Technology

Looking down at the corpse, Daidalos hawked and spit. The dead man had been Eustathios. He'd been a good worker, Eustathios, a freedman still in service, saving to buy a wife. Every vein had burst, leaving the corpse so red as to be nearly black. Grim faced, Daidalos turned away and stalked across the work camp towards the monk's tent.

Pushing inside, Daidalos found the pale young man, barely more than a boy, his nose buried in a scroll.

"I've got another worker, dead" growled Daidolos.

The pale young man looked up. "Yes?"

Daidalos moved forward, grabbing the monk by his tunic and pulling him to his feet. "That's four men dead from your magic!" The foreman's rage slurred his words.

The young man fought to keep fear from his voice and face. The foreman was old, but he was strong, hardened by a lifetime's labor. "You knew there would be losses," said the young man.

"Losses!" Daidalos let the monk fall to the ground. It was all he could do not to throw him.

The young man moved cautiously to his feet. "In a week, your crew has accomplished three month's labor. My magic did that. You'll finish the aqueduct before summer."

Daidalos looked at the monk and thought seriously of killing him. And yet, the pale bastard was right. With the monk, there'd be a fat early completion bonus, and a chance at bigger jobs. Without him, they'd be lucky to finish the aqueduct before winter.

"If another one of my freedmen dies because of you," growled Daidalos, "I'll see that you join him." The foreman stalked from the tent.

The pale young man breathed out. The fear faded, replaced by anger. What did that ape know of feeding power to a man, averting hunger and the need for sleep, keeping him strong? Too little and the magic was useless, too much and the man would die. And who cared if a few workers died, so long as the project was completed?

The young man's hand drifted to a hidden pocket, toying with a red stone the size of a finger tip. Perhaps it was time the crew had a new foreman.

Technological development is slow in the great empires. An ambitious and well educated man can live far better serving the government or in business than in the crafts. A man inclined to the peaceful, scholarly life can find a career in the temples or monasteries. Perhaps most importantly, the relatively stable great empires look to the past or within for knowledge. There is a pervasive sense that all worth knowing has already been discovered.

The presence of reliable magic also impedes technological progress, both by drawing away resources and reducing need. Many bright young people are drawn to study magic, but that knowledge is useless to those without the Talent; these failed students tend to be drawn into the temple

bureaucracies or the ranks of government clerks. Rare though they are, magickers skilled with the Black, Red or Gold can craft objects with extraordinary properties. Masters of the White, Red or Gold can predict the future with some accuracy and communicate over vast distances, while masters of the Green, Red and Gold can reliably heal, enhance crop yields and extend life. The availability of these services to the rich and powerful removes much of the incentive to look for new and better ways to achieve similar ends.

When thinking of the technologies available in the most advanced cities of Shen Zhou or the Imperium, think of the height of technology within the classical Roman and Chinese empires. Engineering (aqueducts, sewers, dams, other public works) and medicine are reasonably advanced, clockwork is known and sophisticated, and good quality steel, while present, is too expensive for any save the nobility and the richest of the merchant classes. The printing press with movable type is in common use, and literacy is common among the nobility and merchant classes. Slavery is very common in the Imperium, less so in the other empires. Gunpowder has been developed, and is used in fireworks and to a very limited extent in war, but cannon and muskets have yet to appear in any significant numbers. There has not yet been an industrial revolution. Mass production and the assembly line are almost unknown. Steam power is only a novelty, and Roma is lit by gas lights.

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