also bring the dead to their final resting place where they also reserve the right to reject any they see as having not lived a sufficiently pious existence.

#### THE MASSACRE OF THE BLACK SUN

The main religious holiday of the Cult takes place on the fifth night of the Sword of Blood. Everywhere in the Empire, orgies of exceptional debauchery are held and in every house, a slave or, failing that, a white-coated animal, is violently sacrificed on the altar. Revelers take great pains to stay mostly sober until midnight where they attend the holy prayer of the Cult before going back to a now climaxing party.



# TEN FAMILIES

The Empire is home to many patrician families whose size ranges from a handful of people living in the same home to several hundred members, including cadet branches and vassals absorbed into the family by marriage and alliance.

In the Empire's beginnings, a few families among the most powerful and august managed to raise themselves above the rest by showing their loyalty to the throne. In theory, their position of privilege can be revoked and they can be replaced by another family that the sovereign or the Cult see as more useful to their ends but in practice, the political ramifications of such a thing are so deep and the interests of these families, the Emperor and the clergy are so intertwined that it is a more common occurrence for them to fall temporarily from grace than to be truly demoted.

The ten families whose elders advise the Emperor are divided into two "wings", Dexter (charged with diplomacy) and Sinister (charged with war). They are also called "The ten fingers of the Emperor".

The Cult and the Emperors have always done their best to stoke rivalries between the Ten Families and refuse them access to the higher offices of the priesthood of the Black Sun. Nero went even further and decreed that the title of Emperor would no longer be hereditary that the Five would designate his successor among the Ten Families. Thus, each of those families hopes to take the throne for itself and stays wary of the others.

## The Size of a Family

The exact size of each Great Family varies wildly but through marriage and the absorption of vassal families, they can be several hundred strong. There is an internal hierarchy to every family, of course, and the children of cadet branches or new additions have very little power. Competition between branches of a family is strong, with the ambitious youth attain ever greater honor while the meek are left by the wayside and placed quietly in unimportant offices.

Most of the Ten Families have about ten branches, all tied to a single main branch that enjoys far greater prestige. These branches do not bear the family name so one must be careful who one is talking to, as even a minor member of one of these cadet and allied branches enjoys more power and prestige than any other citizen in Lux.

## DEXTER FAMILIES

### Caelius

Rivalry between the Caelii and Casti as well as the former's faith in the One have caused on the one hand the fall of the Republic, and on the other the birth of the Empire. The Caelii hold a paradoxical position: their prestige is so great and their scions often distinguish themselves as administrators and magistrates. However, they would presume to influence the decisions of the clergy, which they had hoped would be made subservient to the throne after the birth of the Empire. Emperor Nero being a priest of the Black Sun, it would seem that the balance of power has shifted towards the clergy, to the secret but very bitter disappointment of the Caelii.

### Domitius

Another prestigious line from the time of the Republic, the Domitii are renowned for their talents as negotiators and diplomats and many an emissary or the Empire or preacher of the Cult comes from their ranks. The courtesy and refinement of the Domitii are copied by anyone who's someone in Lux.

### Horatius

Talented public speakers, the Horatii are also poets and dramatists of great renown. Their mastery of the word is unparalleled and they also illustrate themselves in the art of architecture. They have provided several imperial concubines throughout the centuries and it is in honor of one of them that they were raised to the ranks of the Ten.

### Livius

An Empire cannot rule without administration and in many respects, the Livii are the administration of the Empire. Their entry into the ranks of the great families came after the sacrifice of their patriarch Marius Livius Ravila, secretary to emperor Marcus Brutus Primus, in recognition for his service. The Livii prefer to work from behind the scenes, exerting their enormous influence over both administration and trade. Before the Dark Pilgrimages, the Livii were often the main (or the only) link between the foreign peoples and the Empire. Now, they often join the order of Darkness or sometimes that of the Voice, although not so much to preach as to observe what is going on in the Wildlands.

### Petronius

Once the guardians of the imperial law, the Petronii legislators have seen their influence decline since Nero Crassus Primus' bloody ascension to the throne. More and more of them are leaving the capital to live in distant provinces or even independent countries, always looking for opportunities to gain power and make themselves indispensable.

## SINISTER FAMILIES

### Acilius

The Acilii have always been attracted to the unknown, ever reaching beyond the horizon. Originally from the republic of Thalos, these navigators and explorers have since been recognized as full citizens. They often lead great expeditions and some have joined the Order of the Voice.

### Flavius

No family in the Sinister can claim to be the embodiment of the expression "left hand of the Emperor" more than the Flavii. Since Marcus Brutus Primus, this family has been deeply embedded in the Cult and knows many secrets that other families, and even the Emperor, do not.

### Quintilius

Where the Acilii sail, the Quintilii ride. Descended from a rider of the Horde who declared himself for the Empire, they were ennobled after their founder allowed the legions to earn the only true victory the Empire ever gained against the Horde. This family is without pair when it comes to turn the tables of their enemies on the battlefield with surprising and daring tactics. All male Quintilii have a military career and are among the Empire's best generals. The Horde and the Quintilii have an ancestral and visceral hatred for one another that burns hot to this day.

### Sestius

The Sestii are paragons of loyalty to the Empire and martial prowess. They earned their status as Great Family at the tip of a sword on the battlefield over many generations. If the higher ranks of the legions are usually reserved to the Valerii, the Sestii make amazing centurions and command most forts and defenses of the Empire.

### Valerius

The Valerii are strategists through and through. Often charismatic, and deadly in combat, they have come to almost monopolize the upper echelons of imperial military. The ambition of the Sestii and Flavii as well as their strong ties to the Cult means that the Valerii do not quite have the blind confidence of the Emperor as they used to.

## THE PLACE OF WOMEN

Luxeian culture is openly patriarchal and the clergy of the One counts few women in the ranks of its higher priests and no woman has ever been part of the Council of Five. Only a man may ascend the throne and the Emperor has no consort but concubines. The Emperor's sisters and daughters are given to the Cult to join the sacred virgins of the Immaculate. Luxean law considers a husband to be the head of the family and allows him to rule over his household as he sees fit. Women can only inherit wealth and titles if no male relative can in their stead or if they are widowed. While the marriages of patricians are commercial and political affairs that ensure alliances and are decided without input from the interested parties, women of the lower classes enjoy somewhat more freedom in their life choices. The law allows unmarried young plebeian women to join the legions or fight in the arena, while barring patrician women from doing the same. The clergy of the Cult is not allowed to marry but outside of the Immaculate, they are not forced into total abstinence and the fruit of their unions are raised among the Children of the Black Sun to join the ranks of the Cult upon reaching adulthood.



## THE HEART OF A DARK FAITH

When the Caelii and their allies threw down the Republic, they raised a temple to the One at the top of Cradle Mount that was soon under the shadow of the Vox Aedes. The roof the Templum Primaris is a large esplanade strewn with the bones of the Prophet and his daughter, who he gave as sacrifice to the One so he would share his will with him. Inside the Vox Aedes are surely the remains of another child, the last of the Caesti, although none have actually seen them. Since it appeared, not even the Five can enter the gigantic black cube, and the masters of the Cult simply stand in front of it once a Time to commune with their God. When they do, all the people of Lux grow silent and turn toward Cradle Mount, heads bowed in respect. They listen to the "song" of the one, a dreary, haunting lament that echoes throughout the capital of the Empire and even several miles around it.

While the Five go about their bloody sacrifices and commune with the One, many faithful crowd the foot of the Mount. Sometimes, the Vox Aedes sings outside of those moments, an occurrence that used to be exceedingly rare but is now more and more common.

While some scholars in Lux know of the Prophecy of the Oracle, the Cult itself vehemently denies its existence. Some believe that the Oracle was wrong and that it was the birth of the One rather than the return of the Gods of old that was to come. Those who believe this keep it to themselves, the better to stay out of the Cult's suspicion.

The Luxeans live close to their dead, entombing them in subterranean necropolises just underfoot. The dead are wrapped in cloth and fragrant herbs then brought

underground by the undertakers who will proceed to fit them in one of the innumerable alcoves. It is not rare to have to push the remains of older corpses to make room for a new one and the people of the Empire give no particular honor or deference to the dead; their corpses are far more equal in the eye of the One than the living. Oftentimes, there is not even a funeral or ceremony when a person dies; the undertakers simply knock at the door and bring the corpse away to the necropolis, where a priest will decide if the departed's soul was pure enough to allow a burial. Should it be refused, the corpse will be thrown in a ditch or with the city's refuse. There is no cult of the dead, as only the One is deemed worthy of worship and the faithful who wishes to have guidance from his deceased kin should direct their prayers to the One instead. Only the undertakers enter the necropolises.

## THE MAIN BRANCHES OF THE CULT OF THE BLACK SUN

Headed by the Council of Five, the priesthood of the Black Sun is divided into several orders with a unique mission. The largest and most well-known are the following:

### The Order of the Eye

The main branch of the Cult, the Eye oversees the application and enforcement of religious law. This is by far the most prestigious order and many a faithful wishes to join it, with few actually managing to enter.

### The Order of Darkness

Known for its exactness and impartiality, the Darkness collects money for the church and acts as scribes and librarians for the Cult.

### The Order of the Voice

Preachers of the Cult, most members of the Voice live outside the Empire, spending all their time converting and preaching the word of the Black Sun. As bearers of the words of the One, they act as executioners within the Empire.

### The Black Circle

The inquisitorial branch of the Cult, the Black Circle tracks down heretics and heathens within the Empire and even over its borders, should they flee. They make sure that the

flock remains on the path of the One and watch everyone, including other members of the Cult. They have sanction to act on their own, without warning other branches of the Cult or obtaining their approval.

### The Children of the Black Sun

The order that welcomes young children fated to become priests. Most are pupils of the Empire but some patrician families place one of their children there. The current generation is deemed to be especially blessed, as it will witness the birth of the One.

### The Immaculate

The sisters and daughters of the Emperor join the order of the Immaculate and live as cloistered nuns in the Templum Primaris. Most faithful know nothing of the rites and devotions they practice, as they live mostly apart from the rest of the Cult. They almost never leave the temple but when one does go into the streets of the capital, people give her a wide berth, as touching, shoving or hurting an immaculate in any way is one of the worst possible crimes. Even the Council of Five honors their sanctity and avoids causing them harm. It is said that their purity and holiness is such that the One prolongs their existence and shields them from diseases and accidents.



## The Black Legions of Lux

Outside of a few bodyguards and the lictorate, the imperial legions are the only group of people under arms allowed in the Empire. The Luxean uniform is a simple gray tunic decorated with black bands at the sleeves. Officers wear a black tunic with bands of different colors according to their rank: white for optio (sergeants), silver for centurions, and gold for praetores (generals). All legionnaires wear a breastplate and open-faced helmet and carry a sturdy shield. Centurions decorate their breastplate with silver inlays, while praetores do the same with gold. Each legionnaire carries a knife and gladius; a short sword whose blade used to be barely longer than a dagger but has elongated over the centuries.

There are dozens of legions, but the most renowned are the 24 that correspond to the hours of the day and night called the major legions or legio majoris. The most prestigious among them are the XIIth and XXIVth legions.

The XIIth legion is called the zenith legion, associated with midday where the eye of the One dominates the celestial dome and the world. This legion is traditionally tasked with protecting the capital and the palace of the Emperor.

The XXIVth legion is called the legion of birth, as it is associated with midnight, when the nightly prayer to the one is said. Soldiers of the XXIVth are tasked with protecting the members of the cult when they leave on mission, they also stand guard at the foot of Cradle Mount and keep the faithful from climbing it.

The minor legions, or legio minoris are numbered starting with XXV. Their prestige is far lesser than the first 24 and even most of their members would rather pass on a promotion within them than be transferred as lowly soldiers in one of the majoris. Some minor legions have distinguished themselves but they are still looked down upon by the major legions.

One legion consists in 24 centuries for a total of 2,400 men. The XIIth and XXIVth centuries are also endowed with strong symbolism, with the former serving as bodyguard to the praetor and the latter being used as a sort of elite unit, taking care of the most dangerous missions and deploying where the fighting is fiercest. Six centuries form the cavalry of a legion (equipped with leather armor and throwing spears) and six others are the archers (sometimes slingers). The twelve remaining centuries are pure infantry and carry a pilum, a heavy spear used as both melee and throwing weapon. The XIIth and XXIVth centuries are often part of the cavalry.

The XIVth, XVth and XVIth legions are the navy of the Empire and thus, are organized very differently. They are forever struggling with Taegean corsairs that they cannot manage to outclass no matter how much they train or how well outfitted their ships are.

The chiefs of staff of the Empire are the praetors of the legio majoris. When one of them retires or dies, the others offer his place to the most talented praetor of the legio minoris or to one of the centurions that served under him. Luxean generals have shown great interest towards Avhorean crossbows and have managed to reverse-engineer them with some success, although they are still difficult to make. Crossbowmen only ever amount to a few decuriae here and there within the archer centuries of major legions rather than forming a full corps.

## LUXEAN NAMES

All citizens of the Empire have a family name and patricians had a nickname (cognomen) that corresponds to their specific lineage or serves as a sort of badge of honor. Emperors honor their predecessors by using the same first name and using the cognomen for numbering (Primus, Secundus, Tertius, etc.) The current sovereign, Nero of the Crassus family is the first of his name, therefore his full name is Nero Crassus Primus.

### Female first names

Alba, Beatrix, Beltana, Calida, Cassia, Drusilla, Edria, Juliana, Lavinia, Lea, Lucinda, Lydia, Mira, Petra, Prisca, Quintinia, Rufina, Selena, Serena, Stella, Valeria, Veronia.

### Male first names

Aetius, Aloysius, Astranus, Belisarius, Caeso, Caltarias, Cato, Claudius, Drusus, Edrius, Gaius, Leo, Lucius, Marcus, Marius, Menas, Parsimus, Petrus, Quintinius, Quintus, Reginaldus, Sertor, Severius, Sextus, Stravus, Valerius.

### Family names and cognomen

Acilius, Aelius, Albanus, Barrius, Borellus, Caecina, Caledus, Calatorius, Caprenius, Decius, Facilis, Fulvius, Labeo, Minerus, Naso, Nuncipio, Oranius, Petronius, Pomponus, Pontius, Rufus, Rusonius, Salonius, Sejanus, Septimus, Silius, Tarquinius, Trebellius, Umbrenius, Validara, Varius, Vedius, Veranius, Vespasia, Vipus.

## Soaring to New Heights

The beginning of the Dark Pilgrimages saw a marked increase in military preparations as the Empire musters its forces to finally crush its enemies. In a few years, border skirmishes have increased tenfold and the Empire established new outposts all over the Frontier, strengthened its ties to Babel and braved the nomads of the South to gain a foothold in the jungles of Tuuhle. The Republic of Thalos, the Horde, and the empire of Avhoreae are the main targets of the Lux's ambition, but the hurdles are many. The imperial fleet is outclassed by the Thalosian navy, its cavalry is no match for the clans of the Horde who can strike like lightning and disappear into the vast expanse of the steppe before any real effort to stop them can be mounted and the knightly orders of Avhoreae have discipline and courage to match any legionary.

Using foreign auxiliaries is becoming the norm for the armies of the Empire, despite the legions' misgivings about them and their lack of faith in the One. The Legionaries' distaste for those they see as faithless barbarians means that auxiliary units are systematically attached to the minor legions and never the major ones. There are three main groups of auxiliaries: the renegades of the central plains who hail from the Frontier or the lands of the Horde, corsairs who engage the Thalosian navy, and Vaelkyr marauders whose service is paid for in slaves to perpetuate their doomed people.

The implantation of the Cult in foreign lands is still the best means of expansion available to the Empire, as the preachers and converts can act like sleeper agents ready to rise up against their homeland. While the queen of Babel has officially adopted the faith of the Black Sun, a genuine and important political and symbolic change, the same cannot be said of the rest of the Wildlands. The Divided Kingdoms are too wary of each other to be easily united by the Cult, the nine cities of Ool have been completely impossible to convert, and the emissaries sent to Saeth have never returned. The priests of the One are killed on sight in the lands of the Horde, in the republic of Thalos, and in Avhoreae, while indifference and distrust is the only welcome they receive in Tuulhe.

## THE LAST CANDLE

The Order of the Black Circle knows that heresy hides in the very heart of the capital. Not only can the citizens and patricians stray from the path of the One, but some go even further. For generations, the Black Circle has been working to eradicate a cult (or secret society) that opposes both the truth of the One and the Empire itself. The members of this group, called Lux Aeterna, the eternal light, have been decimated many times and were thought to be completely eliminated more than once, but they always spring back up sooner or later. Furious at their lack of success in ridding the Empire of these enemies within, the Black Circle has never volunteered information as to their existence to the rest of the Cult, which remains completely ignorant of them. Only the members of the Circle know that seemingly isolated acts like the killing of a preacher or the "accidental" burning of a temple are in fact the work of an organized group and even that is the end of their knowledge. They have no idea of the structure, direction or true intentions of Lux Aeterna.

