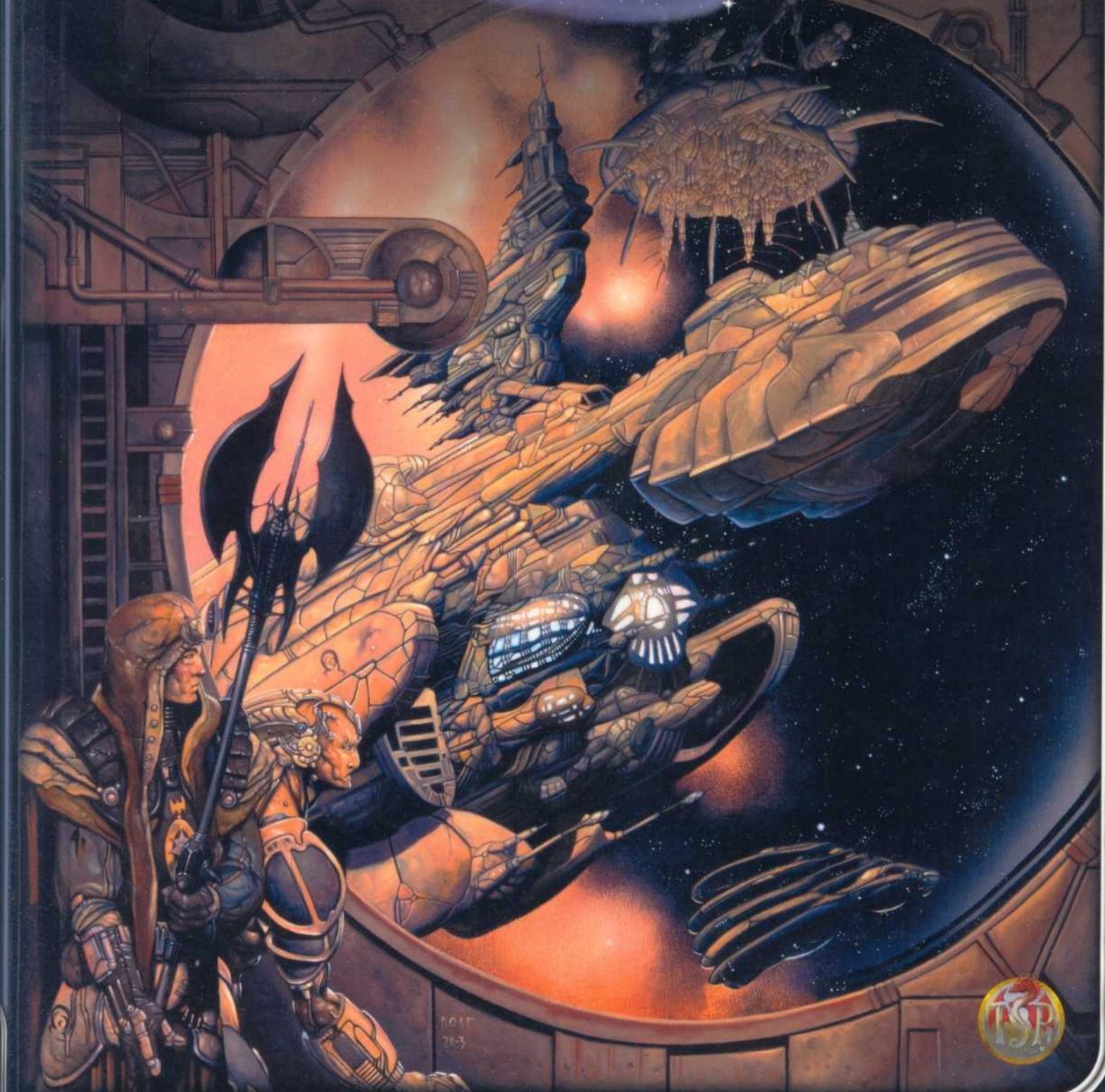


ALTERNITY

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# STAR DRIVE™

CAMPAIGN SETTING



by David Eckelberry and Richard Baker

ALTERNITY®

Science Fiction Roleplaying Game

# STAR DRIVE™

## CAMPAIGN SETTING

CAPRICORN  
2990-1

INTERIOR

by David Eckelberry  
and Richard Baker

U.S., CANADA,  
ASIA, PACIFIC, & LATIN AMERICA  
Wizards of the Coast, Inc.  
P.O. Box 707  
Renton WA 98057-0707  
+1-206-624-0933



Visit our website at [www.tsr.com](http://www.tsr.com)

EUROPEAN HEADQUARTERS  
Wizards of the Coast, Belgium  
P.B. 34  
2300 Turnhout  
Belgium  
+32-14-44-30-44

SG 98

Editing: **Wolfgang Baur** and **Keith Strohm** with **Kim Mohan**  
Additional Design: **Jim Butler** • Concept & Creative Direction: **Bill Slavicsek**  
Typesetting: **Angelika Lokotz** • Cover Graphic Design: **Matt Adelsperger**  
Interior Graphic Design: **Sean Glenn** • Art Direction: **Paul Manchette** • Cover Illustration: **rk post**  
Interior Illustrations: **Doug Alexander, Charles Bernard, Tom Gianni, Nemo Halverson, Hannibal King,**  
**Andrew Robinson, Dave Seeley, Ron Walotsky**  
Character Concept Art: **rk post** • Stellar Cartography: **Sean Glenn, Rob Lazzaretti, Corey Macourek**  
Special Thanks: **Kim Mohan and Christopher Perkins**  
ALTERNITY Logo: **Dawn Murin** • STAR DRIVE Logo: **Eileen Mecha**

Playtesters: Peter Adkison, Jim Butler, Shawn Carnes, Dave Gross, Bruce Heard, Duane Maxwell, Paul Peterson, Sean Reynolds, Cindi Rice, Michael Selinker, Jefferson Shelley, Bill Slavicsek, Paul Timm, and Sam Wood.

## CREDITS

## Caprienne

「アキラ」大河原トヨヲ著

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When I was a child, I wanted to be an astronaut. More than that, I wanted to patrol the infinite stars in my own space fighter and sit in the captain's chair of my own space cruiser. Sadly, I think that we've become prisoners of our age. Just as the power of science begins to advertise the secrets of distant stars, our sight and our desire exceed our grasp. We just can't get there yet, no matter how much we want to. So we dream.

My dream of **STAR\*DRIVE** began in early 1996 along with the creation of the **ALTERNITY** role-playing game. The concept called for a space opera that could balance excitement and action with brushes of realism that didn't violate every known rule of physics. Why space opera? Cyberpunk, contemporary, horror, time travel, and near-future SF are all popular genres, and maybe someday soon we'll explore them. But it is spaceships doing battle over a myriad of alien worlds that our thoughts first turn to when we hear the words "science fiction." In other words, the 20th century beckoned.

The work began by imagining "how do we get there." Hours and days of discussion went into envisioning the string of events that could bring us to where and when we wanted to be. We looked back over history and attempted to draw parallels. We researched popular theories of high-energy physics, and then we fashioned our future history. In so doing, the setting took on a life of its own. With each decision about a colonial power in the stars, the growth of **STAR\*DRIVE** became more complete, more detailed, and more interesting to witness. All said, it's been a great two years.

**STAR\*DRIVE** is yours now, not really a property of mine, TSR, or Wizards of the Coast. To the readers and players of science fiction tomorrow, I invite you to join us in a dream of the future.

David Eckelberry, April 1998

So, you ask, what's this all about?

John Campbell, one of the great influences on Golden Age science fiction, demanded that his authors confine themselves to one outrageous assumption per story. That was the rule, the definition of speculative fiction. Today, this old rule of science fiction has fallen by the wayside—the audience expects that you'll build on the assumptions they've seen before in the genre. The audience will give you faster-than-light travel, antigravity, and a dozen other basic assumptions; you don't have to prove your case for each in today's science fiction if you've got a story to tell.

In the **STAR\*DRIVE** setting, we've postulated the existence of dozens of imaginary sciences, technologies, alien races, and worlds. Despite these marvels, this is an imaginary future in which human heroism, human weakness, and human motives drive the action. It's an age of discovery and wonder stained by centuries-old conflicts and rabid nationalism. With the stars in our grasp, humankind is still harried by the demons of war, greed, oppression, and injustice. And we crafted all of these assumptions to tell the story of the **Verge**, an untamed frontier on the very edge of charted space. Exploration, intrigue, trade, warfare—everything that represents the best and the worst humankind has to offer—can be found in the **Verge**. It's an old story, but it's far from worn out yet.

So, what is **STAR\*DRIVE** about? It's simple. The stardrive itself, the central assumption in our universe of assumptions, poses one question for you and your players to answer:

If we could reach the stars, what would we do with them?

Richard Baker, April 1998

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### HOW TO USE THIS Book

With more than 200 pages waiting, the task of exploring the STAR\*DRIVE campaign may seem a daunting one just now. There's a wealth of material presented in the next few pages, describing history, technology, and hundreds of individual locations. Don't get overwhelmed. To help you along, the sections of the book are divided into discrete chapters and sections that you can skip, read, or return to as you desire. Eventually, you may read over its entirety. For now, though, you have a few ways to get into the game.

Your first option is to simply turn to the next chapter and begin reading. You'll get the details of the STAR\*DRIVE timeline—how humanity got from the dawn of the 21st century to the dawn of the 26th. This section gives you the setting's background and history before it gets down to the nuts and bolts of creating roleplaying scenarios, but it provides the big picture behind the whole setting.

If you're a new hero ready to explore the planets of the Verge, concentrate on *Chapter 5: Hero Creation*. The careers and other information presented there can give you a foundation on how to build a distinct hero. Once you've thought about the kind of character you want to play, you can consider specific details such as national origin, species, and all of the game details from the ALTERNITY Player's Handbook. When you get a chance, you can turn back to Chapter 3 of this book and learn about the game benefits and cultural details of the national background you've chosen. Give some thought to your character's history, personality, and motivations—and you're ready to go.

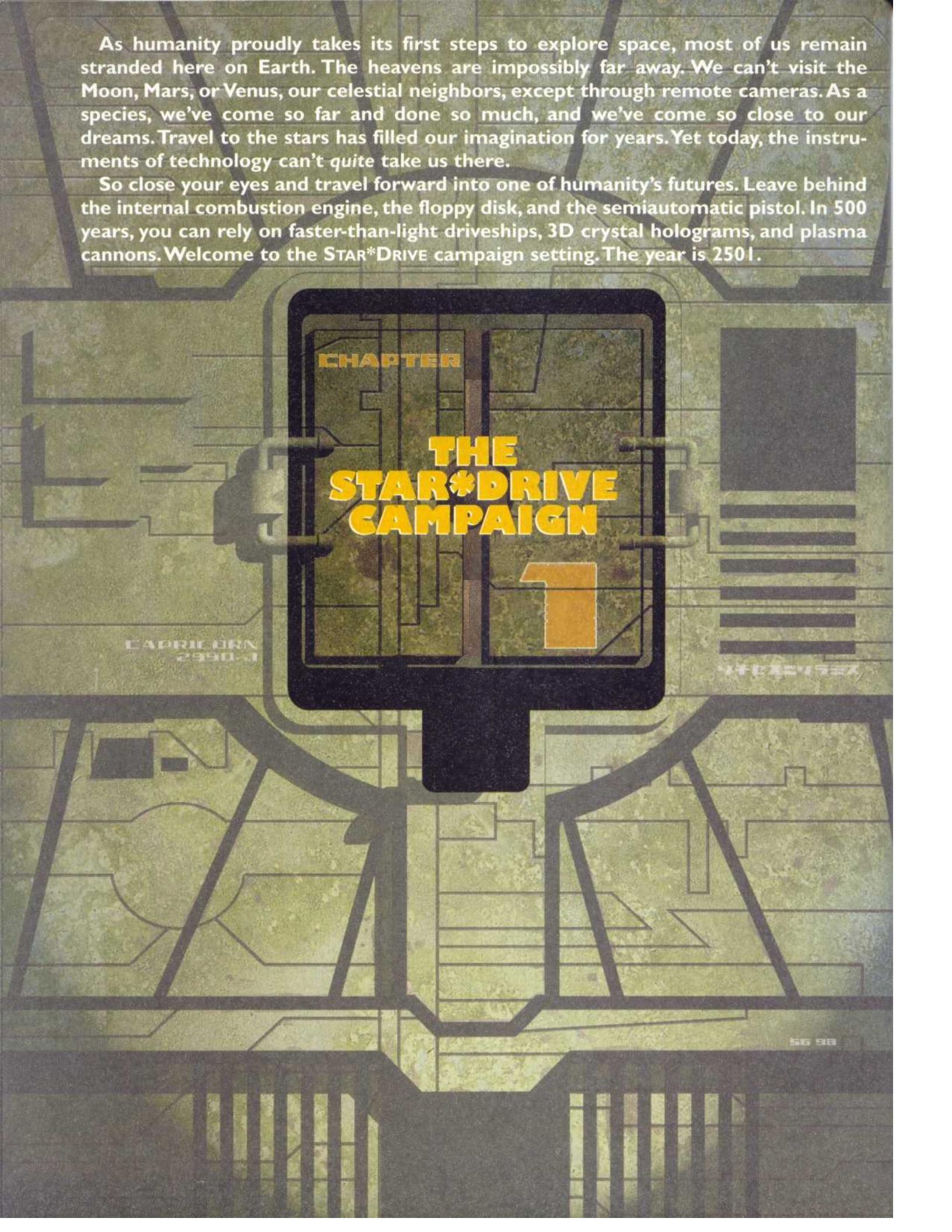
If you're a Gamemaster starting a new campaign and looking to get under way as quickly as possible, there's no need for you to learn every detail from the first three chapters or research all of the star systems detailed in the second half of the book. Look over page 17 and select a campaign model that you feel comfortable starting with. Then, turn to Chapter 4 to read the details of the star systems recommended for that model. Begin your adventures around a single sun and branch out. Later, you may want to turn back and learn more about the cultures that are active in your star system. Or in time you'll sail on to another point of space, another star system described in the Chapter 4 or maybe one of your own creation.

Wherever you begin or end up, each star system's description contains information about the two most important things you'll need. The first of these is a home base. In each star system, you'll find populated cities, space stations, and protected domes that can fulfill this role. Another choice for your heroes' center is the mobile space station, the *Light-house*, that could serve as a permanent home for heroes even as it travels from system to system.

In each system description, you'll also find sites of interest and plot ideas that you can use during your first gaming sessions. Whether mediating a peace settlement on Blue-fal's Orion Way, delving into Tendril's Skyward Caverns, or dodging klick skirmishes in the Vicek Belt, there's no limit to the stories you'll tell of the future. Soon you'll invent your own material, drawing on the goals and actions of your heroes and on your own creativity. And that's all part of the fun; no two STAR\*DRIVE campaigns are the same. Each reflects the personality and gaming desires of players and Gamemasters. Make the galaxy your own.

As humanity proudly takes its first steps to explore space, most of us remain stranded here on Earth. The heavens are impossibly far away. We can't visit the Moon, Mars, or Venus, our celestial neighbors, except through remote cameras. As a species, we've come so far and done so much, and we've come so close to our dreams. Travel to the stars has filled our imagination for years. Yet today, the instruments of technology can't quite take us there.

So close your eyes and travel forward into one of humanity's futures. Leave behind the internal combustion engine, the floppy disk, and the semiautomatic pistol. In 500 years, you can rely on faster-than-light driveships, 3D crystal holograms, and plasma cannons. Welcome to the **STAR\*DRIVE** campaign setting. The year is 2501.



CHAPTER

# THE **STAR\*DRIVE** CAMPAIGN

1

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The STAR\*DRIVE campaign is the first setting for the ALTERNITY® science fiction roleplaying game. To make use of this campaign book, you'll need copies of the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook* and the *Gamemaster Guide*. Those two books contain all of the rules necessary to play the game. This book doesn't contain an assortment of additional rules; instead, it introduces you to the galaxy's worlds and adventures.

*It's an age of discovery.* Human ingenuity and alien technology have created the means to traverse the incredible distances between the stars. Gravity's tricks are ours to master. Without the boundaries of light's speed limit to bind us, the stars are ours to explore. Millions of stars shine in our galaxy, and we've only begun to test the Milky Way's depth. White dwarfs, red giants, blue supergiants, pulsars, black holes, white holes—they're out there, waiting for us to find them.

Orbiting these stellar bodies are worlds that defy our comprehension. Sheltered in our solar system, guided by our experience of only nine planets and a single sun, we can't conceive of the strange combinations that the laws of matter, energy, and chance have produced. The universe seems to delight in surprising us, challenging our understanding of its laws and origins. In the STAR\*DRIVE campaign, human scientists and archeologists routinely discover astonishing new life forms, incredible space and time phenomena, and scattered hints of ancient life in the ruins and artifacts of alien worlds. Under the light of a million suns, the diversity of the galaxy can dazzle us all.

*It's an age of wonder.* Science gives us the tools to get there. Ships of all sizes, shapes, and purposes navigate through space and drivespace to travel between worlds. Fortress ships, veritable cities in space, are the expensive and indomitable peacekeepers of the day, ferrying vessels, protecting trade routes, and projecting military force. The proliferation of interstellar travel has produced a wealth of independent traders who buy, sell, and trade the wealth of planets.

Life abounds. As astronomers discovered at the end of the 20th century, planets are common near distant stars. In the STAR\*DRIVE galaxy, life appears on other planets more often than today's most optimistic projections. Planets strange and dangerous to human life have become home to organisms that meet most if not all of the defining qualities of life: assimilation, respiration, reproduction, growth, development, movement, secretion, and excretion. Complex lifeforms find the narrow path to survival and evolution. On a few lucky worlds, sentience emerges.

As the 26th century opens, we've made contact with dozens of alien species. A few have become familiar brothers and sisters after centuries of interaction. Others are new friends we've just come to know. Some we've adopted, much like children in need of guidance as they grow up. No matter what our relationship, each species comes to us with its own millennia of history. Each species has been shaped by its own trials and successes on the path to civilization, on a world completely unlike the one we know. After all, they're called aliens for a reason.

*It's an age of change.* As the centuries have passed, the governments and cultures of Earth have fallen away. Their legacies have seeded the stars and given birth to the new powers of human space, the stellar nations. Today these nations extend humanity's control of space, currently spreading out across more than 1,000 light-years. Each nation is the product of a unique origin and culture, and their national goals often differ widely. All of the stellar nations remain locked in struggle.

Only a few years ago, the stellar nations ended a century-long war, the second fought between the young spaceborne powers. The Second Galactic War was a terrible conflict, result-

ing in the death of billions. In the end, the nations agreed to peace not because of any smashing victory, but out of simple exhaustion. While some nations now strive to forge a lasting peace, others scheme to increase their power and widen their sphere of influence. The threat of another great war looms shockingly near.

Humanity itself is changing. For centuries, men and women have lived on worlds far from Earth, slowly mutating, adapting, and evolving to local conditions. Simultaneously, technological integration and body modification has allowed those motivated by professional ambition or personal desire to augment themselves with cybertechnology. Medical science has opened the path of genetic engineering on both the individual and societal scale. Engineered humans, and even mutants, are growing more common. The continued rise of extraordinary mental powers among human beings is even more inexplicable.

More than ever, society must address the question "What does it mean to be human?"

*It's an age of heroes.* Whether you're an explorer peeling back the edge of the unknown, a diplomat in pursuit of international leverage, a trader hunting down a few extra Concord dollars, or a soldier defending our new homes in the stars, you can hear destiny blowing her trumpet. It will fall on the shoulders of a few scattered heroes—human, mutant, mindwalker, cyborg, and alien—to make the difference in the years to come.

Nowhere is this struggle more exemplified than among the distant stars of the Verge, a frontier region of the galaxy. Cut off from the rest of human civilization during the War, this sector of space has only recently been reunited with the galactic community. Here, in a handful of star systems, the rivalry of the stellar nations flares into espionage, raids, skirmishes, and even deadly combat. Some fight the wars of the past; others strive to keep the freedom they won during the years of isolation. More troubling to the denizens of the Verge is the destruction of the Hammer's Star colony, a small outpost at the farthest edge of explored space. Rumormongers and prophets whisper of a dark and terrifying enemy that wiped out the settlement.

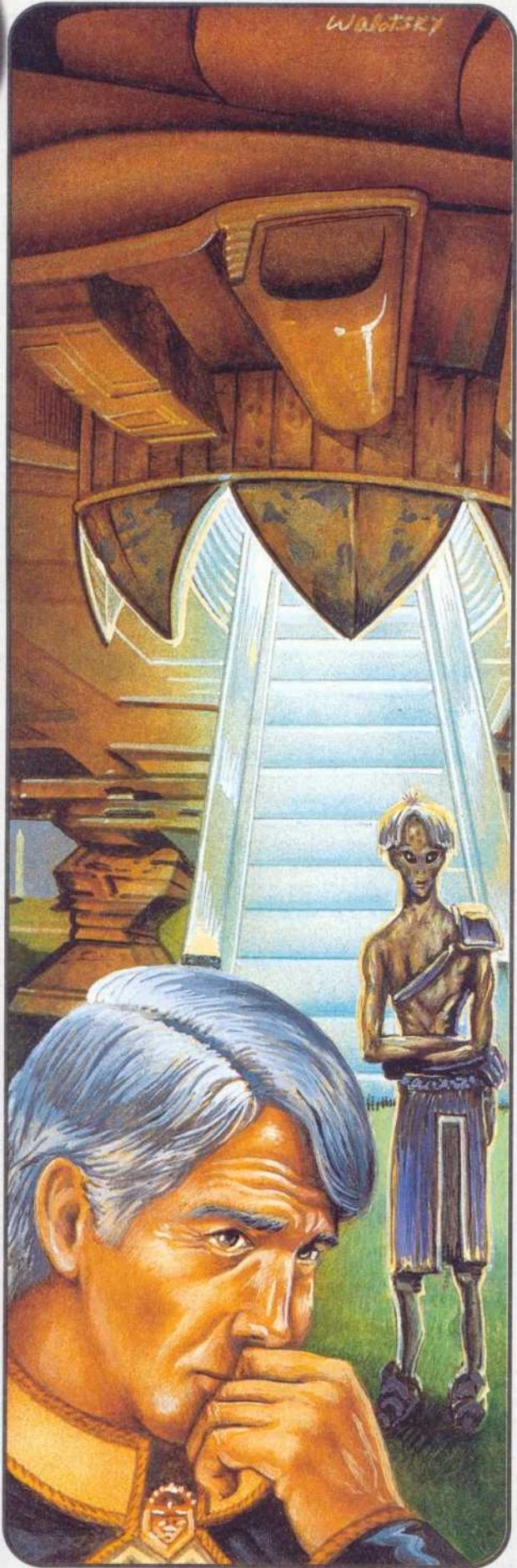
Life in the Verge is tough, and it may get a whole lot tougher.

## LOOKING BACK ON TOMORROW

A terse summary of all of humanity's history—to say nothing of the numerous other species we have encountered—would consume thousands of pages. Fortunately, citizens of the 26th century begin their study of history with the first missions into space. Everything else is "prespace Earth" and far too ancient to be of interest to the average youth of 2501.

Late in the 20th century humanity took its first steps away from home. Remote-controlled machines led the way, followed by manned craft spiraling into orbit. Before long, artificial objects were forever circling above, looking down and transmitting information across the planet. The first satellites were military in function, but soon a halo of satellites beamed messages around the planet and a man named Armstrong placed the first human footprints on the Moon.

Technology and invention continued to advance at a rapid pace in the 21st century. Slowly, semiautonomous drones and probes left Earth to travel throughout the solar system, exploring and cataloging the nearby planets. In 2032, the world was linked electronically by the first Grid, an enhancement of earlier electronic networks. The Grid allowed nearly limitless data stor-



age, lifelike interactive virtual environments, and real-time visual communications. As computers grew more personable and portable, use of paper declined for the first time.

As predicted by the doomsayers of the day, growth in technology enhanced the power of international corporations and anonymous financial cartels. Corporate power and independence grew. As yet, none could present a threat to a world power, but less powerful countries were not so immune. Microtel, the largest of Earth's corporations, began an economic assistance program in South America that became the classic example of national leveraging. Less obtrusively, other corporations, such as the military contractor and arms supply conglomerate Ontis Ordnance, manipulated nations through more subtle means. Fighting to survive, smaller corporations and independents formed formidable consortiums and guilds of their own.

The collapse of rigid, communist governments at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century heralded a new opportunity for peace. It was a time to offer a helping hand to less developed nations. Of course, some would call such economic development exploitation, destruction of environments, or an attack on native cultures. But it was an opportunity to solve long-standing problems and regional conflicts. Regrettably, small, localized conflicts remained common. Nationalism competed with economic interest, and new nations formed from the ashes of their parent states. Fortunately, governments new and old avoided the temptation to construct massive arsenals of nuclear weapons.

The 21st century brought the first steps toward public recognition of human psionics. Tales of strange power to manipulate matter and thought had been part of human legends and superstitions for years: ghosts, shapeshifters, and magical powers were seen as simply irrational tales from a more primitive era. But they held a tiny seed of truth. Over the years, those who believed were first ridiculed, then brushed aside, then listened to with skepticism. More and more cases were documented, but the causes behind the stories remained unclear. Were these cases the result of a change in human nature or the result of more careful observation? Regardless of the reason, the tide of evidence slowly became undeniable. Even when psi powers were recognized, the fraction of the population with these talents remained small.

While human nature itself was changing, certain economic principles remained the same. Self-interest propelled many nations toward economic union, first in the industrialized West and then beyond. As time passed, nations that formed unions for business reasons moved on to conduct joint diplomacy and draft legislation as one. Political alliance led to consolidation and ultimately political union. The nations of the world coalesced into six powerful unions: the American States, the European Union, the Asiatic Federation, the Microtel Protectorate, the Pacific Bloc, and the Indo-African League. An era of world government had begun.

It was a time when the great powers found new ways to wage war. Indeed, industrialization and the Information Age presented a significant threat to peace. As more nations struggled to join the ranks of the first-world powers, conflict erupted over fishing rights, religious reformation, and the flagging leadership of the United Nations. The motivation behind most 21st-century strife was simple: limited resources. Power plants relying on fossil fuels were the primary source of power as the planet industrialized. Despite the best efforts of many to harness renewable wind, solar, or geothermal power, resources disappeared at an alarming rate. Governments collapsed as energy

reserves ran out. Estimates put world population at more than 20 billion by 2050. Automobiles and personal aircraft became staples of most households. Worldwide industrialization led most people to pursue a home in the suburbs, modern cars, and a plentiful selection of luxuries. Military struggles gave way to economic wars fought on trading floors and marketplaces. Industrial espionage became standard practice. The first conflicts over oil and water rights led to the widespread belief that a new world war was inevitable.

The war never materialized. Instead, the development of an efficient fusion generator in 2047 spawned the Fusion Age. The race for successful nuclear fusion was almost 70 years old when two scientific teams made nearly simultaneous announcements of the technological feat. The Spennner-Mindara reactor, as the first model became known, was a product of an independent scientific institute in the European Union and an Asiatic Federation government research project. Rejecting demands from governments to maintain secrecy, the Spennner Institute released its findings to the Grid and the scientific community on November 11. Within a year, dozens of generators were powering an energy-starved world.

The rise of cheap and plentiful power averted the prospect of a war fought over the world's shrinking fossil fuel supplies. While fusion generators were too expensive for anyone but governments, large corporations, and wealthy universities, the average citizen reaped numerous benefits. Harsh restrictions on power consumption vanished as the threat of resource wars receded. Fusion-powered rails crisscrossed the planet, providing affordable travel to all. Entertainment and leisure industries experienced wild, unparalleled growth. Fossil fuel technology was improved and replaced. Amazing technological breakthroughs advanced the standard of living by leaps and bounds. Thanks to the period's social stability and the advance of science, the people of Earth experienced a time of unprecedented peace and prosperity.

The deep rumble of fusion torch engines heralded the coming of the second space race. Despite a plentiful power supply, the need for raw resources remained. Orbiting Sol, a wealth of valuable materials lay unclaimed. The Pacific Bloc completed the first permanent lunar colony in 2064, and the first manned outposts on Mars followed less than a decade later. The American States marked the end of the century by establishing the first Jovian colony on Callisto. In the next few decades, almost 100 stations were established on the nearest planets, moons, and asteroids. The first serious efforts at colonization, dreamt of and planned for decades, were at last a reality. The six great unions dominated the effort, but many corporations joined in to make their mark on the future. A healthy competition developed, and the vast new frontier proved large enough to contain international ambitions without noticeable conflict.

Back on Earth, science pursued new miracles. Medical researchers solved mysteries of the human body. Understanding of bioelectric energy advanced the security of personal belongings and homes; only an item's owner could activate it. Cancer followed polio and typhoid into oblivion. Humanity became a more formidable, often unassailable, opponent for diseases and viruses. Genetic engineering, once the sole province of the rich and powerful, became widespread, and the maximum human lifespan reached more than 150 years. A few nations manufactured clones by mass production. Experiments with the human genome produced deliberately altered humans, some tailored to adapt to new environments, or for a specific profession, or to improve the species. Public understanding of psionics, still in its infancy, grew with the release of psionic detectors

and inhibitors. Cybertechnology, once limited to military and direct medical application, became available to the public, and cybernetic limbs and organs replaced or enhanced human abilities. Implants such as subdermal body art became briefly fashionable.

New industries on Earth and new business opportunities in space forced changes in the world market. The giant cartels and business groups that had dominated the previous century had to evolve or die. In 2091, Microtel spawned VoidCorp, a corporate division that would later play a significant role in history. Within a decade, VoidCorp, responsible for all of the corporation's space operations, accounted for a fifth of Microtel's resources. Numerous mergers and corporate takeovers allowed existing giants to expand. Austrin Arms joined with its competitor Ontis Ordnance in 2089. Equally important, a burgeoning middle class with disposable income and spare time offered an unmistakable chance for corporate interests to increase their market share and importance in everyday lives.

Studies in high-energy physics and advances in the understanding of subatomic matter produced a remarkable new technology. The Indo-African government revealed the first functional mass reactor in 2106. The same mass reactor design, with only slight modifications, has stayed in use for four centuries, and remains the standard to the present day. Relying on the discovery of a nonbaryonic, exotic dark matter named "duodecim," the mass reactor offered numerous advantages over the fusion generator. It delivered greater power output, and for the purposes of the everyday engineer, it never needed refueling. It was safe, easy to operate, and simple to repair. Equally important, a mass reactor could be miniaturized and used to power smaller spacecraft, equipment, and space stations. This scientific advance forever changed the world and humanity's place in it.

But the golden era of peace was over.

The mass reactor renewed political tensions as the great powers raced to find uses for this new energy source. Ironically, while the fusion generator solved a crisis by ending an energy shortage, the mass reactor's overabundance of energy filled the powers of the day with the desire to use it. In 2110, the first system-explorer craft equipped with mass reactors, the *Ulysses*, soared into space. Over the next four decades, the world powers visited, divided, and colonized the solar system, expanding their territories and exploiting natural resources from sunbaked Mercury to cold, distant Pluto. Another round of minor skirmishes developed during the same period, including constant asteroid poaching in the Oort Cloud, as well as the Apple Skirmishes of 2122, the Satellite War of 2137, and the Martian War of 2155. War in space was something new to human experience—it proved to be quick and exceedingly deadly. Each of these conflicts lasted only a few days, and was soon forgotten.

Despite its new technology, humanity was for all practical purposes imprisoned within its solar system. The distances between the stars remained too vast to cross.

## FIRST CONTACT

Humanity's success at colonizing the solar system did not go unnoticed. The fraal, an alien species who had lost contact with their own civilization, had spent much of their recorded history watching Earth, waiting for an opportunity to reestablish contact with humans. Their first attempt, almost 10 millennia ago, resulted in myths about elves, thundering gods, and fiery chariots in the sky. This irrational human response prompted the fraal to abandon human contact.

So the fraal removed themselves from humanity, resettling in distant reaches of the Earth. Centuries rolled by as the two civilizations lived apart, one completely ignorant, one watching and waiting.

Human expansion in the 15th and 16th centuries forced the fraal to withdraw to Earth's polar regions. As humanity grew in numbers and in its understanding of science, the retreat accelerated. First, the fraal took up new homes on the surface of the moon. Then they fled to Mars, to Ganymede, and to Nereid. After witnessing the second wave of human colonization of the solar system thanks to the mass reactor, a consensus formed among the fraal to open relations. From its sealed habitat deep within Charon's crust, a fraal vessel slowly rose and made its way toward Earth. In the early morning hours of July 17, 2124, it landed on Earth, escorted closely by a fleet of warships representing each of Earth's six great powers. Of course, news of the fraal ship, including some stunning visuals from the Saturn outposts, had already reached Earth. The revelation that humans weren't the only sentient life in the galaxy generated a mixture of fear and excitement. That the fraal ambassador had come to Earth only enhanced the public's emotions.

Each power made sure that it was represented in this historic meeting, and each outdid itself ensuring that none of the other nations attempted to sabotage it. At the request of the fraal ambassador, the delegates from the six powers agreed to meet in the Collège de Genève to discuss establishing formal diplomatic ties.

The news reports showed the alien ambassador calmly walking out of his starship, surrounded by a small honor guard. Bewildering and disappointing thousands of reporters who gathered in hopes of interviewing the aliens, the ambassador stopped and made only the briefest of statements: "We are not here to wage war, change your way of life, or to side with any of your Earth empires on any particular issues. We are a peaceful people who hope to find friends in this vastness of space." After repeating his message in several languages, the ambassador left behind a stunned press corps and entered the Collège de Genève.

Despite his comforting words, the fraal's presence had an immediate effect on Earth. Contact with an alien species fanned the flames of confusion and political instability. Groups of humans immediately aligned themselves for and against the fraal. Several groups entered into retreats of their own, either out of xenophobia or to seek spiritual guidance. Among these recluses were a group of wealthy aristocrats who would, a few years later, form a modest but eventually important nation of their own, the Borealis Republic. Religious riots broke out in Jerusalem, Rome, New Delhi, and Mecca as news that mankind wasn't the only sentient creature in the galaxy brought religions to their knees. Some religious leaders declared the landing a hoax, others called for an execution of the demonic aliens. Fortunately, the extremists were in the minority and most religions openly embraced the fraal.

The Contact Treaty, signed on October 27, 2124, granted full citizenship to the fraal. Individual fraal could elect to become members of any nation, and an independent fraal outpost on Ganymede was recognized as a sovereign state. That's all the fraal requested. In exchange, the fraal immediately began to share their technology with the nations of Earth.

## THE STARDRIVE

Fraal technology was quite distinct from that of humanity. It included an understanding of psionics that far surpassed human-

ity's. Fraal mental disciplines—what they call mindwalking—became enormously popular, even among those without the gift for harnessing it. The fraal also offered a knowledge of gravitics far more advanced than anything humanity had hypothesized. By using the force of gravity to augment a fusion reaction, fraal grav-fusion cells could far outmatch human fusion generators. The true breakthrough that gravitics offered, though, was the gravity induction engine. For centuries, fraal vessels had manipulated gravity to produce motion. The induction engine could, in layman's terms, bend space so as to make a spaceship "fall" in any desired direction. In comparison, reaction drives such as the fusion torch or ion engine were crude, slow, and inefficient. The gravity induction engine revolutionized interplanetary travel, and the colonization of the solar system entered its final phase.

The technology transfer wasn't entirely one-way; at least one human technology bewildered the fraal. The mass reactor, a unique invention of the century, eclipsed fraal grav-fusion cells. The manipulation of dark matter boggled even the best fraal scientists.

The union of the two species' most advanced sciences—dark matter physics and gravitics—produced the only known means of traveling faster than light. The first stardrive was activated in 2160.

Human mass reactors could generate and apply a level of power that the fraal gravitic coils had never seen. Instead of causing space to bend, the stardrive broke it. A stardrive-equipped vessel dropped into a previously unknown dimension instead of moving through normal space. This dimension, termed drivespace, is tied to the gravitic plane of the galaxy, though even by the dawn of the 26th century the physics of the phenomenon aren't completely understood. In its most basic sense, the stardrive was an engine capable of hurling vessels from one star system to another in a short period of time.

The discovery of drivespace was monumental, as neither humans nor fraal could have found it on their own. The human-built mass reactor couldn't access this dimension, and neither could the fraal gravity-induction engine. But the two systems together created the stardrive, an engine that opened a singularity portal into drivespace at one location and allowed a ship to emerge at a location light-years away. It was discovered that the larger and more powerful the stardrive, the farther a ship could travel—up to a maximum of 50 light-years in a single starfall with the technology of 2501.

But the first vessels didn't have nearly this range, instead traveling only a few light years for every starfall. Nevertheless, the light-speed barrier was broken, and this was an incredible improvement over conventional travel. The nations of Earth began a new era of exploration and colonization. Thousands, millions, and eventually billions of humans bid farewell to the solar system. In the first years, the six wealthy power blocs led the charge to the stars. Slowly, the cost of interstellar travel fell to more reasonable levels. Smaller corporations and wealthy individuals made the trip. Humans with valued skills indentured themselves to a colony to leave Earth behind and explore a new destiny. Happy about the influx of resources and personnel, Earth's power blocs made the fateful decision to permit unrestricted colonization.

Many groups, organizations, and corporations tried to write themselves into the history of stellar colonization. One of the first was a new religion founded only a decade after the creation of the stardrive. The Orlamu Foundation, led by Jeff Sendir, one of the scientists who produced the first stardrive, left the Indo-African League to study both the technological and the theologi-

cal aspects of drivespace. More than 1,000 of Sendir's colleagues left their positions with governments and corporations to join him in his spiritual quest for the true understanding of drivespace and the advancement of drivespace technology. The foundation moved its headquarters to the colony world, Prophethome.

VoidCorp, Microltel's space division, created the first drivespace communication satellite in 2193, allowing quick communications with the colonies. Previously, the colonies depended on slow and expensive message services that carried messages aboard driveships. Demand for the drivesat communication technology was incredible, as it allowed fast, reliable communications between star systems. VoidCorp had proven itself, and the division's coffers filled quickly. Microltel ordered VoidCorp to take on additional projects, and the division soon added dozens of subsidiaries.

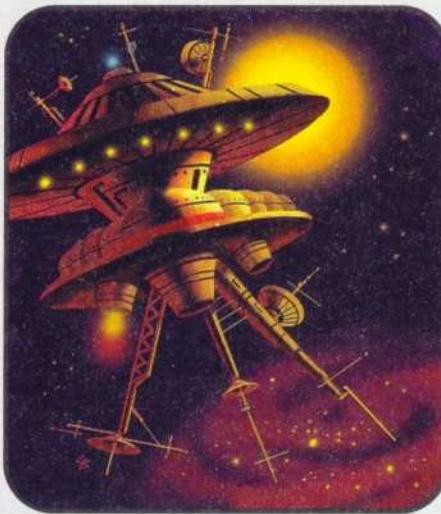
The first of these branches was Insight, incorporated in 2198. Insight was assigned the formidable task of developing an interstellar Grid to replace the system-bound ones. As a second, continuing goal, Insight was told to improve the Grid, creating new technologies that would become essential ingredients for every government, corporation, and individual. They immediately set to work on technology that would allow virtual shadows to navigate the Grid independently, create new hardware that molded man to the machine, and stretch the Grid's reach across the drivesats.

As engineering techniques and understanding of how the stardrive functioned grew, so did the size of the vessels. In 2218 construction began on the first of the three-kilometer-long fortress-class ships. Crafted in Earth orbit, these massive vessels were built around the largest stardrives of their time and were capable of carrying hundreds of smaller vessels with them in their jump into drivespace. They also lived up to their name, as they were among the most heavily armed and armored vessels ever constructed. Because of their size and function, fortress ships became traveling cities in space. Markets, theaters, diplomatic posts, and more all made their homes within these giant vessels. The stellar navies used the fortress ships to control distant systems and to keep enemies at bay by projecting significant force over long distances. No individual could afford to build them. No nation could afford not to.

Throughout the early 23rd century, the nations of Earth raced to build fortress ships and thus control space and their colonies. All the major industrial facilities of the solar system were fully occupied with the massive projects, so much so that entire new shipyards sprang up to meet the continuing demand for civilian vessels. With a fleet of fortress ships under the control of the great Terran powers by the 2230s, humanity started a new period of exploration and colonization. The exodus to the stars from the crowded worlds near Sol accelerated.

## LOSING CONTROL

By 2241, Earth's alliances claimed more than 100 star systems. And despite their enviable technology and impressive technological reach, the great nations of Earth found themselves faced by dwindling influence out among the stars. Distance, social fac-



tors, and a fever of independence have deposed many powerful rulers in history. The empires of Earth began to crumble.

The six great powers didn't lose control of their colonies at any specific moment. Their influence diminished gradually, but not without notice. As the Terran powers stretched their influence into the stars, they established new governing bodies to deal with the problems of colonization. Colonies were given autonomy in exchange for taxes and raw materials that the Terran powers needed for continued growth and development. Of course, everyone on Earth assumed that the loyalty of colonial leadership was beyond question.

So the new powers of the era relocated their capitals, corporate headquarters, and other centers of power. The Borealis Republic, virtually ignored on Earth, quietly moved its capital to the planet Sapphire in 2243 and opened its doors to all who wished to join. The Rigunmor Star Consortium, once simply an interstellar trading guild, explored and established a colonial nation centered around the planet Bazaar. Austrin-Ontis Unlimited transferred its management and operations departments to the planet Powder, an industrial center dozens of light-years from Earth. VoidCorp moved its divisional headquarters to Catalog, to "take advantage of the unique needs and circumstances of developing interstellar commerce." On these distant worlds, colonial leaders laid the foundations for nations built along principles more to their liking.

Early in 2246, the Orlamu Theocracy, a colonial territory, made contact with the weren, a race of pugnacious creatures of incredible strength and vitality. Knowing that the discovery of another intelligent alien species would bring a rush of Terran powers to the new planet, the Orlamus carried out negotiations themselves. The integration of the weren into the Theocracy came quickly and easily. Following the model of the Contact Treaty, the Orlamus offered complete citizenship to the weren and pledged not to invade or otherwise develop Kurg, the weren homeworld. The powers of Earth learned of the weren only when the treaty was presented to them by the Orlamus. With no solid grounds for objection, the Terran powers grudgingly recognized the Orlamu treaty.

## THE TERRAN EMPIRE

History proves that the declaration of the Terran Empire in 2250 was a largely symbolic gesture. The edict proclaimed that Earth was the governing body for human colonies everywhere. Colonial representatives were welcome to participate in the Empire as nonvoting members. The six Terran powers would control all legislative and economic affairs.

The declaration affected Earth more than its colonies. Humans and fraal were living full lives without ever seeing the light of Sol, and the fledgling stellar governments cared little for the dictates of a distant regime. The newly declared Empire had neither the ships nor the manpower to supervise Earth's thousand distant colonies. Even those loyal to Earth understood that the Sol system was a small part of life in the interstellar scheme of things. Each of the fledgling colonial governments was becoming powerful in its own right, building starships and vessels of war to defend themselves against any threat.

When decrees from the Imperial Council of Earth arrived,



the stellar governments grudgingly obeyed. As the demands from the Empire increased, however, it became apparent that something needed to be done. None of the young colonial governments was willing to take that first step, however. Publicly, they obeyed. Privately, they complained, loudly and bitterly.

New colonial powers rose and fell among the stars, sometimes completely unnoticed by the Imperial Council. The birth of the Thuldan Colonial Authority in September 2263 was destined to alter the balance of power. Guided by a vision of humanity united under a single banner and led by the charismatic tycoon Gregor Kent, Thuldan fleets conveyed waves of millions of colonists to their new homes. Nearby colonies joined with the affluent and well-equipped Thuldans—some of them willingly, others forced into annexation by the Thuldans' growing military and economic power. From the inhospitable world of Naria, the Nariac Domain consolidated system after system under their watchful leadership. The Terrans didn't care who ruled the "provinces," frankly, as long as the money kept rolling in.

One angry voice within the Terran Empire physically removed itself from Earth's dominion. The Hatires, long considered radicals for their outspoken hatred of technology, endured a voyage to a new planet where they could set up their own way of life. Critics of their faith took the opportunity to attack the Hatires; after all, the technology the Brethren deplored was the key to founding their own nation. The Hatire ignored their critics and settled distant colonies, keeping the location of a few of them secret. They were cut off from Earth influence, but also from its technology, resources, and support. Many were happy to see them go.

As the colonies expanded outward into space, new worlds fell under human control, and inevitably humans encountered more alien species. Representatives of the Riguromor Star Con-

sortium stumbled across the mechalus, a species of humanoids that lived with fully integrated cybertechnology. The Riguromors successfully cajoled the aliens into joining their young nation with promises of independence and free trade.

Likewise, VoidCorp discovered the jungle world of Sheya. A VoidCorp resource analysis team nearly bypassed the resource-poor world. Instead, they met a primitive alien species. Working like the Orlamus before them, VoidCorp negotiated the Sesheyen Compact. VoidCorp executives intimidated the sesheyen population into a servitude equivalent to the conditions all VoidCorp Employees operate under to this day. That is, the resulting treaty between VoidCorp and the sesheyans guaranteed that the offspring of sesheyans would toil in perpetual subjugation for all time. Other colonies and the Terran media denounced the treaty, but no one was in a position to force VoidCorp to change its ways. The sesheyans became the first alien species that humans forced into slavery. VoidCorp stepped up its efforts to find a second.

## THE FIRST GALACTIC WAR

Tensions between the Terran Empire and its colonies mounted. The Imperial Council issued comprehensive mandates intended to bring the stellar governments closer to their Terran roots. New colonies were given less time to establish themselves before taxes came due, and the stellar governments were given less grace period before they had to return profits.

In 2296, an independent explorer made first contact with the t'sa, an alien species with interstellar capability. The t'sa controlled a small cluster of stars that they had settled without a faster-than-light engine. Unlike previous contacts, no nation had an obvious claim to the t'sa, their worlds, or their valuable tech-

## STELLAR NATIONS OF 2312

Austrin-Ontis Unlimited	Nordic Independent State
Anarchist Union	OGAM, Inc.
Borealis Republic	Orlamu Theocracy
Chrysanthemum Imperium	Pioneer Coprosperity Zone
Delavan Autonomous Region	Rigunmor Star Consortium
Dreth Commonwealth	Sothvec Industries
Free Kyrena Society	StarMech Collective
Hatire Community	Sultanate of Fomalhaut
Leodal States	Taurean Star Republic
Middle Kingdom	Thuldan Empire
Nariac Domain	Union of Sol
New Columbia	Utopia Now
New Newfoundland	VoidCorp

nology. And so several colonial states—and the Terran Empire itself—tried to justify the annexation of the t'sa. The t'sa resisted, steadfastly refusing all offers. They had no qualms about joining galactic society, but they didn't want to become a client state of humanity either. The conflict over the t'sa stretched the discord between the Terran Empire and the colonial governments to the breaking point.

Gregor Kent, governor of the Thuldan colonies, declared independence from Earth in 2298 and simultaneously announced the formation of the Thuldan Empire. In short order, the Thuldans convinced many colonial governments to proclaim independence and demand recognition as sovereign governments. The Thuldan Empire had the strongest fleet among the colonies. Once it declared independence, most other colonies followed. Even VoidCorp joined in, thus beginning a hostile divestiture from its parent corporation, Microtel. Only the Borealis Republic abstained, as internal factions and classes in that nation fought their own civil war.

The six great Terran powers had to act, or they stood to lose everything. The Terran Empire gathered its forces, a massive armada of military spacecraft. This armada split up to launch attacks on the colonies that had declared their independence, and soon other nations and stellar corporations became entangled in the conflict. The First Galactic War had begun. The initial posturing and sword rattling erupted into open battle in the year 2299. Within three years, all of human space was engaged in an interstellar free-for-all. Earth's power blocs wanted to keep governing—and more important, taxing—the stellar nations. At the same time, various nations attacked each other, looking to increase their spheres of influence and prove their military superiority. Everyone had a wrong to right, a slight to avenge. Many claimed that the problems were new, but many causes of the war could be traced back to events that had their origin in a time when all of Earth's people were firmly rooted on the planet that spawned them. Even those nations that considered themselves allied to Earth broke away to take advantage of the situation.

The First Galactic War was vicious, marked by long periods of nerve-wracking anticipation followed by sudden, deadly combat. Some star systems found themselves engaged in long, drawn-out battles as fortress ships fought in-system vessels and troop carriers touched down on planetary surfaces. It was an expensive war, both in lives and resources.

The conflict dragged on. Earth's six alliances and some stellar nations were wracked by internal conflict, but the passage of years slowly determined a winner. Beginning in 2308, a se-

ries of campaigns led by the Thuldan Empire dealt serious losses to the Terran forces. By 2311, it had become clear that the era of Earth imperialism was over, and the Terran Empire agreed to arbitrate a settlement to bring the war to an end. Without an excuse to keep fighting among themselves, the stellar nations came to the peace table.

The Treaty of Earth was drafted in 2312. Among the conditions of the treaty that ended the First Galactic War were the abolition of the Earth-based superpowers, the formal recognition of twenty-five stellar nations, and the formation of a 26th nation, the Union of Sol, to replace the extinct Terran Empire. The Solar Union was much smaller than the Terran Empire, made up of the Sol system and just over 100 nearby stars.

## INTERBELLUM

The tyrannical Terran Empire was defeated, but little was settled. Borders between the stellar nations were contested, and nations strong and weak behaved more like predator and prey than friendly neighbors. For many stellar nations, the treaty of 2312 was a time for rearmament rather than a chance for lasting peace. GW1 had made clear that no Earth government would control space, but it was an open question what balance of powers would replace it.

During the next three decades, tension boiled just under the surface, and several small conflicts kept diplomats hopping—but a cautious interstellar peace held. Everyone could see a new war on the horizon, and so the nations stockpiled military assets and strategic resources. The previous conflict had taught the stellar nations many lessons about spaceborne war. The weapons grew more advanced, the battlefield larger, and the stakes even higher. Next time, the war would be fought for more than freedom—it would be fought for control of space.

Wise national leaders committed their nations to preparing for the worst. Any spark might reignite the wildfire of war. For their own protection, the Free Kyrena Society, Nordic Independent State, and New Columbia joined together with a fourth nation unrecognized by the Treaty of 2312. This union created a new stellar nation, the Orion League, in 2321.

Ironically, the anxious time between the wars stimulated new growth on all fronts. The borders of Old Space stretched and planetary improvements blossomed as nations developed their industrial capacity. It was also a great time for exploration. All of the stellar nations funded surveys and colonization of distant stars and worlds. They expected to be hungry for raw resources soon. In addition, no nation wanted to repeat the errors of the Terran Empire by allowing unrestricted expansion to undermine their future or their sovereignty. For the next 30 years, the stellar nations claimed more and more stars. The nations quickly reached the top and bottom of the galactic arm, and began to spread out toward its edges. Colonies were established over an area some 2,000 light-years across, and regions such as the Verge, Far Reach, and the Orion Frontier were opened. The scars of war began to fade, but a new war already loomed on the horizon.

## THE VERGE

The Verge received more attention during this period than any other frontier region. Why? Popular media may account for some of its success, with numerous blockbuster holofilms and a catchy term to attract the masses. But economics was a real driving force. When the stellar nations searched for resources, the

Verge offered an abundance. Fortune had gifted that area of space with more than the usual number of worlds rich in raw materials. National ambition was the second key to the Verge's fame. To date, no human had left the Orion Arm of the galaxy, the arm of the Milky Way where humanity was born. The Verge rests on the edge of that galactic arm, serving as the gateway for the next wave of human expansion. No stellar nation wanted to be left out of the Great Leap to the next galactic arm and the rest of the galaxy, and so each made great efforts to establish a stronghold.

Scouts explored the region in 2314 and 2315. Colony ships visited Bluefall a year later, establishing the first Orion colony in the Aegis system and the first human colony in the Verge. As Aegis grew and became the acknowledged center of Verge space, dozens of other colonies were established. Although more than 100 light-years separated the Verge from Old Space, the cradle of human nations, many colonies were funded and organized by the stellar nations. Fortunately, the wealth of unexplored stars kept the stellar nations too busy for conflict. Money and manpower poured into the area. It was a prosperous time for the Vergers.

But the Verge was viewed as wild, unclaimed space by the stellar nations. Colonies and outposts were created to serve the needs of their stellar patrons, and the colonists knew the problems and confrontations of Old Space. As the tension in Old Space grew, tensions within the Verge increased as well. When the dark shroud of war overshadowed the bright glow of peace, the citizens of the Verge celebrated with their own little wars to imitate the confrontation taking place far away. Verge systems went to war with their neighbors, each convinced that its parent nation had been wronged.

## THE SECOND GALACTIC WAR

The spark that set off the next war was the Mutant Uprising of Tau Ceti. Within the Union of Sol, the Tau Ceti system was well defended against foreign attack, but it was unprepared for a revolt from within. In 2346, an uprising financed and supported by the Thuldan Empire gathered attention throughout the Stellar Ring. The rebellion itself was unremarkable, but it was led by "mutants"—bioengineered individuals whose genes had been heavily tampered with to produce extreme changes. Humans were split about the worth of such radical changes, but no one was indifferent to the suffering of the Tau Ceti population.

Solar military forces moved in at once to end the unrest. As soon as they learned that the rebellion had been funded by the Thuldans, threats, accusations, and counterthreats flew through the Grid. The Solars accused the Thuldan Empire of creating supermutants to destroy one of the Union's prized systems, and the Empire pointed out the inhumane methods the Solars used to quell the rebellion. The shouting match quickly degenerated into a shooting match between two of the most powerful stellar nations, longtime opponents in the previous war.

Despite the public's violent reaction to the Uprising, the event was merely a catalyst. Everyone expected a return to the conflicts of GW1, but this war was far nastier and lasted far longer. Once the initial flurry of burned planets ended and the first billion had died, the war kept going, plunging humanity into a violent age. For more than a century, stellar nations waged war upon one another. In many regions, the conflict was localized and interstellar travel became harder. The huge fortress ships built in the previous century to transport humanity across the

## STELLAR NATIONS OF 2472

Austrin-Ontis Unlimited  
Borealis Republic  
Hatiire Community  
Insight  
Nariac Domain  
Orion League

Oriamu Theocracy  
Rigunmor Star Consortium  
StarMech Collective  
Thuldan Empire  
Union of Sol  
VoidCorp

void of space became pure war machines under the strict control of their parent nations. Fortress ships were still the best way to take or hold systems, and no stellar nation could squander its assets on exploration or transportation.

Whole regions of space suffered under the onslaught of terrible superweapons. Stellar nations were sliced up, swallowed whole, or wiped out completely by more powerful nations. Three immensely powerful alliances developed to preserve a balance of power, but mostly served to perpetuate the conflict. In some places, technological advancement ceased as the war devastated more and more worlds and targeted centers of industry and learning. Some planets were bombed into a primitive state, falling from the heights of technological achievement to the depths of the worst dark age in humanity's history. Other planets starved as supply routes were cut. Some worlds suffered from germ warfare or asteroid strikes. The war was expensive, bankrupting nations as trade dwindled and treasures were exhausted to pay for the war effort. Medical research, standards of living, arts and sciences—all fell by the wayside as the stellar nations turned their collective resources to the task of destroying each other. It was a grim, deadly period, and civilization came dangerously close to disappearing entirely.

Humanity pulled back from its expanded borders. Ultimately the developed worlds of Old Space were more precious than new settlements. The Verge lost contact with the stellar nations in 2375 when the Battle of Kendai destroyed the Kendai drive-space communication relay, a crucial link between Old Space and the Verge. The increasingly exhausted nations forsook frontier regions, leaving their distant colonies and client worlds to fend for themselves during the dark night of war.

For more than a century, the Verge colonies were on their own. Some fought among themselves. Others put an end to fighting and resumed the business of living. A few waited impatiently for ships or news to arrive from their sponsor nations. Several Vergers set out in small driveships to seek news of the war; most of these never returned to the frontier. The colonies were on their own, and many of the rugged pioneers came to like it that way. To the young people born during this period, the stellar nations were nothing more than names in their history lessons, legends spoken of by the oldest colonists.

The war raged on. After 100 years of bloody strife, it was clear that no nation or alliance could walk away from the war and claim victory. Indeed, if the war continued much longer, every nation would end up bankrupt, decimated, or destroyed. In 2465, the leaders of three powerful stellar nations came together to work out a solution. These leaders were Warthen Hale, President of the Orion League; Alison Breel, Executive Guilder of the Rigunmor Star Consortium; and Emperor Regist of the Thuldan Empire. They negotiated for weeks in secret, yet even these powerful figures couldn't mandate a peace. That required years of work, and effort more painful than anyone anticipated. But they knew the effort was humanity's best hope.

Years of negotiations, clandestine deal-making, and intense planning passed before an official peace could be established.

President Hale kept the effort alive. It was his vision of humanity's future that inspired the galaxy and gave even the most destitute worlds hope. Hale's vision became the basis for the Treaty of Concord, signed in the Orion League in 2472. The treaty not only ended the war, it established the Galactic Concord, potentially humanity's greatest achievement.

The treaty set forth several conditions that the stellar nations agreed to abide by. First, it divided human space into twelve distinct nations. Second, it established the Galactic Concord, an independent nation made up of worlds, people, and resources donated by the war's twelve survivors. The Concord was given the duty of preserving the peace, negotiating differences between the nations, and generally overseeing humanity and its befriended species throughout space.

The Concord had three qualities that placed it above the petty quarrels of even the best stellar nations: a grand purpose, a unity of vision, and a moral compass. It was a mix of individuals from all stellar nations, giving it a tolerant attitude that allowed it to see beyond the borders of any single nation. If humanity was to survive as a collective force in the galaxy, this attitude and vision would be needed in the years ahead.

## CONTACT WITH THE VERGE

In 2496, the Galactic Concord's efforts to repair drivesat relays on the frontier yielded a major success. While no word had yet come from Far Reach or the Orion Frontier, the newly repaired relay orbiting the star Kendai received the first message from the Verge in over 100 years. The Concord welcomed the news, but it also feared what might lie behind the message.

"Borealis colony Silver Bell at Hammer's Star, calling any FreeSpace Alliance vessel," the drivespace message began. "We are under attack by ... Repeat, the colony is under heavy attack by unknown forces. Send help. Repeat, send help. It's May 3rd, 2489. We need help, damn it! Please ..."

The message repeated. A reconnaissance team was quickly assembled and launched. When the Concord fortress ship *Monitor* reached Hammer's Star in 2497, eight years after the message had been recorded, it found a decimated planet. The colony had been destroyed. There were no survivors. Concord observers were able to determine that the colony was destroyed in a matter of hours.

As the *Monitor* made its way through the Verge, contact resumed with Aegis and many other systems. The other colonies reported the loss of contact with the Hammer's Star system, but no one had an explanation. Verge ships sent to investigate the silent colony had found nothing but ruins. Silver Bell never called nearby systems for aid, probably because it had been at war with its neighbors for years. None of the other colonies reported attacks or unknown invaders, though the Concord heard disturbing rumors of such attacks in the months ahead.

By the end of 2500, the Concord had established several key bases in the Verge and was helping the region rejoin the galactic community. Unfortunately, the Concord's resources were spread thin, many Verge worlds regarded the Concord with suspicion, and some even saw the Concord as a new enemy. Moreover, the stellar nations returning to the Verge were eager to bring their lost colonies back into the fold. At least half of the Verge systems made public a desire to remain independent. To this list of problems, the Concord found persistent evidence that some unknown enemy threatened not only the Verge but all of human space.

## THE GALAXY TODAY

The year is 2501. It's the dawn of the 26th century, and while hopes of a bright future linger, so do the shadows of ancient wars. Hatred dies hard, old enemies have long memories, and new dangers haunt the edge of space. Every nation seeks an advantage, and most include war as a means to their goals. To further complicate affairs, some nations are already expressing disdain for the Concord and the current order.

War looms on the horizon despite the Concord's determined efforts to lay the foundations of peace. This war might come from within, as stellar nations struggle for power and aliens seek influence. Or it might come from outside, where a mysterious threat lurks, waiting for a chance to strike. What will this century hold for humanity and its allies? Individuals and their actions will set the course. Throughout human space, explorers and traders reestablish ties and regain knowledge lost in the war. The routes to the frontier are reopening as the Verge returns to the galactic community. In the unsettled systems, new opportunities arise constantly for a hero to step forward and make a name for himself.

### STAR\*DRIVE SHORTHAND

When discussing a particular individual, it is often convenient to know a few facts but not the character's life history or precise abilities. Some supporting cast members are briefly described by [species-sex/nationality/profession-level]. For example, a level 8 female human spy of the Concord would be described as [Hf/Concord/FA-8]. Professions include Combat Spec (CS), Diplomat (DCS, DFA, DTO, or DMW), Free Agent (FA), Mindwalker (MW), Tech Op (TO), and Nonprofessional (NP).

#### SPECIES CODES

Code	Species
F	fraal
H	human
M	mechalus
O	other
S	sesheyans
T	t'sa
W	weren
X	mutant

#### NATIONALITIES

Code	Nationality
Austrin	Austrin-Ontis Unlimited
Borealin	Borealis Republic
Hatre	Hatre Community
Insight	Insight
Nariac	Nariac Domain
Orion	Orion League
Orlamu	Orlamu Theocracy
Rigunmor	Rigunmor Star Consortium
Starmech	Starmech Collective
Thuldan	Thuldan Empire
Solar	Union of Sol
VoidCorp	VoidCorp
Concord	Galactic Concord
System Name	Verger
Independent	Independent

## TIMELINE

**2047** The fusion generator is developed. Six world powers divide Earth: the American States, the European Union, the Asiatic Federation, the Pacific Bloc, the Indo-African League, and Microtel. A period of peace and prosperity begins.

**2064** Pacific Bloc builds first permanent lunar colony.

**2073** Permanent manned colonies on Mars established.

**2106** The mass reactor is developed by the Indo-African League, forever changing the world. A period of tension and competition begins between the world powers that eventually involves even the client states.

**2110** The first spacecraft fitted with mass reactor power sources roll off the assembly lines, and system explorer vessels are quickly developed. Over the next 50 years, the world powers explore, catalog, divide, and finally colonize most of the solar system.

**2124** Humans make first contact with the fraal.

**2154** The Borealis Republic founded on Earth.

**2160** Fraal science combines with human technology to create the stardrive. With this new engine, space vessels can now travel out of the solar system at relatively fast speeds due to the stardrive's ability to access drivespace.

**2183** The Orlamu Foundation, later the Theocracy, colonizes planets of its own.

**2193** VoidCorp constructs first drivespace communications satellite.

**2218** First *fortress*-class ships are designed and construction begins.

**2230** The first fortress ships, vessels capable of leaping 25 light-years in a single starfall, are completed. A new era of exploration and colonization begins.

**2241** More than 100 star systems fall under the control of the various Earth powers and growing colonial powers. Ties to Earth begin to fray.

**2246** The Orlamu Theocracy contacts the weren.

**2250** The Earth alliances declare the formation of the Terran Empire to stem the tide of colonial nationalism and retain control of their extensive holdings.

**2263** Gregor Kent founds the first Thuldan colonies.

**2267** The Nariac Domain is declared.

**2271** The Hatire Community is formed.

**2273** The mechalus civilization is encountered by the Rigunmor Star Consortium.

**2274** VoidCorp encounters the sesheyans.

**2291** Civil war begins in the Borealis Republic.

**2296** First contact with the t'sa.

**2298** The Thuldan Colonial Authority declares independence.

**2299** The First Galactic War begins, partially incited by the refusal of the t'sa to join the great Terran Empire or one of its young colonies. The Terran Empire seeks to crush the rebellious colonies. The Guilder Conclave declares the independence of the Rigunmor Star Consortium.

**2310** StarMech declares itself an independent nation.

**2312** The First Galactic War ends with the signing of the Treaty of Earth. The Terran Empire is replaced by the Union of Sol. Twenty-six stellar nations are recognized. The Interbellum begins. It's a period of new exploration, scientific growth, and development. The ultimate range of the stardrive increases from 25 to 50 light-years.

**2314** The first explorers reach the Verge. Members of the StarMech Collective explore the Tendril system.

**2321** Four nations, the Orion Nation, the Nordic Independent State, Free Kyrene Society, and New Columbia, form the Orion League.

**2343** The Hammer Research Group explores Hammer's Star, the last system in the Verge to be settled during the Interbellum.

**2346** The Mutant Uprising of Tau Ceti sparks the Second Galactic War. Nastier than the first, this war plunges humanity into a violent dark age.

**2361** Emperor Decret announces the formation of the Expansion Pentad, which includes the Thuldan Empire, VoidCorp, the Hatire Community, the Nariac Domain, and the Dreth Commonwealth. The Orion League and the Borealis Republic announce the formation of the FreeSpace Alliance. The Rigunmor Star Consortium, the Union of Sol, Austrin-Ontis Unlimited, and StarMech together form the alliance known as Profit.

**2375** The Battle of Kendai. The drivespace communications link to the Verge is destroyed.

**2394** Representatives from Insight, a division of VoidCorp, clandestinely meet with leaders of the FreeSpace Alliance and share Expansion Pentad plans and secrets.

**2401** The turning point of the war is fought at the Battle of Songham. The Thuldan Empire and the Expansion Pentad are pushed back after almost 70 years of success. The "gentleman's agreement" between the FreeSpace Alliance and Profit ends.

**2460** Insight declares its independence. The VoidCorp Grid crashes.

**2465** Leaders of the three great alliances meet to negotiate a peace at the Alkaid Conference.

**2472** After years of effort, an agreement is signed to end the Second Galactic War. The Treaty of Concord establishes the Galactic Concord, a political body made up of representatives of each stellar nation and designed to maintain the peace, settle disputes, and bring unity to the galaxy. The stellar nations go about the business of reconstruction.

**2489** The Borealis Colony on Spes, a planet orbiting Hammer's Star in the Verge, is attacked and destroyed by unknown forces.

**2496** The Kendai drivespace relay is rebuilt. Contact with the Verge is reestablished, transmitting the seven-year-old recorded distress call from Hammer's Star.

**2497** The Concord fortress ship *Monitor* arrives in the Verge and begins a tour of major star systems on the way to Hammer's Star. The *Monitor* finds the Silver Bell colony a battered ruin.

**2501** The present.



# CAMPAIGN MODELS

The depths of space are quite literally beyond our ability to fully conceive. So, it's no great surprise that within this vastness one finds numerous places to go and wonders to behold. The galaxy of 2501 is filled with nations of humans, worlds of alien species, mutants, robots, mindwalkers, and more. There's never been a better time for heroes to find adventure.

In all this wealth of opportunity, there are four principal models of play that heroes can enjoy: *exploration*, *intrigue*, *military*, and *trade*. Each model can support hundreds of adventures, each different and uniquely entertaining. Information to support each of these styles of play can be found throughout this book. Players and Gamemasters can concentrate on one or two models, or jump between all four.

## EXPLORATION

This model of play reaches out to the wonder and mysteries of the galaxy. Discovery, ultimately, is the reason humans took to the stars. In this campaign, the heroes form an exploratory team. They're outriders on the frontier and the leaders of discovery. Perhaps they represent a professional interest, commissioned from a guild or government. Corporations employ scouts to look for profit and precious resources. Stellar nations continue their philosophy of expand or die. The Galactic Concord views exploring and contacting new species as part of its charter. Finally, there's the independent company of heroes. Maybe they've devoted their lives to the frontier. Or they may count on a discovery to produce the next great technological advance—or at least a hefty finder's fee.

This book contains lots of information to help a campaign focused on exploration. Read through the next chapter, especially the section on star travel, to get familiar with what's possible. The Verge is a great place to begin. The descriptions of the settled systems in Chapter 4 provide some worlds to visit. Ultimately, an exploration campaign is founded on imagination; as heroes peel back the border, players and Gamemasters must plot for themselves what lies beyond.

## INTRIGUE

This style of play emphasizes diplomacy, espionage, courtly intrigues, and games of death and deceit on a galactic scale. Heroes become a part of the galactic game of power. They could assume the roles of interstellar diplomats, preserving the peace in a desperate galaxy. Or they may be part of a government agency determined to advance the interests of a single nation. Or they may find employment among corporations large or small; the lure of the dollar hasn't diminished. Perhaps they're involved in the formation of an entirely new government. Whatever the mission or its source, this style of play showcases role-playing, plotting, and high drama.

*Chapter 3: Stellar Nations* should be your starting place for this model of play. It describes the goals and differences between the thirteen powers that control explored space and the web of alliances and conflicts that divide humanity. In the Verge (Chapter 4), there is no greater center of power than the planet Bluefall in the Aegis system. But throughout the region, the interests of stellar nations conflict with one another and with the desires of local governments.

## MILITARY

This model of play emphasizes action-oriented conflict between heroes, antiheroes, and villains. The heroes may be Concord Marines, sworn to peacekeeping on the frontier. Or they may be soldiers trained to protect valuable assets and strategic sites. Maybe they're mercenaries who work in the Verge because their skills are in such demand by all sides. They may be a unit of ground infantry, special forces infiltrators, or the crew of a cutter or corvette. Whether they are attacking a rival nation or defending humanity from an unknown enemy, the heroes in this style of play thrive on adrenaline and the pulse of action.

For details on how to flesh out a military campaign, read through the "Military" and "Travel & Piracy" sections of the next chapter. They contain information on available technologies used in conflicts small and large. *Chapter 3: Stellar Nations* can help you determine the likely sources of conflict between governments. Finally, star systems such as Algemon and Hammer's Star provide a fantastic battlefield of the future.

## TRADE

The trade model of play invites more realistic and materialistic heroes to take a second look at how society really works. Why do humans explore? To discover new sources of material and open new markets; in other words, to make money. Why do stellar nations compete? To increase their economic dominance and resources. Or, to put it another way, to make money. Why do soldiers fight against one another and against foreign threats? To protect current holdings and seize new ones. Money again surfaces as a motivating factor.

There's nothing ignoble in the quest for the Concord dollar. This model of play emphasizes trade and commerce; the heroes are free traders, smugglers, or corporate merchants. Profit is the driving force of this campaign style, but it can also feature exploration, alien contact, and combat as the heroes go about earning a living along the space lanes.

The place to begin building a trade campaign is with the "Economy & Commerce" section of the next chapter and the "Ships" sections of *Chapter 5: Hero Creation*. After that, a Gamemaster can use *TABLE S2: COMMODITIES* (see page 26), which describes the exchange rate for various commodities in demand in the Verge. The best places for a general trade campaign in the Verge are the Tendril and Oberon systems.

For a life on the seamier side, the Lucullus system is an excellent place to base a campaign concentrating on trade or piracy. Thousands of independent traders have flocked to the system to escape the regulation, taxation, and tariffs of other Verge systems. Anything goes in Lucullus, but as long as a trader can cough up protection money or fight to prove that he doesn't need protection, he can get along just fine.

## OTHER MODELS

Players and Gamemasters can also use the information in this book to create their own games: epic campaigns of technological wonder, stories of far-future murder and mystery, horrific dramas exploiting the sensibilities of the human mind, or daring tales of fledgling colonists determined to establish a better tomorrow on a planet fraught with challenges. The future is open to heroes as never before.

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The STAR\*DRIVE campaign contains an entire galaxy of amazing technology. This chapter introduces you to important elements of the setting and how they will affect your plots and adventures. After all, for heroes to succeed they must understand the wonders they'll encounter. All heroes should understand the advances of science and medicine, the complexities of travel, the military strategies of the day, the specifics of commerce, and the religions of the time, they should also have a passing familiarity with psionics, cybertechnology, and robotics.

Of course, with thousands of stars to explore, some of the generalizations made here won't apply to specific locations. Some star systems may lack interstellar travel. Local economies may function by barter, or they might deny notions of ownership entirely. For example, the Second Galactic War left many planets as battered ruins, including some worlds deep in the heart of Old Space. And who can predict what explorers may find out on the frontier? Heroes, be forewarned: Surprises are part of the job of interstellar adventure.

## CHAPTER THE 26TH CENTURY

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# SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

The era of plentiful energy that began in 2160 is generally called the Gravity Age, and it has delivered the miracles it promised. The era's namesake science, gravitics, has affected all elements of daily life. Spacecraft slide across star systems, traveling hundreds of millions of kilometers in just a few hours, using gravity induction engines. The mass reactor and the stardrive that gravitics produced both offer enormous power and an outlet to the stars.

Affordable power seeps into the homes of citizens and the offices of small businesses. Skycars fill the air, powered by induction engines. Luggage is rendered weightless by mass neutralizers. Mass transceivers keep friends, relatives, and professional contacts in touch with instantaneous communication within a star system. The Gravity Age has also unlocked the ability to create holographic images in free air; holo has replaced video as the medium for art, movies, and advanced computer interfaces. Holobroadcast has replaced television.

Personal technology keeps people constantly connected to society. Computer pads and comm gear are available to everyone. Gauntlet technology has become the rage; electronic plates line the arms of older businessmen, adventurous space jockeys, and young gridpilots. Professional gauntlets offer easy access to information and guidance. Computer gauntlets and gridcasters provide a never-ending flow of data from the Grid.

To counter the age's invasion of privacy, those seeking solitude face some simple choices. Biolocks demand a precise bioelectric signature and prevent unwelcome intrusions. Anti-scan weave can shelter individuals, vehicles, or domiciles from unwanted perusal. Sensor detectors reveal prying eyes or machines. Ultimately, the answer to overcrowded metropolises, burdened infrastructures, and nervous urban psychologies is the push into open space where people can begin anew.

## WORLDS OF THE ORION ARM

The wonders just described are common on *first worlds*. The classification of planets as *first*, *second*, or *third* worlds has been in common use for more than a century. In 2501, the terms describe a planet's overall level of civilization and technology. The first worlds of Old Space, including the stellar capitals, are sprawling city-planets of a scale never imagined, home to tens of billions. The worlds of the Sol system remain the most extreme example, inhabited by more than 100 billion humans, fraal, and other sentients. Current surveys place the total number of first worlds at just over 200. Almost without exception, first-world environments easily sustain human life. They're the jewels of human space, valued and well protected.

Second worlds are more common; humanity has established several thousand of these. Second worlds average a population of a billion sentients or less, and their natural environments may be uncomfortable for, or even incompatible with, human life. Since Earthlike worlds orbit fewer than 1 in 10,000 stars, most of the colonized worlds of Old Space fit into this category. Many of these worlds are rich in minerals and resources but too alien to become popular homes for free citizens. Others may be habitable, but they have yet to grow in population. Technology remains state of the art or close. In the Verge, most governments recognize Bluefall, Alaundril, Lison, Alitar, and Galvin as second worlds.

Third worlds include any (mostly) self-sufficient settlements. These budding worlds may depend on trade to provide specific

goods (as do many first and second worlds), but in return they provide resources to pay for that support. Technology and certain goods are scarce in comparison to more developed worlds. Third worlds are uncommon in Old Space and growing even less common all the time. In the Verge, most independent planets and systems fit into this category.

Uninhabitable worlds don't always remain uninhabitable. Terraforming is extraordinarily expensive, costing trillions of Concord dollars and years of effort even for the simplest operations. Nevertheless, many stellar nations and even wealthy colonies and corporations are sometimes willing to pay the price. Terraforming more radical shifts in planetology and planetary orbit can give even a stellar nation pause; the costs escalate rapidly at this scale of effort. Today the most famous feat of terraforming is the home system of the Thuldan Empire, where brilliant engineers have coaxed five planets into lush habitability. Thuldan Prime is simultaneously the pride and the expensive crown jewel of the Empire.

It's worth noting that the descriptors *first world*, *second world*, and *third world* that describe a planet's development have no direct correspondence to the system used by environmentalists and planetologists. For scientific purposes, Class 1–3 planets describe a relationship to Earth-normal; Class 1 is very close to Earthlike, Class 3 is very far. Class 4 planets are gas giants, and Class 5 planets are airless rocks or other bizarre forms. (See page 197 of the *Gamemaster Guide* for more details of this classification system.)

## STANDARD TECHNOLOGY

In the STAR\*DRIVE setting, human technology stands at Progress Level 7, as described in *Chapter 9: Goods & Services* in the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook* and in the *Gamemaster Guide*. Gravity Age technology is the commonly accepted definition of cutting edge. Within the borders of Old Space, this technology is taken for granted by the average citizen. Nevertheless, many items developed during the Fusion Age remain in widespread use. Items originally introduced more than 200 years ago are still produced by most factories. The design of Fusion Age gear is often less expensive, and it has a proven track record that some recent innovations lack.

As for alien technology, several species that humanity has encountered have demonstrated at least one superior technology, but none have shown a broader range of expertise. The mechalus remain clearly superior in computer hardware and organic interfaces, the fraal lead in gravitics and in the mind-walking sciences, and the t'sa have long since perfected cryogenic technology. But while each of these species has brought something new into the scientific or technical realm, no living species has reached beyond humanity's ability to understand. At least, no species has revealed such an advantage so far.

The results of humanity's overall technological dominance are widespread. The most obvious sign is the relative size of the human population compared to the sentients that humans have encountered. While humanity is prolific and prone to exploration and expansion, the fact that humans and the fraal discovered the stardrive is the key behind humans and fraal outnumbering other sentients forty to one. For the last century or more, the human-led stellar nations have shared their technology. Yet it will take a century or more before the other sentient species of the Orion Arm can boast a true equality.

# COMMUNICATION

Fast and reliable communication is critical to the maintenance of empires, the growth of free thought, the needs of a modern economy, and the deployment of military assets. As humanity has grown, the family of humans and aliens is increasingly reliant on communications technology to stay in touch.

## PLANETARY

On a planetary scale, communication has been cheap and instantaneous for almost five centuries. An armada of satellites orbits all developed worlds, dedicated to providing connectivity to the citizens below. The average citizen carries comm gear in the form of a data slate, headset, or computer gauntlet. The same network of satellites provides audio, video, and holo mediums, serving as the backbone for the Grid.

## INTERPLANETARY

For communicating within an individual star system, the limits that light speed imposes make the use of radio and laser mediums cumbersome. Within the familiar Sol system, for example, a message from Earth takes more than four hours to reach Neptune; any reply takes just as long. Since radio waves are inexpensive and easy to generate, many star systems continue to rely on this method. But for a culture that has grown beyond a single planet of a star system—or for one with the ambition to do so—radio and laser mediums simply don't produce the desired result.

The mass transceiver—invented by the VoidCorp division Insight in 2330—revolutionized in-system communication. While a thousand times more costly than radio, the mass transceiver accelerates compressed and massless graviton packets. Instead of propagating normally—that is, at the speed of light—these particles move at several times their normal speed, making communication near a star effectively instantaneous. The new technology changed the nature of the average star system; an entire system could suddenly be administered from one point. Today, most planets and ships rely on the mass transceiver.

The mass transceiver suffers under a single limitation that has prevented it from becoming the instrument used for communications everywhere. Since the transceiver depends on the star's gravity as a carrier frequency, its range is limited by the star's own mass and gravitational well. Communication beyond a star's cometary belt is impossible. For the typical G-class star similar to Sol or Aegis, that places the maximum range of the mass transceiver at about 100 AU. For larger stars, that range can extend up to 10 times that distance; for the smallest red dwarfs, the range of a mass transceiver may be only 10 AU.

## INTERSTELLAR

Drivespace communication relays predate the existence of the mass transceiver by a century. Nevertheless, the mass transceiver's limitation to a single system makes drivespace communication the standard for transmitting messages between star systems. Drivespace communication utilizes the same principles as the stardrive itself to send a relay momentarily into drivespace. Since the drive relay isn't actually traveling anywhere, its trip to and return from drivespace are nearly simultaneous. During the few seconds that a drivesat sits in drivespace, it launches an energy carrier wave to other drivesats within 50

light-years. These transmissions take 11 hours to reach their destination, and thus contact between star systems always operates on a delay. Messages traveling from the heart of Old Space to the edge of the frontier—some 1,000 light-years away—take about nine days to reach their destination, carried over a network of relays. A reply takes the same time.

The political, military, and economic impacts of drivespace communication are endless. Drivespace communication makes the existence of interstellar nations and empires possible, but its limitations place some heavy burdens on these institutions. Because communications are slow between systems, economic forecasters must accurately predict the need for resources; ships that respond to changing market needs are even slower. Military forces suffer the same problems; during the Second Galactic War, drivesats were primary targets. Finally, delayed contact diminishes the ability of central governments to control individual systems. Hence regional authorities possess considerable power, even within huge stellar nations.

For the stellar nations, nowhere are the lines of support and communications longer than those to the Verge. Only three Verge systems can boast drivespace relays. Tendril, Aegis, and Hammer's Star have been home to relays since before the Second Galactic War, and the Concord Communications Commission has recently completed overhauls of all three. The high cost of drivespace relays hasn't encouraged their proliferation on the frontier, but several stellar nations have begun to consider such constructions. To stay in touch with the rest of human space, all Verge drivesats depend on the crucial link at Kendai, one of the few inhabited systems in the barren stretch between the tamed regions of space and the Verge. Since the Kendai relay was restored in 2496, it has become one of the most active drive-comm relays outside the heart of Old Space.

Frontier systems without a drivespace relay must depend on merchants who carry messages much like any form of cargo. For a fee, these *data merchants* deliver messages between colonies and the nearest drivespace relay. To prevent tampering, sophisticated cryptography protects the privacy of transmissions. The profit margins in message traffic generally aren't exceptional, so most merchants use it only to supplement their normal trading. In addition, today all data merchants must be licensed by the Concord Communications Commission—and the CCC has high standards. The CCC's lengthy background checks ensure that message carriers of the 26th century can be trusted.

Infotrading's weakness, especially in the Verge, is its vulnerability to outside interference. While drivespace communication is almost invulnerable to malfeasance, the same cannot be said of the many independent traders and small corporations that deal in messages. Despite the best efforts of the CCC, mail carriers are still lost to accidents and attack by undisciplined rogues and desperate pirates. Star Force, the Galactic Concord's spaceborne military, suffers public condemnation for its inability to end piracy, but the brutal fact is that Concord resources are just too thin in the underpopulated systems and less-traveled star lanes to stop piracy entirely.

Music gauntlets produce symphonies unimagined by the previous generation. Hypochondriacs wear the same medical gauntlets paramedics use. The paranoid carry weapon detectors to reveal the armed and dangerous. Psi-detectors reveal whether neighbors probe each other's minds. And sensor gauntlets enable scientific exploration—or simply permit bored citizens to watch over neighbors and gossip.

# GRIDSPACE

What once intrigued scientists, computer freaks, and hackers is now a relatively ordinary facet of the universe. The Grid is taken for granted as just another part of a technologically enhanced life, along with computer gauntlets, holobroadcast entertainment, and interstellar travel. It's such an essential part of everyone's life, in fact, that the average citizen of the 26th century wouldn't know what to do without it. The Grid is an electronic world where businesses, governments, the military, and common citizens all interact. Vast amounts of information infuse the Grid, and even the most paranoid corporations store valuable records within it; there's simply no easy way to access records from a distance unless they are on the Grid.

Gridspace is, quite simply, the medium for all forms of communication. It includes all categories, ranging from private person-to-person holographic conversations to holobroadcast entertainment programs watched by billions. Centuries ago, it replaced telephone, coaxial, fiber-optic cable, television, and radio. Now, it's an instrument that encompasses and exceeds all of its predecessors.

The Grid can no longer be divided into districts, regions, or even planets. Thanks to the existence of mass transceivers, the Grid stretches to include entire star systems. For this reason, when analysts rate the communications quality of a star system, they'll commonly refer to the Sol Grid, the Tau Ceti Grid, or the Tendril Grid. A system's Grid quality is determined simply by how well it's maintained and the bandwidth it can sustain. In turn, the quality of its Grid can help make a star system either a bustling beacon of modern times or a backwater nowhere.

The exact condition of a system's Grid depends on its location and its owner. The basic rule is this: The farther out from Old Space a system is, the less current its computer infrastructure is likely to be. The core worlds and stellar nation capitals are home to the most sophisticated Grids in explored space. Exceptional cases such as Insight and VoidCorp systems universally maintain the most up-to-date computer technology. On the other hand, Hatire and Austrin-Ontis systems both lag significantly behind the tech curve.

Of course, at any moment individual computers or networks within a system Grid can be as open or restricted as their operators desire. Security on the Grid ranges from nonexistent to extreme. Military and corporate sites frequently have strong security measures except in their general information areas. The importance of the Grid has created a new area of law that has merged with the rest of the criminal code. For example, breaking into a corporation's financial records is prosecuted as criminal trespass. Protecting one's Grid domain is perfectly legal, however, so a security shadow that destroys an invading shadow within a company database has committed no crime.

## THE INTERSTELLAR GRID

The Stellar Ring is the most densely settled part of space, with cultures that span literally thousands of individual star systems. Over such distances, people depend on the interstellar Grid to stay in touch within and between stellar nations. And the interstellar Grid depends on the constant work of drivespace communication satellites.

Within the confines of the Stellar Ring, drive relays serve every populated star system. As everyone knows, all message traffic within the Stellar Ring works under a delay of at least 11 hours—the time it takes communications to travel from one dri-

vesat to another. And the larger the distance between two systems, the more drivesats a message must be relayed across, and the longer it takes. Even within crowded Old Space, news can be delayed as long as two days.

Farther out, delays between a communique and its source grow longer. Along the frontiers, information lag from the Stellar Ring can grow incredibly long by the standards of the day. Businessmen must make do with data that's days or even weeks old. More important to the governments, maintaining ties to people, bureaucracies, and military assets is equally difficult. The delay is especially annoying for professional computer users and gridpilots. Whenever someone wants to obtain information from a database outside his or her own star system, it takes at least 22 hours to get it. And that's if the data can be retrieved over a single relay—greater distances increase the delay.

For data retrieval from public databases, users transmit simple requests, launching search engines to capture the data and return. Use of drivesats and entry to target databases requires access fees. For more complex actions in distant Grids, gridpilots rely on Insight's engineering triumph: shadow technology. After a shadow is generated to represent the gridpilot's interests and fulfill his or her mission objectives, it can be transmitted much like any other form of data.

## SYSTEMS WITHOUT DRIVE RELAYS

Grid ghettos are those without drive relays: the "deaf Grids" that cannot communicate directly with other Grids. Operating within the confines of a deaf Grid is the bane of computer users and gridpilots everywhere. Yet use it they must. In these far-flung systems, the only means of transmitting or receiving anything—data, programs, or shadows—is through the computer storage banks of a driveship.

The situation is too bizarre for the modern gridpilot to contemplate. First he must pay a data merchant to take data to its destination directly, or to a system that has a drive relay. Either way, it's likely to take weeks, since if the system didn't have a drive relay, it's also likely to harbor only small driveships. Such small ships generally cannot reach a settled system in a single starfall. CCC oversight of these systems is often minimal. As a result, data access in these systems is slow, extraordinarily expensive, and completely unreliable, since communications may be intercepted, altered, or even misrouted when traveling either in or out of the system.

## GRIDPILOTS

For a select few, the Grid transcends ordinary existence and is, instead, reality's underlying truth. These true believers are the gridpilots, the masters of the virtual world. Their understanding of the Grid goes beyond the simple user knowledge of the masses. Gridpilots create and alter the electronic world. Part programmer, part mechanic, and part security expert, gridpilots can command their own salaries in the business world. Or they can enjoy an electronic life unacknowledged by the powers of the day even as they take advantage of them.

## GRID NEWS AGENCIES

The Galactic News Agency is an interstellar network of holo and Grid reporters who operate throughout human space. In the Verge, the TransVerge Network (TVN) fulfills much the same function.

# TRAVEL & PIRACY

Despite the vast space humanity has settled, galactic citizens expect fast and reliable transportation to any destination in any system. As a result, vehicles restricted to the muddy earth are obsolete. The Fusion Age introduced directed thrust engines and flying cars, and 26th-century gravitics provide an elegant alternative: sleek skycars gliding on the invisible waves of gravity.

The physics behind this faaal technology are well understood: gravity induction engines generate an artificial curve in space. In essence, the engine tricks space into believing that a very large object lies in front of a vessel, and so it naturally falls forward. Sports coupes fill the skyways, enjoying a velocity of thousands of kilometers per hour. Family sedans zoom through the atmosphere, carrying passengers anywhere on a planet. Expert piloting systems protect even unskilled drivers from accidents.

## INTERPLANETARY

Between planets, travelers on a budget often choose commercial system liners. These commercial liners may accommodate a dozen comfortable first-class passengers or 400 cramped passengers in economy seating. Sometimes referred to as "planet buses," the best liners offer transportation across a system for as little as a few hundred Concord dollars (§). Of course, what economy travel gains in low cost, it loses in time. Travel across a large solar system can take as much as a month. Powered by fusion generators and driven by a fusion torch or ion engine, most system liners use reliable technology several centuries old. As a result, they can't match the pure speed of today's best vessels.

Luxury liners, speedy cruisers, and yachts use gravity induction engines to decrease the time spent planet-hopping. Most of these vessels would make the famous Mercury-Neptune run in just over a day. The price of fast commercial system travel can be five times that of economy travel, reaching \$7,000 in popular or hazardous systems, and that price assumes a passenger travels at planned times with scheduled reservations. Chartering a space vessel for an unscheduled run can double or triple the price.

Some intrasystem trips are quite safe; others are undertaken at great risk. Navigation around developed planets is entirely routine. Travel in well-mapped, settled systems is almost universally accident-free. Planetary and solar navigational satellites provide information and traffic control for spacecraft that approach velocities of 0.4c—more than a third the speed of light.

Near fledgling frontier colonies or unexplored systems, interplanetary travel is slightly more troublesome; gravitational influences and orbits are more difficult to navigate in uncharted regions. Fortunately, the low density of traffic minimizes the likelihood of a disastrous collision. Regrettably, the law of averages has produced some unfortunate consequences. No year goes by in the Verge without more than a few mishaps involving cruising spacecraft. Most natives of the Verge consider the risk an unfortunate fact of life.

Most wealthy individuals, traders, and frontier freebooters buy or lease a starfaring vessel of their own. For the trader on a budget, a battered system liner can be had for as little as \$200,000. Travelers only interested in crossing a system's inner reaches may consider a launch. But for most heroes of the day, a spacecraft isn't complete without a stardrive for interstellar travel. For new vessels, a stardrive pushes the price up to about 2 million Concord dollars.

## INTERSTELLAR

Despite impressive feats of conventional travel on and between planets, when the average citizen thinks of travel, the likely mental image is that of a driveship starfalling into drivespace in a multicolored burst of light.

### DRIVESPACE

What is drivespace? Drive physicists have given engineers the capability to travel through it, but they have no easy answers. For example, terabytes of data exist to explain how to manipulate drivespace to produce faster-than-light travel, but the equations that describe drivespace are intelligible to a very small percentage of the sentient population, human or otherwise. Ultimately, most drive physicists admit that the fundamental variables of their best drivespace equations are based on experiments and observation. In other words, the hows have been mastered, but the whys remain mysterious—even to the obsessed Orlamus, acknowledged leaders in drivespace theory. No one can answer how the plane of drivespace came to be, or how it stays tied to the gravitic effects of reality but freed from the considerations of distance.

Just as gravity's pull connects every object, drivespace connects every point in space. Drivespace travel is accomplished in three steps. First, a mass reactor aboard the vessel reaches maximum power, briefly producing more energy than a star. The stardrive then harnesses this energy to strengthen the link between normal space and drivespace, tearing open a rift between the two. Finally, the stardrive's tachyon emitter forms a bond between the ship's origin and its destination. By carefully controlling the application of energy, the stardrive allows its wielder to make starrise within a few thousand kilometers of a precisely selected destination.

The ship disappears in a brilliant splash of multicolored light—occasionally, a starfalling ship emits just a single color. These colors have various interpretations among the Orlamus, physicists, and travelers. Spacers hold the most superstitious view; while most spacers consider a black starfall lucky, they consider a red starrise a very bad omen.

### DRIVESPACE PROPERTIES

The limitations of drive technology have become well understood. By bending two locations in real space to the breaking point, the stardrive sidesteps the limits between gravity and space and thus the barrier of light speed. But all space vessels and objects that traverse drivespace emerge after 121 hours—about five days. After a starfall, a vessel must wait two to five days for its stardrive to recharge in normal space.

Resonance is an important side effect of a ship making starfall. When the first drivespace communication relays began operation, scientists believed that the fluctuating background noise was just an unusual form of quantum disturbance. After a few years of studying the phenomenon in an effort to better understand the principles of drivespace mechanics, observers concluded that the background noise was actually a resonance created by every ship that entered drivespace. By careful filtering, computers installed aboard second-generation drivespace communication relays could pinpoint both the starfalls and imminent starrises of vessels within 50 light-years. These readings reveal the destination of ships making starfall nearby as well as the origin of ships making starrise within the relay's ef-

TABLE S1:  
INTERSTELLAR DISTANCES

	<b>Ae</b>	<b>Al</b>	<b>Ar</b>	<b>Cor</b>	<b>Cou</b>	<b>En</b>	<b>HS</b>	<b>Ig</b>	<b>Ka</b>
Aegis (Ae)	—	38.69	22.23	47.27	37.60	42.92	43.64	36.02	40.70
Algemron (Al)	38.69	—	38.30	84.82	58.47	76.14	53.02	59.54	40.48
Argos (Ar)	<b>22.23</b>	38.30	—	60.83	23.85	52.99	31.67	56.29	57.96
Corrivale (Cor)	47.27	84.82	60.83	—	64.46	<b>22.17</b>	67.73	51.16	72.40
Coulomb (Cou)	37.60	58.47	<b>23.85</b>	63.45	—	61.53	47.81	63.29	73.70
Endomar (En)	49.92	76.14	52.99	<b>22.17</b>	61.53	—	50.45	59.38	71.64
Hammer's Star (HS)	43.64	53.02	<b>31.68</b>	67.73	47.81	50.45	—	79.10	76.59
Ignatius (Ig)	36.02	59.54	56.29	51.16	63.29	59.38	79.10	—	31.55
Karnath (Ka)	40.70	40.48	57.95	72.40	73.70	71.64	76.59	<b>31.55</b>	—
Lucullus (Lu)	<b>20.21</b>	44.01	34.54	54.48	41.10	57.53	32.31	24.51	36.19
Mantebron (Ma)	38.86	37.04	38.56	80.85	43.01	80.99	68.59	48.54	47.01
Oberon (Ob)	22.80	39.13	35.38	51.65	56.20	39.51	39.37	47.39	41.55
Ptolemy (Pt)	42.45	78.45	51.93	35.98	44.03	50.02	73.39	41.88	68.81
Rinstoke (Ri)	25.90	59.88	31.22	32.62	40.10	<b>22.31</b>	36.18	52.69	63.28
Tendril (Ten)	49.99	81.29	70.32	39.96	74.36	52.27	87.80	<b>26.00</b>	53.41
Terivine (Ter)	<b>20.92</b>	58.84	31.52	33.35	33.39	36.31	51.42	38.16	55.92
Tychus (Ty)	51.02	44.33	60.21	77.48	83.39	63.30	55.96	67.47	47.83
Vieron (Vi)	34.79	30.15	37.96	69.67	61.66	55.09	35.63	61.95	47.78

	<b>Lu</b>	<b>Ma</b>	<b>Ob</b>	<b>Pt</b>	<b>Ri</b>	<b>Ten</b>	<b>Ter</b>	<b>Ty</b>	<b>Vi</b>
Aegis (Ae)	<b>20.21</b>	38.86	22.80	42.45	25.90	49.99	20.92	51.02	34.79
Algemron (Al)	44.01	37.04	39.13	78.45	59.88	81.29	58.84	44.33	<b>30.15</b>
Argos (Ar)	34.54	38.56	35.38	51.93	31.22	70.32	31.52	60.21	37.96
Corrivale (Cor)	54.48	80.85	51.65	35.98	32.62	36.96	33.35	77.48	69.67
Coulomb (Cou)	41.10	43.01	56.20	44.03	40.10	74.36	33.39	83.39	61.66
Endomar (En)	57.53	80.99	39.51	50.02	22.31	52.27	36.31	63.30	55.09
Hammer's Star (HS)	32.31	68.59	39.37	73.39	36.18	87.80	51.42	55.96	35.63
Ignatius (Ig)	<b>24.51</b>	48.54	47.39	41.88	52.69	26.00	38.16	67.47	61.95
Karnath (Ka)	36.19	47.01	41.55	68.81	63.28	53.41	55.92	47.83	47.78
Lucullus (Lu)	—	28.01	40.17	37.66	42.18	44.75	26.60	64.54	51.05
Mantebron (Ma)	<b>28.01</b>	—	56.30	59.23	61.75	71.73	49.12	74.67	58.44
Oberon (Ob)	40.17	56.30	—	60.62	30.95	57.76	38.48	30.34	<b>18.89</b>
Ptolemy (Pt)	37.66	59.23	60.62	—	41.23	39.15	<b>23.54</b>	89.95	76.22
Rinstoke (Ri)	42.18	61.75	30.95	41.23	—	54.59	28.81	60.01	44.46
Tendril (Ten)	44.75	71.73	57.76	39.15	54.59	—	42.91	79.02	75.74
Terivine (Ter)	26.60	49.12	38.48	23.54	28.81	42.91	—	68.58	53.21
Tychus (Ty)	64.54	74.67	30.34	89.95	60.01	79.02	68.58	—	<b>23.50</b>
Vieron (Vi)	51.05	58.44	<b>18.89</b>	76.22	44.46	75.74	53.21	23.50	—

The table above lists the distance between the various systems of the Verge. Bold-faced entries show the closest system. Note that even coming out one-tenth of a light year from a destination requires an additional jump (or a few months of travel at sublight speeds).

From Tendril in the Verge to Kendai in the Stellar Ring is a distance of 270 light-years, or six jumps in a 50-light-year driveship. The distance to Sol is 1031 light-years.

fective radius. The same measurements reveal the ship's mass. Soon, dedicated drivespace detectors were put in orbit around important colonies along the borders and were mounted in the sensor arrays of capital warships.

Resonance waves propagate at normal communication speeds (11 hours), and thus are an important factor in military operations. When an enemy made starfall on a path that would put it over a hostile border at starrise, the defending forces had four and a half days to prepare. If reinforcements can be summoned from within a single starfall's distance, the defenders only have to hold on for 11 hours before the reserve fleet or troops appeared. Since a raiding fleet can't leave the system it is attacking until its drives have recharged, the defender often gains a tactical advantage.

### STARDRIVE POWER

One measure of a starship's power is how far it can travel in a single five-day starfall. The stardrive is limited only by the amount of power that can be generated within a compact area. The force of gravity resists manipulation, and it's only possible to bend space back on itself so far. The most efficient power generators are fortress ships, titans fueled by more than a dozen linked mass reactors. In a single starfall, a fortress ship can cross 50 light-years. With such power and range, fortress ships can stretch their influence across space for a variety of purposes, military or otherwise. The crew of a fortress ship numbers tens of thousands and the vessel serves as home to 50,000 humans and other sentients. Naturally, such a valuable target is armed to the teeth and accompanied by a fleet of cruisers and destroyers.

Unfortunately, the construction of a fortress ship can bankrupt nations; they cost literally trillions of Concord dollars. Even the wealthiest nations have only a few of these irreplaceable national assets, some as much as 200 years old and refitted a dozen times. Older ships such as Insight's *New Hope* (formerly VoidCorp's *Fortress Ship 6*), the Rigunmor *Voyageur*, and the Solar flagship *Kiku* were built during the first wave of fortress ship construction. The Concord's *Monitor* and the Thuldan *Emperor Gregor I* and *Centurion* have histories as complex as many small star systems. New ships such as the Rigunmor *Oneagle* and the Concord *Lighthouse* are marvels of speed and power. Fortress ships truly are the monarchs of the spaceways.

Smaller than fortress ships, military dreadnoughts and cruisers join large commercial transports and industrial freighters in the second tier of driveships. These heavy lifters can leap 20 to 35 light-years in a single starfall. While still expensive, these vessels are much more common, with hundreds registered to each stellar nation. Unlike the fortress ships, many commercial transports belong to private corporations. For both military and civilian purposes, they are the workhorses of the stars, moving cargo and personnel across the long stretches of space.

Smaller still are light freighters, traders, yachts, and military scouts. While larger vessels may leap between major systems, it's not uncommon for smaller ships to make several falls along the way. The average free trader or small exploratory vessel must make do with a limit of 5 or 10 light-years per starfall. While this allows a ship to cross billions of kilometers, populated destination systems can be even farther apart. To travel great distances, smaller craft must make starfall many times.

For example, a vessel with a 5-light-year range traveling from the Sol system to Beta Pictoris must make 10 starfalls. The trip takes about 81 days (50 days in drivespace, and nine waiting periods averaging three and a half days each).

Fortunately, small craft have another option. Thanks to their

abundant power and size, capital-class vessels of both military and civilian design can ferry smaller vessels as they travel. It's not uncommon for a fortress ship to carry hundreds of small- and medium-sized vessels, either connected to a docking ring or carried aboard prodigious hangar bays. Dreadnoughts, cruisers, and large commercial freighters can fulfill the same function. In this way, a systemship or driveship with a small range can travel incredible distances quickly. Once its patron makes starrise, the smaller craft disconnects and moves on to its destination.

Economic realities impose certain limits on ferry travel. First of all, the commanders of most large driveships demonstrate a certain wariness toward unknown or unrecognized craft. Before a military driveship provides passage, its crew performs safety inspections of its would-be client. Commercial ship crews are easier to convince, but they're much more likely to charge a hefty fee for the service, up to \$50,000 in some regions. Ultimately, though, the limit on ferry travel is quite obvious. The hopeful traveler has to find a larger driveship that's going where he wants, when he wants.

In the established spaceways of the Stellar Ring, the search isn't hard. Literally thousands of vessels hop between the populated worlds, following schedules announced on the Grid well in advance. In less crowded reaches of space such as the Verge, it's more difficult. The *Lighthouse*, a mobile station maintained by the Concord, tours populated stars in 50 light-year starfalls. Two Concord dreadnoughts and a dozen large commercial craft regularly traverse the major systems as well, offering a chance at 35-light-year jumps. Since large craft are scarce, it can be days or even weeks before a vessel arrives to convey craft in the major systems. Ferry travel to less populated systems—and unexplored stars—is usually not available at all.

### PIRACY

Pirate ships stalk the spaceways, hijacking ships and stealing cargoes; many of these pirates learned their trade during GW2, and they know how to cripple a vessel's system engines. Not surprisingly, most captains run when pirates appear, but the braver souls among them will defend their passengers and cargoes with laser cannons and guided missiles.

True pirates can prey on any vessel they choose. In general, it's difficult to force an engagement on a ship in open space unless the pirate vessel has a significant edge in speed or position; pirates in slow ships won't get very many chances to ply their trade. The easiest place to catch a prize is near a port, but that's also the riskiest tactic, because the victim is in easy reach of vessels that may cut a pirate attack short.

Once a prize is taken, it must be sold. At rogue planets that accept such tainted goods, stolen cargo usually sells at 50% of its legal market value. The fence makes his profit, and a smart pirate captain divides most of the wealth among his crew before setting out for another voyage.

A corsair who wants a semblance of legitimacy for his actions may become a privateer. A privateer is a captain who carries a letter of marque. This legal document is issued by a nation or power against the merchant shipping of an enemy nation. As long as the privateer limits his prey to the designated enemy, he can plunder and loot to his heart's delight. Of course, the target nation may take actions to stop him.

In addition to stealing valuable cargoes, a pirate captain may elect to take a vessel as a prize. A pirate can dispose of a stolen ship for standard salvage rates—as long as a particular port's authorities do not object to the pirate's presence. Typically, pirates also ransom valuable crew members.

# ECONOMY & COMMERCE

Money is the blood of empires, and the STAR\*DRIVE campaign provides vast fortunes for those who know how to seize them. The source of this wealth is the interstellar economy of the 26th century, a great and hulking beast, larger and stronger than ever before. In the last three decades, the Stellar Ring has shifted from a century of wartime economy controlled by the needs of government to a realm of healthy commerce, growing industry, and towering new business.

## CURRENCY

The Concord dollar reigns supreme in the starfaring nations. Although each stellar nation had issued its own currency prior to GW2, the interconnectedness of their economies made the currency markets a source of economic aggression—and a potential source of another war. With the Treaty of Concord, the stellar nations established a universal currency—the *Concord dollar* (\$)—accepted throughout the Stellar Ring and far beyond.

The Galactic Bank, one of the administrative bureaucracies of the Concord, is the central bank that controls the flow of currency into the interstellar economy. Whereas system banks and regional financial institutions can only exchange money, the Galactic Bank creates and destroys Concord dollars electronically to preserve the human sphere's economic health and halt the tide of runaway inflation or deflation.

This isn't to say that paper currency exists; the Concord dollar is entirely electronic. A few years after the development of fusion power, paper money finally disappeared, replaced by digits in financial networks. For individuals, a single card completed any financial transaction. Credit became governed by computer analysis of credit records; every individual's worth could be estimated, and his or her spending limits determined at Grid financial record centers. Except in special cases, robbery came to an end.

After GW1, the 26 stellar nations of the period pushed the barriers back by calling for the elimination of credit cards. Bioelectric signatures, DNA scans, fingerprint detectors, and voice pattern analyzers made it easy to identify individuals, so it was no longer necessary to carry identity papers. The interstellar Grid made it possible for data networks to spin links between the stars. A bioelectric energy scan is the standard means of confirming identity and accessing accounts. To transfer money, a citizen simply confirms his bioelectric scan with a merchant, bank, or financial institution and authorizes the move. Sophisticated megabit encryption protects the banking community from fraud and other disasters.

The Treaty of Concord also recognized the *guilder* as a unit of exchange equal to one-hundredth of a dollar; this mollified the Star Consortium, the financial empire that threatened to reject the treaty. (In Rigunmor space, merchants price an item that would sell elsewhere for \$7 at 700 guilders.) By a political coincidence that is still the subject of debate, the Solar Union's currency, the Solar credit, was exchanged for Concord dollars on a one-for-one basis at the time of monetary union in 2482, 10 years after the end of the war. Many Solars still refer to their money as "credits" rather than dollars.

After endless arguments over rates of exchange, all twelve stellar nations have successfully converted currency to the Concord dollar. Only a few colonies, frontier regions, and backward planets use other forms of exchange, such as the T'sa Cluster's creeve or the Orion Frontier's mark. A few years ago, the same

could be said of all the Verge systems, but since 2497 the Concord has set aggressive timetables so that even the most distant colonies adopt the universal standard. Many systems used in the Verge prior to the arrival of the Concord were dated by contemporary standards, but the Galactic Bank spared no expense in updating computers, retraining bankers, and exchanging old equipment for new. As a result, the Verge banks are becoming as up-to-date as those found in Old Space.

## BANKING

The vast distances between the stars complicate galactic banking. Since instant communication between star systems is beyond current drivesat capabilities, the citizens of the 26th century find themselves financially limited as they travel. To access money, a traveler must temporarily open an account with a bank in the local star system. Typically, the traveler transfers funds in advance via a drivespace communication relay.

To buy or sell in systems without a drivespace relay, an individual can carry a 3D crystal that contains the same data as a drivespace message. Once the 3D crystal arrives at a bank in the destination system, the traveler has full access to the funds it verifies. The 3D crystal can be protected by its owner's bioelectric signature, and most banks limit 3D crystal transfers to \$100,000 for individuals and \$10,000,000 for corporations. The Galactic Bank can authorize larger transfers, but it typically watches such transfers closely to avoid fraud or other crimes. Modified shipboard systems can also store bioelectrically secured funds; military personnel and traders depend on these secure onboard systems.

Banks charge money for their services. They charge a straight 1% fee—to a maximum of \$1,000—for transferring money to another star system, onto a 3D crystal, or into a shipboard computer.

## LOANS

Anyone who wants to buy a spaceship or fund a colony needs a great deal of money—hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars. If you don't have the funds, you need to approach a bank for a loan. Banks won't loan money to just anyone—only individuals with proven employment records are eligible, but any corporate merchant can secure a loan. A corsair or an outlaw will have to find another source of funds.

In exchange for a loan, the bank requires the debtor to sign a contract detailing how the loan will be repaid. Typical repayment plans last five, ten, or twenty years; the interest rate depends on the length of the loan, the debtor's credit status, the bank's perceived risk, and the collateral. Normally, the plan requires quarterly payments on the debt. If payments fall behind, the bank seizes the assets purchased using the loan, and possibly other assets as well. In many places (including the Rigunmor Star Consortium), a defaulting debtor suffers criminal prosecution and punishment, up to and including debtor's slavery (only in the Star Consortium). By signing the note and failing to repay the debt, the debtor relinquishes any rights to appeal, much like a criminal who jumps bail.

Of course, not every loan is a multimillion-dollar contract. Loans for a few thousand Concord dollars—for a new weapon or some cyber gear, for example—can be made without collateral. Credit ratings are a matter of public record, freely avail-

**TABLE S2: COMMODITIES**

QUARTERLY PRICE INDEX  
Compiled by the Redman-Smith Trading Corporation, July 2501  
Numbers expressed in thousands of Concord dollars.

- 1 Requires a special bay or hangar.
- 2 Regulated or illegal item that may

- 1. Requires a special bay or hangar.
- 2. Regulated or illegal item that may be difficult to procure or sell.

Numbers in each column represent the going price for commodities in the star system identified at the top of the column. For the listed price, a quantity can be purchased that fills a standard ship's cargo unit, typically about 10 cubic meters of cargo space.

able on the Grid. Anyone who fails to repay a loan damages his credit record for many years, eliminating any chance of getting another loan. The credit databases are well protected, and accessing a credit record requires a bioelectric signature.

## CORPORATIONS & FREE TRADERS

Interstellar corporations are galaxy-spanning conglomerates with interests spread over thousands of light-years. Typical corporate divisions include advertising, consumer services, sentient resources, marketing, market research, merchant relations, operations, production, research and development, sales, security, and transportation. As a company grows and develops, it must issue stock and pay dividends, protect equity and market share, and outwit the competition.

For the independent trader, business is much simpler—at least in principle. Traders operate under the same theory as all other businesses: buy low, sell high. Put bluntly, independents fill their cargo holds with cheap goods from one star system and carry them to another system where the price is significantly higher. Of course, free traders often discover that life is not so simple. Merchants may be willing to swindle, scam, or betray a free trader, though they would never dare to try it with a corporate or national representative. Most free traders turn a profit despite quirky local complications and risks on the frontiers of explored space. In fact, most operate there because the large corporations have yet to move in and destroy a small trader's chance to prosper.

Without a controlling organization, free traders sometimes band together in guilds. Operating together, guild members share information about prices—their most important function. They also update their members on dangerous situations, emerging markets, and opportunities for profit. Typically, the guild charges a membership fee for its services, including acting as a reference for accomplished traders. Some guilds expand over time, becoming corporations and issuing stock.

When independent trader profits become truly lucrative, the demand for working capital grows equally high. For a trader to make \$100,000 transporting technical equipment he must have millions of dollars to buy the equipment in the first place. Most traders have neither the capital nor the collateral to secure such loans. Many are still paying off the loan on their driveship, so many free traders work under contract. Rather than purchasing goods themselves, free traders take a contract from someone else. Usually, the price is set on both ends, and the free trader takes a percentage of the profits—about 10% plus expenses. It's never as lucrative as working for yourself, but many traders rely on contracts when times are tough.

## INFORMATION

Buying and selling data is a tricky business reserved for those with plenty of resources and a shrewd understanding of the value of knowledge. Those who make a living selling information are known as data merchants. These merchants carry data either in special ship computers, on encrypted and bilocked 3Ds, or in secure internal nanocomputers. Basically, data merchants are intelligence agents and couriers who operate without the protection of a central agency; they sell information as others sell industrialized parts.

The easiest part of infotrading involves selling information, carrying messages, and delivering news to the frontier. Without drivespace relays, frontier planets rely on driveships to carry libraries, financial records, and calls for economic and military assistance. These are the core business of data merchants. Sim-

## TRADE BASICS

So, how should a Gamemaster get a trader hero started? First of all, the would-be free trader needs an opportunity to buy, lease, or salvage her own ship. A driveship is useful if the hero wants the opportunity to visit any part of the Verge that strikes her fancy, while a systemship is a more economical choice. Even with a systemship, she can visit other stars—she'll just have to hitch a ride on large intersystem transports, the *Lighthouse*, or any fortress ship passing through the region.

The free trader needs to raise a stake with which to purchase her first cargo (see *TABLE S2: Commodities*). A beginning stake of about \$5,000 per Personality point is not unreasonable for a new hero using the Trader career (double that if she has the *Filthy Rich* perk), but an experienced character taking up trade for the first time should only have whatever she can get her hands on at the start. If she can't afford to purchase her own goods for resale later, the free trader might rent cargo space to other merchants. A shipping fee of 10%, 20%, or 30% (depending on an item's bulk) of the total cargo's profit is fairly standard across the Verge.

Of course, a trader must find a commodity to carry and a place to purchase it—though any major port has work of this sort. However, it might be necessary to deal with shipping agents or port supervisors in order to arrange a time and place for loading. The trader will also have to find a place where her cargo is in demand (or just fly her cargo to a buyer's location) and then arrange to sell it. Finally, she can count her proceeds from the sale of her own cargo.

The fastest way for a trader to increase her profits is to smuggle contraband. While the return is higher, the risks are also greater—many systems will seize a vessel found to be carrying restricted goods. In exchange for the return of her ship, the owner must sign a bond backed by funds up to 20% of the ship's value. If she is again caught smuggling, the funds are forfeited and the ship seized permanently.

Traders may also have to make payments for a ship, or dole out cash for crew salaries, guild dues, and ship maintenance. In addition, taxes, docking fees, and other expenses could put a dent in a merchant's bottom line.

ple data delivery can't provide a living for dealers with small ships, so most data merchants also carry normal cargo.

It's a tricky business. Information joins foodstuffs as one of the few commodities in the galaxy that grows stale and useless over time. Holding information too long can be just as disastrous as holding out for a few more dollars.

## SELLING PASSAGE

A trader with a ship has one other commodity that he can carry from system to system: passengers. In the Verge, people pay to ride aboard trade vessels or freighters heading in the right direction. This isn't luxury service; the quarters are barely adequate, the service is nonexistent, and the food consists of whatever the ship's cook puts on the table. However, it's an economical way to travel.

Rates rise as the quality of accommodations increase. Aboard a ship equipped with a luxury passenger suite, the standard rate is \$100 per light-year of travel. The rate drops to \$50 per light-year if the ship has a luxury suite without service, and \$25 per light-year if the living quarters are standard crew fare.



# MILITARY

## STANDARD TECH

Progress Level 7—the Gravity Age—remains the standard for weapons and armor throughout the STAR\*DRIVE setting. Leaks from government and corporate research facilities hint at masers, stealth technology, and personal ablative field suits, but by all published reports, functional models of these Energy Age (PL 8) technologies are decades away—only a glimmer in the eyes of young engineers.

## PERSONAL HARDWARE

The continuing exploration of new worlds and a growing frontier creates a demand for improved small-unit weapons and personal weaponry. While Austrin-Ontis Unlimited has led the way in arms dealing, it hasn't been the only corporation making money by selling weapons. The rich diversity of 26th-century killing instruments includes render, quantum, mass, stutter, and laser energy weapons; the conventional slug-thrower continues to evolve with large-bore charge firearms such as the 25mm sabot cannon.

For almost two centuries, the handgun of choice has been the 9mm charge pistol, or simply "the nine." Concealable, reliable, and relatively cheap, the nine has produced many variants in style, ammunition, and environmental adaptations. It's a police-force staple and remains a standard holdout for military and paramilitary forces. Similarly, the 11mm charge rifle is standard equipment for the infantry of most stellar nations.

But the dependence on slugthrowing weapons is slowly fading. While sometimes less reliable, energy weapons can deliver crippling force with great accuracy. In addition, personal armor doesn't effectively counter the strong energy weapons. The laser pistol and mass pistol are replacing the 9mm and 11mm charge pistols, respectively. Quantum rifles may someday lead to the disappearance of charge rifles on the high-tech battlefield. Mass pistols and mass rifles offer enormous firepower. For riot suppression and nonlethal combat, stutter guns are superior to rubber bullets or gel rounds.

The needs of the new era have produced scientific advances in a new generation of close-range weapons for specialized needs. Explorers and ship assault units favor gravnaces, power cesti, and chainswords. Stun and pulse batons are common among planetary police and security forces.

Despite the proliferation of arms technologies, most civilized governments, including all stellar nations except Austrin-Ontis, explicitly demand permits for owning firearms. Carrying a concealed weapon is a felony. All firearms and most melee weapons are included. Most citizens of Old Space spend their lives without even considering the purchase of a handgun. Fewer than 1% of the citizens of Old Space (excepting Austrins) own one.

On the Verge, where Gravity Age weapons were once rare, the reappearance of the stellar nations led to an immediate explosion of arms trafficking. Today, advanced weaponry is at least as prevalent in the Verge as in the Stellar Ring. Most local governments can't control the trade of firearms as the stellar nations do, and, given the dangers of the frontier, they wouldn't want to. The proliferation of arms has been augmented by the governments' weakness, coupled with the natural desire for self-protection on the frontier and the tensions produced by hostile political groups living side by side. Polls indicate that almost one in every four Vergers owns a firearm. The arms business remains in the top five industries on the frontier.

## SHIP COMBAT

In military terms, space fleets form the most important aspect of controlling a stellar nation, or sending one into war. Infantry forces and planet-based tools of war will always be a part of occupations and defensive engagements, but a stellar nation, corporation, or private individual with an advantage in space assets has the upper hand in most conflicts. In the Second Galactic War, this was proven true. The epic battles of the conflict were the clashes of stellar navies. The stellar nations divided their assets into task forces and sector groups that defended their own territory or charged into the heart of their enemy's. When a fleet moved into enemy space, drivespace detectors recorded the invasion; a dispatch to the nearest task forces guaranteed that a battle would ensue shortly after the enemy's arrival. Only after the battle in interplanetary space was over could assault ships land and establish a beachhead on enemy shores.

Strategies vary from nation to nation, as do techniques of building and philosophy of design, but military vessels fall into classes that describe their mission and capabilities.

• **Fortress ships.** The largest vessels built by human hands, fortress ships range from 2,500 to 4,000 meters long and carry crews of up to 50,000. They travel 50 light-years in a single starfall and carry 200 to 500 fighters and scouts. A typical fortress ship is armed with a main battery of plasma cannons in five turrets, a secondary battery of mass cannons or particle beams, and a tertiary battery of MRB missiles from 24 launch tubes. There are also up to 100 defensive turrets of various types, and an internal drivespace communication relay. Fortress ships are often the centerpiece of a fleet, since they can carry dozens or hundreds of smaller vessels with them through drivespace. The average stellar nation commands eleven fortress ships.

• **Dreadnoughts.** The largest vessel designed strictly for military purposes, dreadnoughts are about 500 to 1,000 meters long and carry crews of 1,000 to 2,000. A dreadnought can stand up to a fortress ship for a short time, but is quickly outgunned. Four or five together are a match for a lone fortress ship. Dreadnoughts are almost always driveships, capable of 25- to 35-light-year starfalls, and always equipped with an internal drivespace communications relay. Light dreadnoughts are typically called battlecruisers. They're faster than dreadnoughts, skimping on either protection or armament in exchange for speed in normal space. Dreadnoughts and battlecruisers are expensive, and most stellar nations don't have more than 70 such ships in their fleets.

• **Carriers and Light Carriers.** As military fleets rededicate themselves to peacetime operations, the carrier grows in popularity. The full carrier bears some 200 fighters, useful for patrols, escort missions, and exploration. The light carrier usually supports between 50 and 70 fighters. In a confrontation be-

tween carrier and dreadnought, the dreadnought usually proves victorious; carriers succeed only when they keep the dreadnought at a distance while the carrier's fighters do their work.

• **Cruisers.** Cruisers are the backbone of every space fleet, consisting of both drive cruisers and system cruisers. Cruisers fill a wide variety of missions, so heavy cruisers, light cruisers, missile cruisers, and survey cruisers are common. On average, a stellar nation's fleet includes 1,000 cruisers; cruisers also embody the heaviest form of military craft owned by independent planets and corporations. Cruisers range from 200 to 400 meters long and carry crews of 200 to 500. Most naval personnel are guided by a dream of commanding their own cruiser, leading independent expeditions across the galactic arm.

• **Destroyers and Frigates.** Used to screen capital ships and convoy merchant vessels in wartime, destroyers and frigates are escort vessels detached for scouting duties or special missions. Produced in equal numbers as driveships and systemships, destroyers range from 150 to 250 meters long and carry crews of 100 to 150 people. Frigates generally dispense with secondary weapons systems and make do with one main battery; in some cases, this main battery is mounted along the spine of the ship. A typical frigate is about 75 to 125 meters long and supports a crew of 50 to 75.

• **Corvettes and Cutters.** Mass-produced in wartime to provide large numbers of cheap, expendable units, corvettes and cutters form the bottom end of military craft. Many of these are systemships. Corvette class driveships make useful pickets and scouts; cutters are patrol craft designed to counter pirates, watch for smugglers, and keep the space lanes safe for travel. Corvettes are 50 to 75 meters long and have a small crew of twenty to thirty people. Cutters are smaller, lightly armed by military standards, and crewed by only ten to twenty (and can be operated by two to six in a pinch).

• **Fighters.** A small one- or two-man fighter has neither the punch to threaten anything larger than a frigate nor the armor and size needed to survive a clash with capital ships. Even squadrons of fighters have a difficult time attacking larger craft, and losses in such battles can be high. During fleet combat, they see best use in harrying escorts and performing specialized attack runs against individual ships. Squadrons of fighters can be based on any warship of cruiser size or larger, and even smaller vessels with dedicated hangar bays can carry one or two fighters. Typically, though, fighter groups launch from carriers and fortress ships. The vast majority of these small craft function without stardrives.

• **Assault ships.** Delivering marines and other assault forces to the battlefield is the job of an assault ship. Fortress ships, dreadnoughts, and cruisers often carry marine detachments, but an assault ship is specialized for the job. It carries 500 to 2,000 marines and their accompanying equipment—including light artillery, skytanks, armored assault vehicles, comm and jamming satellites, and airborne weapons platforms.

### SHIP ARMAMENTS

Just about every vessel run down a slipway in the last century carries offensive armament. It's a matter of course for military vessels, but even the most innocuous ore hauler or tramp freighter carries basic means of self-defense. Piracy flourished in the long, dark years of the Second Galactic War, and the Concord is just beginning to suppress piracy in the Stellar Ring. Regions beyond the Ring (such as the Verge) are constantly plagued by rogues, criminals, and other threats.

As shipboard weapons outpace the advancement of personal firearms, the decline of projectile weapons is more ap-

parent in ship-to-ship combat. The principal projectile weapon is the rail cannon, using an electromagnetic accelerator to hurl small projectiles at relativistic velocities. Power-hungry and inaccurate, they can nevertheless be deadly at close ranges. Missiles are a mainstay, one of the oldest, most reliable weapons systems in use. Various warheads and guidance systems are available; most use conventional high-explosive or nuclear payloads. The ordnance of choice is the matter reaction warhead.

Energy weapons came into use not long after ships colonized the Sol system. With ships capable of traveling a measurable percentage of the speed of light, lasers proved necessary to strike any distant target. Lasers are accurate and have good range and a quick rate of fire, but they don't deliver a hard punch. Today, lasers are a little outdated, but sometimes independent captains can't spare the funds for anything more advanced. Variations include infrared and x-ray lasers, both of which perform slightly better than the basic model.

The next generation of energy weapons proved much more effective: particle beams, plasma cannons, matter torpedoes, mass cannons, and mass converters. *Particle beams* are linear accelerators firing bursts of subatomic particles. They consume a lot of power, but are accurate and hard-hitting. *Plasma cannons* convert an electrochemical projectile into white-hot plasma. The plasma superheats and explosively vaporizes when it contacts a target. *Matter torpedoes* are charged dark-matter warheads flung at a target by a simple accelerator. Though they are limited in range and require lots of power, they are immensely damaging. Matter torpedoes are strictly military ordnance. *Mass cannons* fire powerful ripples of intense gravity waves. State-of-the-art weapons, they can be found only on front-line military vessels or the most lavishly equipped private vessels. Finally, the rarest and most advanced weapons of the day are *mass converters*. They strip a target's atoms of particles; a target's substance corrodes to a useless, dusty husk.

### SHIPBOARD DEFENSES

Standing up to the abuse a heavily armed warship can dish out is difficult. The best protection is distance and speed; it's very hard for anything to hit a ship hustling at 0.3 or 0.4c unless the pursuer is able to match course and speed. Once a battle ensues, the combatants have only a few choices to bolster their ship's defenses: chaff, jammers, point-defense guns, deflection fields, and various types of hull armor. *Chaff* consists of tiny strips of metallic foil launched by a simple rocket; the rocket explodes and the chaff blooms into a huge cloud, covering the ship. *Jammers* interfere with radar or communication signals. Fire control and missile seekers can be scrambled by a jammer, as well as some sensors. *Point-defense guns* use rapid-fire guns to create a wall of projectiles between a missile and its target. *Deflection fields* are created by hull-mounted gravitational arrays. By emitting intense gravity fields, these fields can deflect energy weapons around a ship and stop physical projectiles outright. This defense is expensive and consumes a lot of power.

Finally, *hull armor* varies from nonexistent to formidable. The lightest forms include *polymeric* and *cerametal* armor. Polymeric armor is made from engineered plastics, much like carbon fiber. Cerametal armor consists of sandwiched plates of laminated ceramics and lightweight metals. *Alloy* armor consists of large quantities of supertough metals, such as vanadium steel. *Neutronite* armor is the densest, strongest material known, but it's also extremely expensive. Only wealthy nations can afford to outfit their entire navy in the stuff; most make do with lighter armor for the smaller, faster ships, keeping their limited supply of neutronite for the finest ships of the fleet.

# MEDICINE

Modern medicine has eliminated the plagues, diseases, and epidemics that once harried humanity. The old infectious diseases—everything from lethal viruses to the common cold—exist only within medical museums. The few infectious diseases that do exist on faraway alien worlds must defeat a bolstered, powerful immune system to invade the body. For example, cancer, once a bane of the human species, is a trivial matter monitored by the body's own cells; rarely, a brief visit to a clinic is all that's required to rid it from the body.

## MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY

Medical technology has grown commonplace. The average citizen of the 26th century can pass under a medical scanner at work or home once a week and be virtually guaranteed of good health. Medical scanners boast a 99.4% effectiveness at diagnosing potential problems. For more up-to-date data, a medical gauntlet can keep its wearer constantly updated on all vital statistics: heart rate, blood pressure, sugar content, cellular division and replication, and body temperature.

When problems do strike, the intervention of medical personnel can often be avoided. Even those with minimal first-aid training can use a trauma pack, a belt pouch that combines a dedicated computer, medicine injectors, and synthetic flesh patches to provide immediate medical relief. A properly used trauma pack can heal most wounds and even stabilize mortal damage until proper medical attention becomes available. Automedics, popular among travelers and explorers, are essentially smart trauma packs that monitor the wearer's status and act to counter disease, toxins, wounds, or injuries via injections even if the wearer is totally incapacitated. An automedic can even close wounds through basic surgery if placed at the precise site of injury.

Yet the need for professional medical personnel has never disappeared. Just as old challenges have been overcome, new ones arise to take their place. Alien microbes and diseases, rare though they may be, pose new obstacles to human health, as numerous frontier colonies have discovered. Ironically, the Second Galactic War was a fantastic time for medical research. Some of the best hospitals in human history were founded during the conflict, including the medical institutes of Thuldan Prime and Sapphire. Nevertheless, for all the praise that surgeons and doctors of the war heap upon recent medical innovations, the need for trained nurses, doctors, and paramedics continues to grow. Skirmishes along the stellar nations' borders are partially responsible, but so is the new age of exploration.

The advance of medical technology, like that of the stardrive, has been a thorough combination of human and alien ingenuity. Knowledge of the human body has advanced to allow for all kinds of improved treatments and reduced hospital stays. Medical knowledge encompasses so many fields and subspecialties that the general practitioner relies extensively on computers, databases, holo conferences, robots, and cybernetics. As a result, humans enjoy an incredible rate of recovery. Advanced tailored drugs can augment the body's own ability to heal injury. The average hospital stay has been reduced to only two days, and many injuries that might have once led to surgery and bed rest can now be treated in a few hours.

Contact with the fraal, mechalus, and t'sa has done wonders for human medical knowledge. The fraal taught humans how to use the mind to treat the body—both by the direct application of

a mindwalker's healing powers and by the more general power of belief and will. In addition, the t'sa showed humanity incredibly advanced cryogenics. While humanity doesn't rely on it for space travel as do the t'sa, the principles that it unlocked went beyond the simple ability to flash-freeze the sick and wounded for later treatment. T'sa cryogenics made it possible to control tissue by directly controlling the rate of cellular interaction. Finally, the mechalus completed the human integration of cyberware. Their understanding of neuron-transistor interaction gave humans hundreds of workable nanites and vastly reduced the rejection rate of cybertechnology.

## GENETICS, LIFESPAN, AND CLONES

The medical extension of sentient lifespans has been possible because of the mapping, exploring, and understanding of the genomes of each sentient species. With these weapons in the medical arsenal, many flaws can be found and corrected long before they become threatening. Most expectant mothers visit doctors for gene scans and gene therapy. Even after birth, gene therapy can alter the DNA strands in cell nuclei to eliminate metabolic defects.

Many governments go beyond simple genetic repairs, taking it upon themselves to examine and improve the genome generation by generation. Sometimes called "active evolution" and sometime denounced as "reckless tinkering," the practice is still considered distasteful by many citizens. It's most common among colonists looking to adapt their children quickly to the foreign environments of alien planets. It's also prevalent throughout the Thuldan Empire.

Genetic engineering has produced advantages for the masses too. Each decade or so, citizens go to a hospital or genetic spa for anti-aging gene therapy. Since the treatment costs \$7,500 or more, not every stellar nation offers it as part of basic health care (and in the Hatre Community, genetic life extension is illegal). As a result of these treatments, the lifespans of humans and other sentient species continue to grow. The typical human can live 200 years or more, assuming a life of few accidents and consistent medical care.

Other species have used similar genetic techniques to extend their lives. The already long-lived fraal live more than 400 years. Mechalus, historically slightly longer-lived than humans thanks to their molecular repair units, live just over 250 years. Aboriginal sesheyans on Sheya before contact with VoidCorp lived less than 50 years; with modern science and better nutrition, they can reach 180 or 190. Weren who survive the battles of their youth and reach old age can live up to 160 years. Even the notoriously short-lived t'sa, once accustomed to living just 35 years, now have an average life expectancy of more than a century.

Clones—genetic duplicates—are another outgrowth of genetic engineering. Cloned sentients represent less than 5% of the total galactic population; most clones are born to infertile couples or are raised in corporate creches. The exact legal status of a clone depends on the local laws; usually, they are treated as the legal heirs of their genetic parent, their legal parents, or both.

The Borealis Republic is famous for its clone population. Half of the Republic's population shares less than 100 "honored and established" genomes, genetic types that Borealins believe represent the elite of their society. Borealin geneticists perfect and find new genome lines about once a decade.

# MUTANTS & BIOTECHNOLOGY

Human society holds two views of what constitutes a mutation. The first is some physical characteristic that sets an individual apart, such as a different eye color or a skin discoloration. That's the popular view, but it's a bit simplistic from a scientific point of view. Scientists consider any significant alteration from human norms to be a mutation, but scientific definitions of "significant alteration" vary widely. In truth, just about every mutant—whether engineered or random—has more than 99% of the same DNA structure as an unaltered human. That's not surprising, given that every Terran primate would qualify as well.

What's the definition of the species *Homo sapiens*? The scientific question has been complicated by political issues. Thuldan scientists, well-known for their interest in bettering the human genome, hold that genetic alterations up to 1% of the genome constitute a member of the same species. Mainstream scientists hold that alterations greater than 0.1% can distinguish an independent species, and point to the other Terran primates as proof. Preservationist Solars living on Earth teach that any intentional genetic alteration—or random ones greater than 0.01%—proves a person has gone beyond the boundaries of what it means to be human. The debate rages on.

The galaxy has also given rise to natural mutations, individuals born with a variation in their DNA. Given the months and years that spacers spend exposed to cosmic radiation, it's not surprising that mutations are more common in the 26th century than before the advent of spacefaring. Most natural mutants are the offspring of spacers; few are born to planet-bound parents.

Most natural mutations are defects that hinder the person born with them. A few are as beneficial as engineered changes, though the result is unpredictable and most mutations are small, with little or no outward sign of their presence. For example, no mutants with twelve eyes have appeared, but mutants with better night vision have been recorded. More bizarre mutations, for reasons as benign as simple research and as malevolent as the creation of supersoldiers, are fortunately very rare. And the more extreme the mutation, the more likely that serious flaws—even fatal ones—will arise within the mutant's genome.

## MUTANTS IN SOCIETY

Estimates place the total mutant population at 49 billion, or less than .005% of the total human population. Among aliens, engineered mutants are entirely unknown, as none of the major spacefaring species tampers with its genes. In some regions and distinct populations—including mutant enclaves, certain Thuldan colonies, and reservations—the percentage of human mutants is much, much higher, up to 100%.

According to popular opinion, these few live a cursed and barren existence. Ostracized by most of society since the Mutant Uprising of Tau Ceti, mutants are widely feared and distrusted. Holos of Tau Ceti's terrible destruction are shown to every schoolchild, and anti-mutant sentiment runs deep in some nations, especially the Solar Union. The fiercest distrust is aimed at mutants with obvious mutations or mutations clearly intended for combat: claws, poison, and the like. On the other hand, most of the Stellar Ring has accepted the mild alterations made to colonists seeking to inhabit hostile worlds.

Mutants' specific legal status remains up to each stellar nation. Some mutants have the same rights as other humans. A fine example of tolerance can be found in the Thuldan Empire. Thuldans have used selective breeding and engineering to alter

the Thuldan genome, producing a population that's stocky, strong, and built to withstand the stresses of combat. Beyond this norm, experimentation further improves the speed, aim, and reaction time of Thuldan soldiers.

In the rest of the Stellar Ring, mutant sympathy is less common. Mutants are treated as second-class citizens, and many engineered humans are little more than slaves shackled to the demands of their corporate or colonial creators.

Most stellar nations actively encourage individual mutants, whether engineered or natural, to live together on selected worlds apart from the rest of the galactic community. Mutants with dangerous abilities, such as an acidic touch or an electrical aura, may find their actions severely limited to biodomes and other quarantine structures. Some individuals and cultures even see genetic engineering as a crime against nature. The Union of Sol, for instance, requires mutants to live in controlled communities and gives genetic labs the same respect as sanatoriums. In other words, they're isolated and kept outside the community. Most mutant zones are located near medical facilities, since hospital environments are needed to treat most genetic disorders.

Despite widespread prejudice, the average human can genetically alter his or her offspring as a matter of personal freedom. Those who wish to subject their children to the associated risks are free to do so. A few communities, such as the Hatiere and the Solar Union, have laws shielding infants from such alterations except in the treatment of medical or psychiatric ailments.

Most mutants live pretty freely within the Verge, their actions no more limited than any other human's; the frontier is more forgiving of such differences. Back in Old Space, the Galactic Consulate has repeatedly failed to pass a Mutants Act to grant equal rights to mutants. The bill is reintroduced annually by representatives of mutant rights groups, but has gotten little support from the Solar Union, Nariac Domain, and Hatiere Community.

## COMMON GENOTYPES

Genetic engineering by the Thuldan Empire has produced many specific lines or genotypes. The most famous are the Warlions (see page 251), Vacuum, and Hi-g mutants, all well established in the Empire and known (if not exactly familiar) elsewhere. Concord Shock Troopers are also fairly common.

Concord Shock Troopers are a very recent genotype, created by the Taurean Star Republic late in GW2 and since adopted by the Concord. They have Increased Metabolism, Improved Reflexes, and Adrenal Control. They are trained in war from birth; 1,000 such troopers serve with the Concord Marines aboard the *Monitor*. Shock Troopers suffer from moderate Reduced Will.

Vacuum mutants aren't quite vacuum-proof but they are much more space-tolerant than normal humans. With Thin Atmosphere Adaptation and Radiation Tolerance, Vacuum mutants suffer half damage from explosive decompression and have slight High Gravity Sensitivity and Minor Physical Change (narrow faces and elongated limbs) drawbacks. Many Thuldan miners are Vacuum mutants.

Hi-g mutants have Hyper Strength, Gravity Adaptation, and Improved CON and can work at up to 2 g. Their food demands are correspondingly higher, and they suffer from Inefficient Metabolism and Major Physical Change (1.4 m tall and up to 160 kilos).



# PSIONICS

Psionic individuals exist throughout explored space. Almost every sentient species demonstrates some ability, though that potential isn't always realized within the species' civilization. Psionic power was first conclusively demonstrated in the second decade of the 21st century, ending a century of debate over the possibility of extrasensory perception (ESP). The governments of the era were remarkably unwilling to accept the possibility, but documents uncovered long after the period indicate that certain administrations and agencies knew more than they ever admitted. They simply had no desire to share their research or acknowledge the success of others.

After ESP gained acceptance, three other mindwalking disciplines were acknowledged. The first was Telepathy, not only the ability to sense emotions and thoughts, but also to introduce thoughts into another's mind. Next came the recognition of Telekinesis—the ability to move or alter objects from a distance. Finally, Biokinesis uses psionic control over the body to regulate its function and alter its chemistry and metabolism. Each use of a mental power weakens the user, so even an extremely powerful fraal mindwalker has limits. With each use of mental abilities, a character becomes more fatigued, until eventually he is too exhausted to perform psionic feats.

Mindwalkers are fewer than .01% of the population. They have aptitude in all four of the major psionic disciplines. Talents, on the other hand, demonstrate proficiency with only one. Talents are 10 times more common than true mindwalkers. Mindwalkers are much more common among the fraal (up to 20% of the population, by some estimates), and many humans attend fraal sanctuaries in order to harness or focus their mental faculties. Even those fraal who are not full mindwalkers have some psionic talent.

## PSIONICS IN SOCIETY

Ever since the fraal joined humankind, the discipline of mindwalking has been accepted as a part of reality, even though its relative rarity prevents it from becoming completely mainstream. The initial fraal knowledge of mental powers far exceeded that of humanity's in 2124, so it's no surprise that fraal nomenclature and training became the standard. While the initial years were tense as religious and other objections to mindwalking were voiced, in the end mindwalking became an accepted career.

To most people, psionics are great gifts that can easily be abused. So, while mindwalkers and talents are tolerated, they are also treated cautiously. Holo programs have instilled an image of mindwalkers as normal men, women, and sentients with extraordinary abilities. Mindwalking families—psionics run in bloodlines, though the genetics have never been properly understood—want to live, love, and thrive just as much as any others.

Nevertheless, the rarity of mindwalking ability means that a mindwalker's life is never like that of the nonpsionic majority. Each stellar nation has adopted its own laws and customs regarding mindwalkers. Certain laws regulating psionics have become almost universal. All stellar nations require that mindwalkers register themselves. For most citizens, this is a matter of course. Psionic testing during primary and secondary education reveals 99% of those with the ability. Aptitude testing helps governments recruit mindwalkers, but it also helps protect the population in general, since experience has shown that

an untrained mindwalker is the most dangerous kind, prone to lash out with his powers when threatened or upset. Governments and private interest groups set up mindwalking academies to train young mindwalkers and prepare them for a life in society.

The law provides strict penalties for psionic malfeasance. Most crimes committed by mindwalking are prosecuted normally. That is, homicide by electrokinesis is no different from homicide by laser pistol. Laws governing privacy are uncommon in the stellar nations, but the negative public reaction to mindwalkers has led most stellar nations to legislate against mind probes, clairvoyance, and other invasive techniques, even though those laws proved difficult to enforce.

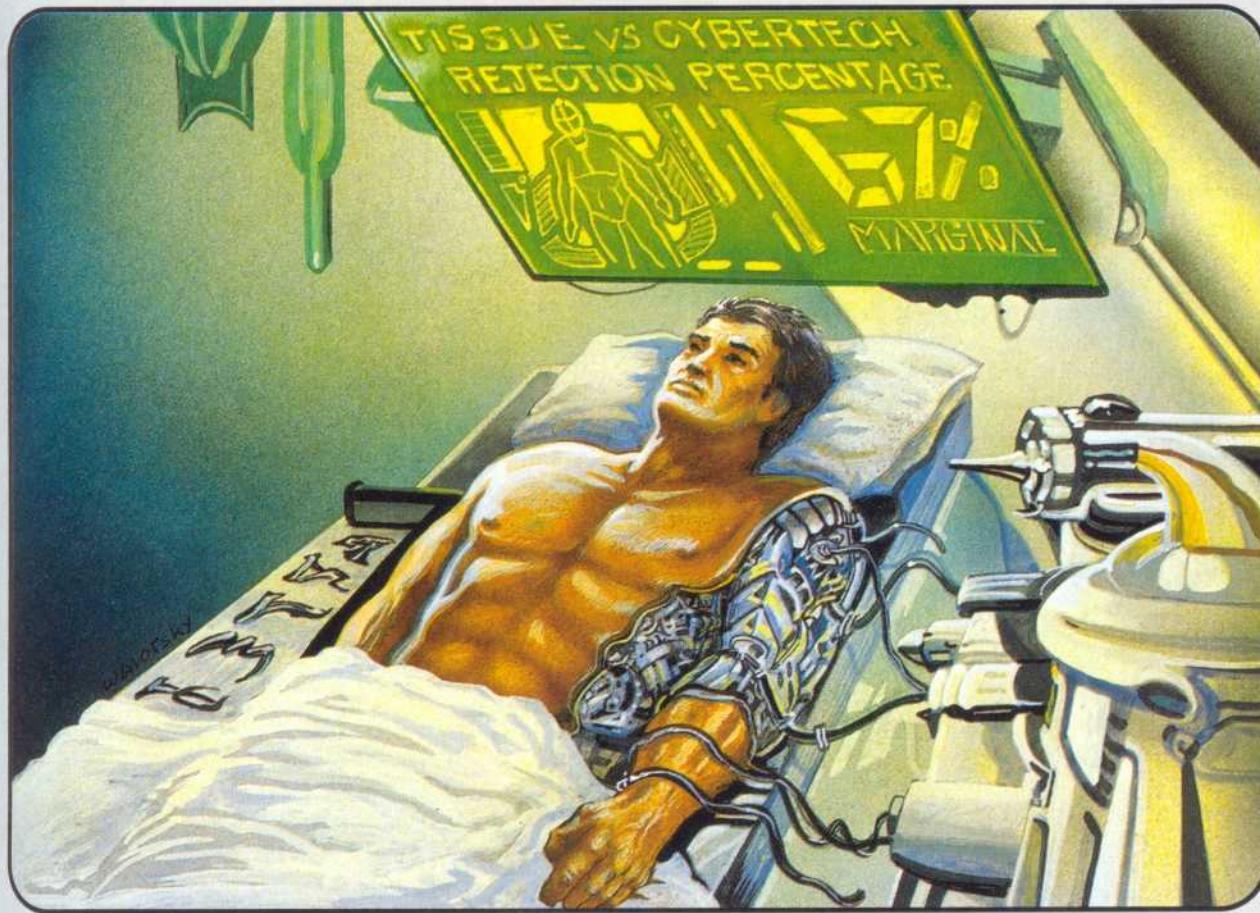
Licensed use of mindwalkers exists in every industry. Law enforcement and court officials commonly employ expert witnesses: typically psychometrists or mystics with postcognitive abilities. One of the results has been the lowest rate of unsolved crimes in modern history. In more rigidly controlled stellar nations, such as VoidCorp and the Thuldan Empire, direct mind-reading is permitted to ascertain guilt. In the private sector, mindwalkers work in communications, espionage, medicine, and human resources. Whatever their specific job, mindwalkers benefit from a labor-friendly environment. Scarcity and high demand combine to produce high pay and excellent benefits.

Most of the thirteen stellar nations demonstrate noteworthy attitudes toward mindwalking and mindwalkers. Both religiously oriented nations—the Orlamu Theocracy and the Hatire Community—understand mindwalking as a miracle of a greater power. Mindwalkers are prized and revered, typically encouraged to take up orders as members of the clergy. The Hatire are especially noted for their biokineticists and their telepaths. VoidCorp uses its mindwalker employees as it does all its assets. The Orion League and the Union of Sol allow their mindwalkers almost unchecked freedom, while the Naric Domain requires that its mindwalkers live with psi-restraint implants, allowing the state to control them. The Concord leaves mindwalking alone, though many Concord Administrators are said to be mindwalkers. The Borealis Republic has had some limited success with cloning mindwalkers; the Hoffmann line demonstrates mindwalking ability in almost 4% of its clones.

## PSIONICS & TECHNOLOGY

As the scientific understanding of psionic energy has grown, so have the tools to detect psionic activity and the ways to shield people from psionic manipulation. Hand-held psi-detectors now detect psionic activity within 100 meters, and psi-restraints can inhibit use of psionics.

More recently, hand-held psi-spectrometers have demonstrated the ability to record psionic energy signatures. Psi-spectrometers can detect a mindwalker's psionic print about an hour after the psionic activity—the exact length of time depends on the amount of psionic energy expended. The unit can recognize the mindwalker whose psionic print matches the one recorded, but it has a range of only 10 meters and can store no more than 100 psionic prints at a time. Thanks in large part to this technology, the regulation of psionics has become an accepted part of forensic science.



## CYBERTECH

Enhancing organic life with cybernetic implants has been possible for centuries, but cybertech has never achieved widespread popularity. In the 26th century, cyberneticists continue to explore what's possible, and the line between humans and machines continues to blur. Is humanity still evolving, soon to follow a path like that of the mechalus? That seems unlikely. The limits imposed on cybernetics are self-imposed. With the possible exception of the Nariacs, neither the peoples of the Stellar Ring nor their governments are prepared to accept a cyber-dominated galaxy.

If history is a guide, cybertechnology will bypass the limits anyone attempts to impose. The first significant melding of electronics and the human nervous system occurred in 21st century militaries. Subdermal weapons, cyberoptics, and body plating eventually gave way to full limb replacements. Medicine followed close behind, using cyberware to replace lost eyes and limbs and deploying microscopic nanites to enhance the body's ability to heal wounds and fight off disease.

The next step in cybertech's evolution was its move into the mainstream, albeit in a small way. Business people, scientists, and gridpilots adopted the simplest form of cyberware—neural interface jacks, popularly known as NIJacks—to enhance their everyday effectiveness. Finally, fashion, forever seeking something new, has accepted fragments of cybertechnology into its world. Bioart is a common sight within the Stellar Ring, and few question the casual use of such neon implants.

### CYBERNETICS AND SOCIETY

Thanks to the Cyko Riots of 2314–15, most sentients in the Stellar Ring view anything more than cosmetic implants with

distaste. Financiers and gridpilots with nanocomputers and athletes using cytronic circuitry are acceptable. Anything more obvious inspires apprehension and distrust. That's especially true if the cyberware has a military application. Only on the most rugged and untamed planets can BattleKlaws, body plating, or MusclePlus go without attracting attention from law enforcement agencies.

The precise reaction of citizens of the Stellar Ring depends on the nation of their origin. The Nariacs are well known for the integration of cybertechnology into all aspects of their lives, especially law enforcement and population control. Cybertechnology plays an active role in their lives, and their bodies and culture have adapted to contain it. The Rigunmors, thanks to their long friendship with the mechalus, think little of electronic-organic combinations. The Austrins and the Brethren of the Hatire Community are much less forgiving. The Hatire hold cyberware in contempt because it pollutes the human soul. The citizens of Austrin-Ontis also object to cyberware, but for a different reason. Their dislike stems from the Austrins' fierce conflicts with the Nariacs during the Second Galactic War.

Use of offensive cyberware is prohibited by the same laws that prohibit assault and physical attack. Unfortunately, the wielders of cybertech weapons are difficult to disarm. Depending on the local government, cyber-enhanced lawbreakers may simply be tagged for location, or they may have their cyberware forcibly removed. In the minds of the masses, any overly cybered human is an unpredictable killer, a cykotek in the making. In reality, few cykoteks exist. Most cyber-enhanced humans are normal citizens who prefer to keep their cybernetic gear minimized, or at least concealed.

# ROBOTS & AIs

The robot-filled world predicted for centuries is becoming a reality. In the 26th century, robots serve in every major industry and in every stellar nation, performing programmed tasks of various levels of complexity from rote actions to advanced technical work.

The science of robotics has grown ever since its origins in the 20th century. The reason for robot production appears clear. Robots do work that human beings can't do. The human body, like other organic sentients, is limited and even weak. Pistons and gyros can apply more force in a smaller area than an organic muscle that tires and weakens. Robots can also work in environments that would endanger human life. No one questions the use of drones in situations where the risk is high. Humans can't tolerate extreme temperature, gravity, or pressure for very long, and radiation can cripple the human body. But such obstacles can be overcome by robots, without any of the moral quandaries of cybertechnology or applied genetic manipulation.

Robots also do work that humans don't want to do. Work that's repetitive, dull, or located within the loneliest outposts of space can be reliably executed by a subsentient robot. Without feeling, emotion, or self-awareness, the average robot has no distaste for tasks that would drive most sentient species to boredom or even insanity. They perform in completely servile roles without complaint. Common robot models include bodyguard, colonizer, drone, mechanic, miner, and robot tank.

## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Developments in interstellar technology have been pointing to changes in human-robot relations for many years. In 2318, the first true artificial intelligence went online. Prior to that point, many computer systems could fool a human into believing they were sentient, but their reactive networks actually did little more than respond to stimuli with such blazing speed that they could delude most of the public—that is, they passed because of human weakness, rather than because of true sentience. After the development of crystal lattice processors that both stored and processed data—much like the neurons of the human brain—the machines began to talk back. Soon enough the early AIs were asking the interesting questions of metaphysics. Borealin philosophers had a field day dissecting the implications and quizzing the new machines about their model of the universe.

Artificial intelligence is all the rage. At first, an AI filled rooms upon rooms, dozens of square meters. The first AI occupied the equivalent of four city blocks, although much of that space was open to give the AI's builders access to data crystals. Development over the last two centuries has reduced the cumbersome crystal lattice structures somewhat, but the smallest AIs must still be housed within the computer banks of starships, space stations, and ground installations. Therefore, the technology of the day cannot effectively miniaturize an AI program to fit within the confines of a humanoid body. Many of these artificial intelligences can and do control robots of their own—via remote controls commonly called memory harnesses. A bot under the control of a parent AI doesn't have the processing power of its parent when operating alone, but usually the bot and the AI stay in direct radio contact whenever possible.

## AUTONOMOUS ROBOTS

Only a few years after the birth of the first AI, a revolution in autonomous robots changed the way that they would operate and be perceived. According to computer theoreticians and literati, it isn't artificial intelligence. But it's not a strictly linear program-driven matrix either. The Dillon lattice pseudo-AI unit is the means by which most robots function. They aren't fully sentient, but they are intelligent, able to make complex decisions on their own. They have no emotions and no ability to comprehend human emotional responses.

As for truly independent robots, controlled by free intelligences, they remain still a goal, not a fact. Research continues throughout the Stellar Ring, especially in the StarMech Collective, famous for use of robots in all aspects of its society.

## SOCIETY AND LAW

The full implications of artificial intelligence remain unexplored. Once a matter of theoretical debate, the issue is growing more immediate, and each culture struggles to find an answer. At first, robots were simply property, but they were soon given special status under the law. Malicious attack on a robot is classified as property damage, but if a robot's memory or processor cores are damaged, charges of homicide can be levied.

Many historians believe the shift in attitude toward robots and AIs during the last hundred years is a result of contact with the mechalus. With mechalus working alongside roboticists, it was easier for everyone to accept broader robot rights. The precedent was established in the Rigunmor Star Consortium in the Guilder Van Huys murder case, when robots first testified as witnesses in court by performing memory downloads. The Orion League, StarMech Collective, and Insight soon followed suit, granting robots the right to act as witnesses in court cases, as well as for wills and other legal documents.

Increasingly intelligent and independent robots may someday be accepted as full citizens, at least in progressive nations such as the Orion League, Insight, and the Borealis Republic. There, robots are already gaining civil rights and must be treated as full citizens in many respects. They may own property, run businesses, and access public places; emancipated robots must even pay taxes. But even in the most liberal stellar nations, free robots are rare. In the rest of space, emancipated robots don't exist. They simply must accept orders from their creators—or risk depowering and reprogramming.

## ROBOTICISTS

A roboticist is an expert who builds, maintains, repairs, reprograms, and modifies robots of all kinds, from heavy industrial welders and miners to delicate scientific survey bots. A trained roboticist needs to understand not just hardware actuators, databases, and decision trees, but also imaging programs that permit robot vision and social programming that oversees robot interactions with humans. In a way, the job combines the most difficult aspects of engineering, programming, and psychology. Independent robots who take up roles as roboticists generally perform very well in all categories save the last.

# RELIGION

Religion is one of the strongest motivational forces in human history. The power of faith and religious belief has created two stellar nations, and even beyond the borders of the Hatire Community and the Orlamu Theocracy, more than half of all sentients consider themselves believers in one faith or another. Even those who don't profess a particular belief system are affected by religious forces.

All religions struggle with the issues of faith and destiny. It's not acceptable to merely to look back to the words of prophets and ancient texts. People want to know where they're going—as a culture, as a nation, and as a species. As humanity and its allies adapt to their first centuries in space, their solutions to the puzzle of belief have become more complicated than ever.

## ANCIENTIST

A small but growing religion is sweeping through many of the stellar nations. Begun in the Borealis Republic, this new faith focuses on the ruins and monoliths left behind by a spacefaring civilization that rose, flourished, and disappeared long before humanity left its home world. The faithful call themselves the Children, but the popular press refers to them as "the Ancientists" due to their fervent interest in the past.

This faith believes that the ancient civilization was a species of gods. (Historians have labeled this mysterious group the Precursors.) Their power and majesty can be seen in the structures they left behind, claim the Ancientists, and they believe that someday the Precursors will return. On that day, the Precursors will grant humanity the knowledge and technology it needs to take its place beside them.

"We are the children of the Precursors," the Ancientists claim, "and soon they will return to see what we did with what they left behind. If we did well, they will shepherd us to the next level of existence." Some Ancientists also believe that the Precursors will test and judge humanity when they return. If they find humanity wanting, the Precursors will destroy humanity and reclaim their ancient home. Ancientists, naturally, believe they will be spared this judgment—provided they can decipher the clues left behind in Precursor ruins.

Ancientists are scholarly, inquisitive, and fond of exploring and studying Precursor sites and artifacts. Their young faith has few established churches or hierarchical structures. Though it has a seminary on Sapphire and a Grid presence in many systems, members of the faith usually gather at Precursor sites to meet, exchange information, and worship.

## HATIRE

The Hatire are followers of a god they call the Cosimir, an alien deity that they have adopted as their own. Though they became infamous for their "by-the-sword" conversions during GW2, they are also well-known for their passionate dislike of advanced technology, especially tech that alters the human body. In truth, the Brethren of the Hatire Community—which accounts for more than half the total followers of the faith—follow a conservative philosophy and lifestyle that seems to invite attack and ridicule by outsiders.

The Brethren accept the burden of their reputation, as undeserved as they believe it to be. Why? Like most religions founded in the last three centuries, the Hatire faith is a proselytizing one. The Hatire see themselves as missionaries, deter-

mined to bring trust in the Cosimir to the masses, exalting the spirit revered by the long-vanished dwellers of Haven. For both the Brethren and the ancients whose stories they translated, worship is about purity and purification. All other factors being equal, the ideal Hatire life pursues simple harmony, without complicated technology to distract the spirit. It would be a simple agrarian life, focused on spiritual contemplation. Nothing would stand between a believer and the universe.

This is not the universe the followers of the Cosimir must live in. In a fierce, contentious universe, the Hatire must gird themselves with weapons and technology they abhor. The Hatire priesthood offers special dispensations, called technology indulgences, to those who volunteer to contaminate themselves in this way. The Brethren must fight fierce wars, undertake far-flung explorations, and even research spaceships and other instruments, though ultimately these things are only distractions from the truly important goals in life.

Missionaries of the Cosimir travel throughout the Stellar Ring and beyond, spreading the word. The average believer can comfort himself with the thought of someday returning to the spiritual life—once all of humanity has been prepared for it. That's the job of the Cosimir's disciples. The most famous are the Hatire Mind Knights, trained in special academies such as the Mindanaoth Academy of Grith in the Verge or the Académie du Monde on the stellar capital of Haven. The Hatire's less violent followers include its telepathic Seers and the members of the Chorus.

The ranks of the faith are fairly simple. Brethren begin as *reverents*, then become ordained *missioners* for a local church and possibly *diocesans*, responsible for an entire planet.

The Chorus is a Hatire religious order that believes faith heals injuries. Chorus members view biokineticists as masters of the Hatire faith, adepts who have perfected themselves and others without using technology. The largest Chorus community in the Verge dwells within the Forest Cathedral on Grith, a moon in the Corrivale system.

The Hatire faith continues to grow, especially within the Thuldan Empire. While it's true that Hatire ministers have had to adapt their teachings to overlook the Empire's manipulation of the human genome, belief in the Cosimir is winning over the hearts of the Thuldan people—members of a culture that the Brethren consider spiritually bankrupt and ready for change.

## HUMANITY REFORMATION

The Reformation's tenets acknowledge that all human faiths—indeed all humans—are flawed. Theocratic governments, rigid belief systems, and well-defined canon produce nothing more than a docile, weak-minded populace and a wealthy religion. The faith acknowledges a single god, responsible for the creation of the universe. However, worship is irrelevant to the creator—worshippers must help themselves. Blaming one's shortcomings on an omnipotent god is just another failing.

According to Reformer tradition, humans should never expect divine help to overcome problems. Instead, the creator expects sentients to solve problems in themselves, in others, and in society. When a person sees a wrong, he should right it. More important, when a Reformer discovers greed, malice, or any other flaw within himself, it is his duty to confront it.

At the same time, Reformers must help believers overcome their flaws—psychological, physical, or spiritual. To take advan-

tage of another's weakness or, worse, take joy in it is a greater crime than to sin or to have personal failings of one's own. Followers of the Reformation are expected to devote themselves to lives of achievement, giving generously to charity, helping those in need, and opposing injustice.

Opposing injustice often puts the faith's clergymen in conflict with local authorities, other churches, and even stellar nations. According to Reformation doctrine, a member must oppose injustice even when doing so violates local laws. For example, the Reformers actively denounce VoidCorp's ownership of its employees and work hard to help escaped sesheyans. Despite its high-profile troublemaking, the Humanity Reformation is widely accepted throughout the Stellar Ring. The only issue that divides the faithful is nomenclature. The church is open to sentients of any species, but its name implies that only humans are fully welcome. It's an open question whether the next church council will remove human-specific titles and doctrines.

Clergy begin as *initiates* and are given small tasks to prove their worthiness. Once these tasks are completed, an initiate is given the position of *father* or *mother* and is assigned to a specific location. Alternately, the initiate may be ordained a *reformer*, a wandering priest who searches out wrongs and helps others as part-time counselor and adviser. The reformers are considered the faith's true patriots, and competition is fierce for such assignments. *Abbots* are the rulers of individual Reform settlements. While a father or mother can become an abbot or abbess, he or she can't rise any higher unless named a reformer at a later date. Finally, the term "reformer" is also used by those outside the church to describe all its members.

*Bishops* are the next highest rank, made up entirely of prominent reformers who have achieved great successes. A bishop is assigned a region to watch over, which may be as small as a continent or as large as a star system. Bishops appoint reformers, fathers, and mothers and occasionally sponsor initiates into the order. Ultimately, the religion is guided by thirteen *cardinals* led by the *pontifex*. Collectively, the cardinals and pontifex make up the Council of Reform. Their annual meetings are held on the planet Desire, in the StarMech Collective. This body is the faith's highest, and it controls all bishop appointments, doctrinal issues, and financial arrangements.

## THE INSIGHTFUL

As the youngest major religion in existence, the Church of the Oracle is the spiritual home to worshipers called the Insightful—so named to distinguish them from the title Inseer, given to citizens of the stellar nation of Insight. Followers of the Church of the Oracle aren't acknowledged as religious adherents by many stellar nations, and certainly aren't acknowledged by the other major religions. Nevertheless, more than 500 billion believers call the Insightful faith their own. The religion is a well-known haven for gridpilots and programmers, and some of the best hackers are known to follow the code of the Insightful.

To understand the Insightful's beliefs, it's necessary to experience the Grid. The Grid's ability to allow exchange of thought is the cornerstone of all Insightful beliefs and practices. Insight depends on a perfect melding of technology and mysticism—a melding that has a strong appeal for many of the technically and artistically inclined. The vehicle of the religion is not prayer, or good works, or devotion to scripture. The Insightful believe that divine potential lurks within the Grid.

Uncomplicated by the imperfections of human language, the Grid—especially as perfected by Insight—permits direct contact with the conscious mind. As such, it grants human minds the

potential for complete understanding, or complete union, with one another and with the universe. This is a possibility once thought limited to those fortunate enough to be gifted with mind-walking talents. This union results in a state of complete equality among souls, reflected by the Insightful disregard for the notions of ranks and hierarchies. The only hierarchy is the exchange, and its fire of truth. As a believer grows in understanding, he gains access to higher and higher levels of truth and advances along the path to perfect understanding.

For humanity to evolve beyond crude flesh to a free exchange of thought across the Grid, information must be free. For governments and corporations to keep secrets and restrict the free flow of information is a sin. It's the sacred duty of the Insightful to expose the truth, no matter how painful it may be. The price of free exchange, the price of human destiny, is the willingness to learn and embrace both the good and evil sides of human nature, and ultimately rise above them both.

## ORLAMISM

Unlike any other religion except the Church of the Oracle, Orlamism is a dynamic faith built on a foundation of technology and science. The Orlamist faith was born from the invention of the stardrive and the subsequent discovery of other dimension, drivespace. While testing the stardrive, pilot Jeff Sendir had an encounter with the divine. When he returned to normal space, he abandoned his previous life and set forth the principles of the faith: Drivespace is the groundwork of God. Just as the world all around was the conscious act of the creator, the space behind space remains the source and origin of all things. Drivespace is nothing less than the Divine Unconscious.

The doctrine of the Theocracy is centered around a single objective: understanding and contacting the Divine Unconscious. To reach this goal, the Orlamus constantly monitor and experiment to advance their understanding of drivespace. Doctrine changes as necessary to fit the latest theory supported by the scientific evidence. Disputes and disagreements among the Orlamist faithful are more than permitted; they are encouraged, just as division and argument are vital to the scientific community. Not surprisingly, a secondary result of all this experimentation on the Divine Unconscious has been the superiority of Orlamu stardrives over the last 300 years.

The Theocracy can only loosely be considered a united religion, since it lacks elders who preach a common doctrine. The only requirement for an Orlamist is that one's activities help to understand the Divine Unconscious. By seeking to understand what drivespace truly represents, one comes closer to understanding God. For example, the 121-hour duration of each starfall has led some Orlamists to suggest that this was the span of creation itself. A more radical Orlamu cult questions the very use of the Divine Unconscious as a means of travel; might not trespassing alter the very nature of God? At the same time, the religion's openness and tolerance extend beyond its own faith; Orlamists are accepting of all religions.

## OLD EARTH

Waves of emigration from humanity's homeworld have yet to weaken the venerable belief systems developed on its surface. Some have seen a percentage decrease in their numbers when compared to the whole of the population. This decline can be partially attributed to the same factors that led to the First Galactic War; far from religious centers and leadership that were still based within the Sol system, faith among the colonial powers

wandered. It's also likely that the discovery of nonhuman sentient life—and the unfriendly response that more conservative religious groups offered—played a role in decreasing the attendance at Old Earth churches, synagogues, and temples.

Yet as human population has grown, so has the number of followers of most Old Earth faiths. Missionaries sent to convert the alien species have enjoyed some moderate success as well. More than one and a half trillion sentients follow an Old Earth faith. All of the major religions in existence prior to the discovery of the stardrive still flourish, including Christianity (in Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant denominations), Buddhism (in Theravada, Mahayana, and Tantrism branches), Islam (in Sunni and Shia sects), Judaism (in Hasidic, Orthodox, Conservative and Reformed divisions), and Hinduism (in three major traditions encompassing a variety of sects).

## ALIEN RELIGIONS

The alien species encountered by humanity haven't embraced human religion as quickly as they've embraced human technology. Indeed, all alien species have offered up their own answers to religious questions—though most humans find these answers almost incomprehensible.

### FRAAL PHILOSOPHIES OF MIND

The fraal are skeptics in most matters of faith. Indeed, the fraal are the only one of the five major nonhuman species without a native faith of their own. Even fraal who adopt a religion are rarely very devout. They show little interest in human missionaries, and they often forbid preaching on board their city-ships.

At the same time, Borealin colleges have closely studied fraal philosophy for more than 200 years, and a number of 23rd century discoveries link fraal schools of mindwalking academies with sacred belief systems. Though the data is incomplete, the fraal seem to believe that each major form of mindwalking corresponds to a sentient being's inner form, possibly something that resembles a soul. However, the fraal's extreme reticence in discussing their beliefs about the origin of mindwalking powers has frustrated every attempt to broaden human understanding of these beliefs—though the Hatire have gleaned some portion of this knowledge. As long as the fraal refuse to discuss it, speculation will continue unchecked.

### MECHALUS CREDO

Ever since the genocide that converted most mechalus to pacifistic ways, these aliens have suppressed their only native faith, the Warrior's Credo. Founded by a warrior/programmer named Thetor, the faith taught that only through struggle could the mechalus species attain and maintain unity. The little evidence available indicates that the religion involved special implants and software as well as ritual acts of prayer and violence. Most mechalus today look back on these beliefs as primitive and even distasteful, much as many humans frown on some old human religious practices such as animal sacrifice.

Since contact with humanity, however, the mechalus have demonstrated some interest in human faiths. Currently, many mechalus adhere to Old Earth Buddhism or claim membership among the ranks of the Insightful.

### SESHEYAN FABLE ANIMISM

The sesheyans have their own beliefs, based on tales and proverbs told by their shamans. These tales vary from shaman to shaman, but almost all contain one of three important figures: Neshii'en the trickster, Tal the hunter, or Vec'lir the brood-

mother. In particular, the parables of Neshii'en and his enemies have sustained the sesheyans during the dark times of their servitude to VoidCorp—though many of the public rituals and outward expressions of the faith have been lost.

Sesheyan religious practices are now strictly verbal within VoidCorp space: Possession or manufacture of religious paraphernalia is punishable by heavy fines, demotion, or relocation. If anything, this restrictive atmosphere has strengthened the hold of religion on the sesheyan culture; new tales of Neshii'en's conflicts with agents of VoidCorp circulate as pervasively as jokes and rumors.

### CH'NALISM

T'sa religion is a complex polytheistic faith generally referred to as Ch'Nalism. Ch'Nalites believe in a single, all-powerful creator who provides a guardian deity for every sentient creature. After creating the universe, Ch'Nal created many lesser gods, the Ch'Nakan, for each kind of living thing. Each Ch'Nakan watches over its own piece of creation, acting as guide and guardian to its charges. The Ch'Nakan can appear in whatever aspect suits them.

While the t'sa revere Ch'Nal and celebrate his holy day during the harvest, they reserve their daily worship for their personal guardian, K'san Ch'Nak, a tireless patron who takes good care of the t'sa. The t'sa joke that it is good that K'san is immortal, because otherwise his curiosity would have killed him many times over. K'san Ch'Nak embodies all the qualities that the t'sa value most in themselves. He is curious, friendly, and quick-witted.

Within the T'sa Cluster, almost all t'sa worship Ch'Nal and K'san Ch'Nak. In human space, many t'sa cling to their religion, but some have adopted other belief systems. The t'sa back home consider this odd, but not blasphemous, since they assume that every species has its own Ch'Nakan guide.

### THE WEREN HERESIES

Many weren still living on Kurg have embraced Orlamism. Unfortunately, these weren often hold heretical versions of the Orlamu beliefs. For these weren, the Divine Unconscious is indelibly linked to the universe itself. Their version of the Orlamu god—the Divine Unconscious—takes them from their homeworld to other, better worlds. The Divine Unconscious isn't a subject of scientific study, but a force that believers must appease. A weren who makes the proper offerings before leaving Kurg will find her way to one of the paradises of the Great Beyond. Those who fail to do so end up in one of the universe's many hells.

The native religion of Kurg is a sophisticated form of animism that depends on its adherents' belief to give strength to a clan's warriors through the channeling of the proper spirits. Beyond that point, interpretations differ from tribe to tribe.

Weren priests offer a number of simple explanations for everyday problems. Hexes, curses, astrological predictions, and the summoning of disease by hostile prayers are widely held beliefs, especially among the nomadic marrizhe-herders. The details of these beliefs vary, but the position of priest is one of the few in weren society with as much prestige as that of warrior. The priests watch over the sacred combats of the faith's high holy days and perform the ceremonial bloodletting that purifies a clan's warriors. These religious festivals sometimes become little more than drunken riots, as the weren argue points of doctrine and the merits or interpretation of each individual combat. Few outsiders can withstand the sheer noise of a weren religious gathering.

The Treaty of Concord (2472) recognizes thirteen distinct governments dividing explored space—the stellar nations. These rulers of the galaxy make decisions that affect all of humanity and the species it has contacted. Together, the stellar nations lay claim to thousands of colonized worlds and outposts throughout hundreds of light-years. Given their might, the only force capable of stopping a stellar nation is another stellar nation.

Twelve stellar powers were the most powerful republics when the Treaty of Concord was drafted. As a group, they are sometimes called the winners of the war, simply by virtue of their survival. Without the treaty, the Second Galactic War would have continued, dragging them into an abyss of blood and fire. The twelve powers have the most to lose if war returns.

Each stellar nation controls a distinct region of space, marked on star maps and patrolled by military driveships. The borders indicate which stellar nation owns which star systems. While they vary widely in size, even the smallest nations control tens of thousands of star systems and are home to more than 200 billion sentients. As many as a trillion reside in the larger stellar nations. The laws of a stellar nation apply to all the worlds under its flag, but enforcement depends on the particulars of each world in question. Given their immense size, the nations contain hundreds of diverse star systems, client regions, and allied planets. What a visitor can expect depends not only on the stellar nation, but also on the individual star system.



Economically, the stellar nations have chosen different paths. Each nation has the resources to survive and grow independently—even tech-obsessed Insight pursues traditional and hydroponic agriculture to feed its hungering billions. But how each stellar nation answers the needs of its populace makes it distinct. Some use the reliable principles of capitalism, depending on corporations and individuals to manufacture, distribute, and sell goods. Others, such as VoidCorp, control corporate divisions that take up these roles. A few use planned economies or operate on military lines. While all stellar nations can meet their basic needs, many excel at one or more industries, such as computers, high-tech arms, or entertainment.

In strength of arms, the stellar nations have fallen far from the dizzy heights they had climbed prior to the Second Galactic War. They now approach half the power they commanded at the start of the war. Each stellar nation controls several thousand spacecraft, most of which are smaller spaceships such as scouts, cutters, and corvettes. Each stellar nation also commands many cruisers and dreadnoughts, and a few fortress ships. Several factors have produced these large navies: large reaches of interior space, long borders to patrol, and colonies and other interests that extend to the farthest reaches of explored space. Despite the best efforts of longsighted pacifists, no stellar nation has seriously considered disarmament in decades.

Among the stellar nations, nationalism represents the greatest threat to peace. Most citizens of the 26th century place their national identity at the center of their existence. Sociologists refer to the phenomenon as “new tribalism.” Humans—and many aliens—think of themselves as Orions, Borealins, or Thuldans. Even as the convenience of modern transportation allows all citizens to interact freely, humans continue to band together, not just for protection but to form common identities.

While the nations compete for interstellar dominance, their citizens struggle with each other in smaller ways. The stellar nations have been fighting since their birth, and their citizens’ prejudices make it likely they will fight again. In 2501, most of these prejudices reflect the recent war. Yesteryear’s enemies are well remembered, and chance encounters between VoidCorp employees and Inseers, Thuldans and Solars, or Nariacs and Austrins can quickly turn into brawls.

In the interest of preventing open warfare, the Treaty of Concord created a thirteenth stellar nation: the Galactic Concord. To form this artificial state, each nation donated territory, personnel, space vessels, and resources. Today, the Concord controls planets, stars, and entire regions of space, just as the stellar nations do. Concord bureaucrats regulate the growth and development of Concord worlds. The stellar nations didn’t set up the Concord as a competitor, but the Concord has surprised its creators. While the Concord’s existence may once have depended on the sufferance of its creators, it has now raised an entire generation under its rule. These citizens see themselves as Concordans first and foremost.

While the Concord Star Force is only slightly stronger than the navy of any other stellar nation, the existence of an armed mediator has already stopped several small conflicts from escalating, such as the Rigunmor-Borealin border war of 2481. The Concord’s charter demands that it rise above local conflicts to keep the peace. This commission overrides all others. No stellar nation is willing to fight the Concord openly; the other nations would support the Concord, and such a conflict might well spark another war. No one is quite ready for that.

The Concord acts to help humanity and alien species throughout explored space. The Concord ensures free trade between all stellar nations, and Concord vessels patrol well-trav-

eled space, curbing piracy and privateering. While the Treaty of Concord doesn’t allow the Concord to interfere in any nation’s internal affairs, most Concord authorities stress the importance of sentient rights in preserving a workable peace. The Concord also serves as an arbiter between the t’sa and human governments. In addition to all these duties, Concord law is interstellar law; in the reaches beyond Old Space, the Concord administers justice, recognizes claims, and settles disputes.

Even pessimistic historians have called the Concord one of humanity’s brief fits of sanity since the species left Earth. Most of these historians also predict that the Concord will ultimately fail. They may be right; the stellar nations may prove too powerful, too prejudiced, and too intractable, but no one questions the value of making the attempt.

A final consequence of the Treaty was the official extinction of several nations. Even as the treaty recognized the sovereignty of the twelve stellar nations, it dissolved more than a dozen other nations recognized prior to the war. Many had been destroyed. Others had been assimilated into other nations. Today, these powers are historical footnotes, relegated to minor status as client states of the stellar powers or reduced to governments in exile. Although more than 30 years have passed since the war’s end, loyalty and bitter memories keep the defunct nations from completely disappearing. Scattered within the new borders, expatriated citizens, bitter refugees, and entire star systems refuse to accept the authority of a foreign power.

## THE STELLAR RING

While humanity has stretched its wings to explore the Orion Arm for 1,000 light-years in every direction, only about half of that space has been annexed by the stellar nations. Within this area, called the Stellar Ring, well-defined borders divide the stellar nations into recognized territories. Beyond the Stellar Ring is Open Space, full of stars that have been explored but have yet to be annexed by any stellar nation.

The heart of the Stellar Ring is Old Space, the region within 200 light-years of Sol. Each nation began its expansion here, and the first-world planets of Old Space represent the core of human territory. Old Space’s planets are marked by miles-high megatropolises that stretch almost endlessly over the surface. The poor, the working class, and the ultrarich alike dwell on these city-planets. Though urbanized from pole to pole, first worlds feature incredible diversity. Some portions are pristine and beautiful, graced with grand architecture and public art. Others are run down and filthy, crowded with the destitute and the criminal. In between, winding along the wide avenues and around the magnetic highways, the commercial districts full of shops and restaurants are painted in the kaleidoscopic light of advertising boards, holo commercials, and garish interactive placards. On most first worlds, humans and aliens live and work side by side.

Capital planets and stellar homeworlds are almost universally located in Old Space. These awe-inspiring showcase worlds are the height of the stellar nations—paradise first worlds, clean and beautiful. As the saying goes, everyone comes to the capitals; these worlds are the pride of the stellar nations, and rightly so. The capitals are grand examples of the best the nations have to offer, and in their buildings the nations’ business, politics, and diplomatic posturing never end.

Outside Old Space lie the second-world planets that form most of the remainder of the Stellar Ring. Most are colonies that have reached the second stage of development, and most have good prospects for continued growth. A few have yet to com-

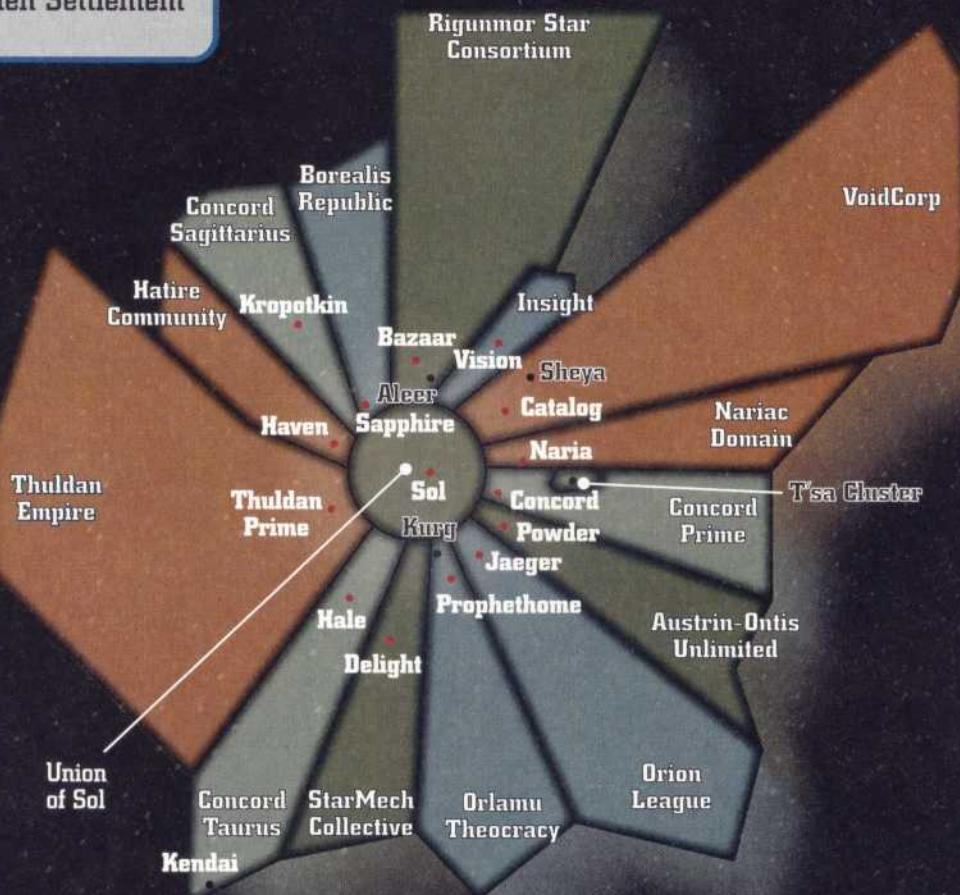


## Far Reach

## The Stellar Ring and Open Space

1 = 50 light-years

- Capital
- Alien Settlement

The  
VergeOrion  
Frontier

plete the extremely expensive process of terraforming to render them habitable to unassisted human life. Others are planets that will never attract the population or develop the resources to gain first-world status. At least one continent or significant portion of territory must be developed for a planet to be classified as a second world.

Third-world planets are those where civilization has yet to extend its grasp. Most third-world planets are established colonies or planets with neither the resources nor the strategic importance to merit significant development. Usually, at least one city must be developed to classify a planet as a third world.

Not every world in Old Space has been urbanized. Many planets are holdings, undeveloped worlds featuring wildlife preserves, natural environments, and immaculate communities. Typically, these utopias are populated by the human elite, such as political leaders and the wealthy. All others must obtain a visa to visit, dwell, or gain employment on a holding, and alien species are usually barred. Holdings can be found throughout each stellar nation, in Old Space and beyond.

Similarly scattered throughout space are alien reservations. These are worlds that have been established for a nation's alien citizens, and worlds that belonged to the alien species when the nation subsumed them. The conditions on these worlds depend on the nation that claims them. Some have been left almost exactly as the humans found them. Others are little more than glorified prison camps. A select few are as beautiful and peaceful as the human holdings, living monuments to alien civilizations.

The newest divisions of space are the Concord Neutralities, the territories administered by the Concord. These regions are found in each stellar nation, but far more important are the three major Neutralities: Concord Prime, Concord Taurus, and Concord Sagittarius. Each neutrality is considered neutral ground, whether in a stellar nation's territory or in Open Space.

Colony worlds are the backwaters of a stellar nation, and they retain most if not all of their original environmental conditions. They haven't been terraformed, industrialized, or covered in layers of steel and plastic. Life can be hard on a colony world, but it can also be uplifting and good. To many, the colony worlds are more real than the overdeveloped first worlds or the bio-engineered perfection of the holdings. Some even feature all of the modern conveniences of a nation's first worlds while being far removed from the crowded conditions of Old Space, making them especially attractive to those who yearn for a bit of freedom and breathing space. Colony worlds can be found in any region settled in the last century and a half, both within the Stellar Ring and out along the frontiers.

Concord ambassadors serve throughout human space, enforcing the terms and conditions of the Treaty. While many fill posts in the Concord Neutralities, they also poke around on colony worlds, alien reservations, the Verge, Open Space, and disputed regions of the Ring. Wherever they serve, they foster good relations and negotiate differences of opinion.

## OPEN SPACE

Beyond the ring claimed by the stellar nations lies Open Space. Though humans have mapped an area 2,000 light-years in diameter and 200 light-years deep, space stretches beyond humanity's grasp in every direction. Even in the settled regions near the frontier, plenty of planets have been missed or forgotten, or simply remain unexplored.

Open Space is the last slice of human territory defined by the Treaty of Concord. Its vast regions aren't claimed by any single stellar nation. Instead, they serve as areas of growth for those



who hope to establish independent homes or new nations in the future, or safety valves for nations with population pressures.

Parts of Open Space were so devastated in the Second Galactic War that nothing can live there. It was the battlefield of nations willing to test their most powerful tools of annihilation. These weapons crushed planets, loosed deadly diseases, or otherwise rendered these regions uninhabitable. A few spacefaring nomads survive in these regions by salvaging valuable materials, engines, and other goods from these worlds, but no colony could survive in the ruined ecosystems of these wasted worlds.

Other areas of Open Space remain habitable. These contain space stations, independent worlds, or corporate holdings not tied to the stellar nations or the Galactic Concord. Open Space may also be home to undiscovered alien civilizations. Each stellar nation explores Open Space in the hope that it will find the next race of sentients and become their patrons. Each explorer hopes to find such a species and profit from the knowledge of the species' location, language, and customs, which can be sold to the Concord or the highest bidder. At the very least, the artifacts left in alien ruins often fetch a high price for anyone bold enough to find and plunder them.

In the depths of Open Space, space stations are vital relay and resupply points. They dot the void, serving as guideposts, communication relays, resting points, and meeting places along the interstellar travel lanes. Military stations watch for threats and protect travelers crossing their regions of space. Private spaceports act as way stations for travelers, providing places to rest, restock supplies, and gather news. Corporate stations serve these same functions, though they can have military applications and might even be labor camps. Stations become less important the more settled a region becomes, but even in the Ring they help travelers cross space for a modest price.

In the normal course of events on the frontier, minor outposts and stations are eventually supplanted by colonies. Entire systems in Open Space may be controlled by one of the stellar nations, but the nation can't claim control of the surrounding space. The continued growth of such systems eventually allows a stellar nation to expand its borders.

Where Open Space stretches close to established nations, portions may be patrolled or surveyed by those nations to pro-

tect their nearby holdings. Sometimes this is left to the Concord, but more often it falls to the nations themselves to watch for danger. Open Space also makes a wonderful hiding place for criminals, pirates, the disillusioned, the banished, and the unwanted masses of humanity—those who, for one reason or another, would rather not be tied to a particular stellar nation.

The Verge is an example of Open Space, albeit an unusual one. Concord law officially applies, but stellar nations have claims to many individual planets and systems. Independent governments control many societies. The Verge is unique because it was settled by so many stellar nations and independents. Members of every stellar nation live in the Verge, even those whose territory is on the opposite end of human space.

## THE CENSUS OF 2500

The Itrius Foundation, a privately funded research group, released its sixth census report a year ago. Improved polling measures and calculation methods made the census the best taken since the first colonial driveship left Earth. For six months, Itrius representatives traveled throughout the stellar nations, gathering information. The census publishers are proud to report a margin of error estimated at less than 3% in population figures and less than 1% in religious affiliation; more skeptical observers note that the accuracy of religion responses is impossible to guarantee. The Itrius data defies earlier estimates that placed human population in excess of 10 trillion. A revised estimate holds that 10 trillion sentients will dwell in explored space within three years.

The table below presents the master summary of the census. The population of each stellar nation is broken down into the six principal species and a default category to include other species. As a casual glance at the table reveals, humans outnumber alien species by a generous margin; for every 40 humans in explored space, the census found only one alien.

Individual sentients provided their religious affiliation after polling. Two facts should be noted. First, sentients were not

asked if they regularly attend or support their religious affiliation. Some atheists view the inclusion of so-called "casual believers" as evidence that religious estimates are inflated. Finally, it's noteworthy that representatives of the stellar nations were sometimes present when their citizens revealed a religious affiliation. Since confidentiality couldn't be assured, the representatives may have affected their citizen's answers.

For the first time, the Itrius Foundation has given Insight its own listing, ending its classification as "Other." The move is thought to be a response to public pressure and an attempt to end Grid attacks against the foundation's computer core.

In population terms, the Union of Sol still remains the largest nation, almost twice as populous as the next largest and six times bigger than newcomers such as Insight. In terms of population density, though, the Galactic Concord is the most thinly settled nation, with 631 billion citizens. Its battered territories suffered bombardment, biowarfare, starvation, and wholesale slaughter during the Second Galactic War; even after the war, many of its constituent parts collapsed from lack of infrastructure. Before the war, the region's population had stood at 790 billion souls. The greatest increase in the Concord's population lately has been due to the addition of the t'sa, whose numbers have quadrupled in the last 30 years.

Most of the other alien species remain clustered near their homeworlds; the fraal are the obvious exception. Due to their nomadic lifestyle and their odd ship designations, the Wanderers among the fraal introduce a high degree of uncertainty into their numbers. Some city-ships are surely miscounted, and others may roam beyond civilized borders. The margin of error is higher in this category than for other species and approaches 6%.

Finally, the Itrius Foundation has recently been commissioned by the Galactic Concord's Committee on Verge Integration to undertake a complete census of the Verge. Preliminary sampling has already begun, though the foundation is still hiring census takers to visit some of the region's more remote systems. A fully compiled report isn't expected until 2504 at the earliest.

TABLE S3: STELLAR NATIONS CENSUS

<b>Sentients</b>		<b>AO</b>	<b>BR</b>	<b>HC</b>	<b>IN</b>	<b>ND</b>	<b>OL</b>	<b>OT</b>	<b>RC</b>	<b>SM</b>	<b>TE</b>	<b>US</b>	<b>VC</b>	<b>GC</b>	<b>Total</b>
(in billions)															
Human	640	362	455	273	633	877	745	700	527	1,071	1,804	944	546	9,577	
Fraal	1.2	2.1	0.6	1.4	0.6	7.2	2.4	2.1	0.7	0.2	3.9	0.6	3.3	26	
Mechalus	0.1	0.2	0.03	0.6	0.06	1.1	0.5	33	0.3	0.1	0.4	0.2	1.5	38	
Sesheyen	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.4	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.01	16.1	0.5	17	
T'sa	1.1	0.4	0.3	0.7	0.9	1.8	1.1	0.9	0.4	0.1	1.4	0.6	70	80	
Weren	1.9	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.2	1.2	31	0.6	0.5	0.8	0.6	0.7	2.4	40	
Other	1.8	3.2	1.3	1.4	1.6	4.4	2.2	3.1	1.2	0.1	2.1	1.6	7.1	31	
<b>Total</b>	<b>646</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>636</b>	<b>893</b>	<b>782</b>	<b>740</b>	<b>530</b>	<b>1,072</b>	<b>1,812</b>	<b>964</b>	<b>631</b>	<b>9,810</b>	
<b>Faiths</b>		<b>AO</b>	<b>BR</b>	<b>HC</b>	<b>IN</b>	<b>ND</b>	<b>OL</b>	<b>OT</b>	<b>RC</b>	<b>SM</b>	<b>TE</b>	<b>US</b>	<b>VC</b>	<b>GC</b>	<b>Total</b>
(in percentages)															
Ancientists	4	13	0	2	0	4	4	4	6	2	8	1	6	4%	
Hatire	8	2	98	1	0	6	1	6	0	31	11	1	3	12%	
Insight	1	2	0	79	0	9	2	4	2	3	1	2	4	5%	
Humanity															
Reformation	16	11	1	8	4	13	8	15	19	10	16	1	11	11%	
Orlamist	2	5	0	3	1	17	73	3	6	2	3	0	14	10%	
Old Earth	51	13	1	1	5	13	5	5	23	12	37	1	8	16%	
Other	5	8	0	2	1	7	2	3	3	3	8	0	3	4%	
None	13	46	0	4	89	31	5	60	41	37	16	94	51	38%	



Citizens of the Stellar Nations: Austrin, Borealin, Nariac, Inseer, and Hatire

*"Without guns, where would humanity be?"*

—CEO James "Crazy" Gates, 2472

Many outsiders consider the survival of Austrin-Ontis Unlimited as evidence of a human obsession that stretches back for centuries. Of course, Austrin-Ontis accepts the tradition of supplying armaments with pride. Categorizing Austrin-Ontis remains a difficult task for diplomats and historians alike. It stands somewhere between a corporate stellar nation and a confederation of rugged colonies. Most Austrins see no contradiction between maximizing the profit line and exercising the desire to demonstrate their products whenever possible.

## HISTORY

Arms dealers are nothing new to human history, and by the early half of the 21st century, the industry was booming. As new superpowers rose and corporations staked their claims to global power, both national and corporate armies felt the need for state-of-the-art, military-grade arms. Simultaneously, many free-minded citizens who were intimidated by the world's changes soothed their fears by arming themselves. By 2050, personal firearms were rapidly spreading throughout otherwise civilized nations.

Austrin Arms and Ontis Ordnance devoured corporations of the previous century. Both companies had grown into diverse conglomerates with holdings in dozens of industries from transportation to agriculture. Austrin focused on personal arms, marketing itself to concerned citizens worried about protecting their homes and families. Ontis met the demands of a professional army. Over time, the possession of powerful, advanced weapons became popular in many frontier areas of the solar system. Ontis began to market itself to the public, and thus started an economic war between the corporations. Aggressive advertising pushed gun sales ever higher in those nations that allowed ownership, and corporate-sponsored smuggling sent weapons into the rest.

The competition ended in 2112 with Austrin Arms' hostile takeover of its competitor. With its new military-grade weaponry and research facilities, Austrin-Ontis Unlimited became one of Earth's most powerful corporations. It clung to monopolistic control of the arms trade and ruthlessly obliterated any attempts to encourage competition. Simultaneously, A-O trained a lavishly equipped corporate security force. The A-O private army mushroomed in size to exceed that of many nations. To command this ideal army, the megacorporation hired experienced military commanders from existing armies.

The result was never ideal. Given the newest toys to play with from the moment of enlistment, A-O soldiers tended to be highly individualistic. Competition among the troops in accuracy, speed, and nerve spread through the entire company. While sometimes these games were simple contests at a shooting range, duels and individual acts of violence also increased, plaguing the corporation's ability to organize.

Most analysts believe that Austrin-Ontis would have consumed itself from within had existing trends continued. Fortunately for the Austrins, the stardrive arrived to transport humanity to other star systems. Like most multinationals that survived the century, Austrin-Ontis made the choice to leave Earth and the restrictions that governments could impose. The same rugged independence and boldness that plagued attempts

to bring order to the corporate ladder served the Austrins well in space. Austrin-Ontis defied the trend of governments and corporations tightening down on their new colonies.

Without guidance or organization from above, many Austrin colonies failed. Fortunately, new groups of hardy adventurers always stood ready to take their places, and the Austrin-Ontis stellar nation rose on the backs of the fallen. Officially, the nation remains incorporated, and Austrins retain employment under the auspices of a board of directors and a CEO. In practice, the Austrins grew used to the freedoms and liberties that life on a faraway colony provided. During its early days, most Austrin-Ontis colonies met or exceeded production quotas, and the corporation didn't tighten controls until the First Galactic War. Even today, A-O provides a far more relaxed atmosphere than that of other corporate nations, such as Void-Corp.

The First Galactic War came as a shock to most Austrins. At the war's inception, the corporate management relocated to Powder, one of Austrin-Ontis's well-established worlds. As demand for A-O weapons rose, profits from the war filled the corporate treasury. At the same time that it was supplying arms, Austrin-Ontis fought against all of its neighbors at one time or another. The Terran Empire was the primary enemy, but Austrins also attacked the Leodal States and the fledgling Orion League. The Austrins pushed the Terrans out of their space and more than held their own against the stellar nations around them. Most important, Austrin-Ontis Unlimited kept its reputation as arms supplier to the interstellar community, even though it was both a supplier and a combatant.

## THE SECOND GALACTIC WAR

History texts lay the responsibility for inciting GW2 on Austrin-Ontis Unlimited. The accusation is well-founded. Between the wars, A-O merchants roamed the galaxy as arms dealers and rogues. Desperate to increase sales, the Austrins soon gained a reputation for creating business—stirring up trouble wherever they went to raise the demand for weaponry. No conclusive evidence has yet been found linking Austrin-Ontis operatives to the Mutant Uprising of Tau Ceti, though most of the rebels were armed with A-O arms. As A-O representatives point out, though, Austrin weapons are common throughout human space.

The war proved disastrous. Demand for A-O weapons fell as stellar nations saw the foolishness of fueling an enemy's economy and built up their own weapons industries. After initial successes—the Leodal States fell in 2355—Austrin-Ontis fought the combined forces of the Nariac Domain and Void-Corp. By joining the Profit alliance and trading space for time, Austrin-Ontis survived. Self-interest motivated even the Orions to assist A-O occasionally, lest the members of the Expansion Pentad rest on their border instead of the Austrins'. The systems between Austrin-Ontis and the Nariac Domain became a wasteland of battered planets that were eventually donated to Concord Prime. By the end of the war, even some Austrins admitted a certain exhaustion.

## TODAY

During the war, Austrin-Ontis joined an alliance motivated by a single goal: increasing the revenue of its members. The same

goal extends throughout this stellar nation. Members travel the galaxy in search of deals and opportunities for profit. As long as a member of the society adds to the profit line, the corporation allows its people freedom to transact their business however they wish. Failure doesn't meet with the same result; Austrins who fail to meet sales or production goals are consigned to serve in the A-O bureaucracy, pushing paper for the rest of their lives. Forbidden from transacting A-O business, these wretched failures suffer the highest indignity: Their right to bear arms is revoked.

The consequences of failure and the corporation's blind eye toward method have promoted a popular image of Austrins as desperate, bullying tradesmen. While there is a great deal of truth in this public conception, most Austrins don't confine their interests to making the deal of the century. Even while in search of making money, most Austrins are would-be heroes, rugged individuals who travel to the edges of known space and beyond. The same individualism has kept pistol duels as an accepted practice. If both parties agree to the duel, murder is legal in the A-O sphere of influence.

Military service is voluntary but common. The corporation lures volunteers by providing its soldiers with the best equipment—state-of-the-art firearms, for the most part. Three weeks into training, enlistees receive an automatic rifle, which they may keep after three years of service. Furthermore, the A-O military maintains its strength by lavishly supporting its troops. As a result, Austrins tend to be highly effective when operating alone or in small units. In large actions, Austrins sometimes fail to demonstrate strict discipline and training.

Thirteen fortress ships bear the Austrin-Ontis logo. The Austrin Navy mirrors the army's strengths and weaknesses—fantastic equipment without direction. Despite the Navy's successes in the war, the corporation favors a large standing army to this day. Even Navy troops and officers prefer personal combat; their specialty is disabling and boarding enemy ships. Once aboard an enemy vessel, Austrins take a mad delight in wholesale slaughter.

The A-O capital planet Powder is said to contain enough firepower to level dozens of star systems, though this may be an exaggeration. It is true, however, that Austrin-Ontis has devoted an substantial level of resources to the protection of the planet. Defense drones and cascading layers of roaming satellites cordon off the entire system into defensive sectors; the defenses combine strategies of strength and depth.

In the Verge, A-O influence is focused on the planet Galvin, contested by the Thuldan Empire. However, Austrin salespeople are a frequent sight throughout the region, as they peddle arms to the local governments. Since the majority of Verge equipment is quite dated, there's a large market available for the latest A-O models. Sales to the Ptolemy pirates have been proven, but no Verge nation can stop the A-O juggernaut, and the Concord has not yet intervened. They have also applied for permission to resettle Vieron.

### PLAYING AN AUSTRIN

There's no polite way to say it: Austrins are a little gun-crazy. Sure, stellar nations, including the mighty Austrin-Ontis, consist of billions of inhabitants scattered over hundreds of worlds. In these massive collectives, each planet and each individual is unique—with diverse origins, opinions, and beliefs. Pundits claim to abandon notions such as the "typical Orion" or the "typical Austrin." Citizens of the 26th century can only laugh. The traits a nation shares are what hold it together. What holds

the Austrins together is a love of firearms, the belief in violence as the crucible of character, and even a somewhat quaint notion of personal honor.

Within Austrin-Ontis, conditioning for a life of action and heroism—the true life of an Austrin—begins soon after birth. In childhood games of marines and Bug-Eyed Monsters, school-vs.-school battles, and serious adult duels, Austrins learn not to shy away from confrontation or competition. The Austrin psyche requires brave deeds. Austrin-Ontis wisdom recognizes the inbred human need for violence and doesn't try to suppress it; instead, it provides healthy ways for Austrins to express their violent urges.

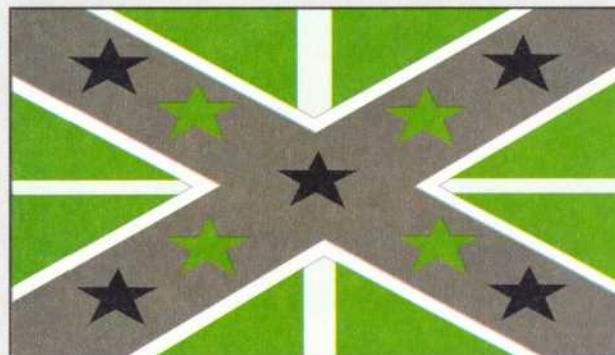
Violence, the Austrins hold, is merely a manifestation of change, discovery, and progress. Witness human history. War and conflict bring out the need for development: technologically, mentally, and even spiritually. Controlled violence keeps Austrin-Ontis a dynamic, growing entity ready for any challenge. Fortunately for the nation, this brew of aggression and competition has fostered a respectable *esprit de corps*. Recognition of kindred souls allows the rugged frontiersmen to survive the 26th century.

The long relationship between Austrins and their specialized material of trade has had its influence in the Austrin-Ontis character. Austrins tend to be direct, honest folk. Fans and foes alike agree that Austrins as a group lack deceit; they tell it as they see it. This trait and its fame serve the Austrins well in their trading throughout the galaxy. Integrity and lack of duplicity are points of pride. Austrins manifest these traits in their trading, too; frequent and willing demonstration of their finest military wares is a hallmark of Austrin-Ontis commerce.

In matters of spirituality, Austrins tend toward the conservative and traditional. Old Earth faiths predominate, though over the past century, missionaries from the Humanity Reformation and even the Hatire Community have enjoyed a little success. Indeed, the reformers have done so well that many wonder about a new openness in Austrin-Ontis thought. Having fought over much of the galaxy, Austrin society may now be slowing down to enjoy life's more abstract pleasures. Of course, if war is declared, this cultural change may be quite short-lived.

### GAME BENEFITS

The bond between an Austrin and his trusty sidearm transcends ready understanding. Perhaps centuries of reinforcement have enhanced hand-eye coordination. Or maybe years of coolness under fire have trained the Austrin-Ontis flair for firearms into the culture. During character creation, an Austrin hero can specialize in Heavy Weapons or Modern Ranged Weapons. Any use of the chosen broad skill or its specialty skills during play receives a -1 step bonus, which can be combined with the Combat Spec bonus to provide a -2 bonus.



# BOREALIS REPUBLIC

*"Justin Arimensis extends compliments from the Republic of Borealis, the nobility of the planet Sapphire, the Conclave of Lords, and the twelve schools of philosophy. Due to the emergency situation which has developed concerning the destruction of the Borealis fleet at planet Retradat twelve days and sixteen hours ago, the Conclave of Lords has accepted the petition that formalities be kept to a minimum during the current conference between the Conclave of Lords and the Orion delegates on this the 13th of August, 2442. Address this human being as Justin Arimensis, son of Charles Tantresis, Prince of Dalos Bay, Grand Philosopher of the Conclave of Lords, Historian of Ledarn Metaphysics, and alumnus of the College of Justice Ethics.*

*— Grand Philosopher Justin Arimensis, 2442*

The founders of the Borealis Republic would never have ventured into space had they realized how history would turn against them. Conceived as a return to notions of aristocracy and nobility, the nation has abandoned these ideas, leaving behind only ghostly shadows. Today, the Borealis Republic is a unique free society, comprised in equal parts of naturally conceived sentients and popular copies—clones.

## HISTORY

During the early 22nd century, changes swept over Earth. New superpowers clashed, and new technologies radically changed humanity's way of life. Extraterrestrials, the fraal, revealed not only their existence, but also the fact that they had been visiting Earth for millennia! Humanity prepared itself for fundamental, comprehensive alterations to its way of life—including a jump to the stars. Several of Earth's nation-states spurned these transformations. Rejecting the radical populist ideas that swept Eurasia, these reactionary nations turned back the clock to a time that was, in their minds, better and simpler.

The Borealis Republic formed in 2154. The constitutional monarchy was one of the few successful returns from a democracy to a form of autocracy. The new state reestablished a noble class from its cultural leadership, tracing distant ties back to various noble houses of medieval Europe. Expatriates, tsarists, royalists, petty nobles, and imperialists of every stripe flocked to swear allegiance to the anachronistic new state. The Borealins adopted ancient and long-defunct ideals of public service, but, in essence, the new nobility ruled unchecked. Meanwhile, the state poured resources into the arts: drama, literature, and especially philosophy. While it formed from a reaction against the changes wracking humanity, the Republic was far from stagnant.

The new state owed its existence to the invention of the stardrive. Many states saw the Borealins as evidence of a tyrannical resurgence against democracies. Others mocked the absurdity of an aristocracy actually ruling a country in modern times. Under scrutiny and assault, the Borealis Republic took a step that ensured its survival. Investing heavily in stellar exploration, the Borealins relocated their capital to the planet Sapphire in 2243.

To the surprise of most of the other fledgling stellar nations, the Republic flourished in its first century. The sometimes rigid structure proved its worth on far-off colony worlds. The strong authority united the Borealis colonists and gave them the di-

rection they needed to survive. Each planetary leader, typically a duke or a baron of the Republic, clung to the powers of a dictator. Of course, the nobility saw it as a point of personal pride that their colonies met with success. Ironically, the old structure encouraged the expansion of the Borealis Republic as well. Wealthy nobles' sons and daughters each wanted to command a colony of their own, and they settled these areas with clones to pass on both their material and genetic inheritance. Since only the eldest would inherit, the younger siblings raced off to the edges of Borealin space to found a new planet for the Republic.

Indeed, many observers have noted that the Borealis Republic reached its geographical and political height before the First Galactic War. In 2291, eight years before the war began, revolution shook the Republic. The autocratic governors had grown complacent, and their experiments in cloning and population control had become unpopular. Moreover, the arts and education that the nobility had endorsed had trickled their way down. Most of that philosophy had little to say about a nation that did not acknowledge equality among men.

At first, the civil war looked as if it might end swiftly, with the Borealin revolutionaries carrying the day. After all, the nobility represented only about 5% of the population. But after the initial storm, the nobles became entrenched, refusing to submit to commoners. By now, the clone population had grown to half the Borealin population. The nobles were outraged that their own creations, often their genetic duplicates, were rebelling. This rage led them to take great risks and make great sacrifices to keep from losing what they had built.

In 2299, the First Galactic War broke out. Engulfed by their own problems, the Borealins—noble, revolutionary, and clone alike—took little interest. The nobility didn't want to encourage further revolutionary thought by breaking ties with Earth but, unable to form a common defense, the Republic found itself picked apart from many sides. The Rigunmor Star Consortium annexed more than 20% of the Republic's systems during GW1.

The Republic's civil war came to an end just before the conclusion of GW1. The revolutionaries held an unquestionable advantage; most believe that, given another decade, they would have defeated the nobles. Instead, a compromise was reached. In his last act as leader, King Carolev V of the Borealis Republic granted nobility to all Borealins, natural and clone. Henceforth, all Borealins possessed at least the rank of Knight. The monarchy was dissolved, and a conclave of nobles took its place. In essence, the king's decree formed a democracy.

## THE SECOND GALACTIC WAR

The Borealins wanted to stay out of GW2. Surrounded by stronger military and economic powers, the Borealin people had grown more and more inward-looking, preferring consideration of life's essential questions to fighting over stars and planets. Discussion of ethics took precedence over plans for the coming war. Out of necessity, Borealis allied itself with the FreeSpace Alliance in 2372. Thanks to its Orion and Orlamu allies, the Borealis Republic exists today. Still, the Expansion Pentad claimed many systems of the Borealis Republic; most were later donated to the Galactic Concord to form Concord Sagittarius.



## TODAY

The Borealin focus on the arts and the nation's loss of power in the galaxy represent a vicious circle. The more removed the Borealins have grown, the more that neighboring stellar nations have taken advantage of the situation. Most Borealins seem to prefer life in the ivory tower. Once, the clones performed all necessary (but tedious) physical labor. Today, all Borealins share in intellectual freedom. Borealin sculpture and drama remain the finest in the galaxy, even if others occasionally criticize it as too self-referential. Borealins admit that they are more interested in the immutables of existence than, for example, in the rising price of rhodium.

A dozen Colleges of Philosophy dominate the Borealis Republic, and every Borealin attends one of them as part of their higher education. It's traditional to attend the school of one's parents, but not required. Today, many younger sons and daughters attend a college of their choice. Recently the College of Justice Ethics has gained in popularity. Members of this college advocate a stronger devotion to keeping the peace and preserving liberty for all Borealins. Justices, as they are called, represent about half of those enlisted in the Borealin military.

The Borealins remain the best historians. While domestic politics interest most Borealins only so far as issues of ethics, morals, and proper etiquette are concerned, Borealins are avid explorers. New thoughts and discoveries are traded in the Borealis Republic much as weapons or metals are elsewhere. As a result, the libraries on Sapphire contain the best records of humanity outside of Earth itself. Indeed, the Borealin histories of humanity since it left the Sol system are probably superior to those of the Solar Union.

Sapphire itself resembles a planetary college. The philosophy academies debate in the larger cities, and the Conclave of Lords holds council in a sprawling clone-built palace in the mountains. Sapphire resembles an immaculate campus of beautiful lawns and landscapes. Libraries fill great volumes of space, and many of them still stock printed books in various languages. No one questions knowledge as the noblest pursuit.

During the Second Galactic War, the last outward vestiges of nobility fell away. Rather than Duke or Baron, today Borealins hold ranks based on academic standing. Most of the population still ranks as Student, with upper echelons gaining the titles of Lecturer, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, Professor, and Dean. The Conclave of Lords ranks highest with its Philosophers and current Grand Philosopher, Justin Arimensis.

Compared to other stellar nations, the Borealis Republic is weak. Its military is growing but remains small. On the other hand, the Borealins possess a multitude of small interstellar craft and an unusually high proportion of drivesats. Interstellar communication and the exchange of information hold a high priority. Borealin diplomats are canny, if long-winded. The Borealin economy is healthy internally, but weak in the interstellar marketplace.

In the Verge, the Borealin Silver Bell colony is no more. The nation mourned the loss briefly, then aggressively recolonized. Its scientific research teams investigate sites of interest such as the Skyward Caverns of Atlas in the Tendril system. Despite the great potential for academic pursuits, many Borealins are nonplussed by the idea of colonial life so far from home and opt for the Far Reach frontier instead.

## PLAYING A BOREALIN

Within Borealin space, farmers, shopkeepers, miners, and factory workers go about their business. Today half of the Bore-

alin population comes into the world through a hospital cloning tank, the product of genetic mimicry. The Borealin reliance on cloning, while alarming to many stellar nations, hasn't cast a significant influence over Borealin culture. Clones and naturals enjoy a completely equal status. And contrary to popular opinion, not every Borealin spends his or her days in the ivory tower of an academic college inventing arcane systems of reasoning. The Republic demands that its citizens fill all ranks of life. Nevertheless, the life of a Borealin is a life of intellect. Even as they go about their normal routines, Borealins are surrounded by study and contemplation. As the saying goes, scratch a Borealin and you uncover a philosopher.

Borealins are justly proud of their educational system. The first institutionalized classes begin at age three, and a general if superb scholarship continues until the student reaches age 16 and formal proficiency testing begins. After two more years of vocational batteries and apprenticing to a sampling of careers, Borealin youths must select a College of Philosophy, which they join for life. Tradition holds that Borealins attend their parents' college and eventually wed a member of their own college. In the last century, independent choice of college, once a rebellious gesture, has become an accepted practice. Most students stay familiar with current theories and discussion of their school, and as amateur philosophers, students are more likely to experiment with splinter schools and outside religions—usually the Humanity Reformation or Old Earth faiths.

At present, twelve colleges exist. In the past three centuries, the number has varied from as few as nine to as many as seventeen. Colleges often splinter or die, and new Colleges form as radical new ideas are introduced into the academic environment, spreading out from the Borealin capital of Sapphire. From oldest to youngest, the twelve active colleges are Unism, Virtue, Aestheticism, Neosolipsism, Deism-Unism, Utilitarianism, Platonism, NeoKantian, Exonihilism, Verant-Benn, High Rationalism, and Justice Ethics. Since their formation, the colleges have kept a healthy rivalry.

## GAME BENEFITS

Thanks to a fantastic, highly adaptive early education system and centuries of breeding for intelligence, Borealin heroes increase their Intelligence score by one point during character generation, to a maximum of 15.

An unfortunate side effect of the Borealin obsession with discovery and new methods of thinking has been to produce citizens often preoccupied and distracted. All Borealin heroes automatically begin play with a moderate (+4) Obsessed flaw, although they may eventually remove the flaw using the standard achievement rules. The player chooses the focus of his or her character's obsession.



# HATIRE COMMUNITY

*"The destiny of mankind lies not with its aberrations or its technology slaves, but with our brothers and sisters, standing together for the soul of humanity."*

—High Minister Marion Rhodes, 2498

The Hatire Community is an empire filled with contradictions. A theocratic stellar nation that couldn't practice its faith without the stardrive, the Brethren deny the value of the technological advances of mankind. Most of humanity sees the advance of science as a measure of humanity's progress. This belief seems foolish in the eyes of the Brethren. The success of a species cannot be measured in technological toys alone. The Brethren believe that the next step in humanity's evolution will be a spiritual leap of faith.

## HISTORY

More than 100 years before the invention of the stardrive, Adam Hatire and his group of religious reformers exercised moderate influence over several of Earth's superpowers. Over time, the Brethren lost ground as technological breakthroughs continued at an ever-faster pace. Still, as scientific advances forced radical societal change, the Hatire faith attracted millions by aggressively marketing itself as a return to a spiritual way of life. The message was heard, and hundreds of Hatire communes existed on Earth by the time the first space colonies were founded.

Hopeful colonists left the Sol system, and the Hatire Brethren were among them. Many wealthy Hatire churches decided that only in the uncontaminated reaches of space could a new spiritual colony meet with success. Millions of the Brethren left Earth behind, hoping to build a new society. Subsidies from friendly Terran powers helped lift the Hatire into space, and the faith's early spaceborne popularity ensured its offworld success. Colonies were established in dozens of systems, and the Hatire doctrines of a simple life of hard work and a minimum of technology met with great success. Colonies supported their closest neighbors and exchanged information. Eventually, the linked colonies formed a closed economy with one another, excluding the rest of human space. But since any closed society is an irresistible lure to human curiosity, the fame of the Hatire colonies spread, and more Brethren took to the stars. Connected by religious ties, a shared sense of the future, and a budding economy, the Hatire Community declared itself a nation on September 16, 2271.

As decades passed, the Hatire faith lost some of its cohesion. Generations of Brethren grew up on a number of diverse planets with different ways of life. The simple style of living remained popular, and the mad advance of science met with the same scorn by the collected Brethren. The religious fervor of the faith had never been as strong as the call for a return to simpler days, but now the religious component of Hatire life was weakening rapidly. Heretics grew in number, and the normally reclusive and peaceful Brethren were forced to put down several splinter groups.

The start of the First Galactic War in 2299 brought the Community's internal schisms into sharp relief. Governed by a system-by-system confederacy, most of the Community elected to declare neutrality. A few colonies sided with Earth, and a few allied themselves with the Thuldan Empire.

Despite the Community's neutrality, the first decade of the

24th century transformed Hatire society. Haven, a beautiful planet settled in the late 23rd century, provided the inspiration that eventually drew the Community together. The exploration of Haven's surface offered humanity a rare opportunity to see the intact ruins of a million-year-old alien civilization.

Hatire archeologists reported that the largest structure to survive was located at the center of the ancient city. The relics found within that site dazzled scientists, but the story told on the edifice's walls was even more important, at least to the Brethren. After studying the alien symbols for a dozen years, the Brethren announced a discovery that would reshape the Community. The ancient dwellers of Haven's ruins revered a noncorporeal being that the translators named the Cosimir. The alien writings recorded the history of the Cosimir's visitation to the material world and its prescription for a new purity of spirit. As more texts were translated, the gospel of the Cosimir spread among the Hatire. Over the next decade, the Community went through phases of curiosity, debate, and ultimately revelation. While Hatire theologians argued about the Cosimir's message, the masses accepted the Cosimir as an element of faith they had been missing. Purity of spirit and trust in the Cosimir became the watchwords of the Hatire Community.

Transformed by their new faith, the formerly reclusive Brethren saw their mission clearly. The Cosimir's word must be heard and spread throughout space.

## THE SECOND GALACTIC WAR

The years between the wars—and the first few years of GW2 itself—went badly for the Community. As Hatire missionaries met resistance to what many outsiders perceived as a bizarre religion, the Community became more entrenched. Unlike other stellar nations, the Community spent few resources exploring new frontiers. Instead, it concentrated on spreading the faith, but with missionaries traveling throughout human space, the Hatire were ill prepared for the outbreak of war in 2346.

When the Thuldan border expanded to contact the Community in 2357, the survival of the nation was threatened. Fortunately for the Hatire, the list of the Thuldan Empire's enemies had grown long. Meetings with Emperor Decret produced a peace agreement that eventually led the Community to join the Expansion Pentad. A detachment of Hatire mind knights went into action in the first Expansion Pentad joint operation in 2362 in a ground assault during the Battle of Morgan's Bluff.

While the Community had accepted force as a useful instrument to spread the word of the Cosimir, its goals were different from those of the Pentad's other members. Even as Thuldan and Hatire forces fought together against the Borealins and the Solars, Hatire missionaries worked to gain converts in the powerful Empire. After all the physical battles were won and lost, the Empire found there had been a spiritual front to the war as well. Almost a quarter of the Thuldan population had embraced the Hatire faith by the war's end, and the ties between Empire and Community grew stronger than ever before.

## TODAY

Hatire society is defined by its faith, which permeates all levels of Hatire life. Morning and evening meditation services are established custom among even the most secular of the Brethren. Indeed, more than a third of the Hatire petition to join the

priesthood, hoping to live in constant contemplation of the Cosimir. The order accepts fewer than half of the applicants.

The current High Minister is Marion Rhodes, who has been serving the Cosimir with distinction for the last 40 years. Each planet in the Community has a parish Minister, and the 27 highest-ranking Ministers function as the true governing body of the Community. Serving from within the holy walls of the Temple of Cosimir on Haven, the Ministers issue decrees that affect both the political and religious life of their followers.

To the Brethren, little distinguishes the political from the religious. Haven is the spiritual and political center of the Community. Most followers of the Cosimir hope to make a pilgrimage to the holy ruins before they die, and as a result the planet is now one of the most heavily populated Hatire worlds.

Militarily, the Community appears to be one of the weakest stellar nations. Only eight fortress ships survived the war with Hatire loyalties, and of the twelve stellar nations, the Community boasts the third-smallest standing army. Speculations of their military weakness, however, end on paper. The crusading army of the Community is made up of known fanatics, willing to sacrifice their lives for the Cosimir. Moreover, the Community's neighbors offer no threat. Ties to the Thuldan Empire and even the Union of Sol have grown with the spread of the Hatire faith, and the Borealis Republic's military threat is negligible.

The revelation of the Cosimir radically altered and matured the Hatire faith, but much of the conservative ideology that brought the Community into space remains with it. The words of the Cosimir call for a purity of spirit. The long-despised invasion of technology has contaminated that spirit in humanity. Hatire distaste for technology is now famous, and in truth most Hatire treat all forms of advanced technology with suspicion. But the Hatire reserve their greatest hatred for technology that pollutes the spirit, and they turn clones, mechalus, and fully cybered gearheads away at the border. Those who don't take the hint are often spurned or even attacked if they overstay their brief welcome on Hatire worlds.

The most important part of Hatire life is spreading the word of the Cosimir to unbelievers. Many take this tenet of the faith quite literally and become crusaders. In fact, most Hatire encountered outside the borders of the Community are crusaders. No one questions the zeal of these well-intended citizens, but the actions of a few violent crusaders have given this missionary work and the Community at large a mixed public image.

Still, it is possible to live a life full of the Cosimir's bounty without serving as a missionary. In all the roles of life, the Community demands that the Brethren hold themselves to the highest standards of excellence. Not only must every member of the Community strive for purity of the soul, but the Brethren must stand out against a galaxy of sin and mediocrity as a shining example of what joys enlightenment brings.

In the Verge, the Hatire Community is resettling Diamond Point, its colony on Grith in the Corrivale system. However, the Hatire also have a monastic retreat in the desert of Alaundril in the Tendril system, and small missionary temples in most cities of any size.

### PLAYING A HATIRE

Accused of racism and feared as Luddites, the Hatire follow a difficult path. Almost all the Brethren have an abiding distrust of new technology, and they abhor technology that alters the human body. Those who tie themselves to cybertechnology, including the mechalus, have strayed from the path of truth.

The Second Galactic War and the fearsome Hatire mind

knights gave the Community a reputation for militarism and intolerance, producing an image of a religion bent on converting humanity by the sword. To the Hatire, such notions are absurd. The Hatire has proven itself a Community willing to accept change: Did not the Community founders accept alien doctrine into their own theology? Did they not accept the Cosimir, an alien divinity? The Hatire life embraces metamorphosis, accepting both the actuality and potentiality of human existence. Now the Brethren must work diligently, redefining themselves as crusaders of peace rather than war while maintaining important ties to their powerful Thuldan and VoidCorp allies.

Wisdom clings to the Brethren as gravity clings to stars. Only the independent and thoughtful members of the Community, arriving in space without blinding notions of nationalism or conquest, could open themselves to the spiritual message of a long-dead alien species who probably knew nothing of the human species. It is a source of Hatire ecstasy that the words of the Cosimir, a noncorporeal entity with nothing but sentience in common with humanity, ring true. The life of spiritual contemplation calls to all Brethren, and it is with some regret that the Brethren acknowledge a duty to the Community and all of humanity. Duty calls for individual Hatire to practice agriculture, business, and even the art of war. Duty doesn't demand that they enjoy these distractions from the higher things in life.

For the words of the Cosimir to reach all species, the Community itself must prosper. Without thought of reward, the Community has accepted the burden of preaching to the unwilling; it wouldn't say much about the strength of their faith if they only spread the word to those who were already listening. Until the day when "all are one," the Brethren must act to preserve the Community's integrity even as they found Hatire churches in far-flung reaches of space under foreign flags.

The loyalty that the Brethren feel for the Community is only rivaled by the reverence in which they hold the Cosimir. It is unfortunate, for its own sake, that much of humanity fails to enjoy the happiness and peace the Cosimir brings.

### GAME BENEFITS

Because of the devotion and passion that Hatire learn to instill within themselves, Hatire heroes begin play with the Faith perk automatically, without having to purchase it. Even the least devout of the Hatire can't quite shake their religious upbringing.

In addition, some Hatire have developed an especially close link with the Cosimir. Normally, the Faith perk begins with a -d4 situation die, and is penalized one step (+d0,+d4,+d6, etc.) after each use. The Hatire can gain a great benefit by spending additional skill points to purchase the Faith perk during hero creation. In this case, the strength of the Hatire faith increases the power of the Faith perk, and the base situation die for Hatire with this greater level of religious conviction improves to -d8.



"Click on this reality."

-Zane, 2460

# INSIGHT

Insight is the youngest stellar nation, born only 40 years ago. On the surface, it barely deserves mention. It boasts the fewest star systems and the weakest military. But as the saying goes, knowledge is power.

## HISTORY

Insight's history is inextricably entwined with VoidCorp and the Grid. Although systems for electronic data transfer existed in the 1960s, the first true Grid came into use in 2032. The Earth-Grid linked all of the planet in a sophisticated virtual environment, and the computer-focused corporation that eventually became VoidCorp had its hand in the Grid from the beginning.

While claiming massive areas of space in its early days, VoidCorp made technological leaps. In 2193, the first drivespace communication relay—commonly known as a drivesat—was designed. Initially limited to simple data exchanges, in only seven years VoidCorp Employees integrated Grid technology with the drivesats. While real-time interstellar Grid exchanges remained impossible, gridpilots developed the use of shadows to cross drivespace and interact in the interstellar Grid.

Profits and fortunes could be made from this medium, and VoidCorp hastened to realize that goal. Most stellar nations licensed creation and even maintenance of Grid systems to VoidCorp Employees. No independent corporation could compete with the stellar nation. After two decades of VoidCorp dominance, competitors sensed the opportunity for profit, and VoidCorp saw the need to maintain a division devoted to advanced Grid design and shadow programming.

Insight was incorporated as a VoidCorp division in 2198. From its inception, Insight produced success after success. VoidCorp technology and implementation became the standard for the interstellar Grid. With a near monopoly, sale of VoidCorp computers skyrocketed as the corporation integrated proprietary hardware and software systems. Insight's achievements gave its vice president unprecedented influence, and Insight was granted unheard-of independence.

Insight was the closest thing that VoidCorp had to an institutionalized forum for artists. As hefty profits continued to roll in, the Inseers, as they came to be known, got whatever they wanted. No Inseer held lower than N rank, and top designers were Qs or higher—the equivalent of a subdivision manager (see the VoidCorp text). The unique environment became an accepted part of Insight's organization. Free intellectual exchange blossomed in one small division of VoidCorp.

## THE SECOND GALACTIC WAR

A year before GW1, Insight marked its centennial as an incorporated division. Generations of Insight Employees had been born, educated, and even died as members of the division. The top-notch computer professionals had unrestricted access to the Grid and all the information it could provide. Insight Employees enjoyed not only the liberty to exchange ideas internally, but also channels that connected them to all of humanity. Insight's intellectual freedom manifested itself in a multitude of ways. Their freedom led to revolution and betrayal.

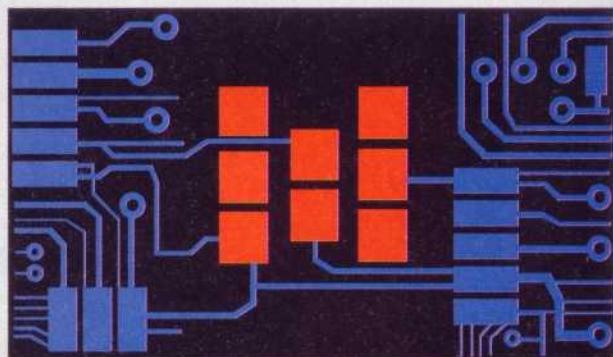
Insight's revolt started with small things. Often difficult to manage, the Inseers were allowed to choose one of their own as their division's new vice president in 2314. The practice of promoting gridpilots from inside the division to leadership soon became an Insight tradition. Under their own leaders, Insight gridpilots popularized radical systems of thought. The Grid, Inseers posited, is not an artificial reality, or even a secondary reality. The Grid *was*, waiting for us to find it. The Grid *is*, more real than real, the haven of conscious minds embracing one another. The Grid *will be* humanity's ascension.

*Information born free* became the Insight motto. To this day, the Inseers still believe that data has a natural inclination to disseminate, and no government, religion, or corporation has the right to restrict the flow of information. Given this difference in attitude, the break with VoidCorp was foreordained. Aware of how VoidCorp executives would react to any statement of Insight's principles, the Insight revolution stayed underground. The gridpilots expanded the audience for their messages but found the typical VoidCorp Employee uninterested. Most non-Insight Employees were consumed by corporate ambition and unfamiliar with free thought. The Inseers realized their lonely situation, and kept looking for the proper means to achieve independence.

While Insight Employees kept up the image of loyal, productive servants, Vice President ZV237 82WBR (Stalker) met with representatives of the FreeSpace Alliance in 2394. The clandestine gathering set in motion a plan for the next 50 years. In those 50 years, Insight was the most valuable intelligence asset in human history. Insight gridpilots uncovered key elements of the Expansion Pentad's strategy, plans, and military placements. Unaware of the source of their intelligence reports, the Orion and Orlamu militaries were remarkably well prepared for the Pentad's offensives. Time after time, FreeSpace attacks found VoidCorp weaknesses—without significant damage to Insight assets.

Insight's treachery can account for many of the FreeSpace Alliance's successes. Still trapped in the corporation's grasp, the Inseers anxiously awaited the opportunity to leave VoidCorp behind. Their philosophy abhorred the secrets they found themselves keeping. In 2454, the Inseers met face to face with President Hale of the Orion League. Knowing the value of Insight's inside information, Hale advised patience. Long tired of this message from the Orions, the Inseers made their final preparations. On February 5, 2460, independence was declared. Insight positioned its strength in what was formerly Dreth Commonwealth space, and seven defecting VoidCorp fortress ships gave the new stellar nation a fierce bite.

VoidCorp was stunned. Insight's treachery was the best





kept secret of the century. Ignoring Insight warnings, VoidCorp massed their fleet to crush the upstart state. On May 10, 2460, the VoidCorp Grid crashed. Entire datacores were erased, and star systems found their networks unresponsive. Many VoidCorp drivesats simply vanished. The damage to the VoidCorp economy and infrastructure couldn't be measured; VoidCorp is still recovering today. The invasion of Insight was aborted; buttressed by FreeSpace assistance, Insight survived until the war's end.

## TODAY

With their freedom established, the Inseers shed most relics of the VoidCorp organization. Inseers were declared private citizens, no longer held accountable by management and the board of directors. No formal government has emerged to replace the old system. Governors exert nominal control over Insight planets and systems, but the only term to describe the current situation is institutionalized anarchy. To outsiders, no order can be discerned. Inseers admit the administration is unconventional, but point to a clear pecking order set by reputation and gridpiloting ability.

Insight leads much of the computer industry, specializing in Grid hardware, software, and interfaces. While VoidCorp Grid systems remain universal and fixed—boring, say the Inseers—Insight Grid systems are beautiful, unpredictable works of art. Despite their complexity, the Insight environments allow greater individuality and creativity. When used by a skilled gridpilot, Insight systems provide the best performance known. Insight's relentless advances into VoidCorp's markets has fueled the hatred VoidCorp feels for its rebellious child.

VoidCorp has refused to recognize Insight's independence except to the extent required by the Treaty of Concord. VoidCorp often refuses to attend diplomatic conferences where Inseers are expected, and VoidCorp employees are taught that Insight is composed of deviants and traitors. For their part, most Inseers believe that VoidCorp represents a step in mankind's evolution that they have transcended. In the Grid, the war quietly rages on, as VoidCorp uses its greater resources to test Insight skill. The guerrilla warfare remains largely invisible to all save its players, and the Galactic Concord is powerless to stop the giants of the industry from tearing at one another's throats.

Most Inseers have adopted the doctrine of the Insightful. The Grid represents the first environment in which minds can exchange information uncluttered by hindrances. Free information is a natural state to which the Inseers believe all sentients will ascend. Of course, the demands of a successful economy mean that Insight endorses free information but markets the technology to receive, manipulate, and send information. Like all stellar nations, Insight is invested in a range of industries from agriculture to weapons manufacture; in all of these, though, the Insight bent toward advanced technology is visible.

Nowhere is Insight's technophilia more apparent than on its capital planet, Vision. The Insight homeworld boasts a system-wide Grid network with a complexity rivaling the ancient Grid of Sol. Implemented using only the best equipment, the Vision Grid has both the fastest carrier rates and the highest carrier load. Even those unfamiliar with gridpiloting admit its frenzied splendor; gridpilots, hackers, and reality entertainment junkies come from around the galaxy to behold Vision's wonders.

The Insight military remains one of the smallest in the galaxy. It lost one of its fortress ships in the war and has not rebuilt it, but six fortress ships still bear the Insight banner.

Plans call for only a modest increase in the Insight defense forces; the fledgling stellar nation continues to rely on its ability to successfully wage an information war against any foe.

In the Verge, Insight took over the VoidCorp colony at Walin III in the Walin system by a bit of logistical sabotage, sending only Insight employees to found the colony. Elsewhere in the region, Insight techs are busy building or rebuilding the local Gridspaces. Curious Inseer Grid tourists are a common sight in the Aegis, Oberon, and Karnath Grids, and the planet Bhruu in the Karnath system is a major Insight settlement.

## PLAYING AN INSEER

Inseers describe themselves as poets, explorers, and artists of electronic dreams. Usually, the denizens of the youngest nation of the 26th century aren't given a chance to describe themselves except within the Grid; reputation and the madness that passes for style and fashion speak for them. As the smallest stellar nation, Inseers are also the most radical. Inseer space has given birth to notions that would have boggled the minds of pre-space Terrans. And that's just how the Inseers like it.

No one understands the true nature of the Grid, not even the Inseers. It's the ultimate in virtual environments, providing a haven for the soul's free expression unlike any other. For the Inseer, it is the reason for being. Fully interactive along all human sensory inputs, every Inseer becomes a painter, a sculptor, a musician, and more—all at once.

Many Inseers avoid real life altogether, leaving machines and programs to regulate the frail flesh, yet even veteran gridpilots cannot quantify or hope to define the Grid, infinitely complex and infinitely large. No wonder it gave birth to the Insightful religion, the latest technology to force the question of what it means to be human. The Insightful believe the Grid to be the final expression of intelligence. Free exchange—no secrets, no misunderstandings.

Most Inseers seem just as colorful outside their virtual realities as within them. Although today Insight includes people of all ages and backgrounds, as a nation Inseers are young to the stars. This makes them almost desperate to find new experiences, to do that which no one has done before. Inseers have something to prove, to themselves and to other stellar nations.

Over the years, Inseer speech has become a dialect of its own, only loosely related to Galactic Standard. Just as Insight's leaders are defined by their reputation as gridpilots, so the patois spoken among the Inseers serves as a means of recognition. The Inseers spice their language with jargon and inside terminology; indeed, when on the Grid, their language is often flavored with sounds and graphics meant to speed communication. This leads to an inward-looking, impenetrable jumble of tech-talk whenever two Inseers meet.

## GAME BENEFITS

A culture of technical wizardry, older than the existence of Insight itself, infects all Insight characters. This genius provides Inseers with an automatic -1 step bonus to all computer activities, including design, use, hacking, programming, and any Grid-based actions. In addition, Insight heroes and their shadows receive a -1 step bonus on Grid action checks.

Unfortunately, the Insight mind and body, long perfected to understand electronic media, reacts slowly in non-virtual environments. All Inseers suffer a +1 step penalty on real-world action checks.

# NARIAC DOMAIN

*"Workers of the galaxy, unite!"*

—Premier Palis, 2304

The galaxy needs equality. Who has not heard the cries of men and women for the end of inequalities? ask the Nariacs. Inequalities of species, gender, and social rank. Only the Nariac Domain promises a life without such human pettiness and short-sightedness. No, life in the Domain is not perfect and often isn't easy. Life will always force struggle upon those who want to succeed, but at least among the Nariacs you know that you work alongside brothers and sisters for an equal division of the fruits of your labor.

## HISTORY

Despite the passage of time, many stellar nations can trace their origin back to an Old Earth government, corporation, or individual. The Nariac Domain is an exception to the rule. Before 2267, no Domain existed.

For a variety of political and economic reasons—chief of which was fewer habitable worlds per cubic light-year—no powerful organization staked out a claim in the stretch of space the Nariac Domain would later occupy. Instead, independent colonists explored and settled the region. Ever since the production of stardrive vessels began in the second half of the 22nd century, wealthy enthusiasts and dreamers had taken to the stars to find their perfect tomorrows. While many visionaries saw their amateur colonies end in disaster, overpopulated Earth sent out its hopeful in droves. By the time the Terran Empire was declared, the Nariac sector was well populated with colonists from two dozen sources.

Settlements on Naria, a harsh planet wracked by earthquakes and hot winds, experienced a unique evolution. Like many colonists, the Nariacs survived their first few decades without any formal system of government or leadership. Instead, each member of the early community worked for the betterment of all. On Naria, the choice was simple: cooperate or die. Because the success of the community was more important than any individual, no one individual was held up as superior to any other. Private property would stratify the Nariacs and create an elite class. To prevent this, the community owned all property on Naria, and the individual owned none.

Naria's development was truly curious, since its colonists never attempted to develop another system. Not only did the settlement survive its first two decades, it flourished. Naria's rich heavy-metal deposits made the colony profitable even as the unkind planet discouraged immigration to its surface. The Nariacs solved the problem of a small labor pool by investing heavily in cybernetics. With each Nariac's productivity multiplied by electronics, the colony's economy grew by leaps and bounds, becoming a center for trade and commerce among nearby systems.

Naria's colonists attributed their achievements to their unique birth and society. Nariac histories boast that the circumstances of their creation allowed them to choose only the best elements of Old Earth to incorporate into the Nariac way of life. Early critics of the Nariacs disagreed with the choices that the space-born empire made. After all, they claimed, communist societies failed in both the 20th and 21st centuries. The only Nariac answer to those criticisms was the Domain's thriving empire.

It was only natural that the Nariacs spread their success throughout local star systems. They gained economic leverage, then a growing military, as system after system joined the Nariacs and their way of life. Many colonies willingly joined the newly formed Nariac Domain in hopes of simply participating in their economic success. Others found themselves surrounded by Nariac traders and the Nariac Navy. Either way, those integrated into the Domain's fold adopted the conventions of Nariac society, including the aggressive use of cybertech.

The First Galactic War marked the high point of Nariac expansion. At the start of the war, the Domain numbered several dozen systems, and the Domain joined many fledgling stellar nations in 2304 in declaring independence. Following the Thuldan lead, the Nariacs sent resources, ships, and soldiers into war. In large part, though, the fight for independence covered a darker plan, because the Nariac Domain considered GW1 a prime opportunity to extend its borders. During the thirteen years of the war, most of the Nariac military fought against other young colonies and budding empires. Few Nariacs went to battle the Terran Empire.

The Treaty of Earth ended GW1 and likewise ended Nariac expansion. Nariac borders stood about where they rest today. Further growth was difficult; at the war's end, the Nariacs were surrounded by the radical capitalist states of VoidCorp and Austrin-Ontis. Philosophical disagreement and competing ambitions made conflict in this sector of human space inevitable. Even as most stellar nations devoted their resources toward exploration and colonization of new borders, the Nariac Domain found itself fighting frequent skirmishes with VoidCorp—and losing.

## THE SECOND GALACTIC WAR

VoidCorp representatives, hated as they had become over the previous three decades, made an irresistible proposition to the Nariacs in 2344. The Nariac Domain joined the Dreth Commonwealth in a treaty with VoidCorp calling for a cessation of hostilities and mutual defense. Everyone could see another interstellar war coming, and the Dornain desperately needed allies. Moreover, all three empires saw conquest as a valid way to increase their power.

As the Nariac war engine turned against Austrin-Ontis Unlimited at the start of the war, Nariac ties to VoidCorp grew. To defend their ally, VoidCorp warships roamed Nariac space. Within a decade, the truth was clear to those in power: The Nariac Domain had become a client state of the VoidCorp monolith. VoidCorp used the Domain as a buffer against the enemies of the Expansion Pentad; Nariacs took the heaviest losses in conflicts against the Solar Union and Austrin-Ontis. Nevertheless, the war went well until the Orions and Orlamus intervened on behalf of the Austrins. Forced to compete with both FreeSpace and Profit alliances, Nariac Domain saw defeat piled on defeat throughout 100 years of warfare. The region between the Nariacs and Austrins was one of the fiercest battlegrounds of the war, and literally dozens of systems were laid waste.

## TODAY

Officially, no ruler stands over the Nariac Domain. All Nariac citizen-workers are equal. This equality is preserved by the

simple fact that private ownership does not exist in any form. Competition, independent corporations, and private enterprise remain forbidden through all Nariac reaches. Instead, the Nariac state makes all decisions for the economy. Both selling and buying prices are fixed by central planners. Quotas for production are mandated for each factory and source of production. All transactions are authorized and monitored by the state economic AIs. Those who deal with foreign powers or traders are especially scrutinized. Rigorous educational testing places each Nariac in a field suited to his or her ability.

In Nariac society, the government bureaucracy is merely another source of production, at least in name. Centuries ago, the Nariac assertion that members of the government bureaucracy held no more rights or claims may have been true. Today, as an instrument of the Nariac will, the government bureaucracy must act to preserve the integrity of the society and the well-being of all. Cybertechnology is the Nariac solution. Originally employed to multiply the labor capital of an underpopulated society, today cybertechnology keeps order throughout the Nariac Domain. Implants monitor the activity of Nariac citizen-workers, and only a few refugees of the Nariac Domain are without cybernetic implants. Nowhere is the tendency toward implantation more evident than on the Nariac's homeworld, Naria. There, the Domain has encouraged the development of cybertechnology as an art form.

Nariac military forces are strong, and the Domain's emphasis on heavy industry and cybernetics has made its armed forces mighty. Although military service is no longer mandatory, the Nariac army remains a popular choice among the stellar nation's younger generation. After a few years of service, enlistees can retire and keep their military-grade cyberware. Eleven fortress ships serve the Domain, including the famous NDS *People's Justice*.

Since the conclusion of the War, Nariac relations with other nations have grown more unsure. After the Insight secession, VoidCorp's control over the Nariac Domain has waned. VoidCorp executives still make pointed suggestions about the Domain's foreign policy. Most Nariacs look forward to a day when VoidCorp is driven from their nation. The Nariac Domain's links to other stellar nations are neutral at best. The enemies of past wars hold to their hostile attitudes.

Recently, the Domain appears to have given up on conquering the stellar nations directly. Today, the goal of the Nariac seems to be the subversion of the stellar nations and the Concord. Nariac envoys travel far and wide to speak to the workers of foreign powers, inspiring them to seek out better conditions and better government. None of the stellar nations has yet to view the activity as a serious threat. The Nariacs view their toil as laying the groundwork for the interstellar revolution of the masses. On that grand day, human and alien alike shall stand together for a better future.

The Domain has no holdings in the Verge; its colony in the Ptolemy system has regressed into piracy and resists all appeals to return to the fold of Nariac society. Nariac efforts are currently centered on securing the rights to the moons of Pox, a gas giant in the StarMech-controlled Tendril system.

### PLAYING A NARIAC

An individual Nariac—the idea is alien, bordering upon the absurd. It's true that individuals and individual freedoms exist with the Domain, but to define a Nariac is to describe a member of a thriving community. Just as the Domain rewards each of its worker-citizens with a livelihood, employment, and a

place to live, the Nariacs contribute their skills and hard labor for the betterment of the whole.

Of course, that's not to say that the Nariacs claim to have erased the human ego and its avarice, ambition, and envy. Yet in a community in which there is no individual property, greed becomes pointless. In the Domain, personal ownership is a thing of the past; the Domain legally owns all material goods. Individual citizens only register use of objects, land, and other possessions. It's not a perfect system, as Nariac bureaucrats admit, but it's a clear improvement over systems that permit the greed of a few to inhibit the greater good of the many.

Nariacs, for the most part, respect and value their system of government while simultaneously quietly questioning the integrity and motives of the Nariac leadership. Cybertechnology prevents any organized disruption of the Domain, but its invasive presence—and the utter lack of privacy in the nation—is something that even the Nariacs sometimes have difficulty with. Of course, most Nariacs understand the necessity for such precautions: Humanity is filled with those who wish to harm the Domain. Agents and spies from Orion, VoidCorp, and elsewhere attempt to despoil Nariac prosperity. Nariacs understand that once the galaxy is united, the true utopia will issue forth. For this reason, Nariacs travel far from home and family and the comfortable order to which they are accustomed. They risk their lives to educate the workers of the galaxy.

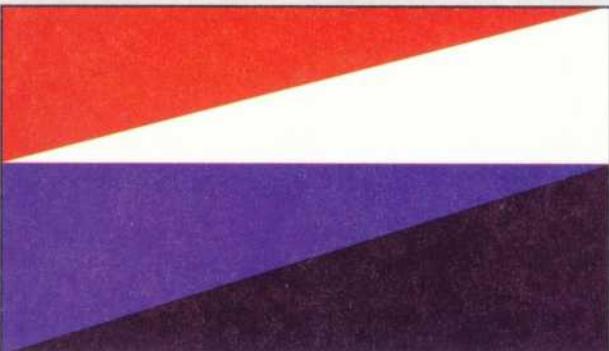
The practice of religion, or any similar outdated concepts of worship, is frowned on within the borders of the Domain. Only a small number of Nariacs acknowledge a religion, and these pariahs face public mockery, government scrutiny, and possible expatriation. Missionaries from several faiths occasionally enter the Domain in secret, only to find their mission near impossible. The few organized churches have been forced into a clandestine, underground existence, to be quickly destroyed if their presence is discovered.

### GAME BENEFITS

More than any other people, Nariacs are immersed in technology. Cool metallic surfaces surround the Nariac child, and joining the Nariac nation always entails the integration of circuitry into skin. All Nariac heroes begin play with one free item of cyber gear worth \$5,000 or less—and with a free implanted security monitor that reports their movements to the Domain.

Fortunately, the Nariac psyche has adapted well to the constant intrusion of technology. Their bodies and Nariac culture in general are well adapted to cybernetic implantation. Thus, the free item of cyberware does not count against the heroes' cyber tolerance score.

Finally, Nariac doctors with the surgery specialty skill gain the cybernetic surgery skill rank benefit for free. However, all Nariac cyber gear contains the Domain's tracking monitors.



# ORION LEAGUE

*I stand in awe of this diverse fellowship of men and women who have bound together to form a union.*

—President Kathryn Brown, 2321

Neither the strongest nor the largest of the stellar nations, the Orion League is known as the most heterogeneous. Every ethnicity from Old Earth can find descendants in the League, and many have preserved their way of life unchanged. Meanwhile, space has produced dozens of new cultures in Orion space. Though the hundreds of worlds that comprise any stellar nation usually share general tendencies, the Orion League defies attempts at definition.

## HISTORY

To trace the formation of the Orion League is to examine the foundation of dozens of separate states. In the first wave from the Sol system, hundreds of independent colonies established themselves by migrating toward the constellation of Orion. Some colonists were fleeing from trouble, and others sought a fresh start far from home. Of these system-states, more than half were subsidized by corporations or independently wealthy private individuals. The superpowers of Earth's western hemisphere dispatched colonies of their own to the region.

By 2260, eighty-six distinct governments were functioning in Orion space. Most of Old Space had been explored and claimed by at least one of the fledgling states, and humanity was pushing past the borders of known space. About this time, the unchecked growth of the small nations halted. Several colonies failed or were absorbed into other nations. A few clashed directly, and others formed trading coalitions. Then the First Galactic War erupted, and everything changed.

The future Orions fought a disorganized and defensive war against the Terran Empire, against stellar nations such as the Orlamu Theocracy and Austrin-Ontis Unlimited, and against each other. Some colonies were destroyed, while others barely noticed the war. Natural selection whittled away at the independents in Orion space. Four centers of power developed: two founded by Earth nations, and two founded on economic alliances between neighboring systems.

After the war ended, the Nordic Independent State, Free Kyrene Society, and New Columbia were recognized as stellar nations. The fourth, the Orion Nation, was centered farther out from the Solar Union and the center of humanity. Ironically, it was the Orion Nation's omission from the Treaty of Earth that led to the formation of the stellar nation known today. In terms of military strength alone, the Orion Nation could not have faced down any of the three powers. But given the Orion Nation's position at the edge of colonized space, it held the key to expansion, and all three of the new stellar nations would fight for that opportunity to expand.

Still, the nations were tired of war and needed time to rebuild. Three years after signing the Treaty of Earth, the four nations met in conference about the Orion capital planet, Jaeger. The delegates were commissioned to iron out an agreement under which the nations could live together peacefully. Seven months into the slow process, the focus of the meetings changed. Word arrived that Austrin-Ontis had refused to allow vessels passage through its space. It was the first shot of an economic war. The delegates reacted as one, ordering a multi-national force of vessels to clear the way for merchant traffic.

After a single skirmish, both sides backed down. Shortly thereafter, news came of yet another Thuldian raid into a neighbor's space. The delegates joined together to boycott Thuldian goods, and officially censured the Empire. After nine other nations agreed to the boycott, the Thuldian emperor stopped the raids.

With these joint successes in mind, the delegates reconvened in 2317. These new meetings were no longer confined to discussions about internal peace and stability between neighbors. They looked outward at the stellar nations, shared information, and negotiated trading opportunities. All four leaders were now in regular attendance. The Jaeger Conference developed into a permanent forum.

The nations grew entangled until 2321, when Kathryn Brown, president of the Orion Nation, addressed the delegates. She spoke at great length about the advances that her nation had made in recent years, and lauded her citizens for their courage and resolve in the face of difficulty. The surprise came when she offered to dissolve her own nation and unite it with one of the other three nations. The Orion people would be assured representation in the Treaty of Earth, and a larger nation would stand a better chance in the coming war.

The delegates took her words to heart. Unfortunately, this unified nation would disturb the careful balance of power between nations. The delegates rejected her proposal. Instead, each national leader articulated the need for alliance, praised his citizens, and dissolved his nation. The Orion League was united. Jaeger was named the capital, and Brown was elected president. Her first act was to commission a charter and a bill of rights. Freedom of speech, religion, press, and assembly for all sentients was declared throughout Orion space. Ethnic and species discrimination was denounced. The Orion League grew, and aliens—especially the fraal—flocked to its banner.

## THE SECOND GALACTIC WAR

The Orion League hurried to unify as the war opened in 2346, about a decade after Brown had retired from public life. When the war broke out, newly elected President Mischa Dobrescu had just taken office, and the Orion response was slowed as a result. Dobrescu concluded a nonaggression pact with the Orlamu Theocracy, and the Orions focused on Austrin-Ontis. The Orions buckled at first, but turned the tide by 2360. Then the Thuldans announced the formation of the Expansion Pentad.

Consultation with the Orlamu Theocracy and the Borealis Republic led to the creation of the FreeSpace Alliance. Meanwhile, another set of stellar nations formed the Profit alliance. Concerned about Thuldian and VoidCorp advances, Brown established a "gentleman's agreement" between the Profit confederation and the FreeSpace Alliance. Over the next few decades, the Orions supported the war efforts of the Borealins, the Orlamus, and occasionally the Austrins. By 2401, the Expansion Pentad had been pushed back, and the agreement with Profit collapsed. The war degenerated into three bitterly entrenched alliances. Only the heroism and sacrifice of Warthen Hale brought peace.

## TODAY

The nature of politics in Orion space keeps power decentralized. Individual worlds and systems are free to conduct their own business, as long as certain broad laws—including the



Citizens of the Stellar Nations: Weren, Orion, Orlamu, and Fraal

Orion Charter—are followed. Of course, each member system is taxed by the Orion government. The chief functions of the League are to maintain peace between its member systems, and to guard against foreign aggression. The League also sets fair trade practices, both internally and with other nations.

Each system elects representatives based on its population. The legislative house, called the House of Equals, meets in conference for three months every year on Jaeger. The House of Equals is also convened during national emergencies, such as in wartime—including throughout most of GW2. The representatives are a diverse body of professional politicians, colony leaders, and alien emissaries. To accomplish their individual objectives, House members must compromise and build coalitions among groups with widely divergent interests.

The League president guides the stellar nation. Every Orion world participates in the election of the chief executive, held every five years. The current president of the Orion League is Lora Trigard; in the 2504 election she is expected to face stiff opposition from Senator Bruce Hale, youngest son of the famous peacemaker, president Warthen Hale.

Orion military strength helped the League remain the leader of the FreeSpace Alliance during the war, even though the front lines of the war seldom touched Orion space. Although the League tapped every industry and individual to contribute to the war effort, the Orion military has always been formed from volunteers. Twelve fortress ships bear the Orion flag.

Twenty years after the war, the Orion economy is still recovering. After dashing over long stretches of human space to preserve Insight and the Borealis Republic, clashing with Austrin-Ontis, and donating resources to the Galactic Concord, the League finds itself at the end of its resources. A postwar economic recession cast a pall over the Orion League's prosperity for more than a decade, and only now are signs of recovery emerging. Recently the Orions have planned new exploration, including rebuilding contact with the Orion Frontier.

Jaeger is one of few capital planets where visitors from foreign stellar nations and empires are welcome. Indeed, this tolerance is a source of pride for the Orion people. Founded on freedom and equality for all, the Orions accept dissidents and refugees no matter what their origin. While this leads to clashes with other nations, it also contributes to the League's strength. Immigrants and refugees from VoidCorp, the Thuldan Empire, the Union of Sol, and the Orlamu Theocracy have all joined the Orions.

The League made its contribution of resources and personnel to the Concord quite willingly. Someday the Orion loyalty to the Concord may weaken, but today many Orions consider the Concord their own child.

In the Verge, the Orions have one ace holding: Bluefall, in the Aegis system. While the planet has an independent government, its cultural and political ties to the parent nation remain strong. Using the Aegis system as their base, the Orions travel the Verge, exploring and trading. They have also reunified with the tiny High Mojave colony in the Mantebron system. Most of their plans for expansion, however, involve the Orion Frontier.

### PLAYING AN ORION

Categorizing an Orion is like trapping a wild weren—frustrating at best. From its exploration centuries ago until today, tolerance and diversity have illuminated Orion space. While many states seek to bring unity out of sameness, the Orion League seems at times willing to sacrifice its own unification for the sake of

preserving the individuality of its peoples. Evaluating the spectacular diversity of Earth, the Orions have gone further by adding free sentient races and humans adapted to every kind of world and environment to their national makeup.

While in general the Orions appear content, their own diversity keeps the society in a constant state of turmoil. Individual systems retain a great deal of autonomy, and economic conflicts among individual groups in the Orion League deter any attempt at firm organization. Other stellar nations often view the chaotic nature of politics in the Orion League as a weakness to be exploited. In times of crisis they have been proven wrong, as the shared ideals of the nation pull its disparate groups together.

For the most part, Orion patriotism squashes outside attempts at fomenting dissent and chaos. Of course, in the hundreds of stars that belong to the League, foreign ambassadors and envoys enjoy some success at manipulating local government, but these lobbying efforts rarely affect the League as a whole. Rather than close off their free society, the Orion attitude is to lead by example and to hope that more stellar nations will grow to grant the same freedoms.

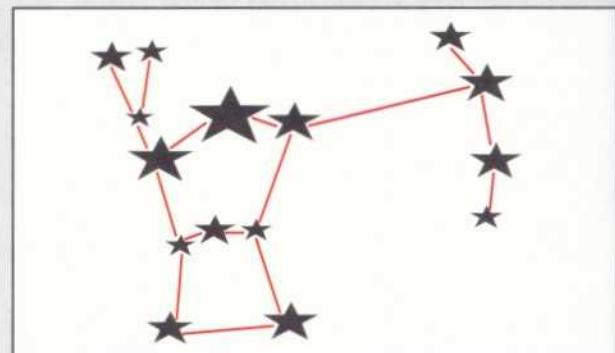
Orion motives for the exploration of space are as varied as the Orions themselves. Some hear the call of distant worlds. Others see a profit to be made in the depths of space, trading new commodities and information. Finally, there is the call of the frontier, which almost all Orions seem to have in common. The borders of human space, the edges of the galactic arm, and the Verge summon Orions like a candle attracts moths.

Personal freedoms are taken for granted among the Orions. Orions traveling outside the League are often astonished at both the interference and the subsidies that foreign governments inflict on their citizens: licenses, high taxes, economic support, and denial of basic rights. Checks on the free practice of speech or religion are practically unheard of within the League. Even on colony worlds founded by a particular faith, religious tolerance prevails. More than two-thirds of all Orions claim a religious affiliation, and of these the Orlamist, Reformer, and Old Earth churches hold the lion's share.

### GAME BENEFITS

With its emphasis on the need for civilized interpersonal and intercultural relations, the League has instilled its founders' values within its individual members. During character creation, Orion heroes add 1 point to their Personality attribute, to a maximum of 15.

In addition, Orions have an easier time familiarizing themselves with different cultures. Orion heroes automatically gain a -1 bonus when using the Culture broad skill or any of its specialty skills. Their reputation for tolerance and goodwill grants them the benefit of the doubt from almost everyone.



# ORLAMU THEOCRACY

*'Prepare to enter the Divine Unconscious.'*

— Orlamu medium Anwar Etan, 2501

The Orlamu Theocracy marks the latest example of a society born out of the desire for religious freedom. For the Orlamus, the exodus from Earth meant abandoning the clouded views of a planet to embrace the reality of the stars. The Orlamus happily attribute the origin of their society to a scientific advance. Their union of faith and science has been blessed with success.

## HISTORY

The stardrive project formed in 2154, a collaboration between the fraal and human representatives from Terran superpowers. The research presented a terrific drain on all of the national economies, but Earth's scientific community believed—correctly—that the marriage of fraal gravity technology and humanity's ability to harness dark-matter power would prevail. Only through the combined efforts of the world powers was the feat accomplished.

Unknown to all but the research team and a few senior government officials, the first starfall took place on November 11, 2159, almost three years before the first public exhibition. Scientists constructed the prototype stardrive on a satellite orbiting Mars. On the fateful day, engineers began to bombard the activated dark matter with gravitons at 7:01 GMT. Thirty seconds later, the satellite vanished in a spectacular wave of light. Observers witnessed the first recorded starfall. Since the satellite's projected path was only to the other side of the Sol system, scientists expected the vessel to reappear after a few moments. The ship vanished, and the wait for its return stretched first to minutes, then hours, then days.

Scientists and researchers panicked. The fate of the satellite was unknown. Would it return? When? Accusations of incompetence and sabotage flew between the superpowers. Exactly 121 hours after its departure, the satellite returned and was immediately surrounded by dozens of scientific and military vessels. The incident was the first instance demonstrating an important rule of stardrive travel: All trips take five days, no matter the distance traveled.

The charismatic Jeff Sendir, engineer for the Indo-African League, was the only crewman aboard the satellite for the surprise journey. Unprepared for a long departure into an unexplored dimension, Commander Sendir struggled to survive. During the five days, the satellite's sensors drew no readings from drivespace. All measurements and readings reported that the satellite was surrounded by a featureless void.

Sendir's report was not so silent. On the third day of what he began to think of as his afterlife, Sendir described a shift in his consciousness. He characterized it as similar to a dream. He had the sudden feeling that he was not alone, although the best efforts of his five senses and the satellite's instruments could not reveal an intruder. The experience was entirely intangible. Sendir recounts that he felt that his mind was a part of something greater, in direct contact with an intelligence. First he felt as if his own mind was being poured out, as if his own unconscious thoughts and memories had left him. Sendir became aware of something more than himself. Vast, unfathomable ideas floated through his consciousness, and Sendir lost feeling in his own body. A few moments later, the contact abruptly ended, and the next two days passed without event.

The normally stable Sendir had never demonstrated mind-walker talents, and he passed a battery of psychological and physical exams after his return. None of the later test pilots into drivespace reported a similar experience. Many wrote Sendir's experience off as an anomaly.

Sendir stayed active in the scientific community for another decade, keeping abreast of the development and commercialization of the stardrive. He retired in 2170 at age 45. More than a hundred of his colleagues left their positions to join him in establishing an independent academy for the study of drivespace and dark matter energies. The Orlamu Foundation devoted itself to unlocking the mysteries of not merely how the stardrive operated, but why. What, Sendir asked, is the true nature of drivespace? From its beginning, the foundation had religious overtones. Even while his strictly scientific pursuits attempted to deepen knowledge of drivespace, Sendir continued to develop religious views and spread them to the scientific community. Even as the Orlamu Foundation assisted many nations in the exploration of space, it continued to develop larger and larger stardrives. In 2213 it claimed several systems for itself; the first of these was Prophethome. Sendir retired to the planet in 2215, taking the headquarters of the Orlamu Foundation with him.

Light-years from Earth, the Orlamu Foundation experienced its final metamorphosis with the official recognition of Sendir's sainthood. The Orlamu Foundation became the Orlamu Theocracy in 2211, and five years later First Prophet Sendir was succeeded upon his death by First Prophet Walen. Shortly thereafter, the new Theocracy discovered the weren in 2246. Despite the weren's own never-ending civil war, they were peacefully incorporated into the Orlamu Theocracy over the following years.

## THE SECOND GALACTIC WAR

The Theocracy avoided activity in both wars as long as possible. In the First Galactic War, it wasn't until the conflict actually began that the Orlamu Theocracy aligned itself with the stellar powers to oppose the Terran Empire. The decision was almost entirely based on a prediction of the eventual defeat of the Terrans.

The Theocracy opened the Second Galactic War by concluding pacts of nonaggression with its closest neighbors, the StarMech Collective and the Orion League. Still, skirmishes with powers near and far harried the Orlamus, and the appearance of the Expansion Pentad dealt thoughts of Orlamu neutrality a death blow. When the call from the Orions came for the formation of the FreeSpace Alliance, the only regret of the Orlamus was that StarMech could not be persuaded to join. Fighting along the Orlamu-StarMech border remained light until the Pentad's defeat at Kendai in 2401, when fighting between the FreeSpace Alliance and Profit began in earnest. Despite its well-established policies of tolerance, the Orlamus became just as aggressive as any of the other stellar nations and survived the war.

## TODAY

The Theocracy's origins still cast shadows over its interests and strengths, but even its founders could not have foreseen the levels of contradiction that define the Orlamus. More than any-

thing else, drivespace research and stardrive development are the nation's principal focuses. Much of the Orlamu population devotes itself to understanding drivespace, or, as they call it, the Divine Unconscious. Oddly, the Theocracy remains a scientific body first and a religious organization second. Only the most radical Orlamists would place their faith over proven scientific fact. At the same time, the religion has become another spur to Orlamu intellects. Only through scientific development can the Orlamist religion answer its adherents' questions.

This interest in science has propelled the Orlamu economy to a great deal of success. Orlamu stardrives power almost a third of the starships in service, and the reliability of Orlamu drive technology is second to none. The Theocracy has met with the best success in miniaturization and development of stardrive technology, and through high production the Orlamus make a hefty profit in sales of stardrives and the technology to build them. The Orlamu media industry has blossomed since GW2 as more and more humans seek an alternative to the Borealis' stranglehold on the entertainment industry. In turn, economic success has forged a strong military. Although most military vessels spend most of their time conducting research rather than war, the Orlamu navy has proven itself time and time again, favoring superior technology and training to massive armadas and strike forces.

Intellectual and religious freedom are accepted as a matter of course by the Orlamus, more a matter of tradition than of any written contract. Even as most Orlamus follow the Orlamist faith, most Orlamus hold the theocratic government as a necessary evil, not a divinely inspired power. The Orlamus acknowledge the need for a central power to organize the interests of the stellar nation and see to its common defense, but most of the time theirs is as much of a burdened bureaucracy as any other.

First Prophet Galindus heads this bureaucracy with a practiced hand. Galindus ascended to the highest position in 2474, the chosen successor after the retirement of First Prophet Zachel. Considered a moderate, he spent nine years serving on a stardrive ship, more than twice the time required of Orlamist priests. He left behind the pursuits of science for a career facilitating similar pursuits by others. It is said that even today he keeps himself current on the latest drivespace equations. Galindus controls the Orlamist church and Orlamu state from the world of Prophethome, the capital for both religious and scientific pursuits. The Sendir Cathedral is the seat of the Orlamu government and of most of the hierarchy of the Orlamist faith.

The weren have flourished under Orlamu guidance. Their violent tendencies have made integration difficult, but talented weren are growing more common throughout human regions of space, often preaching the Orlamist faith with a greater zeal than the Orlamus themselves. A few of the most devout have achieved important posts within the church hierarchy.

The strongest Orlamu outpost in the Verge is the *Lighthouse*, the stardrive-equipped station that the Theocracy donated to the Concord. Though now operated as a Concord base, the *Lighthouse* still carries much of its original support staff and an Orlamu temple. The Orlamus have also reunified with the Yellow Sky colony in the Tychus system.

### PLAYING AN ORLAMU

Orlamu life is founded on the acceptance of contradiction. The people of the Theocracy maintain a belief in scientific revelations: the tachyon paradox theory of subatomic particles, the grand unified theory of forces, and the Kaidman dark-matter

assumption, all of which provide the scientific foundation of knowledge for a stardrive. Along with their allegiance to the most advanced disciplines of science, the Orlamus gaze with wonder at the marvels of the universe—the beautiful balances of energy and matter, and the existence of life itself. And in these marvels, they see witness of a conscious, divine will.

Unlike followers of older religions, the Orlamus do not find their beliefs and scientific rationalism conflicting. As the Orlamu saying goes, the search for truth demands realism and a trust in the divine. The Orlamu mission is simply to explore the divine itself: in this world, a realm of conscious divine creation, and the Divine Unconscious itself, which others call drivespace.

The Orlamu obsession with drivespace has been established for centuries. Fortunately, it's proved profitable as well as educational. Orlamu mediums—others simply call them drivespace navigators—travel through the Unconscious regularly, and the Orlamu people hold a great deal of reverence for all things that drivespace touches. The most famous example are the generally honored and pampered Starborne, a group whose members were born in the Unconscious.

The only enemies an Orlamu admits to are the familiar, the tedious, and the boring. The burning desire to discover fills the Orlamu life and soul. It's common to find Orlamus along the borders of humanity—venturing into the unknown, unsure of what to expect but willing to accept whatever is found.

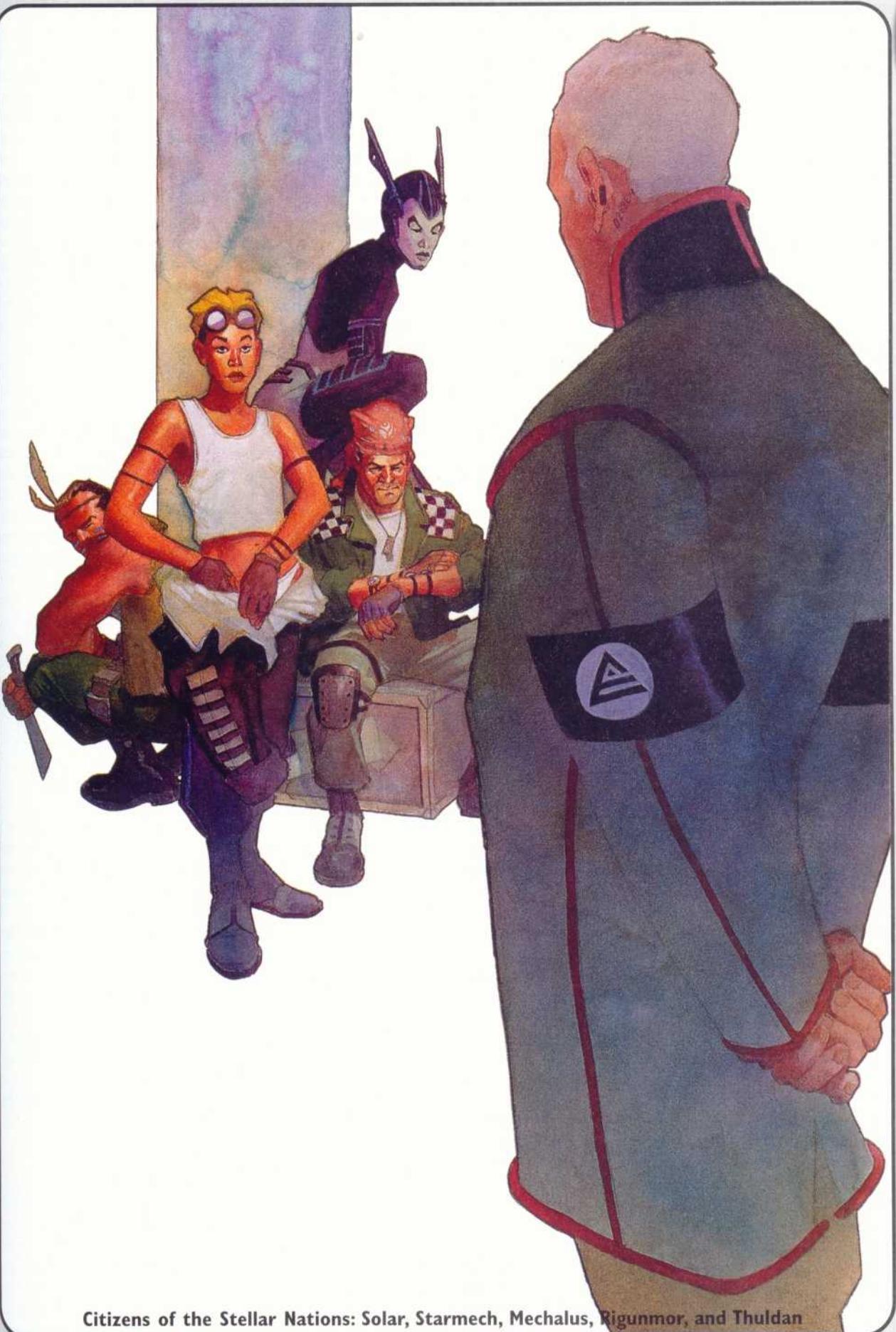
For the Orlamu people, the Orlamist church and theocratic government are largely accepted as a matter of course. Orlamu missionaries wander the stars, but most seem more devoted to personal explorations and investigation than to making conversions to the Orlamist faith. After all, the religion poses as many questions to its faithful as it delivers answers.

### GAME BENEFITS

The Orlamus attempt to reach a better understanding of the universe and their place in it has met with great success. Pioneers in many realms of science, Orlamus pride themselves on their use of scientific methods and instruments to discover truth. Orlamu heroes gain from this outlook and education by receiving a -1 bonus on the use of any Physical Science or Navigation skill.

Moreover, the Orlamus are blessed with a disproportionate number of mindwalker children. The merits of Orlamu mind academies have gained Orlamus a reputation for psionic aptitude second only to the fraal themselves. Orlamu Mindwalkers reduce the cost of all Mindwalker broad and specialty skills by 1 point, both during character generation and later advancement. Finally, all Orlamu mindwalkers have a -2 bonus when using the *navcognition* specialty skill.





Citizens of the Stellar Nations: Solar, Starmech, Mechalus, Rigunmor, and Thuldan

# RIGUNMOR STAR CONSORTIUM

*"Warthen, let's make a deal."*

—Executive Guilder Alison Brel, 2465

As an enlightened society, the Star Consortium holds that life, liberty, and the pursuit of profit are inalienable rights common to all sentients. Though many nations bear such sentiments in treaty or charter, only the perspicacious Rigunmors recognize that life and liberty are just necessary conditions that allow humanity to pursue its noblest goal: the Concord dollar. Rigunmor financial zeal and success has brought numerous accusations and slanders; the peaceful Star Consortium faces frequent condemnation as a society of thieves, smugglers, and cheats. Rigunmors are a forgiving people and continue to conduct business with those who naturally envy the Star Consortium.

## HISTORY

The Rigunmor Star Consortium is the only stellar nation with the audacity and ability to contest Thuldan and VoidCorp claims of supremacy routinely. In large part, Rigunmor power can be traced to the Consortium's venerable age among the stellar nations. At the midpoint of the 21st century, long before the development of the stardrive or even the mass reactor, the Consortium was born among the superpowers of Old Earth.

While the superpowers presided over an era of unprecedented peace and prosperity, Old Earth knit itself into a single economy. Trade for common and cheap goods crossed the globe, and falling freight prices allowed profit-seeking entrepreneurs to leap into international trade. Independent traders flourished. Several of Earth's great alliances eventually considered the growth of these independents as a threat. While large corporations received coveted privileges under the aegis of the superpowers, the Rigunmor found regulations and economic restrictions intruding more and more on the success of small businesses and private individuals.

The Rigunmor Consortium began as one of many trading guilds, consortiums, and organizations created by businesses to protect their interests. By banding together, smaller companies found that they could greatly increase their influence over both corporations and governments. Some of these business unions and cooperatives died when met with even tougher resistance from governments and competitive corporations. Others evolved into corporations themselves.

By the 22nd century, the Rigunmor Consortium had not only survived, but had developed into the largest economic affiliation of its type. The Consortium preserved the sovereignty of its individual members and allowed unsupervised internal competition. Unlike most of its kind, the Rigunmor Consortium did not specialize in the production of a specific product. Instead, the Rigunmors came to be known as specialists in the art of the deal itself—traders, financiers, and sometime swindlers. Simply put, Rigunmors made their profits arranging for the transfer of product and finance from one party to another. The psychology of convincing both seller and buyer that they had made a good deal came naturally to the Rigunmors.

Humanity leapt to the stars in a chaotic, disorderly rush, but this only further catalyzed Rigunmor success. Without the Terran powers to frustrate their efforts, the Rigunmors became a popular source of trade goods among the early colonies. Rigunmor driveships traveled between colonies exchanging the necessities of life: food, clothing, technical gear, and sometimes

water. Rigunmor trade proved especially vital for independent colonies such as the Hatire Community and the Nariac Domain.

In time, the Rigunmor guilders saw that their own success would be challenged in the years to come. As the fledgling stellar nations gained power and became self-sufficient, the need for Rigunmor trading vessels waned, though it never vanished. Moreover, as early as 2241 they saw that the stellar governments and the Terran superpowers were destined to clash. Interstellar war, as a Rigunmor noted, could be bad for business.

No longer only traders, ambitious Rigunmor vessels explored and colonized a region of space to call their own. One of the first of these systems produced the capital planet called Bazaar, a center of Rigunmor trading to this day. Later, Rigunmor scouts discovered a system in 2273 that had been fully explored by an alien species, the mechalus. Without the stardrive, the mechalus had been limited to a single star. Despite this, many mechalus technologies rivaled the best humanity had. The Rigunmor deal with the mechalus was quite simple; the mechalus system joined the Star Consortium peacefully, but individual mechalus were free to explore the galaxy with the stardrive.

The 2299 Guilder Conclave was the largest such gathering to date. The resolution of that council created the Rigunmor Star Consortium as a stellar nation, joining the Thuldan Empire and VoidCorp in leaving the Terran Empire. It was a risky decision, but the timing was too convenient to pass up. The Rigunmors were dragged into the First Galactic War.

GW1 demanded yet another division of Rigunmor labor. Joining with the Thuldans and their allies to gain independence, Rigunmors took up the mantle of warriors as well as traders and explorers. Although thousands of Rigunmors fought valiantly, the Consortium's supply lines were even more critical to the war efforts of the young stellar nations.

## THE SECOND GALACTIC WAR

Unlike the hawks in several other stellar nations, Rigunmor profit analysts did not advocate fomenting war. Indeed, although most historians consider the Star Consortium one of the war's few victors, the Rigunmors were among the first to join Warthen Hale's quest for peace.

Rigunmor victories are easy to trace. For decades, the Star Consortium literally was the richest nation, and that reputation made enemies hesitate to attack early in the war. In addition, Rigunmor wealth made it easier to convince the Union of Sol, Austrin-Ontis, and StarMech to join Profit, an alliance supporting the causes of free trade. For the Rigunmors, the alliance was a triumph. Large sections of their borders were secured. Division within VoidCorp only cemented what was clear to many: If anyone could claim victory in GW2, it was the traders.

## TODAY

The Rigunmor Star Consortium organizes itself on a principle of fairness. In the Consortium, background, birth, and ethnic origin are unimportant, because the stellar nation measures success by a much simpler equation: "Let he with the most rule." After all, reason the Rigunmors, only victors in the fields of finance and profiteering have the talents necessary to administer the Consortium. And only the wealthy can command respect and obedience from the Rigunmor masses.

Auditors annually assess each Rigunmor's net worth to determine his or her position, both within the Consortium as a whole and inside the bureaucracy, if the Rigunmor takes up government service. The plutocracy is led by the Executive Guilder, the richest individual in the Consortium. Today the position is held by Atha Oneagle, a post she has held for the last seven years. Alison Brel, her predecessor, held the reins of power for 31 years, until her death. The Executive Guilder is backed by an Advisory Board, overseeing the mighty Rigunmor economy. The Board consists of the ten individuals whose wealth totals slightly less than that of the Executive Guilder.

The Rigunmor military follows a similarly unusual command structure. Military rank, like everything else, is up for sale. While the practice causes occasional discipline problems, Rigunmor avarice does seem to hold its military together. Bounties, plunder, and salvage are common practice; these customs often occupy the mind of ship crews and army brigades, who divide spoils by rank.

Mobility characterizes Rigunmor society. Just as interstellar markets can decide Rigunmor leadership, the culture as a whole welcomes an unmatched upward and downward social mobility. As long as he shows off his wealth, the Rigunmor treat a foreigner or immigrant with respect. Of course, yesterday's golden child can quickly become today's has-been.

Rigunmors also favor physical mobility. Traveling the stars, they look for new businesses to finance, expeditions to exploit, and any means to make a buck. Even the Executive Guilder, the Advisory Board, and the upper government refuse to stay put. The Consortium's leaders place their administration in a fortress ship, the *Oneagle*. Indeed the transfer of power in the Consortium is always accompanied by the transfer of the *Oneagle*'s ownership to the new Executive Guilder. The largest fortress ship ever, it roams Rigunmor space issuing regulations and decrees. Reports claim that the *Oneagle*'s starfalls exceed 60 light-years.

The arrangement pleases the denizens of Bazaar, the Rigunmor capital. Freed from the imposition of serving as an administrative center, Bazaar can focus on the important thing: making money. Everything's for sale in the capital, even money itself. The decentralized Rigunmor economy prevents Bazaar from assuming the role of the true heart of the Consortium.

The mechalus hold close ties to the Consortium. The mechalus homeworld falls officially under Rigunmor jurisdiction, and mechalus are as free to come and go as any other citizen of the Consortium. In truth, the mechalus have absorbed few Rigunmor traits, but the relationship between the Consortium and Aleer—the mechalus homeworld—is healthy. Mechalus assistance during GW2 was a decisive factor against VoidCorp forces.

In the Verge, the Star Consortium was recently outmaneuvered by the United Lison State in the Oberon system, which had been one of the Consortium's richest sources of rhodium before the war. Persistent rumors claim that the Rigunmors plan to retake Oberon by force.

## PLAYING A RIGUNMOR

Though others may mock such timeless Rigunmor aphorisms as "greed is best," the people of the Star Consortium accept a philosophy of life that few others understand. Looking over humanity's long history, they say, what has remained constant? Goodwill, charity, and kindness have not. In times of trouble, and in times when personal desire interferes, humans have been known to toss all such ethical niceties aside. No, say the



Rigunmors, one thing has remained fixed during times of war and peace: human avarice.

Rather than whine about what some might call the root of evil or at least one of humanity's flaws, the Rigunmors base the existence of their society on it. While Rigunmors cannot rely on the benevolence or altruism of their fellow humans, they can rely on greed to dictate action. In the Star Consortium, the veil of ignorance about human nature is removed, so Rigunmors can deal with one another with simple honesty, knowing in their hearts what everyone is after.

Of course, simple honesty is not the approach that most Rigunmors choose to operate their business with. The Rigunmor way of life is subtle and manipulative; as their philosophies embrace the covetous elements in man, the law of the Rigunmors is to let the buyer beware. More than a prescription for consumer caution, the old saying illuminates Rigunmor willingness to utilize any trick, any scheme, to cut a deal. It's common for a Rigunmor victim to walk away happy and content, unaware he or she has been swindled. Thus have the Rigunmors gained their reputation of interstellar swindlers and con artists. Fortunately for the rest of the galaxy, the Rigunmors prize trading with their own kind as a real challenge.

Ambitious young traders take to the stars to make their fortunes, wary of becoming complete paupers among their own. Hordes of such entrepreneurs, often desperate to make names for themselves, travel far from home seeking a chance for riches. Such independent expeditions end in success more often than not, and the Rigunmor explorers return home rich in both funds and experiences to claim their own space within the Consortium.

In their devotion to the almighty Concord dollar and guilder, Rigunmors have little time for organized religion. Rigunmors generally note that most faiths, if not overtly against the acquisition of worldly goods, do not encourage wealth. The Star Consortium has one of the largest populations of atheists and agnostics among the stellar nations, second only to VoidCorp and its puppet state, the Nariac Domain.

## GAME BENEFITS

As many have observed, Rigunmors have a talent for making customers comfortable with even the most outrageous deals. Rigunmor heroes gain a -1 step bonus to all uses of the Interaction and Deception broad and specialty skills. Just because everyone knows Rigunmors can't be trusted doesn't make their ploys less effective against the gullible.

In addition, Rigunmors always pay 1 point less than the listed cost for purchase or advancement of the Interaction—*bargain* skill. As members of the wealthiest stellar nation, Rigunmors may begin with the Filthy Rich perk for free. Characters who elect not to take the perk gain 6 more skill points instead.

# STARMECH COLLECTIVE

*"Unit 82189, give me an update on the hull reconstruction project. Unit 92052, increase the pressure by four newtons. Unit 53891, adjust the holo frequency to 106 megahertz. Unit 45215, prepare my beverage."*

— Lt. Commander Samuel Tritiac

One of the smallest and youngest of the stellar nations, the StarMech Collective has led a marginal existence for more than a century. Created by bureaucratic need, interstellar fiat, and hedonistic pleasure, the Collective has survived through the cleverness and technological ingenuity of its members. Specifically, StarMech survives because of its renowned ability to construct the finest ships and robots in the galaxy.

## HISTORY

The region of space accepted today as the StarMech Collective lacked both organization and leadership during the 23rd century. The century before had seen the end of the 100-year peace imposed by the six Terran alliances. During the 23rd century, humanity undertook a massive leap to the stars, but many smaller countries left without much planning. Colonization was correspondingly chaotic. Dozens of small corporations and states carved out a niche in regions ignored by the larger powers, including the Taurus sector.

Almost unnoticed among the migrations was the relocation of StarMech Inc., a corporation specializing in the manufacture of advanced machinery. Specifically, the company focused on robotics. StarMech abandoned profitable contracts and fiscal security on Earth to maintain its independence in space.

As fledgling colonies sprang up and nations unified, the Taurus sector had no central power able to forge neighboring systems into a larger whole. Until 2299, the nation's future citizens—already referred to as "Starmechs"—suffered through a dark and confusing time. As the colonists civilized the new worlds, natural disasters and piracy took their toll. Without support from Earth, life itself was a struggle. Slowly, the colonies improved and even flourished, opening avenues for trade. But without a central government, StarMech success went unpublicized. Compared to other young nations, emigration to StarMech space was very low. The region's reliance on robotic technology grew, and the Starmechs enjoyed the benefits of a large, artificial work force: time for recreation and play.

When the First Galactic War erupted, the inhabitants of the region were caught off guard by the intense conflict. Military readiness was a foreign idea. The region wasn't a primary objective for forces on either side of the war. The greatest threat to the colonies came from pirates, who saw the war as a time to loot and pillage the undefended.

Despite the constant attrition of the weak, the colonies took the first steps toward cooperation and unification. As the war marched toward its conclusion, StarMech and the other regional powers formed a mutual defense force and patrolled the region, preserving a tense peace for all of the new colonies. In 2312, the war ended after thirteen bloody years.

In the following months, diplomats wrangled for advantage in the Treaty of Earth. At the time, StarMech Inc.'s leadership wanted to use its robots to conquer the surrounding colonies. To do so, it needed permission from great powers that might intervene, especially the Thuldans and the Orlamus. The post-war treaty did more than define borders between the new pow-

ers; it determined what the powers were. Since no true power existed in the Taurus sector, it was to be divided among its neighbors. StarMech Inc. pulled in favors and staged one of its infamous, often deviant, parties. Legend claims that when the diplomats awoke the next morning, StarMech had the signatures to guarantee a diplomatic coup. Partly through pure socializing and partly through closed-door arbitration, StarMech convinced the other treaty signatories to recognize the Collective as one of the 26 great powers. In 2312, the Collective was born as a nation, at least on paper.

In practice, the Collective remained a fiction for more than a decade. Over time, though, StarMech technical expertise paid off in unexpected ways. First, the corporation had thousands of construction orders to fulfill—and at reduced prices, as part of the deal that it had signed to secure its status as a recognized nation. With contracts flooding in, the overworked robots and their builders had little time to unify their neighbors. Besides, outfitting an army of conquest didn't fit StarMech's pleasure-seeking culture. Instead, for the next two decades, StarMech and its robots built hundreds of high-quality driveships.

At first, StarMech's smaller neighbors were understandably nervous about StarMech's plans. Many were angry at being included in the Collective, which they rightly considered a bureaucratic creation. But as the years passed, StarMech's economic ties with its neighbors grew ever tighter. Even after the treaty commissions were filled, the quality of StarMech workmanship kept an economic boom going, and both materials and personnel were desperately needed in the shipyards. Fortunately, it was faster and easier to negotiate for new staff than to form a battle fleet. The Collective pulled together, and by 2331, it was not just a map sector; it was a stellar nation. Soon StarMech driveships set out to explore the galaxy.

## THE SECOND GALACTIC WAR

To a nation still struggling to bring its members together, still forming its first navy, still obsessed with feeding personal pleasures and amusements, the Mutant Uprising was an unrivaled cataclysm. StarMech's members, caught up in carousing, were among the few who did not see the war coming. Their long-standing reliance on robots proved unfortunate as well; warrior robots fared poorly against well-armed soldiers.

Losses were acceptably low in the first years of the war, until the collapse of Sothvec Industries, a StarMech neighbor, brought the Thuldans to StarMech's border. Faced with overwhelming force, the Collective's military fell back, abandoning systems to buy time to construct more ships. In 2361, the Rigunmors proposed an alliance, and the Orions and Orlamus promised support—or at least neutrality—during the Thuldans' invasion. With only one enemy to focus on, StarMech forces halted Thuldans advances by the turn of the century. The StarMech-Thuldans front was one of the fiercest in the war, and losses on both sides remained high until the end.

## TODAY

The Second Galactic War saw the loss of 40% of StarMech's former territories, and the shrunken nation struggles to pull itself into shape. Many valuable star systems were lost to the Thuldans, including ravaged Delight, Tallis, and even Liber, once the economic and political center of the Collective. While

the Collective has relocated its capital to the planet Chance, rebuilding its current territories will be the effort of a lifetime. In an effort to share the burden, StarMech CEO Adam Spiner donated several sectors of ravaged planets and battlefields to the Galactic Concord Neutrality of Concord Taurus. In the process, he reduced the Collective to one of the smallest nations in area.

Today's Collective embraces a level of unification and organization that only two galactic wars could bring. The rule of the Collective is finally recognized throughout all of StarMech space. Still, the destiny of StarMech Inc. would have surprised its founders. Although the Collective retains the pretense of corporate existence, StarMech's disorganized neighbors never accepted the transition to a corporate way of life. The Collective's leadership found it necessary to form a *de facto* republic.

Every citizen of the Collective is also a shareholder in StarMech, Inc., possessing one share of the company and the ability to elect the administration. The Collective society grants most democratic freedoms to its citizens—freedom of speech, religion, and leisure is taken for granted. But the Collective retains its corporate roots. The Starmechs vote for leaders who hold offices such as CEO, CFO, and COO; the elections are called "shareholder referenda." Starmechs also vote to appoint members of the Board of Directors, which oversees the executive officers and heads the judicial and legislative departments of the Collective.

The Collective's economy walks a delicate line between free republic and corporation. Independent traders and small corporations exist throughout the Collective, sometimes even competing with an official division of the StarMech Collective itself. Still, the Collective's economy, independent or tied to the corporation, relies on the superior workmanship and production facilities about planets such as Chance. StarMech shipyards are rightfully the pride of the Collective and the source of most of its interstellar trade. While the StarMech specialization has created a dependence on interstellar trade, the high quality of StarMech material has created *de facto* allies out of several stellar nations, especially the affluent Riganmor Star Consortium. No one wants to see StarMech robotic shipyards cease operation.

The StarMech military has been rebuilt since GW2. Today, StarMech boasts a young and new navy easily able to defend the Collective's borders. StarMech military vessels, like all StarMech craft, are at the leading edge of starship design, with systems and sensors of unrivaled sophistication. More important, to StarMech minds, is the unquestioned reliability of StarMech engineering; their ships never fail to pass inspection. As StarMech naval forces grow, many Starmechs see a day when fortune may smile, and they may take vengeance on the Thuldans. Three new fortress ships are already being assembled by the nation's robotic fitting yards.

In the Verge, StarMech's control over the Tendril system is still a matter of some dispute, but StarMech hopes to resolve the matter legally. In addition, it has sent robotic scouts to all nearby systems to establish additional footholds in the region.

### PLAYING A STARMECH

StarMech engineers conceive brilliant theories, unorthodox designs, and fantastic models. Then the robots do the work. The Starmechs enjoy the opportunity to have a good time. They don't suffer from any overpowering need to collect material possessions, or even to acquire wealth. Neither do StarMech citizens separate themselves from the galaxy and seek meaning in abstraction and exploration of arcane theories. What they

do have is a special cleverness that goes into manufacturing ships and robots. StarMech construction and engineering robots fulfill most of the needs of the society, and Starmechs are comfortable with their mechanical servants, treating them as other cultures treat dogs or children. Most Starmechs prefer to travel with at least one robot servant.

StarMech culture lives and breathes in the technical advances of the day. For instance, they seem more comfortable when surrounded by their own robotic creations rather than other humans. Even Starmechs who never leave the planet of their birth appreciate the StarMech devotion to the engineering. They're baffled by foreign cultures, such as the Hatire, which reject technical advances. How can one reject the instruments of creation? The applications of robots in industry, especially heavy industry, fill all corners of StarMech society.

Ultimately, Starmechs accept that the world is run for profit. Most will admit that their frolicking, no matter how attached they've become to it and no matter how enjoyable may be, can't form the basis for a real existence. Most Starmechs instead dream of the realization of the next ship, the next building, the next project, and the next hope to bring into reality. Not that a Starmech necessarily wants to get started on that glorious project right away. Idleness and unemployment among the Collective are common, despite the constant work to be done.

Given the lack of a StarMech work ethic and the acceptance of technology in all parts of their lives, the Starmechs would seem to have little need for religion. Ironically, most Starmechs do profess a religious affiliation, with Humanity Reformation and Old Earth faiths claiming the largest followings.

Finally, although Starmechs have a fierce interest in science, most also have an odd streak of superstition. A Starmech expects terrible events to follow breaking a reflector, crossing green and yellow wires, and making a red starfall. Many Starmechs have their own quirks of superstition; even their robots are sometimes programmed to take these into account.

### GAME BENEFITS

StarMech's excellent educational and occupational training give the Starmechs a natural flair for all things technical. During play, Starmechs receive a -1 bonus to any use of the Technical Science broad skill or any of its specialty skills.

In addition, many Starmechs are prone to the excesses of hedonism, withdrawing from the real world in favor of lavish parties, inebriation, and sensory excess. At the player's option, a Starmech hero may take the Oblivious flaw and gain double the usual skill points (8). While many Starmechs seem distracted, others pursue their pleasures obsessively. These heroes may take the Obsessed flaw and gain 4/8/12 skill points, depending on how much time the hedonist devotes to physical pleasures.



# THULDAN EMPIRE

*"The future of mankind is a burden we cannot refuse."*

—Emperor Gregor Kent, 2263

In terms of size, age, military strength, and self-opinion, the Thuldans rank first among the stellar nations. The success of the empire rests on the fierce patriotic spirit that infuses Thuldans society. The Thuldans Empire has proven itself in dozens of conflicts without a defeat; the Second Galactic War is its first battle "lacking a victory."

## HISTORY

In the wake of humanity's departure from Earth, one of the first space-born cultures to rise was the Thuldans Empire. The beginning of the 23rd century marked an explosion of humanity from the cluster of stars around Sol. In those early days, even a small stardrive facilitated the founding of dozens of colonies. Many of these fledgling colonies maintained strong ties to the Earth-based nations that spawned them; others, funded privately, gained a rogue independence early in their existence.

Gregor Kent had risen to become one of the wealthiest tycoons of the era. Already his power had grown to eclipse governments, and he dictated policy for much of old Europe. As Thuldans legends tell it, Kent was concluding a multitrillion-dollar deal to bankroll a stellar expedition when he experienced "the Vision." For 28 hours Kent lay on the floor of his palatial offices, silent except when refusing offers of water, food, and medical care. When Kent emerged from his darkened chamber, he declared, "I have seen tomorrow." The media mocked his press releases and his predictions of space-based kingdoms and nations. No colony, public opinion held, could survive in space without support from Earth.

Thuldans epics tell the story. Kent despaired of humanity's folly and lack of foresight. He lamented that in his vision of tomorrow, no one would be able to lead humanity, to guide it forward to meet the challenges of space. Kent resolved that if one man could make a difference, he would. Nothing must stand in the way of mankind's future. Taking control of the stellar expedition he was funding, he poured all of his immense resources into the foundation of a new home where humanity's next generation of leaders could blossom. For the first time, a fleet of stardrive-equipped vessels left for the stars.

Kent didn't look back. No Thuldans textbooks point out the inhuman drive that allowed Kent to seize control of the expedition and oust its former administration. Rumors abound about the tactics Kent employed to command his employees and their families to follow him into the unknown.

Traveling more than 50 light-years from Earth, Kent established an independent colony on the planet Thuldans. The empire recognizes Sept. 1, 2263, as Founder's Day. Coincidentally, the arrival on Thuldans Prime fell on Kent's 50th birthday. The Thuldans Nation—a decade later the Thuldans Empire—was declared, with Kent its leader and eventually its emperor.

The empire grew quickly. Only 10 years after the founding of the first colony, five excursion fleets left the planet Thuldans to extend their Emperor's sphere of influence. A dozen colonies were accepted into the Thuldans fold after a short period of reeducation. These times of adjustment remained violent; tragically, Emperor Kent observed, many died in the struggle for humanity's advancement. Rumors abound about the Empire's early years and the measures needed to establish an indepen-

dent colony so far from Earth; some even claim that the Thuldans discovered a sentient alien species that helped them survive. In any case, the species has never been seen and its existence remains unproven.

It is a quirk of history that the Thuldans Empire, conceived in a burst of aggressive expansionism, has yet to end. In the First Galactic War, the Empire took on a leadership role among the young stellar nations against the Earth-based Terran Empire. More than 100 systems fell under Thuldans control economically and militarily. When GW1 ended in 2312, the independence and influence of the Thuldans Empire was established. Militarily, the empire was among the strongest of the stellar nations of that period. The influx of hundreds of colonies ensured that the Thuldans Empire would remain forever independent. Emperor Kent died in his sleep in 2317, content that his creation would one day guide all of humanity.

## THE SECOND GALACTIC WAR

The Empire's growth continued unabated during the period before the Second Galactic War. Thuldans explorers pushed the borders of the Empire farther and farther away from Old Space, and skirmishes with other stellar nations helped to increase Thuldans holdings. Emperor Decret saw another war on the horizon, and the Thuldans military-industrial complex, already gigantic, consumed world after world of resources. The size of the Thuldans navy and war engine grew.

With the outbreak of war in 2346, the Thuldans Empire became an aggressor. By 2356, Sothvec Industries, the Anarchist Union, the Sultanate of Fomalhaut, and the Taurean Star Republic had been swallowed whole, their planets occupied and their populations forced to adapt to Thuldans ways or face imprisonment and extermination. Battle lines were drawn with other stellar nations, especially the newly formed Solar Union, and the Empire's advance slowed. Two decades into the war, the weakest stellar nations had been wiped out, and those that survived commanded formidable fleets and armies.

The formation of the great alliances occurred during this period. With his health beginning to fail, Emperor Decret reached an accommodation with one of the Empire's enemies, the Hatiere Community. In return for a cessation of hostilities, the Hatiere joined the Thuldans in their campaigns and conceded several contested star systems to the Empire. Meanwhile, Decret revealed his greatest diplomatic coup in 2361; Void-Corp, one of the great powers, allied itself with the Thuldans, as did the Dreth Commonwealth and the Nariac Domain. Decret proclaimed the formation of the Expansion Pentad.

Soon after, the Thuldans Empire reached its greatest extent to date. At its height, the Empire controlled the areas now called Concord Sagittarius and Concord Taurus. But other alliances had formed to oppose the Empire, and Thuldans supply lines were growing very long. In 2415, for the first time, the Empire was pushed back, and the war settled down into a long campaign of attrition.

## TODAY

Emperor Regist rules with an iron hand. All decisions that affect more than a single star system remain the emperor's to make. For more than a decade, Regist has faced down attempted coups and assassinations following his decision to

make peace in the Alkaid Conference of 2465. Much of the Thuldans' military was reluctant to accept a war that ended without victory—and to accept the surrender of land the Empire had gained. One of Regist's most difficult tasks during the seven years between the Alkaid Conference and the signing of the Treaty of Concord was convincing his own people that a cessation in hostilities was necessary, at least in the short term. Today, Regist rules unquestioned. Already 170 years old and still healthy, he is likely to rule for another decade or more. Even so, he has yet to follow tradition and name a successor. Since he has no clear heir, the turmoil following his death could tear the Empire apart.

In strength of arms, the Empire remains the clear leader. Seventeen fortress ships and more than 200 capital ships bear the Thuldans' flag. In addition, all driveships built in Thuldans' space—from the lowliest freighter to the richest passenger liner—must carry armaments of use to the Thuldans' military. In terms of sheer manpower, the Empire has enormous reserves. Legally, every Thuldans citizen answers to the military, and all adult Thuldans hold military rank and are subject to military orders.

The capital of the Empire, referred to as Thuldans' Prime, consists of five habitable planets orbiting a single star. The terraforming effort that altered the orbits of three planets is considered one of the wonders of the galaxy; it nearly bankrupted the Empire during the Interbellum. Home to more than 60 billion men and women, Thuldans' Prime serves as the political and intellectual center of the Empire. Thuldans' power emanates from the homeworld in a highly centralized pattern; systems farther out from the homeworld receive progressively less attention. Given Thuldans' Prime's location in the heart of Old Space, notions of imperialism central to the Thuldans' belief system—spreading Thuldans' influence out evenly in all directions—meet stiff resistance from other stellar nations. While Thuldans remain interested in exploring new worlds, they are more interested in fulfilling Kent's Vision. Humanity must be unified.

In service to that destiny, the Thuldans' definition of humanity has widened. Thuldans see nothing wrong with genetic engineering, as long as these improvements are properly harnessed. The Thuldans' military has altered many of its citizens for missions ranging from assassination to terraforming. Thuldans' medical science is the most advanced known.

Thuldans' philosophy doesn't leave room for deviation from the vision's path. Dissidents, though common in systems far from Thuldans' Prime (including those in the Verge), are by definition traitors to humanity's future. Similarly, the Thuldans' attitude toward aliens remains less than liberal. At best, alien species are servants to human destiny. If they do not adapt and accept the Empire's vision of a unified human state controlling all of the Orion Arm (and one day the galaxy), they will be eliminated.

The Thuldans are expanding aggressively in the Verge, reshaping Filtrane Island on Bluefall in the Aegis system, fighting a proxy war through their puppet state on Alitar in the Algeman system, and settling new bases elsewhere. The Thuldans' military's interest in the Verge shows no sign of dwindling.

### PLAYING A THULDAN

Thuldans stride from world to world with pride and patriotism, and more than a bit of arrogance. Thuldans are self-confident as a matter of course; in every conflict and war they've ever waged, even the painful Second Galactic War, the Thuldans' expansion has continued. Of course, Thuldans can understand

that many of their stellar neighbors choose to insult or deprecate the Empire's goals. Envy is a common human trait.

The reputation that Thuldans have for tough skins, strong arms, and coarse behavior rings true. Few Thuldans go through their first two decades without strenuous physical and military training. Even preschool Thuldans have the souls of drill sergeants, quickly orienting their young charges to the methods of the Empire. From an early age, Thuldans are taught the importance of the chain of command, and the absolute need to follow orders from superior officers.

Most Thuldans dream of joining the Legions; those who don't are encouraged to keep their weakness quiet. Epic poems, art, and stories of conquest fill Thuldans' society, and the Legionnaires are always shown in a halo of glory as befits Thuldans' champions. Indeed, the nation is proud of the Legion's history of conquering, sometimes destroying, dozens of systems. Of course, few Thuldans ever realize the ambition of becoming Legionnaires. Most Thuldans serve only two years in the military before mustering out. The same military training, however, ensures that proficient and skilled Thuldans mercenaries serve in armies and navies throughout the galaxy.

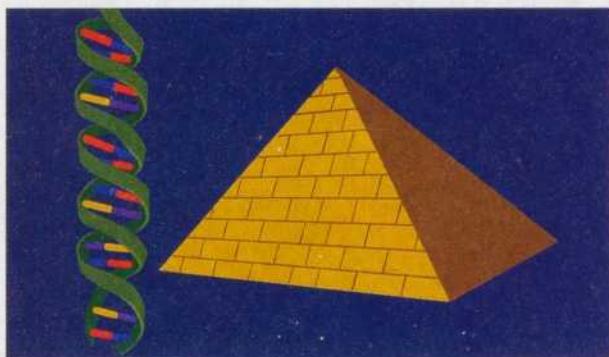
Fortunately, Thuldans' strength stays focused on the goal of Kent's centuries-old Vision. That the galaxy will be united under solid leadership Thuldans have little doubt, but the recent war has made clear the importance of consolidation. Over the past two decades, the reconstruction of dozens of Thuldans' worlds has begun. Meanwhile, Thuldans continue to search for new resources and military technologies. To many in the Empire, the current peace is only a cease-fire.

The reverence in which Thuldans hold their founder and his Vision leaves little room for the cultivation of religious belief. Nevertheless, converts have flocked to the Hatire faith over the past century as its missionaries link concepts of human purity and cultural unification. Today, almost a third of the Thuldans' population professes a Hatire faith, and that number continues to grow.

### GAME BENEFITS

Widespread genetic manipulation and centuries-long breeding programs have toughened the Thuldans' physique. Moreover, the Thuldans' drive for perfection has encouraged ambitious Thuldans' physical education. These programs rival the depth and enthusiasm that other nations devote to "useless" academic pursuits. During hero creation, Human Thuldans' heroes have maximums of 15 in Strength and Constitution, although they still receive 60 ability points.

Thuldans' efforts to improve the human body have borne fruit. Thuldans' medicine and understanding of human biochemistry is unmatched. Thus, all Thuldans' mutant heroes reduce their number of drawback points by one.



# UNION OF SOL

*"The Union of Sol welcomes you to the Earth metropolis. While visiting the cradle of humanity, please remember that camping, collecting, farming, fishing, harvesting, hunting, gathering, littering, loitering, mining, settling, smoking, violence, and any disturbance of the natural environment are not permitted on the surface. Enjoy your stay."*

—Starport Supervisor Irene Liu, 2501

The Union of Sol rests at the core of humanity. The hub between all of the stellar nations, it remains a center for trade, diplomacy, and intellectual pursuits. Whatever other stellar nations may claim about their place in the galaxy, man is Solar. Humanity has not sailed so far or so wide as to forget its origins, and Earth is the mutual center. And it shall remain that way, so say the Solars.

That Solars are arrogant nationalists has never been disputed. Neither has the nation's place in humanity's past and present.

## HISTORY

The history of the Solar Union is the history of mankind, the description of which fills libraries of electronic files. Until the 22nd century, the history of man is the history of Earth, and not until the 23rd century can one attempt to claim that men and women lived and died independent of Earth's influence. Warfare between nations and eventually corporations continued all the while, and many historians consider humanity lucky to have survived long enough to discover the stardrive. Now, humans have ensured the survival of the species by spreading throughout this region of the Orion Arm. While utopians and radicals fled the Sol system and eventually declared their independence, life continued on Earth.

Earth nations poured their own resources into space even while continuing their intense competition. Gradually, the superpowers devoted more and more resources to the colonization of space, and the systems near Sol all fell under Earth's direct control. Farther out, independent colonies grew at a feverish rate, and the new colonies gave birth to new stellar-based powers. So many newly explored planets held human life that by the mid-23rd century, Earth's leaders could no longer control them. To further muddy the waters, the stellar colonies declared a desire for independence from the homeworld.

In 2250, the Terran Empire was declared. The Proxima conflicts lasted only a few years; openly defiant systems were systematically brought to heel. The Terran Empire and its Imperial Council claimed the right to govern all human affairs.

Although the Proxima conflicts discouraged political agitation for the next 20 years, the Terran Empire was a failure from its conception. Earth's nations continued to bicker over power and seat assignments on the Imperial Council even as the fledgling stellar nations sought their own representation. More and more of Earth's populace left the earthbound rivalries behind by fleeing into space.

In the end, the Asiatic Union seized control of the Imperial Council by co-opting (one way or another) more than half of the council's 100 voting members. Ironically, the move was only possible because most of Earth's superpowers had relocated their capitals to the stars. Still, the leadership of the early Asiatics was refined and benign; a multitude of cultures thrived. At the same time, final steps were taken for the pro-



tection of Earth's biosphere. By then, Earth was the worldwide metropolis that modern Solars know today, a ball of mud encircled by water and asphalt. The council instituted strict measures to prevent further erosion of Earth's environment.

The new leadership did not, however, show any leniency toward the upstart colonies. The Terran Empire put down several rebellious colonies that refused to acknowledge the dictates of the council. The military might of Earth and its tightly held neighbors could easily match the strength of half the growing stellar nations. But as their power and stability continued to grow, the stellar nations demonstrated more and more contempt for the Imperial Council.

The Thuldans were the first to claim independence in 2298. Although the Empire was one of the strongest of the stellar nations, the move was unexpected, given the constant Thuldans speeches crying for humanity's unification. Instead of a swift military response, the Imperial Council rattled its saber and tried to cajole the Thuldans back into the fold. The posturing lasted for more than a year, and most of the new stellar nations took the Council's reluctance to attack as a sign of weakness. Dozens of the tiny star-born nation-states threw in with the Thuldans, and the First Galactic War began.

If the stellar nations had kept to their unified purpose, the war would have quickly ended. Instead, the nations spent almost as much time fighting one another as they did fighting the Terran Empire. After 12 years of war, the Imperial Council capitulated and recognized the independence of the stellar nations. The Treaty of Earth dissolved the Terran Empire and replaced it with the 26th stellar nation, the Union of Sol.

## THE SECOND GALACTIC WAR

The new Solar Council had no desire to enter into another war a short 30 years after the first was concluded. The Union of Sol had just finished decade-long reconstruction projects on Earth and in the nearby ring of systems. Solar vessels for the first time had joined in the exploration of the deeper reaches of space, visiting sites as far off as the Verge.

When the war opened in 2346, the Union immediately declared neutrality. For almost two decades, the Solars held onto that neutrality. The Solar defense forces kept incursions and skirmishes to a minimum while Solar industry went to work to increase the size and strength of the Solar navy. With the creation of the Expansion Pentad in 2361, the nature of the war changed for the Solars. The Thuldans had already crushed several of their neighbors, and the Solars thought—correctly—that they would be next on the Thuldans' list. The bad blood between Solars and Thuldans was already a century old. In

response, the Union of Sol formed the Profit Confederation with the Rigunmor Star Consortium, Austrin-Ontis Unlimited, and StarMech. With the aid of its new allies—and sometimes the assistance of the FreeSpace Alliance—the Solars pushed the Thuldans back. It was ironic that when the war finally ended in 2472, the Solar Union had grown by 20%.

## TODAY

When the Union of Sol formed in 2312, many of the institutions of the Terran Empire survived. The Solar Council operates with much of the old Imperial hierarchy. After the war ended, for the first time colony planets held more seats than those given over to Earth itself. Today, Earth still controls 42 of the 100 seats, and many Solar colonies are unrepresented at the highest level of government.

One decisive change in the Union was the anointing of a chief executive, the Sunlord. A charismatic figure in the Imperial Council, Jimol Gatanita, became the first Sunlord, and after his death the position became hereditary. For the most part, the Sunlord is a figurehead: he performs the role of public spokesperson for the Solar Council's decisions. The military reports directly to the Council, and the Sunlord's legal powers to check the Council are seldom exercised. The Sunlord's actual function is to act as the Council's foreign minister, meeting with heads of state to iron out political and economic agreements. The current Sunlord is Acron Gatanita. His daughter, the temperamental and ambitious Princess Cestre, will become the first female Sunlord as soon as Acron retires, possibly within the decade.

Despite internal calls for disarmament, the Solar Union retains a strong fighting force. Military service is voluntary, but generally considered a position of honor and a prelude to a life of public service in the Solar government. Traditionally, the Sunlord and his heirs spend at least a few years in the navy. Younger sons and daughters of the Sunlord's family have been known to make a career of the military; whenever a visitor to the Union asks about "Admiral Gatanita," a Solar must respond "Which one?" Ten fortress ships bear the Solar flag; the first and largest of these, the *Kiku*, is also the Sunlord's flagship in times of war.

The Solar economy is among the healthiest. Earth's location at the center of explored space still makes it an ideal trading and diplomatic center. Solar planets tend to have large, educated populations, but few resources. Solar mining corporations, for example, swept the solar system's moons and asteroids clear of valuable materials almost a century ago. The Solar economy has evolved to focus on manufacturing and services; raw materials are imported for refinement and manufacturing. Solar financial markets run second only to the Rigunmors', and since the Earth financial market doesn't move as the Star Consortium's does, many favor it over the mobile Rigunmor financial centers.

Surrounded by history, the Solars are often accused of arrogance and self-centeredness. It is a claim that Solars are quick to refute, citing their interest in helping all of humanity find diplomatic solutions to its problems.

That desire to serve as the galaxy's diplomats has made the Solar relationship with the Concord difficult. Most Solars view the creation of the Concord as entirely unnecessary. After all, the Union of Sol, as the center of humanity, is perfectly capable of fulfilling the Concord's charter. This new upstart, say the Solars, is a subtle insult. Solars rarely miss an chance to upstage a Concordan on issues of charity, policy, or governance.

The Solars' interest in the Verge is centered on the Lucul-

lus system, where they have gained basing rights in exchange for recognizing the system's independence. The Solar Fleet is aggressively searching for a new habitable planet and may develop aquatic colonies on Dione if no better site is found.

## PLAYING A SOLAR

With nearly 60 billion sentients on Earth and most habitable worlds experiencing acute problems of overpopulation, Solars are accustomed to a crowded, urban lifestyle. As necessity pushes planetary populations thousands of meters below or above the ground, or ultimately into space, the stellar nation at the center of humanity faces unique challenges.

As the caretakers of Earth, Solars are surrounded by history. Over 4,000 years of recorded history passed before men and women left their homes for the stars, and only the Solars can truly appreciate the ties to the past. As a result, they have radical environmental goals. To preserve Earth's surviving native flora and fauna, they forbid any interference by humanity in the Union Preserves. On Earth and the colony worlds they've discovered and settled, Solars display the deepest respect for ecological issues. In many cases, they do more than preserve native creatures; they restore damaged biospheres and ensure species survival by elaborate stewardship arrangements.

Even while aggressive steps are taken to prohibit the loss of natural treasures, Solars protect Earth's cultures. Human history is filled with examples of extinct and endangered cultures. Today, years after humanity left Earth behind, Solar communities and individuals attempt to preserve the human cultures of Earth. Many Solars adopt the lifestyle and fashions of a lost age, such as the precolonial Aztecs, imperial Japan, independent Athens, or 17th-century France. Ethnic origin plays a role, but many Solars join cultures outside their own heritage. Since most Solars take part to some degree, almost every culture that ever was finds representation in the Union.

Of course, if the Union is to survive, it must look to the future as well as the past. Only the most radical Solars completely abandon modern technology in their devotion to ancient cultures. Most Solars strike a balance between the culture they grew up in, and the demands of the present day. Though Solars care about the past, Solar driveships also roam the edges of human space, seeking new frontiers and new resources for the overpopulated and resource-hungry nation.

Solars show great respect for native life forms, but they rarely tolerate mutants and genetically altered humans. Some attribute this attitude to the Solars' sense of historical and cultural stewardship. Others point to the Solars' long dislike of the Thuldans, whom the Solars consider little more than filthy mutant freaks. Thuldans and others don't answer the Solar bigotry directly. Whatever the reason, genetically altered humans are usually given a very hostile reception in Solar space.

Solar diversity doesn't seem to be harmed by its dominantly Japanese leadership, and religious freedom is widely accepted. Old Earth religions remain the most common. The younger religions have met with small, but growing, success.

## GAME BENEFITS

The richly diverse and well-developed Solar people benefit from a culture full of talented citizens unweakened by extreme specialization. To represent the diversity of the Solar people, Solar heroes start with a total of 62 points to assign to Ability Scores rather than the usual 60. Nevertheless, Solars must abide by the human maximum of 14 in any Ability Score.

# VOIDCORP

*"VoidCorp does not grant the clemency request of assistant manager FH327 74USK (Catherine Howe). VoidCorp hereby terminates FH327 74USK's contract, effective immediately."*

*—Vice President ZM925 34HIW (deleted), 2499*

Space is chaotic and unpredictable. Although humanity may never be able to fashion stability in the stars themselves, it can put its own house in order. Only when order is maintained is humankind free to pursue goals of profit, advancement, and societal growth. Only in the stellar nation called VoidCorp can one find such order, and it is that very order which explains the economic and political leadership of VoidCorp in the galactic community. Or so claim the corporate brochures.

## HISTORY

VoidCorp traces its roots to a corporation born in the late 20th century. Originally a software company, VoidCorp's ancestor Microtel grew into Earth's largest and most powerful corporation. When the 21st-century wars between corporations, nations, and superpowers broke out, the corporation invested in dozens of industries while maintaining its supremacy in computer systems. With a virtual monopoly on the market, the transnational corporation wielded power greater than that of many nations, and attempts to break it met with violent failure. By the end of the 21st century, VoidCorp's precursor had secured a position as the most powerful corporation on the planet. It had already gained its reputation for ruthless business practices and territorialism.

With the beginning of exploration into human space, a new corporate division came into existence. The new division, VoidCorp, was stocked with the most talented Employees. Granted vast resources, the VoidCorp mission was explicit and direct: carry the stellar corporation into space. Out among the stars, VoidCorp had the opportunity to found an autonomous collective free of interfering governments. At last, the corporation could define every aspect of the new state.

The corporate plan met with great success. VoidCorp employees settled dozens of star systems, and in 2193 VoidCorp developed the first drivesats to link its star systems together. Of course, some VoidCorp Employees were shocked as the corporation took the final step: Personnel, long listed as a corporate asset, became property of the corporation. Its internal strength assured, VoidCorp grew much as any nation in space.

Humans were not the only servants of the corporation. In 2274, a VoidCorp vessel landed on Sheya, the largest moon of the system's fourth planet. There, project leader JT795 43IWQ (Erim Ollander) had first contact with the alien species known as the sesheyans. JT795 43IWQ negotiated a contract with the species. All sesheyans are held to the Sesheyan Compact: In return for the benefits of technology and the freedom to leave their own planet, the sesheyans were named VoidCorp Employees in perpetuity. In essence, they became subject to all VoidCorp corporate rules and VoidCorp authorities, and each sesheyan was assigned an Employee Identification Number.

In VoidCorp space, every child, human or sesheyan, is a VoidCorp Employee from the moment of birth. VoidCorp Employees attend corporate schools and corporate colleges, compete in corporate athletic and academic games, and take their assigned places in the corporate structure.

Within two generations, the remaining vestiges of Old Earth

ties were erased. One of those ties was to VoidCorp's parent corporation. When the First Galactic War erupted in 2299, VoidCorp took up sides with many of the colonies of space against the Terran Empire and the superpowers of Earth. The VoidCorp leadership had long ago relocated itself from Earth to the planet Catalog to take a hands-on approach, and VoidCorp brought with it all of its parent's stellar assets. As a result, a civil war was fought on economic grounds. The parent corporation bankrolled the Terrans' forays into VoidCorp space, and VoidCorp retaliated with the aid of neighboring states. The war fought between VoidCorp and its parent corporation in cyberspace was the first of its kind.

At the end of the war, VoidCorp claimed victory. Its parent had depleted its financial resources, and collapsed under the relentless attacks of its former employees. VoidCorp was named one of the 26 stellar nations in the Treaty of Earth.

In the years after GW1, VoidCorp tightened control internally even as it expanded externally. In 2330, an official corporate memo forbade Employees from ever leaving the company. Ironically, the memo didn't mention even death as a valid form of leave-taking; the memo was eventually called the Death Oath. At the same time, the edges of VoidCorp advanced farther from Sol than those of any other stellar nation. Management demanded more and more raw resources and hoped to discover another client species.

## THE SECOND GALACTIC WAR

Such aggressive inclinations led directly into the second war between the stellar nations. Just before the war, VoidCorp signed alliances with two of its neighbors, the Nariac Domain and the Dreth Commonwealth. Both became client states under the leadership of the big corporation, and VoidCorp borders were secure. Although Rigunmor and Solar Union forces occasionally raided VoidCorp territories, its planets survived the first three decades of the war largely unscathed. In 2361 VoidCorp joined the Expansion Pentad. The Rigunmors shattered the Dreth Commonwealth in 2380, and VoidCorp losses rose as it took over that front of the war. Expenditures reached heights that drained even VoidCorp's immense treasury.

Unknown to most VoidCorp Employees, the worst was yet to come. Insight, a corporate division responsible for Grid and software design, had grown disillusioned with VoidCorp. For decades, Insight provided the FreeSpace Alliance with information about VoidCorp plans and battle tactics. During a Grid battle between the Orions and VoidCorp in 2433, shadows of the Inseers handed the Orions the victory. In 2460, Insight grew tired of waiting and declared its independence, claiming the area of the former Dreth Commonwealth. As VoidCorp readied its response, the rebels countered by crashing the Grid upon which VoidCorp relied. History repeated itself as a corporate division once again spun off into autonomy.

## TODAY

VoidCorp remains at heart unchanged. It has retained its centuries-old focus on computer software, hardware, and the Grid. Its draconian practices still form the most regimented way of life known to man. To VoidCorp management, this structure is the most advantageous avenue for profit. VoidCorp Employees, raised in its culture, accept it as a fact of life. Indeed,

when Insight broke off, most VoidCorp dissidents left with it, and now VoidCorp homogeneity is greater than ever.

The VoidCorp corporate structure mirrors its business practices. At the lowest level, Employees are little more than slaves. Over 70% of the population fits this mold. Once in a skilled or managerial position, Employees grow intensely competitive. The society succeeds, evolves, and holds itself together through struggle. Inferiors expect denigration and abuse. Sycophancy, submission, and currying favor mark behavior to a supervisor. When the superior is gone, machinations to gain position take over. Political maneuvering, favoritism, and backstabbing are well established; informers are rewarded. Deaths of superiors that remain unexplained guarantee promotion. Officers of vice president rank and above live anonymously.

As Machiavellian as it may sound, the system works.

In terms of sheer wealth, only the Rigunmor Star Consortium can boast deeper pockets than VoidCorp. Thanks to its strict hierarchy, VoidCorp can bring resources to bear more effectively than the more disorganized, if richer, Consortium. The VoidCorp military is recovering following Insight's treachery. VoidCorp commands only 10 fortress ships; eight were lost during the war—seven to Insight and another wasted in tithes to the Concord. The prodigious VoidCorp assets are rebuilding a dominant military. Only the tenacious corporate will to succeed has allowed VoidCorp to weather the times. The VoidCorp Grid, ironically updated by Insight before its defection, has kept the stellar nation at the top.

Rule of the sesheyans continues as it has for centuries. Few sesheyans have climbed the corporate ladder; most are pawns working as specialist couriers, bounty hunters, or assassins. VoidCorp executives also retain sesheyans as bodyguards. Sesheyan attempts to win freedom are crushed whenever discovered. The native, planet-bound sesheyans can only mourn the loss of their friends who willingly serve the corporate state.

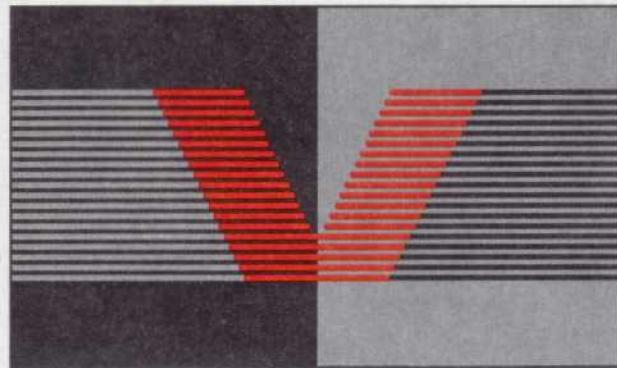
According to management, the corporate structure is the next stage in humanity's evolution. Minor setbacks such as Insight's revolt are the last throes of humans resisting their destiny. (Insight's existence is not officially acknowledged.)

Unofficially, the Grid war between the corporations rages on, largely unseen. Shadow saboteurs on both sides scramble to destroy relay stations, databases, and public records. Recent years have been filled with the results: phony press releases from both companies, tampering with annual reports, as well as unexplained power and data losses. Both deny being either the instigators or victims of any act of sabotage.

VoidCorp is extremely active in the Verge, despite the distances involved. It is pursuing legal and harassment campaigns against the Grith sesheyans of the Corrivale system and is busily exploiting resources, such as its gas mines on Redcrown in the Aegis system and the refineries and strip mines of Iphus in the Corrivale system. Its exploitation teams (resource-oriented survey teams) are investigating all likely sources of raw materials in the region. Corporate strategy dictates that the Verge will be one of the corporation's next great profit centers.

### PLAYING AN EMPLOYEE

Rank is everything. Stop at nothing to get it. Among Employees, such statements are common, even accepted. VoidCorp executives have expressed their opinion on the corporation's competitive internal hierarchy: Survival of the fittest is a sound business strategy. Of course, VoidCorp's vice presidents and directors rose to their positions under the same social Darwinism, so they do not encourage any change to the structure.



VoidCorp is well known for its rigid corporate structure, but most rising managers and station leaders point to their own advancement as proof of VoidCorp's willingness to change. Nevertheless, every citizen holds a corporate rank from birth, expressed in his Employee Identification Number. Each of the 676 ranks begins with a double alphabetical code, ranging from AA, AB to ZZ. Most Employees never rise above CM status, though valuable, skilled laborers reach L ranks. At ranks of M and above, Employees accept management positions whose exact duties vary depending on local departmental and division needs. Directors usually rate at least an S rank, while the anonymous executive officers—vice presidents and above—merit a Z. Rumors claim that a single CEO holds ZZ rank, but his or her identity remains a mystery.

Employees can be found in every corner of human space, often following orders they do not fully understand, or even orders that contradict another Employee's orders. Despite this reputation for faceless interaction, VoidCorp does not permit retirement—Employees must work until death. When found, escapees (called "absentees" by corporate personnel) can expect harsh discipline, if not literal termination.

Following the failure of early attempts to implement and control a state-sponsored faith, VoidCorp outlawed the practice of religion. Churches have been forced underground, and their members are severely punished when discovered. Most Employees grow up without a personal familiarity with religious practices, and VoidCorp religious education is presented as a purely historical subject. With the exception of the Insight-tainted census of 2481, every official poll shows that Employee believers represent just 6% of the population. However, representatives of several faiths have commented that religious practice is more widespread than VoidCorp would ever admit, without providing any basis for these comments.

### GAME BENEFITS

VoidCorp takes steps to insure that all of its Employees are prepared for a life in the harsh realities of interstellar business. VoidCorp heroes automatically begin play with the Business broad skill and the Business—*corporate* specialty skill. No skill points are paid for these skills, and they do not count against the maximum number of broad skills that a hero can start with. In addition, any use of the Business broad skill or any of its specialty skills during play, whether used in negotiating business deals or as an encounter skill in financial situations, receives a -1 bonus.

Employees are also quite competitive; as a result, VoidCorp heroes permanently fill in the leftmost box on the achievement track of their hero sheet during hero creation. (This achievement point can never be turned in for skill points.) Thus, VoidCorp heroes advance in level faster than other characters do.



Citizens of the Stellar Nations: Sesheyen, VoidCorp, Concordan, and T'sa

# THE GALACTIC CONCORD

*"Humanity is only as strong as its commitment to fellowship, advancement, and peace. For once civilization has lost faith in its future, then it is truly lost in the present."*

—First Secretary Thomas Stern, 2472

Formed from the wreckage of the Second Galactic War, the Galactic Concord stands as mankind's hope for the future. Cobbled together from the losers and leftovers of the war by the surviving nations, the Concord is an arbiter in the affairs of the stellar nations. The Concord has been described as humanity's jury, a moral compass intended to keep all the stellar nations in line.

## THE TREATY OF CONCORD

The Treaty of Concord established the groundwork for the Galactic Concord. The treaty finalized the borders between the stellar nations, established Concord Neutralities, allocated resources from the existing governments into a pool that became the property of the Galactic Concord, protected the t'sa by establishing their cluster of space as a Concord protectorate, and created the 13th stellar nation.

The Concord was established along the same lines as other stellar nations. Understandably, many nations feared the creation of a supernation that could one day overthrow them. The lessons of both Galactic Wars and the secessions that came with them were still fresh in the minds of the delegates.

The nation created by the treaty is a hybrid unlike any of the other stellar nations. Its borders are scattered across Old Space, creating neutral territory between wartime enemies. Its governmental bodies contain members from all of the stellar nations, each dedicated to governing on both a macro and micro level. The Concord's military is likewise composed of members from every nation and species. In the years since the war, Concord authorities have successfully brought numerous small conflicts to a close. Skirmishes have proven Star Force and the Galactic Marines surprisingly effective after only a few years of organization.

## THE T'sA

Officially, the T'sa Cluster remains a Concord Neutrality, protected from interference through the Treaty of Concord. The existence of the t'sa as an independent force in human-controlled space is still a matter of great concern to many; humanity's manifest destiny to the stars is a popular concept.

The leader of the t'sa, Chaluk Chisier, is a far-sighted t'sa of great diplomatic skill. While the t'sa have proven their unwillingness to bow to human military force, they're not interested in an armed conflict, either. Both Chisier and the human leaders of the remaining stellar nations understand that such a direct confrontation could spark another interstellar war.

Visitors to the T'sa Cluster are warned by Concord communication drones that the t'sa operate under their own laws and that the laws of human space do not apply there. The same message greets every visitor: "Welcome to the T'sa Cluster. Your ship has entered the jurisdiction of the t'sa. Military vessels may not proceed without a security escort. All other vessels should be aware of the cluster's customs and regulations, the details of which are available on the Grid." In the Cluster, humans always travel at their own risk—though the t'sa are friendly, they owe no allegiance to any stellar nation.

## GOVERNMENT

The Galactic Concord is composed of five branches: executive, judicial, diplomatic, legislative, and financial. Two branches—legislative and financial—are totally autonomous from the stellar nations, but they are also the weakest of the Concord's divisions, restricted to internal operations. The judicial and diplomatic branches are extremely powerful, but their power is checked by appointees from each of the other twelve stellar nations. The executive branch has the authority to act independently, but it is restricted from significant expansion by the treaty.

All branches of the government meet on the planet Concord, located in the center of Concord Prime. The planet is open to visitors, tourists, and lobbyists of all species and nations, but the Concord's space-to-ground security is quite thorough.

## GALACTIC CONSULATE

Of all the powers that the Treaty of Concord gave to the Galactic Concord, the survivors of GW2 feared the diplomatic branch, the Galactic Consulate, the most. It reminded some delegates of the Terran Empire's Imperial Council, whose high-handedness sparked the First Galactic War. Others feared that the Consulate would only serve the greatest of the stellar nations.

The Consulate is composed of six ministers from each of the stellar nations, plus two ministers from each of the alien nations. The Galactic Concord itself has nine ministers in the Consulate, though it started with only two ministers and worked its way up to its maximum in 2496. The Galactic Consulate is currently at its maximum size of 91.

The selection of ministers is left to each stellar nation. Many nations appoint representatives for a variable number of years; others serve as long as their particular political faction retains control. The fraal, by counterexample, appoint their ministers for life. Typically, membership in the Consulate is a prestigious position, seen as a stepping stone to power in the stellar capitals. To the masses, the Consulate ministers form a modern nobility, the core leadership of the sentient species.

The Consulate creates laws that govern the relations between the stellar nations and finalizes laws passed by the Concord Assembly. Recent laws passed by the Consulate include the establishment of shipping lanes throughout the Stellar Ring, the Code of Galactic Salvage measure, and laws to punish Grid terrorism. The Consulate is in session year-round.

The Treaty of Concord requires a two-thirds majority (61 votes) for any measure to pass the Consulate. As a result, most local issues remain in the jurisdiction of the stellar nations, and the Galactic Consulate concentrates on issues of importance to all of explored space.

Ministers act and vote independently; it's not uncommon for one minister in a national delegation to vote in opposition to another. This is especially true when ministers are appointed from governments containing factions vying for control. The singular exception to this democratic process is VoidCorp; to date, VoidCorp ministers and their sesheyen clients have voted in a bloc without exception. This pattern has earned them a nickname among the Concordans; the VoidCorp bloc is often referred to as "The Eight Gods of Happiness."

One of the Consulate's many subcommittees, the Committee on Verge Integration, is composed of one minister from each stellar nation. Chaired by Undersecretary Michael Thayne

(Hm/StarMech/DFA-19), the committee's official goal is to bring the Verge back into the galactic community. More practically, each nation has its own vision for the Verge's future.

Five of the committee's members make regular forays into the Verge, reporting their findings back to the other members. Undersecretary Thayne and ministers Bruce Hale (Orion), YC937 59NMP (VoidCorp), Relitalia Yonce (Rigunmor), and Philosopher Karel Denisenko (Borealis) are regular visitors to the Verge. Each maintains diplomatic offices on board the *Lighthouse*, showing up at least once a year for tours, briefings, and fact-finding missions. The last few visits have concentrated on the Hammer's Star system to investigate the destruction of the Silver Bell colony, but little new information has surfaced. As demands for an explanation of the colony's destruction mount, many of the ministers are openly scoffing at the notion that aliens were responsible.

### THE FIRST SECRETARY

Elected by the ministers from among the Consulate members for a four-year term, the First Secretary is responsible for directing the flow of debates and votes, calling the Consulate to order, sanctioning recesses, and overseeing other legislative matters. In exchange for the power to direct the Consulate, the First Secretary loses his or her ability to vote. The only exception to this rule is when a single vote will decide the outcome of an issue. Interestingly, in every election since the Concord's founding, a Galactic Concord citizen has been elected to fill the post of First Secretary. It seems that none of the stellar nations desires a competitor from an opposing stellar nation to rise to the position. First Secretary Derek Orthen started serving his second term in 2500.

The First Secretary can be removed by a vote of no confidence by the Consulate, which requires a two-thirds majority and which permits the Secretary to vote in his or her own defense. If the vote passes, a new First Secretary is elected.

The First Secretary appoints six Undersecretaries to assist him. The Undersecretaries act as the First Secretary's mediators and ambassadors. While they may act independently, the First Secretary can replace them at any time. No more than one Undersecretary may serve from any single nation. Under the Concord's charter, at least one Undersecretary must be an alien.

The current Undersecretaries are Princess Cestre (Solar), ZH937 57ILK (VoidCorp), Kinna Loric (Mechalus), Alexander Foss (Orion), Richard "Nickelshot" Kessel (Austrin-Ontis), and Michael Thayne (StarMech).

### PLAYING A CONCORDAN

Members of the Galactic Concord have a knack for reading the political climate of the times, and they realize that they have both great power and responsibility in dealing with the other stellar nations. A Concordan in a position of authority knows that rash decisions—even moral decisions, in some instances—could catapult human space into another war.

While most Concordans have a strong sense of right and wrong, they realize that such tender sensibilities must sometimes be sacrificed to interstellar diplomacy and peace. The Treaty of Concord is a model of such realism, often acceding to the demands of the strong with few apologies to the weak. Concordans take extraordinary risks to do the right thing, even if it means ruffling a few feathers along the way. Concordans excel at knowing where the thin gray line begins and ends, having an innate understanding of just how far to push before backing down.

### GAME BENEFITS

Unapologetic defenders of humankind, Concordans embody the finest qualities of humanity: honor, selflessness, and a certain realistic attitude. Belonging to the Galactic Concord gives one a balanced, circumspect viewpoint. Concordans are frequently called upon to provide an unbiased opinion, to resolve disagreements between citizens of different nations, or simply to serve as a calm and reasonable voice during a sudden crisis.

Heroes who begin their career as Concordans add +1 to one of their resistance modifiers (Strength, Dexterity, Will, or Intelligence). Trained to resist physical and mental influence, Concordans demonstrate a remarkable ability to avoid trouble.

### GALACTIC COURT

The Court is composed of representatives from each of the stellar nations. Its primary task is to settle legal disputes between nations, and its decisions are enforceable through the Concord military. The judicial branch is forbidden from involving itself in legal disputes internal to any stellar nation except the Concord itself. The Court serves as the final authority for the various planetary system, and neutrality courts throughout the Concord.

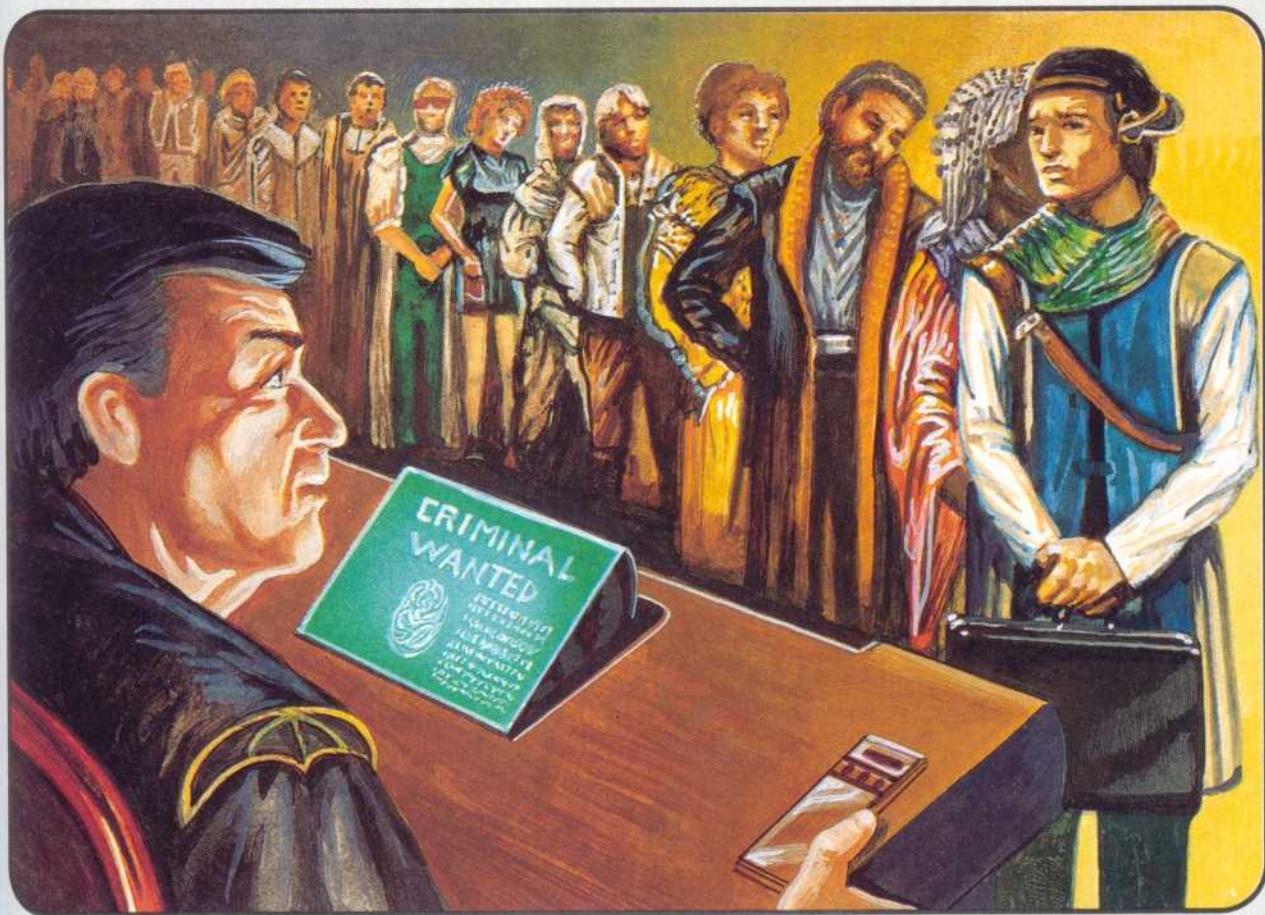
An appointment to the Court lasts 20 years, but no Justice may hold office for more than a single term. Each stellar nation appoints a single Justice to the Court. Each year, the Justices decide among themselves who will serve as Chief Justice, the individual with final responsibility for establishing the order in which the Justices hear cases and render their decisions. The Galactic Court operates year-round. Though the Justices are not required to sit in a single room to argue out their cases, they normally do.

The Galactic Court holds powers similar to those of the courts of the Borealis Republic and the Union of Sol. It can impeach any other Concord official, including nation-appointed ministers. A majority vote is required to begin the impeachment proceedings, and a two-thirds majority is needed to impeach. The Court is quick to hear all appeals brought into its jurisdiction, normally hearing a case within a month of filing, though politically sensitive cases are sometimes delayed for years.

With contact with the Verge still new, the Court is bracing itself for a storm of appeals from the surviving outposts applying for independence. So far, Verge-related appeals have centered around old claims of system ownership between competing stellar nations. Chief Justice Sheila Lecoq (Borealin) has scheduled cases to be heard, through a Grid link, on Bluefall in the coming year. The most hotly contested claim is a renewed effort by VoidCorp to absorb the sesheyans on Grith into the corporate structure. VoidCorp wants the Court to set aside the ruling of Ari Mahdra, a Concord Administrator who recognized sesheyan independence on Grith in 2499. Officially, Lecoq is waiting for all sides to file their claims and for an open space on the Court's docket, some year in the future. In fact, she's convinced that a vote at the current time would not favor VoidCorp and might further aggravate tensions in the region.

### CONCORD ASSEMBLY

This is the largest group of elected representatives within the Galactic Concord, containing more than 1,200 representatives from Concord worlds, colonies, and outposts. The Assembly is always in session, meeting daily on a secure node of the Grid. Members travel to Concord Assemblies for formal meetings at least once a year. The Concord Assembly only has jurisdiction within Concord Neutralities.



Laws are passed by a simple majority, and debate is limited to what a representative chooses to view on his gridcaster. Once through the Assembly, a measure goes directly to the Consulate. If approved by the Consulate, it becomes law.

The Assembly has taken only a minor interest in the Verge, since certain parts of the area—such as the Ignatius system, Hammer's Star, and the *Lighthouse*—are technically Concord Neutralities. Until the diplomatic tangles are resolved, however, the Verge has no representation in the Assembly.

### GALACTIC BANK

The Galactic Bank is one of the most powerful, yet unassuming, branches of the Concord. Its powers shape the economies of all the stellar nations and ensure the financial stability of the Concord itself. Yet few citizens actually notice it.

The Galactic Bank is responsible for establishing a uniform currency (the Concord dollar); insuring the integrity of all banks; providing secure data exchange between stellar banks, corporations, and individuals; investigating failed banks and questionable loans; and establishing borrowing rates between stellar banks. While the Galactic Bank contains dozens of bureaus, each is responsible for its own specific task, such as security or research. To the average citizen, these departments are virtually unseen. Operating through offices in Old Space and the Verge, the financial branch of the Galactic Concord quietly makes sure that transactions are safely conducted. It doesn't look for headlines.

The Regulator General heads the Galactic Bank and guides thousands of regulators who conduct investigations. The regulators work with other government branches toward the common goal of unifying the galactic currency, as agreed in the Treaty of Concord. Bank regulators roam the Stellar Ring and Open Space, ascertaining that fair practices govern the distrib-

ution of the Concord dollar. The t'sa Talox Tesla is the current Regulator General, serving a five-year appointment.

### CHANCELLOR

Elected by citizens of the Concord to a six-year term, the Chancellor directs all aspects of the executive branch, including the military abroad and police forces at home. The executive branch carries out orders from the Assembly and the Consulate. As the commander-in-chief of Star Force, the Concord Defense Corps, and the Concord Marines, and the ultimate overseer of the Concord Administrators, the Chancellor wields considerable influence over the affairs of the Concord.

The current Chancellor, Tor Rustoski, began his six-year term in 2500. He was a StarMech hero from the Second Galactic War who entered politics following a famed Old Space battle. His popularity has yet to be challenged by a major crisis. Rustoski spends most of his days insuring his popularity by keeping a careful eye on affairs in the Stellar Ring and Open Space.

Vice Chancellor Elizabeth Fortuna and dozens of Directors control various departments of the executive branch. At least one director is always resident in any Concord Neutrality, and many directors travel from system to system to keep a close watch on their wards. They are appointed to the offices by the Chancellor and confirmed by the Assembly.

### CONCORD DIPLOMATIC SERVICE

The Concord is deeply involved in galactic affairs, and the Chancellor commands a vast number of diplomatic functionaries in one of the executive branch's largest departments, the Concord Diplomatic Service. The current Director of the Diplomatic Service is Ihsan Karra, a resident of the Concord Sagittarius Neutrality.

At the foundation of the Diplomatic Service are the ambas-

TABLE S4: RANKS OF THE CONCORD MILITARY

## ENLISTED RANKS

Star Force
Spaceman 3rd Class
Spaceman 2nd Class
Spaceman
Petty Officer 3rd Class
Petty Officer 2nd Class
Petty Officer
Chief Petty Officer
Sr. Chief Petty Officer
Master Chief Petty Officer
Warrant Officer*

Concord Marines
Private
1st Private
Lance Corporal
Corporal
Sergeant
Staff Sergeant
First Sergeant
Master Sergeant
Sergeant-Major
Warrant Officer*

## OFFICER RANKS

Star Force
Ensign
Lieutenant, J.G.
Lieutenant
Lt. Commander
Commander
Captain
Commodore
Rear Admiral
Vice Admiral
Sector Admiral

Concord Marine
2nd Lieutenant
1st Lieutenant
Captain
Major
Lieutenant. Colonel
Colonel
Brigadier General
Major General
Adjutant General
General

Command Size
None (assigned to a unit)
Cutter/platoon
Corvette/company
Frigate/battalion
Destroyer/Cruiser
Dreadnought/brigade
Sector/division
Fortress Ship
Fleet/Marine commander
District, system, or world

\* Promotion to warrant officer is only granted to those rare enlisted personnel with special technical skills who have earned the respect of their peers and commanding officers. Years of service is also an important requirement, but not every long-serving Chief or Sergeant-Major receives a promotion to Warrant Officer.

sadors in each large, settled system of the Concord Neutralities and Protectorates. These ambassadors operate as field agents, and command staffs of as many as 1,000 who keep tabs on various planets in a system, major urban centers, military readiness, local legislation, and taxation. They also work closely with the Concord Investigative Bureau.

The ambassadors assign deputy ambassadors to watch over specific cities, planets, and installations, and to investigate charges and conditions throughout the system.

## CONCORD INVESTIGATIVE BUREAU

Little information is available about "the Silent Bureau," but it is believed that the Concord's intelligence-gathering arm is based on the Taurean Star Republic's Strategic Information Agency, which had many agents in place throughout the Stellar Ring before that nation's collapse in GW2.

## CONCORD MILITARY

The Concord military is split into four branches: Star Force, the Defense Corps, the Marines, and the Administrators. All of these branches report to the Chancellor, Tor Rustoski.

For a military scraped together from volunteers, outdated or damaged ships, and the shattered armies of defunct nations, the Concord Military has done a remarkable job of training, upgrading, and unifying its forces. In part, this is due to the sense of shared mission that Concordans rely on. The Concord has also benefited from substantial military advice and materiel from the 'tsa, who view the Concord as the best chance for retaining their independence.

## STAR FORCE

Star Force is the pride of the Concord military; its motto is *"Excellence outshining the stars."* Thirty years ago, Star Force existed only as a plan in the mind of a few diplomats. Today, Star Force is the strongest naval force in the galaxy, patrolling all of explored space, from the heart of Old Space to the farthest systems of the Verge. The men and women of Star Force keep humanity safe from alien threats—and from itself.

While the Concord has plenty of funding to produce or procure state-of-the-art naval vessels, the pilots, engineers, crew, and commanders of those vessels give Star Force its edge. Star Force personnel exude a cool confidence when dealing with enemies. The officers of the Star Force have alloyed their unique

strengths and their individual backgrounds to form the core of the stellar navy. Even though Star Force's personnel numbers more than 4 million, it can afford to recruit only the best from an annual applicant pool larger than the size of its membership.

The selection process to attend the officers' academies is even more intense. Five years of officer training produces ensigns honored to serve, and three Star Force academies prepare officers for service. Each Neutrality boasts an academy, but Viction, on Concord itself, is considered the best of the best.

The most active branch of Star Force on the frontier is the Concord Survey Service, a scouting, surveying, and first contact organization. The CSS is devoted not just to patrolling the borders of human space, but to pushing beyond them into unknown and unsettled territory. It frequently assists colonists on new worlds by maintaining supplies and communications, and it tracks the movement of pirates and outlaw vessels along the frontier. The CSS frequently hires independent explorers to visit new worlds or conduct geological surveys of promising planets.

## CONCORD DEFENSE CORPS

The Concord Defense Corps, or CDC, is the principal branch of the Concord military. Numbering more than 11 million sentients under arms, its mission is defined by its motto: *"We defend the galaxy."* The CDC protects all settled regions of explored space, including Concord systems, planets, and stations. With bases throughout the Stellar Ring, the CDC stands on the front line of international conflict.

The CDC is an entirely volunteer force and has the highest turnover in the Concord military. This turnover stems from the Concordan desire to serve; doing a few years in the CDC is a common way for a citizen to realize that desire. Although this frustrates the generals who must organize this large and dispersed army, the depths of its ready reserves also mean that if the Concord ever mobilizes for war, the CDC can triple its numbers in less than a year.

## CONCORD MARINES

The Marines are the Concord's elite force. Their motto is *"Eager to Strike."* It's their job to strike and hold targets on the front lines. Numbering fewer than a million, the Concord Marines make up for small numbers with a well-trained ferocity. Marines serve in planetary assaults, hazardous peacekeeping duties, and frontier defense. When the Concord expects trouble—or wants to stop some—they send in the best: the Marines.

A single master academy offers the two years of training required to join. Training doesn't end there; the veterans that formed the Marines' heart 30 years ago made sure that training never ends. While units and whole divisions of the CDC and even Star Force report less than combat readiness, the Marines by their very nature must be ready for a state of war at all times. In these times of peace, they practice their battle talents with the only worthy opponents—each other.

### CONCORD ADMINISTRATORS

The best of the Concord's servants are ordained as Concord Administrators, easily identified by the tri-staff that signifies their office. Trained to embody the best that the Concord has to offer, Administrators bear a heavy burden, as reflected by their motto: *'Our duty is peace.'*

The Administrators' history extends back to the first days of planetary colonization in the Sol system. Concerned about conflict between the multinational settlements, the superpowers of the day agreed to create the United Administrators in 2073. Controlled by an independent organization, the Administrators preserved order during humanity's era of peace. Eventually, though, the new colonial empires and the strains of interstellar politics grew beyond the power of the Administrators to control.

With the Treaty of Concord, the Administrators were reborn. The Concord now oversees the Administrators and commissions small groups to oversee the lawless edges of humanity. By Concord law, Administrators are authorized to arrest, convict, and sentence criminals out in the lonely depths of space. Most of the time, Administrators bring miscreants to a public trial; it's good publicity, and it demonstrates the price of breaking Concord law. Sometimes, though, Administrators are left with little choice but to execute summary punishment.

The Galactic Concord prides itself on a rigorous training regimen that results in few abuses of power. Applicants for the honor of Administrator duty are numerous, a result of both Concordans' willingness to support the peace and the natural ambition for such a respected position in interstellar society. Fewer than 1 in 100 of the applicants are invited to attend Ascension, the college of the Administrators on Concord.

### THE VERGE

The political pressures that ignited the Second Galactic War still prevail in the Stellar Ring and beyond. With commendable foresight, the Concord has recognized that these problems are spilling over into the Verge. Unable to address the danger directly for fear of starting another conflict, the Concord is using the Verge as a testing ground for resolving the bitter rivalries of Old Space. Perhaps if a particular approach succeeds in the Verge, it will have a similar effect back in the older regions.

Chancellor Rustoski is keeping a close eye on Verge activities, and the rumors from Hammer's Star are a cause for great

**TABLE S5:  
ADMINISTRATOR RANKS**

Rank	Command Size
Cadet	None
Senior Cadet	None
Field Administrator	None
Deputy Administrator	20 Administrators
Administrator	City
Chief Administrator	Planet
System Administrator	Star system
District Administrator	Stellar cluster
Sector Administrator	Concord Neutrality
Administrator General	All Administrators
Chancellor	The Galactic Concord

concern. Most of the stellar nations don't believe the Verge contains a tangible threat, and Chancellor Rustoski finds it difficult to change opinions while he remains unsure of the situation. Without a serious loss of troops or ships, the Chancellor has no proof to present to the Consulate.

The Consulate is a viper's nest of political intrigue and debate. The Committee on Verge Integration has only a few members who have an interest in what is going on in the area; some of their motives are less than altruistic. It's obvious that any resolution to reintegrate Verge politics with those of the Stellar Ring would fail, and it's equally apparent that many of the stellar nations don't want the Verge to fall into the hands of the Galactic Concord. An unspoken truce currently reigns.

### JOINING THE CONCORD

In 2472, approximately 500 billion humans and alien sentients became citizens of the Concord. Most were given no choice; the Treaty's new boundaries dictated the change. For others, each home government provided an incentive for its citizens to join the Concord. Defeated nations transferred all their military units to the Concord at the end of the war; since their old nations were extinct, these units became loyal to the Concord.

Today, the decision to join the Concord is always voluntary—if anything, the Concord's high standards make immigration more difficult than ever. In practice, the process is fairly simple; the applicant just files a few electronic forms with his home government. To gain citizenship, an applicant must have one of two qualifications. The first is to prove status as a political refugee. The second is to demonstrate a skill that Concord officials consider valuable. Of course, some citizens, such as Employees of Void-Corp, can't legally terminate their former citizenship.

As with all changes in nationality, heroes who become Concordans after hero creation keep the game benefits they began with, and do not gain the benefits of their new nation.

### THE TRI-STAFF

This impressive-looking and powerful weapon is a Concord Administrator's most prized possession, serving both as a badge of office and an effective means of self-defense. It consists of a massive three-pronged blade at the end of a 2-meter-long staff (see the illustration on page 175 of the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook*). When the device is activated, it is capable of dealing out large amounts of energy damage—and it exudes a force field that improves its wielder's Strength and Dexterity resistance modifiers by 1 step. Game statistics for the weapon are as follows:

Skill	Acc	Range	Type	Damage	Actions	Clip Size	Clip Cost	Hide	Mass	Avail	Cost
Melee-powered	-1	Personal	En/0	d8+2w/3d4+1w/d6m	3	12	200	-	5	Res	5000

# ALIENS

Humans dominate the explored reaches of the Orion Arm. This seems odd. More than a dozen sentient species have been discovered, and five of these have taken to spacefaring in significant numbers. And yet collectively, the nonhuman sentient species equal only about one-fortieth the sum of humans living in the Stellar Ring. Why have humans grown while others lag behind?

The standard and popular answer is the stardrive—discovered by lucky humans. It allowed them to explode out of their home system long before other species. Unfortunately, this solution, while politically neutral, doesn't answer every aspect of the problem. Several factors are at work, many of them unique to the circumstances of every species.

One species' low population can be traced to its low numbers when the first stardrive was constructed. Fewer than a million fraal were living in the Sol system in 2160. Given such a humble beginning, the fraal situation is explained. For other species, other factors are at work. Among the weren, sesheyans, and mechalans, much of the population has chosen to stay home. Without the manpower demands of a wave of colonization, their numbers have been much more stable.

Even these explanations don't offer a complete picture. A realistic and neutral observer couldn't help considering the effects of species bias. In enlightened parts of the galaxy, equal rights and consideration are a matter of course. But many parts of space—in the Stellar Ring and beyond—can't be so pleasantly described. To be fair, interspecies discrimination is uncommon, but it exists. With humans outnumbering aliens by such a huge proportion, many humans live their lives never seeing a sentient alien other than on holo.

## FRAAL

*"Let us speak. There are humans present."*

—Lirist Jil Oric, 2124

By now, fraal and humans should be as close as brothers. They've known one another for almost 400 years, and they colonized space together. In the 26th century, fraal can be found as members of every significant society. The truth is, though, that fraal are in many ways still the most alien sentients that humanity deals with. A full third of the fraal live almost completely apart from humans. They're from an ancient culture, even if their history lies mostly forgotten, and the differences between human and fraal loom larger than those between many of humanity's newer friends.

Legally, fraal enjoy the strongest protection under the law and suffer the least discrimination. As humanity shares the credit for the stardrive with the fraal, it's pretty well accepted that the fraal should be given equal consideration in other matters as well. Indeed, the respect given to fraal borders on veneration in some parts; this is especially true of fraal who have experienced their 300th or 400th birthdays.

As for the fraal themselves, their culture has been deeply divided since before 2124. The younger generation of fraal, called Builders by humans, pushed hard for contact with humanity. The older, more conservative Wanderers had become entrenched in their opposition, by then millennia old. This division remains in place in the 26th century, not surprising given the fraal lifespan. The eldest fraal still remember the arguments. As the centuries have passed, the Wanderers' numbers have

declined as more and more of their city-driveships leave human space in search of their homeworld. Those left behind are primarily the Builders, whose numbers continue to mushroom.

This population shift is largely a result of choices the two cultures have made. The Wanderers prefer life aboard city-ships. These lonely voyaging craft can be found within all stellar nations, starfalling from one end of space to the other. For the most part, the dwellers of the city-ships avoid contact with the humans they pass by, and the humans extend the same courtesy. Human folklore considers these fraal truly mysterious, as they were in the days when unidentified objects wandered over the cities of Earth. But the nomadic life has never been explained. Maybe the wandering serves a purpose that even the fraal have forgotten, but for the fraal it's the life they're used to.

The younger generation, the Wanderers say, has become tainted by the humans they watched for so long. The Builders have left the city-ships behind. Instead, they live intermingled with humans, taking up human causes and concerns. Fully absorbed in human society, they share in human interests and culture. They fight in what many would call humanity's wars, as the Galactic Wars demonstrated. They are in all ways active citizens of the stellar nations. They live in human-dominated cities and find employment side by side with humans.

## WEREN

*"Of course I care whether I live or die. Did you think that big meant stupid?"*

—Lt. Commander Raiaza, 2500

In February 2246, the Orlamu Theocracy made contact with a second sentient race. The ferocious weren living on Kurg were just emerging from their own Middle Ages. The discovery of the printing press was changing their feudal states, and weren explorers discovered a second continent. The invention of black powder weapons threatened to end the ancient and honorable codes of warfare.

The best statement of Orlamu success during first contact is that Jamal Abuweren ("Father of the Weren") is a saint among both Orlamists and weren. Despite more than three centuries of human contact, weren culture and spirit are unpolluted. The weren remain a proud people, determined to preserve their way of life. On Kurg, the clans still rule through a well-established system of feudalism and scutage. By mutual agreement, Orlamu law forbids the import of advanced technology, especially weapons. Two isolated starports in Kurg's barren regions are the only sign that humans ever visit.

At the same time, a galaxy of opportunity has opened for individual weren. Depending on a clan's opinion of humanity and space, they send either their best or worst representatives to one of Kurg's starports. Disaffected weren also make the trip, fleeing an unhappy life or hopeful of a better one in the stars above. Whatever a weren's reason for coming, a delegation of Orlamus greets him or her at the starport. A week of interviews confirms that the émigré is committed to leaving Kurg. In fact, the Orlamus discourage weren from emigrating; they want the candidate to weigh the decision carefully. Once a weren has left, the Orlamus discourage him from returning and contaminating Kurg with foreign ways.

A weren who leaves Kurg immediately gains temporary citizenship in the Theocracy, and an overwhelming majority of

were attend an Orlamu college. Crusade, a respected military academy orbiting the Orlamu capital, is a popular choice. But the Orlamu diplomats provide other options as well, many of them outside the borders of the Theocracy. If a weren expresses an interest in exploring these options, representatives from each stellar nation, including the Concord, have offices in Kurg orbit. The fierce warriors of Kurg are in high demand by stellar nations. The weren are prized assets within any nation's military force.

The many weren who take up lives within the Theocracy can choose careers in business, academia, or the military. In the Theocracy, the final option is to enter the priesthood, and a surprisingly large number of weren find themselves inspired to take up orders as Orlamists. Once they join the church, weren are fierce supporters of the Orlamist faith and the Theocracy. They're among the most successful missionaries, traveling throughout the Stellar Ring and beyond.

Whether they stay at home, join the Theocracy, or travel abroad, weren are among the most respected sentients in explored space. Part of this respect can be attributed to the weren physique and their well-deserved reputation as powerful warriors. Part of it comes from the value that weren culture attaches to loyalty. Proverbially, when a weren elects to place his loyalty—whether to clan, nation, religion, or friend—it's impossible to shake.

## MECHALUS

*"We agree."*

*—Phi Sota, 2273*

The third sentient species to be brought into humanity's fold, the aleerins were discovered and adopted by a young stellar nation just as the weren were. For the aleerins, though, the meeting took on a different, though benevolent, tone. Rigunmor diplomats were astounded by the wonders of Aleer, and paid the natives a compliment by sparing no expense to demonstrate the advantages in an alliance with the Rigunmor Star Consortium. To the amazement of the Rigunmor delegation, prepared for months of arbitration, the aleerins signed a commercial agreement after only a few days.

Although the Rigunmors attributed the aleerins' haste to their appreciation of Rigunmor society or to the aleerins' ability to communicate quickly through their Grid, the truth was that the aleerins were especially vulnerable at the time. Three centuries previously, the warlike and expansionist aleerins had discovered and fought a sentient species within their own star system. The complete annihilation of this species produced a revolution on Aleer and a radical change in aleerin culture. The aleerins vowed to put aside their violent ways.

More radical pacifists, the uncompromising Negationists, swore that their own biological components were incompatible with peace. Shedding the last remnants of organic life, the Negationists became one with their computers. After stripping aleerin military vessels of their weaponry, they departed in the aleerin fleet. Those who remained on Aleer still felt the impact of their departure for decades afterward, as the fleet slowly sailed out of radio communication range.

Though it wasn't obvious on the surface, the Rigunmors had encountered a species just recovering from incredible internal turmoil. And though it never became an issue, the aleerins had no fleet. The Rigunmor proposal to incorporate Aleer within the Rigunmor sphere of influence met no resistance. The aleerins even accepted the name that humans gave them: mechalus.

Shedding their old name seemed to serve as the last element of the revolution.

The mechalus's unique abilities and technology have contributed to the Star Consortium's growth as an interstellar power. Though most mechalus refused to fight in the Second Galactic War, the indirect effects of mechalus assistance proved essential to the Rigunmors, especially against computer-savvy VoidCorp. Even the most pacifistic mechalus, it turned out, did not consider Grid warfare a form of violence. The mechalus don't speak about their contribution to the war effort often, but surely they had something to do with the Consortium's freedom from crippling electronic attack.

Today, the mechalus are recognized as the unquestioned masters of computer and Grid technology; they are the front-line defenders of Rigunmor Grid sectors against hostile tampering. In fact, their skill at manipulating the Grid is so advanced, only the best of Insight and VoidCorp can match them. For the Rigunmors and those lucky enough to secure mechalus labor contracts from the Consortium, mechalus technology provides a powerful source of efficiency and protection.

## SESHEYAN

*"It's a pleasure to serve, Vice President. How else may I be of assistance?"*

*—RX839 58LIE (Easodan), 2483*

Outside the borders of VoidCorp, many sentients believe that the sesheyans of Grith got a raw deal. In fact, the entertainment industry relishes the situation as a forum for social criticism. In holofilm, even the most nefarious sesheyan assassins are depicted as unwilling pawns to be pitted or even rescued. It's a sure bet that holos depicting such plots, or anything involving rebellious sesheyans, don't make it inside VoidCorp.

VoidCorp survey ships landed on Sheya on July 13, 2274. Since that day, the sesheyans have fallen under the control of the corporate state. The sesheyans call it *aiketa*, "The Day of Ghosts." That day, and the subsequent signing of the Sesheyan Compact, ended the sesheyan's peaceful if primitive lifestyle. The interstellar community, represented by the Terran alliances, could do no more than stand by and express shock and dismay. Even the sesheyans who avoided conscription into the ranks couldn't completely avoid VoidCorp's influence. VoidCorp personnel wander Sheya at will, inspecting, analyzing, and monitoring all of sesheyan society.

VoidCorp and its Employees, however, see the entire affair differently. VoidCorp found the sesheyans living in terrible straits, victims of a stagnant culture. Far worse off than even the most destitute VoidCorp Employee, the sesheyans were living on the edge, forced to fend off dangerous predators with bone knives and animal skins. They lived in crude houses cut into trees. VoidCorp brought the sesheyans out of the darkness of their own ignorance, bringing enlightenment to the dark jungle world. VoidCorp provided the sesheyans with humanity's most advanced technology, and invited them to join a growing, successful society in the stars.

At what cost? None. The sesheyans became VoidCorp citizens—Employees, actually—just like any other. They have clear and equal rights under official corporate memoranda. They have equal, if not superior, opportunities for advancement, given their unique skills. The elevation of more than a dozen sesheyans to vice presidential level (ZA or above) demonstrates VoidCorp's commitment to promotion through achievement.

It's true that sesheyans are rarely found outside VoidCorp,

but their numbers were never very large. A few million among 17 billion have made their way, illegally, to join other stellar nations. Some escaped with Insight during the Second Galactic War. And, to answer the complaints of many, VoidCorp legally recruited almost half a billion sesheyans to join in the formation of the Galactic Concord. Even so, 95% of the sesheyans remain productive members of VoidCorp.

## T'SA

*"Of course! Graviton wave compression! Dark matter duodecim! Tachyons! If only we'd realized!"*

—Wisek Wopli, 2296

Humans got lucky. That's the only explanation the t'sa will accept. They lucked into the discovery of dark matter physics and the mass reactor less than a century after discovering the fusion generator. They lucked out again when, having only just begun space exploration, an older, wiser species simply handed them working knowledge of gravity technology. And luck blessed humanity a third time—again with fraal assistance—with the largely accidental invention of the stardrive.

The t'sa did it the hard way, without the helping hands of friends and fortune. The t'sa built up their expertise and civilization over 20 millennia—longer than human history even pretends to remember. The t'sa were developing their solar system while humans were erecting tetrahedrons in the desert. When humans confirmed that their world was indeed round, the t'sa sent their first robotic probes into the depths of interstellar space. And around the time humanity detonated an atomic bomb, the first t'sa colonists fell into a deep cryogenic sleep and began their voyage to nearby stars.

When humans met the t'sa in 2296, the t'sa had claimed five star systems near their homeworld. A group of independent explorers were the first to meet the t'sa, and that may be the one bit of blind luck that t'sa society has had. Even though fate blessed humanity with the stardrive, none of humanity's young stellar nations could press a clear claim to the t'sa and their stars. T'sa independence was the spark that lit the First Galactic War. Standing on the sidelines, the t'sa observed their fascinating new neighbors, and slowly made friends.

It was a challenge for both species. The t'sa disliked human arrogance, nationalism, and belief in a manifest human destiny for the galaxy. They're rightfully proud of their accomplishments as a people. As for humans, even the most enlightened were unprepared for a species that demanded equal consideration. With the exception of the fraal, humanity was used to loftily dispensing freedom to the species it encountered.

The t'sa weren't about to take handouts from anyone, and they didn't sit idly by while humans colonized the galaxy. They took the opportunity during both galactic wars to settle a few new systems with their own fast driveships. These planets were settled with incredible speed, because their ships could each carry millions of t'sa settlers in cryogenic sleep in their cargo holds, eliminating the need for life support by treating the settlers like bulk goods. Soon swarms of hard-working colonists were raising t'sa cities on new worlds. Within a few months, tens of millions of t'sa could settle a world or an entire system. When humanity looked around after GW1, the T'sa Cluster had expanded by three densely populated new worlds. After GW2, the t'sa had settled fifteen more. Today, the T'sa Cluster numbers twenty-three worlds, and the t'sa have petitioned the Concord to settle forty-one new worlds in nearby Concord space. The case is currently under review.

The t'sa today aren't totally content, but they can be proud that no human government presumes to govern for them. Officially, the T'sa Cluster is a protectorate of the Galactic Concord. For all practical purposes, the t'sa have complete independence within their space. The t'sa also have standing invitations to become citizens of any stellar nation. Almost a tenth of the t'sa have left their homelands behind to join human affairs.

Exciting humans provide an answer to t'sa restlessness. The t'sa, more than any sentient species, are a curious people. They like to know, to find things out, to discover. To many t'sa, humanity's scientific and stellar explorations are irresistible. It's impossible not to join in.

## OTHER SPECIES

The galaxy has proven itself an exciting place. In the millions of systems visited by the sentient species, explorers have encountered literally trillions of different species. Of course, most of the species have only the most rudimentary, animal intelligence. Only a small percentage have evolved to reason and tool use. About 50 sentient species have been discovered, the exact number depending on whose scale of sentience is applied.

In the Verge alone, several sentient species have been discovered. The deepfallen of Bluefall in the Aegis system are shy aquatic humanoids who went undiscovered for years. The bhruu of the planet Bhruusil in the Karnath system are a plodding herd species; they show some curiosity about other worlds, but seem reluctant to leave their herds behind.

Many other species remain unclassified with respect to intelligence; gauging higher-order behavior is a difficult process that can take years. The warlike ke'kekt of the planet Ignatius in the Antigua system, for example, were initially dismissed as marauders without real intelligence. When they overran a Tauran Star Republic colony using simple weapons, opinions of their level of intelligence changed, though they were still considered little more than savages. Further contact and analysis have shown the ke'kekt to have a sophisticated—but extremely xenophobic—culture. Similar misjudgments are frequent occurrences in the exploration and classification of alien sentience.

Of all these species, circumstances prevent all but a few from taking to the stars. For some, it's a matter of biology; they're ill fit for interstellar travel. For others, it's a matter of choice. Some species don't feel the drive to push outward. Finally, in a few cases, those who found them chose to leave the species alone. Maybe they're not ready. Or, despite their intelligence, we have nothing in common and no way to communicate. And so, while one in 40 sentients is an alien, only about one in 500 is not of human, fraal, weren, mechalus, sesheyan, or t'sa origin.

## EXTERNALS

Many alien species have been encountered only in passing. Since the homeworlds of these species are unknown, they are collectively referred to as "externals"—not of human space. Most externals are sighted once and never seen again. Characterizations of their technology vary from superhuman to barely spaceworthy.

Some externals speak to humans; sometimes the first encounter ends in bloodshed, but it's often unclear whether they are species from outside the Stellar Ring or species from an unexplored frontier world. Externals are among the mysteries hidden by the sheer volume of the universe.

*They abandoned us for a hundred years. Did they expect us to welcome them back with open arms? Let's get real. The Arrivers see a lot of things around here that they want. And they have some things we'd like to have. Fine. What we need to decide now is whether we're willing to tie our fates with theirs one more time. And, if the answer is no, what we're willing to do about it . . .*

—President Michael Kevik

Life out on the frontier is quite different from the decadent lives led by the teeming trillions of Old Space. While a Verger sacrifices some modern comforts, the benefits can't be overlooked. Even the most rigid of the frontier governments in the Verge fail to match the level of intrusive control imposed by VoidCorp, the Nariac Domain, or even the Borealis Republic. Vergers are free to come and go as they please, and most of them take a great interest in ensuring that this freedom is preserved.

## ATTITUDES

With a population close to 5 billion sentients of every species and nation, the Vergers are tough to categorize. They've grown up in all the settled star systems that had little contact with one another during the Long Silence, when the Verge lost contact with the Stellar Ring. Even now, they don't always have much to say to each other; the citizens of Lison have little in common with the freebooters on the prison planet Penates. There is no unifying cultural set of assumptions that works throughout the Verge, as Arrivers quickly learn.

Though all Vergers agree on the necessity of dealing with the stellar nations, they disagree on how to go about it. In general, Vergers can be divided into three loose camps based on their reaction to the stellar nations' return: loyalists, separatists, and the undecided.

### LOYALISTS

At one extreme lie the enthusiastic Vergers of star systems such as Ignatius, Tychus, Coulomb, and Mantebron. All Vergers agree that the Long Silence forced terrible days on the people of the Verge. Most colonies were less than 20 years old at the start of GW2. The adolescent colonies were unprepared for the disappearance of their providers. The settlements in the Vieron and Aegis systems disappeared entirely, no doubt thanks to their inability to support themselves.

Many young colonies survived with constant diligence, sacrifice, and occasional desperate measures. Without resupply ships from the Stellar Ring, the colonies were forced to set up makeshift trading circles among themselves and improvise ways to persevere. Every system has tales of the heroes who led the way and made the hard choices necessary for survival. Even so, the loss of life was high, and many Vergers squeezed out a miserable existence on their new worlds.

The return of the stellar nations has been an unexpected boon. They bring the latest technology, resources, and benefits of a 26th-century lifestyle. To a stellar nation, the resources a small colony requires are next to nothing. To the people of worlds one step away from collapse, the nations are saviors. How can they be blamed for wanting a better life?

Variously known as patriots, sympathizers, or collaborators, loyalist Vergers usually endorse a quick reunification with the

stellar nation that founded their colony. In a few instances, the particulars of the situation have led loyalists to seek a new patron from the Stellar Ring. The same individuals adopt stellar nation cultures and fashions, and they support groups dedicated to the peaceful reintegration of the Verge.

### SEPARATISTS

Not every citizen of the Verge thinks well of the stellar nations' return. Despite the difficulties that the Long Silence imposed, many Vergers can't help looking back on their survival and hard work with pride. Sure, there were tough times, but that's no reason to throw away all the good work that's been done. The Verge has been home to incredible successes and much native ingenuity. Independence gives Verge systems an opportunity to reinvest in their own worlds and interests rather than waste resources catering to the demands of a ruling council located 1,000 light-years away in Old Space.

What sane Verger would prefer to be ruled by an emperor or oligarchy that he or she will never see? Most people find the time to take greater interest in their leadership when they can influence its decisions. In the Verge, local governments are around to see what Vergers want and need. And they're much more likely to be interested in the needs of a mere 40 million citizens. History has proven the capricious stellar nations less than trustworthy. Many of the nations lied, cajoled, or even abducted citizens in order to get them here. Indeed, how long can Vergers expect the bellicose stellar nations to be around? The last peace lasted only 30 years, and as the stellar nations rearm and compete, who can expect this one to last much longer? When war comes, the Verge will have to do without yet again.

Some separatists respond with arms when pressed. The Concord quelled conflicts between stellar nation forces and separatists in the Annahoy and Oberon systems. More radical separatists—convinced that the stellar nations have already gone too far—have forged terrorist groups such as the Concord Free Verge, determined to remove the infection of stellar-nation influence. They don't hesitate to turn to violence, especially actions that gather mass attention. As more and more Arrivers settle the Verge, these attacks will surely grow more frequent.

### UNDECIDED

Of course, most Vergers don't reach such a level of fanaticism even if their personal sympathies are for loyalist or separatist. They remain undecided. It's clear that a marriage with the stellar nations offers many advantages, but it's equally obvious that the Verge systems will give up something special should they become just another outpost of stellar national identity. The last few years of growth show that the stellar nations are here to stay; what happens next is anyone's guess.

### GAME BENEFITS

The youth and diversity among Verge systems has yet to produce specializations that alter the dynamics of hero creation. Vergers raised on a world dominated by one of the stellar nation's cultures share in that stellar nation's advantages (see the individual system descriptions). Vergers from independent systems are treated as Independents (see page 80) and share their benefits.

# INDEPENDENTS

*"Shut up. You can't tell me what to do."*

*—Sarah Duarte, freeholder*

Over the last 200 years, growth in the availability of interstellar travel has created a new class of non-citizens. During the Second Galactic War and immediately thereafter, the number of unpatriated sentients in the galaxy reached incredible heights. An estimated 1 billion humans, about 1 in every 10,000, live their lives unacknowledged by any nation, willingly forgotten by the political entities of the day.

## ATTITUDES

Most citizens can't help feeling a little envy of the independents of the galaxy. Of the trillions of sentients in the galaxy, only these free spirits can truly claim to be free. They're not beholden to the whims and caprices of governments. Legally, they have no obligation to answer to many of the demands of citizenship. They don't need to support a patron government with income and property taxes.

The overwhelming majority of sentients choose to remain citizens of a stellar nation. Many don't have the opportunity or the means to renounce their citizenship. And even if they had an opportunity to renounce the nation of their birth, most would stay at home.

Why? Safety and comfort, first of all. In exchange for taxes and duties, citizens are assured of a secure environment. Police protect them against crime. Armies and navies patrol space to ward off attack from any foreign quarters. And even the most oppressive stellar nations demonstrate some concern for the well-being of their people. Medical care and the necessities of survival are given to the poor or elderly. The leadership in all stellar nations realizes that it's in their best interest to have a population that's at least mollified, if not entirely content.

Independents and expatriates can't rely on anyone. No one protects them against felons or criminals, and they stand undefended in the event of war. Legally, they have no right to visas or diplomatic papers that allow travel between nations and star systems, a luxury taken for granted by those in established space. Independents have no embassy, no court to appeal to, no backups. Faced with aggression, independents have no one in their corner. Against serious attacks, such as those of a stellar nation, they're helpless. More than one independent colony has fallen to the avarice of a powerful government or to simple piracy.

## DIVERSITY

Piratical independents sometimes prey on one another. While anonymity cloaks most pirates, it's clear that most pirates are expatriates themselves. They survive and profit through the robbery of the weak. Strong military forces render the buccaneers harmless in many regions of space; on the frontier, no star system is safe.

Criminals are also independents of a kind. Fleeing prosecution, these exiles roam the star lanes refusing to acknowledge any stellar nation as their patron. Wanted by the law, criminals are forced into a nomadic life, always trying to stay one step ahead of pursuit. They take on new identities in time, some just keep moving. More than any other independent, they feel the vulnerability of operating without a safety net. Some wind up

avoiding prosecution by entering the T'sa Cluster; others strike out for the trackless systems of the Verge.

Not every sentient takes up the independent lifestyle out of a desire to turn bandit or flee criminal prosecution. In the last 200 years, thousands of citizens have abandoned comfortable lives in the Stellar Ring. Forming small bands, these pioneers travel beyond the reach of the stellar nations. Eventually, they find a world that meets their needs. Some of them go to explore new worlds. Some go for the adventure. Some go to escape an oppressive government. And some go to establish a better place for themselves and their descendants.

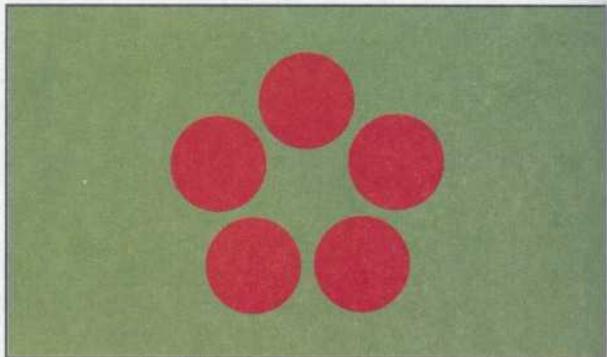
About half of these colonies fail within the first five years. They may succumb to the rigors of an alien environment, or they may fall victim to raids by aliens or corsairs. Just as often, they collapse from within. Internal conflict and small civil wars have struck down many a growing colony. Finally, as the stellar nations grow, many independent colonists, or their descendants, are reabsorbed into the Stellar Ring.

For the greater part of humanity's interstellar history, independents simply didn't exist in interstellar records. Stellar nations occasionally hunted down criminals, but that was about it. That's beginning to change. Though several stellar nations may now regret the decision, the Galactic Concord has the charter to control and administer Open Space, where most independents live. Derek Orthen, the Concord First Secretary, recognized this authority officially by committing scarce Concord ships and Administrators to the frontiers. Today, explorers comb the stars to recontact humanity's lost sons and daughters. And for the first time, serious military resources are being devoted to quelling piracy.

The Verge serves as an example of the Concord's successes and failures. While the campaign to suppress brigands hasn't been a complete success, the Concord has reestablished contact along many frontiers and mapped out the location of many independent settlements, commonly called freeholds. Of course, the problems that the nations' return causes are another headache for the Concord. But for the independents and expatriates, times are more difficult than ever. To preserve their sovereignty, Verge governments have become more organized. As always, the new government comes at the price of the independents' freedoms.

## GAME BENEFITS

Often homeless, the independents live their lives without the advantages of an established culture. Heroes who begin their career as independents gain an additional last resort point.



Flag of the T'sa Cluster

# ANALYSIS

The stellar nations are vast entities, home to trillions. They control thousands of worlds, millions of stars, and power that's difficult to fathom. With each passing year, scholars create terabytes of data that fill the Grid with analysis of the stellar nations' militaries, economies, and politics. Complex equations promise to predict the actions of nations and planets. More important to the average citizen is an understanding of what it means to be a Inseer, an Austrin, or a Thuldian, and what that means to where everyone stands.

For more than 20 years, the Mikada Report compiled annually by Philosopher Trent Mikada, College of Utilitarianism, has performed admirably in introducing students and scholars alike to the depth and diversity of the age. While it embraces the Borealin perspective wholeheartedly, it is widely considered a relatively unbiased source for interstellar trends.

## EXCERPT FROM THE MIKADA REPORT

The efforts of most politicians and policy studies to quantify the powers of the thirteen stellar nations are largely fruitless. Any one nation is strong enough to render hundreds of worlds uninhabitable, slaughter billions of innocents, or perhaps construct a dozen beautiful first worlds. What's more valuable to students today is a comparison of stellar nation economies.

The growth of humanity beyond its home system has allowed the formation of specialized republic states. Or, to put it in pedestrian terms, some stellar nations are better at some things than others. In this précis, we introduce the strengths of the stellar nations via a cursory discussion of the primary fields by which they may be evaluated. Because this broadcast is intended for a public, largely unlearned forum, we shall endeavor to direct our commentary to the simplest explanations.

**Agriculture:** Ignoring the ethical issues, this category includes the harvest of both vegetable and animal crops. Only the Hatire Community has constructed a successful economy from interstellar trade in foodstuffs. That's no real surprise, given the perception that Brethren project as simple people uncomplicated by modern ways. Austrin-Ontis strength in agriculture may be a function of its historical association with explosives, sometimes derived from natural sources. Solars, Inseers, Rigunmors, and our own Republic are all somewhat dependent on others to provide sustenance for the masses.

**Biology:** The study of biology, including human and alien lifeforms, has been a subject of interest to all cultures stemming from Old Earth. As we've indicated, Thuldian medical knowledge has been on the forefront for more than a century. The Kent Hospital Institute, the most famous and most successful hospital in human space, bears witness to the Empire's strength, as do the many breeds of genetically enhanced Thuldians. Insight and StarMech, two nations otherwise heavily invested in high-tech industries, demonstrate clear weakness in this category, relying on medical technology as much as three decades old.

**Chemistry:** Chemical science, including planetology, has seen amazing growth recently. Today, the most advanced studies in the field are devoted to the growing science of terraforming. The overpopulated Solar Union has invested terabillions in research and development over the course of centuries. Unlike other nations, the Union of Sol has been forced to reinvest resources in established space instead of expanding to new territory. To date, their efforts in the 100 light-years around Earth

have paid off handsomely; the Solar Union is home to more habitable planets and more sentients than any other stellar nation, thanks to the well-protected secrets of its scientific community.

**Computer Engineering:** Clearly, we all depend on computers in our daily lives; they assist us at work, guide us in travel, and allow us to communicate. Without computers, the Grid couldn't transmit this report. Only the most foolish of stellar nations can ignore a technology on which so much depends. As has been true since its formation, VoidCorp leads the field; its hardware and software, or imitations based on its models, run on just about every computer, gridcaster, and interface. VoidCorp's rebellious offshoot Insight runs a close second.

**Cybernetics:** Cybernetics allow the middle-class citizen of the 26th century to enjoy more leisure time than ever before. This category includes the technologies that focus on pure robotics and those that marry organic tissue to metal and plastics. Use of cybernetics is common in fields ranging from military to heavy industry, and even the Hatire Community can't completely divest their theocracy from its use. Today, the leaders in cybertechnology are the StarMech Collective and the Nariac Domain for their superiority in robotics and cyborg technology, respectively.

**Entertainment:** Many question our nation's leadership in video, virtual, holographic, and live entertainment. Data from recent economic studies in addition to our own has confirmed that Borealis entertainment media outsell all others. Of course, much of what is popular in the mass market is scorned within our own critical circles. More interesting works of culture exist primarily for the distinctive Borealis palate. Nevertheless, the entertainment industry is the best means by which superior Borealin thought may be absorbed by the interstellar masses.

**Finance:** Not precisely a form of production itself, finance and its professionals facilitate the production of other industries. What may seem the arcane movement of Concord dollars from one place to another represents a truly complex distribution system of buyers, sellers, and independent marketers. Rigumnor merchants are famous for leading both sides of the industry: financing business ventures and coordinating the sale of products throughout explored space. Of course, the finance industry depends on a steady flow of trade goods.

**Grid Engineering:** The newest industry to be included as a category in our report, the importance of the Grid to communications, trade, and even war has become clear in recent years, and has warranted its own category for quite some time. Grid engineering includes the use of local Grids and interstellar communications over drivesats. The primary function of the Grid is to inform and communicate, although for centuries popular media has emphasized the ability of gridpilots to probe into the secrets of the rich and powerful. Insight and VoidCorp technologies offer the best alternatives in a field otherwise mediocre.

**Heavy Industry:** Many stellar nations place great emphasis on heavy construction, which includes infrastructure improvement, advanced building materials, and even large machines. As new colonies are created and developed, heavy industry puts together a workable infrastructure for the young worlds. Despite weathering significant losses of production capital during the GW2, the StarMech Collective has a clear edge over its competitors. Nevertheless, heavy industry is a field that most studies predict will decline in the next decade as more citizens focus on the inner growth and intellectual development

**TABLE S6: INDUSTRIAL CAPACITY**

Industry	A0	BR	HC	IN	ND	OL	OT	RC	SM	TE	US	VC	GC
Agriculture	7.2	3.4	9.6	3.3	5.6	6.4	4.4	3.1	4.6	5.2	2.7	4.2	5.0
Biology	5.3	4.5	5.7	2.5	3.4	3.2	3.6	5.0	2.9	9.4	6.3	5.3	6.3
Chemistry	7.4	5.4	5.6	3.2	3.5	6.1	4.1	5.7	3.4	4.1	9.5	4.2	4.8
Computer Engineering	2.4	5.3	3.2	8.4	4.8	5.2	6.5	6.3	4.6	5.0	5.4	9.1	4.6
Cybernetics	4.3	3.0	1.4	6.0	9.8	5.2	6.7	3.4	6.7	2.4	5.8	7.4	4.3
Entertainment	2.6	9.0	1.5	5.1	2.5	6.9	7.1	6.5	2.9	3.3	6.8	2.9	6.4
Finance	5.3	4.5	2.6	3.3	4.5	5.1	3.7	9.5	3.1	4.8	8.2	6.2	8.7
Grid Engineering	1.4	2.7	1.8	9.7	3.5	5.6	3.1	4.7	2.2	3.4	5.6	7.5	4.4
Heavy Industry	5.2	1.0	5.1	1.4	6.4	4.8	5.4	2.5	9.1	7.3	2.7	6.8	5.6
Military Technology	9.3	2.7	6.5	1.8	5.8	6.3	5.8	6.8	6.0	8.6	4.8	7.2	6.7
Stardrive Technology	3.6	4.6	3.9	2.6	4.7	5.7	9.9	5.0	5.1	6.1	3.8	5.1	7.0
Starship Engineering	2.9	3.4	4.6	1.2	3.5	7.2	6.1	6.6	9.4	6.0	5.5	6.4	4.5
<b>Resource Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>57</b>

The table above, taken from the *Mikada Report of 2499*, is an unsophisticated attempt to evaluate several core industries dominating interstellar markets. Each nation has been given a ranking from 1.0 to 9.9 to illustrate its capacity in each industry.

that peace allows. Both our Republic and Insight have logically chosen not to specialize in such a declining industry.

**Military Technology:** Investment in military research and production remains high more than two decades after the war. Tensions among enemies both old and new haven't really diminished. In addition, frontier governments and independents agree that in troubled times everyone should prepare for the worst. As a result, arms suppliers throughout the galaxy can revel in a booming business. Austrin-Ontis Unlimited and the Thuldan Empire are the first and second largest arms suppliers, respectively. Austrins, whatever their heroic dreams, can rely on the most up-to-date weapons technology in the known galaxy.

**Stardrive Technology:** An extremely specialized industry, the design and construction of stardrives is nonetheless critical to interstellar trade, travel, and war. In addition to being a difficult and important field, stardrive engineering is one of the most lucrative. Despite the stardrive's age—the original design dates from 2260—only the largest corporations and wealthiest scientific teams can become involved with research or development. The Orlamu Theocracy leads in both R&D and production of stardrive technology. Their research continues to identify means to increase the range of the stardrive, although many researchers are more concerned with reliability and mass production of current models. Orlamu stardrives power more than a quarter of the driveships in existence.

**Starship Engineering:** A well-built vessel can be appre-

ciated by any interstellar traveler. Starships, whether drive-equipped or not, should be adequately powered, logically laid out, and sometimes well armed. Interstellar economies have become sufficiently intertwined that the construction of a spaceship typically involves parts and technology from a dozen star systems, possibly even from several stellar nations. Most stellar nations maintain a modicum of self-sufficiency to produce their own starships, especially military vessels. The StarMech Collective made its name from its immaculate and efficient shipyards; they've given birth to more ships than those of Earth, even though the Collective's yards are 100 years younger.

**Resource Total:** Contrary to popular opinion, the number listed in the final row of the table cannot and should not be used as a measure of a stellar nation's overall strength. It may prove useful in some regard, however, as a primitive measure of each nation's gross economic strength. For example, Austrin-Ontis may be one of the more powerful stellar nations, thanks to a large and well-trained military. Nevertheless, in terms of its effect on the interstellar economy, several nations produce more capital.

### EXCERPT FROM FIGHTING SHIPS, 27TH EDITION

Rough estimates place the combined interstellar military forces today at about three-quarters the strength demonstrated in the middle of the Second Galactic War, near 2430. More important, the industrial capacity to create military assets has fallen by

**TABLE S7: MILITARY RATINGS**

Military Assets	A-0	BR	HC	IN	ND	OL	OT	RC	SM	TE	US	VC	GC
Task Forces	13	6	9	4	9	11	10	10	8	15	10	10	16
Defense Sectors	8	10	8	6	11	16	15	20	10	24	8	22	30
Fortress Ships	13	7	8	6	11	12	10	14	9	17	10	10	16
Dreadnoughts	82	38	46	32	58	88	76	91	54	128	72	86	144
Carriers	94	33	49	34	71	111	92	101	81	100	92	67	127
Cruisers	962	628	610	438	828	1,038	1,066	1,162	706	1,716	812	1,084	1,936
<i>Naval Rating</i>	B	D	C	D	B	A	B	B	C	B	C	B	A
Military Personnel (billions)	19.3	8.2	8.8	6.2	10.0	12.1	11.6	11.1	10.7	39.7	14.2	12.1	18.5
<i>Ground Rating</i>	A	D	B	D	B	C	B	D	C	A	B	C	A

more than half; the end of the war has brought an end to the need to constantly replace assets lost in fighting. Ironically, though, the gross number of military assets in explored space has risen since the Treaty of Concord. The fact that military forces were at an all-time low before 2472 lends credence to the theory that the current peace is likely to be a temporary one, an opportunity for stellar nations to fortify, rebuild, and prepare for the next round of strife.

Almost three decades after the war, the primary means for the projection of force is still the naval task force. It's the principal military structure of the day. The standard task force is centered around a fortress ship, typically escorted by two additional capital ships (dreadnoughts or carriers), several cruisers, replenishment vessels, and smaller craft. With a range of 50 light-years provided by its fortress ship, the task force can attack or defend over a wide operational theatre. Alternatively, task groups can contain a mix of three or more dreadnoughts and carriers. Though slightly weaker (history has shown the giant fortress ships capable of defeating as many as four dreadnoughts in pitched battle), this task group is a mainstay of most stellar navies, thanks mostly to the incredible cost of fortress ships. Most dreadnoughts can leap a prodigious 35 light-years while ferrying a dozen cruisers and smaller escorts.

Once a task force has eliminated enemy spacecraft and defensive stations and established space superiority, troop carriers and space-to-ground assault craft take the next step. While orbital bombardment can reduce important military targets to rubble, assault troops must seize the important communication, command, and control targets. Losses among ground troops can be very high; this is one reason why each stellar nation has an army numbering in the billions of soldiers. Eventually, a planet and its population can be brought under a new authority.

Nevertheless, the value of naval and ground assets limits their use during offensive actions. Many stellar naval forces are tied down to defense sectors. Each defense sector within a stellar nation is patrolled by the equivalent of at least one task force or group. In times of war, these defensive groups cluster together for strength, awaiting a drivespace signal that indicates the approach of an enemy fleet. It's not uncommon for the defense sectors to be patrolled by a fleet that's more dispersed, concerned with putting out small uprisings and skirmishes rather than facing a concentrated attack from a foreign power.

The greatest advantage that militaries enjoy today are well-trained forces. In the midst of GW2, military personnel learned many of the important lessons on the field of battle—if they survived long enough. Today, the armies are smaller but better equipped, better trained, and better prepared for the occasional skirmishes expected in postwar society. As noted on the primary table of military assets, none of the nations that survived the war have the obsolete "E" naval or ground rating. Only two have "D" scores to represent fourth-rate performance. The number of elite ("A") forces in the galaxy continues to grow, and the high military readiness isn't unnoticed by political scientists of all stripes.

## DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

A Primer for Concord Officers

by Jordan Maddux, Concord Administrator

Stellar diplomacy among the stellar nations and the Concord has considerable impact on the day-to-day lives of Concordan men and women, and every sentient should understand the basics. Of course, the summary provided here grossly oversimplifies

## THE REMAINS OF OSS SHIVA

Even when a fortress ship is destroyed—such as the loss of the Orlamu Sacred Ship *Shiva* during the Battle of Songham in 2401—its life isn't necessarily over. A dozen competing claims to the *Shiva*'s salvage rights kept anyone from taking the ship apart; instead it was slowly settled by the system's squatters and traders, who siphoned fuel from the *Shiva*'s intact tanks and stripped parts from its remaining intact levels. Eventually, a Concord court ruled that the Adrenaline Trade Company, then in possession of the drifting hulk, was the rightful owner by virtue of the capital improvements that the ATC had made to the ship.

The stripped skeleton of the *Shiva*, renamed the SS *Karma* by its inhabitants, became an important relay station for ships entering or leaving the Songham system. Over time, life support and small mass reactors restored portions of the fortress ship to a functional state, though many levels remain unpowered and open to vacuum. Shuttle craft and cargo warehouses now fill hangars where bombs and fighters once were stored.

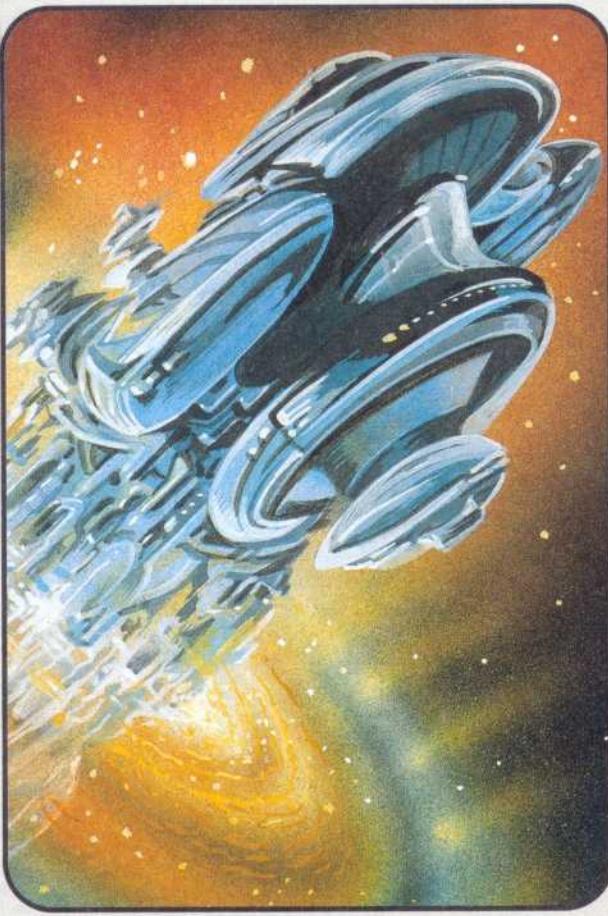
The *Shiva*'s engines have never been rebuilt, as the cost would be enormous, but a dozen of its plasma cannon turrets remain operational, reliant on the same retrofitted mass reactors that power the hulk's new life support systems. As a result, the *Karma* is one of the best-defended space stations in the galaxy, and a bit of a tourist attraction as well. In recent years, its cargo and repair facilities have been joined by a tourist level complete with holo re-creations of the battle. The *Karma* also boasts a Grid-accessible historical museum that includes a virtual tour of the *Shiva* as well as an overview of the battle.

fies the complexities of international dynamics. This simplified presentation illustrates only broad tendencies on the individual level. Orions and Orlamus are steadfast allies, yet nothing prevents individual Orlamus and Orions from despising one another. And the reverse can be said about VoidCorp Employees and Inseers, as difficult as that may be to imagine.

Today, many diplomatic relations remain colored by the events of the War. Enemies of 30 years ago remain unfriendly today, even if the interstellar peace doesn't allow open conflict. As the war recedes into history, new coalitions, alliances, and rivalries are sure to arise. A whole new strain of national competition has started over the frontiers abandoned a century ago. Nations that pretend to the closest friendship clash desperately over economic and territorial issues. The need for the Galactic Concord has never been greater.

*Austrin-Ontis Unlimited* has few friends but only one national enemy. Because Austrins rely on arms sales to every stellar nation, they avoid becoming entangled in alliances. Some goodwill exists between Austrin-Ontis and the other members of the Profit alliance (Rigunmors, StarMech, and Solar), but the competitive nature of the stellar nations has diminished any friendship into simple defensive agreements. Austrin-Ontis's greatest antipathy is reserved for the Nariacs—a hatred fostered by the war.

The *Borealis Republic* follows form by maintaining close ties to war allies and spurning wartime foes. While the *Borealis* military has made minor improvements, *Borealins* walk softly despite their distaste for Thuldans and their puppet *Hatire* brethren. *Borealis* diplomats wrangle for protection and support



from more powerful friends; the creation of the neutral Concord Sagittarius region has only slightly dulled their nervousness.

The *Hatire Community* is dominated by its own religious views and the demands of its theocracy. Nevertheless, this has not prevented the Community from reaching a compromise with its militaristic neighbors in the Thuldian Empire. The Community can't make serious diplomatic moves without Thuldian oversight, but the only issue on which the two nations differ is the Hatire crusade against the Nariacs and their cybertechnology—despite their alliance during the war.

*Insight*, as the youngest stellar nation, is still working to find its place in the interstellar community. About the only stable element in its diplomatic policy is the disdain with which Inseers view VoidCorp. While *Insight* enjoys modest assistance from its wartime allies (Orion, Orlamu, and Borealis), *Insight* leaders have to date refused to ally themselves closely with anyone. They understand that they were supported as a weapon against common enemies—and will continue to be viewed as such.

The *Nariac Domain*, ironically, doesn't reciprocate the Aus-trins' ill will. Instead, most Nariacs dislike VoidCorp. For more than a century, VoidCorp has reduced the Domain to little more than a client state. As the Nariacs institute slow changes in their relationship with the corporate behemoth, they are becoming more openly opposed to VoidCorp "bureaucratic assistance." Unfortunately, the Domain finds itself without allies willing to assist; most of VoidCorp's enemies have little reason to assist the Domain after their violent struggles against cyber-enhanced Nariac soldiers during the war.

The *Orion League* enjoys some of the strongest alliances among the interstellar nations. The close bonds between the League and the Orlamu Theocracy has led to their status as "sister states." They represent an exception to the rule that stellar

nations will use any means to gain an advantage, even against their allies. The League maintains close ties with *Insight* and the Borealis Republic. As the leader of the FreeSpace Alliance, the Orion government is singularly responsible for the survival of these weaker powers.

As noted, the *Orlamu Theocracy* has the strongest ties to the Orion League. Despite their theocratic government, the Orlamites have a democracy, with civil rights preserved for all; this has certainly helped the two states' excellent relations. The Theocracy also shares another quality with the League: few strong enemies. While the Expansion states may never respect either of these nations, since neither Orlamu nor Orion shared a border with them, hatred never became as strongly entrenched here as it did elsewhere.

The *Rigunmor Star Consortium* has many enviable characteristics. Despite a capable military, few nations consider the Rigunmors a political threat. Only with VoidCorp, an enemy during the war and a daily competitor on the open markets, do Rigunmors share a mutual dislike. Rigunmor aggressiveness in financial circles has reduced the number of would-be allies; even wartime friends have gone cold and distant before the juggernaut of the Rigunmor economy. One of few new friends that the Rigunmors have discovered is *Insight*. Since *Insight* is a manufacturing and design house desperately in need of a distributor—and a protector—a new alliance seems likely.

The *StarMech Collective* enjoys healthy and profitable relationships with most of the interstellar community. Ironically, this favor may be a result of the same disinterest in war that led to massive *StarMech* losses during GW2. It's also a testament to the quality of *StarMech* shipyards. Today, *StarMech* diplomats save their venom for Thuldian targets. Though the nation's only external concerns lie in Thuldian space, even that threat is muted by the *Concord* presence in the Taurus Neutrality. The Collective's command of technology has even facilitated its modest success in opening markets in Nariac space.

The *Thuldian Empire* has a healthy relationship with more than a third of the Stellar Ring—namely, its wartime partners. Fear and dislike have bred conflict with the Borealis Republic, the Union of Sol, and the *StarMech* Collective, but even more nations express continued distress over the growth of the Thuldian military and the industries that support it. The Thuldian goal of reunifying humanity stifles their friendship with foreign powers; the Thuldian diplomatic corps is sometimes unclear whether it wants to conquer the galaxy by force or foster a sense of friendship and respect that could lead to a more natural Thuldian leadership of the Stellar Ring.

The *Union of Sol*, always represented in foreign affairs by the Sunlord, presents one of the best images of a successful state. It has no significant enemies, but few strong allies. Solar diplomats are among the most capable, and they benefit from standing at the center of explored space. Like the Thuldians, though, the Union is always looking for habitable worlds to relieve the stress of overpopulation. Unlike stellar nations with obvious routes of expansion, Solars must struggle to build a stranger sort of "internal frontier."

*VoidCorp*, perhaps because of its economic dominance and success, has fewer friends than enemies today. Its underground war with the rogue division *Insight* continues. Despite years of success and the threat of harsh retaliation, the Nariac Domain threatens to leave the *VoidCorp* sphere of influence; in recent years, brazen acts of sabotage and terrorism targeting *VoidCorp* assets have escalated. Oddly, it's still not uncommon to see all three of these stellar nations vote together in the Galactic Consulate, given their interest in technological industries. However,

the Rigunmor Star Consortium, the enemy during the war and beyond, spares no expense to compete with VoidCorp. The only ally that VoidCorp can rely on consistently is the Thuldans Empire, its chief economic and political partner.

The *Galactic Concord*, in spite of its official status above the fray of nations, has many of the same difficulties working with individual stellar nations. In particular, the Solar Union and VoidCorp have proven the most troublesome and difficult; they're notorious for disturbing meetings of the Galactic Consulate and sometimes the Galactic Court. All of the stellar nations have mixed relations with the Concord. On one hand, they relish the peace dividends that the Concord is partially responsible for. They can take advantage of a neutral mediator in times of conflict. But when decisions don't go their way, they are quick to denounce the Concord as a totalitarian regime casting its weight about. To date, the only consistent and constant supporter of the Concord is the Orion League, which led the charge to create the Concord in the first place.

## GW2 AND THE GREAT ALLIANCES

With the war receding into the past, citizens of the 26th century sometimes forget its ravages. Unfortunately, the war continues to cast its shadow over many segments of interstellar life. Three of the most important surviving elements of the war are its great alliances: the Expansion Pentad, the FreeSpace Alliance, and the Profit Confederation.

When the war opened in 2346, few international alliances existed. Every stellar nation was struggling to survive in a galaxy of aggressors. Almost half of the 26 stellar nations established by the Treaty of Earth disappeared within the first decade of fighting. They were weak and unprepared. By 2356, the surviving nations were well armed and well defended. After a decade of operating under a wartime economy, they had improved their readiness for war and were fully capable of prosecuting the war effort further. But the price in lives, resources, and planets would be high.

Faced with the cost of hard conflict, the Thuldans Empire took the first steps to create an interstellar alliance. After making peace and then aligning itself with the Hatire Community, Emperor Decret's next move was bolder. The emperor met with VoidCorp and its clients—the Dreth Commonwealth and the Nariac Domain—and formed the Expansion Pentad in 2361. As its name suggested, the bloc's goal was to bring all of space under its control. This new powerhouse already controlled almost half of the Stellar Ring, and given its concentration of power, it promised to grow.

The other nations were quick to respond. The Union of Sol and the Orlamu Theocracy gave up their dreams of neutrality. The Orion League and the Orlamu Theocracy, after years of mutual peace and friendship, formed the FreeSpace Alliance. Largely a mutual defense treaty promising aid in the event of attack, the FreeSpace Alliance also stood for self-determination in the rough days of war. After the Pentad claimed large areas of Borealis space in 2372, the Borealis Republic joined the FreeSpace Alliance, mostly out of desperation.

At the same time, the Rigunmor Star Consortium formed the Profit Confederation with the Union of Sol, Austrin-Ontis Unlimited, and StarMech. This alliance was formed out of fear, and incorporated nations devoted entirely to trade. The Profit nations depended on the interstellar economy. As a result of their alliance, all four nations survived. Finally, concerned about Thuldans and VoidCorp advances throughout the 2360s and 2370s, President Brown of the Orion League established a

## THE GREAT ALLIANCES

### EXPANSION PENTAD

Dreth Commonwealth  
Hatire Community  
Nariac Domain  
Thuldans Empire  
VoidCorp

### FREESPACE ALLIANCE

Borealis Republic  
Orion League  
Orlamu Theocracy

### PROFIT CONFEDERATION

Austrin-Ontis Unlimited  
Rigunmor Star Consortium  
StarMech Collective  
Union of Sol

"gentleman's agreement" between the Profit Confederation and the FreeSpace Alliance. FreeSpace and Profit nations wouldn't attack one another as long as the Expansion Pentad threat was dominant.

Slowly, the tide of Expansion advance was brought to a halt. The Rigunmor Star Consortium dealt a crippling blow to VoidCorp when it crushed the Dreth Commonwealth fleet in 2380. Almost half of Dreth space fell to the Rigunmors, while VoidCorp annexed the remainder. Furthermore, VoidCorp losses rose when it took over the front against the Rigunmors. The war's true turning point was at the Battle of Songham (2401) in StarMech space. There, Thuldans, StarMech, Orlamu, and Orion armadas clashed. After a savage conflict leading to heavy losses on all sides, the Thuldans were pushed back. Songham changed the nature of the war.

With the Expansion Pentad checked, the agreement between Profit and FreeSpace collapsed. The war degenerated into three bitterly entrenched alliances sniping at one another. Whenever one seemed ascendant, the other two formed temporary alliances to restore the balance of power. The final shift in the war came 30 years later when Insight, a division of VoidCorp, declared its independence and joined the FreeSpace Alliance. Faced with growing rebellion and diminishing resources, the stellar nations finally agreed to a peace in 2472.

Today, remnants of the great alliances live on in interstellar relations. For the most part, the war's enemies remain enemies, and its allies remain allies. The Orion League and the Orlamu Theocracy have never been closer friends, and Solars and Thuldans remain bitter enemies. Whether the alliances will be strong enough to drag all the nations concerned into a third galactic war remains anyone's guess, but the most likely power blocs may not involve three alliances at all. A few shifts plausible in the current climate: The Nariac Domain may attempt to find a home with the Union of Sol, and the Profit Confederation splits between the Union/StarMech and the Rigunmor/Austrin-Ontis pairing. Further, Insight is rumored to be toading furiously among the Rigunmor to cement a partnership against their mutual VoidCorp enemies. The great enigma that keeps these conflicts from sparking into war remains the Concord, which cannot afford to take sides.

The Verge is full of wonders and treasures, but it's not for the timid. Out here in the farthest reaches of explored space, the process of discovery continues. Virgin worlds still await the first imprint of a human foot, and humanity continuously encounters new life. As more than one explorer has put it: The Verge is where the action is.

The Verge's borders are a matter of some debate. Some stellar cartographers include all the stars beyond Kendai, at the border of the Concord Taurus protectorate. Others—StarMech, for example—say that the Verge begins with the populated world of Bluefall in the Aegis system (of course, this assertion benefits StarMech, as it could then advance a claim that the systems centered around Tendril should fall within StarMech space).

Most stellar nations acknowledge Tendril as the closest edge of the Verge. In fact, it was the Tendril system's discovery that began the rush of exploration and colonization. The Verge's farthest point is Hammer's Star, the last system explored before the Second Galactic War. Beyond this area lies the Lightning Nebula, a likely destination for the next wave of expansion. Aegis forms the center of the Verge and contains the largest population on the frontier. The Verge's radial edges are harder to define—though Mantebron

and Endomar form the likeliest candidates on each side.

All in all, the Verge is a sector of space about 100 light-years long, wide, and deep. With an approximate stellar density of one star for every 10 cubic light-years, the Verge contains some 10,000 stars, and explorers have examined only 1000 of those. Fewer than 100 of these explored stars possess colonies.

Officially, the region is part of the vastness of Open Space, but the Galactic Concord sees the Verge as a collection of independent nations and patrols accordingly. Unfortunately, many of the stellar nations don't see it this way. Ties between these patron nations and their colonies still remain strong, and many governments in the Stellar Ring would like to pick up where they left off before the opening of GW2.

To complicate matters, the Verge has some very valuable assets—commodities upon which each stellar nation has its eye. With fewer than 1 in 10 star systems explored, ships and probes have already discovered at least eleven Class I planets—worlds easily colonized by humans—in the Verge. The region also contains an abundance of planets, asteroids, and stellar matter in high demand by the growing economies of both the Stellar Ring and the Verge itself.



Thus, the Verge represents the future. If the Interbellum of 2312–2346 is any guide, the sentients of the Stellar Ring are likely to seize upon this new era of peace as a time of growth: in the sciences, with new discoveries and advancements; in population, with more opportunities for a peaceful existence; in exploration. New expeditions into the Verge begin each year, and explorers currently plan to travel beyond Hammer's Star.

The Verge is a springboard into the unknown because of its location near the edge of the Orion Arm of the Milky Way. Not far beyond (in astronomical terms) lies the Perseus Arm, an unexplored expanse that presents new opportunities for the sentients of the Orion Arm. Finally, the depths of intergalactic space lie beyond the Perseus Arm. It is to here that the bold and courageous species of the Milky Way must eventually travel.

## HISTORY

The history of the Verge is bound up in each of its many systems, all of which possess unique origins and experiences. These systems share one thing: a common history that encourages them to work together as a group instead of competing against each other.

## EXPLORATION

Expeditions to the Verge began with the StarMech Collective's journey to the Tendril system in 2315. It was the StarMech Collective's first wave of exploration after the First Galactic War. In truth, the Tendril system lay closer to the Taurean Star Republic, a weak stellar nation eventually destroyed by the Thuldans Empire during GW2. But the leaders of StarMech set a precedent by advancing a claim to the system.

Taking advantage of what they correctly perceived as Taurean weakness, groups from every stellar nation soon followed the StarMech advance.

Orion scouts charted the beautiful Aegis system in 2316. The Hatire Community seized the world of Grith in the Corrvale system in 2319. The Solars registered a claim to Penates in the Lucullus system. The Rigunmors latched onto the mineral-rich world of Leen in the Oberon system, and within two decades, the Thuldans and Austrins settled the twin planets of the Algemon system. Finally, in 2341, an expedition partially funded by the Borealis Republic crossed most of explored space in order to colonize Spes, a planet in the Hammer's Star system.

By then, the wave of exploration had ended. The stellar nations directed their precious resources inward, girding themselves for the Second Galactic War. It proved to be a wise step, for the war dragged on longer than anyone anticipated, and none of the stellar nations wanted to support their colonies when they faced extinction back home.

## CONFLICT

The Vergers followed the first few years of the war with interest, as the infant Verge colonies considered themselves very much a part of the stellar nations that founded them. News of the major battles and confrontations arrived via drive relay, and interest soon grew to conflict. Thus, the Second Galactic War found a microcosmic expression in and between many Verge systems, as the colonists used their meager resources to fight each other.

Slowly, several factors led most colonies to waver in their loyalties. The first of these was the lack of commitment demonstrated by the stellar nations at war. Few of the nations assigned

military forces to help the Vergers win their little wars, and indeed the resources that these nations promised their colonists began to dwindle as early as the 2350s. Some of the smaller colonies actually collapsed as a result, and even the largest and most populous felt the crunch when their support vanished. Not surprisingly, a few of the less intrepid colonists decided to climb aboard driveships and make their way back to their stellar nations.

Most Verge settlements decided to weather their difficulties, and instead of sending their few driveships back to the Stellar Ring and its war, they sent driveships to each other. Many of the settlements couldn't survive on their own, but with trade between systems, each found a way to get what it needed. A sense of a common good even led some of the richer systems to go out of their way to trade with their weaker neighbors. Yet it quickly became clear that nothing like a common Verge government would ever arise. Even though most of the Verge systems had put aside their desire to battle one another in the name of their stellar nations, distrust still ruled throughout the frontier. Piracy and crime were rising fast, and some of the systems—Lucullus and Ptolemy among them—embraced these practices as a way of life.

## THE LONG SILENCE

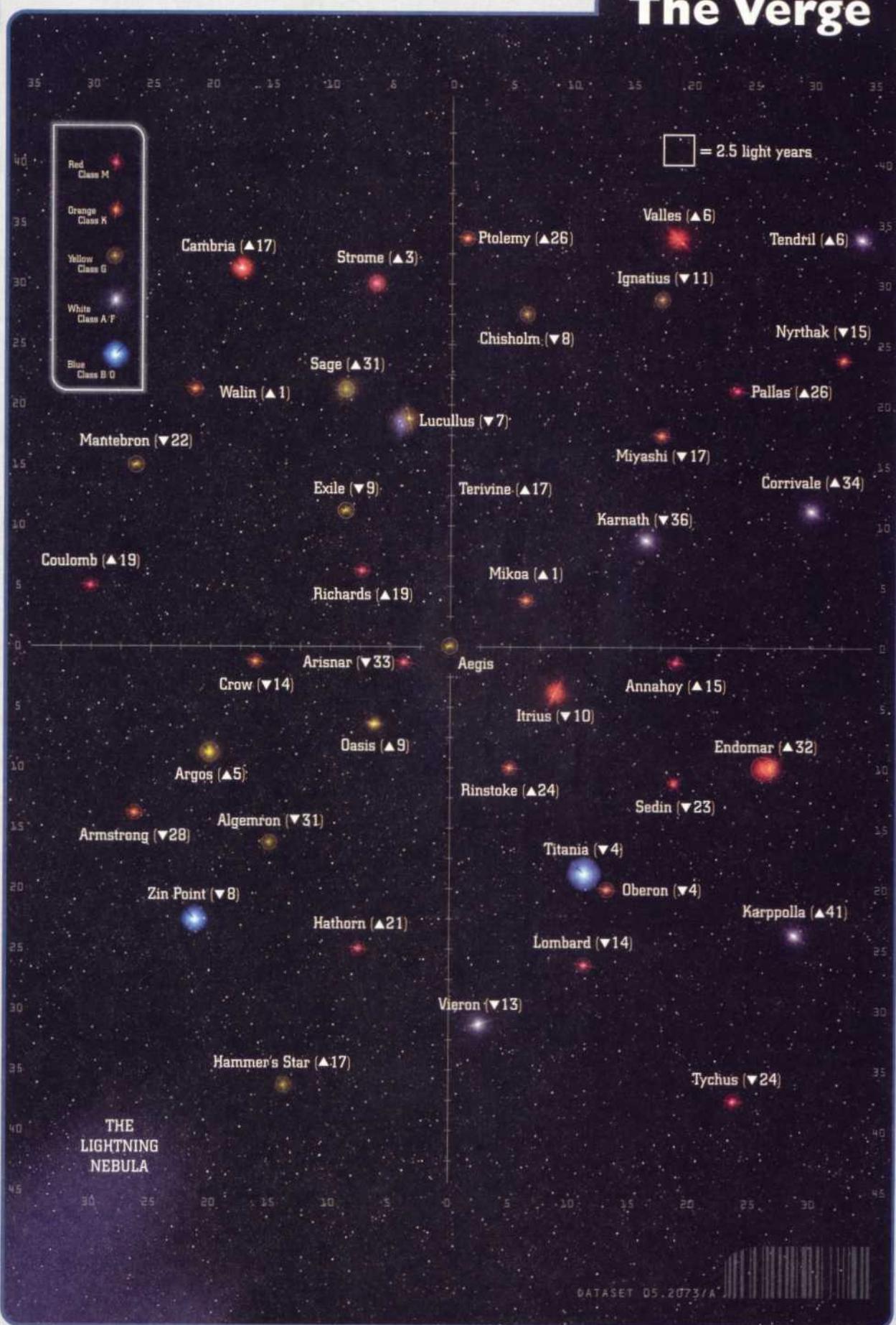
The catalyst for the final break came with the Battle of Kendai, fought at the edge of the Stellar Ring in 2375. During the engagement, the Kendai drivespace communication relay was destroyed, terminating contact between the Stellar Ring and the Verge. Thus began the Long Silence. Now firmly on their own, many colonies of the Verge began to think independently. As new generations were born and cultures developed, many colonists started to think of themselves as citizens of their own system, instead of members of a distant stellar nation. By the time contact was reestablished more than a century later, more than half the Verge systems boasted of their independence.

Meanwhile, they struggled for survival. Both traders and pirates organized themselves, and life on the frontier soon reached a certain level of stability. However, two events rocked that stability during the Long Silence. The first was the inexplicable disappearance of the Orion colony on Bluefall in 2454, a mystery that remains unsolved. The second was the destruction of the Silver Bell colony—and much of the surface of the planet Spes with it—in the Hammer's Star system. (The culprits behind this attack are still at large.) Both of these events taught the Vergers the unpredictability of life on the frontier.

Yet the Long Silence itself was never absolute. Occasionally, stray vessels—some of military origin and some full of refugees—would make their way out to the frontier. A whole fleet of such newcomers arrived from Orion space in 2464 to reestablish a colony in the Aegis system. Most of these travelers brought word of the terrible ferocity of the Second Galactic War; many had fled dying worlds and crumbling stellar nations in order to come. Yet in 2472, the war in the Stellar Ring came to an end. In the next two decades, while the stellar nations struggled to survive and rebuild, rumors trickled into the Verge that peace had descended. Most didn't believe it at first, but by 2496, the gossip had gained the ring of truth: The war was over.

## THE RETURN

The reconstruction of the Kendai relay occurred just as several of the Verge governments, led by the Regency government of



Aegis and the corporate syndicates of Tendril, began planning a joint expedition back to the Stellar Ring. While many Verge nations were enjoying their independence, some colonies continued to struggle. In any event, the Vergers wanted first hand news of the Stellar Ring.

The transmission received at the Tendril drive relay ended the Vergers' proposal. Along with allowing the colonies to send and receive messages to the Stellar Ring again, the rebuilding of the Kendai drive relay had two important effects. First, it allowed the distress call of Hammer's Star—then seven years old—to reach its intended audience. The stellar nations were, if anything, more alarmed than the Verge governments, as the Vergers had grown used to disappearing colonies. Second, it became clear that the stellar nations had regained their interest in exploration, expansion, and the Verge.

The arrival of the *Monitor*, a fortress ship of the Galactic Concord, made that abundantly clear. Now the stellar nations have returned to the Verge, and they're eager to take up where they left off a century ago.

## TODAY

The Vergers' reaction to the Return was quite mixed. The struggling colonies cheered the return of their patrons, and many of the larger colonies—such as those on Algemon and Tendril—hoped that the return of their patrons would solve many of their problems. Others, however, resented the arrogant presumption that the stellar nations could so quickly and easily assume control. Currently, more than a dozen systems have loudly proclaimed their independence, demanding recognition from the stellar nations and the Galactic Concord.

As for the Concord, most Vergers consider its arrival an overall benefit to the region. It patrols Verge space, keeping the area (relatively) safe for trade, travel, and exploration. Despite the number of planets and star systems claimed by individual stellar nations, the Concord's political control includes the length of the Verge. Such titular control is complicated by the realities of the situation. A dizzying variety of factions have focused their attentions on the region. Servants of the Concord must therefore balance their authority with the demands of many parties in order to avoid confrontation. While it's unlikely that a skirmish between a stellar nation and an independent Verge government would spread to the Stellar Ring, the Concord doesn't want to take any chances. The contentious Verge can't be allowed to spark a Third Galactic War.

## VERGE PROTECTION

In keeping with its ultimate priority of securing peace in the Verge, the Galactic Concord has done much to increase the overall defense of the system. Every four months, either the *Monitor* or the *Kordava* (Concord fortress ships) returns to Tendril from the edge of the Stellar Ring, bringing supplies and assistance. The Concord's stated purpose in completing this trip is to facilitate passage between established space and the frontier using either ship's gigantic stardrive. It's also clear that these fortress ships serve as a powerful deterrent to violence. Each ship is part of a strong task force that includes a pair of dreadnoughts and more than a dozen cruisers and smaller craft.

Within the Verge, the Concord's defense is just as strong. The *Lighthouse*, a mobile space station donated by the Orlamu Theocracy, is a station of commerce, but it carries a formidable arsenal of its own. Along with it, three dreadnoughts patrol the length of the frontier region. The *Vition* has been assigned to

permanent duty in the Hammer's Star system—at least until the system is safe from the criminals and aggressive aliens that plague it. Two other dreadnoughts, the *Tender Dawn* and the *Revealer*, lead patrols in the major and minor systems of the Verge, wherever the Concord feels that a demonstration of force and interest is appropriate. In addition to these two dreadnoughts and their escorts, the Concord has devoted dozens of smaller craft—cruisers, destroyers, corvettes, and smaller vessels—to the protection of the Verge.

The stellar nations and the Verge governments also contribute to the overall defense of the system—although they are just as likely to use their assets for conflict as for cooperation. All of these craft are cruiser-class or smaller, with the exception of the *Sanctuary*, an independent dreadnought owned by the Regency of Bluefall. The stellar nations like to keep a collection of corvettes and scouts near their established colonies—just in case. Larger military vessels, destroyers and the like, can assist in commerce by ferrying smaller craft through drivespace.

## DEFENSIVE SYSTEMS

While many systems in the Stellar Ring have state-of-the-art defensive systems of Type Six or above, the planets in Verge space have considerably less advanced armaments. The classifications, and the systems that use each defense rating, appear below. Volatile conditions within the Verge can alter the capabilities of any individual system at a moment's notice. For example, the Concord constantly patrols the region. Should one of its two principal task groups enter a Verge system, that system's defensive rating improves by at least one type.

### TYPE FIVE

The epitome of protection in the Verge, this defensive system equals the military capability of many Stellar Ring worlds; it includes planetary shields, advanced satellites and weaponry, and other support craft. These defenses could suppress an attack from a task group and perhaps even hold out against the forces of a full armada. Independent raiders and criminals don't stand a chance against these defenses. Only two systems in the Verge can boast such protective armament: Aegis and Hammer's Star. Aegis, controlled by the Regency government, has a strong fleet led by a dreadnought. In the Hammer's Star system, the Galactic Concord has assembled an even greater collection of might to avenge the destruction of the Silver Bell colony...

### TYPE FOUR

Armed space stations and a capable space fleet boasting cruiser strength are necessary criteria for a Type Four defense. Together, mobile and fortified points create a network of shielding capable of stopping all but the most determined assaults. Within the confines of the Verge, Tendril and Algemon possess this defensive level.

### TYPE THREE

This system consists of a small navy or a network of defense satellites; it can provide a capable defense against independent craft and pirates. Against more determined foes—such as a large naval force—the system's fortifications would probably prove unequal to the task. Three Verge systems qualify for Type Three status: Corrivate, Lucullus, and Oberon.

### TYPE TWO

A sparse defense network or a meager fleet of a dozen or fewer noncapital craft earns a Type Two rating. These defenses can-

not repel an attack by trained military forces, and they are even vulnerable to more organized raids by pirate bands and groups of criminals. Several systems fall into this category, including Argos, Ptolemy, Mantebron, Karnath, Coulomb, and Tychus.

### TYPE ONE

This defense system consists merely of a few patrol ships. About the only antagonist this system could repel is a lone raider or corsair. Against more significant enemy forces, the only useful action is a call for help. More than half the colonized systems of the region fit into this category.

### TYPE ZERO

Systems with this defensive level rely on the goodwill of their visitors. In other words, no hope for realistic defense exists—though planetary-based defenses and inhabitants may repel small assault groups. The youngest fledgling colonies and the many unexplored stars of the Verge—about 94% of its territory—fit this category.

## THE INTEGRATION ACT

Operating in an area as diverse and complicated as the Verge, the stellar nations have adapted to new avenues and possibilities. In some ways, they're more likely to work together in the Verge than in the Stellar Ring—despite their competition for Verge systems and planets. Simply put, the stellar nations don't have enough assets to accomplish everything they want in the region, and commitments back home make it almost impossible to devote additional resources. So, they adopted the Integration Act. Passed by the Galactic Consulate, this measure gives greater latitude to military and government personnel. In short, given the permission of a commanding officer, military personnel can serve aboard independent vessels, ships of a Verge government, or even the vessels of another stellar nation.

For example, it's not uncommon for the Galactic Concord military to act as crew members on free traders, and VoidCorp military personnel frequently travel on board corporate merchants that serve another government. As long as the cooperation makes sense to military commanders or serves some good purpose, it's normally allowed. Of course, the captain or controlling officer aboard the integrated vessel must also agree to the assignment, and there are obvious exceptions. VoidCorp military would never work openly with the sesheyans of Grith or Insight military, and the Galactic Concord would never authorize its military personnel to work as corsairs, thugs, or smugglers.

Only 10% of military forces are eligible to participate in the Integration Act; the remainder are on active duty in more conventional environments. The Integration Act is one reason why Concord Administrators are so busy in the Verge; they must constantly adjudicate questions arising from this new mix of military and civilian personnel.

## VERGE ORGANIZATIONS

During the many years of the Long Silence, the people and governments of the Verge banded together for protection, economics, and self-interest. Most of the time, this simply meant that Vergers politely shared information with one another. The governments attempted to keep abreast of events, alerting their citizens whenever a threat manifested in a system. Clear examples of this teamwork appeared in response to the civil war in the Algemron system and the destruction of Silver Bell. A cry went out loud and clear: Vergers should avoid these systems.

In most instances, looking out for one's neighbors never became a real matter of trusting them, but rather of needing them to live and prosper. Many of the colonies exist on worlds that can't sustain independent growth without trade.

## VERGE CONFEDERATION

Originally a political body, the nature and focus of the Verge Confederation has changed throughout its short history. In 2468, leaders of many Verge governments met for the first time on Bluefall in order to discuss means of improving the economic and political stability in the area. Many saw the conference, and the confederation that resulted from it, as an attempt by the Regency government of Bluefall to seize control. Whatever the conference's ambitions, that threat never materialized.

Instead, one of the small, secondary agenda items went on to change the Verge in an unexpected way. The delegates agreed that the Verge Confederation should form a small bureaucracy of its own to watch over conditions in the frontier. Operatives of this bureaucracy would investigate unusual events, phenomena, and risks to the region's security. In point of fact, the Verge Confederation became a clearinghouse of unusual talents, explorers, and agents of one kind or another. When private individuals, corporations, or governments wanted special assistance, they enlisted the Confederation's help.

The Verge Confederation, as a political body, has met only twice since its creation. In 2490, delegates from most of the Verge colonies came together in order to discuss the destruction of the Silver Bell colony. In 2497, they met again to determine what, if any, strategy the Verge systems would take in response to the return of the stellar nations.

The most recent session clarified the political powerlessness of the Verge Confederation. The separate colonies had such disparate thoughts about the return that they couldn't strike a real alliance. About the only agreement they did hammer out was the principle of self-determination: Each colony had the right to decide whether to reunite with its former patron, to form ties with a new stellar nation, or to remain independent.

It's unlikely that another council will ever convene; as a political body, the Verge Confederation is dead. Now it serves merely as a clearinghouse for talent. For the most part, members of the Confederation work independently of each other; sometimes they may even work at cross purposes. The only oath members of the Confederation must take regards the Verge principle of self-determination. No member can act in a way that would undermine the principle of Vergers deciding their future.

Atilis Jil Utir (Fm/Argos/DMW-8) is the bureaucrat who oversees the Confederation from its headquarters in the Argos system. Small offices exist in the populated colonies. Each of these offices keeps records and resumes of Confederation members. Recently, membership has become quite easy to secure, and the group even accepts applications from Arrivers.

## CONCORD FREE NOW

Concord Free Now is the most radical political group in the Verge. Since its first public appearance—when it claimed responsibility for the sabotage of a StarMech cruiser in the Tendril system—CFN has grown increasingly desperate. Its attempts to keep the stellar nations out of the Verge clearly aren't succeeding, and now its members view themselves as the patriots of an occupied territory. Concord Free Now has been connected to dozens of terrorist attacks against military and civilian assets of the stellar nations—including the Galactic Concord. The only

criterion necessary for an attack by CFN is a connection to the Stellar Ring.

CFN believes that the governments of Old Space surrendered all rights to the Verge during the Second Galactic War. The Verge is no longer theirs; it belongs to the Vergers. CFN's activity has focused on systems that share some of its ideals for independence—especially the Oberon system—but all Verge systems are subject to CFN attack and sabotage.

### REDMAN-SMITH TRADING CORP

In the Verge, money has proven a more unifying factor than politics. Here, corporations and giant syndicates have yet to take over the regulation of trade; independents and free traders still dominate the trading economy for Verge systems. These smaller merchants have formed guilds such as the Redman-Smith Trading Corporation. Originally, this trading company consisted of only a few dozen Rigunmors and Starmechs from Tendril and Oberon who united to shuttle heavy metals from Leen to Alaundril. The guild's membership grew, adding systems and cargoes to its accepted list of sources and destinations.

The Corp spends a significant portion of its manpower and resources on the publication of its quarterly price index. Full-time Corp employees wander the major systems, confirming the availability and current value of commodities. Corp members are expected to communicate the same information to the parent guild whenever possible. For free traders in the Verge, the manual becomes the bible by which to buy and sell items, or negotiate contracts. Of course, it's no guarantee of success. In the tumultuous frontier economy, prices can change faster than even the most dedicated trading guilds can track. This quarterly index, and the strong reputation that Corp membership provides, are the primary reasons for joining Redman-Smith.

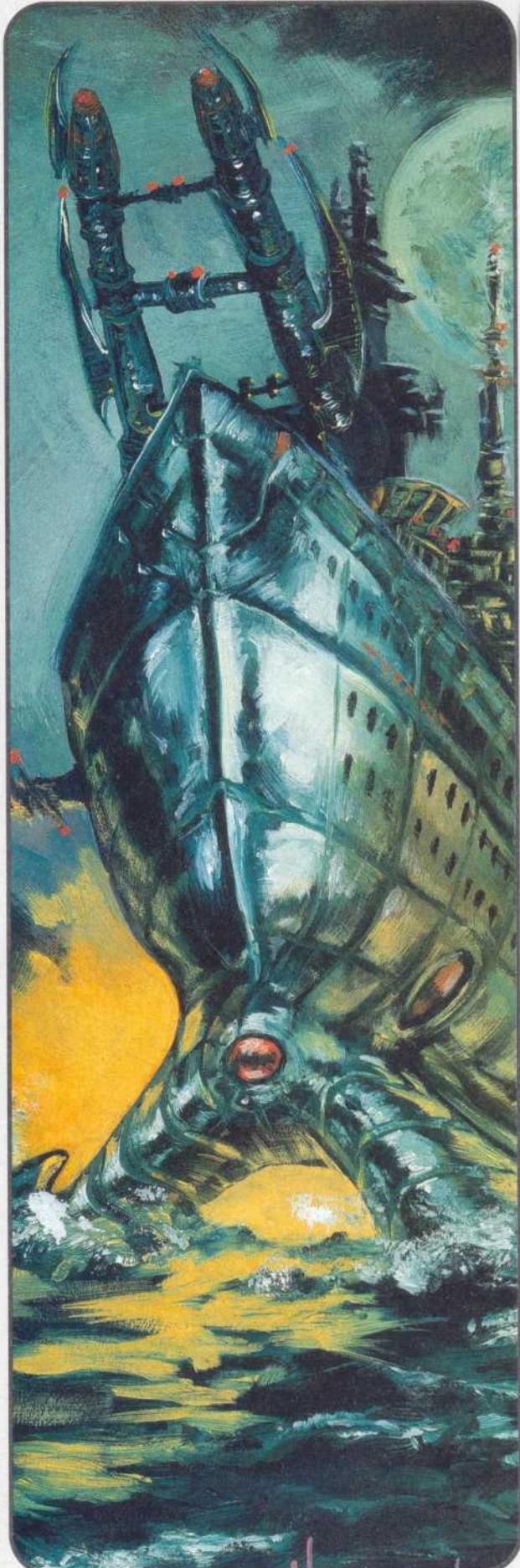
Requirements for membership have been formalized for decades. First, Redman-Smith performs a background check on the prospective applicant. It doesn't want members who are known for piracy or other criminal activities—although it's well known that the group makes exceptions for wealthy candidates. In truth, the most significant requirement is an annual membership fee, now at \$1,242. The trading group adjusts the fee each year for inflation and adds a surcharge (1% net profits after the first million Concord dollars earned in a year) for the most profitable Corp members.

At present, more than 70 years after its creation, the Corp has become a bureaucracy of its own, with several thousand employees spread over all the more populated planets. Recently, Redman-Smith has diversified in the services that it offers its members. In addition to its famous price indices, the guild offers loans and financing to members in good standing. Typically, it offers interest up to a full point below standard, making it a popular choice for its members.

### SYSTEM TABLES

Each of the major star systems described in this chapter contains a table that provides scientific information on that system's planets. This includes information such as the planet's distance from its star, the length of its year, and other quick-glance statistics that may be useful to Gamemaster and player. Note that entry names in parentheses refer to moons rather than planets.

Planetary class, and the mechanics of the GRAPH system as it relates to heroes and supporting cast members, are described in *Chapter 3: Gamemasters in Action* and *Chapter 14: Campaign Architecture* in the ALTERNITY Gamemaster Guide.



# THE LIGHTHOUSE

In the years of the Second Galactic War, economic and military power bases throughout the Stellar Ring played critical roles in establishing and maintaining dominance. One of the most impressive of these bases was the *Lighthouse of Faith*, a space station built and owned by the Orlamu Theocracy. What was unique about the giant station was the installation of a powerful stardrive within its heart; this station could move through space with an impressive 50 light-year range, equal to the drivespace range of a fortress ship. In addition to serving a unique role as a mobile temple for the Orlamist religion, the *Lighthouse of Faith* served as a center of economic activity within Orlamu space. Merchants came aboard and traded with individuals from diverse worlds; through its travels, the *Lighthouse of Faith* constantly exposed itself and its guests to new markets and new cultures.

The near-complete destruction of the station in 2461—thanks to a Solar raid into Orlamu space—was a terrible loss. The Orlamus consigned its ruined treasure to a scrap heap until the war ended in 2472. Finally, it delivered the crippled *Lighthouse of Faith* to the Galactic Concord. Sixteen years would pass before its name was heard again.

In March 2498, the Galactic Concord—more specifically, the Concord's Committee on Verge Integration—feared for the success of its “frontier rehabilitation program.” Put simply, the star systems of the Verge remained isolated and divided—despite the return of the stellar nations and the arrival of the Concord itself. The overwhelming majority of Verge systems had no way to communicate through drivespace; they relied heavily on driveships that could take months to reach other civilized systems.

The Concord (and the Committee on Verge reintegration) hoped that military vessels and the increased economic traffic brought by the return of the stellar nations would forge new links among the Verge systems and the people of the Stellar Ring. Unfortunately, the Concord's Star Force was too busy patrolling, keeping peace, and fighting in Hammer's Star to support this lofty goal. Furthermore, the stellar nations' economic interests in the Verge focused on the most populous and developed star systems.

With the fear of Verge isolation firmly in his mind, Michael Thayne, Minister of the Galactic Consulate, lobbied for the Verge to become the home of a rebuilt *Lighthouse of Faith*. A year later, the refurbished, refitted, and greatly rearmed Orlamu space station arrived in the Tendril system to begin a never-ending tour of all the Verge settlements. Many inhabitants of the Verge consider the station, now known simply as the *Lighthouse*, the finest achievement of the Concord.



Flag of the Galactic Concord

From top to bottom, the tall cylindrical station is some 1,461 meters, with a diameter that ranges from 36 meters at its thinnest section (the lower disc) to 401 meters at its widest (the upper disc). The station contains docking ports and bays, as well as maintenance services for arriving vessels. Long rails of spindly metal extend from the cylindrical station, allowing hundreds of small craft to link up with the *Lighthouse*. Within the station's crowded halls, a fully functional urban center answers the needs of both guests and permanent inhabitants. A full range of supplies, entertainment, employment opportunities, and Concord agency offices exist within the station. One of the largest Concord offices functions as the headquarters for the Concord Survey Service, a bureaucracy best known for contracting independent explorers for missions throughout the Verge and beyond.

In gratitude to the Theocracy for donating the station, the highest level of the *Lighthouse* still serves its initial purpose: Orlamist worship. As a Concord-run station, however, it's open to members of any religion, nation, or species. Essentially, the *Lighthouse* serves as a point of neutrality under the seal of the Galactic Concord, and it is the primary Concord base of operations in the Verge. Thanks to the efforts of Concord technicians and engineers, the armament aboard the *Lighthouse* ranks among the most powerful and most effective. Although the station couldn't stand up to a fortress ship, it can repel an attack from a dreadnought. Three Star Force cruisers and a score of smaller escorts fly alongside the *Lighthouse*. In addition, a reinforced company of Concord Marines serves aboard the station itself.

The *Lighthouse*'s stardrive still has a 50-light-year range, making it one of the most impressive examples of human engineering. Today, the *Lighthouse* uses its stardrive to follow a course through Verge systems. It remains in these systems anywhere from a few days to a few weeks before traveling to another destination. The station usually becomes the center of economic and political activity in each system it enters.

Politically, the *Lighthouse* offers contact and communication with the rest of known space. The station houses all sorts of political officers, ambassadors, and statesmen who make a livelihood serving their nations. Moreover, the *Lighthouse* possesses a drivespace communication relay. As long as it remains in a system, all of that system's worlds can access the interstellar Grid (for a fee, of course). In addition, the spindly docking arms of the *Lighthouse* permit spacecraft without stardrives or with smaller stardrives to dock and “piggyback” on it. This allows for faster travel around the Verge and more frequent contact between various worlds and settlements. Every government, both stellar and Verge, takes advantage of the Concord's generosity.

Economically, the single station represents a force that equals any star system in the Verge. A sizable trading community has established itself aboard the station, willing to meet the trading demands of any star system. More than one independent trader has made his fortune traveling the stars without ever leaving the *Lighthouse*.

The *Lighthouse* has been called a beacon that will lead the Verge out of its long darkness of separation. Flowery language and public relations aside, it provides a presence of authority, a connection to the rest of human space, and a protective force to help stand against the many threats—internal and external—facing the Verge.

## The Lighthouse

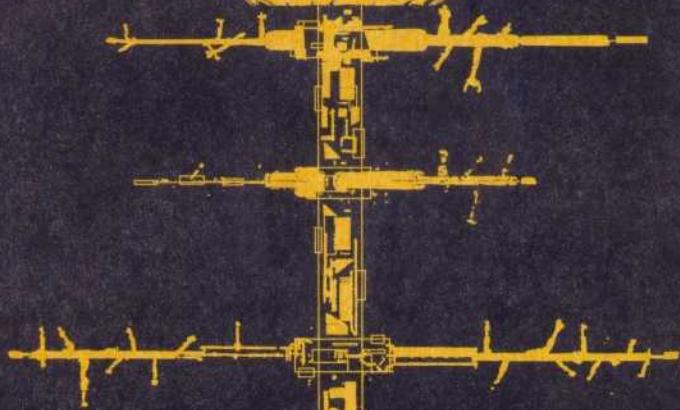
Verge Quadrant



**City Section**  
3457.ZT0008



**Docking Section**  
675.X00325



**Engineering Section**  
890.M000471



Station Height: 1464m

# TENDRIL

The Tendril system is a stellar time bomb with a very long fuse. The blue star Tendril is a markedly unstable F1 star—as the star nears end of its life, its intense solar flare activity grows slowly stronger. Roughly every 67 days, solar flares engulf the star for 13 days in a period that system natives call the Burn. After each flare-up, the solar activity returns to normal levels for about 67 days. According to the most reliable measurements, the star won't be going nova in the next few thousand years, but scientists are at a loss to explain the star's strange yet steady pulse.

Until its star goes nova, the Tendril system will remain the gateway from the Stellar Ring to the center of the Verge. To Arivers, it bears a strong resemblance to the kind of place they're used to. As the first settlement in Verge space a century ago and the first to be contacted after the Second Galactic War, Tendril is also among the most civilized systems in the Verge. It is the Verge's third most populous system, a sprawling, asteroid-filled area of space whose worthwhile holdings—moons, mostly—were claimed by StarMech before the war. The vast majority of Tendril's immense mineral wealth remains unclaimed, though many spacers stake informal claims, mine it, and process it before anyone notices.

Despite Tendril's ideal location, the system is unlikely to dominate the politics and economics of the Verge. The first problem is the star's instability. The second is the system's lack of an easily habitable planet, or even an easily terraformed one. Tendril bathes its inner system with a high level of radiation. The ring of space that's warm enough to support a habitable planet is too dangerously radioactive for most sentient species to endure without special equipment.

The closest planet to Tendril is Delphin, a sandy husk with an atmosphere of carbon monoxide and carbonyl vapor. Its sole importance today is the Land's View terraforming station. Land's View is one of the most ambitious and long-term terraforming operations in explored space. Sperous, a hellish planet cloaked in clouds and blanketed in intense heat, gives Venus of the Sol system a good name. It's home to nothing and no one; even exploratory probes rarely reach its acidic surface. However, Sperous does boast a moon, Alaundril, capable of supporting life. Atlas, a cold rock-planet, and the Cyra Belt close out the inner system; the gas giant Pox and its many small moons lie beyond.

## HISTORY

The tale of the Tendril system is representative of Verge experience as a whole. It has a hopeful beginning, a tragedy of war and abandonment, struggle, and success. As always, the troubles of yesterday cast a heavy shadow over the future.

## EXPLORATION

Scout vessels from the StarMech Collective explored Tendril in 2315, just three years after the end of the First Galactic War, during a period of interstellar expansion known as the Interbellum. For StarMech, exploring the Verge was a logical avenue for later expansion. StarMech representatives never guessed that finding a life-bearing world so far from established borders would attract attention from so many, and lead to the formation of the diverse Verge that now exists.

On the contrary, StarMech documents reveal that the Collective's long-term plan was to annex the distant star within 50 years. But as explorers and colonists—some independent and

some citizens of other nations—emigrated to the Verge frontier, that objective became more complicated. StarMech military vessels were too few and far too dispersed to patrol Tendril or to keep others from exploring neighboring systems. The StarMech plan for the region suffered another blow when Orions explored and claimed the Aegis system and an idyllic habitable planet in 2316. The precedent was now set; the Verge would be probed and exploited by all of the stellar nations. Of course, the harshest blow to StarMech development goals in Tendril was the outbreak of the Second Galactic War.

## COLONIZATION

Meanwhile, the first years of colonizing Tendril were difficult ones. The star's intense radiation was a nuisance under the best of conditions. During solar flares, the radiation spikes scrambled electronics and damaged sensitive equipment. During the 13-day high-rad cycle, interplanetary communication is almost impossible.

StarMech's first goal was to lay claim to the only body capable of supporting human life: the moon Alaundril orbiting Sperous. With no one to oppose them, StarMech colonists had only one challenge—adapting their robots and technology to the high radiation. They had mixed success. The boom-town city of Babel proved the most industrious and profitable, and eventually became recognized as the moon's capital. In addition, StarMech made rapid claims to many of the most promising asteroids in the Cyra Belt. Many of the independent miners who arrived agreed to work for the most lucrative contract around—mining for StarMech and shipping the metals to the refineries of Alaundril.

StarMech's decision to contract out the mining work in the Tendril system turned out to be a good move. The independents paid a fee for mining rights to an asteroid. Then they had a choice of selling minerals back to StarMech corporations or paying StarMech a gross percentage and selling to anyone. The best part of the deal was that StarMech avoided any risk. If a mining group failed to generate a profit, or even disappeared entirely, StarMech lost nothing. Mining conditions were dangerous; the intense radiation of Tendril scorches even the distant asteroid belt.

To attract additional workers, StarMech built Darkhold, an emergency medical and supply station within the Cyra Belt itself. StarMech profited by selling supplies to mining crews that came unprepared or needed resupply. Within a few years, Darkhold became home to numerous entertainment facilities and social establishments catering to the StarMech taste for diversion. The contractors of Darkhold had discovered a lucrative business of serving the recreational needs of the Cyra Belt's miners, who often had money to spend. The station's purpose was quickly changed. As an indignant Hatire moralist said, it became a little den of sin and crime. During a Burn, many a lonely and bored mining crew came to Darkhold carrying riches. They enjoyed themselves immensely; the lucky ones returned to their mining with their accounts emptied. The unlucky found themselves in debt.

Partially as a result of the change in the way things evolved at Darkhold, StarMech built a second station millions of kilometers from the Cyra Belt. The morbidly named Nova Station a larger and more advanced facility, was completed in 2335. Set in orbit over Atlas, the station contained the first drivespace

communication relay in the Verge. Nova was originally planned as nothing more than a research and communication center for StarMech, but like Darkhold it found itself serving as a port of call for ships desperate for supplies.

Although Nova was designed for radiation resistance, even its shielded systems aren't completely immune. The solar radiation during a Burn plays havoc with the station's sensitive and advanced electrical systems, and communications aboard the new station fail just as they do elsewhere. The station's drivesats continue to receive messages from faraway stars, but Nova can't relay them anywhere in the system. During a Burn, communications in the Tendril system are dependent on courier vessels.

Just to keep it operational, Nova station follows one of the highest maintenance cycles of any StarMech station. Without frequent repair, the station quickly becomes inoperable. During solar flares, the communication relays aboard Nova are often permanently damaged. Only the frequent arrivals of supply vessels from StarMech keep the space station operational.

For years, StarMech sent bulk cargo ships to pick up the valuable ores collected in the system and drop off much-needed supplies and replacement parts. It was a profitable arrangement for the new colonists and local workers, but when war broke out in 2346, StarMech concentrated on its own borders. Tendril and its complicated radiation problems were suddenly forgotten.

### THE LONG SILENCE

For the first few years of the war, the colonists of the Tendril system enjoyed certain advantages compared to other Vergers. News filtered in from the Stellar Ring of the growing conflict. Nova Station received communiqués from parts of Old Space about the mutant uprising on Tau Ceti and the escalating conflict back home. Out on the frontier it seemed safer. Tendril was one of the better defended Verge systems, and the local situation hadn't yet grown desperate enough to encourage raiders and pirates.

The first indication of a real problem came in January 2351. StarMech vessels were scheduled to arrive at the start of the month, as they had once every three months, carrying new colonists, new soldiers, new tools, and new parts for the station. But the scheduled ships failed to appear. At first, the colonists didn't worry too much; in wartime, some ships would inevitably

be intercepted or lost in combat. Nova Station's technicians simply replaced the damaged components from spares and sent an inquiry to StarMech questioning the delay. They were told that a conflict within the Stellar Ring had delayed the ship, but that the next supply ship would be on time.

After another five months, time ran out. The quarterly Burn ravaged Nova Station's systems, burning through backups and short-circuiting repair mechanisms. With almost all of its drivesats damaged beyond repair, the drivesat communication relay was offline. All contact outside the system was lost—not only with StarMech, but also with Aegis and Hammer's Star. StarMech's additional supply ships never made it. At the same time, Babel's population barely managed to throw together larger and larger greenhouses in time to feed its hungry. The Nova Station administrators and the Alaundril colonists were confronted with some difficult decisions. They tried to keep things running smoothly, but they weren't used to operating without outside help.

By methodical scavenging, the station comm technicians brought the drivespace comm relay back online in 2367. The news flooded in that the Tau Ceti incident had precipitated a full-scale galactic war. StarMech authorities back in Old Space admitted with regret that the stellar nation could no longer afford to send resources so far away. And then the voices from the Stellar Ring stopped. No more messages arrived from StarMech or any of the stellar nations. In 2375, the Kendai communication relay, set at the edge of the Stellar Ring, was destroyed. The Long Silence began in earnest.

The sense of isolation fell over the system. In the new atmosphere, divisions grew between Darkhold, Alaundril, and Nova Station. They slowly but steadily pursued separate paths. While all the settlements publicly proclaimed their loyalty to the StarMech Collective, each one privately concentrated on its own survival.

Darkhold furthered its reputation as the local rough-and-tumble port where anything and everything was available for a price. While it retained some repair facilities, Darkhold slowly sold off most of its technological devices to Nova Station—in exchange for additional alcohol, virtual reality gear, generators, and other leisure items. In the middle of the Cyra Belt, Darkhold remained a pleasant place to lose a fortune.

For Babel and the rest of Alaundril, survival also meant catering to the miners. The outpost began expanding its indus-

TABLE S8: TENDRIL SYSTEM

	<b>Delphin</b>	<b>Sperous</b>	<b>Alaundril</b>	<b>Atlas</b>	<b>Pox</b>
Primary	Tendril	Tendril	Sperous	Tendril	Tendril
Planetary Class	Class 3	Class 2	Class 1	Class 2	Class 5
Gravity	G3 (1.83 g)	G3 (1.81 g)	G2 (1.14 g)	G1 (0.57 g)	G2 (0.94 g)
Radiation*	R4-5 (64 rem/hour)	R2-3 (11 rem/wk)	R2-3 (17 rem/wk)	R3-4 (34 rem/day)	R3-4 (14 rem/day)
Atmosphere	A3 (CO, CO <sub>2</sub> , Fe(CO) <sub>5</sub> )	A4 (CO <sub>2</sub> )	A2 (N <sub>2</sub> , O <sub>2</sub> )	A0 (CO <sub>2</sub> )	A1 (H <sub>2</sub> , He)
Pressure	P3 (1.60 atm)	P5 (85.13 atm)	P3 (1.24 atm)	P0 (0.02 atm)	P5 (Gas Giant)
Heat	H3-4 (80°C+)	H5 (737°C)	H2 (28°C)	H2 (-46°C)	H1(-165°C)
Orbital Distance	2.74 AU	3.67 AU	382,014 km	5.74 AU	16.01 AU
Diameter	8,406 km	10,432 km	7,726 km	6,178 km	50,100 km
Year	3.38 years	5.24 years	(30.84 days)	10.22 years	47.69 years
Day	16.01 hours	2106.4 hours	77 hours	33.64 hours	17.0 hours
Axial Tilt	2°	14°	11.3°	21°	13°
Density	2.78	2.26	1.88	0.54	0.24
# Satellites	2	3	0	0	33

\* The value before the dash indicates normal radiation; the second number indicates radiation during a Burn.

trial base so it could trade in a wider variety of goods and services. Babel's shipyards, already able to repair most spacecraft, quickly gained the capacity to construct system spacecraft for miners, patrol ships, and independent traders. Other facilities were built to provide basic electronic components for the radiation-bathed system. After a decade, Babel's technological base became strong enough to create the sophisticated replacement parts required by Nova Station.

Nova Station, its interstellar voice restored but limited to the Verge, was a communications relay for both Tendril and the adjacent star systems. Contact with the Aegis and Hammer's Star systems became regular, and Tendril became one of the dominant powers of the region. Nova also served as a major port of call for all craft traveling in the coreward half of Verge space. Since ships lacking space-to-ground capabilities couldn't land on Babel, Nova Station provided a spaceborne shipyard, easing the completion of repairs.

It wasn't until 2405 that a StarMech naval vessel finally made its way to Tendril. While the Tendril colonies scavenged to survive and began trading with some of their friendlier neighbors, the SMS *Augustine* arrived. But it didn't deliver what anyone expected. The *Augustine* was a research vessel commanded by Robert Harrison. The *Augustine* had begun the long journey from Kendai once it became clear that the war's end lay far beyond the horizon. Oddly, Harrison's cruiser didn't carry many supplies, as most Alaundrins had hoped when they saw the Old Space vessel make starrise. Instead Harrison promised technical knowledge and the expertise necessary to turn the system around. Tendril, Harrison said, must become independent. And even though the *Augustine* was a research vessel, it represented the strongest military force in the system. For the next four decades, Harrison ruled the system from aboard his driveship and from his offices on Nova Station.

The commands from Nova Station and Atlas signaled an important change in leadership. They also drove another wedge between the StarMech authority, the miners, and the colonists of Alaundril.

### THE AUGUSTINE

For decades, the scientists on board the *Augustine* had been surveying and investigating the rocky surface of Atlas; many living in the system thought their time would be better spent helping to improve living conditions. In 2445, 40 years after the ship's arrival, the *Augustine* crew made a momentous discovery on Atlas: an alien artifact hidden deep within the crust of the planet.

The pyramid-shaped device was coated in black metal and magnetite, and it radiated a shimmering field of energy whenever exposed to a power source. The scientific team, led by Dr. Elizabeth Danwin, tried a battery of tests; during every probe the pyramid generated a force field that deflected laser and mass pistol attacks directed at it. The more energy that was pumped into the generator, the stronger the protective shield that surrounded it. Somehow, word of the discovery leaked. In the wake of the disclosure, Governor Harrison revealed that his primary mission since arriving in the Tendril system involved investigating alien sites on Atlas.

The scientists kept testing the pyramid, but the alien technology inside the shield generator defied all attempts to learn the secrets of its operation. The researchers couldn't even look inside the pyramid with ultrasound or radar sensors. Their only success came when they found an alien power converter with similarities to the first artifact. By 2448, Dr. Danwin had tested

the pyramid as much as possible with the tools she had at hand. She needed a larger power source—a mass reactor—and she got one. Later that year, she obtained approval to install the pyramid on board the *Augustine*.

On November 23, 2448, at precisely 14:22:36, the alien shield generator was successfully activated, as it had been dozens of times before. For the next hour, patrol craft launched mock assaults on the *Augustine* to probe the strength of its newly installed alien shield generator. At 15:29:42, Nova Station stopped receiving telemetry from the *Augustine*. At 15:30:07, a massive energy wave smashed into Nova Station, damaging its in-system communication and life support centers. Three patrol craft and a few merchant vessels were lost in the energy wave; wreckage of the craft was later found and salvaged by miners.

Parts of the *Augustine* were found in a large crater on Atlas, but most of the spacecraft had disintegrated. The fate of the alien device itself remains a mystery, though some scientists believe it survived the energy wave. Others believe that it was destroyed. Both Dr. Danwin and Governor Harrison, who had gone aboard the *Augustine* to observe the test, died in the explosion.

### A NEW SYSTEM

With the old StarMech order removed by the destruction of the *Augustine*, local business interests quickly became dominant. The corporate leaders of Alaundril demonstrated their decisiveness by commissioning seven new frigates, enough to more than replace those that were lost. A dozen well-armed frigates soon patrolled the system; this small navy kept it safe from most raids. Alaundril's leaders also donated replacement parts to Nova Station. In exchange for this generosity, the Alaundril executives gained the right to hand-pick the captains and crews of the system's naval vessels.

Harrison's death left a power vacuum and set the stage on Alaundril for a new government with system-wide implications. The *Augustine* incident, coupled with a growing dislike of Nova Station's leadership, returned power to Sperous's moon. A decade passed as Babel's corporate leaders vied for control of Alaundril. Scott Williamson, the 27-year-old CEO of Ion Productions Incorporated, won popular support with many of the colonists. Finally, the captains and military officers he once championed brought him into power. A small conflict erupted when Harrison's hand-picked successor, Governor Thomas Conraith of Nova Station, tried to take control, but the situation was quickly resolved. Conraith has not been seen since.

Scott Williamson quickly changed Tendril's government. First, he established large conglomerates from sets of competing businesses. More important, Williamson changed the Alaundrins' expectations. No longer could the governors and commanders of Nova Station issue decrees to the people of Alaundril. Indeed, now the reverse was true. The station and the military vessels of the Tendril system answered to the civilian government on Alaundril. Business leaders worked with one another for the common defense of the star system, writing rules to govern trade, and creating a small bureaucracy to handle Alaundrin internal affairs peacefully.

The most important-sounding decree of the new government was a proclamation of loyalty to the StarMech Collective, but it was purely a formality. It mimicked the statements that previous leaders had made ever since the Long Silence began. Many citizens of the system were the children and grandchildren of StarMech colonists, and the Collective's fun-loving, hard-working culture still dominated the citizens. In short, the proclamation made the citizens of Alaundril happy and preserved a

sense of continuity. The slow trickle of information that the occasional refugee ship brought from the Stellar Ring described ongoing desolation, loss, and continued war. No one ever expected the stellar nations of Old Space to return.

## TODAY

After decades of neglect, Nova Station has recently returned to the forefront of Tendril politics. For 121 years, the drivesats around Nova haven't received a single message from Old Space. In 2489, the transmissions from Hammer's Star had ceased, leaving only Aegis to communicate with. But in 2496, light-years away, the Kendai drive relay was restored, and messages flooded in from the Stellar Ring. The Second Galactic War was finally over, and the stellar nations would soon be returning to the Verge.

The stellar nations' first representatives arrived in the Verge four years ago, but the changes they brought to the Tendril system are just an extension of the system's patterns of the last 50 years. Most important, the stellar nations brought powerful economic interests to bear, always hungry for resources. The increased demand has opened the door to independent businessmen who are now raping Tendril for its mineral and metal wealth; when the resources are exhausted, they will move on to other systems. This rapid exploitation of Tendril's mineral wealth has put a strain on the status quo, but Tendril's traders are no strangers to trouble.

In the new economy, the people of Alaundril—or Alaundril, Inc., as some call it—have made a vast fortune selling stockpiles of minerals and metals to the Galactic Concord. The Alaundril business councils offer slightly reduced prices to Concord buyers to increase Concord interest and influence in the Tendril system. The plan has been successful, and the system is safer for the Concord presence. The sales have also made many busy leaders very wealthy. In the most spectacular example, Williamson remains the wealthiest man in the system, although he has reinvested his earnings heavily in modernizing Alaundril's shipyards. A little of this great wealth has trickled down to the people, who are happy with Williamson's rule, for the most part.

The StarMech Collective has mixed feelings about the situation. On one hand, they are pleased that they've regained a system in the Verge when so many systems have rebelled against their former nations. Furthermore, Tendril isn't just any system; it comes with the Cyra Belt, a vast and easily accessible source of mineral wealth. It has a habitable world in Alaundril, despite the radiation. Finally, Alaundril's shipyards are simply the finest in the Verge.

The political situation casts a shadow over Tendril's assets. While the Alaundril government continues to voice its complete support of the Collective, StarMech ambassadors and bureaucrats often find it difficult to deal with Williamson and his business councils. StarMech citizens are welcome within the system, and StarMech vessels have full rights of passage. But StarMech officials in the system find it upsetting that directives from the Stellar Ring aren't always followed here. Tendril's inhabitants look to Alaundril for leadership, not to Chance, the StarMech capital hundreds of light-years away in Old Space.

The long absence of their beloved patron, Williamson explains, has created a unique situation in the Tendril system. Three generations have been born and raised as Vergers rather than as Starmechs. While their parents and their great-grandparents remember StarMech and remain loyal to the nation, Tendril's natives consider the members of the Collective no more than friendly strangers. While no one wants to sever the



Flag of Independent Alaundril

system's ties to StarMech, it will take years to reintegrate the population peacefully.

The system's inhabitants aren't prepared to answer to a new civilian authority after years of independence. For example, a law passed in 2455 allows the Alaundril government to reassign any mining claim that hasn't been worked in 10 years. Many independent miners hired by StarMech long ago became small companies and made claims of their own. These independents contribute to Tendril's success, and no one wants to see them shut down.

The end result is that the star system is recognized as a StarMech protectorate. StarMech cruisers maintain the peace, and StarMech law rules the system. Tendril's corporations send a percentage of their profits to StarMech tax collectors each quarter. But within the system, and especially on Alaundril, StarMech authority is checked by the business council that acts as both government and employer. For the time being, the local government retains the right to assign claims in the Cyra Belt. This represents the true power in the system, even though much mining in the belt is unlicensed.

The one place where StarMech military and civilian officials do rule unchecked is over Nova Station. After StarMech promised both the businesses of Alaundril and the Galactic Concord that Nova's drivesats would remain open to everyone, the government of Alaundril ceded the giant space station and its drivesats to StarMech in 2499. Of course, StarMech still makes large profits from drivesat communications, given its monopoly. StarMech made public access to the drivesats a point in assigning valuable Concord shipping routes to Tendril; Alaundril agreed with the decision. By doing so, the locals guaranteed cheap rates for interstellar communications. And given the station's high upkeep cost, it's often more trouble than it's worth.

The local StarMech leadership headed by Chelsea Krest (Hi/StarMech/DFA-13) appears largely content. Krest has advocated taking the long view in most relations with Alaundril. As StarMech gains more influence in the system, Krest is certain that the citizens of Alaundril will become accustomed to their new friends. Within a generation, reunification will be an accomplished fact.

The prominent exception to Krest's slow and sure approach is at Darkhold, in the heart of the Cyra Belt. To Krest, StarMech's public success in Tendril depends on its ability to create a stable and reputable peace. Darkhold has grown independent from the rest of the star system, but it has also made itself vulnerable. In the first two years after StarMech's return, it has made generous offers to Darkhold, meant to convince the outpost how much more pleasant life would be under StarMech control, but Darkhold has chosen to remain independent. The outpost's newest strategy is to jam the navigation equipment of uninvited craft, forcing these ships to navigate the crowded heart of the

Cyra Belt manually. StarMech has condemned the activity as illegal and dangerous. Recently, StarMech lost a cruiser in the belt, and the repercussions are still being worked out.

The rush of prospectors from the Stellar Ring has provided yet another destabilizing force. As has been true since Tendril's colonization, many of the new miners hope to strike it rich. Lately, though, research vessels are arriving in numbers that almost equal the mining ships. Each is eager to explore the mystery surrounding the *Augustine*'s disappearance. Since 2497, the number of digs on Atlas has increased tenfold. The number of recognized academic institutions, religious groups, and eager amateurs working side by side has created a new economic niche in the Tendril system. Today, only StarMech has taken any steps to regulate their activity, by loosely tracking expedition routes and licensing new arrivals. The only thing that StarMech has insisted on is that any experimentation involving alien discoveries be done around the distant gas giant Pox. After the *Augustine*, no one has questioned this demand.

## DELPHIN

As far as most humans are concerned, the system's innermost planet, Delphin, is a fine example of the worst elements of planetary evolution. Tendril is a hot F1 star; at a mean distance of only 80 million kilometers, its planet Delphin is a scorched and irradiated chunk of metal. The planet's steady rotation and moderately thick atmosphere allow the entire planet to experience Tendril's warm gaze. Indeed, while the planet retains an atmosphere, its extreme heat and poisonous atmosphere make life here nearly unbearable. The high radiation makes most pilots think twice before landing, especially during the Burn. Buried deep below the surface, heavy metals might lure desperate miners if the Cyra Belt didn't present an easier target.

There's really nothing on Delphin's surface but sand. And the sand makes overland travel extremely treacherous. Delphin is known for its wild sandstorms, with winds frequently reaching speeds of 450 kph. That's fast enough to flay skin and hurl men and women alike from one sand dune to the next. It also reduces visibility to zero. If that weren't enough, volcanic rifts and seas of iron carbonyl make Delphin the sort of world that no sane sentient would visit.

## LAND'S END

More than a few have accused Dr. Andrew Tofske and the Delphin Development Division of insanity, but the bleak outlook for successfully transforming the planet hasn't stopped a group of terraformers from setting up camp in a station called Land's End. Arriving with the recent wave of Arriver ships, the terraformers have been hard at work trying to make Delphin a nice place to live—in a dozen generations or so, of course. It's one of the most daunting terraforming efforts that has ever been tried, and many question StarMech's good sense in attempting it. But today Dr. Tofske's scientists are busy creating all kinds of arid-loving, radiation-resistant fauna for the eventual blossoming of the desert world.

Dr. Tofske, the station's technical administrator, is a brilliant scientist known throughout the Stellar Ring for his success in overcoming atmospheric problems in the Iridis system. After winning numerous awards for terraforming Iridis in record time, Tofske has found in Delphin an even greater challenge. Although a citizen of the Union of Sol, he is contracted to StarMech for the next five years to oversee the first steps in the terraforming of this planet. It's said that Chelsea Krest and Star-

## THE BURN

Roughly every 67 days, Tendril begins a 12- to 14-day Burn. The electromagnetic radiation shed by the star during this period increases by a factor of 20, bombarding the star's planets and moons with deadly cosmic and ultraviolet rays. When using the GRAPH system to evaluate environmental conditions, the radiation (R) value increases by one grade during a Burn. For example, Delphin is usually rated R4; during a Burn, it's R5.

The Burn's other effect is to disrupt electronic equipment within the system. All skill checks using System Operation-sensors or communications suffer a +2 penalty during a Burn.

Mech are mostly interested in Tofske in order to learn the latest Solar planet-altering techniques, and may be simply indulging Tofske's whims in exchange. Still, Tofske shapes the research priorities of Delphin's terraforming, leaving the administrative and security work to Liam Pelles and Katherine Gariss.

Liam Pelles (Mm/StarMech/CS-9) recently resigned from the Concord Marines to take a job as head of security for Land's End, and he has retained the respect of those he left behind. A brilliant tactician, he has plenty of surprises awaiting anyone foolish enough to make trouble on his station. Still, the fact that he's on the station makes many wonder what's so important on Land's End.

StarMech has responded only that many samples collected from Delphin are quite valuable (from a scientific point of view). Protecting the 350 inhabitants on the base from harm is an important job—they're mostly scientists, and not very good at defending themselves. While that may be true for the majority of the scientists, nearly two dozen of those living on the station have served in various military branches within the borders of the Stellar Ring. Pelles's security force has likewise received special training.

Katherine Gariss (Hf/StarMech/DFA-12) is a bright young lawyer who successfully prosecuted many war criminals at the Galactic Court before arriving at Land's End. Depending on which story one believes, Gariss has been assigned here because of her overzealousness or because of her effectiveness. It's certainly true that the Thuldian Empire army and navy loathe her for her successful prosecutions of their officers on war crimes charges. StarMech may have transferred her to the Verge to make it easier to deal with Thuldian diplomats back in Old Space. Her title at Land's End is chief administrator, and her work is largely bureaucratic.

## DELPHIN'S FAUNA

Unbelievable as it may seem, Delphin's bitter environment has produced several higher life forms. Today, stories and sightings provide barroom gossip at every station in the system. While every independent expedition sent into Delphin's sandy wastes has returned empty-handed, reckless miners and travelers near the volcanic rift valleys claim to have witnessed everything from rock creatures striding over the radioactive dunes to swirling masses of air coalescing to attack intruders. No evidence of these creatures has ever come to light, and they may simply be tall tales of the frontier.

## DELPHIN'S SATELLITES

The twin moons of Delphin share few traits with their parent. Both are extremely hot—sometimes even molten—with high sur-

face radiation. Neither Demimonde nor Alimonde has an atmosphere.

While neither moon presents any scientific curiosities, Alimonde, the more distant moon, holds an old solar research satellite locked in its orbit. Anything of value has long since been stripped from the old observatory, but it has remained in stable orbit.

## SPEROUS

One of the mysteries of the Tendril system, this planet is forever cloaked in thick clouds and ripped by fierce winds. Its intense atmospheric pressure is fatal to anything that enters its confines, which has further restricted the information available on the planet. The thick atmospheric blanket is mildly acidic.

A few robotic probes have weathered the extreme environment to provide reports on Sperous's surface conditions, but even these efforts have been rather limited. Between the intense heat and the immense pressure, nothing manmade has had much luck surviving on the planet's surface.

## GOLIATH

The only settlement near Sperous proper is *Goliath*, a gas mining station floating in the planet's upper atmosphere. The station is suspended beneath huge gas cells that both provide lift and store the station's output; gravity induction engines provide a backup in case the gas bags are ever ruptured. It's a fairly large facility that is mostly stable amid the planet's wild winds. While *Goliath* is a StarMech venture dating back to the days before GW2, its workers are individually contracted. The typical tour of duty lasts about six months; few workers renew their contracts, despite generous incentives.

Gas mining is hard work, and there's normally little trouble on board the base. Twelve security officers are responsible for maintaining order on the base, but the miners police themselves fairly well. Often, they're too tired to cause trouble. A handful of scientists spend their time aboard *Goliath* dropping probes into the murky interior of Sperous. Most of them are attempting to gather laser-enhanced images of the planet's surface.

No more than 200 people ever live aboard *Goliath* at any one time, even though its capacity is more than 500. Living conditions are poor, lighting is dim, and the base's instability makes many wonder how they will survive six months of such tossing and tumbling about. Administration of the facility is handled remotely through Nova Station, though the miners occasionally joke about an administrator who was relegated to six months penance aboard *Goliath*. Such assignments are very rare, but they're normally seen as punishment by everyone involved.

The *Goliath* high-atmosphere station hosts nothing more than a modest array of medical devices under the skillful hand of Dr. Temeris Bliss, a middle-aged doctor from Alaundril, and three assistants. Many of the miners are wondering what Bliss's crime was to get him sent here. The doctor seems unfazed by his current assignment, however. Despite Dr. Bliss's skill, patients with serious injuries are transported to Alaundril; these cases—in fact, everything going to and from the station—travel on the Vortex lift.

## THE VORTEX LIFT

The Vortex lift conveys passengers to and from *Goliath*. It transports up to 10 passengers at a time through its conduit to an

## DR. ANDREW TOFSKE ADMINISTRATOR OF LAND'S END

### Level 13 Human Tech Op

STR 9	(0)	INT 14	(+2)
DEX 10	(0)	WIL 9	(0)
CON 10		PER 8	
Durability: 10/10/5/5		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 1	

### Attacks

Unarmed—*brawl* 10/5/2 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/0

### Defenses

Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (EN)

### Skills

Athletics [9]; Unarmed [9]—*brawl* [10]; Vehicle [10]—*space* [11]; Stamina [10]; Business [12]; Knowledge [14]—*computer* [17]; Navigation [14]; Life [14]—*biology* [16], *botany* [16], *xenology* [16], *zoology* [16]; Physical [14]—*chemistry* [17]; *physics* [17], *planetology* [20]; System Operation [14]; Technical [14]—*knowledge* (*terraforming*) [24]; Administration [9]; Awareness [9]; Culture [8]—*etiquette: Tendril* [9], *etiquette: StarMech* [9], *etiquette: Solar* [11]; Interaction [12]; Leadership [12].

Tofske wants nothing more than to complete the impossible, with his name forever etched into history as the man who mastered the hell that Delphin was. Obsessed as he is, he left behind a reliable position in the Solar Union to put his radical ideas to the test out in the frontier. He knows that many of his StarMech assistants are watching him, hoping to discover the secrets of Solar terraforming, but he just doesn't care.

Tofske doesn't believe in the claims of indigenous sentients on Delphin. If anyone were to provide proof of such a lifeform, Tofske might quit the project entirely.

The truth is that both StarMech authorities and Concord surveyors have found and catalogued at least three animal species on Delphin. One of them appears to be sentient. This is the real reason behind the StarMech's willingness to pour billions into the near-impossible task of terraforming Delphin. The terraforming effort is a smokescreen to conceal their discovery. The revelation of a sentient species is quite valuable, politically and economically, to any stellar nation.

It's going to take some pretty strong evidence to convince anyone in Tendril that life truly exists on such a hostile planet. A few smashed conduits and damaged airlocks are hardly conclusive.

orbital satellite. Now over 100 years old, the Vortex elevator system was once a source of pride for the inhabitants of the Tendril system. After years of use and abuse, it's now a dilapidated and temperamental piece of machinery. If not for constant juryrigging by StarMech engineers, the Vortex would long ago have fallen prey to corrosion by Sperous's acidic atmosphere.

Trips in the Vortex lift's pods are typically disorienting, rocky, and wild, but almost every pod launched up the Vortex reaches its destination. A few unlucky souls have lost their lives when fierce weather—or the debilitating effects of a Burn—strike Go-



NEMO

liath and the Vortex. Pods that fall to the planet's surface have never been recovered, despite some heroic attempts.

### SPEROUS'S SATELLITES

While Alaundril is the moon everyone thinks of, two other satellites orbit Sperous. Cormis is an airless rock, peppered by craters and not even promising enough to attract miners. Testament is just as barren, but has become home to a few hundred colonists, all of them devout Muslims. They're relatively new arrivals, setting up their base on the moon and arranging for periodic supply shipments from Alaundril. Their goal is to set up a self-sustaining base from which to spread their faith to this sector of space.

### ALAUNDRIL

Of the three moons that orbit Sperous, only Alaundril can support life. As the seat of planetary power and resources in the system, Alaundril is a vital link to the Stellar Ring and the systems of the Verge. It's also the closest thing the system has to a refuge from Tendril's radioactive fires. Still, it's not Earth. Alaundril's hot, rocky surface, its glittering golden sands, and its dark mountain ranges don't welcome visitors. At first glance, Alaundril seems to be another lifeless victim of Tendril's tremendous radiation.

Surface scans are much more revealing, showing small settlements across the surface, and the planetary capital of Babel is unmistakable, its golden towers apparent in all but the worst weather. Blue laser beacons and radio transponders guide all vessels toward the landing platforms at Babel.

### ALAUNDRIL'S GOVERNMENT

Babel's government is Alaundril's government; no other settlement on the planet can compete with its size. The government is led by conglomerates of competing businesses, called the Common Council. Each consortium tries to ensure that its competitors don't gain an unfair advantage. Only the largest and most profitable corporations in the star system gain representation in Alaundril government. Corporations based or headquartered outside the Tendril system do not participate directly in the government. The only exception to this rule, made via special amendment in 2499, grants membership to the StarMech Collective.

Common Council seats are granted based on bottom-line profits; the more profit, the more seats. In addition, a company can obtain additional "incentive seats" by reinvesting its profits in various projects beneficial to Alaundril. Scott Williamson, CEO of Ion Productions, has led the Council for 43 years, and seems likely to continue in this role. No other business group comes even close to the sheer market dominance of Ion Productions.

Accounting firms guarantee that all citizens and businesses pay their fair share of the tax load. Security firms keep order, with their profits tied directly to crime statistics. Representatives write and debate laws in the Common Council. Williamson presides over all of these groups from his serene position on high; he rarely interferes directly, instead making his wishes known through intermediaries.

Various churches control an independent welfare system, but their generosity is limited by the fact that they are taxed just as heavily as anyone else. The dominant religions on Alaundril are Humanity Reformation and Ancientism. The Reformers

have maintained a church since before GW2; the Ancientists migrated to Tendril to study the relics and traces of ancient life on Atlas.

### ALAUNDRIL'S ECONOMICS

Business life permeates the city of Babel. From the electronic pulse of commerce in the marketplace to the soft hum of a video terminal late at night, almost everyone is trying to figure out a way to improve on old ideas or to launch the next great business. In the burning desert air of Alaundril, it's profit or perish. Though it's not fair to say that every citizen of Alaundril is obsessed with profit, it's not that far from the truth. Entrepreneurs run rampant, and everyone seems to have a fresh (or crackpot) business idea. Some of those ideas saved Alaundril from disaster when StarMech abandoned it during GW2, while others caused widespread grief.

Alaundril is the gateway to Old Space. The Concord has scheduled the arrival of one of its fortress ships twice each year. In addition to enforcing the peace, the fortress ship and its convoy add to the importance of the Tendril economy to the rest of the Verge. The fortress ship drops off much of its cargo before heading back to the safe confines of the Stellar Ring. From Alaundril's warehouses, profit flows to the far corners of the Verge.

The largest trade interest in the system is Copernicus Capital, whose holdings include hundreds of warehouses and more than 60 transport driveships. Copernicus vessels are a common sight in the Verge's populous systems; the trade routes between Tendril and Aegis, a central distribution site for the Verge, are especially profitable. While Copernicus Capital keeps the most lucrative trading deals for itself, its representatives often hire independent traders for marginal hauls or for runs to dangerous systems such as Algemron.

The Alaundril Ministry of Trade places a variety of cargoes available for bid on the freight exchange, where both independent and established traders can compete for hauling rights. Profits range from slim (less than 10%) to moderate (around 25%) on such hauls, depending on the degree of competition. The most lucrative trades are kept off the market by special arrangements, such as the private, long-term contracts between the Ministry and major shipping groups such as Copernicus Capital and InterSystem Services.

Alaundril, like most Verge societies, has yet to complete the transition to exclusive use of the Concord dollar, so it is one of the few places in explored space where a fortune can still be made in financial speculation. Representatives of the Concord's Galactic Bank work hard to advance the timetable of the changeover, but it will be years before the last Alaundril scrip—primarily based on archaic currencies such as the StarMech bull and the Thuldan kent—has left circulation. For now, the situation is profitable for cunning traders, pawnbrokers, and bankers.

### ION PRODUCTION

The largest corporate entity on Alaundril wasn't always the behemoth that it is now; it wasn't even always synonymous with shipyards and quality spacecraft. When the Second Galactic War drew StarMech's interest away, Kane Williamson made the bold move of investing his reserve capital into converting his tool-and-die business, Ion Parts & Manufacturing, into a full-fledged shipyard. It was a risky move. If the Second Galactic War had been as short as the first and StarMech had returned quickly, ship construction in the Stellar Ring would have bankrupted Ion Productions.

Some have called Kane's smart investment foresight, while others dismiss it as luck. It was most likely a combination of the two, but Kane's luck ran out in 2451, when he died of radiation sickness while on a survey mission to the Cyra Belt. His 21-year-old grandson, Scott Williamson, became the CEO and quickly solidified his position in the company.

Scott's business acumen proved tough to compete against. While the businesses of Alaundril vied for supremacy, he took the direct approach. After opening the Kane Academy military training facility, he invited the best of Tendril's small navy to take advantage of Ion Productions' generosity. He presented a handful of advanced prototypes to the military for inspection, with crews directly from the Kane Academy. Influence in the Tendril military gave Williamson a small edge over his trading competitors; his later control over the military gave him a huge advantage. At the same time, Williamson's gifts to Tendril's defense made him the patron saint of the establishment. Recently, Williamson signed a deal with an Orlamu corporation to secure a steady supply of stardrives for the next generation of Ion driveships.

Today, Ion Productions guarantees that Alaundril maintains a trade surplus with respect to interstellar trading in general and the Stellar Ring in particular. Without the production capital of Ion Productions, Tendril could quickly become simply another backwater source of raw resources.

### OTHER CORPORATIONS

Ion Productions wasn't the only philanthropic corporation in the new economy. A handful of companies supported Williamson and continue to operate in-system. StarMech contracted TaskCor Communications to administer Nova Station's drivesats, and it profits heavily from its investment in Alaundril's communications system.

Paramilitary corporations lead the Alaundril economy. Quest, Inc. developed the body armor worn by security personnel of both the government and major corporations. Encryptix established a standard data-encryption format for the Tendril Grid, and Dynamic Response Ltd. became the premier supplier of small arms in the Tendril system.

Finally, Solar X, a publicly held corporation with a 51% share owned by the noble House Blackmore of the Borealis Republic, has one of the highest-trading share prices on the Vessy stock exchange (see page 154). House Blackmore recently lost two members of its family to the corsair lord Kalt Terenz, and has offered a reward of \$2.5 million for his head. The Solar X corporation produces mining equipment, e-suits, and specialized ore-processing equipment for ground-based crushing and smelting.

### GALACTIC CONCORD

Eager to cement relations with a neutral power, Scott Williamson has been quick to provide the Galactic Concord with anything it needs. Williamson is in no hurry to give StarMech the keys to Tendril. Concord vessels' repairs take priority over any others, and the Concord has opened an embassy in the city of Babel. Ambassador Dmetri Demerot (Hm/Concord/DFA-13) represents the Concord, but he understands the delicate balance between StarMech and Babel and refuses to take sides. His assistant, Idan Jil Tir, handles the day-to-day issues while he determines policy.

Demerot's goal is to secure the system as a permanent port of call for ships arriving from the Stellar Ring. He contracts with the various trade interests to store supplies for the Concord, at-

tends diplomatic functions, dinners, and negotiations; aids the Alaundril government in drafting laws; and assists the Galactic Bank in introducing the Concord dollar.

While the Concord maintains a small garrison in Babel at the embassy, most of its military operations are conducted from military spacecraft or during the semiannual arrival of a fortress ship. The Alaundril military has opened its own bases to the Concord in an effort to strengthen ties between the two governments. Alaundril shipyards have also given priority to the repair of the CSS *Ganesh*, a Star Force battle cruiser recently damaged in a February 2501 action in the Hammer's Star System. The ship looms large in the dry-docks, and is the scene of constant activity, as the Alaundril yards are pursuing a round-the-clock repair schedule.

## BABEL

Located in a rocky basin near the equator, the metropolis of Babel is a sprawling city whose lights are visible from space. The city's original urban planners divided Babel into distinct districts; today, the focus of each district has wavered due to the city's rapid growth since 2497.

To the northwest lie immense factories and the Ion Productions shipyards, whose bulk obscures the skyline. Southeast, on a large outcropping, rest the Foundingstones, home of the wealthy elite. West and southwest are military bunkers and government landing pads. East is the business district, and northeast are common homes, a 26th-century suburbia. The government district and main landing pads are at the old heart of the city. Slums consume the northern ward. South lie colleges, research facilities, and recreational parks.

The first thing to greet a ship and its crew after landing are businesses eager to offer services. Ship repairs and upgrades, communications and financial services, hotel accommodations, casino promotions, and similar offers abound. The government sets few strictures on travelers and businesspeople; after a brief customs inspection, tourists have free access to the city.

Babel is a civilized enclave, not some lawless anarchy. Carrying guns in public is illegal, except for police officers or Alaundril, Concord, or StarMech soldiers. The port authorities politely ask visitors armed with handguns to leave their weapons aboard ship. Those who disembark from ships armed with rifles, shotguns, or armor-mounted SMGs get a more emphatic request to disarm.

Once here, visitors discover a city ready to welcome newcomers from the Stellar Ring. Most of Babel's businesses cater to high-end tastes, believing that travelers are looking for an escape from the bad food and cramped quarters of most space vessels. Four-star dining establishments such as Hannoley's, Kanstoi's, and Yesterdays intermingle with luxurious hotels such as Bergenhost, Holocourt Hall, and Traveler's Sanctuary.

## SITES OF INTEREST

Visitors to Babel can find hundreds of professional, technical, strategic, or entertainment-oriented sites of interest. Five of the most important are described below.

### HOLOCOURT HALL

This luxury hotel lies on the outskirts of the Foundingstones district. Surrounded by six acres of manmade forest, Holocourt Hall is a sanctuary in a troubled galaxy, and security is correspondingly high. The three-meter-high stone wall surrounding the property contains a variety of electronic surveillance equipment,

### SCOTT WILLIAMSON CEO OF ION PRODUCTIONS

#### Level 13 human Diplomat (Tech Op)

STR 8	(0)	INT 12	(+1)
DEX 9	(0)	WIL 12	(+1)
CON 9		PER 12	
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 12+/11/5/2	
Move: sprint 16, run 10, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 2	

#### Attacks

Unarmed-brawl 9/4/2 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/0

#### Defenses

Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

#### Skills

Athletics [8]; Unarmed [8]-brawl [9]; Vehicle Operation [9]; Stamina [9]; Business [12]-corporate [15]; Knowledge [12]-computer [14], language: Standard [15]; Navigation [12]; Physical Science [12]; System Operation [12]; Technical Science [12]-invention [13], knowledge (starship construction) [14]; Administration [12]-bureaucracy [14], management [17]; Awareness [12]; Resolve [12]; Culture [12]-etiquette: Tendril [16], etiquette: StarMech [14]; Deception [12]-bluff [14]; Interaction [12]-bargain [15], charm [15], intimidate [15]; Leadership [12]-command [14], inspire [15].

Williamson, still a reasonably young man by the standards of the day at 70, has had a single goal since he was a boy: power. He inherited his wealth from his grandfather, multiplied it, and turned his economic success into political leadership. On Alaundril, that's not hard to imagine, since the moon's people prize wealth above other virtues. Fortunately for Alaundril's citizens, Williamson's success has added to their own.

On top of the world, Williamson today demonstrates a lassitude that he would have abhorred only a few years ago. It's clear that within a decade, StarMech leaders will dominate Tendril and Alaundril. It's unclear whether Williamson will accept a position in the new order, or retire and become an ultrachic playboy. The early signs are that Williamson is feeling the weight of long rule and hopes to retire to a ceremonial position.

Williamson's heir, his daughter Maria, is a largely unknown force in Alaundril's politics. Speculation has it that StarMech has approached her and been rebuffed.

but it's impossible to tell from casual observation exactly where the devices are located. Guest rooms are sealed by the latest bioelectric locks and monitored from a central security office to ensure privacy.

Each room is a large suite with all the modern necessities—video terminals, grav beds, a bar with selections of exotic beverages, full Grid access, a chef, masseuse, personal assistant, and dreamwalker (a mindwalker who specializes in programming one's mind for special dreams). Of course, such amenities aren't cheap. A night's lodging starts at around \$1,200, not including gratuity, meals, alcohol, and staff service charges. Despite this, the Hall is normally booked weeks in advance.

1 cm = 1100 km  
km x 1000

0 1 2 3



### THE SPACEWALK

Jokingly referred to as the theme park of Babel nightclubs, the Spacewalk is a gigantic, popular bar built around an old Earth pirate motif. It was founded decades ago by Jack "Steelheart" Loman, a Solar who had adopted the trappings of a 17th-century buccaneer. Loman requires that the Spacewalk's patrons wear garb of that era—naval uniforms, pirate costumes, or other 17th-century Earth clothing. It's not unusual to hear the thunder of cannon or the steady click of a wooden peg leg (normally just a holo projection) upon entering the Spacewalk. Colorful Caribbean drinks (in large glasses topped with bright flowers) are the most popular beverages, but rum, ale, and beer are also served.

Ever since its construction, the massive club that occupies two city blocks has been a favorite among both the rich and the fashionable of Alaundril. Its success is due to Loman, now 132 years old and a rich man in his own right. Loman himself has become something of a cult figure. A few thousand of the Spacewalk's fans have adopted the Solar practice of "culture preservationism" by joining Loman's faux buccaneers, at least on weekends.

To make the establishment even more fantastic, engineers have altered the gravity in various parts of the building. This allows acts of bravado that would otherwise be impossible, and also permits them to stage small boat-to-boat battles along the small stream that snakes its way through the club.

### SHADOWROCK BASE

Much of Alaundril's military can be found in a large complex on the rim of the Shadowrock basin, overlooking Babel and keeping a wary eye trained to the stars. Ships approaching Babel

without responding to hails are greeted with a weapons lock by Shadowrock's ground-based defense stations.

The Shadowrock Base is a city unto itself. Rigidly organized into various departments, the military outpost contains housing, administration, weapons, storage, repair yards, and other necessities for maintaining an independent existence. Military personnel seldom confine themselves to the base, preferring to visit Babel during off-duty hours. The Shadowrock base is the biggest threat to any enemy military force. Security sweeps across the base and unannounced drills and inspections are common exercises conducted to keep the base alert. The base security chief is a little paranoid about infiltration by unauthorized personnel.

General Karen Jestons (Hi/Alaundril/DCS-13) has been the commanding officer for the last six years. Well-known for her ability to inspire others, General Jestons frequently wanders the base, chatting with everyone from cooks to MPs. While she's proven herself an able politician, she prefers not to involve either herself or her soldiers in the day-to-day political strife of Babel. This personal quest hasn't met with universal success; Scott Williamson, among others, considers the Alaundril military a tool to be wielded as he sees fit.

The Shadowrock base is also the system headquarters of Star Force, the naval branch of the Concord military. Star Force's local headquarters is a structure that sits immediately adjacent to the Alaundril base complex. It's nothing special to look at, just a reinforced bunker where visiting or newly assigned Star Force officers go to learn the intricacies of the Verge, but it is equipped with the most up-to-date jamming and signal intelligence equipment in the Verge.



### PROVIDENCE

More of an outpost than a city, Providence is a mixture of prefabricated buildings and old ship hulls. Scavenged housing marks the streets and alleys, serving as research labs, meeting halls, and homes.

Providence's rough appearance is deceptive. Its sheet metal and mud walls hide research facilities that measure radiation, air pollution, and atmospheric composition, and its primitive housing is home to many of Alaundril's finest scientists and technicians. Its scientific pursuits have changed over the years from measuring the long-term effects of radiation exposure to the fabrication of materials to shield against radiation. Providence's research projects have changed the lives of Alaundrins for the better.

The clearest example of scientific success is a synthetic fabric called polythericlene. While it has the feel of silk and the wear of cotton, it also filters out more than 50% of Tendril's intense radiation. For resisting high-radiation environments, it's as effective as a soft e-suit, but much more comfortable. In Alaundril's usual R2 conditions, this is enough to protect the citizens. The fabric has changed the textile industry, and virtually all domestic clothing is made from it. Polythericlene doubles the price of apparel on Alaundril.

To protect humans from high radiation, scientists developed and tested a protective chemical that could be added to the water. Radilyn has become a standard supplement to the water supply and has proven effective in combating the high radiation. Anyone who drinks radilyn daily gains the benefits of antiradiation serum. Radilyn's only problem is its slow onset; it takes a month or more to achieve a high enough level within a host body to be fully effective.

Providence's scientists are working to augment the atmosphere's ultraviolet shielding and protect the planetary surface, probably by an increase in ozone, though other options are being considered. The atmospheric scientists hope to find a cheap way to significantly alter Alaundril's atmosphere. If successful, they can sell their technique to a terraforming company to put into practice. The scientists haven't had much luck so far, but they're hopeful that their investigations will yield some salable discoveries soon.

### THE SEERS OF TORAI

A lonely temple complex lies more than 800 kilometers west of Providence, in the heart of the desert wastes. Founded by Hatire mystics in the early days of the system's exploration, it remains a stronghold of the Brethren on Alaundril. Over the centuries, it has attracted more fame for the predictions of its mystics than for its role as a religious sanctuary.

The Seers are led by Polfoal Liquurl (Fm/Tendril/MW-16), who serves as the group's diocesan. Polfoal was among the community's founders, and has held his present position for more than 150 years.

The Seers of Torai have documented many startling predictions over the last 10 years, but they refuse to aid anyone bearing cyberware or suffering from other spiritual poisons. Indeed, they refuse to help most supplicants, proclaiming them unworthy for one reason or another.

## ALAUNDRIL'S FAUNA

A variety of native life exists on Alaundril, and several of the major species occasionally approach the smaller settlements and even the outskirts of Babel. More often, Alaundril's native animals fear human vehicles and the roar of spacecraft, and avoid the urban areas entirely. But the desert plains of Alaundril are not safe. Instead, they are home to a wide variety of dangerous predators. The most impressive are the sandgrotha, the gevlin, and the egistron.

The sandgrotha are three-meter-long catlike carnivores who always hunt in groups. They can run at up to 50 kph over the sandy wastes and strike without warning. Their dull gold-brown skin gives them excellent camouflage in the sand. The sandgrotha's poor night vision prevents it from hunting after sunset.

Another carnivore, the gevlin, has even less fear of humanity. Willing to prey on small settlements, the solitary arachnid-like creature burrows into the desert sand before attacking. It's most active during the early morning and evening hours, avoiding Alaundril's temperature extremes.

The nocturnal egistron are large, flying pseudomammals. They avoid sources of light, but anything else is fair game. During Alaundril's baking summers and during particularly intense Burns, the egistron go into a form of aestivation, or summer hibernation, in the cool depths of their burrows.

## ATLAS

Given Alaundril's more habitable conditions, it's no surprise that Atlas was ignored for years. The planet is a cold and lifeless rock in space, well outside the star's habitability zone. Without an atmosphere to protect it, Atlas suffers the full force of Tendril's radiation despite its greater distance. In some systems, Atlas might have become a home to sentients in a domed and controlled society. In this star system, there's no real need for such measures.

Atlas has been settled anyway. A group of radical Orlamists set up a colony in 2333, seeking privacy and freedom. They soon found seven sites indicating the presence of a previously unknown civilization. Archaeological expeditions began a few years into the Long Silence. Eventually, word of the expeditions reached the Stellar Ring and led to the *Augustine's* arrival in the summer of 2405. Forty years after the *Augustine* disaster, the planet's mysteries attract more interest than ever.

Today, the original dig site is well guarded and researched. The Danwin site, named for the *Augustine's* lead researcher, has been thoroughly examined. Nothing there has explained the origin of the planet's previous inhabitants, or even their precise nature: The unknown aliens could either live in vacuum, or have arrived as colonists from somewhere else. To investigate the civilization, hundreds of privately funded operations have sprung up and have established bases scattered over Atlas's surface. Furthermore, the original Orlamist missionaries have been joined by a larger number of Ancientists. Neither the Alaundril government nor StarMech has effectively controlled these groups.

## SKYWARD CAVERNS

The Skyward Caverns are located in a mountain range on Atlas' southern hemisphere. These extensive caves, clearly artificial, are the most important sites for Ancientist and Hatire examinations. Unusual artifacts retrieved from the Caverns in the last year have set off a flurry of excitement in the archaeological community. Several independent groups have staked claims to

## IDAN JIL TIR CONCORD DEPUTY AMBASSADOR

### Level 12 fraal Mindwalker

STR 7	(0)	INT 12	(+1)
DEX 9	(0)	WIL 14	(+2)
CON 9		PER 9	
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 12+/11/5/2	
Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 1	
Psionic energy points: 21			

### Attacks

Unarmed	7/3/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
Electrokinetics	19/8/4	d6+2s/d4w/d4+2w	En/G

### Defenses

Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

### Skills

Vehicle Operation [9]; Stamina [9]; Knowledge [12]-computer [13], language: Standard [15]; Physical Science [12]; System Operation [12]; Technical Science [12]; Administration [14]-bureaucracy [16], management [17]; Awareness [14]-intuition [16]; Resolve [14]-mental [18]; Culture [9]-etiquette: Tendril [12]; Interaction [9]; Leadership [9]; ESP [12]-empathy [13], mind reading [16], precognition [14]; Telekinesis [14]-electrokinetics [19]; Telepathy [9]-suggest [13].

The ambassador's assistant Idan Jil Tir is the power behind the Concord presence in the Tendril system. Idan generally remains a quiet figure during the ambassador's meetings, but his ability to read and influence minds often guarantees that the Concord's policies succeed. His ability to determine when someone is lying has kept the ambassador from mistakes more than once. Idan's precognition has several times provided valuable warning of an impending threat to the ambassador and once has warned him of a threat to Nova Station itself.

Idan is young by the standards of his people, barely a century old. He prefers to stay out of the public eye, never accepts speaking engagements, and rarely agrees to public appearances except at Ambassador Dernero's side. Secretly, he fears that revealing the extent of his influence will just make him a target for the Concord's political enemies. He may be right.

Idan's mindwalking expertise is in ESP. He gains a -1 step bonus whenever using a ESP specialty skill, increasing his already formidable ability to read other's minds. He has no qualms about using his power secretly. If anything, he finds it faintly amusing to sit quietly and learn an adversary's secrets while the ambassador chatters on.

In his spare time, Idan visits the desert retreat of the Seers of Torai to talk to the Hatire diocesan there, one of the few other fraal of any stature on Alaundril. In many ways, the fraal mystic is Idan's mentor. Although Idan is not religious, he enjoys the peace of the monastery, and often wishes aloud that he could retire there. The ambassador pays no heed to all such wishes, an attitude that Idan finds irksome.

ALAUNDRIL **LUCRE-CLASS ESCORT**

Compartments: 10  
Maneuver rating: +1  
Cruising speed: 1 AU/hour

Durability: 50  
Acc: 1 Mpp  
Berthing: 36

Armament: 2 mass cannons  
Range 5/10/15 Mm d6+2s/d6+1w/d6+3w LI (p)/A  
2 launch racks with 16 missiles (6 ARN, 8 CHE, 2 MRB)  
Defenses: Deflection inducer, jammer, chaff  
Armor: Moderate neutronite (5 dur)  
d6+1 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d6 (En)  
Computer: Ordinary computer core, Ordinary engineering  
and battle dedicated computers  
Engines: Induction engine  
Power: 2 mass reactors rated for 20 power factors total  
Drive: 5 light-years per starfall

Roll	Comp't	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Durability
—	Command	Multiband radar (0/0) Radio transceiver (0/0) Jammer (0/1) Turret: mass cannon (3/3) Reentry capsule (0/0)	6/6/3
—	Engineering 1	Induction engine (6/6) Airlock (0/0)	12/12/6
1	Engineering 2	Mass reactor (2/*) Stardrive (3/*)	10/10/5
2-3	Auxiliary	Mass reactor (6/*) Autosupport (0/3)	12/12/6
4-5	Weapons 1	Tractor beam (2/*) Launch rack (2/1)	8/8/4
6-7	Weapons 2	Turret: mass cannon (3/3) Launch rack (2/1)	10/10/5
8-10	Electronics	Laser transceiver (0/1) Chaff (1/0) Ordinary computer core (1/0) Deflection inducer (3/6) EM detector (0/0) IR detector (0/0)	10/10/5
11-13	Crew	Crew quarters (4/0)	8/8/4
14-16	Crew	Crew quarters (2/0)	8/8/4
17-20	Cargo	Sick bay (2/0) Autocargo (3/3)	6/6/3

The *Lucre*-class escorts form the mainstay of Alaundril's modest defensive force. With two mass cannons and two launch racks, these escort ships give any independent smuggler or pirate reason to reconsider.

For the most part, the military keeps these prized assets close to home in the Tendril system. Occasionally, they can also be found in nearby star systems where the businessmen of Babel have interests to protect—the shipyards can't resist the potential sales, and for many years, the *Lucre*-class ships were the only warships for sale to any system in the Verge. A few *Lucre*-class ships have fallen into the hands of pirates, the Burn pirates (see "System Log," page 108) are reported to have at least two such ships.

These escorts are produced exclusively at the Ion Production shipyards. Forty-six such vessels have been built to date, at an average cost of \$11.3 million each. Seven more are currently on order.

the Caverns themselves. The Borealin research arm of the College of Justice Ethics has been investigating a site in the Caverns named the Pipe Organ Gallery, after the exquisite stalactites that line one of its walls. So far, the results of their research have not been posted to the Grid, but early indications are that the Borealin scholars are making faster progress than their Hatire and Ancientist colleagues, who spend as much time feuding with each other as they do in the field.

The Hatire-Ancientist dispute is one example of this infighting; what should be a collaboration of brilliant minds investigating a fantastic mystery instead turning bitter and violent. The competing archeological groups routinely hire security forces to ensure that their territory is well marked and the borders are respected. Accidents and deaths have increased; in one case, explosive decompression of a team's shelter killed more than thirty people. The news reports of conflicts fill Tendril's news services.

The cause of these conflicts is simple to identify. Most of the groups are funded by private corporations, and all of them hope to make an incredible fortune from the first intact alien devices found. The Galactic Concord, noting the failure of both Alaundril and StarMech to intercede, has promised to send a negotiator to help end the crisis.

**NOVA STATION**

The largest satellite around moonless Atlas, Nova Station is gigantic. As the largest fixed space station in the Verge, it's home to about 5,000 personnel. Most of the station's citizens are Starmechs who've come to the Tendril system in the last few years.

The station acts as a communication center for the system and as a relay for drivesat communications. As one of only three drive relays within Verge space, Nova's drivesats are necessary for any communications to or from the Stellar Ring. TaskCor Communications is the StarMech corporation that won the contract to administer system and interstellar communications. To date, TaskCor has fulfilled its contract well; no significant breakdowns have occurred. The Concord Communications Commission has an office on the station, overseeing the operation to ensure that messages from the edge of explored space—especially Hammer's Star—reach the Stellar Ring.

Messages from Nova Station travel a long way before reaching Kendai. The trip is 270 light-years one way, and the average travel time for a message to Kendai is 66 hours. Messages sent farther into the Stellar Ring can take as long as 242 hours to reach Sol or 308 hours to reach Vision, the capital of Insight.

A one-minute voice, video, or data burst costs \$50 per relay it must pass through en route, and there are six relays from Tendril to Kendai. Called Verge Relays 5, 4, 3, and 1 and the Blue Chamber, these relays are automated systems parked in safe orbits in uninhabited space. Routine maintenance visits from StarMech and Concord technicians keep them running smoothly. The only automated relay that requires no maintenance is the Blue Chamber relay. Once known as Verge Relay 2, it has become home to an Insight-generated artificial intelligence named Kemal. Kemal's robotic remotes keep the relay running at peak efficiency, as long as the AI keeps communications open, no one minds the loss of a few computer cycles. However, in the event of an emergency, the Concord keeps an inactive backup relay in the area.

Nova Station also serves as the instrument of StarMech military. StarMech military vessels patrol Tendril space side-by-side with local naval craft from Alaundril. For the most part,

StarMech permits the local government to govern interactions with traders and economic interests. Alaundril, in turn, doesn't interfere as StarMech authorities and military forces interact with foreign stellar nations. However, conflicts arise in relationships with other Verge systems. Trade with Tendril is complicated by the competing desires of Alaundril and StarMech officials; both claim to have the authority to determine all trade and policy issues.

The station is divided into three major compartments, each home to separate functions. All StarMech authorities—including Ambassador Chelsea Krest—live on the lower levels. Her office is nominally in charge of all StarMech assets in the Tendril system, including the station itself. The StarMech military assets are headquartered on the center decks, near the docking facilities. A modest repair yard has been built at the station, but significant ship repairs require the shipyards on Alaundril. Finally, the highest levels of the station, farthest from Atlas, house the communications equipment and the TaskCor offices. Olivar Jin (Hm/Insight/DTO-6) is the current operations leader for TaskCor. He and his staff control all drivesat communications into and out of the system.

## CYRA BELT

The resources of the Cyra Belt fuel the Tendril economy. Not a day goes by without Alaundril welcoming the arrival of one or more cargo vessels coming in from the belt. Their cargoes are quickly bought, processed, and fed into the industrial maw of titans such as the Ion Production shipyards. But the legal status of the miners' claims remains muddy. If anything, claims to the Cyra Belt have become more arcane than ever.

Alaundril more or less gave up on effectively administering the claims soon after the Second Galactic War began and StarMech authority left Tendril. Now that StarMech has reestablished itself, Concord Ambassador Dmetri Demerot has made reorganization of Cyra mining a priority. The thousands of miners with claims have been variously denying StarMech's right to the belt, pleading for Alaundril to intervene, and quietly petitioning StarMech officials to recognize their individual claims. Though Alaundril publicly claims jurisdiction, privately it leans on the Concord for help.

## DARKHOLD

In a system brightly lit by the fires of industry, Darkhold stands out as a small corner of shadowy darkness. The return of the stellar nations and the restoration of Nova Station have reduced the independent station's importance, but the inhabitants of Darkhold are adapting.

Once, Darkhold was home to fine repair yards and a ship base second to none. When the better-equipped Nova Station began operation in 2335, this demanded that Darkhold change its focus. Darkhold agreed to Nova's demands, closing down its ship facilities and altering its orbit from a solar-orbiting free station to a base on one of the belt's larger asteroids. It also expanded its entertainment facilities, serving contract miners operating in the Cyra Belt. For decades, Darkhold provided bored Cyra workers with comfortable homes, bawdy entertainment, and other amenities designed to keep them content. In the decades before the stellar nations returned, Darkholders talked of restoring their ship facilities, but any such thoughts are moot now that StarMech has returned.

StarMech's presence has upset the balance at Darkhold. StarMech spacers have brought slick new holos from the Bore-



alis Republic, new drugs from the Collective, and new robots from StarMech shipyards—and their robots' ability to do routine ship maintenance outshines anything else in the Verge. As a result, Darkhold has lost the revenue that servicing the spacecraft and their crews would have provided.

But Darkhold's situation is worse than that, because StarMech's persuasion-by-partying tactics, aimed at getting Darkhold to agree to StarMech administration, are convincing many of Darkhold's customers that StarMech rule would be an improvement over the current state of things. Under the friendly exterior, the PR campaign is another step toward cementing StarMech authority in Tendril, especially its power to grant or refuse mining rights.

Darkhold has neither the resources nor the organization to resist StarMech in the long term. Ownership of the station and its asteroid is a murky issue, with more than a dozen Darkhold corporations and mining groups tracing claims that date back up to a century. In practice, a business council rules Darkhold, copying the system of Alaundril but with less success. Recently, the Darkhold council has proven itself susceptible to wild, unconsidered action. It decided to jam ship sensors in the Cyra Belt, but the decision has infuriated both the miners and the StarMech vessels that patrol the Tendril system. The practice continues despite the loss of a StarMech cruiser to an asteroid collision—or perhaps that was the point all along.

## Pox

An unremarkable medium-sized gas giant, Pox stands alone in the distant cold reaches of the Tendril system. It's the only planet beyond the Cyra Belt. Not surprisingly, the citizens of Alaundril and the visitors from the Stellar Ring have united in ignoring Pox ever since the system was first explored almost two centuries ago.

### SATELLITES

More than two dozen small moons orbit Pox. This far from Tendril, these satellites experience less radiation; they also absorb much less warmth. All of Pox's moons are lifeless rocks, and the only construction is a series of shafts and quarries made by miners who are either afraid of the contentious Cyra Belt or seeking solace in Pox's lonely orbit.

In February 2501, StarMech opened negotiations with the Nariac Domain. Officials of the Domain expressed an interest in acquiring the rights to Pox and its moons, and have begun to make offers. The Domain hopes to use the moon to create a secure way station for further exploration of the Verge, but so far the negotiations haven't been fruitful. StarMech has declined outright purchase, and instead seems to be pushing for Nariac and VoidCorp recognition of all StarMech claims in the Verge.

## SYSTEM LOG

The Tendril system remains edgy, unsettled, and trigger-happy in the wake of the Arrivers' presence. The primary sources of conflict are StarMech's claims to the system and the alien ruins on Atlas. Several events worthy of attention have cropped up in recent months.

### BURN PIRATES

A new band of pirates has entered the Tendril system, attacking freight and passenger traffic alike. The new group has

earned the name "Burn pirates" from the Grid press, since they only attack shipping during a Burn. Somehow, these pirates can locate and board ships during a Burn, keeping their sensors and comm systems operational during the event. Since communications are so difficult during a Burn, the thieves strike quickly, strip a vessel clean, and then depart long before the Burn ends.

So far, the pirates have left only one survivor, a ship's mechanic robot named PAD-7. The pirates may operate from a primitive base on one of Pox's moons—though this is pure conjecture. So far, the Concord and the Alaundril defense forces have had no luck in tracking the Burn pirates. Though both Lord Hellis of Ptolemy and the Lucullan corsairs remain under suspicion, PAD-7 claims that a member of the boarding party mentioned the moons of Caina in the Rinstoke system.

### NEW SKYWARD CAVERNS DEATHS

Conflict over these archeological sites has intensified recently, with theft, assaults, and a gunfight in the Blue Chamber region of the caverns between Hatire and Ancientist factions. The Blue Chamber represents one of the richest sites for investigation. Unfortunately, it has also been the scene of intense fighting, with skirmishes flaring on and off again over the course of a week. However, Concord Administrators have ended the violence and are pursuing investigations.

Both sides are accusing the Concord of stealing the best relics, and open violence may break out again at any time. The Ancientists have filed a formal complaint against the Administrators; the Hatire have simply hired a dozen new security experts and refused to allow Concord personnel access to their sites, supplies, or equipment—resulting in standoffs in the Throne Cavern, the Pipe Organ Gallery, and the Tailor Gallery.

### STARMECH DARKHOLD BUYOUT

The StarMech Collective has offered to buy out the consortium that owns Darkhold; the offer was tendered more than a month ago, but has just recently been made public. Details of the offer remain undisclosed, but sources close to the station confirm that a \$4 billion offer is at the heart of the deal.

Several Darkhold-based groups have urged acceptance of the offer—though the system government on Alaundril has expressed its disapproval of the transaction. Stockholders are expected to vote on the offer within the month. Rumors of shareholder bribery by StarMech officials and ballot stuffing by the station's owners remain unconfirmed.

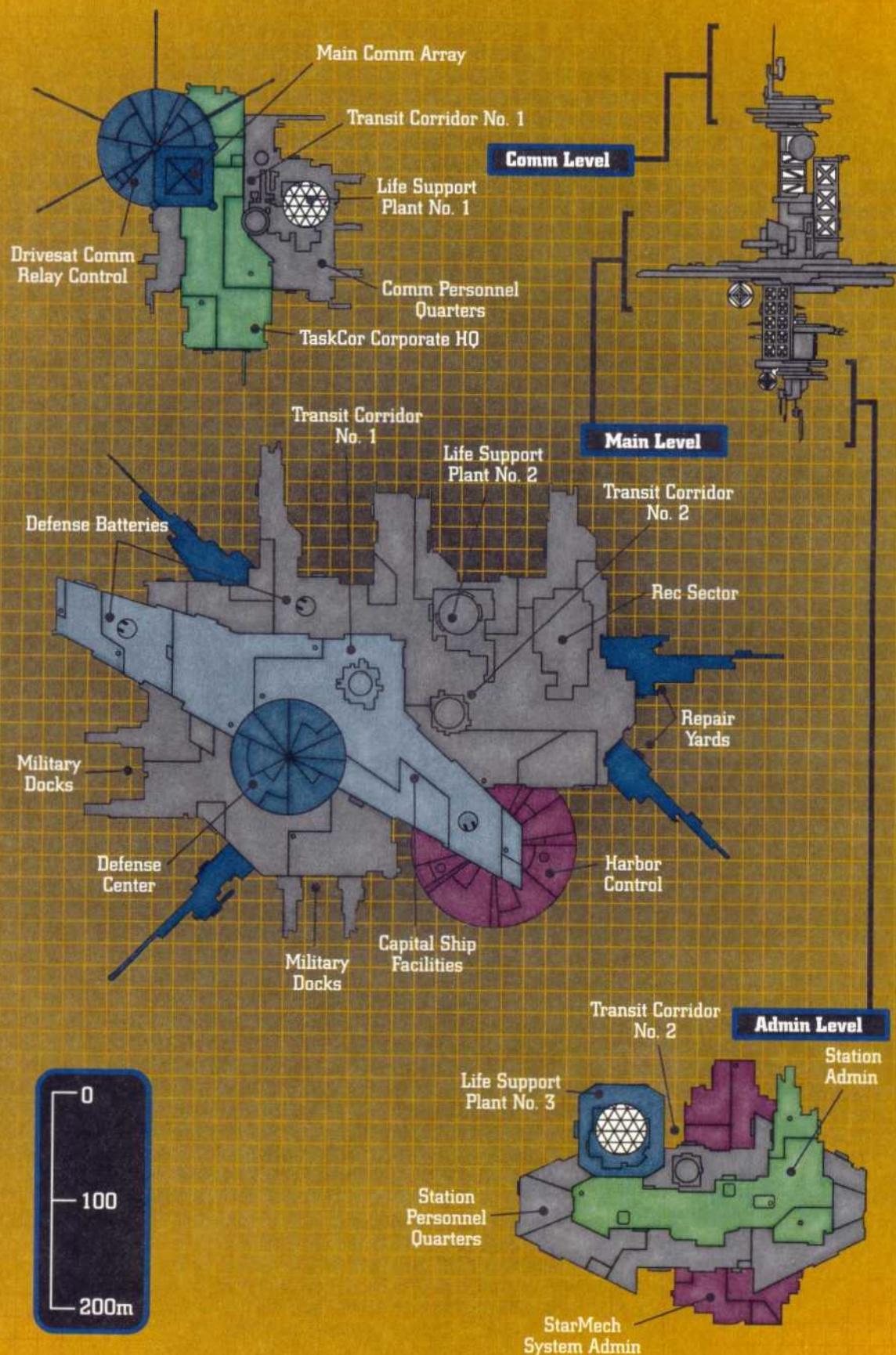
### HEROES OF TENDRIL

Natives of the Tendril system work hard and play hard, and they retain many of the other traits of their StarMech heritage. Any hero from this system may choose to gain the benefits of StarMech Collective citizenship. However, just as many are independents or Vergers without any additional affiliation.

In addition, Verger Tech Ops have centuries of experience in dealing with the Burn's effects on mass transceivers, sensor arrays, and electronic equipment of all types. Any native of the Tendril system gains a -1 step bonus when using Systems Operation—*sensors* or *communications* during a Burn or other conditions of high electromagnetic flux.

Because of Tendril's close affiliation with StarMech, this system is one of the few places in the Verge where robots are common. Heroes can buy and sell robots on Alaundril or may choose to hire robot helpers here.

# Nova Station



# CORRIVALE

For almost 200 years, traders and explorers entering the Verge have made Corrivale their second stop along the way. From Tendril, Corrivale is only 27 light-years, a journey of no more than six starfalls for even the smallest vessels. Virtually abandoned during the Second Galactic War, Corrivale is now home to a thriving colony of independent sesheyans and a Hatire settlement on the jungle moon of Grith. It is also the site of alien ruins, a Concord station, and extensive VoidCorp mining operations in the cold reaches of the outer system. Despite this concentration of interests and outposts, Corrivale remains a thinly settled frontier region, a third world in every sense of the word.

Today, tensions run high as the Hatire Community, the Galactic Concord, and VoidCorp all seek to establish military, economic, and political dominance over the system. All three nations must work against the opposition of the Grith sesheyans, who naturally want to remain masters of their own home. Blessed with a Class 1 world, extensive mineral wealth, and a prime location along the Verge spine, Corrivale is rapidly becoming a point of contention among the great powers. Skirmishes, raids, and corporate piracy are all too common throughout Corrivale. Visitors are advised to proceed with caution.

## HISTORY

Like Tendril, Corrivale was surveyed by the StarMech Verge scouting missions of 2315 and 2316. While the Collective authorities preferred Grith to Alaundril as a colony site, Alaundril's location closer to Old Space seemed a better strategic move to control access to the Verge. Anxious to stake a claim in the newly opened frontier, the Hatire Community purchased the rights to settle Grith from StarMech in 2319 for the sum of 50 million Terran credits. The first Hatire colony vessel landed at Diamond Point in the moon's arctic in 2324, and the Brethren began taming the jungle the old-fashioned way, with bulldozers and fire.

The Hatire soon discovered that they weren't the first inhabitants of Grith; moss-grown alien ruins lay hidden in isolated sites all over the forest world. Hatire xenoarcheologists surveyed dozens of major sites, hoping to find new insight into the long-vanished Cosimir. They discovered no religious revelations, but instead pieced together a few tantalizing hints of an ancient warrior race through guesswork and supposition. The origin and fate of the Grith builders remains a mystery to this day; Hatire digs turn up new finds every few years, and survey teams regularly chart new sites for future investigation.

By the beginning of the Second Galactic War in 2346, the Hatire settlement of Diamond Point had grown into a good-sized town of more than 30,000 citizens, surrounded by vast plantations and open rangeland—a green plain more than 100 kilometers across in the northern reaches of Grith's world-girdling jungles. For a time, Diamond Point continued to thrive, a rare system untouched by the tides of war.

## THE CA 319 RAID

Early in 2350, *Heavy Cruiser 319*—a VoidCorp warship—arrived in the Verge. Boldly preying on any Verge commerce it could run to ground, *CA 319* ruthlessly bombarded Diamond Point, destroying most of the fledgling colony's industrial capac-

ity and port facilities. *CA 319* hit several nearby systems over the next three months before VoidCorp recalled the ship to the heavy fighting in Old Space.

Wrecked by orbital bombardment, Diamond Point suffered from a plague the next year, brought on by the destruction of its hospital. Corsair fleets preying on isolated outposts and weak systems in the Verge hit the colony in 2353, 2359, and again in 2360. The few remaining Hatires abandoned Diamond Point in 2362, emigrating to Tendril or Oberon.

From 2362 through 2497, Grith lay fallow, its verdant jungle reclaiming much of the colony site. Corrivale wasn't completely abandoned; mining operations still proceeded on Iphus and in the Inner Belt, Alaundrin merchants passed through the system routinely in their travels along the Verge spine, while outlaws and prospectors built hardscrabble lives for themselves in the Outer Belt. From time to time, a rugged homesteader from a neighboring system landed on Grith to build a home far from Old Space and the war. Some of these settlers still live deep in Grith's backcountry.

## THE MONITOR'S ARRIVAL

In 2497, the Concord fortress ship *Monitor* returned to the Verge, reestablishing a link to Old Space. Surveying each system as she proceeded along the Verge spine, the *Monitor* made an astonishing discovery in Corrivale: The old site of Diamond Point had been reoccupied by a colony of 100,000 sesheyans! These sesheyans claimed they'd always been on Grith, living thousands of kilometers south of the Hatire settlement.

The VoidCorp representative aboard the *Monitor* instantly filed a claim to recognize the sesheyans as VoidCorp Employees, but the sesheyans maintained that they'd been taken from Sheya more than 1,000 years ago by the mysterious race who once inhabited Grith. Since their ancestors had left Sheya centuries before VoidCorp's contract, the Grith sesheyans argued that they weren't subject to its authority.

Despite an exhaustive investigation, VoidCorp could not prove that the Grith sesheyans didn't arrive on Grith in exactly the manner they claimed, although many impartial observers suspected that the sesheyans were refugees who had somehow slipped out of VoidCorp's grasp in the chaos of GW2. In a controversial 2499 ruling, Concord Administrator Ari Mahdra denied VoidCorp's suit and recognized the sesheyans of Grith as an independent, indigenous race. Since Grith was largely unsettled, she also upheld the Hatire right to recolonize Grith at a rate of 50,000 colonists per year. Mahdra's ruling required the sesheyans to return 60% of Diamond Point to the Hatire, and left the Hatire as Grith's recognized planetary government.

## THE SECRET HISTORY OF GRITH

Here's a surprise: The sesheyans are lying. In 2359, a sesheyan leader by the name of Nu'itei led an uprising in a vast VoidCorp labor camp in Old Space. Gaining their freedom, the sesheyans seized a ragged flotilla of corporate gunboats and freighters and fled for the Verge. With the help of a computer division insider, they erased all records of the camp, the stolen ships, even their own Employee numbers.

Arriving in the Verge, they scouted the region and chose Grith as their new home. The third "corsair" flotilla that attacked in 2360 was actually the sesheyan invasion. Desperate to pro-

tect their freedom, they drove most of the Hatiros off the planet and killed those who remained. Then Nu'itei crafted an elaborate story to explain the sesheyans presence on Grith. All children born on Grith were taught that their people had been brought to the jungle world a thousand years before, and that the Hatiros had fled of their own accord. Many sesheyans resisted the crafting of such a monstrous lie, and taught their children the true story as well as the false one. Most Grith sesheyans honestly believe the lie, and most dissenters understand that their silence is their freedom.

## TODAY

In the last two years, the Hatiros have begun rebuilding Diamond Point. While the Mahdra ruling provides for an annual immigration rate of 50,000 people, the Hatiros have been moving a little more slowly; Diamond Point numbers only 44,000 Brethren, compared to more than twice that many sesheyans. At the same time, the Hatiros leaders have been farsighted enough to invite the sesheyans to participate in the government of Grith. While some sesheyans resent any human intrusion, and some Brethren feel that the sesheyans are nothing but squatters, the two groups are getting along. The sesheyans know that the Hatiros can overwhelm them with manpower, money, and resources, but the Hatiros know that the sesheyans can sue for Concord incorporation if they feel like they're losing control. Neither faction wants to push its neighbors too far.

While Grith is the political center of the system, it's not the only site of interest. Both the Inner and Outer Belts are home to thousands of asteroid miners, and isolated outposts can be found on Lordan and Almaz. In 2498, the Concord fortress ship *Repulse* placed Omega Station, a Concord base, in a high polar orbit around Lecterion. Omega is ostensibly a research station and repair facility; cynics suspect some military purpose behind the station.

The wild card in this situation is VoidCorp. In the days before GW2, VoidCorp paid StarMech for mining rights on Iphus and started up most of the major mining operations on that planet. During the Long Silence, these posts incorporated as Iphus United, but VoidCorp reclaimed the wayward facilities on its return to the Verge. It's well known that the company still contests the Mahdra ruling, and VoidCorp warships are becoming more and more common in the outer reaches of the Corrivale system.

## THE CORRIVALE SYSTEM

The Corrivale system contains eight planets and two major asteroid belts. Corrivale is a yellow-white F2 star, about twice as bright as Sol. While its radiation level isn't as ferocious as Tendril's, Corrivale still renders travel hazardous within one AU of the star. The system's only habitable world is Grith, a moon of Hydrocus, but Lordan is a reasonable candidate for terraforming, and distant Iphus is a source of great mineral wealth, already being exploited by the Employees of VoidCorp.

TABLE S9: CORRIVALE SYSTEM

	<b>Inderon</b>	<b>Tricus</b>	<b>Hydrocus</b>	<b>(Grith)</b>	<b>Lordan</b>
Primary	Corrivale	Corrivale	Corrivale	Hydrocus	Corrivale
Planetary Class	Class 5	Class 4	Class 3	Class 1	Class 3
Gravity	G2 (0.85 g)	G2 (0.83 g)	G3 (1.29 g)	G1 (0.62 g)	G1 (0.49 g)
Radiation	R4 (250 rem/day)	R3 (45 rem/day)	R2 (20 rem/yr)	R2 (15 rem/yr)	R2 (5 rem/wk)
Atmosphere	A0 (Vacuum)	A0 (Trace)	A4 (N <sub>2</sub> , CO <sub>2</sub> , SO <sub>2</sub> )	A2 (N <sub>2</sub> , O <sub>2</sub> )	A3 (N <sub>2</sub> , CO <sub>2</sub> )
Pressure	P0 (Vacuum)	P0 (Trace)	P3 (5 atm)	P3 (0.83 atm)	P1 (0.2 atm)
Heat	H4 (310° C)	H4 (211° C)	H3 (70° C)	H2 (40° C)	H1 (-46° C)
Orbital Distance	0.52 AU	0.81 AU	2.05 AU	322,000 km	3.76 AU
Diameter	7,812 km	5,242 km	17,060 km	8,696 km	7,702 km
Year	106.9 days	207.9 days	836.9 days	(14 days)	2078.9 days
Day	335.5 hours	199.4 hours	58.3 hours	37.05 hours	18.1 hours
Axial Tilt	8.8°	2.2°	11.5°	8.5°	29.3°
Density	1.39	2.01	0.96	0.91	0.81
# Satellites	0	1	1 (Grith)	0	2
	<b>Lecterion</b>	<b>Iphus</b>	<b>Almaz</b>	<b>Chark</b>	
Primary	Corrivale	Corrivale	Corrivale	Corrivale	
Planetary Class	Class 5 (gas giant)	Class 4	Class 4	Class 5	
Gravity	G4 (2.95g)	G1 (0.71g)	G1 (0.52g)	G1 (0.23g)	
Radiation	R4 (120 rem/day)	R2 (25 rem/yr)	R1 (10 rem/yr)	R1 (6 rem/yr)	
Atmosphere	A1 (H, He)	A0 (Trace)	A0 (Vacuum)	A0 (Vacuum)	
Pressure	P5 (100+ atm)	P0 (Trace)	P0 (Vacuum)	P0 (Vacuum)	
Heat	H0 (-110° C)	H0 (-170° C)	H0 (-190° C)	H0 (-210° C)	
Orbital Distance	5.5 AU	17 AU	30 AU	48.7 AU	
Diameter	98,110 km	8,014 km	5,314 km	4,380 km	
Year	10.07 years	54.76 years	128.36 years	265.49 years	
Day	7.42 hours	16.9 hours	97.4 hours	683.3 hours	
Axial Tilt	14.8°	47.8°	20.5°	95°	
Density	0.38	1.12	1.24	0.65	
# Satellites	11	0	0	0	

## INDERON AND TRICUS

Baked by the fearsome sunlight of Corrivale, these two planets are blasted husks. Both are rich in heavy metals, but the irradiation of the nearby star and the lack of atmosphere render them completely uninhabitable. Of the two, Tricus is slightly less discouraging, and several Grith-based companies have established mining posts on the planet. Considering VoidCorp's dominance of the mineral-rich outer system, the Tricus installations may prove to be the only reliable source of strategic metals for an independent Corrivale.

Tricus is orbited by one tiny moon, irreverently named Flyspeck. An asymmetrical lump of rock about 30 kilometers in diameter, Flyspeck whirls around Tricus once every 11 hours. Tricus Development Corporation (TDC Inc.) has recently purchased Flyspeck for the purpose of installing basic planetary defenses on the moonlet.

## HYDROCUS

About 100 million years ago, Hydrocuss was more or less Earth-like, with living seas and an extensive terrestrial biosphere. Unfortunately, Hydrocuss had a problem—a heavy concentration of sulfur in the upper portion of its crust. Tidally induced vulcanism pumped sulfur into the atmosphere of the planet, gradually poisoning a Class I ecology with acid rain. Over the course of a few million years, the reaction accelerated, turning the planet's shallow seas into lakes of sulfuric acid and weathering away the fragile limestones and chalks of the surface. Today, Hydrocuss is a marred giant, its atmosphere choked with corrosive fumes, its surface a morass of mud flats and sulfur pans. The few lifeforms that survived Hydrocuss's transition from a Class 1 to a Class 3 world literally evolved an entirely new biochemistry capitalizing on the acidic conditions of the planet. Most of the survivors are single-celled organisms.

Rumors of larger lifeforms and alien ruins hidden in the sludge and salt pans of Hydrocuss are, to date, largely unsubstantiated. Biological investigations of the acid planet, however, have been sparse.

While Hydrocuss is no longer habitable, its moon—the jungle world of Grith—is one of the few Class 1 worlds in the Verge. Grith orbits Hydrocuss at a distance of 322,000 kilometers, a little closer than the distance at which Luna orbits Earth. Since Grith is almost one-seventh the size of its parent (and roughly 30 times the mass of Earth's moon), the two are often referred to as a double planet.

## GRITH

The heart of the Corrivale system, Grith is a green gem paired with the sullen mudball of Hydrocuss. As Corrivale's only habitable world, Grith has been the main focus of exploration, settlement, and exploitation since the discovery of the Verge, almost 200 years ago. Currently home to settlements of free sesheyans and Hatire colonists, the jungle moon remains the main point of contention in the system today.

## PLANETOLOGY

Grith is the only satellite of the planet Hydrocuss, orbiting its parent once every 14 days. Hydrocuss appears almost twice as large in Grith's skies as the Earth appears from the surface of the moon; its subtle shadings of ochre, yellow, and red are quite striking in clear conditions (although they're often blurred into a

muddy brown by poor light or hazy air). Tidal forces between the two worlds are extremely strong—scientists estimate that both Hydrocuss and Grith have slowed in rotation by 50% to 70% since the formation of the system, and Grith will be tidally locked by its parent planet in about 10 to 20 million years.

The tidal forces of the system create other, more immediate effects. Both worlds have much more volcanic and tectonic activity than they would otherwise. This increased vulcanism led to the destruction of Hydrocuss's Class 1 biosphere in the distant past, while Grith—a moon with no plate tectonics whatsoever—is kept volcanically active by the pull of Hydrocuss. Naturally, the landlocked seas on both worlds demonstrate extraordinary tidal ranges. Grith's seas rise or fall by 100 meters or more in the course of a day, creating an intertidal zone hundreds of kilometers wide around its largest bodies of water. These powerful tides make sea travel impossible, but offer a cheap source of power for shoreline hydroelectric plants.

Corrivale's intense sunlight makes much of Grith uncomfortably hot and bright for both humans and sesheyans. In the moon's equatorial regions, daytime temperatures average 50° Celsius and can soar much higher in the hotter part of the year. Diamond Point, the moon's largest settlement, is located in the northern polar regions near Grith's boreal sea; polar temperatures range from 15° C in winter to 40° C in the summer.

Grith is marked by four distinct climate systems. First and foremost is the jungle, thousands upon thousands of square kilometers of multiple-canopy rain forest that girdles the planet. The upper layers are hot, dry, and bright; the forest floor is dim, humid, and steamy. In many places, the forest supports several distinct ecosystems, each perfectly adapted to its own stratum of the canopy. Sesheyans are quite comfortable in the jungle gloom, and perhaps a tenth of the Grith sesheyans choose to live simple, nomadic lives in the trackless depths of the forest.

Grith's open seas are the next most prominent feature of the moon. By Earth standards, they're small and deep, narrow ribbons of blue marbling the green forest belt. Only about 30% of the moon's surface is covered by open water. Like the jungle, Grith's seas teem with life, but human marine biologists haven't had much opportunity to study the oceans; the extreme tides and low-gravity wave action make seafaring very dangerous.

Between the sea and the jungle are immense tidal marshes and intertidal estuaries. Grith's seas shift their boundaries by dozens or hundreds of kilometers each day, covering and uncovering a vast amount of land. At the low end, the marsh is submerged by 100 meters of water for most of the day; at its highest reaches, it's inundated for only an hour or two by a few meters of saltwater. Human and sesheyen settlers have found that the high marsh is an incredibly rich ecosystem, teeming with shellfish and game, but a dangerous species called the veractor makes the tidal region dangerous for travelers.

The most comfortable portions of the planet for humans are the savanna and grasslands of the polar latitudes. Grith has no ice caps, and the jungle gives way to these cool, dry plains in the planet's arctic and antarctic regions. The moon's human population is concentrated in Diamond Point, a few hundred kilometers from the north pole.

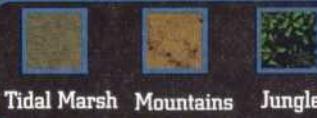
## GRITH'S GOVERNMENT

The governing of Grith—and by extension of the entire Corrivale system—is a complicated process. The Mahdra ruling affirmed two dichotomous positions: first, that Grith is a Hatire colony, and second, that the sesheyans of Grith are an independent, indigenous race. Technically, Grith is a possession of the Hatire

1 cm = 1200 km

km x 1000

0 1 2 3



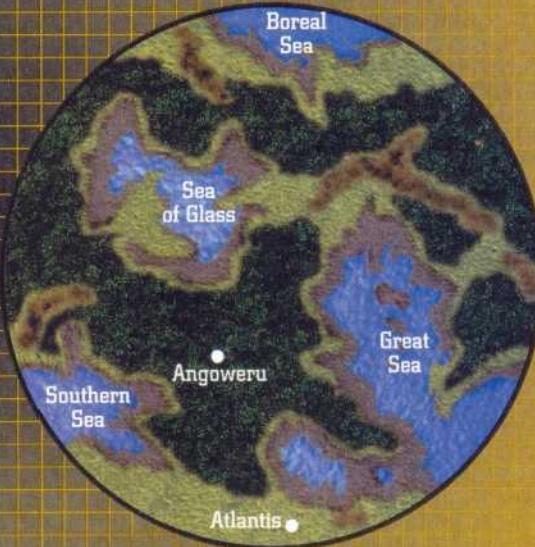
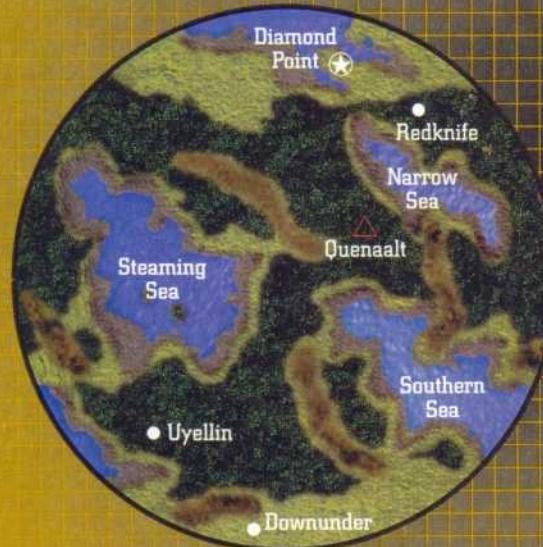
Savanna/grassland

Ruins

Planetary Capital

•

Settlement



Community—but the Hatires can exert no authority over the native population of sesheyans. The whole arrangement is murky at best, and a powderkeg ready to blow during times of stress.

So, how does it work? The moon is ruled under the Colonial Diocese of Grith. In the Hatire Community, there is no distinction between religious and secular government. Any high-ranking government official is by definition a high-ranking member of the church. The Colonial Diocese strictly administers the day-to-day affairs of the moon's Hatire population, both as a member state of the greater Hatire Community and as the recognized planetary government. But the Diocese has no jurisdiction over sesheyans outside human settlements, it cannot settle lands currently occupied by the indigenous race, and it cannot levy taxes or tariffs against native trade arrangements. The Hatire are bound by Concord law to leave the sesheyans alone.

As an independent race, the sesheyans of Grith may govern themselves however they choose. They must respect Hatire law in Hatire settlements and don't have any claim on Hatire aid or defense in the event of attack. Outside the lands designated as sesheyan territory, the sesheyans may not establish new settlements or pursue resource exploitation unless the Hatire grant them permission.

In theory, the sesheyans govern themselves as a Council of Tribes. Unfortunately, this system is basically an oligarchy of criminal bosses, industrial leaders, corsair captains, powerful merchants, and a handful of rabble-rousing populists. The Council can't raise taxes, can't pass laws, and can't even negotiate on behalf of all the sesheyan factions. Each oligarch commands his own private army in a virtually feudal arrangement. Under the protection of the Mahdra ruling, these captains and crime lords ignore the Hatire and carry out any illicit trade they like. Mean-

while, the Colonial Diocese slowly grows at the Council's expense by incorporating more and more of the disenfranchised sesheyans who are tired of living under criminal overlords.

Currently, the three most powerful factions in Grith's government are the Colonial Diocese, the Aanghel criminal empire, and the Devli'yan, followers of a shaman of the old tradition who urges a return to the ancient sesheyan ways. The three share a deep and abiding antipathy, and in their own various ways each of them works to become the principal power of Grith. In the background lurks the ever-present threat of renewed VoidCorp involvement on Grith; until that threat actually materializes, the existing powers on the moon will continue to harry each other rather than turn their attention to distant foes.

### THE COLONIAL DIOCESE

Although the Colonial Diocese includes any part of Grith not designated as a sesheyan reserve, Diocesan Kola Entele (Hi/Hatire/DFA-4) leads a Brethren community of only 40,000 souls. Tough, strong-willed, and fiercely devout, the diocesan governs the Hatire on Grith through a small hierarchy of reverents, missionaries, and chosen, the lesser ranks of the Hatire theocracy. Diocesan Entele is very unhappy with the current balance of power on Grith, and she's investigating the arrival of the sesheyans, hoping to find evidence to invalidate the Mahdra ruling and return all of Grith to Hatire control. Once the sesheyans' special immunity is removed, the diocesan feels that she can bring some peace and order to the troubled sesheyan society.

Diamond Point is the Diocese's major settlement, although much of the city is reserved for sesheyan commerce. Diocesan Entele oversees her flock from the Forest Cathedral, a grand complex 30 kilometers south of the city. This magnificent edifice, with

### Flag of the Aanghel Empire

its quiet, devout staff and its stately green forest paths, is a show-piece of the Hatire dream for Grith. The cathedral is also home to a subgroup of the Hatire, the Chorus, a group of Brethren biokineticists who believe in the power of the mind to heal.

The Diocese commands modest planetary defenses near Diamond Point and the Forest Cathedral. However, the Verge is a long way from Hatire space, and serious efforts to fortify and reinforce the Brethren foothold in the frontier are a low priority with the leadership back in Old Space.

### THE AANGHEL EMPIRE

The sesheyans who first settled Grith were far from a unified force. Although Nu'itei held nominal command of the fleet, the people he led came from dozens of different tribes. Some were ancestral enemies from old Sheya, forced to cooperate to defeat VoidCorp. Others had been stripped of their heritage by internment in corporate camps for generations, and knew little of the ways of their people. The sesheyans who followed Nu'itei were rootless vagabonds and corsairs, far removed from the culture and ways of their people.

During the struggle for freedom, two factions emerged, centered on the most charismatic and powerful leaders of Nu'itei's inner circle. One of these was the notorious assassin Aanghel, who had been a VoidCorp operative for years before throwing in with Nu'itei. Aanghel and his followers enjoyed life as corsairs, and when the sesheyan fleet landed at Diamond Point, Aanghel retained a dozen small fighting ships. During the Long Silence, his followers raided nearby systems from the new settlement. Illicit markets, illegal shipyards, and a dozen other sordid activities connected with the capture and sale of stolen goods grew up around Aanghel's corsair fleet. The corsairs built such a large infrastructure that Aanghel's heirs could shift their criminal activities into the shadows when the Concord arrived.

In 2501, Aanghel Enterprises is a holding company run by Aanghel Osu'i'ke (St/Corrivale/DFA-6), a young but powerful crime lord whose reach extends into every portion of the Corrivale system. Osu'i'ke firmly believes that the old ways of Sheya are long dead, and that her people must use human technology and methods to survive in the modern day. While everyone on Grith knows the true nature of her business, Osu'i'ke has been able to exploit the self-governing clause of the Mahdra ruling to keep her freedom.

Aanghel Osu'i'ke dislikes any personal involvement in her more sordid enterprises. She prefers to work through agents and middlemen. Her right-hand sesheyan is a hard-nosed killer named Pe Terei.

### THE DEVLEI'YAN

Not all sesheyans agree with the violent rule of Grith's industrial captains and crime lords. Thousands of the poor and disen-

franchised feel that syndicates such as the Aanghel family are mere mockeries of human society, sesheyans pretending to be something they're not and wreaking irreparable harm by doing so. Some of these lower-class sesheyans remain in the Diamond Point area, reluctantly working in the humanlike society that Aanghel and the others have created, but many have instead chosen to abandon the trappings of human civilization. Slipping away into the endless jungles of Grith, these tribal sesheyans have returned to the aboriginal ways of their ancestors.

Devlei'ir is the foremost of a growing number of sesheyan leaders who are rebelling against the technological and economic domination of the powerful captains. His followers, who call themselves the Devli'yan, include thousands of workers and laborers in Diamond Point as well as dozens of tribal bands in the deep jungle. Religious hierarchies aren't a traditional part of sesheyan culture, but Devlei'ir commands the loyalty of roughly a third of Grith's sesheyan population.

Devlei'ir (Sm/Corrivale/DTO-10) is an energetic old shaman gifted with a natural mastery of oratory and rhetoric. He rarely rails against his opponents, but instead uses parables and calm discussion to illustrate the faults of sesheyans who have turned away from the way of their people. For the sesheyans who follow him, Devlei'ir's stories form an incisive and inescapable indictment of Grith's leaders. Rumors circulate from time to time that the Brethren fund the Devli'yan cause, but these stories may just be lies spread by the Aanghel to discredit the shaman.

Crime lords such as Aanghel Osu'i'ke don't dare strike directly at Devlei'ir. First of all, sesheyans have a great cultural reluctance to offer violence to a shaman, and second, the Devli'yan masses could topple the corrupt Council of Tribes if provoked by a martyrdom. In recent months tensions have been growing between the non-technological populace and the smaller number of industrial sesheyans. It's rumored that the major captains and bosses have had all they can take of Devlei'ir and his sermons.

### DIAMOND POINT

The only city of any size on Grith, Diamond Point overlooks an arm of Grith's Boreal Sea. Bluffs more than 100 meters tall protect the city from the towering tidal surges of Grith's seas, although the Boreal Sea has the smallest tidal range of any major body of water on Grith. The name Diamond Point refers to the long peninsula on which the city stands. Cool green hills swept by invigorating sea breezes surround the city. Broad plantations, orchards, and forested hills extend for 100 kilometers or more inland from the town, and most of the region's population lives in these rural areas.

Diamond Point is located about 400 kilometers north of the northernmost range of Grith's world-girdling jungle, insulated from the impenetrable vegetation by a wide belt of rolling grassland and arid hills. The modern city is built around the ruins of the original Hatire settlement, and some sectors of the city are still cratered rubble from the orbital bombardment during GW2. Salvaging materials from these silent wrecks is illegal, but many people ransack them anyway—the only penalty is a small fine.

Under the Mahdra ruling, the Hatire rule about a third of the existing city, including the most important colonial structures. The Brethren have worked hard to restore their portion of Diamond Point to its original condition, but ramshackle sesheyan neighborhoods sprawl outward in all directions from this small core of orderliness. The sesheyan parts of Diamond Point are actually a collection of small fiefs, camps, shantytowns, and reclaimed

ruins, divided along invisible lines of tribal loyalty. Some tribes are nothing more than old corsair crew affiliations. Sesheyans with the right connections to the captains of industry live in safe, comfortable quarters, while lower-class workers suffer in dismal squalor. Undoubtedly this divide between rich and poor has fueled the success of populists such as the Devlei'r.

Violence between neighborhoods is fairly common, a fact that the nearby Hatire deplore. Unfortunately, Hatire lawkeepers can enter the sesheyan parts of the city only if invited and only to stop the most brazen criminal activities. Some sesheyan barons patrol their districts with uniformed lawmen, but most of these forces are simply thugs with badges. Visitors to Diamond Point are advised to avoid entering the sesheyan parts of town unless they've arranged for an escort provided by a powerful sesheyan leader.

### SPACEPORTS

Diamond Point's spaceport is located in an otherwise ruined sector of the city. Since the spaceport consists mostly of flat, open ground, it was hard for *Heavy Cruiser 319* to permanently damage the facility, although new hangars, terminals, and repair shops have replaced the rubble of the original structures. The spaceport is nominally under Hatire administration, although hundreds of contracted sesheyan workers run the place. Many of these workers have strong ties with the Aanghel syndicate and other unsavory groups. In deference to sesheyan preferences—and perhaps to the needs of smugglers—most of the spaceport's landings occur at night.

Several smaller landing fields are hidden in the hills and jungles near Diamond Point. Most of these are extremely primitive, old corsair dens and smuggler's strips with only the most rudimentary service and maintenance facilities. Various sesheyan captains and Council leaders use these secondary strips to carry out whatever commerce they choose, away from the prying eyes of the Brethren.

### LODGINGS

The Diamond Point Plaza is a grand old hotel that survived the bombardment with only minor damage. Reconditioned by the Aanghels, it's now an upscale casino-hotel overlooking the Bo-real Sea. Visitors shouldn't plan on winning much money at the tables; everyone knows that the house plays crooked. Rooms run about \$200 per night.

The Emerald Hostel is a cheap facility near the spaceport, known for its low-quality clientele. Run by the Cordiel family, the Hostel caters to spacers and laborers, providing sordid entertainment at the cheapest prices. No one with the money to stay elsewhere would book a room at the Emerald, but it's a good place to find transients keeping a low profile. Its rooms rent for \$40 a night, though various entertainments can drastically increase the price.

### SITES OF INTEREST

Tourists often visit Grith to hunt big game with binoculars, holocams, or laser rifles. A dozen outfitters offer safari tours into the deep jungle. These expeditions are quite dangerous; Grith isn't a tame world, and more than one would-be trophy hunter has failed to come back. Wilson's Game Outfitters, a small company owned by an entrepreneur by the name of Ignario Wilson (Hrn/Rigunmor/NP), is one of the most successful of these outfits. Wilson himself knows nothing about the outdoors, and he's always looking for guides to lead the expeditions he brokers out of Diamond Point.

## PE TEREI, AANGHEL OSUI'IKE'S LIEUTENANT

### Level 9 sesheyan Diplomat (Free Agent)

STR 8	(0)	INT 11	(+1)
DEX 12	(+1)	WIL 11	(+1)
CON 7		PER 11	
Durability: 7/7/4/4		Action check: 14+/13/6/3	
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4, fly 40		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 2	

### Attacks

Unarmed	7/3/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
Laser pistol	15/7/3	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	En/0

### Defenses

CF softsuit: d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)

Dodge [14/7/3]

Defensive martial arts [13/6/3]

### Skills

Athletics [8]—climb [9], throw [9], Melee [8], Acrobatics [12]—daredevil [13], defensive [13], dodge [14], flight [14], Modern [12]—pistol [15], Vehicle [12]—air [13], space [13], Stamina [7]—endurance [9], Business [11]—illicit [12], Knowledge [11]—language: Standard [14], language: Sesheyan [14], Awareness [11]—intuition [12], perception [12], Investigate [11]—interrogate [13], Street [11]—criminal [13], street [14], Deception [11]—bribe [12], Interaction [11]—bargain [12].

Pe Terei is the problem-solver of the Aanghel syndicate, a seasoned criminal who serves as Aanghel Osui'ike's lieutenant. He's worked his way up through the ranks, earning promotion through a combination of intelligence, perceptiveness, and a certain degree of ruthlessness. Pe Terei is pragmatic and reserved under all but the most stressful conditions, coldly calculating the odds around him and never taking any chances that he doesn't have to take.

Pe Terei is small even for a sesheyan, agile and quick. He prides himself on his wits, determination, and charisma, and is inclined to resolve problems through hardball negotiations and veiled threats instead of physical violence. Unlike many others in the Aanghel mob, Pe Terei understands that Grith is changing, and that the lawless days of the moon's criminal warlords are coming to an end. He respects Concord and Hatire laws as one more set of obstacles in the game he's chosen to play, and constantly seeks ways to use these laws against his enemies.

Often involved in cleaning up situations that reflect poorly on Aanghel Osui'ike, Pe Terei hires freelancers and mercenaries, and then arranges for a quiet termination of the freelancer's employment after the mission's done. Even the most ruthless sesheyan crime bosses respect Terei's willingness to go to any lengths to accomplish a task. When all else fails, he often gathers together his most loyal thugs and undertakes a mission himself.

In his off time, Pe Terei often visits the Twilight Hunting Lodge in the jungle city of Redknife. His subordinates claim that he hunts with nothing more than a spear and has brought down a gandercat single-handedly. The skin of the creature hangs in his office. (In fact, he used a laser rifle.)



Diamond Point's most notorious watering hole is the Planetfall, a tough joint built from the cannibalized wreck of a grounded pirate vessel. The Planetfall is a place where free traders, smugglers, and other spacefaring scum come to meet their opposite numbers in the sesheyen criminal organizations. Although the Planetfall is technically neutral ground, drunken fights break out on a nightly basis, often with lethal results.

The Mindanaoth Academy is located in Diamond Point's Hatire quarter, in an ancient stone building overlooking the Boreal Sea. The academy trains mind knights of the Hatire faith; many of these mind knights serve at the Forest Cathedral or in Missioner Houne's Internal Security Ministry. A few are indentured to serve as bodyguards for important reformers elsewhere in the Verge.

#### QUENAALT

The most extensive ruins found on Grith to date, the ancient city of Quenaalt is located more than 6,000 kilometers from Diamond Point, a short distance from the moon's equator. No one tries to reach the ruins overland; aircar or suborbital shuttle are by far preferred. It's a popular destination for tourists and xenoarcheologists, and a handful of small excavations are currently under way at the site.

Experts estimate that Quenaalt was abandoned about 5,000 years ago. Its people were large quadrupeds about the size of a brown bear or leopard who seemed to have had a strong aversion to large social groupings; Quenaalt was a city of 20 to 50,000 people scattered along a river valley encompassing almost 1,500 square kilometers. No one knows for certain what became of the people of Quenaalt and the other ruined sites of Grith. Some theories suggest that the race died off in a sweeping epidemic, possibly brought about through biological war-

fare, while others maintain that the Old Ones of Grith underwent some kind of abrupt regression to a more primitive state.

#### DOWNUNDER

About 40 years ago, a Lucullan trader by the name of Marcus Pharen (Hm/Lucullus/FA-5) ran afoul of a powerful crime baron in his home system. Fleeing for his life, Marcus loaded up his valuables and a handful of his most trusted employees and set out for safer ground. Recognizing the potential of the forest moon, Marcus reached an understanding with the Aanghels and other sesheyen tribes and settled near Grith's south pole. He named his new home Downunder in recognition of the 175 degrees of latitude between Diamond Point and the new settlement.

Downunder has grown into an all-round trading post, shipyard, and outfitter for Corrivale's asteroid miners and working spacers. Marcus Pharen still runs the place, growing rich as Midas by virtue of the simple fact that he gets a piece of every sale, every transaction, that takes place in Downunder. It's his private kingdom, run by a gang of ruffians under Pharen's orders. Downunder is a place to pick up supplies, meet contacts, effect repairs, and sign on for jobs, all without any awkward questions.

It's rumored that VoidCorp uses Downunder as a base of operations on Grith, having struck a deal with Marcus Pharen. The trader has close ties with the miners of the Inner Belt and Iphus, and he is known to take money from both the Council of Tribes and VoidCorp's operatives. Most Grith sesheyans consider making deals with VoidCorp to be a crime worthy of terrible retribution, but the most ruthless tribal leaders overlook this when profit is concerned. Downunder skates on some very thin ice,

but so far Pharen's sesheyans seem willing to give him a little latitude.

## THE JUNGLE CITIES

Though most sesheyans live in Downunder or Diamond Point, a few follow older ways and live with the shamans deep in Grith's jungles. The only three jungle settlements of any size are Redknife, Angoweru, and Uyellin.

### REDKNIFE

The largest of the non-Hatire sesheyans settlements, Redknife is also the closest to Diamond Point. Many of the 8,000 inhabitants still cleave to traditional sesheyan ways, and they are among the most loyal to the Devli'yan cause. Redknife is also something of a tourist attraction for the Hatire, who come to view the "poor, benighted primitives" in their natural environment. The sesheyans are willing to put on dances, feasts, and other tourist-friendly entertainments; in exchange, they rake in a handsome profit from human curiosity.

In addition, the Redknife Tourist Bureau offers hunting trips with locals; these trips rarely bring back big game, but they do teach humans respect for sesheyan woodcraft. After a single short day in the jungle, most humans are hopelessly filthy, insect-ridden, and lost.

### ANGOWERU

This jungle city is built on the ruins of a much older city; the sesheyans scavenged stone from the alien ruins to build shelters and storehouses. Angoweru is primarily a corsair base, with a primitive, camouflaged landing pad, navigation beacons, an encrypted mass transceiver, and basic refueling and repair/maintenance facilities.

The 3,000 or so sesheyans who live here are all loyal to the crime lords of the Aanghel Empire; the city's single shaman is their puppet and often denounces Devlei'ir and his followers. Most of the Angowerins are service and support staff for the corsair fleets.

### UYELLIN

The smallest of the jungle cities, Uyellin is an interesting mix of modern and ancient elements of sesheyan culture. While the shamans rule here, they allow new practices. The city has a small landing pad for spaceships, good Grid links to Diamond Point, and a tribal longhouse for the comfort of visiting guests. Uyellin is perhaps the sesheyans' best chance of establishing a city that respects both modern galactic law and tribal customs.

Wyrna birds, sable snakes, and even gandercats are relatively common in the nearby jungles, and sesheyan corsair captains and crime lords often undertake extended hunting expeditions. The city's 900 sesheyans hire on as guides, beaters, or trackers for these trips, and the best of them are sometimes hired on as bodyguards when the Aanghel lords return to Diamond Point.

## THE INNER BELT

Between the Hydrocus-Grith planetary system and the world of Lordan lies the first of Corrivale's asteroid belts. Most of the asteroids of the Inner Belt orbit Corrivale at a distance of 1.5 to 2.5 AU. The belt is unusually spherical in shape, and most of its moonlets and boulders tumble through the lonely reaches above or below the plane of Corrivale's ecliptic. The Inner Belt has no major settlements or industrial facilities. Instead, it's mined by a

## MISSIONER ELIAS HOUNE, DIAMOND POINT CONSTABLE

### Level 7 human Combat Spec

STR 11	(+1)	INT 11	(+1)
DEX 9	(0)	WIL 10	(0)
CON 10		PER 9	
Durability: 10/10/5		Action check: 14+/13/6/3	
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 1	

### Attacks

Unarmed—*power*<sup>1</sup> 14/7/3 d6+1s/d6+3s/d4+1w LI/0  
15mm sabot pistol 12/6/3 2d4w/2d4+1w/d4+3m HI/0

<sup>1</sup> Base situation die is -d4.

### Defenses

Battle jacket: d8 (LI), d4+2 (HI), d4 (En)

### Skills

Athletics [11]; Unarmed [11]—*power* [14]; Modern [9]—pistol [12]; Vehicle [9]—land [10]; Stamina [10]—endurance [11]; Knowledge [11]—deduce [12], first aid [12]; language: Standard [14]; Law [11]—enforcement [13]; Security [11]—protocols [12]; Awareness [10]—perception [12]; Investigate [10]—interrogate [11], search [11]; Culture [9]—etiquette: Grith sesheyan [10]; Interaction [9]—intimidate [10]; Leadership [9]—command [11].

Blunt and unyielding as a block of granite, Elias Houne is the chief law officer of the Hatire Community's colony of Grith. He holds the ecclesiastical rank of missioner, roughly equivalent to a senior agent or field-grade officer among the governments of other nations. Missioner Houne strongly believes in leading through forceful example. As the commander of the Hatire Internal Security Ministry, he tirelessly pursues any lawbreakers within the Hatire territory on Grith—which extends to any spot that doesn't have a sesheyan standing on it, in Houne's eyes.

The missioner has no respect for the nuances of the Mahdra ruling, and he often ignores sesheyan immunities in the pursuit of Hatire justice. Usually, Houne backs down grudgingly when confronted by the legal opposition of tribal authority, but he marks any lawbreaker hiding behind the diplomatic shield of the Council of Tribes. Once he has marked a sesheyan as a troublemaker, he goes to extreme lengths to capture dodgers if they ever set foot outside their strictly defined havens. While Houne resents the diplomatic boundaries placed on his authority, he is scrupulously honest in all other matters.

Missioner Houne is a balding man in his early forties, with a military-style crewcut and a soldier's rigid bearing. He prides himself on his physical fitness and practices his martial arts every day, believing that enlightenment comes through the rigors of the flesh. He is extremely loyal to Diocesan Kola Entele, and he leads a hand-picked force of over 100 Hatire lawmen on her orders. These lawmen are the bane of the sesheyan gangsters, and have won a measure of respect from their adversaries. The sesheyans call them the mend'lya, the relentless ones. They are unbribable and tough fighters; several are said to have been trained as mind knights.

### CSS STINGRAY

#### Concord Manta-class Cutter

Compartments: 8 Durability: 40  
 Maneuver rating: 0 Acc: 2 Mpp  
 Cruising speed: 1.5 AU/hr Berthing: 12

Armament: 2 plasma cannons  
 Range 4/8/16 Mm d6+2w/d8+2w/d6+1m En(e)/A  
 Defenses: Deflection inducer, jammer  
 Armor: Moderate cerametal (4 dur)  
 d4+1 (LI), d4+1 (HI), d4+1 (En)  
 Computer: Ordinary core, Ordinary battle computer, Ordinary nav computers  
 Engines: Induction engine  
 Power: 2 mass reactors rated at 10 power factors each  
 Drive: 5 light-years per starfall

Roll	Comp't	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Durability
—	Command	Airlock (0/0)	8/8/4
		Mass transceiver (1/1)	
		Radio transceiver (0/1)	
		Multiband radar (0/0)	
		Computer core (1/0)	
		Crew quarters (2/0)	
1-2	Engineering	Stardrive (3/*)	18/18/9
		3 x Induction engine (6/6)	
3-4	Auxiliary 1	Autosupport (0/1)	8/8/4
		Mass reactor (4/0)	
5-6	Auxiliary 2	Autosupport (0/1)	8/8/4
		Mass reactor (4/*)	
7-9	Electronics	Mass detector (1/0)	6/6/3
		2 x Deflection inducers (2/4)	
		Laser transceiver (0/1)	
10-12	Cargo	Airlock (1/0)	8/8/4
		Cargo bay (3/0)	
13-16	Weapons 1	Plasma cannon in turret (4/3)	8/8/4
17-20	Weapons 2	Plasma cannon in turret (4/3)	8/8/4

Captain N'drochi's ship is a battle-scarred and finely-tuned machine emblazoned with clear Concord markings; the 12-person crew of the *Stingray* knows how to wring every last drop of performance from the ship's engines, weapons, and deflection inducers. Like other *Manta*-class ships, it was built at the Hale Memorial shipyards of Concord Taurus in the 2470s. The *Stingray* saw action during the Rigunmor-Borealin skirmishes of 2481, and served with distinction. Three of the crew members are veterans of that action.

The *Stingray* relies on its plasma cannons for offensive power, but it is also a very fast and maneuverable ship. The *Stingray* can outrun many of the corsairs, who tend to operate older, slower ships.

The crew has trained in running under communications silence and in asteroid emulation, a tactic that consists of deliberately setting the vessel into a tumble resembling the natural orbit of an asteroid of the Inner or the Outer Belt. Once in a tumble, the *Stingray* can't be detected by corsairs as anything other than an other tumbling, metallic rock. At this point, the ship's sensors are deployed to listen in on corsair radio traffic; the ship's crew includes a code-cracking communication specialist. When a signal is picked up, the ship's speed allows it to intercept its target quickly and silently.

large fleet of battered systemships that prospect for promising asteroids, land for a few days or weeks to strip the most valuable and easily accessible minerals from them, and then move on to find the next asteroid. It's a difficult way to make a living, and most asteroid miners teeter on the verge of economic ruin from week to week. Ore pirates aren't uncommon in this portion of the system, and a number of corsairs and smugglers use the legitimate mining vessels as cover for their illegal activities.

### LORDAN

The initial StarMech survey report for Lordan, compiled back in 2315, read simply: "Like Mars before the Solars terraformed it, only bigger." Lordan is a desiccated planet with a thin atmosphere of nitrogen and carbon dioxide. While the planet is interesting to geologists, no one has paid a great amount of attention to it so far. With the exception of a handful of tiny domed research stations, Lordan is uninhabited and unexploited.

Surprisingly, Lordan may be shaping up as a flashpoint in the Corrivale system. The planet is a good candidate for terraforming, and several large consortiums are competing for the rights to develop it. The problem is simple: Who owns Lordan? The wording of the original StarMech agreement with the Hatiere Community is vague on this point. The Fhei'irre Consortium of Grith, a high-tech space industries company, claims the planet on behalf of Corrivale's indigenous sesheyans, planning to terraform it and then sell it to any interested party. VoidCorp has actually registered a claim on the planet, which the Concord is now evaluating. It's a legal nightmare.

### LECTERION

A gas giant of Jovian proportions, Lecterion is easily the largest of Corrivale's planets. Its dense core of metallic hydrogen and rapid rotation induce a powerful and unpredictable magnetic field. It's dangerous for a human to spacewalk in this region under the best of circumstances, and when Corrivale flares abruptly (an event that happens at least once every two or three years) the collision of the solar wind with Lecterion's magnetic field creates violent electromagnetic storms. Resembling the great sheetlike formations of the aurora borealis, these EM disturbances can ionize unshielded computer and sensor gear, spike out radiation sensors, and cause all sorts of other havoc. They are also a sight of incredible beauty.

Lecterion is orbited by eleven moons, most of them asymmetrical rocks only a few dozen kilometers across. It has only two moons of any real size, Nike and Hephaestus. The former is shrouded in a dense fog of nitrogen and methane, while the latter is an Io-like moon with intense tidal-driven volcanic activity. While both moons show promise for mining or long-range terraforming projects, no such activities are yet under way. Lecterion's fierce electromagnetic activity discourages serious settlement. Most unshielded electronic equipment fails within 24 hours of arrival in close orbit.

After paying StarMech a small compensation, the Galactic Concord has assumed the rights to develop Lecterion's moons. Many Concord diplomats feel that this was wasted money, but Star Force is proceeding with plans to create a major fleet base in the Lecterian moons.

### OMEGA STATION

Orbiting above the frigid mists of Nike, more than a million kilometers from Lecterion, Omega Station is a lonely outpost of the

Concord. The station is a spiderlike skeletal framework with only a handful of modular sections in place. Currently, the station is 15% complete, and construction is proceeding at about 10% a year. Eventually, the station will provide docking, repair, supply, and support facilities for up to a hundred warships and auxiliaries.

Patrol Squadron 131 of the Concord Star Force is currently based at the incomplete station. The squadron contains two second-rate drive cutters and seven system escorts. The private navies of the wealthiest Grith sesheyans easily outnumber this token force, and VoidCorp routinely stations several destroyers and corvettes near Iphus—a flotilla that could wreck Patrol Squadron 131 with little trouble, if hostilities ever break out. Despite the presence of potential enemies, Commodore Shari Talivyn (Hf/Concord/DTO-7) deploys her small squadron as boldly as if each ship were a dreadnought. She counts on the Concord's moral authority to protect her ships and crew as she zealously enforces Concord law.

Commodore Talivyn's best officer is Lieutenant Commander Aryl N'drochi, a brilliant mechalus who commands the *Stingray*, one of the squadron's drive cutters (see sidebar). The captain and his crew are personally responsible for the capture of seven corsair vessels in the last six months. N'drochi has gained a reputation as a mechalus with the intuition and cunning of a fox.

## THE OUTER BELT

Beyond the moons of Lecterion lies the Outer Belt, a vast region of asteroids supporting a few lonely mining outposts. Asteroids of the Outer Belt are richer in strategic minerals than their inner-system counterparts, and most of them orbit Corrivale at a distance of 8 to 12 AU, although many orbits are highly elliptical.

Because asteroids in the Outer Belt are few and far between compared to the inner portion of the system, the culture of nomadic prospectors that exists in the interior system never developed out here. In the outer portions of the system, it makes more sense to search out one large asteroid to strip for years than it does to set up short-term operations on a sequence of smaller ones. That's exactly what the miners of the Outer Belt have done, though the miners here are a tiny group compared to those in the Inner Belt.

No one's ever bothered to assay more than a few hundred of the most promising asteroids in the Outer Belt; thousands upon thousands of uncharted, unclaimed rocks still drift silently through space. About two dozen outposts are scattered through the belt, each stripping asteroids of up to several hundred kilometers in size. Several of the outposts are sesheyan enterprises started up in the last 30 years, and a handful belong to independent Verge mining companies based in Lucullus or Tendril. However, most of the Outer Belt bases are old VoidCorp installations that have been recently refitted. The stellar corporation is vigorously pursuing industrial development in the system's remote regions.

## IPHUS

The second most valuable world in the Corrivale system is Iphus, a cold and desolate rock completely inhospitable to human life. Its only redeeming feature is great mineral wealth, in the form of a dense nickel-iron core and a rich carbonaceous crust. Neither is particularly uncommon or valuable in the uni-

### LCDR ARYL N'DROCHI, CAPTAIN OF THE *STINGRAY*

#### Level 5 mechalus Diplomat (Tech Op)

STR 8	(0)	INT 13	(+2)
DEX 8	(0)	WIL 11	(+1)
CON 9		PER 11	
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 12+/11/5/2	
Move: sprint 16, run 10, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 1	

#### Attacks

Unarmed	4/2/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/O
Laser pistol	9/4/2	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	En/O

#### Defenses

CF softsuit: d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)

#### Skills

Athletics [8], Modern [8]—pistol [9], Vehicle [8]—space [10], Stamina [9]—endurance [10], Computer [13], Knowledge [13]—computer [15], interstellar affairs [14], language: *Mechalus* [16], language: Standard [16], Navigation [13]—drivespace [14], system [14], System [13]—communications [14], sensors [14], Tactics [13]—space [16], Administration [11]—bureaucracy [12], Awareness [11]—intuition [13], Interaction [11]—charm [12], Leadership [11]—command [12].

Aryl N'drochi is a clever and determined captain who tempers the system commander's idealism with practical experience in the trenches. He is one of the first mechalus officers to join the Concord Star Force without first serving in the Rigunmor Consortium's mercenary fleets. He had to overcome a fair amount of racial prejudice and stereotyping in order to win command of his own vessel. Like many other mechalus now living in the Concord, Aryl grew up in much more cosmopolitan circumstances than the mechalus who remained within the Star Consortium. With more cultures to observe, he's learned to understand the many styles of human emotion and duplicity.

At two meters tall, Aryl is towering and slender for a mechalus. He grew up in the light gravity of an asteroid settlement, and he's worked in space all his life. Regardless of the circumstances, he never gets mad—he simply takes new developments into account and continues with the mission, although he's acquired a dry humor and soft-spoken sarcasm from his association with humans.

Part of the secret of Aryl's success is that he interfaces directly with his ship when engaging hostile vessels, and thus gets status reports faster than any human could. However, the rest of his secret is simple tenacity and a wily cunning that few mechalus raised on Aleer display. He's justly proud of his crew's accomplishments, though he is quick to dismiss any praise of his performance, deflecting all compliments to the benefit of the ship as a whole.

verse, but the Stellar Ring's tremendous demand for plastics and metals make worlds such as Iphus worth trillions of Concord dollars. Several vast strip mines and refineries sprawl across the airless surface of this frigid world, processing the raw materials of interstellar society.

## SECURITY LEADER MR361 28DRF (RAMOS EDOUDIN)

### Level 8 human Combat Spec

STR 11	(+1)	INT 11	(+1)
DEX 12	(+1)	WIL 10	(0)
CON 9		PER 7	
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 15+/14/7/3	
Move: sprint 22, run 16, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 0	

### Attacks

Unarmed—power	12/6/3	d6+1s/d6+3s/d4+1w	LI/0
Combat knife	14/7/3	d4+2w/d4+3w/d4+4w	LI/0
11mm pistol <sup>1</sup>	16/8/4	d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m	HI/0

<sup>1</sup>—d4 base situation die.

### Defenses

CF coat, long: d4+1 (LI), d4+1 (HI), d6-1 (En)

### Skills

Athletics [11]—climb [12], jump [12], throw [13]; Melee [11]—blade [14]; Unarmed [11]—power [12]; Modern [12]—pistol [16], SMG [13]; Stealth [12]—hide [13], sneak [13]; Vehicle [12]; Movement [9]—race [10], swim [11]; Stamina [9]—endurance [11]; Demolitions [11]—scratch [12], set [13]; Knowledge [11]—language: Standard [14]; Security [11]—devices [12]; Tactics [11]; Awareness [10]—intuition [12]; Interaction [7].

Edoudin is a professional killer who enjoys his work. He moves in a shadowy world of dark missions and secret operations, following Mayasa Ombe's orders without question or remorse. An excellent strike leader, Ramos has refused several promotions to VoidCorp management because he has no patience for personnel development. Instead, he insists on working with the best people he can find and attacks the mission at hand with pure, emotionless professionalism and pragmatism. Ramos is absolutely ruthless, although he's never malicious or unnecessarily cruel. People that could get in the way of a job are just obstacles to be removed.

Ramos Edoudin is a compact man about half a head shorter than most humans. He's good-looking and athletic, with long dark hair he wears in a ponytail—but one look in his cold, emotionless eyes quickly dispels any idea that Edoudin might be charismatic or charming. It's just not in his nature.

As the Corrivale security leader, he carries an 11mm pistol prominently at all times, and when on duty he wears a carefully tailored CF long coat with corporate logo prominently displayed. Ramos is usually escorted by two junior security officers, sesheyans identified as DA178 and DA179, though they are more often referred to by their nicknames, "Bull" and "Bear." The sesheyans hide behind mirrored, golden sunglasses that wrap around all eight of their eyes.

Edoudin's duties take him all over the system, and he has access to a luxury yacht that VoidCorp has outfitted with extensive eavesdropping and security equipment. Although it is technically referred to as the *PC71*, Edoudin has nicknamed the ship the *Talon*.

## PLANETOLOGY

Iphus isn't a place for humans. It's a barren, airless world more than 17 AU from its sun; even fierce Corrivale is just another star in the sky (albeit dozens of times brighter than any other celestial body). Temperatures on the surface never rise above -170° C. These frigid, gloomy conditions claim the lives of dozens of workers every year.

Surprisingly, Iphus is tectonically active, retaining a small liquid core from the time of its formation. This core has cooled and shrunk over geological time, leading to fissuring and subsidence in the crust, almost 2,000 kilometers thick. Vulcanism on Iphus proceeds at a snail's pace compared to Earth, but small eruptions and outgassing occur on the planet every 5 to 10 years. Mountains raised early in the planet's history still stand, surviving billions of years in the absence of any weathering or erosion. Iphus's tectonic activity now consists mostly of mild earthquakes.

With no atmosphere to speak of, Iphus has no climate changes. Its old mountainous regions are steep and sharp, barren rock unmarked by the ages of erosion that wear down Earth's mountains. The lowlands and mountain valleys are buried under a thin layer of glaciers, mostly water and ammonia ice with a frost of carbon dioxide snow on the higher peaks. It's an eerie and dangerous landscape, requiring heated e-suits and insulated machinery to survive.

## GOVERNMENT

Human settlement on Iphus consists of about 50 different mining stations, sprawling industrial complexes naked to the planet's cold and vacuum. Black refineries stand like the skeletons of forgotten cities, illuminated by the harsh glare of arc lamps. Massive strip mines surround these cheerless installations, scraping away the planet's shallow glaciers to excavate gaping pits into the world's rocky crust. Most of the actual mining work is performed through teleoperated or self-guiding robot vehicles, but the pervasive cold routinely stops even the best machinery, requiring frequent maintenance by the refinery crews.

During the Long Silence, a few of the original VoidCorp crews eventually sold out to local Verge operations. Most instead banded together to form a local company called Iphus United. This company supplied processed ore to planets around Tendril, Lucullus, Aegis, and to the planet Galvin in the Algernon system. However, with the return of VoidCorp to the Verge in 2497, Iphus United was abruptly reclaimed by its corporate parent.

Today, VoidCorp owns 44 of the 51 mining facilities on Iphus. To date, the corporation has allowed the remainder to operate without interference, but everyone in the other seven posts is waiting for the other shoe to drop. VoidCorp cruisers and destroyers are a constant presence in orbit above the ice world, and the company can close the remaining stations any time it chooses.

Since no one ever came to Iphus with the idea of settling, no planetary government was ever created for the mining stations. Every installation was out for itself. VoidCorp has changed that, organizing its 44 stations into the Iphus Mining Division, a subsidiary of VoidCorp proper. It's manned by VoidCorp Employees and subject to company rules and regulations.

The current Chief of Operations is a veteran engineer and manager by the name of Farrn Reaves (RC094 29KJN). Chief Reaves (Hm/VoidCorp/T0-5) generally ignores the sesheyan situation on Grith, viewing that as a home office affair. Instead,

he concentrates on the productivity and defense of Iphus. Reaves is straightforward and fair, a tough manager usually unforgiving of mistakes.

While Reaves holds the highest rank and runs the show on Iphus, he's not the most important VoidCorp agent in the system. Verge Sector Security Chief Mayasa Ombe (QN105 74MAC) is responsible for protecting all VoidCorp interests and enterprises in the Verge. She is the operational commander of all VoidCorp military and security forces in the Verge, as well as the top spymaster for the region. Unlike Reaves, who's mostly concerned with the productivity of Iphus, Sector Chief Ombe is in the Verge with the express intent of dominating this region on VoidCorp's behalf. Ruthless and high-tempered, Ombe (Hf/VoidCorp/DFA-8) takes her job very personally and keeps a long list of anyone who gets in her way.

Sector Chief Ombe's most trusted operative is Ramos Edoudin, a top-notch wetwork specialist. Ramos oversees covert operations, intelligence gathering, and risk management. In other words, he "manages" people who have become security risks.

### IPHUS 1

The center of VoidCorp activity in the Verge, Iphus 1 is the largest and oldest mining complex on the frozen world. Small, crowded habitat domes cluster beneath towering machinery, and gloomy sublevels are cut into the bedrock beneath the surface installations. In all directions the bleak landscape of Iphus has been stripped mercilessly in stark, deep cuts, now largely idle. Steel landing platforms cling to the refinery towers, a cold metal forest tarnished by the bitter frost of the site's industrial exhaust.

Unlike most of the Iphus mining pits, Station Iphus 1 is more important as a smelter and refinery than it is as an operational mine. The planetary operation office is located in Station Iphus 1, a played-out mining post that is being retooled for the manufacture of plastics. The post hopes to make spare parts for ships and mining machinery from carbonaceous feedstocks. It's an enormously wasteful process, but the energy requirements can easily be met by the use of mass reactors. The huge amount of heat generated by the chemical synthesis will help heat Iphus 1.

Iphus 1 is home to a total of 20,000 residents, made up of VoidCorp Employees, contract workers, and independents. As the largest settlement in the outer portion of the system, it serves as a center for trade, recreation, ship repair, and administration. Squalid corporate apartments catering to the most questionable forms of entertainment line the factory town's tunnels, while blank-faced corporate levels reserved for Operations, Security, and Administration rise above the crowds. VoidCorp Internal Security holds Iphus 1 in an iron grip, preventing most violent crime and property damage, but ignoring vice crimes as no concern of the company. All in all, Iphus 1 is a dangerous place unless you are well connected with VoidCorp management.

### SPACEPORT

The town's commercial district is a raucous zone of free trade, independent vendors, and travel agents sprawling in a small ring around the corporate core. About a dozen subcontractors lease landing platforms from VoidCorp and furnish them as "spaceports." Most are devoid of any service or repair capabilities, and all charge an arm and a leg for landing fees (\$500 per day of docking).



**LODGINGS**

Travelers with serious VoidCorp credentials (an HA rank or higher) can stay in the Corporate Travel Suites, a sprawling complex of personal quarters allocated as a travel perk for management-rank employees or their special guests. Silent and Spartan in decor, these are the best temporary quarters available on Iphus 1, far removed from the noise and squalor of the commercial district.

Heroes without connections can find any number of wretched flophouses in the working sector of Iphus 1. These dismal facilities run anywhere from \$100 to \$200 a night, an outrageous sum for the quality of the room.

**SITES OF INTEREST**

The new Executive Tower, a black monolith rising from the rusting infrastructure of the refinery and the oldest habitat domes, is the corporation's nerve center in the Verge. The most important executives in Corrivale, including Chief Operations Officer Reaves and Sector Security Chief Ombe, have their offices, command centers, and personal staffs here. Naturally, Executive Tower security is virtually airtight. No Employee with less than MA-level status is allowed into the Tower for even the most trivial tasks.

Subsector 17 of the commercial district is widely recognized as the gambling capital of the outer system. Run by MacroEntertainment, an independent contractor, the subsector includes more than twenty casinos and two sporting arenas. MacroEntertainment is as crooked as they come, rigging fights, shaving points, even using thugs to recover bad gambling losses.

**ALMAZ AND CHARK**

The outermost of Corrivale's planets, Almaz and Chark are frozen slushballs with little to recommend them for human settlement. Almaz's nickel-iron core gives it some small value as a mining property; VoidCorp is currently conducting a remote satellite survey to locate the richest deposits. So far, the survey has been impaired by Almaz's unpredictable magnetic field. Delicate instruments are sometimes damaged by magnetic anomalies concealed under the snowy crust.

Chark is even less hospitable. Its surface is an endless slushy plain of liquid hydrogen, ammonia, and water ice. Very little firm ground exists, and several ships have sunk beneath its hydrogen-slush plains, never to be seen again. The liquid hydrogen adheres to metallic surfaces on contact, creating all kinds of mechanical problems. Chark's remote location and hazardous nature deter all but the most intrepid explorers.

**SYSTEM LOG**

Since the settlement of the Verge, Corrivale has been a minor player compared to densely populated systems such as Tendril, Aegis, or Oberon. During the Long Silence, the system was virtually abandoned to the handful of miners, corsairs, and settlers who decided to make Corrivale their home. Even the sesheyans immigration of 2360 (or "discovery" of the existing colony, depending on which story you believe) didn't catapult Corrivale into the spotlight.

Today, that's changing. From a forgotten backwater, Corrivale has grown into a strategic foothold for no fewer than three stellar nations—the Hatire Community, VoidCorp, and the Galactic Concord—as well as the home system for an industrial, spacefaring society of sesheyans protected from VoidCorp by

the most tenuous of legal shelters. It's still lightly populated compared to other Verge systems, but it seems that everyone in Corrivale is a player for one team or another. Here are a few of the current events shaping up in Corrivale:

**LORDAN CONFERENCE SET**

Determined to resolve the legal tangle surrounding the ownership of the planet Lordan, Commodore Talivyn of Omega Station has called a conference between all interested parties, including representatives of the Fhei'irre Consortium of Grith, VoidCorp, StarMech, and the Hatire Community. The conference will take place aboard the station under heightened security, though few observers expect that the issue will be resolved. Concord ambassadors are expected to mediate the dispute.

**AANGHEL OSUI'IKE INDICTED**

In a move that shocked and divided the sesheyan community on Grith, Diocesan Kola Entele has indicted Aanghel Osui'ike, leader of the powerful Aanghel family, on charges of conspiracy, racketeering, and moral turpitude. While Osui'ike is immune to Hatire prosecution as long as she remains in sesheyan territory, a conviction would trap her in tribal lands—as soon as she set foot outside sesheyan land, she'd be subject to arrest and confinement. The conviction could also cost her many of her holdings in Diamond Point that happen to be on Hatire land. Many sesheyans back the powerful (and popular) crime lord, arguing that a successful prosecution of the charges would lead to Hatire dominion over all of Grith. Others, particularly the Devly'an, maintain that it's time for the oligarchs of the Council of Tribes to start answering to some authority.

The case hinges on the testimony of two former Aanghel operatives who stood close to Osui'ike for years. These sesheyans are being kept in extremely secure seclusion to ensure that they'll live long enough to testify. Without them, the case against Osui'ike falls apart.

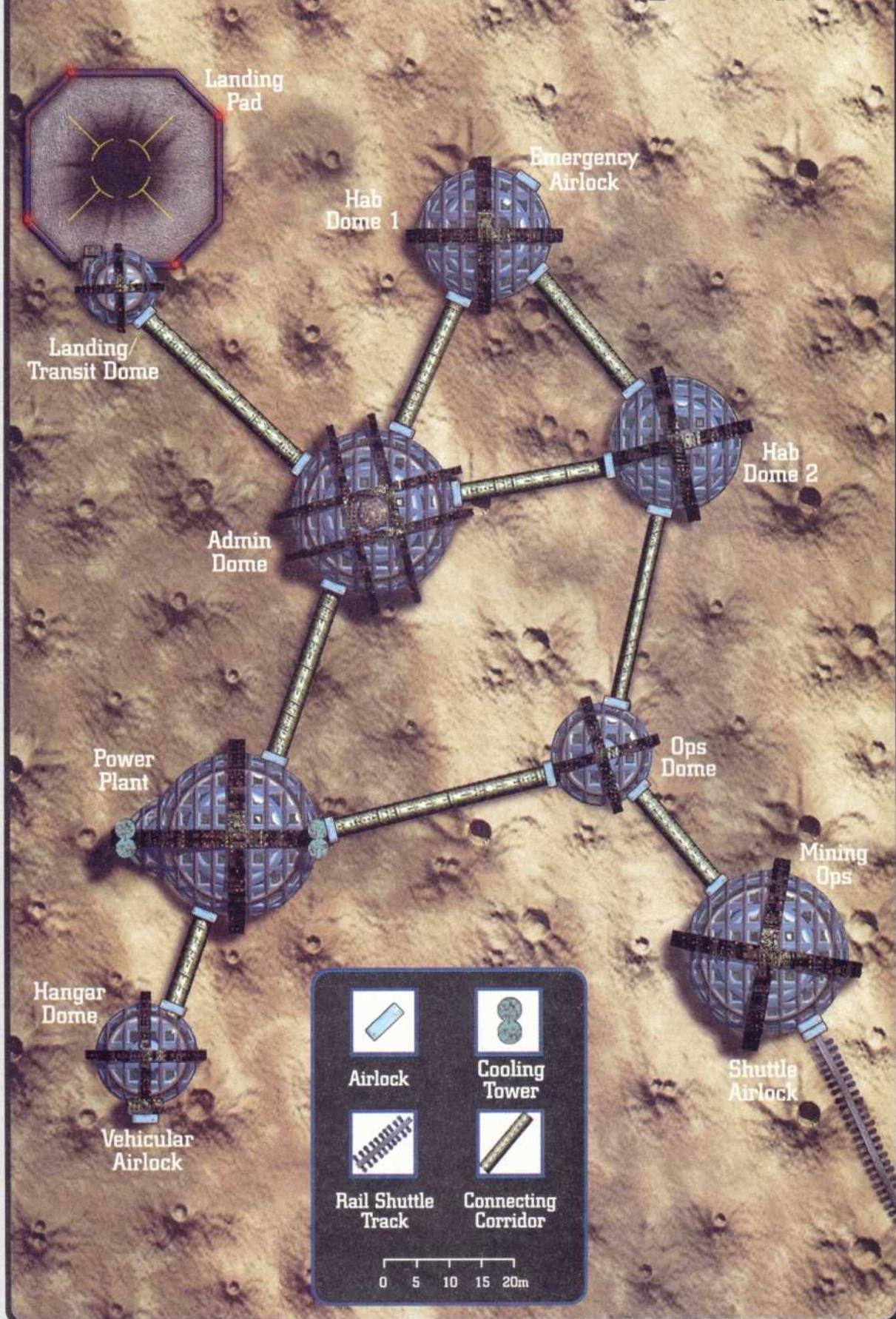
**NEW DIG AT QUENAALT RUINS**

The ancient Quenaalt site has proven more extensive than anyone imagined. A subterranean complex of vaults, caverns, and tunnels honeycombs the ground beneath the sprawling surface ruins. Initial explorations indicate that hundreds of kilometers of passageways and chambers may exist beneath the familiar ruins. Some xenoarcheologists speculate that these new finds may finally prove or disprove the sesheyan story about their abduction from Grith many centuries ago. Naturally, this lends more than a little political tension to the archeological digs. Early indications show artifacts of at least a petrochemically fueled society, and may even indicate the existence of fusion technology in these tunnels.

**HEROES OF CORRIVALE**

Corrivale natives belong to one of three major groups: Hatire colonists, VoidCorp Employees, or sesheyans. Hatire and VoidCorp heroes of human descent gain the bonuses associated with their stellar nations. Grith sesheyans reduce the penalties they suffer in bright light to +1 step for light of Good intensity (full sunshine) or +2 steps for light of Amazing intensity (flares, extremely bright daylight). They've grown more accustomed to Corrivale's bright sunshine than others of their species.

# Mining Outpost



# LUCULLUS

Of all the systems rediscovered during the stellar nations' return to the Verge, Lucullus is the one that most of the Stellar Ring would like to forget. Lucullus was once the dumping ground of the Solar Union, but the penal colonists of the system overthrew their oppressors in a prison revolt of shocking violence. Unlike many revolutions, however, the Lucullus revolt didn't install a new government. Instead, the entire system degenerated into brutal anarchy; the strong took what they wanted.

Despite the lack of a real government to restrain gang and corsair activity, not every Lucullan is a criminal. In the absence of a civil authority, current Lucullan society has organized around economic power. When the walls came down, everything in this system was up for grabs, and the former inmates seized control of the various industries scattered through Lucullus. Over the course of generations, these pillagers became industrialists and merchants. Though criminal elements receive most of the attention, a thriving society based on unregulated free trade has evolved beneath the scarred face of the Lucullus system. It's dirty, dangerous, and corrupt beyond belief, but the Lucullan social order rewards the strongest and brightest of its citizens with the opportunity to build an empire with their bare hands. In this system, crime bosses, corsair fleets, merchant princes, and industrial magnates struggle for supremacy, with faction after faction wheeling and dealing to survive.

## HISTORY

In 2319, Captain Pierek Luce of the Earth-based Perseus Survey Company first charted this star system and named it after himself. The Perseus Survey Company was a minor corporation that explored a number of stars in this vicinity, selling their findings to the highest bidder. Captain Luce didn't even bother to sell his survey data for Lucullus—the system was worthless. Instead, he simply posted the data to the Grid, following the time-honored explorers' tradition of adding to stellar databases at any opportunity. No one knows what finally became of Captain Luce; after surveying this system, he headed for the Lightning Nebula and was never heard from again.

For the next decade, Lucullus was just one more entry in the lists of hundreds of thousands of marginal star systems. However, in 2331 the Solar Union mounted an expedition to the system and conducted a detailed survey of mineral wealth, colonization sites, and navigational hazards. At the time, the Solars faced a population crisis of staggering proportions. While no relocation scheme could make a serious dent in the Solar Union's population of one trillion people, it was possible to isolate the bottom 1%—urban poor, lawless criminals, shanty town dwellers, and migrant squatters—and remove them from the picture. The decision was based on political perceptions, not realistic population management, but the powers of Sol were determined to show their citizens that they were dealing with the worst part of the population crunch.

Dozens of marginal systems such as Lucullus were surveyed and settled in this wave of forced emigration. Seeking strategic stepping-stones as well as population dumps, the Solars scattered hundreds of millions of untrained, unschooled poor to the far corners of known space. Defending these settlements from foreign aggression wasn't a consideration; the Solars were only too happy to let any stellar power have these abject worlds. In the Solar view, if one out of every ten of these colonies became productive or strategically important, the Union came out ahead.

The Solars chose Penates in the Lucullus system as one of their most dismal colonial projects. The Union dumped the worst of its social misfits—some from overcrowded prisons and confinement camps—on to this world. Many of these "colonists" were people who had simply slipped between the cracks of Solar society, homeless and jobless indigents with no place to go and no defense against relocation. However, the Union sent a great number of violent criminals to Penates as well. In keeping with their controversial "out of sight, out of mind" policy, the Solars allocated only the most meager support for these new settlements, providing only the bare essentials for life—and sometimes not even that.

By 2338, the Union had settled over two million people in Penates's overcrowded habitat domes, dismal subterranean cities, and squalid industrial camps. Every year, they shipped out thousands of the worst criminals to join the growing prisoner population of Penates.

## THE PENAL COLONY

In the early days, life on Penates was hopeless and desperate. The citizens of the new colony weren't quite inmates. In fact, they were allowed to live wherever they wanted, move around from place to place, associate with whomever they chose, and accumulate whatever wealth they could. However, all colonists were required to work in state-sponsored industries for minimal pay, and they weren't allowed to leave the Penates system. Mandatory contraception ensured that the early colonists would never overpopulate their marginal habitat; the Solar Colonial Administration wanted to make sure it could dump itinerants and troublemakers off in the Verge for decades to come.

The first concern of the Solar Colonial Administration (or SCAd, as the planetary population called their jailers) was to create extensive self-sustaining habitats across the face of the planet. Original plans called for an influx of one million transports each year for the next 30 years. Building empty cities, underground agricultural plots, and atmosphere plants to recover oxygen from Penates's shroud of water ice was the primary vocation of many Lucullans. Dozens of major settlements—each filled with untrained, uneducated transports—grew across the frozen surface of Penates, surrounded by a thin toxic smog of nitrogen and hydrocarbons.

SCAd's second concern was the construction of useful industries that would allow the system to contribute in some way to the Solar economy. While the planet's surface would never be hospitable to humans, Penates was rich in light elements and hydrocarbons—the building blocks of a plastics industry. Vast chemical refineries sprouted, taking advantage of both atmospheric and surface recovery techniques. Unchecked by any concern for environmental protection or worker health, heavy chemical and radioactive industries flourished in the dismal environment of the penal colony.

## GUARDED PEACE

In 2346, the Second Galactic War plunged most of the human powers into bitter struggle but left the Solar Union neutral. The pace of population dumping to all of the Union's worlds diminished as space lanes became dangerous to travel. Instead, the Solars used their resources to gear up for an inevitable involvement in the war. In the Lucullus system, the Union initially

reinforced Penates as a potential base for its operations in the Verge, and construction of first-class planetary defenses became the priority of the day. Like all projects in Lucullus, a lack of skilled workers, budget shortfalls, and a shortage of high-tech parts and tools hindered its completion.

In 2361, the formation of the Expansion Pentad brought Solar neutrality to an end. Hard-pressed by its powerful enemies, the Solar Union abandoned any serious plans for Verge offensives and left Lucullus to its own devices. SCAd engaged in a handful of halfhearted raids against Hatire and VoidCorp bases in nearby Corrivale, but increasing difficulties in managing Penates's population, as well as the dissolution of Grith as a Hatire colony, led to a cessation of Solar hostilities in the Verge by 2365. The last Solar supply vessel reached Lucullus in 2377—after that, there was nothing but silence from Old Space.

The situation in Lucullus grew more and more tense as the Solar Colonial Administration, hamstrung by the loss of its supply lines from home, turned to ever more draconian measures to retain control of the populace and keep productivity at acceptable levels. The men and women who made up SCAd represented only 1% of the planet's population, but they controlled 90% of Lucullus's wealth, industrial production, and resources. Contract overseers raised from the common population helped the SCAd bureaucrats and site managers stay on top of the situation by savagely repressing any spark of resistance.

## THE REVOLT OF 2385

Trouble erupted in the early months of 2385. The major systems surrounding Lucullus had all shed their national allegiance by silence or by design, and 50 years of ruthless administration had irrevocably alienated the colonist population from the Solar administration. The events of 2385 were precipitated by an impromptu strike at Mill 117, a sprawling smelter and steel mill in the city of Trinidad. Hundreds of convict laborers walked off the job, protesting the death of a popular reformer, Mays Barret, at the hands of management thugs. SCAd responded by ordering in troops to disperse the strikers; 100 workers died in a crackdown of shocking violence.

The Mill 117 massacre sparked a general strike that spread like wildfire. Laborers in dozens of major industries threw down their tools and protested the Colonial Administration's heavy-handed rule. Criminal gangs, long the shadow rulers of the lower classes, embarked on a rampage of looting and destruc-

tion in the general chaos. SCAd escalated the violence, declaring war on strikers and looters. Administration troops began full military operations to pacify the cities of Penates.

At first, the Solars held the advantages of armament, organization, and communication. Picking and choosing their targets, they cut the unruly mobs to pieces, restoring order to about half of the planet's settlements.

Then, for the first time, the colonists began to push back. Organizing around a nucleus of six powerful criminal gangs, the rebels established tenuous lines of communication and began to combine their efforts. Known as the Barons, the leaders of these groups forged a fractious alliance to defeat their common enemy, the Colonial Administration. Millions of angry Lucullans flocked to their banner, reducing the Solar strongholds one by one. In the fall of 2387, the last SCAd holding in Montserrat was overrun. The Solars no longer held Lucullus.

## THE BARONS' WAR

The defeat of the Solar Administration didn't bring peace to Lucullus, as the six major Barons had their own individual ideas about setting up a personal empire in the smoking ruins of the penal colony. In the absence of any common enemy, they naturally turned on each other.

The strongest group was known as the Jamaican Syndicate after its power base in the so-called Jamaican Triangle of Kingston, Port Royal, and Ocho Rios. These three industrial towns accounted for about 50% of the chemical industry in Penates and were some of the oldest and most heavily populated of the colony's settlements. The Jamaican Syndicate was literally a shadow government, setting "taxes" and passing "laws" in its territory that were relatively reasonable by Lucullan standards. Of course, Syndicate members lived like kings at the expense of the workers and shopkeepers who tried to make an honest living within their territory, but the client-patron ties within the gang made the Syndicate the most organized and disciplined of the warring factions. Mother Gray, the leader of the Jamaican Syndicate, cautiously worked through layer upon layer of underlings and never showed her own hand.

The chief rival of the Jamaicans was a violent street gang called the Picts. These barbarians ruled the Santiago corridor, a sprawling commercial district teeming with Penates's most recent immigrants. Poor and jobless, the Picts reverted to the rule of the strong, taking delight in violence and anarchy more

TABLE S10: LUCULLUS SYSTEM

	Polypheus	Dioscuri	Penates	Telemachus	Dione
Primary Planetary Class	Lucullus A	Lucullus A and B	Lucullus A and B	Lucullus A and B	Lucullus C
Gravity	Class 5	Class 4	Class 3	Class 4	Class 3
Radiation	G3 (1.35 g)	G2 (1.08 g)	G2 (0.86 g)	G2 (1.17 g)	G3 (1.29 g)
Atmosphere	R5 (1628 rem/hr)	R4 (337 rem/hr)	R3 (89 rem/day)	R3 (21 rem/day)	R0 (1 rem/yr)
Pressure	A3 (S, SO <sub>2</sub> )	A1 (NO)	A1 (CH <sub>4</sub> , NH <sub>3</sub> )	A0 (trace)	A2 (N <sub>2</sub> , O <sub>2</sub> )
Heat	P1 (0.28 atm)	P1 (0.11 atm)	P1 (0.49 atm)	P0 (0.016 atm)	P4 (5 atm)
Orbital Distance	H5 (650° C)	H0-4 (varies)	H1 (-40° C)	H0 (-80° C)	H4 (95° C)
Diameter	0.39 AU	3.76 AU	6.8 AU	13.8 AU	0.19 AU
Year	9,044 km	11,512 km	13,888 km	14,038 km	49,780 km
Day	57.4 days	3.47 years	8.45 years	24.44 years	21.6 days
Axial Tilt	19.8 hours	792.1 days	8.8 hours	244.53 hours	14.35 hours
Density	4.8°	15.1°	34.8°	2.4°	4.5°
No. Satellites	1.90	1.19	0.79	1.05	0.33
	0	0	0	1	0



shocking than anything their opponents could imagine. Held together by a cunning brute who called himself King Steel, the Picts developed a rigid code of honor between their own members. Duels resolved issues such as advancement, the division of loot, and arguments; the Pictish code absolutely prevented any retaliation against the winner of a fair duel. King Steel is said to have defeated 200 challengers in personal combat during his tenure as leader of the Picts.

In Trinidad City and its neighboring towns, Union Penates (or UP) held power. Originally an illegal association of workers trying to improve working conditions on the planet, UP became a revolutionary organization during the Revolt. Afterward, UP emerged as the closest thing to a real government that Penates (and therefore Lucullus) possessed—despite the fact that internal Union politics revolved around a cadre of autocratic strongmen. UP's early attempts to seize power after the fall of the Solars provoked the first round of Barons' Wars, as their former comrades objected violently to the Union's actions. In time, UP fell back to its old power base—the Trinidad industrial fields—and consolidated there. Boss Clavin, an oily double-dealer who ruled with an iron fist, led UP during the revolt and the faction wars that followed until his assassination in 2393.

The fourth faction was the Free Trade Guild, led by the self-styled Baron Wertz. The Guild was simply a fancy title for a widespread smuggling network. For years, the Guild had worked against the Solars (and sometimes for them), supplying the various black markets of the penal colony. Almost 20 years before the Revolt, Wertz had sold out to the Solars in order to become the major smuggler on the planet; he used the Colonial Administration to eliminate his rivals. In return, he supplied high-ranking officials with vast personal fortunes. During the revolt, Wertz initially stood on the sidelines, but when he saw

which way the wind was blowing, he was quick to forget his old business arrangements. Short on manpower, the Free Trade Guild's decrepit fleet of tradesmen and blockade runners helped the rebels gain control of the rest of the Lucullus system. Access to space helped the smugglers hold their own against the larger factions that sought to absorb them.

Penates's fragile habitat domes, power plants, and atmosphere processors fell into the hands of a turncoat Solar administrator named Silvia Nolan. An expert hacker and engineer, she joined the revolt out of disgust at SCAd policies and used her access to the Colonial communication and power grids to tie the revolt together. In the early flush of victory, Nolan and her Technospiders attempted to create a new, better government—but their idealism was quickly lost in the struggle to keep crucial installations out of the hands of other factions that sought to use them as instruments of the Barons' War. The Technospiders decided to devote themselves to the maintenance and improvement of Penates's habitats and industrial plants, avoiding direct confrontation with their rivals through technological superiority. To this day, the Technospiders are regarded as the strongest neutral faction in the Lucullus system.

The last major faction in the struggle for Lucullus consisted of Solar expatriates, former SCAd employees who abandoned their posts and slipped through the rebel net as the end of the Revolt approached. Disorganized and hunted by all their neighbors, they didn't last long—unless they fell in with the Supervisors. The Supervisors were the secret police of SCAd, a hidden society of psionic inquisitors who committed atrocious crimes in the process of shoring up the corrupt administration. Their zealous mind-probes and open adherence to "night and fog" justice held the general population of Lucullus in terror for more than 40 years.

While the Supervisors almost ceased to exist as an organization after the fall of SCAd, the remnants preserved themselves by selling their services to the new masters of the planet—the other factions. Over the course of a decade, the survivors gradually pulled together and overthrew a crude gang of street punks to take control of Caracas, an isolated mining region. Using their psionic talents and the thousands of dirty little secrets they'd collected over the years, the Supervisors succeeded in staving off their rival factions by means of espionage and terror. Everyone on the planet hated them with a passion, but they still survived.

Beyond the six major factions and their Barons, dozens of lesser gangs, guilds, unions, merchant houses, and civil governments existed at the close of the revolt. However, the larger factions soon absorbed these weaker bodies. The Barons' War never really ended in Lucullus; it continues in one form or another—although outbreaks of open warfare are now rare.

### FORMATION OF THE LUCULLAN LEAGUE

A generation of confused skirmishing, maneuvering, and infighting left the Barons of Lucullus no better off than they had been at the end of the revolt. Any time one faction showed signs of dominance, the others would unite to drag it down. Traders and diplomats from other Verge systems had to run a gauntlet of hostile vessels to deal with any particular faction, and it didn't take long for the merchants of Tendril and Oberon to write off Lucullus entirely. Lucullus didn't have anything they wanted badly enough to put up with the physical and financial hazards of dealing with the lawless Barons who ran the place.

Recognizing that *someone* had to speak for Lucullus as a system, the Barons met personally in 2419 to discuss the leadership and development of the planet. Lucullus might not have habitable worlds to exploit, but it did possess an industrial base, a workforce, and a lack of governmental authority. The factions attending the 2419 conference recognized that Lucullus needed trade with other systems and work for her industries to remain a viable settlement. Grudgingly, the Barons hammered out the framework of the Lucullan League.

The League was deliberately created as a hollow shell: It could only pass laws if all six Barons agreed; it couldn't raise troops; it was dependent on voluntary contributions by its member organizations for an operating budget and manpower. Despite this fact, it was a beginning. Right after its ratification, the League passed a few laws. It created neutral territory where ofworlders could visit without getting caught in any crossfire, supported free trade, and forced colonists to maintain the fragile artificial ecology of their respective colonies. Most important, the League created a forum in which the six Barons, or their representatives, could meet under a flag of truce to discuss affairs of interest to the entire planet.

Under the League, things quieted down enough for the citizens of the system to look outward for the first time and seriously consider their future. The League wasn't strong enough to gainsay even one determined faction, but it created a semblance of order out of the post rebellion chaos.

### ARRIVAL OF THE MONITOR

In 2497, the Barons of Lucullus received an abrupt wake-up call with the appearance of the Concord vessel *Monitor* in the Verge. As long as each system of the Verge stood alone,



Flag of the Lucullan League

victims of Lucullus were free to plunder, steal, swindle, and raid their neighbors to their hearts' content. No Verge system except Aegis possessed a navy strong enough to overcome the Lucullan corsair fleets, and the Regency's army could never pacify the crowded planet. Now, however, the Barons faced the very real possibility that a Solar armada (or an armada from another stellar nation) might descend upon them to reclaim the colony.

To their surprise, the Solar embassy on board the fortress ship offered the Lucullans independence in exchange for basing rights within the system. The Solars didn't want to govern Lucullus, but they did want a foothold in the Verge. The League debated the Solars' offer for days before accepting on two conditions: The industries of Lucullus would build and supply the base, and Solar vessels would leave Lucullan traffic alone. Emboldened by news of the Mahdra ruling in Corrvale, the Barons hinted at the possibility of another Concord intervention when the Solars hesitated over the deal. Eventually the Solars decided that the basing agreement as modified by the Lucullan League still gave them what they wanted, so they signed.

Naturally, the League's members engaged in furious competition to secure base construction contracts, supply contracts, and even concession contracts for the base. The appalled Solars were immersed in a bottomless mire of graft, violence, and greed as the Lucullan factions fought for the right to make money from the return of the stellar nations. Although the Solar ambassadors soon questioned the wisdom of the arrangement, their agreement with Lucullus kept the other stellar nations from bringing the prison colony into their own spheres of influence.

### LUCULLUS TODAY

Jealously guarding their autocratic rule, the six Barons still scheme and feud for control of the system, just as they've done for over 100 years. While the long-term stability of this arrangement is questionable at best, the people under the Barons' control generally fare better than they did in the days of SCAd. A middle class of traders, technicians, and professionals has grown with the opening of Lucullus to free trade, and even the most powerful Barons can't suppress this shift of wealth without destroying their own power base. In effect, the Barons, and their organizations, have become six shadow governments.

The Solar base on Telemachus is nearly complete, and the Solar Navy has moved a small squadron into the facility to patrol the region and protect Solar shipping in the area. Constrained by law to leave the Lucullans alone, the Solars can only watch the actions of smugglers, traders, and corsairs. If a vessel in distress requests Solar help, the Solars can intervene, but otherwise they must steer clear of Lucullus's pirates. The neighboring systems of Aegis, Oberon, Corrvale, and Tendril are quickly growing resentful of Solar inaction. As these systems

see it, the Solars aren't moving to counter illicit activities in Lucullus because they approve of their former colony's role as a haven for criminals and corsairs. It's a real bind for the Solars; if they withdraw from Lucullus, they lose their foothold in the Verge, and if they try to clean the system up, the Lucullan League will appeal to the Concord.

In the meantime, the Lucullan League is determined to establish its system as a major trade center and industrial plant in the Verge. Each of its members pursues a dozen different agreements to manufacture goods, trade commodities, or provide services for anyone who's interested. Lucullus is corrupt and dangerous, but it's a place of great opportunity.

## THE WORLDS OF LUCULLUS

Lucullus is an unusual place for human activity. It's a complicated trinary system, baked by two young, blue-white stars much more powerful than Sol, and a distant red dwarf. The two massive stars, simply called Lucullus A and Lucullus B, orbit each other at a range of about 1 AU. Lucullus's Arch, a mineral-rich ring, and a molten planet called Polyphemus orbit Lucullus A. Lucullan prospectors extensively mine both of these areas. However, the prospectors must abandon all of their stations and posts during the time of year when Polyphemus or Lucullus's Arch passes between A and B. The region of space between the twin blue stars is too hot and bright for even the best cooling systems.

Orbiting both blue-white stars are several small, barren worlds: Dioscuri, Penates, and Telemachus. These planets are located far from their parent suns, but the hard radiation of these massive stars renders them uninhabitable to humans. No one would have ever thought of settling here voluntarily, but the Solars didn't care where they dumped people; they just wanted someplace they could colonize without a fight from the other stellar nations.

Over 60 AU from the primary stars of this system, Lucullus C, a small red dwarf, shines dimly. The last planet of the Lucullus system, Dione, orbits Lucullus C only one-third of an AU away. All in all, Lucullus is a discouraging system. Baked by the brilliant giants and scathed by hard radiation, there's little here for humans except minerals.

## POLYPHEMUS

A molten nightmare, Polyphemus is a volcanic world baked by its brilliant parent, Lucullus A. Surrounded by a haze of gaseous sulfur and metal compounds, the planet's surface averages over 650° Celsius! The hard radiation is even worse than the thermal conditions, and only the most extensive environment-control technology can withstand surface conditions. Despite this hellish environment, humans still visit Polyphemus; the planet is incredibly rich in heavy metals, and the intense volcanic activity constantly refreshes surface deposits.

## PLANETOLOGY

Lucullus is a young system, only about 30 million years old. During this time, Polyphemus has barely had enough time to form a solid crust and semiliquid mantle. Driven by the intense heat of its interior and the wrenching gravity of its parent star, the crust of Polyphemus is constantly buckling and splitting in a display of extreme volcanism. Most of its mountains are razor-sharp ridges and crags only a few hundred meters in height, as taller mountains require a thicker crust for support. The exceptions, of course, are the young volcanoes of Polyphemus—some

## JORDANN MERIK MIDAS STATION MANAGER

### Level 3 human Tech Op

STR 9	(0)	INT 12	(+1)
DEX 9	(0)	WIL 8	(0)
CON 11		PER 11	

Durability: 11/11/6 Action check: 12/11/5/2

Movement: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2

Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 0

### Attacks

Unarmed-brawl	10/5/2	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
9mm pistol	10/5/2	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	HI/0

### Defenses

CF short coat: d4 (LI), d4 (HI), d6-3 (En)

### Skills

Armor [9]-powered [10]; Athletics [9]; Unarmed [9]-brawl [10]; Modern [9]-pistol [10]; Vehicle [9]-land [11]; Stamina [11]; Demolitions [12]; Knowledge [12]-language: Standard [15]; Verge system: Lucullus [14]; Physical [12]-chemistry [13]; planetology [13]; Technical [12]-juryrig [13], repair [13]; technical knowledge: mining [13]; Administration [8]-management [9]; Awareness [8]; Interaction [11]-bargain [12], intimidate [12], taunt [12].

Chief engineer and manager of Midas Station, Jordann Merik is a seasoned miner with experience in some of the most dangerous ore extraction procedures around. He's a good-natured fellow who makes an art out of swearing and grousing, hiding intelligent observations beneath comically cynical remarks. Underneath his good humor, Merik is actually quite ambitious and corrupt, a light-hearted scoundrel determined to use his position to line his own pockets to the greatest extent possible. It's the way to get ahead in Union politics, after all.

Like every other miner on Polyphemus, Merik abandons his post during the planet's passage into the Arch. The frequent work stoppages are preventing him from getting a handle on the indigenous creatures of Polyphemus. He isn't sure if he should eradicate them to protect his mines, capture them for study, or leave them alone. Whatever he decides, Midas Station will be in the middle of it, since his station has logged the most lifeform sightings on the planet.

of which have raised massive cones and shields on the surface. Most of Polyphemus's thin atmosphere consists of heavy compounds such as sulfur dioxide and sulfur in gaseous form, outgassed from the planet's volcanoes. It's a desiccated world without a trace of water or water vapor; lakes of molten metals and metal compounds make up its seas.

## BIOSPHERE

Polyphemus is one of the few worlds known to support Series VI life (life based on fluorosilicones, organic compounds resistant to extreme temperatures). Driven by the intense radiation and heat of Lucullus, evolution has proceeded at an astounding rate, producing complex animals and plants (or animal- and plant-analogues, anyway) in a matter of 10 or 15 million years. No one's ever undertaken a serious study of Polyphemus' rock-like creatures; the incredible hostility of the environment, com-

combined with Solar apathy, has discouraged scientific expeditions to the molten planet. There are rumors that at least one of these lifeforms may have demonstrated sentient behavior, but these stories are unconfirmed at the moment.

### MIDAS STATION

Typical of the rugged mining outposts scattered across the surface of Polyphemus, Midas Station is located on the rim of an ancient crater near the planet's equator. Much of the station is underground, buried in reinforced and insulated modules designed to withstand earthquakes and incredible heat. Only a dozen miners crew this station at any time. These miners work two-month rotations and then return to Penates when their time is up. It's a high-paying but hazardous job.

The miners don't work on the surface except in the most dire emergencies. The station contains a number of superheavy, refrigerated e-suits, but even these can only function for 20 or 30 minutes on the surface of the planet. Robots make up most of the mining equipment—though humans can operate some of the tools via remote controls. The station is strictly nocturnal, operating from about an hour after sunset to sunrise in order to keep valuable equipment out of direct sunlight.

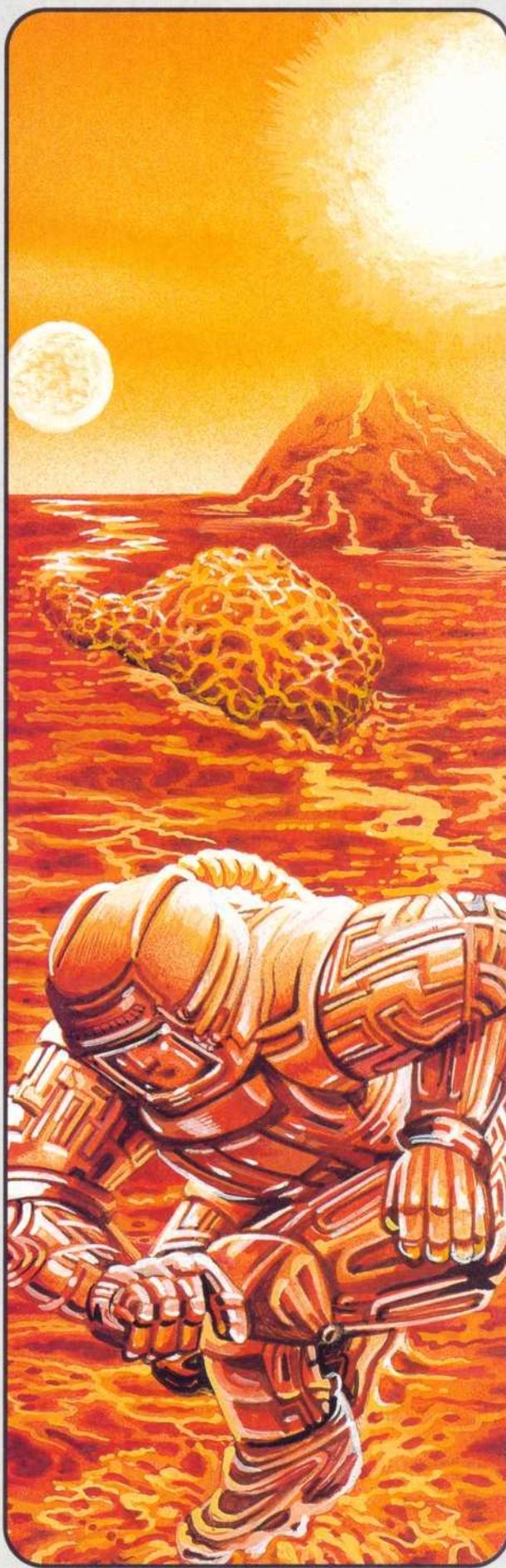
The Union of Arch Miners (UAM), a subsidiary of Union Penates, staffs Midas Station. The UAM maintains five different installations on Polyphemus and a dozen more low-g facilities scattered throughout the Arch. The UAM routinely abandons all of its stations for 40% of the year (20 to 40 days out of every 50 to 100), when Polyphemus and the Arch asteroids pass between Lucullus A and B. During this time, night disappears and the scorching daytime temperatures rise higher and higher.

### LUCULLUS'S ARCH

Glittering like a girdle of diamonds around Lucullus A, the Arch is a mineral-rich asteroid belt that orbits the first of the system's twin suns. Constantly tugged and bent by the influence of nearby Lucullus B, the Arch is a twisted band consisting of millions of rocky bodies, each locked into its own complex orbit. Some asteroids even weave short-lived figure-eight orbits around both suns, hurtling through the incandescent vacuum like burning meteors. Over the course of a few million years, most of the asteroids that make up this belt will be pulled into one sun or the other, vanishing in a furious blaze; for now, however, the Arch is a remarkable sight.

The Arch is one of the most active open-space mining regions in the Verge, comparable with the Cyra Belt of Tendril or the Inner Belt of Corrivate. It's exceptionally rich in heavy metals and radioactive isotopes, minerals generally scarce elsewhere in the Lucullus system. Estimates of the combined value of Polyphemus and the Arch range as high as 5 to 10 trillion credits—although difficulties of extraction severely restrict the realization of this wealth.

Mining operations in the Arch are complicated by three factors. First and foremost, Lucullus A and B are entirely too close. Unprotected ships can endure the Arch for a few hours at most before heat shields and cooling systems break down. Arch miners have found two solutions to this problem. First, ships that work in the Arch are built with reflective hulls, powerful refrigeration systems, and vast heat sinks. While it's possible to keep the interior of a ship cool for a time, even refrigerated cooling systems have to dump the heat removed from the hull into something—so cooled hulls are only a temporary solution. Thus, the miners park their spacecraft and mining structures in the shade, positioning a nearby asteroid in between the work area





and the direct rays of Lucullus A. Ships can work indefinitely behind such parasol asteroids, but planetary bodies in the Arch eventually pass in between A and B, leaving a miner with no shade in which to work. The only practical solution is to abandon the excavation for the days, weeks, or months during which the asteroid in question lies in between the two stars.

The second complication for Arch miners is the presence of unregulated claim jumpers and rivals. All of the six Barons of Lucullus maintain some interest in mining, sponsoring their own miner fleets and using their naval squadrons to patrol their claims. Out here, the Lucullan League isn't worth a rusty nail; fierce skirmishes over prize finds are very common.

Finally, the Arch serves as an excellent hunting ground for independent ore pirates and raiders. The mineral-rich, heavily irradiated belt makes for a sensor operator's nightmare, and ships can easily vanish in the static and glare only to reappear moments later. No one seems to have set up a permanent base (it would be nearly impossible to maintain, in any case), but patrols have sighted dozens of illegal ships in this vicinity.

### DIOSCURI

The innermost major body to orbit both Lucullus A and B, Dioscuri is a barren world shrouded in a thin, acrid atmosphere of nitrous oxide and nitric acid. Its rotation is almost imperceptible; each of its "days" is more than two Earth years long! The hemisphere facing the twin stars heats up to an intolerable 350° Celsius by local noon, and the night side cools off to a glacial -150° Celsius during the long, long night.

The terminator (the dividing line between night and day) marks a narrow temperate zone in which the cool of night lingers before the onslaught of Lucullus's brilliant sunlight, and the warmth of day lasts well into the endless night. At the equator, the terminator advances at the rate of about 45 kilometers per 24 hours; in the extreme north and south latitudes, the terminator's advance is negligible. Despite its moderate temperatures, Dioscuri's terminator is just as inhospitable as the rest of the planet. Great convection storms driven by the heating of the atmosphere over the daylight side bring frigid night winds howling across the terminator at low levels, while warm air at high altitude streams toward the dark side. Violent lightning and winds approaching 500 kilometers per hour make Dioscuri's twilight band a dangerous place to visit.

Due to the difficulties of creating a settlement capable of withstanding all three of Dioscuri's climatic extremes, no one has yet built a permanent habitation on the surface. The planet has no remarkable mineral wealth or indigenous life, and a terraforming effort would be almost futile; in fact, settlers would have to increase the planet's rotation rate, a job that would require unimaginable amounts of power. In addition, they would have to thicken the atmosphere with molecular nitrogen and oxygen. Scientists have proposed some radical schemes that use Dione's plentiful water to create seas and oceans on the surface of Dioscuri, but no one is seriously considering a terraforming effort at this time.

Dioscuri's frozen nightside and storm-swept twilight band are often used as temporary bases by corsairs. During the years of SCAd dominion, Dioscuri was home to a subterranean smuggler base known as Point Janus. The illegal base was destroyed in 2386 by an Administration flotilla that traced a rebel gunrunner back to its port of origin. Rumors persist that a rival faction among the Barons sold out Point Janus.

Although most people believe Dioscuri to be abandoned, this isn't true. One of the most powerful corsairs in the system, De-

### DEVRIELE SHANASSIN CORSAIR LORD

#### Level 10 fraal Diplomat (Tech Op)

STR 7	(0)	INT 13	(+2)
DEX 11	(+1)	WIL 14	(+2)
CON 9		PER 12	
Durability: 9/9/5	Action check: 16+/15/7/3		
Movement: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4	#Actions: 2		
Reaction score: Ordinary/2	Last resorts: 0		
Psionic energy points: 14			

#### Attacks

Unarmed	3/1/0	d4s/d4+1s/-	LI/0
Laser pistol	14/7/3	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	En/0

#### Defenses

CF softsuit: d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)

#### Skills

Acrobatics [11]-defensive [12]; Modern [11]-pistol [14]; Vehicle [11]-space [13]; Stamina [9]-endurance [10]; Business [13]-illicit [15]; Computer [13]-operation [14]; Knowledge [13]-language: Fraal [16], language: Standard [14], Verge system: Lucullus [15]; Navigation [13]-system [16]; System [13]-communications [14], sensors [14], weapons [15]; Awareness [11]-intuition [13], perception [12]; Resolve [12]-mental [14]; Interaction [11]-bargain [13], interrogate [12]; Leadership [11]-command [12], inspire [12]; Telepathy [11]-contact [12], suggest [13].

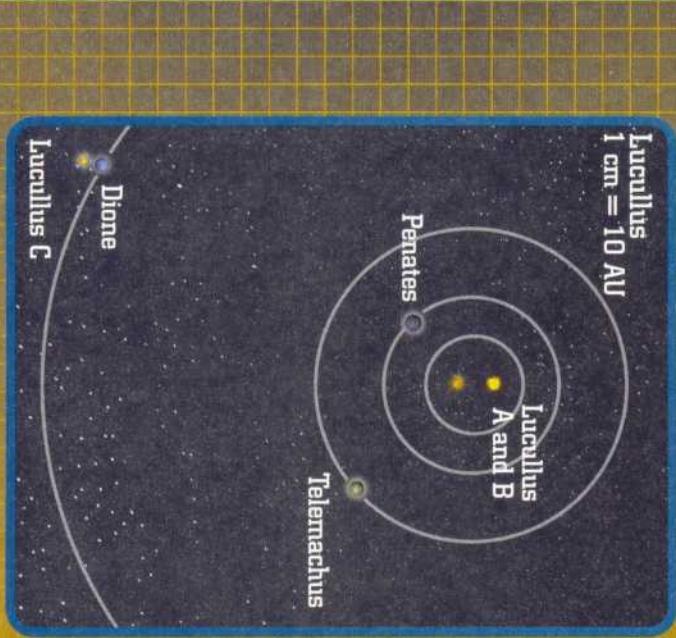
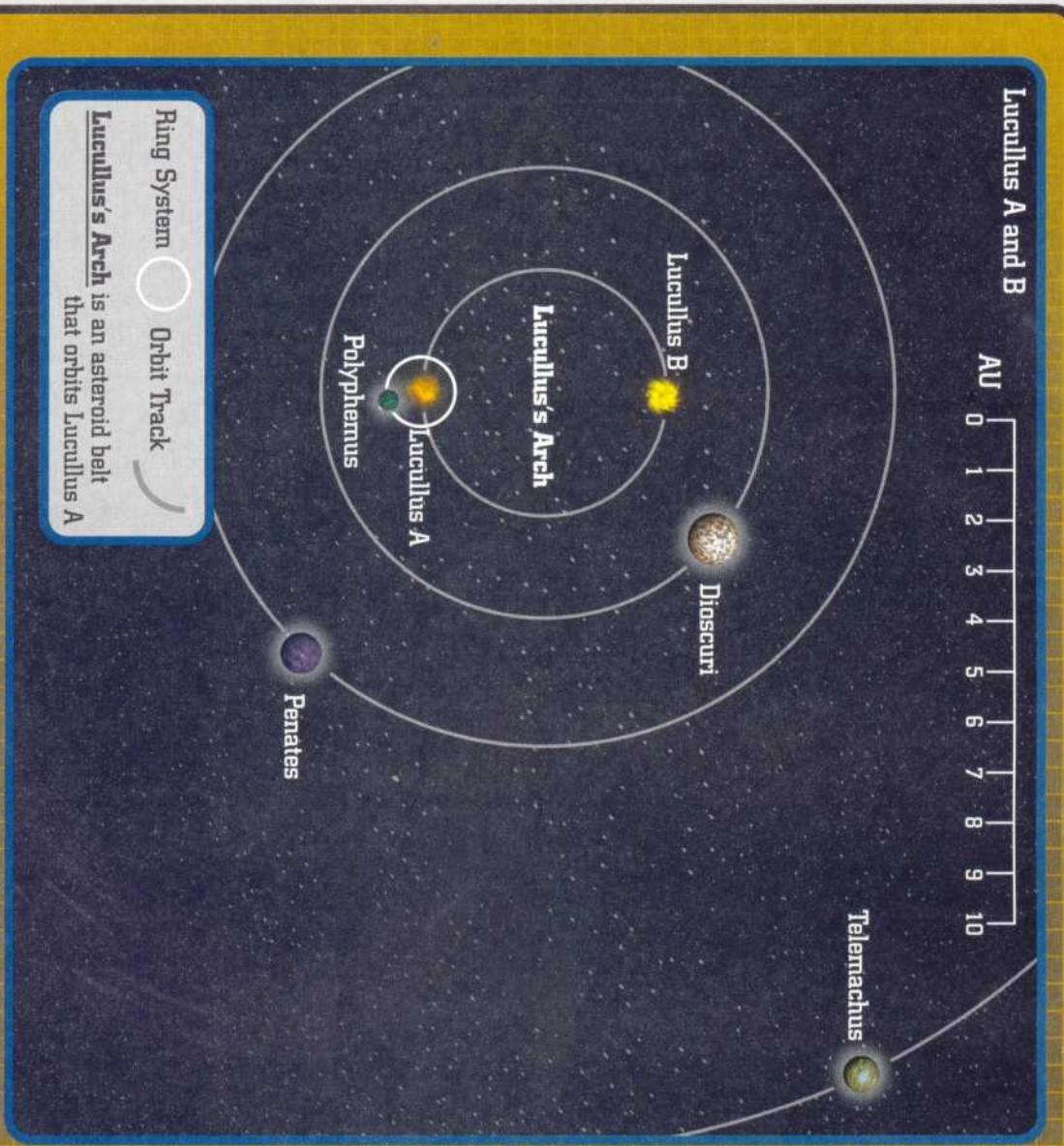
The master of hundreds of corsairs, smugglers, and illegal technicians, Devriele Shanassin is a coldly ambitious fraal who wants nothing less than the complete domination of the Lucullan system. About five years ago he suddenly appeared in the Verge, commanding a light freighter fitted for raiding and piracy. Parlaying his initial success into additional ships and the best crewmen he could find, he spit in the faces of the Barons of Lucullus and thumbed his nose at their attempts to eradicate him. Three years ago, Shanassin began the construction of Icewalk as a refuge for his squadron and a place where the enemies of the Barons could find repairs, supplies, and support.

Shanassin is a middle-aged fraal who takes an unusual pride in his fighting abilities. When it's necessary to discipline or eliminate unreliable followers, he undertakes the task himself. Lean and graceful, he uses cunning and skill to make up for his slender build. Although Shanassin spends most of his time on Icewalk these days, he still engages in illegal activities from time to time, taking his *Blackguard* out to stalk the spaceways.

As an up-and-coming corsair lord, Shanassin seems to have contacts everywhere and a hand in every criminal activity above the atmosphere of Penates. Like a black hole of violence and power, Shanassin pulls lesser corsairs and criminals into his orbit and makes them his own minions.

Devriele Shanassin, has secretly constructed a new mobile base called Icewalk. A mobile fortress on tracks, Icewalk uses the darkness of Dioscuri's night side and the impenetrable storms of the twilight side to hide Shanassin's four-ship corsair squadron. Shanassin's crew numbers over 200 spacehands, technicians,

## Lucullus System Map



### THE BLACKGUARD

#### Refitted *Vashon*-class Freighter

Compartments: 8 Dur: 32  
 Maneuver rating: 0 Acc: 2 Mpp  
 Cruising speed: 1.5 AU/hr Berthing: 18

Armament: Mass cannon  
 Range 5/10/15 Mm d6+2s/d6+1w/d6+3w LI/A  
 MRB missiles (Range 10/20/30) 2d4+1s/2d4w/d8+1m  
 Defenses: Jammer, point-defense gun  
 Armor: Light neutronite (0 dur)  
 d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)  
 Computer: Marginal  
 Engines: Induction engine  
 Power: Mass reactor rated at 15 power factors  
 Drive: 5 light-years per starfall

Roll	Comp't	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Durability
—	Command	Mass detector (1/0) Multiband radar (0/0) IR detector (0/0) EM detector (0/0) Radio transceiver (0/1) Point-defense gun (1/1) Crew quarters (2/0) Computer core (0/0)	8/8/4
1-2	Engineering 1	3x Induction engine (6/6)	12/12/6
3-4	Engineering 2	Stardrive (3/0) 2x Autosupport (0/2)	6/6/3
5-6	Auxiliary	Mass reactor (6/0)	12/12/6
7-9	Crew	Airlock Boarding pod (2/0) Crew quarters (1/0) Launch tube w/15 MRB missiles	6/6/3 8/8/4
10-12	Weapons 1	Mass cannon in turret (3/3)	6/6/3
13-16	Weapons 2	Cargo hold (3/0)	6/6/3
17-20	Cargo		

and security experts. Usually, 50 to 150 pirates lay low at Icewalk at any given time. In addition, dozens of independent corsairs and illegal traders use Icewalk as a meeting place, repair port, and supply base. The Barons of Lucullus all want the base found, but no one's caught Shanassin sleeping yet.

### PENATES

The naked heart of the Lucullus system, Penates is an inhospitable world honeycombed by domed cities, subsurface habitats, and extensive industrial installations. It is also a place where the norms of civilized society have broken down completely. On Penates, the strong exploit the weak, and the weak have no recourse to the law. In fact, there are no rules or regulations barring the sale of illicit substances, contraband, or dangerous merchandise, and no authority exists to protect the innocent from crime, extortion, sickness, or poverty. Without a doubt, Penates is the most ruthless, heartless, and violent place in the Verge—and maybe in all of human space.

Despite the tyranny of the strong, the lack of law, and the dismal environment, a small burgeoning hope still exists. The average person may have to watch her step in a dangerous and violent world, but she can find patrons willing to provide her

with a measure of safety and sanity. Instead of taxes, she pays bribes to local criminal gangs. When she's wronged, she can ask the local crime lord to seek justice on her behalf. More often than not, the baron will acquiesce, not out of altruism, but out of the local lord's desire to make certain that his neighbors and rivals respect his power. Most people on Penates aren't "players," and that means that criminals and thugs generally leave them alone. The loyalty of the local population is a prize worth fighting over and a resource too valuable to waste through wantonly cruel and indiscriminate acts.

In order to maintain some semblance of a social order and the continuing loyalty of generation after generation of citizens, the Barons of Penates have gradually developed a basic social contract with the people they rule. They're hesitant to abuse the people who support their organizations, and they often come down hard on minions who don't seem to understand the importance of a docile populace. Make no mistake—the Barons are unscrupulous, ruthless rulers who routinely make decisions that enrich their own position at the expense of the workers and professionals who live beneath their shadow. However, there's a wide, blurry line that the Barons think twice about crossing. There's always another thug or boss who might offer a better deal, and the Barons never want to lose control of the streets.

Visitors to Penates must endure rampant graft, extortion, and open robbery. Traveling around the globe means cutting deals with every two-bit tyrant who wants a piece of the action and bargaining with people who have little intention of keeping their word. But once a visitor chooses a patron or a host, a powerful Baron to work with, she gains some measure of protection against that Baron's private army, as well as the attentions of the Baron's rivals—as long as she remains within the territory the Baron controls.

### PLANETOLOGY

Covered in rock, ice, and slush, Penates is a typical outer-system planet. It is poor in heavy metals and possesses no tectonic activity or volcanism of note; the highest elevation on the entire planet is a continent-sized bulge 2,000 meters in height left by an asteroid impact millions of years ago. With little activity to erase impacts, craters and meteor-impacted chaotic terrain are the most prominent landforms of the planet.

What Penates lacks in heavy metals, it makes up for in the so-called CHON elements—carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen. These organic building blocks are critical to life support in the planet's habitat domes, providing food (indirectly, anyway), water, and breathable air to the people of Penates. These light elements also form the basis for the plastics and chemical industries of the planet. The atmosphere is a thin fog of methane, ammonia, and molecular nitrogen without a hint of free oxygen. Overall, the surface chemistry of Penates bears a passing resemblance to that of Titan, the largest moon of Saturn in the Sol system.

Humans can survive on the surface with extreme cold-weather clothing and bottled air; surface temperatures average  $-40^{\circ}$  to  $-60^{\circ}$  Celsius. However, the planet's pronounced axial tilt and long year mean that large portions of Penates are lightless for hundreds of standard days at a time. During these polar winters, the temperature often drops as low as  $-120^{\circ}$  C, far too cold for anything except a heated e-suit.

Vast, subterranean hydroponic farms and surface atmosphere plants surround each of the major cities on Penates. Using the organic waste generated in the crowded cities and the basic building blocks of the planet's slush-covered surface, the environmental engineers of Penates maintain a tenuous balance of food production and waste elimination. The atmosphere plants

break down the water and ice of the surface, extracting oxygen and creating breathable air for distribution. All it takes is power, the most precious commodity in Lucullus.

### THE LUCULLAN LEAGUE

Most outsiders look at the Lucullan League and believe they're dealing with the government of the system. The League wields authority over the entire system, after all, and possesses the right to pass laws, determine foreign policy, and execute trade agreements on behalf of the entire planet. Clearly, it's the only body in the system that merits attention.

Unfortunately, the League is a joke.

Any of the six factions that make up the League can veto, ignore, or counter any legislation, agreement, or deal the League supports. The Lucullan League was not created to serve the people of the system or to bind the Barons together under a common government. It was created by the Barons to serve their own purposes, and they were determined to ensure that no conceivable growth of the League's authority could ever overshadow their own power. Consequently, the League is a shell. League appointments are nothing but partisan politics, League policies are dictated by the Barons who happen to cooperate on that particular day, and League forces and finances are donations from the Barons—donations that can be reclaimed with a simple vid call. "I'll ask the League to look into that," is a Lucullan euphemism for "Don't hold your breath."

The only positive effect of the League's existence is a general cease-fire among the Barons. Over generations, the factions have learned that open conflict is wasteful and dangerous. In the rare meetings of the League's Bureau of Directors (a fancy name for the Barons), aggressive Barons are often restrained

by the dark promise that their peers might answer overly ambitious actions with a concerted response. Since none of the Barons wants to see his or her rivals become dominant, the mood of the Bureau runs strongly against the Baron who happens to hold the best position at the time. It's a crude and inelegant balance of power, but it works.

The Bureau of Directors is not involved in the day-to-day administration of the League. Other than the rare conference call or public statement, they don't meet or deign to immerse themselves in the actual running of the government. They've all got an army of political appointees and crooked officials to look after their interests in League business. The League consists of ministries for Common Defense, Foreign Policy, Industrial Development, Trade, Biosphere Maintenance, and Public Welfare. A committee appointed by the Bureau of Directors supervises each ministry.

The League offices are located in Port Royal, a city chosen as a concession to the Jamaican Syndicate. The Syndicate saw the creation of a planetary capital as an opportunity for revenue-generating businesses—such as hotels, restaurants, high-caliber entertainment, and more sordid attractions. In exchange for the privilege of hosting the capital, the Syndicate paid each of the other Barons a handsome fee back in 2419. It's proved a good investment; they've more than made their money back.

### THE JAMAICAN SYNDICATE

Oldest and wealthiest of the factions, the Jamaican Syndicate is a highly organized criminal family structured with layer after layer of feudal loyalties. More than any other faction, the Jamaican Syndicate works hard to present a seamless face to the

## Penates

1 cm = 2000 km  
km x 1000



DOGELOC

0075-3

rest of the world. Its operatives carefully mask the activities of top-ranking bosses and move to eliminate rivals or crusaders who find out too much about how they do business. The Syndicate's goal is simple: to become a black void into which money vanishes, a silent and faceless presence that no one can unmask or resist.

The Syndicate doesn't directly own or manage any assets within its territory. Instead, it works through a variety of front companies. These fronts consist of holding companies, consultants, security agencies, or law firms, and they only exist on paper, as a place to stash money. From these fronts, the Syndicate supervises private enterprise and criminal activity within

### NOLAN AYMES CONCORD AMBASSADOR

#### Level 5 human Diplomat (Free Agent)

STR 7	(0)	INT 11	(+1)
DEX 10	(0)	WIL 10	(0)
CON 9		PER 13	
Durability: 9/9/5		Action check: 12+/11/5/2	
Movement: sprint 16, run 10, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 0	

#### Attacks

Unarmed	3/1/0	d4s/d4+1s/-	LI/0
Stutter pistol	11/5/2	d6+2s/d8+2s/d8+4s	LI/0

#### Defenses

CF short coat: d4-1 (LI), d4-2 (HI), d6-3 (En)

#### Skills

Athletics [7]; Modern [10]-pistol [11]; Stealth [10]-shadow [11]; Vehicle Operation [10]; Stamina [9]; Knowledge [11]-first aid [12]; language: Standard [14]; stellar nation: Concord [14]; Law [11]-court [12]; Security [11]-devices [12]; Administration [10]-bureaucracy [12]; Awareness [10]-intuition [11]; Culture [13]-etiquette: Lucullan [15]; etiquette: t'sa [14]; Deception [13]-bluff [15], bribe [16]; Interaction [13]-bargain [15], charm [16].

A charming and confident man of about 65, Nolan Aymes is a career professional in the Concord's Diplomatic Service. He is currently the Concord Ambassador to the Lucullan League, a thankless job that is probably one of the least desired postings in the Concord Diplomatic Service. Aymes actually volunteered for the post three years ago, recognizing that he was an emissary to an organization that didn't matter. However, it's his long-term goal to shift power from the Barons to their creation, the League, and then to help the League define itself as a responsible system government. It's an uphill struggle, to say the least.

Aymes first plans to support anyone willing to take on low-level corruption and nepotism. Removing Baron-appointed officials and replacing them with Lucullans loyal to the League will be difficult, but it's the best place to start. In pursuit of this goal, Aymes makes a point of passing information about vulnerable appointees and scandals to crusaders willing to take on the system. When possible, he shields his agents through Concord diplomatic immunity or deal making with the local powers. So far, the Barons haven't recognized the threat that Aymes poses. When they do, he's as good as dead.

its towns. Legitimate businesses within Syndicate territory simply hand the Syndicate a monthly payoff for their continued health and prosperity.

The current leader of the Syndicate (and, by definition, a Baron of Lucullus) is Basil Turcheyev (hm/Lucullus/DFA-6), the direct descendent of Andrei Turcheyev, the man who inherited the Syndicate upon the retirement of Mother Gray. The Turcheyevs portray themselves as nothing more than prominent merchants who oversee the operations of a small group of companies. Like most Syndicate leaders, Basil believes in the policy of hiding in plain sight, and he charts a cautious course of accommodation with the League and the Concord. Basil also recognizes that a Concord takeover would spell the end of his criminal empire, so he works to persuade the other Barons not to provoke the Arrivers unnecessarily. An intermediary family answering to the Turcheyevs runs each major town or business within the Syndicate.

The Jamaican Syndicate rules about 30% of Penates and maintains a token presence in the rest of the system. In its towns, the Syndicate has set up "civic constables" and "civic managers" as faux government officials, allowing the populace to create local police forces, schools, hospitals, and something resembling a normal society. However, the Syndicate's hand is everywhere: Syndicate lawbreakers aren't arrested; Syndicate appointees handle the important positions in civic government; and Syndicate-run private companies handle lucrative defense, sanitation, construction, and administration tasks. Nothing happens without the permission of a Syndicate boss.

Hotels, casinos, and other entertainment facilities in Port Royal and other Jamaican Syndicate towns are the chief source of revenue and power for the organization. Of course, the Syndicate receives a piece of every business that makes money in its towns, but it has always owned the red-light establishments of its respective areas. The Syndicate makes its headquarters in the Silver Comet, a sprawling casino-hotel located in Port Royal a short distance from the Lucullan League's office buildings. A private army of more than 200 heavily armed guards protects the Silver Comet and its clandestine Syndicate presence.

## PORT ROYAL

The largest and most sophisticated city on Penates, Port Royal offers round-the-clock debauchery of legendary proportions. Anything goes in this town—*anything*. Home to the League capital buildings and ministries, Port Royal doesn't possess a shred of the restraint or dignity one might expect of a planetary capital. Each street is a never-ending riot of carousers and revelers staggering from one low-grade night spot to the next; the garish glare of neon lights and huge vid-boards displaying material of reprehensible content illuminates the whole place. A Hatire visitor once described Port Royal as "a stinking morass of immorality, iniquity, and immodesty, the very nadir of human expression and behavior." He was correct.

Port Royal is home to the capital dome of the Lucullan League, but the real power lies where the triple-domes of the Silver Comet Hotel and Casino sparkle under a flood of holo-lights. Inside this sprawling complex, the Jamaican Syndicate oversees everything that happens in Port Royal and its neighboring settlements for 1,000 kilometers or more. The Syndicate all but runs the League Security Forces and the Port Royal Constabulary. The only real purpose for these police forces is to prevent the damage of valuable property and protect Syndicate interests from random crime; keeping the streets safe for foreigners just isn't a high priority—unless a hefty gratuity is involved.

## MINDWALKERS: THREAT OR MENACE?

One of the factions of Penates is the Supervisors, a nasty group of psionicists who use their mental powers to manipulate and control everyone around them. After years of arrogance and domination, they've earned quite a reputation in Lucullus. Outside of Supervisor territory (the mining region of Caracas) the general population despises use of psionic powers. In fact, suspected mindwalkers caught using their powers may face lynch mobs, witch hunts, and similar forms of retribution. Mindwalker heroes, beware!

### SITES OF INTEREST

Port Royal is home to almost 400,000 people. It's a serious city—one of the oldest in the Verge—and it's all contained within habitat domes and subterranean galleries. A sprawl of chemical plants, refineries, and mills covers the freezing surface for kilometers around the city. Many of these industries are shut down now, rusting hulks looming against the dim starlight of Penates's surface. Port Royal's a tourist town these days, not an industrial labor camp.

**Spaceport:** Port Royal's spaceport is the Spoke, located about 10 kilometers outside of town and linked to the city by subterranean transit tunnels. The Spoke is a vast, straight-sided pit 2 kilometers across and over 500 meters deep, with landing bays cut into its walls. Heavy blast doors protect these hangars from vacuum. Ships too large for the protected hangar bays must land on the floor of the Spoke in an extensive, open landing field. A series of ring corridors behind the hangar bays links each landing spot with the spaceport proper. Renting a hangar bay for long-term storage of a ship costs about \$125 per day, but there are a number of free spots for ships staying four hours or less. The Spoke has decent repair and maintenance facilities, capable of handling all but the largest jobs. However, the Spoke repair techs charge a large amount for the simplest repairs.

The Spoke is also the chief spaceport and naval base of the Jamaican Syndicate. While the Free Trade Guild in Highport holds a superior position for reaching the rest of the Lucullus system, the Spoke is a close second in terms of size, volume, and importance. The spaceport is heavily defended by weapon installations around the rim of the crater, and Syndicate-controlled Port Security forces keep a close eye on traffic.

**Lodging:** There are literally hundreds of places to stay in Port Royal, ranging from cheap flophouses to four-star hotels. In general, the less you pay, the better the chance you'll wake up with your valuables missing—if you wake up at all, that is. Any visitor who can afford to should stay at upscale establishments. The Silver Comet is by far the best of the lot, and certainly the most lively; the best acts in the Verge play at the Comet, and the hotel has round-the-clock action every day of the year. A modest room costs about \$300 per night.

If the hospitality of the Syndicate is a little unnerving, travellers should consider the Weyr-Moraine, a decent hotel owned by entrepreneurs who simply pay off the Syndicate for the privilege of doing business in Port Royal. Like the Silver Comet, the Weyr-Moraine includes theaters, casinos, restaurants, and dozens of other features. A domed golf course on the surface (owned by the hotel) costs thousands of credits to maintain each

## BANDON "THE FIREMAN" DEVALK

### Level 5 human Free Agent

STR 8	(0)	INT 9	(0)
DEX 12	(+1)	WIL 11	(+1)
CON 11		PER 9	
Durability: 11/11/6		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Movement: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2			

### Attacks

Unarmed-brawl	9/4/2	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
11mm pistol	14/7/3	d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m	HI/0

### Defenses

CF long coat: d4 (LI), d4 (HI), d6-2 (En)

### Skills

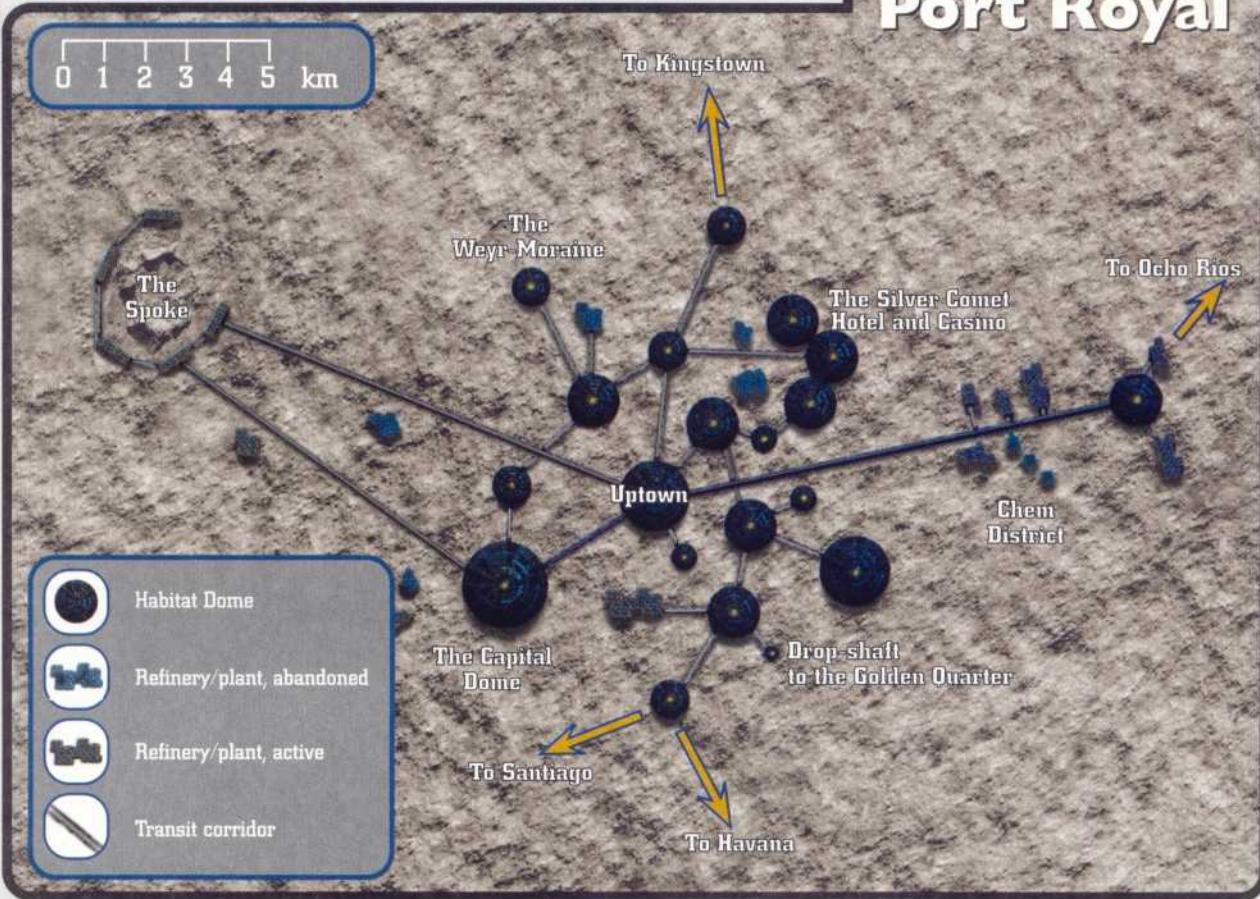
Athletics [8]; Unarmed [8]—brawl [9]; Modern [12]—pistol [14]; Vehicle Operation; Stamina; Demolitions [9]—set [10]; Knowledge [9]—language: Standard [12]; Verge system: Lucullus [12]; Security [9]—devices [10], protocols [10]; Awareness [11]; Investigate [11]—search [12]; Street Smart [11]—criminal [13], knowledge [13]; Deception [9]—bribe [10], gamble [10]; Interaction [9]—interrogate [10], taunt [10].

A short, aggressive fireplug of a man, Bandon DeValk is a street-level racketeer for the Syndicate, a minor boss who started as a simple thug. He's called the Fireman for two reasons: He spends his time putting out fires (so to speak) for the Syndicate, and he's very good at blowing things up. DeValk runs the Midas Palace, a sprawling den of gambling, drinking, and less reputable entertainment located in the worst part of town. It's his job to separate customers from their money, but leave them enough to make sure they want to come back. The Palace covers almost a square block of the Spacers' District, and it's renowned as a place to go for information and contacts as well as a good time.

The Fireman's first job is to take care of anything that the Syndicate needs. He'll shake down merchants who aren't paying their insurance, shadow troublemakers, tip off crooked cops, and even round up a group of thugs to go straighten out rivals and interlopers who don't know how to play the game in Port Royal. There's a price for doing business in Port Royal, and Bandon DeValk is the man who collects it.

day, but offers spectacular views of the city and the planet. A stay at the Weyr-Moraine will set a traveler back about \$250 per night. Fees for an 18-hole game of golf runs \$500 to \$800 per player—depending on the season.

**The League Capitol:** This imposing structure is the dominant feature of the so-called League dome. This is a relatively new portion of the city, a government park housing the ministries and Assembly of the League. Tourists make this a stopping point in their visits to Port Royal, but no self-respecting Lucullan would be caught dead here; the ministries and the Assembly are stocked with the toadies and agents of the Barons, so there's little point in dealing with these figurehead leaders. The Concord and the Solar Union maintain full embassies here, while the Orlamus, Rigunmors, VoidCorp, and Austrin-Ontis all maintain consulates in the better portions of the town below.



The current President of the League Assembly is a Union Pe-  
nates man by the name of Hastner Folkes (Hm/Lucullus/DTO-  
3). Folkes quietly works to move the UP agenda forward without  
being obvious about it. He's coming to understand that UP ex-  
pects him to do a lot more than he is doing, and that his life  
might be in danger if he follows all of his orders from the UP  
camp. Few people envy him his position.

**Uptown:** The best hotels and businesses of Port Royal are lo-  
cated in Uptown, a series of large domes on the surface. When  
people think of Port Royal, this is the part of the city they envi-  
sion, street after street of elegant hotel-casinos and reclusive  
residences hiding behind high fences. The Silver Comet and the  
Weyr-Moraine are both located here.

**The Golden Quarter:** No one knows who coined the name  
"Golden Quarter" for the seediest and most dangerous part of  
town, but it's stuck for generations. The Golden Quarter is a sub-  
terranean sector crowded with squalid dwellings, filthy bars,  
and crooked gambling dens. Visitors to the Quarter had better  
watch their wallets, travel in groups, and stay out of dark alleys;  
the place is crawling with thugs, swindlers, pickpockets, and  
other felons.

The biggest gambling den in the Quarter is the Midas Palace,  
run by Bandon Jeremic. The Midas is known throughout the  
Verge as a place where mercenaries, bounty hunters, smug-  
glers, and corsairs can find work. Anyone willing to sell con-  
traband, stolen property, or services of an illegal nature can find  
a buyer here.

**The Chem District:** Not all of Port Royal is devoted to seedy  
entertainment. Large sectors of the city are more or less like

any city—consisting of light industry, residential neighborhoods,  
transportation hubs, business districts, and even a handful of  
small parks. The Chem District is a good example of the "nor-  
mal" side of Port Royal. It's named for the extensive chemical  
plants and refineries that are concentrated on this side of the  
city, a good 15 kilometers from Uptown or the Golden Quarter.  
Long transit corridors housing maglev trains and groundcar  
thoroughfares link the outlying districts to the center of town.

Five major chemical plants and two plastics refineries make  
up the heavy industry of the district; each rambles over several  
square kilometers of the surface. These plants aren't contained  
in domes; the surface installations are open to space, with ex-  
tensive sealed structures and control towers scattered through  
the machinery. In addition, the Chem District supports two of the  
most critical structures in Port Royal—the Main Power Plant and  
the Atmosphere Station. These aren't the only power and at-  
mosphere plants in the city, of course, but they are the primary  
systems, handling about 55% of Port Royal's power and air de-  
mands. The Chem District is run by the Technospiders, but the  
rival faction gets along well with the Jamaicans who run Port  
Royal; in exchange for their support the Technospiders gain ac-  
cess to the spaceport.

## THE PICTS

There's not much nice to say about the Picts. They rose as a vi-  
olent gang of criminals in the early days of the colony, a coun-  
terculture of desperate nihilists who found themselves one of  
the principal powers of the planet after the fall of the Solar Colo-  
nial Administration. Ostracized by their former allies, the Picts  
raped, looted, and pillaged every town that fell into their control,

killing and stealing indiscriminately. Modern-day savages, the Picts delighted in destruction and refused to back down from anyone who offered a fight. More than any other faction, the Picts contributed to the decades-long Barons' War, luring the impressionable and frustrated masses of Penates to their banner with a lifestyle of utter lawlessness.

As one might expect, this system of government quickly became untenable. Under the leadership of the legendary King Steel, the Picts evolved a stringent code of honor, a dueling code that regulated behavior and authority within the gang. Then, recognizing that the Picts would have to rule the towns they'd conquered or give them back, King Steel built a system of feudal obligation to support his new nation. The Pict gang lords gained ownership of the towns they held, and this made it imperative for them to look out for the interests of their serfs, the ordinary citizens who happened to live within their territory.

This feudal system has persisted to this day. Each Pictish city is ruled by a lord, a powerful Pict who commands the loyalty of a dozen or more chieftains. These chieftains lead war bands of dozens or hundreds of thugs. Every business, activity, and citizen is the property of one of these chieftains. Serfs have no rights other than those freedoms granted by their Pictish chieftains and lords. There are only two laws they can expect their masters to follow: No Pict can kill or seriously harm a serf belonging to another Pict without first gaining the permission of the serf's lord, and any serf can become a Pict by defeating one in personal combat. No one is born a Pict—every gang member was a serf who claimed a position in the ruling class with his fists and feet. Of course, should a serf fail this challenge, he can rarely expect mercy from a gang lord.

The Picts own about one-quarter of Penates. Their stronghold is the Santiago corridor, a chain of cheap and poorly built habitat domes set up by SCAd as a simple population dump. Few valuable industries or resources exist in Pict territory; their cities barely have enough to survive. Therefore, the Picts raid their neighbors to steal needed resources, technology, and personnel. Constant skirmishing is the rule along the Pict-Syndicate, Pict-Union, and Pict-Supervisor borders, and this faction's unwillingness to stop raiding is one of the key obstacles to true peace within the Lucullan League. About the only asset the Picts really have is large numbers of desperate and violent "soldiers" who don't care about their future.

Even more important than their planetary holdings are the Picts' corsair flotillas. About half of the pirates in the Lucullus system are Picts, loyal to King Steel. As a raiding culture, the Picts depend on the loot they can seize from their neighbors, and the corsair flotillas give them the ability to reach beyond Lucullus to the nearby Verge systems. Several major corsair bases are located in Pict territory on Penates. Each ship captain is a chieftain, and a fleet leader wields as much power as a city lord.

King Steel IX currently leads the Picts; it's a tradition for the strongest city lord to claim the title of the Picts' greatest leader. The current King Steel (Wm/Lucullus/CS-13) is a weren brawler who rules through sheer physical terror. No other Pict leader has survived the weren's personal challenges long enough to organize an opposition. However, King Steel thinks with his talons; no one expects him to last long.

### SANTIAGO

The largest city within Pict territory, Santiago is an insane parody of a medieval or Renaissance city, complete with swaggering bravos wearing the colors of their lords, dismal living conditions, and a violent ruling class accustomed to seizing any-

thing that catches its eye. The common citizens live like slaves, scurrying to avoid the attention of drunken Picts. More than 100 chieftains own the city. Some run the few remaining industries, others oversee trade with offworlders, and a few simply plunder the same hapless citizens over and over again. Crusaders beware; the Picts generally recognize a mercantile or diplomatic safe-conduct, but anyone interfering with a Pict's business loses any tenuous protection she might possess.

During a century of freedom, the Picts have had time to lay waste to almost one-quarter of the planet, rebuild it, and evolve a structure to support their position at the top. All of the power remains in the hands of the city lords and their picked chieftains. The system is inefficient and brutal, and every other faction in the system outproduces the Picts.

Most of the people of Santiago and the neighboring cities are nothing more than chattel, but a few professionals and valuable technicians are "retainers," serfs who are off limits to all Picts but the city lords or the king. The Picts realized years ago that they can't afford to have their front-line thugs trashing research laboratories or killing technicians on a whim; thus, they created the retainer class to protect their most valuable serfs.

So, why would anyone want to visit the Picts? The answer is simple: About one-quarter of Penates belongs to them, and they're the masters of the corsair fleet that plagues the Lucullus system. The city-lords and chieftains can pay handsomely for the basic trade commodities Santiago can't produce on its own, and many traders accept the risks in order to reap substantial profits. Second, Santiago is a base and crossroads for the corsair lords, and anyone who needs to deal with them can do so here. The Pict-held cities export mercenaries, manpower, and some light industry; they import everything else.

### SITES OF INTEREST

Most of Santiago and the nearby towns are dismal, squalid places—serf neighborhoods living in terror of their violent masters. There's very little rebellious spirit in the Pict underclass; it was broken decades ago, and they'll roll over for the Picts without a second thought. As far as these serfs are concerned, nothing could be worse than a chieftain's or city lord's anger. They have seen the consequences of deceit and defiance too often.

**Spaceport:** The spaceport of Santiago is an old SCAd installation known as Space Transit Facility 6—although the locals refer to it simply as STF. Santiago's STF is one of the most dangerous spaceports around, and its crowded with Pict-crewed corsair vessels and illicit traders. Most of the repair shops are devoted to the task of refitting and repairing corsairs, and the best landing spots go to the captains of the best-armed ships.

STF 6 is run by a Pict chieftain who calls herself the Shipwright (Hf/Lucullus/T0-9). Unlike many gang members, she's a technical expert in the field of ship maintenance and repair, but she's also proved tough enough to withstand a number of challenges to her position. Anyone who wants a landing spot, supplies, fuel, or repairs at STF must deal with her sooner or later. The Shipwright is rumored to have an eye on the lordship of the city, but she's made no move in that direction yet.

**Lodging:** The only place for a visitor to stay in Santiago (or most other Pict cities, for that matter) is in the stronghold of a chieftain. Picts take great pride in showing hospitality to visiting Picts and foreigners who have earned safe conduct in Pict territory. It's a sign of status to "entertain" guests. However, strangers who just show up in a Pict town shouldn't count on staying with the local lord; they'll have to drop some names,

hand out a quiet bribe, or defeat a Pict champion to earn the right of hospitality. In Santiago, visitors who have not yet secured local hospitality should remain on board their ship or within a corporate compound; a few companies that trade with the Picts maintain small, fortified office complexes in Santiago.

Low-ranking or weak individuals may be perceived as potential serfs by the local Picts. While Picts will often allow visiting serfs to stay with their own serfs, a serf traveling under his own cognizance must expect abuse (and possibly an attempted kidnapping) when traveling through another Pict's territory.

**The Dark Tower:** The Pict capitol, so to speak, is the Dark Tower. Once a SCAd planetary defense installation, this sprawling military base is now the home and stronghold of King Steel. Sitting on a low rise overlooking Santiago, the black cerametal bunkers and monolithic ramparts rise above the city like the fortress of some fantastic overlord. Ruler after ruler has added to the old base defenses, installing some of the heaviest ground batteries anywhere in the Verge. Hundreds of Pict warriors, skilled retainers, and picked serfs guard the complex and spoil Pict leaders with decadent luxury.

King Steel takes great personal pleasure in arranging honor-matches between his advisors, soldiers, and guests. Every night, the court gathers to watch the gladiatorial matches arranged during the day. Vast sums are wagered on the duels. More than one Concord diplomat or Solar consul has met his death in King Steel's arena, defending himself against an arbitrary challenge.

**The Blood Pit:** Santiago's gladiatorial arenas are infamous throughout the Verge, and the Blood Pit is the most notorious of them all. Dozens of fighters die here each month, pleasing the bloodthirsty crowd. Picts consider the gladiator match the highest form of entertainment, and an extensive culture of wagering, training, and ceremony has grown up around this decadent sport. Free Pict gladiators fight in carefully arranged matches—always one-on-one in the "purest" form of the art. Serfs, however, must participate in more extravagant contests, battling carnivorous aliens or killer robots, or even playing extremely bloody versions of blade hockey or power ball for the entertainment of the audience. The Blood Pit is a vast facility that includes arenas, training areas, restaurants, wagering booths, gladiator barracks, and plenty of security to make sure the audience doesn't get out of hand.

On occasion, good fighters in need of quick cash can sign up for a match. Typically, an unknown warrior might receive \$500 for participating in a nonlethal game or demonstration, or \$2,000 for putting her life on the line in a death match. Famous fighters command far larger sums for their performances, and they often acquire a following of rabid fans like other professional sports stars. Even King Steel would think twice before moving against a popular gladiator.

**The HelixTech Complex:** Despite the rule of tyranny in the Pictish domain, several major businesses and corporations elected to stay. HelixTech is one of the most powerful of these. Insulated from the insanity of the Pict city by several kilometers of closely guarded transit tunnels, HelixTech is a broad-spectrum research corporation and electronics manufacturer. The company produces weapons, computers, and control systems, using serf labor rented from the chieftains of Santiago. In this way, HelixTech can conduct research and undertake manufacturing without paying corporate taxes, addressing environmental concerns, or instituting workforce concessions. Likewise, the Picts gain some cutting-edge technology that their brutal society could never produce.

## PYOTR (PETE) SOLOKOV BOUNTY HUNTER

### Level 12 human Tech Op

STR 11 (12)	(+1)	INT 11	(+1)
DEX 11	(+1)	WIL 9	(0)
CON 10		PER 8	
Durability: 10/10/5		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Movement: sprint 22, run 14, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 0	

### Attacks

Unarmed-brawl <sup>1</sup>	14/7/3	d4+3w/d6+3w/d4+1m	LI/0
Sabot pistol	16/8/4	2d4w/2d4+1w/d4+3m	HI/0

<sup>1</sup> When using battleklaw, base skill score is 15.

### Defenses

CF softsuit: d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)

### Skills

Athletics [11 (12)]-climb [13 (14)], throw [13 (14)]; Unarmed [11 (12)]-brawl [14 (15)]; Modern [11]-pistol [18]; Vehicle [11]-space [13]; Stamina [10]-endurance [11]; Computer [11]-hacking [14], hardware [12], programming [12]; Knowledge [11]-computer [14], first aid [12]; language: Nariac [15], language: Standard [12]; Navigation [11]-system [12]; Security [11]-devices [13]; System [11]-sensors [12], weapons [12]; Awareness [9]-perception [11]; Investigate [9]-interrogate [10], search [10], track [10]; Deception [8]-bluff [9]; Interaction [8]-bargain [9].

### Cyber gear

Battleklaw (Good); cyber limb: right arm (Good); enhance programs: action checks (Ordinary), hacking (Good), Modern Ranged Weapons (Good), Unarmed Attack (Amazing); nanocomputer (Amazing); reflex wiring (Amazing).

A Nariac expatriate, Pyotr Solokov is a professional bounty hunter who uses technology to trap his prey. He's a lean, rangy man who's much stronger than he looks. He's also a quiet observer who prefers to let his actions speak for him. There's more to Solokov than meets the eye, however. He possesses many cybernetic enhancements (the Ability Scores and skill scores in parenthesis represent Solokov's adjustments for his cyberlimb).

Solokov once served in the Nariac Intelligence Directorate, but after a failed operation in which he and his team were disavowed, he decided to strike out for new territory. Since coming to the Verge, Solokov has worked for StarMech and VoidCorp, and with various groups of freelancers. He's pragmatic and ruthless, a cold fatalist who shows no mercy to anyone who gets in his way. Solokov is especially good at cracking computers and security systems to find his target's hidden vulnerabilities.

Solokov is currently working out of the Golden Quarter in Port Royal, seeking a new contract. It's a good place for him to stay out of sight of his numerous enemies while keeping an eye open for new jobs.

Companies such as HelixTech have cooperated with Pict gang lords for years as silent partners in the establishment of a ruthless and brutal regime.

The leader of HelixTech is a canny old executive by the name of Kerricks Dow (Hm/Lucullus/DTO-4). Like most HT employees, he started off as a Santiago serf who made himself valuable to the corporation by learning technical skills. Once he'd won the right to leave Santiago behind forever and become a permanent HelixTech employee, he never looked back. Dow loathes the Picts, and he's determined to use HelixTech to bring them down at some point in the future.

### THE TECHNOSPIDERS

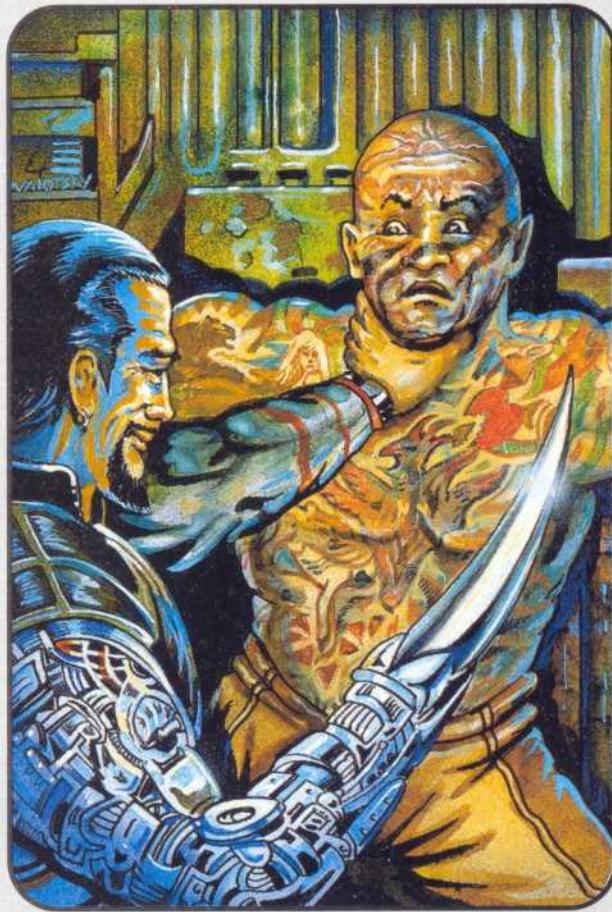
The Technospiders began as an association of comptechs, engineers, and technicians who seized Penates's crucial environmental control facilities during the rebellion of 2385 and never relinquished their command. Too weak and disorganized to bend the other factions to their rules, the Technospiders settled for making sure that no other Baron could seize power by gaining control of Penates's fragile artificial habitat. They've played much the same role ever since.

The Technospiders are the most benevolent faction in Lucullus. While they've been forced to adopt the tactics and morality of their rivals to some extent, most Technospiders believe that the people of Lucullus deserve freedom, a responsible government, and the rule of law. So far, they've succeeded in instituting the government they desire in only three moderate settlements—a constituency comprising less than 5% of the planet's population. Beyond this small region, the Technospiders exist only as enclaves in the domains of the other Barons. They maintain the habitats, communications, and infrastructure of Penates in exchange for a promise of neutrality from their hosts. By providing examples of "beneficent" rule, the Technospiders hope to eventually sway all of the planet to their cause.

Today, the Spiders are a true technocracy. The best and brightest engineers, scientists, and technicians lead the various settlements and enclaves. All people working in a technical field belong to the Penates Artificial Habitat Control Company (or PAHCC, pronounced "pock"), a not-for-profit organization that seeks to make Penates fit for human habitation. The PAHCC Executive Board governs the Technospiders and handles appointments to management posts, League representation, dealings with other factions, and the administration of the Spiders' towns.

Like each of the other factions, the Technospiders possess a leadership caste—the technocrats, in this case—and a number of citizens who don't have any real say in the running of affairs. Merchants, security forces, laborers, and all other non-technicians fall into this second group. Unlike the rest of Penates, the people who live in Technospider territory live under laws protecting their lives, property, and personal freedom. Should these people obtain technical training, they're more than welcome to go to work for PAHCC. It's not a bad system—for Penates.

Technospider enclaves outside their own territory consist of fortified power stations, atmosphere plants, and processing facilities. Warded by automated defenses and surveillance devices, the Technospiders concentrate on keeping their charges supplied with air, water, power, and food. Technospider managers with an unusual amount of initiative may discreetly intercede when they run across a Syndicate boss, Pict lord, or Guild merchant who's making himself particularly obnoxious to the common folk who live within his domain. Through computer espionage and mastery of the local engineering and ventilation systems, Technospiders can reach almost anybody. They're careful not to overuse this authority, however; it wouldn't take much for the Jamaicans or the Picts to overwhelm the Spiders with a direct assault—even if they'd pay dearly for it.



### THE SUPERVISORS

Despised by all the other factions, the Supervisors are remnants of the Solar Colonial Administration. Through the use of ruthless mindwalking spies and overseers, the Supervisors hold almost one-sixth of Penates in thrall. Their vile practices have led to an informal, systemwide prohibition against the use of psionics; Lucullan citizens who catch Mindwalkers using their powers outside of Supervisor territory generally lynch or shoot them on the spot.

The Supervisors are descended from SCAd's secret police. In the prison-colony days, they were the long arm of the Administration, secretly silencing the enemies of the Solars. After the rebellion of 2385, the Supervisors scattered and went underground. Their structure and membership were so secret that the rebels uncovered only a fraction of the Supervisors in the years following the revolt. Even fewer were brought to justice; many Supervisors attached themselves to more powerful factions, using their talents on behalf of the system's new masters.

In 2398, a Supervisor named Ian MacEwan assembled a small team of SCAd expatriates and deposed the criminal gang running the town of Caracas. Carefully, MacEwan set up a Planetary Administration strongly resembling the old SCAd organization. He returned Caracas civilians to positions of power, but he and his band of psionicists maintained an iron grip over the actual functioning of the local government. Over the next three years, the Supervisors reached out to claim a dozen medium-sized towns on the Caracas plateau, carving out a small nation for themselves.

The Supervisors prefer to rule from the shadows, using minor bureaucrats and elected officials to create a semblance of legitimacy. However, they quietly and efficiently direct all the activity of their segment of the populace, freely using mental pow-

## SHERHAN DARGESSI

### PICT GLADIATOR

#### Level 11 human mutant Combat Spec

STR 11	(+2)	INT 9	(0)
DEX 13	(+2)	WIL 11	(+1)
CON 13		PER 9	
Durability: 13/13/7		Action check: 16+/15/7/3	
Movement: sprint 24, run 16, walk 6		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Ordinary/3		Last resorts: 0	
Perks: Improved Fists of Iron, Tough As Nails			

#### Attacks

Unarmed—power	14/7/3	d6+1s/d6+3s/d4+1w	LI/0
Combat knife	16/8/4	d4+2w/d4+3w/d4+4w	LI/0
Mass pistol	15/7/3	d6w/d6+2w/d6m	En/G

#### Defenses

Battle vest: d6—3 (LI), d6—2 (HI), d4—2 (En)

#### Skills

Athletics [11]—climb [12], jump [13], Melee [11]—blade<sup>1</sup> [16], Unarmed [11]—power [14], Acrobatics [13]—balance [14], dodge [14], Modern [13]—pistol 16, Vehicle Operation [13], Stamina [13]—endurance [15], resist pain [14], Knowledge [9]—language: Standard [10], Verge system: Lucullus [10], Security [9]—protocols [10], Awareness [11]—intuition [14], perception [12], Resolve [11]—physical [13], Interaction [9]—intimidate [11], taunt [10].

<sup>1</sup> This skill utilizes a -d4 base situation die.

#### Mutations

Improved reflexes (Ordinary): -1 bonus to action checks.

Increased metabolism (Good):

-2 bonus to Acrobatics, Athletic, Melee Weapons, Movement, and Unarmed Attack skill checks; +2 damage on any successful Unarmed Attack or Melee weapon skill check.

Environmental sensitivity (Moderate):

+3 penalty to all skill and action checks when in areas of high gravity (G3 and higher).

One of the best hand-to-hand fighters in Santiago, Sherhan Dargessi is the personal champion and bodyguard of King Steel. She is an athletic woman with unbelievable reflexes and an uncanny knack for surviving challenges. Like a silent angel of death, she stands at King Steel's right hand, striking down his enemies and killing for his amusement. Sherhan Dargessi is a borderline psychopath, barely restrained by her monstrous master.

Sherhan acts as an assassin, bodyguard, troubleshooter, and second for King Steel. She avoids political duties or power plays; all she wants is someone to direct her murderous impulses, and King Steel's happy to do that. For all of his temper and shortsightedness, the current King Steel is an astute judge of character, and he understands perfectly what Sherhan can do for him. She's a weapon he can turn against his enemies.

Unknown to all but a few of the highest Pict leaders, Sherhan is a mutant, a street waif who was born with the ability to control her adrenal reflex. More than one challenger has died wondering what hit him when Sherhan went into her fighting rage.

ers to spy upon and dominate their citizens. The Supervisors themselves are organized like the old intelligence agency, with field agents, directors, security specialists, and a faceless Senior Director behind the whole facade. In the middle of the general population, they portray themselves as merchants, professionals, or people of means.

The current Senior Director is unknown, but it's rumored that he's petitioned the Solar Union to return Lucullus to Solar control in exchange for the authority to rule Penates. The Supervisors certainly didn't leak this story, so it must have originated from the Solar diplomatic team sent to negotiate the basing deal at Telemachus. In the meantime, the Supervisors have stepped up their surveillance of the other Barons, watching closely for any sign of weakness.

## CARACAS

Isolated from the other inhabited regions of Penates by thousands of kilometers of freezing slush and cratered terrain, the Caracas plateau is home to one major city and a dozen or so associated settlements. This entire region has fallen under the control of the Supervisors, who rule through a skeleton-structure of civic leaders, industrialists, and businessmen. Compared to the rest of Penates, Caracas is a quiet, well-ordered city—but beneath its calm surface lie dark and impenetrable depths.

Caracas was established in 2350 as a local administration and support center for the growing number of mining posts in the rich Caracas plateau. As a small and out-of-the-way town, it was virtually untouched in the rebellion of 2385 and the Barons' War that followed. A local gang boss and racketeer named Gil Velan overthrew the Solar Colonial Administration, though his rule only lasted until Supervisor Ian MacEwan took over in 2398.

Determined to rule the planet, the Supervisors embarked on a long-term campaign of espionage, collaboration, and subversion against their stronger but less sophisticated neighbors. MacEwan (Hm/Solar/MW-15) still leads the faction. Although he is a decrepit wreck of a man more than 200 years old, MacEwan's mental abilities have grown more and more acute as his body wastes away, a frail shell for his malignant psyche.

Very little of this has ever come to light in Caracas. Average citizens believe that powerful business interests pull the strings of the council and the civic administrator's office. However, they definitely don't believe in shadow governments, psionic tyranny, or sinister schemes of world domination. Of course, that's just how the Supervisors want their citizens to think.

Political climate, physical remoteness, and decades of careful preparation have all isolated Caracas from the rest of Penates. The Supervisors have fortified their capital and ensured that the city and its dependent towns are completely independent of imported food, water, air, and power. Meanwhile, they've used the unusual mineral wealth of the Caracas plateau to make their city indispensable to the other factions. Caracas sits on top of the largest deposit of industrial-grade heavy metals on the otherwise metal-poor planet. Every faction is dependent on the raw ore produced in this region, which gives Caracas an economic hammer to hold over others' heads.

**Sites of Interest:** Caracas is governed from the Civic Dome, a new habitat adjacent to the city's business district. The Civic Dome features green lawns, majestic marble statuary, and imposing monuments. The Supervisors intended for Caracas to become a planetary capital, and early in their tenure they began work on a suitable residence for their puppet government.

The real power of the city, however, lies in Sublevel 17.

Buried beneath the city's ore transport yards, Sublevel 17 is the location of the Supervisors' intelligence-gathering efforts. Hundreds of political enemies, crusaders, and unfortunate witnesses are held in secret detention blocks beneath the frigid surface. An army of Supervisor agents swarms over the place, administering an intelligence network that extends all the way to Aegis and Tendril—although most of the Supervisors' agents are Lucullan spies, mindwalkers, and well-paid turncoats of the rival factions. The Supervisors are currently scrambling to learn as much as they can about the power blocs of the Stellar Ring in order to create the best plan for exploiting their return to the Verge.

**Spaceport:** The Supervisors have gone out of their way to control access to and from their realm. Wheeler Dome, an industrial ore shipment station with few amenities for travelers, functions as the spaceport of the city. Vessels landing at one of the cold, lightless landing pads surrounding Wheeler Dome are subject to lengthy and tedious customs procedures. In addition, visitors to Caracas (or any town under Planetary Administration control) must apply for visas and accept Administration escorts.

**Lodging:** Visitor quarters in Caracas are limited to a hotel known as the Prospector 7 and the Administration's Transient Quarters, a cheerless facility that offers citizens and registered visitors tiny cubicles and a single meal for only \$5 per day. The Prospector 7, on the other hand, is about the only bright spot in this otherwise grim city. The hotel features comfortable rooms, entertainment, and fine dining at reasonable rates; however, it's generally reserved for Supervisors and their guests.

## THE FREE TRADE GUILD

About three-quarters of the smugglers, free traders, and merchant entrepreneurs of Lucullus are members of the Free Trade Guild. In the days of Solar control, captains of both legal and illegal vessels enjoyed a level of freedom unavailable to their grounded neighbors. Black-market fortunes were made and lost by the battered traders who supplied the overcrowded colony with goods that the Solars were unwilling or unable to transport to the Verge. In order to operate freely, these captains had to bribe numerous SCAd officials and bureaucrats. Thus, the first trade guilds of Lucullus were formed as captains banded together for stronger bargaining positions against the Solars.

In 2367, almost 20 years before the rebellion, the loose network of guilds, associations, and partnerships fell victim to the predatory aspirations of the largest, most powerful smuggler in the system—Baron Wertz. He offered the highest Solar officials vast bribes in order to obtain their assistance in eliminating his rivals. Within three years, Wertz's Free Trade Guild was the only association of traders left in Lucullus. Anyone else was an independent, and therefore a target.

The Free Trade Guild survived the Barons' War largely untouched. It never controlled any significant assets on the ground, so none of the other barons could really find a way to strike at it. Similarly, the Guild's ability to exert power over the general population of Lucullus was limited to economic embargoes and price gouging—they've never had anything close to the manpower of the other factions. The Guild's stronghold is actually offplanet altogether, in the orbiting station of Highport. Once a powerful Solar spacedock and battle station, Highport was seized by Baron Wertz's forces in a sneak attack.

Currently, the Guild is a loose association at best. It doesn't pretend to be a government or corporation, and it doesn't offer civic services or a common defense. Every person in the Guild

## RONIN DAKURA TECHNOSPIDER AGENT

### Level 5 human Tech Op

STR 7	(0)	INT 13	(+2)
DEX 12	(+1)	WIL 9	(0)
CON 9		PER 10	
Durability: 9/9/5		Action check: 14+/13/6/3	
Movement: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 0	

### Attacks

Unarmed	3/1/0	d4s/d4+1s/-	LI/0
9mm pistol	13/6/3	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	HI/0

### Defenses

CF short coat: d4-1 (LI), d4-1 (HI), d6-3 (En)

### Skills

Athletics [7]; Modern [12]—pistol [13]; Vehicle [12]—land [13]; Stamina [9]; Computer [13]—hacking [17], hardware [15]; Knowledge [13]—computer [15], language (Standard) [16]; Verge system: Lucullus [16]; Security [13]—devices [15]; System [13]—defenses [14], sensors [15]; Awareness [9]; Investigate [9]; Street Smart [9]—criminal [11], knowledge [10]; Interaction [10].

### Cyber Gear

Neural interface jack (Ordinary); nanocomputer (Good); reflex (Good).

A young, hot-headed gridpilot and street punk, Ronin Dakura is one of the best hackers in the Technospider organization. He's a loud-mouthed, overconfident computer expert who advertises himself as the best pilot on the planet and sells his services to anyone who can meet his price. Frequently working for Syndicate bosses, Free Trade Guilders, and offworld investors, Ronin usually passes interesting tips and news back to the Technospiders.

Ronin lives in the Chern District, traditionally a Technospider stronghold in the Jamaican-held city of Port Royal. He's made a number of enemies, but so far no one's removed him. Ronin's Grid shadow is, naturally, a samurai warrior with no allegiance. He's not nearly as good as he says he is, but he's one of the best gridpilots willing to work for strangers.

is a captain, entrepreneur, merchant, or the employee of an independent shipowner or merchant. The rule of the Guild is simple: Make money for yourself if you can, sell your services as an employee to someone else if you can't. The Guild's bylaws prevent members from preying on one another, except in strictly regulated duels or acquisitions. People who aren't Guild members or the employees of Guild members are denied this protection, however. In Highport, Guild-certified thugs round up dozens of vagrants and destitute entrepreneurs every week to sell them to the Picts. It's economic barbarism at its worst.

Guild members fall into one of four rough categories: merchants, smugglers, privateers, and support businesses. Merchants engage in more or less legitimate trade, importing or exporting goods. Penates demands luxury items and manufactured goods of all kinds. A merchant may be the captain-owner

of a single tradesman, the master of a small fleet of vessels, or possibly an importer who rents space on inbound and outbound vessels. Smugglers specialize in ducking tariffs, contraband regulations, and excise fees; few places in Lucullus care about such formalities, but Lucullan smugglers are common in other Verge systems. A few Guild members are privateers, corsairs who leave Guild traffic alone and concentrate on other merchant vessels they catch in Lucullus or nearby systems. Finally, an entire network of support businesses—repair shops, ship outfitters, and Highport concessions and entertainment—helps the Guild captains spend their hard-won money.

Guild leadership generally falls to the most powerful and

wealthy captains. Currently, the Baron is a young, arrogant woman by the name of Gida Haimori (Hf/Lucullus/DFA-4) who inherited Haimori House, a fleet of twenty trade ships, from her father. Gida scored some major successes in negotiating base concessions from the Solars last year, leapfrogging several older and more conservative traders and smuggler-kings to seize the leadership. Gida believes the Guild can “go legit”; she supports the return of law and order to Lucullus in the form of the Concord or the Solar Union—whichever nation offers her the better deal. Many Guild members, particularly the illegal captains, don’t hold with her views and are agitating for continued independence.

Once the undisputed master of everything beyond Penates’s atmosphere, the Free Trade Guild currently finds its traditional space superiority challenged. Nothing in Lucullus can stand up to even a small Solar or Concord task force of destroyers and cruisers, so the Guild is campaigning to keep major warships out of the system. In addition, the other factions have tried for years to break the Guild’s monopoly on space transport. The Jamaican Syndicate sponsors a growing fleet of independent freighters, hoping to break the Guild’s lock on trade, and the Picts openly support dozens of corsair captains who prey on Guild and Syndicate shipping. The days of piracy and smuggling may be passing for Lucullus, but the question is whether or not the Free Trade Guild will pass with them.

### DEVIRAH BLANT SUPERVISOR AGENT

#### Level 7 human Mindwalker

STR 6	(-1)	INT 12	(+1)
DEX 9	(0)	WIL 11	(+1)
CON 10		PER 12	
Durability: 10/10/5		Action check: 12+/11/5/2	
Movement: sprint 14, run 10, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 0	
Psionic energy points: 11			

#### Attacks

Unarmed	3/1/0	d4s/d4+1s/-	LI/0
Mass pistol	10/5/2	d6w/d6+2w/d6m	En/6
Mind blast <sup>1</sup>	17/8/4	d4+2s/d6+2s/d8+2s	En/0

<sup>1</sup> Armor is ineffective against this attack.

#### Defenses

CF softsuit: d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)

#### Skills

Athletics [6]; Modern [9]—pistol [10]; Vehicle Operation [9]; Stamina [10]—endurance [11]; Knowledge [12]—language: Standard [15], Verge system: Lucullus [15]; Awareness [11]—intuition [12]; Investigate [11]—deduce [12], interrogate [12]; Resolve [11]—mental [12]; Interaction [12]—intimidate [13]; ESP [12]—mind reading [14], psychometry [13]; Telepathy [12]—contact [14], illusion [14], mind blast [17], mind shield [14], suggestion [13].

Devirah Blant is the epitome of what the people of Lucullus fear about the Supervisors; she is a ruthless psionicist who uses her mental powers to control and victimize anyone weaker than herself. Blant is a complete psychotic who delights in destroying the defenseless with her powerful mental blasts. She is the personal attack dog of Ian MacEwan. Raised from early childhood as a killer, she does his bidding without a trace of conscience or resistance. Devirah’s striking beauty, petite build, and easy grace conceal one of the most vicious killers in the Verge.

MacEwan typically assigns Devirah to his “special projects,” various schemes and plots designed to neutralize whichever enemy he’s most annoyed with at any given time. Currently, MacEwan’s looking for ways to seize control of the Jamaican Syndicate by mentally dominating the leaders of the family. Heroes allying with the Jamaicans could easily cross MacEwan—and that means that Devirah Blant will be looking for them.

### HIGHPORT

One of the last major Solar projects completed before the fall of SCAd, Highport was constructed as an orbital fortress, space-dock, and center for trade. It fell into the hands of the Free Trade Guild during the 2385 rebellion, and it has served as the Guild’s primary stronghold ever since.

Situated in a high-polar orbit, Highport completes one revolution around Penates every day and a half, and it passes over every point on the planet’s surface as Penates rotates beneath it. Compared to the titanic orbital structures of Old Space, Highport isn’t much to write home about, but it’s one of the largest and best-armed space stations in Lucullus or any of the neighboring systems. Almost 10,000 people are present on Highport at any given time—although 20% to 30% of the population are transient merchants and traders.

The station is generally seedy, dirty, and somewhat unsafe. There’s no civic authority or station management per se; private contractors handle maintenance, life support, waste removal, and similar functions. Temporary housing is overcrowded and unsanitary, the domain of a dozen small-time hustlers who charge an arm and a leg for a tiny cubicle. Despite the squalid conditions that prevail throughout Highport, it’s a vital and exciting place, crowded with thousands of spacefarers and merchants trying to make a buck.

The closest thing to law and order in Highport is House Haimori. Their thugs usually intervene to prevent conflicts from damaging the station, and collect “security consulting fees” from most visitors to the station. It’s a rotten racket, but no one else in Highport commands as much muscle as Gida Haimori.

### UNION PENATES

The last of the major factions of Lucullus, Union Penates is a vast, corrupt labor organization that runs all major industries and fields of employment over roughly 20% of Penates’s population. Worker councils funnel profits from their factories, installations, and facilities back into Union coffers. In the days of the rebellion, SCAd-supported industrialists and landowners were

disenfranchised by Union activity, and the Union still holds power over all business and industry.

While the Union is the only power worth considering in this region, it's not actually the government. Like the Supervisors, the Union created a government to suit its purposes in the aftermath of the war for independence. The cities and towns controlled by UP are actually known formally as the Democratic State of Penates (DSP). The DSP performs most of the functions one would expect of a government: It provides for a common defense, enacts legislation and taxation, and even supports educational and social programs. However, Union appointees and hatchet men smother the existing government. In effect, the DSP is a single-party dictatorship under the thumb of Union Penates.

In theory, the Union's internal politics and bylaws provide for a perfectly democratic election of Union officers. Unfortunately, the Union is corrupt and autocratic. An extensive "old boy" network as intimate and closed as an organized crime family calls all the shots in the party—and therefore in all of the DSP. The DSP constitution makes no provision against rival parties, but for more than 100 years Union Penates has violently disbanded anything resembling opposition. Government officials who aren't Union members (there are a few) don't dare make a move without consulting with the local Union boss.

Despite the party dictatorship that rules this portion of Penates, the Democratic State is not a bad place to visit. Local Union bosses expect payoffs as a routine part of doing business in the DSP, but there's nothing here like the institutionalized feudalism of the Picts or the economic warfare of the Free Trade Guild. Foreign merchants and visitors are welcome here, as long as they don't run their mouths too much about the Union's business practices.

The capital of Union Penates is the mill city of Trinidad, birthplace of the 2385 rebellion. It's still an ugly industrial town without any of the amenities normally present in a planetary capital. The Democratic State of Penates, like the Supervisors' Planetary Administration, claims to be the only legitimate authority on the planet—and therefore in the entire Lucullus system. Union provocateurs roam throughout the entire system, organizing labor in territories controlled by the other five Barons of Lucullus. Their efforts are generally unwelcome.

The current leader of the Union is Executive Director Relvin Doch (Hrn/Lucullus/NP), a petty and shortsighted man who stumbled into his position through good fortune and the manipulations of other Union leaders who wanted someone they could easily control. While Doch pushes around DSP President Laurel Bizert (Hf/Lucullus/NP) and busies himself with meaningless manipulations of government positions, the real power is in the hands of Local Director Farr Histwin, a clever old codger who runs the Trinidad chapter of Union Penates. As the leader of the largest and most important local in the Union, Histwin (Hrn/Lucullus/DFA-7) has played kingmaker for years.

## TELEMACHUS

Utterly desolate, this cold and lifeless rock offers nothing but a convenient place to park spacecraft. Telemachus is somewhat denser and more metal-rich than Earth, but all of its valuable minerals are locked up deep in the planet's core.

With nothing but dust, light rocks, and a trace of ice on the surface, Telemachus is valuable only as a source of rudimentary building supplies. It has virtually no water, few organic compounds, and no strategic minerals. It might be valuable as a target for terraforming someday, since it should retain an atmosphere easily, but it's so far from its parent stars that it would

## WILLIAM "MAD DOG" MORGAN CAPTAIN FOR HIRE

### Level 9 human Combat Spec

STR 13	(+2)	INT 11	(+1)
DEX 9	(0)	WIL 9	(0)
CON 12		PER 6	

Durability: 12/12/6 Action check: 14+/13/6/3

Movement: sprint 22, run 14, walk 4 #Actions: 2

Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 0

Perks: Alien Artifact Flaws: Poor Looks<sup>1</sup>, Temper<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Apply a +1 penalty to all Personality based skill checks.

<sup>2</sup> Morgan reacts without thinking and suffers a +2 penalty to all actions whenever confronted by a new race or species.

### Attacks

Unarmed-brawl	17/8/4	d4+2s/d4+3s/d4+4s	LI/0
Chainsword	17/8/4	d8+3w/d8+4w/d4+3m	LI/0
Autoflechette	11/5/2	d4w/d6w/d4m	HI/0

### Defenses

Battle jacket: d6-1 (LI), d4+1 (HI), d4-1 (En)

### Skills

Athletics [13]; Armor [13]-combat<sup>3</sup> [14]; Melee [13]-powered [17]; Unarmed [13]-brawl [17]; Modern [9]-pistol [10], SMG [11]; Vehicle [9]-space [10]; Stamina [12]-endurance [14]; Knowledge [11]-language: Standard [14], Verge system: Lucullus [14]; Navigation [11]-system [12]; System [11]-engineering [12], weapons [13]; Technical [11]-juryrig [12], repair [13]; Awareness [9]-intuition [10]; Street Smart [9]-criminal [10]; Interaction [6]-bargain [7], intimidate [7].

<sup>3</sup> This skill uses a -d4 base situation die.

### Alien Artifact

Absorbs 6 points from any LI or HI attack (up to 30 points per day).

Warps light in a 1-meter radius, rendering Morgan invisible (for up to 5 minutes once per day).

Mad Dog suffers from mental instability (see page 175 of the *Gamemaster Guide*). Once a month, Morgan must make a Resolve skill check to avoid hallucinations, paranoia, and even more incapacitating symptoms.

Mad Dog Morgan is a repulsive, odious, and short-tempered man who usually acts without thinking. Morgan towers over other people and has a huge gut and a greasy beard.

A veteran spacehand and occasional corsair, he salvaged a pirate-riddled hulk about three years ago and refurbished the ship (a beat-up light freighter), calling it the *Death Hog*. Since then, he's been struggling to make a living as an independent smuggler, trader, and mercenary.

While repairing his vessel, Mad Dog stumbled across an alien device that knocked him out with an energy discharge. When he awoke, he discovered a series of mysterious electronic modules welded to the bones of his arms and legs.

Unbeknownst to Mad Dog, the creatures that grafted implants to his body are trying to establish control over his actions. He was kidnapped and reconstructed as a living weapon. However, the procedure didn't work; their mental commands simply drive him mad for a few days. Mad Dog typically drowns out the voices in his head with copious amounts of liquor. During these episodes, he staggers around and screams answers to the voices he hears. Most Highport regulars give Mad Dog plenty of space when he's like that.

## COMMANDER RAMIL IBN BEIGHUR SOLAR CAPTAIN

### Level 10 human Tech Op

STR 9	(0)	INT 12	(+2)
DEX 11	(+1)	WIL 9	(0)
CON 8		PER 11	
Durability: 8/8/4		Action check: 16+/15/7/3	
Movement: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 0	

### Attacks

Unarmed	4/2/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
Saber	10/5/2	d4w/d4+2w/2d4+1w	LI/0
Laser pistol	13/6/3	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	En/0

### Defenses

CF short coat: d4-1 (LI), d4-1 (HI), d6-3 (En)

### Skills

Athletics [9], Melee [9]-blade [10], Acrobatics [11]-daredevil [12], zero-g [12], Modern [11]-pistol [13], Vehicle [11]-air [13], space [15], Stamina [8]-endurance [9], Knowledge [12]-computer [14], language: Standard [15], stellar nation: Concord [15], Navigation [12]-drivespace [14], system [14], System [12]-communications [13], sensors [13], weapons [14], Tactics [12]-space [14], Awareness [9]-intuition [10], perception [11], Culture [11]-etiquette: Lucullan [13], Interaction [11]-charm [12], Leadership [11]-command [13].

Dashing and gallant, Commander Beighur is the captain of the light cruiser *Birmingham*, the most powerful Solar warship in the Verge. He is a likable rogue, a flamboyant and extravagant leader who commands the undying loyalty of his crew. Captain Beighur has a knack for dodging the restrictions of the Solar-Lucullan agreement and appearing in the *Birmingham* at the exact time and place where he and his ship will do the most good. On several occasions he has destroyed Pict and Guild corsairs, using the distress calls of the pirates' victims as an excuse to step over the line that limits Solar action in Lucullus.

Like Admiral de Soronez, Captain Beighur understands that a great part of his role in the Verge is showing the flag. The presence of the *Birmingham* and the other ships of the Solar squadron affirms the Solar Union's interest in the region, and their right to participate in any discourse concerning political, military, or economic developments in the region. While de Soronez considers this mission the primary focus of Solar activity, Beighur is determined to see to it that the most bloodthirsty and brazen of Lucullus's corsairs pass into history at his hands. As far as Ramil is concerned, murder and terrorism in open space is intolerable.

Captain Beighur often moves covertly when an official presence would not be sanctioned. To this end, he and a handful of his top officers have refitted a captured pirate vessel as a privateer. The *Birmingham* is a major warship, easily capable of defeating an escort or freighter. However, the treaty prevents Concord vessels from interacting with Lucullan traffic. The *Sirocco* is his answer to the legal snares that limit his actions.

require additional heat and light sources to make it habitable. Some scientists have suggested orbital fusion lamps to serve as false suns, but no one's seriously studying the issue at this time.

Telemachus is valuable, however, as a planetary naval base. In fact, the Solar Union is building a massive station that sprawls for kilometers under the cratered surface of the planet. When complete, the base will be one of the largest and strongest installations in the Verge. The Solars need a repair yard, supply center, and defensive post to support their operations in the Verge, and they've chosen Telemachus.

Over 2,000 Lucullan laborers from Union Penates and the Technospiders are currently building the base, while thousands more (mostly Jamaican Syndicate and Free Trade Guild members) deliver raw materials and supplies. A crack team of Solar military engineers oversees the construction, and Telemachus already supports its first military force—a heavy assault brigade of 2,500 Solar marines under the command of Colonel Jasmina Gunte (Hf/Solar/DCS-11). Colonel Gunte fiercely resents the treaty restrictions that keep her from "cleaning up" Lucullus, but she's not imaginative enough to consider taking matters into her own hands.

Colonel Gunte's immediate superior, the highest-ranking Solar official in the Verge, is sector commander Admiral Guillermo de Soronez (Hm/Solar/DTO-5). Admiral de Soronez is a canny armchair strategist and political savant who's been assigned to the Verge as a diplomat, not a military commander. He's smart enough to know that he isn't a fighter, and he lets his officers work at turning Telemachus into a first-rate base.

Admiral de Soronez's mission is to increase Solar power and presence in the system—and thus the Verge—while leaving Lucullus independent. The Solars don't want the headache of governing Penates, but they do want to see a much weaker and more tractable native population. De Soronez is looking for ways to lure various Barons into his orbit. He uses the warships at his command to suppress overly bold pirates and smugglers, but the Lucullans often hide behind the fine print of the Solar basing treaty.

## DIONE

Far removed from the piracy and trade of Lucullus A and B, Dione circles the small third star of this trinary system. Dione is a vast, hot water-world, covered by seas thousands of kilometers deep without a single archipelago or continent to relieve the monotony of its surface. Its hot, steam-filled atmosphere blankets the world-ocean in a perpetual mist intolerable to humans. Atmospheric pressure keeps the ocean from boiling outright.

Dione is a water giant, a type of planet discovered early in the search for extrasolar planets. It's 20 times as massive as Earth, but only about one-third as dense. Larger than anything short of a gas giant, the planet has surface gravity only marginally higher than a terrestrial planet's because the planet's watery surface is very far from the center of gravity, and its rapid spin also counters some of the gravitational pull.

Dione is an excellent prospect for a floating colony at some point in the future. It has plenty of water and air—critical requirements for a settlement—and with some biological engineering, terrestrial plants and animals could adapt to the heat. Unfortunately, Dione's metals lie thousands upon thousands of kilometers beneath its surface. Somewhere beneath all that water, Dione's core is an Earth-sized rock full of rich minerals.

Early Solar plans for the Lucullus system called for the establishment of an industrial base in Penates and the asteroid belts to manufacture components for the vast, floating arcol-

gies that could one day sail the seas of Dione. The war, and the prohibitive expense of any such scheme, brought those plans to a halt. Now, as the Solars are eyeing the Lucullus system again, some of these settlement schemes are resurfacing. Dione offers vast amounts of living space, and little else. However, that commodity alone is enough to excite Solar interest.

Dione's seas support a rich ecosystem of native lifeforms adapted to life in the Verge's biggest pressure cooker. Explorers have yet to find signs of sentient habitation, but there are persistent rumors of hidden civilizations in the cold layers deep beneath the ocean's thermocline. A handful of energetic corsairs and would-be colonists already live on Dione's surface aboard small, juryrigged floating towns. The water giant is a good place to disappear from view, since its steam clouds and the general radioactivity of the Lucullus system scramble most sensors.

## SYSTEM LOG

Lucullus is an active system. The local Solar commanders are pressing for a reinterpretation of the basing treaty with the Lucullan League. Admiral de Soronez and his advisors feel that the Solar Union made a bad deal, and they want to put the Barons of Lucullus out of business in the most direct fashion possible. Solar diplomats in Old Space have so far restrained their local military commanders, but there are signs that the Solars might be about ready to slip their leash.

## A NEW BARONS' WAR

A vicious conflict is shaping up between the Picts and the Free Trade Guild. The Pictish support of independent corsairs is beginning to challenge the Guild's traditional supremacy in space. If it does come down to a shooting match, the Guild will win in space, but they'll probably lose Highport and about one-third of their ground facilities—a very unprofitable development. The Jamaican Syndicate is brokering peace talks between the factions, but so far all the Jamaicans have done is muddy up the issues even more.

## LEAGUE ELECTIONS COMING SOON

Three months from now, a battery of major League elections will take place. For the first time, this election might mean something. The Solars view the League as the only legitimate government in the system, but some of the more patient factions—namely, the Supervisors, the Technospiders, and the Jamaican Syndicate—are considering whether or not they should position themselves for a power grab before the Solars level the playing field.

## HEIRESS MISSING ON DIONE

Continued exploration of the water-giant Dione has revealed an extensive biosphere of highly developed animals and plants existing in the seas of the planet. Three weeks ago, a survey cruiser vanished after descending into the steamy atmosphere for a closer look; search parties haven't found a trace of the vessel yet. No one knows if the ship was destroyed, or if it was simply damaged and unable to report its predicament. The ship, the *Exemplar*, carried the daughter of Old Space billionaire Magnus Iopetet. Magnus has offered an extravagant reward to the rescuer of his daughter.

## THE SIROCCO

Refitted Buckley-class Trader

Compartments: 5 Dur: 24  
Maneuver rating: -1 Acc: 3 Mpp  
Cruising speed: 2 AU/hr Berthing: 6

Armament: 2 mass cannons

Range 5/10/15 Mm d6+2s/d6+1w/d6+3w LI/A

Defenses: Jammer, point-defense gun

Armor: Medium neutronite (2 dur)  
d6+1 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d6 (En)

Computer: Ordinary core, Ordinary battle computer, Ordinary defense computer, Ordinary engineering computer, Ordinary nav computer

Engines: Induction engine

Power: Mass reactor rated at 15 power factors

Drive: Non-equipped

Roll	Comp't	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Durability
1-3	Command	Sick bay (2/0) Multiband radar (0/0) IR detector (0/0) EM detector (0/0) Radio transceiver (0/1) Laser transceiver (0/1) Crew quarters (1/0)	6/6/3
4-6	Electronics	Computer core (1/0) Mass transceiver (1/1) Point defense gun (1/1)	6/6/3
7-9	Auxiliary	3x mass reactor (6/0) Autosupport (0/1)	12/12/6
10-14	Engineering	3x Induction engines (6/6)	12/12/6
15-20	Weapons	2 mass cannons (4/6)	8/8/4*

\* No life support provided to this compartment.

## SHIPS OVERDUE

Several Lucullan freighters and independent traders have recently disappeared in the outward sectors of the Verge. Someone or something appears to be ambushing ships at isolated way points between Lucullus and Aegis, and between Lucullus and Algernon.

## HEROES OF LUCULLUS

Like their parent nation, the Solar Union, the colonists who settled Lucullus a century and a half ago were a very diverse group. Human heroes native to this system gain a bonus equivalent to that of Solar heroes. They begin play with 62 points to distribute among their Ability Scores instead of the normal 60 allotted to a starting character. The hero must also choose a home faction or a Baron to whom he owes loyalty. He can find some degree of shelter and support in his home territory, but in areas controlled by other factions, he's an enemy or rival watched closely. Mindwalker heroes almost always come from the Supervisor faction, since psionically talented people in other areas are persecuted ruthlessly.

A few aliens have immigrated to Lucullus during the years of the Long Silence, but there aren't any established communities of nonhumans. Alien heroes are unusually scarce in Lucullus, and receive no special starting benefits or advantages other than those specified for their particular species.

# AEGIS

The Aegis system is an ideal system—ideal, that is, as a vacation spot for anyone rich enough to slough off their cares or daring enough to take a trip to the edge of known space. Glamorized in hundreds of holofilms, the paradise resort is a sparkling gem of the Verge. Just as important, Aegis is the logical base for mankind's exploration of the Perseus Arm of the Milky Way galaxy. Aegis is more than a magnificent vacation spot; it is an ideal jumping off point for another of humanity's "giant leaps." This strategic location has made it a target for every stellar nation with expansionist tendencies—and that includes pretty much all of them except the Galactic Concord.

The system consists of its primary G2 yellow star, Aegis, and a second, much smaller star. The smaller star is Phantasm, a red dwarf barely deserving the name. The best theories on this double star's early history hold that late in the star's formation, something hit Aegis and raised huge clouds of dust and gas. Before Aegis could ignite and blow the gas away, Phantasm was formed.

The gas giant Redcrown, a Jovian planet, ranks as the third most massive object in the system. It measures 200 Terran masses, though its gravity is low near the upper atmosphere of the gas planet. Redcrown also features a brilliant ring system, tinted crimson and dark orange.

The system's real treasure is Bluefall. The planet got its name from the brilliant blue oceans that cover 98% of its surface. When seen from space, Bluefall shines like a bright sapphire gem in the darkness of space. Even more amazing is the planet's rich, breathable atmosphere of nitrogen and oxygen. Human colonists live without the need for burdensome pressure domes or e-suits. Volcanic activity has raised many habitable island chains above the waves, though Bluefall's islands are small, usually less than 1,000 square kilometers. The whole planet is a tropical paradise, and it richly deserves its nickname: "the Jewel of the Verge."

## HISTORY

Stellar nations are only now learning Aegis's recent history, as reporters from the Stellar Ring swarm throughout the systems telling "the tragic story of the lost colonies." Like all the Verge systems, the Jewel of the Verge has been shrouded in mystery for long years. In Aegis's case, the nations are returning to an system very different from the one they abandoned during GW2.

## EXPLORATION

The Orion nation—which later formed the core of the Orion League—was the first nation to explore and colonize the Aegis system. In 2310, Robin Hughes led a team of explorers from the Orion Nation on a lengthy and wide-ranging survey of space. In the last days of her expedition in 2316, Hughes charted the orange star Aegis and its satellites.

Her first discovery was a surprise to the astronomical community. Parallax measurements charting Aegis's slow movement through space had definitely proven that Aegis had satellites, but few suspected that the wandering sunspot on Aegis's surface was a second star, circling closely about Aegis. Indeed, the second star is only just massive enough to fall into the category of a star instead of a planet. Since it had remained unnoticed for so long, this small star was christened Phantasm.

Redcrown was the first of Aegis's planets to be measured and explored. As on the small planetoid Jetsam, the explorers found that Redcrown was relatively rich in resources and minerals. Hughes's team dashed on to examine the system's innermost planet: Bluefall. The water world immediately drew their attention, and eventually the attention of all of human space. Hughes had hit the explorer's jackpot; he had discovered a world that could support human life without terraforming.

## COLONIZATION

The Orion League did not hesitate to send materials and engineers to Bluefall. Ten years after Hughes's team had returned, an island colony was established and named for its first governor. The Orion League quickly realized that the Aegis system was an ideal location for exerting Orion influence over the Verge. Bluefall would be the center of the Orion sphere of influence, militarily and in terms of settlement.

The Orion plan worked, to a point. Orion engineers built a formidable military base that still stands today. More than a dozen satellites bolster the planet's defenses, most of them clustered over Tribane Island in a geosynchronous orbit 36,000 kilometers above the planet's largest military installation and population center. While Bluefall's oceans made mineral resources scarce, mines on the moons of Bluefall and Redcrown will supply raw materials for centuries.

What Orion's planners failed to foresee was the unusually high rate of immigration to the planet. First, the Bluefall station assignment became a favorite among the Orion military. Orion officers took their vacations on Bluefall, relaxing in the tropical climate, comfortable gravity, and fantastic black sand beaches. Rumors of the paradise soon spread through Orion space, and eventually through most of human space as well. By 2344, wealthy tourists had established a new industry in the Aegis system. Many of Bluefall's guests decided to stay.

Amazed and ecstatic at the colony's quick growth, the governor of Bluefall, William Tribane, extended a simple invitation in 2345. It was an open call to any space traveler who wanted to visit or settle down. For a small fee, immigrants of any origin could establish settlements on any of Bluefall's islands. Colonists came in droves. By 2346, more than a million sentients had registered to become permanent inhabitants. Only Tribane Island remained reserved for Orion League military personnel.

## THE LONG SILENCE

Within a decade after the start of the Second Galactic War, just about every warship with a stardrive had left to join the interstellar war. As the years passed, the few supply ships that arrived often lacked necessary materials. Worse, scheduled supply ships disappeared, victims of war or of the growing menace of piracy. Finally, the Tendril drivesat sent Bluefall a last message from the Stellar Ring. The long, sympathetic speech of an Orion functionary boiled down to a single statement: "Bluefall, you're on your own. Good luck."

The Long Silence, as it would later be called, was just as painful to the populous world of Bluefall as it was elsewhere, though records of this period are sketchy and sometimes difficult to interpret. What's clear is that more than a decade passed before a balance was found between a starving population and

a growing food supply. The colonists, long dependent on interstellar supplies, struggled to find natural resources to support them. Eventually, scientists on Bluefall discovered methods to safely prepare the indigenous flora and fauna. Today, kelp and fish are the staples of Bluefall diet—and much of the Verge's diet as well. During the Long Silence, they were its salvation.

### THE VANISHING

The Aegis system, despite its problems, should have been able to survive without Old Space support. Bluefall permits humans easy travel over its surface. The metals that Bluefall lacked could be had from the rest of the system. Bluefall's planetary population was the largest of any Verge system, numbering near 10 million by the middle of the 25th century.

Records of human activity on Bluefall cease on July 22, 2452. Computers and automatic systems continued to operate, but no human commands were entered. Lunar mining stations and military vessels in the Aegis system appear to have suffered the same fate on the same day. Work was left half done, meals half eaten, and logs half written. The accounts of the first observers to arrive after the Vanishing made it clear that "the lights were left on, the doors unlocked."

Within a few days, trading vessels arriving from other Verge systems confirmed that the Aegis system was empty of human life. Communication attempts directed at Tribane Island met with no response. When the traders landed for a look around, they found an eerie landscape of cities alive but soulless, unmarred by any attack. Without human guidance, machines throughout the system were crashing into one another and causing minor destruction of all kinds. Mining operations continued unchecked and unprocessed.

The vaunted Bluefall military had failed to protect its citizens. When news of the situation reached naval vessels outside the system, they returned home to see the disaster for themselves. The troops restored order to the cities, shutting down automatic systems and returning military vessels to Hughes Island. After a year of careful examination produced no leads and no well-supported theories to the cause of the Vanishing, the remnant of the proud Orion defensive fleet slowly fell apart. Most ships returned to the Stellar Ring and Orion space; records indicate this group eventually reached home only to become embroiled in GW2. A smaller group left to seek homes elsewhere in the Verge, or on one of Bluefall's many islands. Finally, the smallest group, fewer than 1,000 humans and 100

aliens, elected to remain on Bluefall and watch over Tribane Island as its guardians.

For several years, the only humans on Bluefall were these wardens and a few visiting scavengers picking over the surface. Only Tribane Island was left unmolested; the island's automated defense systems persuaded the curious and the avaricious to stay away. The more persistent vultures discovered how deadly the island's fortifications and pillboxes were.

All sorts of theories arose to explain the sudden disappearance of more than a million human beings. Aliens, unchecked solar radiation, diseases, and dark-matter experiments were given credit for the Vanishing. More than one group of people in the Verge panicked, thinking they might be next to disappear. The eventual consensus was that an Orion fortress ship had come to collect their people and take them home to the Stellar Ring. The few Orions who had returned to safeguard Bluefall scoffed at this theory. The Vanishing remains a mystery, attracting an ever wider ring of theories, holofilms, Grid debate, and conjecture.

### THE FLIGHT FROM ERICIS

As the years passed, the great war in the Stellar Ring ground on, consuming lives and materials at an astonishing rate. Worlds and star systems fell victim to the conflict, and no end seemed near. In despair, many citizens fled the war, seeking peace in the edges of known space.

The most famous exodus was the Flight from Ericis, led by Christopher Hale in 2460. While in his second year at an elite Orion military academy on Ericis, the League president's oldest son and his friends formed a cadre of peace activists at the academy. When Hale organized a protest during the academy's graduation ceremonies, the academic authorities imprisoned him. In response, the student body revolted. After Hale was freed, the chaotic uprising became an organized revolution. Seizing control of the academy's military vessels, Hale organized a fleet consisting of dozens of military vessels and more than 100 civilian ships. Promising a peaceful tomorrow, Hale invited his classmates to band together and find a refuge from war. To a man, the cadets joined him. They invited civilians from the planet Ericis along before making a starfall into drivespace. It was days before the Orion government, rattled into a quick response by President Hale, could act.

Christopher Hale's fleet tripled in size before it reached Aegis in 2464, but it still wasn't nearly big enough to carry the

TABLE SII: AEGIS SYSTEM

	Bluefall	Redcrown	Jetsam
Primary	Aegis	Aegis	Aegis
Planetary Class	Class 1	Class 5	Class 4
Gravity	G2 (0.89 g)	G3 (0.91 g)	G1 (0.48 g)
Radiation	R1 (0.2 rem/yr)	R2 (6.2 rem/wk)	R2 (3.7 rem/wk)
Atmosphere	A2 (N <sub>2</sub> , O <sub>2</sub> )	A1 (H <sub>2</sub> , He)	A0 (trace)
Pressure	P3 (0.89)	P5 (gas giant)	P0 (0.014)
Heat	H2 (20° C)	H0 (-160° C)	H0 (-222° C)
Orbital Distance	0.97 AU	8.31 AU	24.16 AU
Diameter	11,452 km	129,006 km	4,260 km
Year	348.8 days	8.92 years	104.3 years
Day	28 hours	11.4 hours	91.6 hours
Axial Tilt	8.1°	26°	72°
Density	0.99	0.09	1.07
# Satellites	2	10	1

entire fleeing population. Estimates place Hale's following at more than 5 million men and women when he left the Stellar Ring. With that many passengers, Hale's fleet didn't try to carry everyone at once. Instead, Hale's 1,000 ships leapfrogged back and forth from one habitable planet to the next. All told, the trip took four years.

Hale had heard from Bluefall naval officers that the Vanishing had turned beautiful Bluefall into a deserted ghost world, so the refugee fleet headed for Aegis. Many of the refugees were pleasantly surprised to have a world of their own. The complete and well-built cities required little repair. Hale's Orions were welcomed by the loyal guards who had remained alone on Bluefall for almost a decade. The refugees built a new city, surrounded by fortifications still formidable after all the years. The refugee culture flourished.

With little protest, Hale declared himself the Regent of Bluefall, and his new nation the Regency. Tribane Island was rechristened Regency Island. His officers retained their military titles, and a military government was formed. Over the next 30 years, the Regency devoted itself to rebuilding a stable society on Bluefall. The few survivors from the old Orion era helped, but the true honors go to the dedicated work of Regency citizens. They found an abandoned paradise and restored its shine.

For the citizens of this new Regency, Bluefall offered an unusual opportunity. Not only was the planet itself a paradise, but its former inhabitants had constructed fine cities. Homes, businesses, and whole islands stood unoccupied, with no signs that their previous owners would ever return. The first act of the Regency was to create a national treasury through the auction of Bluefall's assets. Indeed, for the new citizens of Bluefall, businesses and property were had for pennies on the Orion dollar.

## TODAY

With the return of the stellar nations to Verge space, the recent history of the Aegis system has taken yet another turn. On February 11, 2497, the Concord fortress ship *Monitor* entered the Aegis system on its way to investigate the distress call from the Hammer's Star system. For the most part, the stellar nations were pleased by the resettlement of Bluefall. Word of the Vanishing had spread within the Stellar Ring, and it was a matter of no small comfort to the powers of Old Space that the Vanishing and the distress call from Hammer's Star were apparently unrelated. Emissaries from a few stellar nations saw an opportunity they couldn't refuse. Bluefall was underpopulated, with only a cadre of "ragtag refugees." They should be easy pickings for a stellar nation with a little bravado. It hasn't turned out quite as they expected.

Ships from the Thuldan Empire and the Orlamu Theocracy arrived in numbers in early 2498. The Orlamu Theocracy expressed interest in investigating the mysterious disappearance of the original colonists; the Thuldans were more direct. "As Governor Tribane's invitation has not yet been closed," said the Thuldan admiral, "we are happy to accept this invitation to visit Bluefall. In turn, we invite Bluefall back into humanity's fold."

Hale has led the Regency reaction to the Thuldan decree, a reaction that can diplomatically be described as passionate. Although he concedes that foreign nationals are welcome to visit and emigrate to Bluefall, he has also enforced an old rule that access to Regency Island is forbidden. Furthermore, Bluefall demanded a fee from its immigrants, adjusted for inflation. Yet Hale continues the general practice of open immigration, under

pressure from the Galactic Concord. In response to Hale's impertinence, Thuldan vessels, full of advisors for Hale's government, attempted several landings on Regency Island in March 2498. The ships were destroyed.

In the last few months and years, representatives of every stellar nation, including the Thuldan Empire and the Galactic Concord, have accepted Governor Tribane's 150-year-old invitation and set up a colony on one of Bluefall's islands. Under diplomatic pressure, all of the new colonies have paid a tax to Hale, usually in the form of precious materials unavailable in the Aegis system.

## CONTACT

In June 2500, after more than a century of human civilization on Bluefall, humans made contact with its natives. The discovery of a sentient species after such a long period of settlement was unprecedented.

The *Glory*, a submarine in the service of the Regency Navy, was conducting sonar experiments near Filtrane Island when it received the first communication from the aliens. The details of Captain Elizabeth Iannotti's encounter with the Bluefall aliens remain classified, and the Regency government has made little comment, other than to say that the aliens are amicable. While this secrecy invites fear, the Regency government believes it the best way to limit contact during the critical first few years as a relationship is opened.

Iannotti's vessel returned to Regency Island amid a great deal of secrecy and military security. *Glory* is kept in port, protected from prying eyes by guards and a protective bay typically used for repairing damaged sea vessels. Interestingly, Iannotti herself is one of the few members of the *Glory*'s crew who has not made a public appearance, held an interview, written a book, or signed a holofilm deal about the experience. In the months following the *Glory*'s return to Regency Island, most of her crew took leaves of absence to tell the tale and make a small fortune. Unfortunately for the curious, Captain Iannotti kept most of the ship in the dark about the richer details of what was going on, so the crew versions of the tale are mostly based on fragmentary information and speculation. As for Iannotti herself, a Regency representative reported that she is working to form a good relationship with "our new friends on Bluefall."

Andrew Stott, Thuldan governor of Filtrane Island, has raised an official protest over the incident, demanding that the world of Bluefall has a right to full and free disclosure of information. Meanwhile, he has accelerated the construction of a Thuldan sea navy, so that the truth can come to light. He'll pursue the facts by force, if necessary.

Exact details of the encounter remain a matter of speculation. Most Regency citizens reacted with surprise but with confidence that coexistence with the new species should be possible. After all, "we've been getting along peacefully with them since we got here." Some information has become available to the general public, through the media and through word of mouth:

- Bluefall's aliens dwell in the deep oceans, under kilometers of water.
- The crew christened the aliens "deepfallen" and the name has stuck. The aliens like the name, or don't care about it.
- The deepfallen are humanoid, with two arms and legs.
- One of the deepfallen talked alone with Captain Iannotti for several hours on the *Glory*'s surfaced deck. Iannotti had no lingual or communication equipment with her.

- The aliens asked Captain Iannotti which star system humans were from. When she gave them a vector relative to Bluefall in light-years, they seemed to understand.

- After Iannotti's private conversation, the executive officer of the *Glory* asked if his captain knew how many deepfallen there were "out there." She answered "more than us," leaving some to speculate if she referred to the crew of the *Glory* or the population of Bluefall.

- Since the official announcement, more than 100 sightings have been made by private citizens on Bluefall. None of them have been confirmed.

- A small faction of Bluefall's inhabitants have demanded a military investigation of the deepfallen's home, after it has been discovered. They blame the deepfallen for any number of hostile actions, including kidnappings, Bluefall's occasional hurricanes, and the Vanishing itself.

Though the public demand for news about the deepfallen has not dropped off, the lack of information has led to a series of fluffy "exclusives" and interviews with consultants and xenobiologists to fill the demand. The truth or lack thereof in these reports remains to be seen. Indeed, the entire discussion will remain one-sided until the deepfallen speak for themselves.

## GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Politics isn't a necessity of business in the Aegis system; it is *the* business. Like Paris 600 years ago and Hale in the Stellar Ring, Bluefall has become the favored location for the meeting of powers. To the stellar nations, the planet is simply a nice place to build their embassies. It's near the center of the Verge, and no one can complain about the climate. All but the most territorial nations have recognized the need for a place such as Bluefall, where they can negotiate their differences. As a result, most have abandoned the idea of annexing Bluefall, preferring its role as neutral ground.

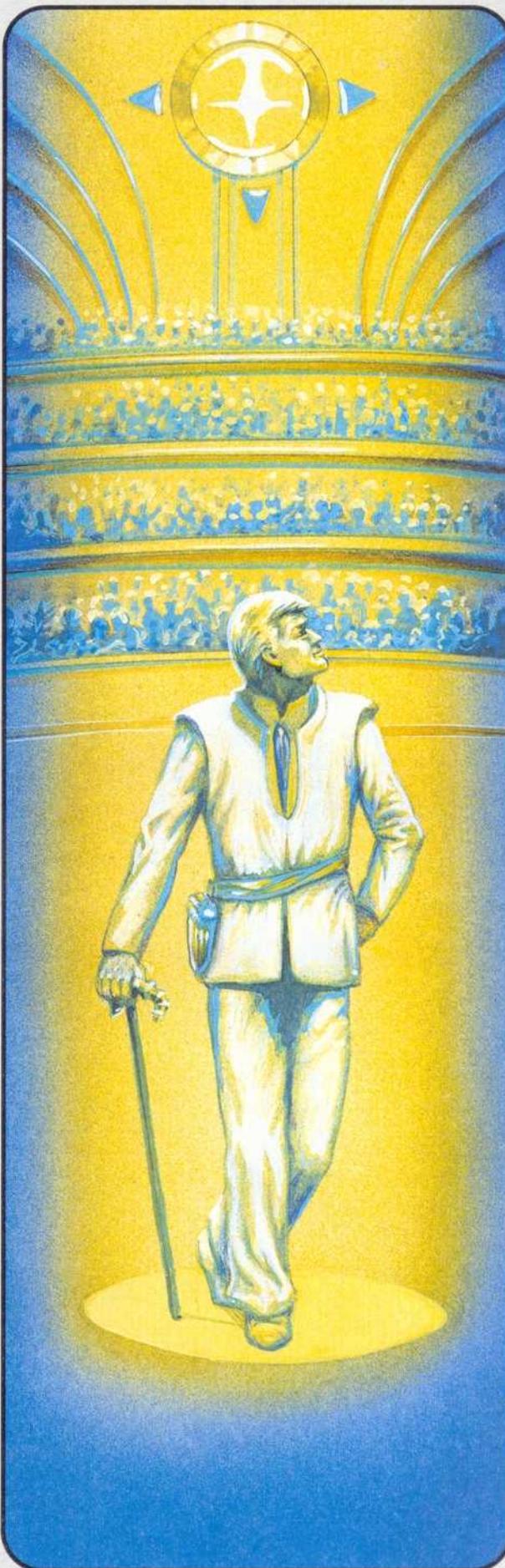
Bluefall's diplomats wield unusual power. Far removed from their capitals in the Stellar Ring, national representatives must react to events without immediate guidance from superiors. Since each diplomat usually reports his or her own version of events back to the Ring, most Old Space governments are pleased with the progress their representatives seem to be making.

For the local government, the situation demands the steely nerves of a tightrope acrobat. For all the Regency's impressive local power, if any stellar nation becomes a true enemy, all of Bluefall would suffer. Regent Hale must court them all, respecting stellar nations while preserving his dignity, and maintaining his popularity among the military and the general citizenry alike.

## MILITOCRACY

Fortunately for Hale and all Regency citizens, the Regent's government is a finely honed instrument. After all, the flight to Aegis began as a military operation, and it retains a little of that character today. Hale's second title, just as important as his role as head of state, is commander-in-chief. Serving immediately beneath Hale are the chiefs of each branch: Stellar Navy, Sea Navy, and Army. Officially, the civilian bureaucracy is a fourth branch, and its director also reports directly to the Regent.

In many ways, the militocracy makes the Regent's task much easier. In some measure, Hale is a despot; officially, there are no checks on his authority, no legislative or judicial bodies can question him. Indeed, Bluefall has no legislature



## CHRISTOPHER HALE

### REGENT OF BLUEFALL

#### Level 26 human Diplomat (Combat Spec)

STR	9	INT	12	(+1)
DEX	9	WIL	12	(+1)
CON	10	PER	14	

Durability: 10/10/5/5 Action check: 15+/14/7/3

Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 3

Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 4

Perk: Heightened Ability (PER)

<sup>1</sup> -d4 base situation die

#### Attacks

Unarmed—power 13/6/3 d6s/d6+2s/d4w LI/0

Laser pistol<sup>2</sup> 12/6/3 d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m En/0

Mass rifle 12/6/3 d6w/d8+1w/d6+1m En/G

<sup>2</sup> -d4 base situation die

#### Defenses

CF softsuit: d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)

#### Skills

Athletics [9]—baseball [16]; Unarmed [9]—power [13]; Acrobatics [9]—dodge [13], fall [10]; Modern [9]—pistol [12], rifle [12]; Vehicle [9]—space [11]; Stamina [10]—endurance [12]; Business [12]—corporate [14]; Law [12]; Knowledge [12]—computer [13], deduce [16], language: Standard [15]; System [12]—engineering [13], weapons [13]; Tactics [12]—infantry [14], vehicle [14], space [15]; Administration [12]—bureaucracy [14], management [15]; Awareness [12]—intuition [14], perception [14]; Resolve [12]—mental [16], physical [14]; Culture [15]—diplomacy [18], etiquette (Orion) [18], etiquette (Concord) [16]; Deception [15]—bluff [16], bribe [16], gamble [16]; Interaction [15]—bargain [16], charm [20], intimidate [18], seduce [16]; Leadership [15]—command [20], inspire [24].

Christopher Hale is an eminently likable man. Barely considered middle-aged at 60, Hale represents the best of charismatic Orion leadership. With the few who know him well, Hale shrugs off the over-serious demeanor he is famous for, and he tempers the burdens of the Regency with his singular passion: baseball. In a sense, Hale is the prince of Bluefall and the Verge, a popular young leader whom people look to. He's as capable as his father could have wished.

After fleeing his responsibilities, today Christopher Hale bears burdens far beyond the norm. As Warthen Hale's son, Christopher was expected to follow his father into politics and diplomacy, but Christopher often found himself at odds with his father and the Orion League. Like many of his generation, Christopher wanted nothing to do with the war that had already killed so many.

After his father secured a third term, Hale abandoned the Orion League and his military education. As he led the fleet out of Orion space and into the Verge, the young Hale found that fate wasn't finished with him. The civilians and cadets looked to him for direction. Already famous thanks to his family, Hale cemented the inevitable during his long voyage. Like his father before him, Christopher Hale seems destined for great power and great responsibility.

and only military courts, also under Hale's jurisdiction. If Hale gives an order, no power can belay him.

In practice, the Regent's will often bends to outside influences. The Regency's generals and admirals are popular figures in their own right, and they have great influence over economics, internal affairs, and relations with the stellar nations. Powerful business interests, including the desalination and oil syndicates, have their say in what happens on Bluefall. And even the military government can't prevent the will of the masses or the desires of special interest groups from influencing policy—at least as long as Hale is in power.

## IMMIGRATION

The invitation to immigrants has stood unbroken for one and a half centuries. The practice is little changed despite the passage of time. Any sentient may request citizenship on Bluefall, and only a handful have had their petitions denied. The standard tariff imposed on immigrants is about \$1,300. Indigent cases may apply for an exemption from the fee, which is usually granted.

In 2500, almost 16 million sentients immigrated to Bluefall. Despite the headaches this high rate of immigration brings, Hale has publicly denied all plans to cap immigration. The Concord encouraged Hale to foster open immigration, in order to make Bluefall a diplomatic center. Privately, however, Hale's aware of the need to slow the runaway growth, and it's only a matter of time before he acts.

## STELLAR NATIONS

The will of the Concord alone can't render the Aegis system calm and peaceful. Though its location has encouraged Bluefall's adoption as a headquarters and diplomatic stage, the presence of so many competing interests has made Bluefall a place of power, espionage, and betrayal.

One of the largest players in the Aegis system is the Thuldan Empire, and despite attempts at spin control, the Thuldan interest in the system is clear to everyone. The Empire, in its quest to unify all of humanity—and thus all of the Verge—under a single banner, wants to own Bluefall outright. Control of the planet would let it influence diplomacy throughout the Verge. Since the abortive attempt to seize Regency Island in 2498, the Empire has been increasing its assets and building up Filtrane Island. As a result, Bluefall is experiencing its first arms race. However, the Empire is limited in the resources it can devote to a star system so far from home—and limited by diplomatic pressures.

Other stellar nations have their own goals. Many Orions see Bluefall as their property, since it was founded by Orion citizens and the son of the Orion League president. Rather than advocate annexation, League representatives have sought a working partnership with the local Regency government. The Orlamu Theocracy has demonstrated a more passionate curiosity about the mystery of the Vanishing than the Regency government has. VoidCorp's interest in the system seems limited to making a profit from its operation on Redcrown and bothering any Insight diplomats assigned to Aegis as often as possible.

It's only been four years since the stellar nations returned, and the intrigues on Bluefall are rapidly growing more complex. For the Regency, survival depends on balancing national desires carefully—and using them against each other when necessary. The best evidence of the Regency's success is the

Concord ambassador's official request that the Empire reduce its military presence in the Aegis system.

## GALACTIC CONCORD

Concordans consider Bluefall one of their successes. In Aegis, the stellar nations coexist in relative harmony, and Concord efforts to resolve differences are successful more often than not. Indeed, Ambassador Oliver Mohan's (Hm/Concord/DFA-13) blunt and honest discussions suit the Verge well, even if some of his Concord associates in the Stellar Ring dislike his direct, sometimes crude, tactics. Mohan's other critics maintain that Bluefall is the true facilitator of diplomacy, not the Concord.

Ambassador Mohan delegates much of his responsibility to a capable staff of young diplomats and administrators. He divides his embassy crew into specialists who focus on a stellar nation or on the Regency. To preserve neutrality, his core staff reviews each department's recommendations and prioritizes the Concord's agenda. The leader of this supervisory bureau, Nur al-Haq, is second only to Mohan himself.

As the Verge opens for resettlement, the overriding Concord strategy has become quite clear: Avoid confrontations at any price, and preserve the status quo. Newly explored and recontacted star systems come under Concord jurisdiction, at least until Concord representatives consider the system ready for independence or unification with a stellar nation. In the name of avoiding another galactic war, the Concord must take measures that purists abhor. Regrettably, sentient rights and the right to self-determination are sometimes sacrificed to the demands of peace. More than once, the Concord has delivered independent systems into the hands of stellar nations to avoid the clash of powers.

Fortunately for the Regency, the political dynamics at work encourage continued independence for Bluefall. Ambassador Mohan has made the Concord position on Bluefall independence very clear. To change the legal status of the Aegis system is to risk disaster and invite war in the Verge.

## REGENCY DEFENSES

Aware that Regency Island could present a target, Regent Hale has continued the system's doctrine of absolute defense of the capital. The doctrine demands fearsome outer layers followed by even more terrible inner layers.

Hundreds of defensive satellites and dozens of orbital stations orbit the skies over Bluefall, almost half of them located in geosynchronous orbit over Regency. Some watch distant space for threats, and others stare down at the planet, watching for troublemakers on the surface. Regency Stellar Navy patrols, already considered overzealous, are even more concentrated over the island. Officers in the service understand the importance of Regency Island as a nerve center, and for many of them the protection of the island is a personal issue. Their families live there, after all.

Some 400 vessels serve in the Regency Stellar Navy. At any given moment, a fifth of these vessels can be found on the surface of Bluefall or in the Nectaris base, undergoing refit operations, repairs, or battlefield testing. An equal portion of the Stellar Navy protects Regency interests outside the Aegis system. They escort convoys to nearby star systems, monitor interstellar fleet movements, and guarantee that Regency interests are protected throughout the Verge.

Most of the Stellar Navy is composed of patrol ships with no more than a dozen compartments. These scouts, picket

ships, and defenders guard against common criminals and pirates. About 50 frigates and 23 cruisers serve in the Stellar Navy. Those two groups are the mainstay of the Regency fleet. Another six are heavier battlecruisers. In 2497, the Regency Stellar Navy commissioned a dreadnought from the StarMech shipyards. The largest Stellar Navy vessel, the *Sanctuary*, is also its flagship. It arrived in February, 2501.

Secretary Jane Tolson (Hf/Orion/DTO-7) assumed overall command of the Regency Stellar Navy in 2489. Formerly the captain of the *Hughes*, one of the Navy's six battlecruisers and its former flagship, Tolson distinguished herself by taking a conservative approach to most conflicts. Her style has been even less aggressive since she assumed command. While Tolson commands the largest fleet in the Verge, she knows that any of the stellar nations could overwhelm her proud Stellar Navy. For the moment, the Regent seems content with Tolson's nonconfrontational style.

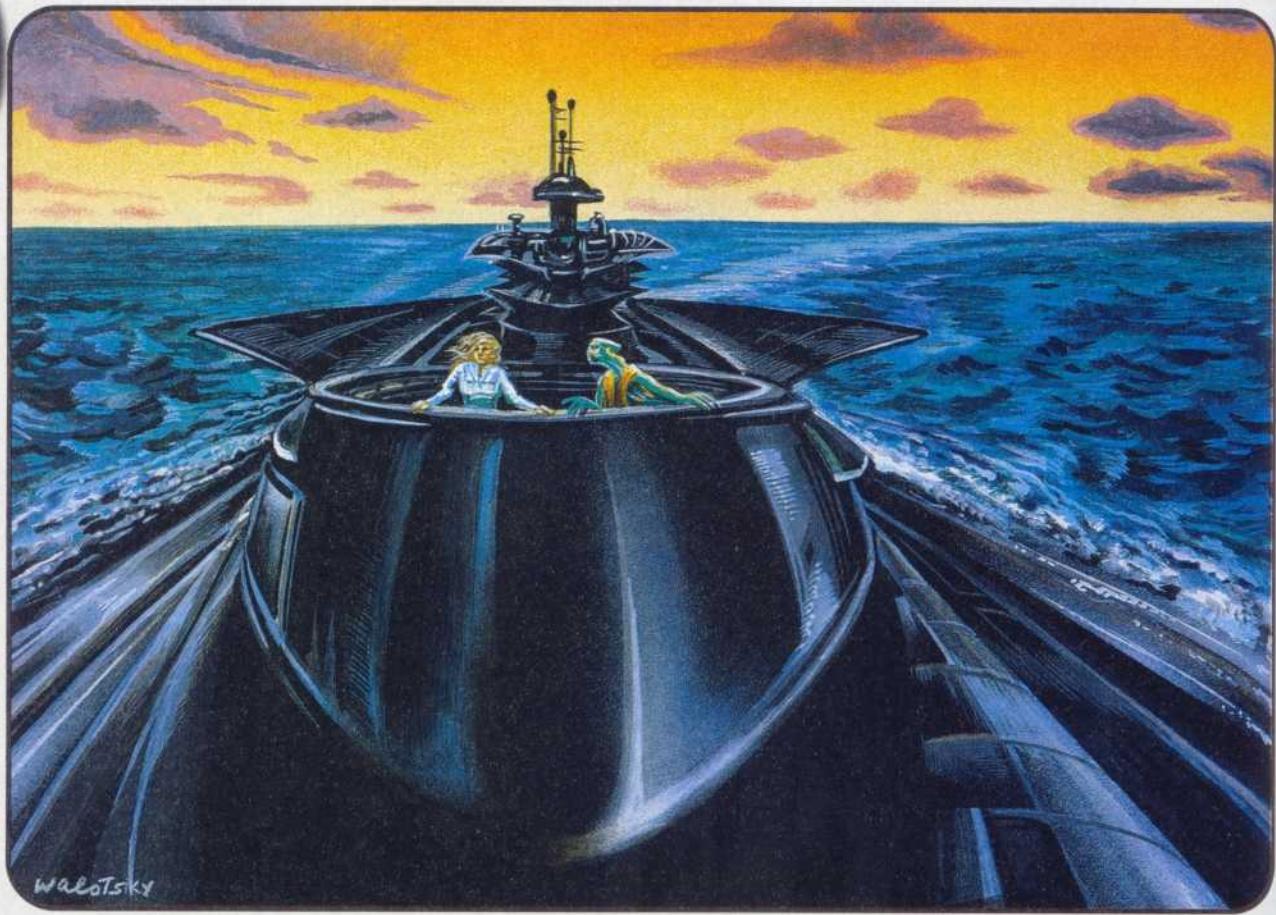
Bluefall's ocean is home to one of the largest navies ever built. One thousand Regency Sea Navy ships and boats keep the peace. As in space, most are patrol vessels smaller than a frigate. They double as sentries and commercial assistance vessels, often going to the rescue of a lost fisherman or amateur yachtsman. Almost a fifth of the Sea Navy's craft are supercavitating submarines. The main strength of the Sea Navy fleet can be found in seventeen powerful battleships and six aircraft carriers. Together, these vessels allow the Sea Navy to project force anywhere on the surface.

Secretary Mary Kytola (Hf/Orlamu/DTO-8) leads the Regency Sea Navy. A career military officer who studied with Hale at the Ericis academy, Kytola took control of the water navy soon after the Regency established it in 2470. At first reluctant to leave the Stellar Navy, Kytola soon found sailing was in her blood. Although she never commanded a Sea Navy vessel, Kytola can be found spending evenings and vacations cruising the bays of Regency Island aboard the *Destroyer*, her small yacht. Rumor has it that one of the other secretaries joins her each night.

Excellent training and frequent attack drills make for an infantry with swift response time and the will to use overpowering force. The Regency Army is fairly small; both navies have more active personnel. On Bluefall, the lack of land has reduced the need for land forces, and the Army is the poor stepchild of the other branches, relying on them for transport and strike capability. Morale within the Army has stayed high thanks to mild discipline and pleasant duty guarding sunny beaches.

Secretary Nadine Cox (Hf/Orion/DCS-6) has been given responsibility for upgrading the neglected Regency infantry, armor, and artillery. Promoted to her position in 2498, Hale and Cox see eye-to-eye on the need to improve Regency land assets. Her only competitor for the position was Commander Kalden, Hale's famous sidekick during the flight from Orion space. He declined so that he could continue to lead the elite infantry defending Regency Island itself.

With stellar nations sending more and more people to live on Bluefall, a growing number of the planet's inhabitants bear no loyalty to its government. Cox has begun a systematic review of Army training and operating procedures. While the Army is likely to stay small, Cox hopes to change it from a small, weak force to a small elite one. The Regency Island Guard has become her model, and she works closely with Commander Kalden to reform the Army. Their recent training programs have included both counter-terrorism and riot suppression exercises.



## ECONOMY

Despite the absurdly high number of individuals in the Aegis system who devote their lives to interstellar intrigue and Machiavellian politics, the schemers' influence on everyday business is often overstated. After all, all the conferences in the world won't support the Regency economy. The Regent refuses to allow his citizens to devote themselves exclusively to supporting the citizens, diplomats, and tourists of Old Space. Bluefall must be able to support itself when its new guests find other interests—the Third Galactic War, for example. To encourage other trades, the Regency supports ventures in desalination and sea mining, petroleum and plastics, and aquaculture.

As might be expected on a water planet, much of Bluefall's economy depends on the sea. In addition to providing easy transportation, the sea is also the planet's primary source of production. Minerals, fissionable deuterium, and water exports can be sifted from it, and sea mining provides a nice secondary business for many desalination plants.

Petroleum has been important to Bluefall since the discovery of oil in 2330. Although deep-sea moorings, underwater mining rigs, and pumping stations require huge up-front investment, the wealth of petroleum below the seafloor offers a more than profitable return. Ancient, primitive life on the oceans, compressed by time and the weight of tons of water, has produced a light, sweet oil. Bluefall's petroleum especially lends itself toward industrial use in plastics, one of Bluefall's principal industries.

The Regency has an excellent reputation as a producer of high-grade plastics. Regency corporations take orders from manufacturing plants in Aegis and the rest of the Verge, developing molds and parts for various functions. They also store

unprocessed plastic for shipping. The Regency has vowed to protect plastics and other industries by supporting them with subsidies and levying tariffs on any competitor.

The third dominant industry of the planet is aquaculture. Fishing is an honorable occupation on Bluefall, and the islanders' mile-long nets catch hundreds of thousands of pounds of fish each day. But that's not nearly enough to feed the hungry. The dominant food source for Bluefall is kelp. Enormous kelp beds line the volcanic sea ridges around most of Bluefall's islands; farming companies tend these beds and harvest the stock four times a year. The unprocessed kelp is sent to treatment facilities that render it edible. The same processes that make island kelp edible remove what little taste the crop has, and so a large culinary industry has arisen, devoted to kelp's skillful preparation.

The last of the Regency's economic centers isn't a source of production at all; it's the Verge Stock Exchange. Through the Vessy, the financial firms of Bluefall make a profit. Through taxes assessed on earnings, so does the Regency.

## CULTURE

Bluefall is home to more than 300 million Regency citizens. Life on the planet is comfortable, with temperatures averaging 20° C (68° F) and little variance on even the coldest or hottest days. The daily rains are brief, and the entire society is geared toward wringing the most out of each sunny day.

Regency natives prefer light, loose clothing in gray and blue tones, in athletic styles. Sailing, surfing, and sunning are popular pastimes, and more than one visiting diplomat has found herself staying a few extra days to research an extensive report on the recreational habits of the local population. Even

Regency citizens find it difficult to take the beatific setting for granted.

Regency culture resembles the Orion culture that most of its citizens left behind a century ago. Most Regency citizens are open-minded; indeed, Bluefall has become a microcosm of the Orion League, with semi-independent settlements operating under the shield of an unifying government. In other ways, Regency citizens are clearly a separate breed. The populace demonstrates a patriotic fervor that's rare in the League, rising to near Thuldan levels at times. Moreover, while the League's diverse mix has stabilized since its formation, Bluefall's mix of people and cultures changes with each new wave of immigrants from the stellar nations. As an ever-expanding melting pot, Bluefall is more diverse than the Orions who resettled it.

## MEDIA

An autocratic regime hasn't stopped the growth of a media-dominated society. Most residences on Bluefall have Grid holo links; almost nine out of ten are connected to the comm grid. For the most part, holo manufacture is dominated by entertainment conglomerates. A variety of distractions are broadcast every second of the 28-hour day. The recent fad in holo circuits, always desperate for novelty, is adding the third dimension to films from the 20th and 21st centuries.

Some holo channels devote themselves to a single topic, such as news and financial services. Most of the islands have their own local news channel, and the larger ones boast as many as a dozen. Regency news agencies enjoy a surprising level of freedom; reporters who pass a security check can gain access to Regency Island, for instance.

The most popular network, carried across Bluefall and the Aegis system via satellites and mass transceivers, is Universal Media, a subsidiary of a Borealin corporation of the same name. It carries the most popular entertainment shows and holofilms from the Stellar Ring, but it maintains its edge through its five continuously updated news programs. Its news personalities are well known by the locals for their journalism, interviews, and dramatic on-location reporting.

## MASK & BAUBLE STUDIOS

*The oldest continuously running studio in the Verge\**

One of three major production studios, M&B is responsible for the release of two dozen holofilms, 50 ongoing holo serials, and the planet's largest studio and postproduction facilities. M&B's reputation for modern facilities and closely shepherding its talents has made it a favorite for rising stars. Together with the Regency's media junkies, M&B's success has made Bluefall the entertainment capital of the Verge.

M&B's studio and headquarters lie on the southwest side of Hughes Island, along a row of streets filled with the trendy restaurants, cafes, and hotels of the Watertower District. As part of the local trendiness arms race, many buildings near the studio have been rebuilt into elaborate architectural confections, each trying to outdo its neighbors.

Because of its high-profile media stars and its flashy street life, the Watertower District has become a popular tourist spot, complete with air car tours of the studio and flybys of the homes of M&B actors, directors, and talking heads. On the district's boardwalk, tourists flock to catch a glimpse of directors, reporters, and talk-show hosts. Despite the constant publicity, many celebrities are still willing to stop and sign an autograph.

## CELESTE RIBAUT NEWS ANCHOR, UNIVERSAL MEDIA

### Level 9 human Free Agent

STR 9	(0)	INT 9	(0)
DEX 9	(0)	WIL 11	(+1)
CON 9		PER 14	
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 12+/11/5/2	
Move: sprint 16, run 10, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 3	
Perk: Great Looks, Celebrity		Flaw: Temper (Moderate)	

### Attacks

Unarmed—power 11/5/2 d6s/d6+2s/d4w LI/0

### Defenses

None

### Skills

Athletics [9], Unarmed [9]—power [11], Vehicle Operation [9], Stamina [9]—endurance [10], Knowledge [9]—computer [11], deduce [13], Administration [9]—bureaucracy [10], Awareness [11]—perception [12], intuition [14], Creativity [11]—journalist composition [12], Investigate [11], Resolve [11], Street Smart, Culture [14], Deception [14]—bluff [15], bribe [15], Interaction [14]—bargain [15], charm [16], interview [18], seduce [16], taunt [15].

### Gear

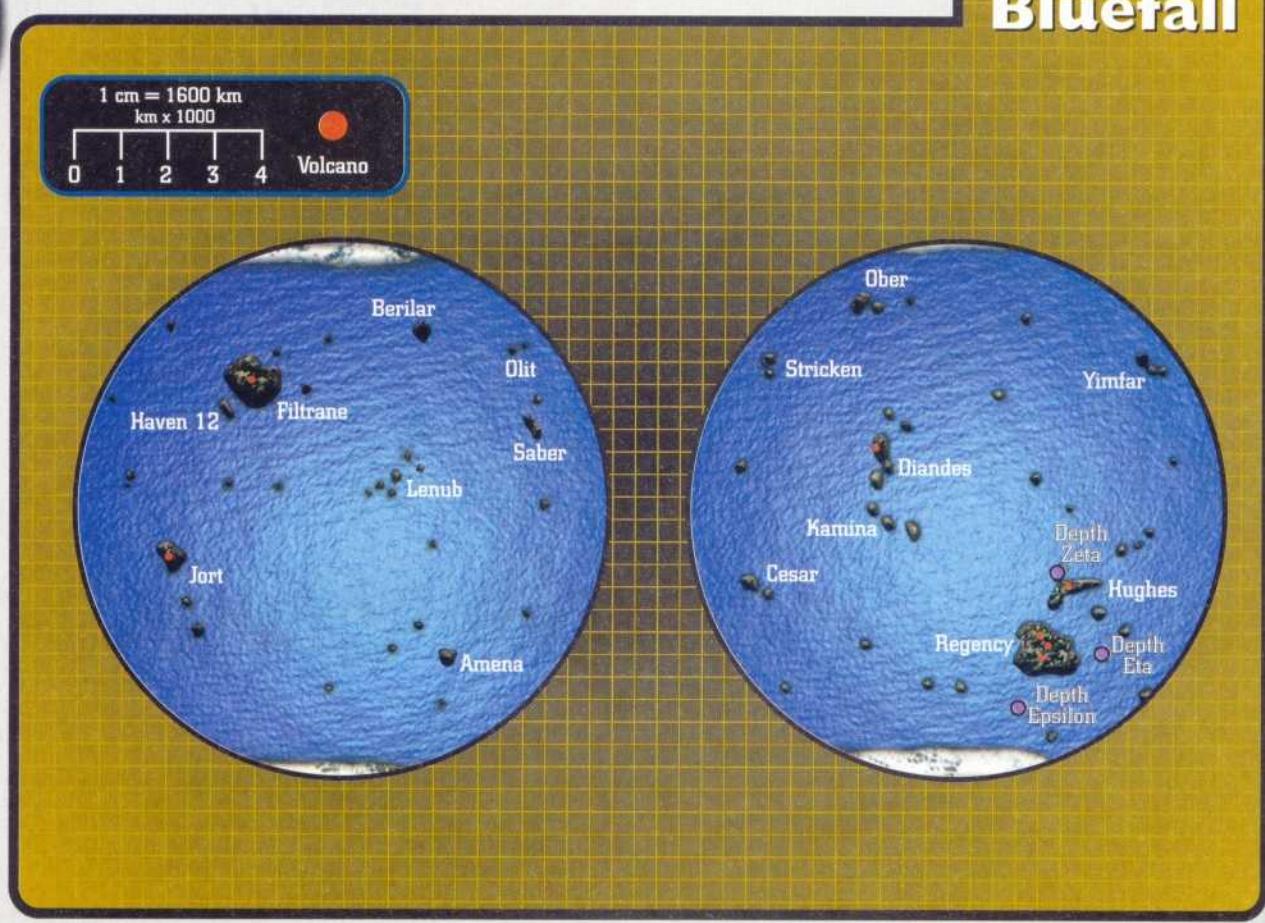
Holorecorder, microphone, orbital uplink, cell phone, business dress.

Though she is only 28 years old, Ribaut has risen through the ranks faster than any of her peers in the business. Since completing compulsory education, she has spent most of her life in front of the camera. In fact, Ribaut's face is only slightly less well known than that of the Regent. Her position has helped to make her a popular public figure, across almost all divisions of age, race, and gender.

Born to Borealin parents, Ribaut has remained steadfastly neutral on the issue of integration with the stellar nations. Many figure that it is only a matter of time before the ambitious woman attempts to secure a position within the Regency government. Others speculate that Bluefall cannot hold her, and she will leave for the populated worlds of Old Space.

Rumor has it that an important member of her research staff recently left, and Ribaut's stories are suffering as a result. The evidence of her decline, some say, can be found in the story Ribaut is currently pursuing. The story is a touching human interest piece about a small colony of kelp weavers on an isolated island; Ribaut claims it is a documentary and she hopes to use it to launch a series of "Bluefall Diaries" about everyday life.

Many of Ribaut's fans see her current work as a waste of a great talent. They hope and pray that she will soon return to the steady diet of puffy celebrity interviews, political exposés, and muckraking that made her famous and feared by the diplomatic classes. Sources close to Ribaut claim that she has steadfastly refused the worst of these stories, but may be tiring of her isolation. In many ways, Ribaut's personal and professional life has become a story in itself.



### AEGIS GRID

The Aegis Grid has been ground into obsolescence by bureaucratic procrastination, growth, and overuse. Anyone using the local comm network must endure absurd delays, dropped transmissions, and other annoyances. For all of Bluefall's fast-paced media mavens, the lousy service is a terrible burden; many expensive media services include independent transmission lines. Truth be told, it's an embarrassment to the system, primitive and even mildly unreliable.

Some see one of Bluefall's few flaws and realize that someone will make a tidy sum providing Grid hardware and software. The chief competitors in this contract bid are VoidCorp and Insight, and both nations have negotiators attempting to close a deal with the Regency. VoidCorp has the advantage of a working relationship with the Regency after closing the deal on Redcrown, but Insight enjoys the advantage of being a friend to the Orions during GW2. Some more surprising candidates, including Esmer Technologies, a Solar Grid-engineering corporation, and Netcoast, an Orion multimedia firm, have stepped forward to make their bids.

In a recent address, the Regent acknowledged the need to solve Bluefall's communication problems. Hale appears to enjoy being courted by so many bidders, and he certainly enjoys the inflationary nature of their offers.

### BLUEFALL

*This is a world men will fight over* was the pronouncement of Robin Hughes, Bluefall's first explorer. While no one would question that Bluefall is worth fighting for, violence isn't toler-

ated on this paradise planet. (Don't let the action-adventure holo "Sapphire Jewels" fool you.) Bluefall is the ideal place for the rich and powerful to leave the cares of the galaxy behind. The exquisite beaches are only matched by the exquisite hospitality of the Orion hosts. . . .

—Cook's Guide to Open Space, Vol. 9 (2364)

Bluefall's potential as a home for humanity has been realized, but in 2499, many question whether the wars Hughes prophesied for Bluefall are just beginning. The records of the original colonists indicate that during the Second Galactic War, the Aegis system formed an island of peace. Armed with one of the strongest fleets in the Verge, the colonists of Bluefall patrolled Aegis and nearby star systems. During the Long Silence, Bluefall enjoyed an era of peace impossible to emulate in the battlefield worlds of the Stellar Ring.

Set near the center of the Verge, Bluefall naturally evolved into its cosmopolitan heart. When they were cut off from the resources of the stellar nations, the Verge systems developed their own trading economies. While a few systems fought wars that imitated the great conflict back home, most concentrated on survival. Vessels laden with cargo traversed the Verge systems, some carrying the property of free traders and some owned by a government. Few colonies could produce everything the growing industrialized cities needed. With the exception of the 12 years between the Vanishing and the arrival of Hale's refugees, Bluefall has served as the linchpin of Verge economics.

The return of the stellar nations hasn't changed the economics of the Verge, but it has radically altered life on Bluefall. Every stellar nation with an interest in the Verge—in other words, all of them—has an interest in Bluefall. Once a financial

center that hosted the occasional conference of Verge leaders, since 2497 Bluefall has been ground zero for political power plays. On Bluefall the stellar nations meet to decide the fate of billions of Vergers. Sometimes these diplomatic discussions are heated; both the Galactic Concord and the Regency government must struggle to preserve order between the Starmechs and the Orlamus, between VoidCorp and Insight, and between the Thuldans and everyone else.

Fortunately, Bluefall's terrain makes it easy to separate antagonists. Each stellar nation has claimed an island or an archipelago in Bluefall's oceans. These islands double as fortress outposts and diplomatic embassies; each stellar nation is free to rule its island as desired. The Regency claims Bluefall as a whole, including Regency, Hughes, and numerous independent islands. Unfortunately, conflict is increasing as available space decreases. Land is already growing scarce as the population continues to soar.

The Regency government, assisted by the Galactic Concord and most of the stellar nations, has adapted to the drastic population increase. Emigration from the Stellar Ring has almost doubled the Bluefall population in only four years. After some initial struggles, the Regency government has put the most immediate crises behind it; Bluefall produces enough food, water, and shelter to meet the demand.

Bluefall has the potential for drastic change. The scarcity of land has prompted the usual solutions. Since it's difficult to expand outward, buildings are climbing upward; the first kilometers-high skyscrapers are already under construction. Within a decade, the skyline of Hughes Island, among others, could be radically changed. Growth onto the seafloor can be expected to accelerate with the initial success of the Depth Epsilon, the planet's first undersea city. Finally, the Regency is considering setting up colonies of its own, on Hudson in the Rinstoke system and on Rivendale in the Terivine system.

The factors that produce overcrowding—population growth and a free immigration policy—aren't likely to change, and those factors will surely reshape Bluefall.

## A BLUE PLANET

Only 2% of Bluefall's surface is dry land; water covers the rest. Ice caps float at the poles, one of few surfaces untouched by settlements. The scarcity of land is one of the planet's few imperfections, as visitors to Bluefall are pleased to discover. Newcomers enjoy the gravity, which at 0.89g allows a level of comfort without causing significant muscle atrophy or decay. Visitors can also enjoy the warm, subtropical temperatures and usually peaceful skies. Even finer is the planet's rich—some would say intoxicating—breathable atmosphere of nitrogen and oxygen. Humans live happily on Bluefall's surface, without the need for filters, masks, or e-suits.

## FLORA

Plant life blankets Bluefall, both above and in its waters. Extensive botanical studies have catalogued and analyzed over two million separate plant species. Many of Bluefall's phyla resemble lifeforms familiar to humanity. Unfortunately, despite the similarity that Bluefall's climate bears to that of Earth's, the alien biology is not completely compatible. Initial attempts to eat untreated plants met with disaster, as many of the first immigrants didn't heed the warnings of the scientists who had surveyed the planet. The waves of sickness that passed through the colony in its early days serve as a reminder that, even in this paradise, assumptions prove dangerous.

## Flag of the Regency of Bluefall

The largest source of plant biomass lies in the oceans. Near the surface, great beds of kelp and plankton flourish. Processed kelp and plankton have more than doubled the volume of Bluefall's food supply. Surrounding the islands are great kelp farms, now cared for and regularly harvested by Bluefall's inhabitants. Kelp farming has become an industry that employs more than a million, and the bounty of food has allowed Bluefall to export its unique cuisine to worlds outside the Aegis system.

Deep below the surface, instruments report other species of plant life that thrive without sunlight. This deep vegetation harnesses Bluefall's abundant geothermal energy to survive, along the trenches of the ocean floor. The depths these plants prefer make the prospect of harvesting difficult, although Regency scientists are learning to grow the deep vegetation in an artificial environment. If the experiments work, plants that feed on the infrared spectrum may nourish many human settlements.

The scarcity of land hasn't prevented plant life from taking root. The sandy soil doesn't offer much purchase, and most growth is limited to grasses and light undergrowth. True trees are rare, limited to the largest islands. Bluefall's light gravity does allow its few trees to grow taller than elsewhere. Ironically, the sparse trees have reinforced Bluefall's image as the planet of tropical islands.

Attempts to introduce alien plants have met with little success. Most foreign flora introduced to the Bluefall biosphere dies in a matter of days. Tests have confirmed that the life native to Bluefall doesn't interact well with the new arrival; it's difficult for the new plants to adapt to a saline soil. The Regency government has given up the practice, choosing to process and treat the native plants so that they become edible to Bluefall's sentients. Most of Bluefall's island inhabitants follow the Regency's example. To date, the Regency government has been generous with the stellar nations as they build their own colonies. The Regency provides botanists and other experts to assist colonists in crop selection, growth, and harvest.

Only Filtrane Island has rejected the "going native" approach. After burning or eradicating all life indigenous to Filtrane, Thuldans found it easier to support a biosphere of species alien to Bluefall. While the island now requires constant maintenance to preserve the purity of its biosphere, Thuldans of Filtrane can feel at home in the familiar environment. The radical measures employed on Filtrane make it unlikely that the practice of importing an entire ecosystem will spread beyond this location.

## FAUNA

As might be expected, Bluefall's lush vegetation feeds a diverse variety of animals. Most native species are marine: mollusks, other invertebrates, and fish. Individual species possess fea-

## NUR AL-HAQ

### CONCORD DEPUTY AMBASSADOR

#### Level 9 Human Diplomat (Free Agent)

STR 10	(0)	INT 10	(0)
DEX 9	(0)	WIL 10	(0)
CON 9		PER 13	
Durability: 9/9/4/4	Action check: 11+/10/5/2		
Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4	#Actions: 2		
Reaction score: Ordinary/2	Last resorts: 3		

#### Attacks

Unarmed	5/2/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
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#### Defenses

Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

#### Skills

Athletics [10]; Vehicle Operation [9]; Stamina [9]; Business [10]; Law [10]-*Regency law* [13]; Knowledge [11]-*computer* [12], *language: Standard* [14]; Administration [10]-*bureaucracy* [12], *management* [11]; Awareness [10]; Culture [13]-*diplomacy* [22], *etiquette: Aegis* [18]; Deception [13]; Interaction [13]-*bargain* [14], *charm* [14], *seduce* [15]; Leadership [13]-*Inspire* [15].

#### Gear

Microcomputer with biokey; formal clothing; cigarettes; lighter; psi-detector; briefcase.

The 2499 assignment of Nur al-Haq to a position of importance in the Aegis delegation was something of a mystery. While he had proven himself capable in more than one instance back in the Stellar Ring, the native of planet Concord had just celebrated his 26th birthday when he was given orders to depart for Bluefall. While many inhabitants of Old Space consider the Verge a provincial backwater, the Galactic Concord has made its consideration of the frontier's importance clear. Aegis is its most important assignment in the region, and the competition to be assigned to Bluefall's shores is understandably intense. The well-known beauty of its sunny beaches doesn't hurt its popularity among the political classes, either.

Receiving the ambassador's post despite being a relative newcomer has given the young al-Haq quite a reputation as an ambitious, subtle schemer. He has done nothing to dispel the aura that surrounds him. He knows his current position is a result of his once intimate relationship with Karel Denisenko, a Concord minister assigned to the Committee on Verge Integration. At first, the Verge was simply a place of adventure and excitement. After his marriage to Isabelle Errioc (HI/Concord/DTO-7), a Concord Administrator, al-Haq devoted himself to fulfilling the high demands of his office. He's also desperately afraid of Minister Denisenko's spiteful vengeance; ironically, she's completely forgotten his existence.

Nur al-Haq is a tall man with black hair and olive skin who projects an air of confidence he doesn't always feel. He has a fondness for well-tailored gray or black suits because he thinks they make him look distinguished. In fact, to most onlookers, the overall effect is to make the young diplomat resemble an undertaker.

tures unknown to previous human experience, but the roles of most phyla have been duplicated in Bluefall's oceans. Large schools of small fish seem more common than truly massive individual ones; the largest fish discovered to date, measuring seven meters, was caught by a trawler off the coast of Hughes Island, then released after study by Regency marine biologists. Mollusks and radial invertebrates have grown to greater size, but these don't threaten Bluefall's many amateur divers.

Plankton serve as the primary food source for sea life, and tens of thousands of species of fish exist, including odd local taxonomic categories such as the turtle fish, ray fish, and sting fish, all not found elsewhere. Moore's sharks, named for their discoverer, are unquestionably the most dangerous marine predator, greatly feared for their ability to attack in unison with tooth and mental attacks. With the possible exception of the deepfallen, no pseudomammalian sea dwellers have been found on Bluefall.

Terrestrial creatures are rare and highly specialized, including the reptilelike herbivores and scavengers populating most of the larger islands. Herbivores outnumber carnivores by a factor of 20, and most Bluefall carnivores prefer scavenging over hunting.

Fliers are even rarer, with variation restricted to true flying creatures: two fish species and a single species of featherless, pterodactyl-like birds. The water-borne fliers are Bluefall's *Volutus piscis*, or "flying fish." The other flier is the sunsoarer, a predator that usually avoids humans. The sunsoarer is a four-legged, winged reptilian that inhabits Bluefall's numerous island lagoons; as the number of humans on Bluefall grows, the sunsoarer's natural habitat is diminishing. Attacks by sunsoarers defending their territory have become more common. Many xenobiologists find the planet's lack of bird species surprising, given the planet's mild gravity, but the birds introduced by the Thuldans on Filtrane have shown no inclination or ability to spread beyond that island.

#### CLIMATE

Cook's *Guide to Open Space* laments that explorers failed to find more worlds like Bluefall. Ever since the planet was surveyed at the start of the 24th century, its climate has been the subject of praise by travel agents, Orion soldiers, and poets. Even the venerable Liad Cook (Hm/Orion/NP) eventually quit cataloguing planets and retired to Hughes Beach.

Since the encyclopedia entry, the original colonists have been replaced by new immigrants from the stars, but the climate is unchanged. Near the equator, a wide band of Bluefall remains tropical throughout the year. Smaller bands of subtropical and temperate zones extend out toward the poles. Polar ice caps form during the cold season, but melt off with the return of summer.

Precipitation is moderate throughout the year. Most of the islands, cloaked in humidity, experience mild rain showers during the late morning or early afternoon. The rain is important to the few land farms, but the harvest of freshwater is even more important. But the daily rains are just the puny relatives of Bluefall's great summer ocean storms.

The ocean storms are rarely mentioned in the travel brochures, but every decade or so, hurricanes wreak havoc on Bluefall, especially on the smaller islands. The worst hurricanes have forced the government to evacuate civilians to Regency Island, whose fortifications are strong enough to withstand hurricanes. During the half-dozen worst typhoons since Bluefall's resettlement, the Regency government island

## BLUEFALL POPULATION

### 427,623,289 SENTIENTS

Human	91%	Austrin	1%
Orion	61%	Nariac	1%
Thuldan	9%	Insight	3%
Orlamu	6%	Hatire	1%
Rigunmor	2%	Borealin	2%
Solar	3%	StarMech	1%
VoidCorp	5%	Independent	2%
Concord	3%		
Alien	9%		
Sesheyen	13%	T'sa	15%
Mechalus	11%	Weren	22%
Fraal	39%		

The Regency is considering setting up colonies of its own, on Hudson in the Rinstoke system and on Rivendale in the Terivine system.

The factors that produce overcrowding—population growth and a free immigration policy—aren't likely to change, but those factors will surely reshape Bluefall.

has housed as many as 10 million citizens of Bluefall for up to six months while reconstruction takes place. Not surprisingly, predicting storms and hurricanes is a respected pastime for scientist and layman alike.

The idyllic conditions influence all facets of life on the planet. While tourism helps the Bluefall economy, Bluefall's value to the Verge is much greater than a simple resort destination. Bluefall's friendly climate catapulted the Verge from a little-known frontier at the end of the galactic arm to a place of interest for most, if not all, of the stellar nations. Bluefall became the base for exploring the rest of the Verge, the home to which the explorers could return.

## DESALINATION

Given the minute land area and the salinity of the planet's oceans, it's no surprise that sources of freshwater on Bluefall are few and far between. Inland lakes provide some water, as do rivers. The populated and developed islands use carefully constructed reservoirs and dams to tap as much rainfall as possible. The newest approach involves gigantic plastic water nets that collect rainfall before it reaches the ocean. The fragile nets are easily damaged by heavy storms, lightning, and sabotage.

Despite fresh water recycling, redirection, and collection efforts, it's still not enough. Less than a fifth of Bluefall's own water supply comes directly from freshwater sources. Bluefall's large population and the need for additional water elsewhere in the Verge create the need to harvest the abundant water both from the oceans and from the air.

Desalination facilities provide 85% of the planet's water production. The process of removing salt and heavy minerals from water has become a great science on Bluefall. The principal method is flash electrodialysis. Powered by efficient mass reactors, a powerful current of electricity is passed through salt water in a holding tank, tearing the sodium and chlorine ions out of the water. Freshwater is the result. Other desalination methods include reverse osmosis and distillation. All of the major islands use desalination plants of one kind or another, but only Regency, Filtrane, Hughes, and Jort have the industrial capacity to export water in quantity.

As the demand continues to increase, desalination plants

have gained new competition. As the skyline of many Bluefall settlements attest, moisture farming is a popular alternative method for harvesting fresh water. Relying on simple principles of condensation, cooled moisture rods rise into the air and capture water vapor directly from the atmosphere. Tall pipes convey the water into the buildings below; their height conveniently keeps the water under pressure. To date, most moisture farming is limited to small settlements and consumer use.

Through all of these methods, an estimated 304 trillion liters of water are produced each day. A third of this volume leaves Bluefall for thirsty colonies elsewhere in the Verge, never to return.

## ACRIM DESALINATION FACILITY

Located on the easternmost edge of populous Hughes Island, the Acrim desalination plant produces the largest volume of drinkable freshwater of any industrial facility. It's certainly the largest in the Verge, and perhaps the largest such facility in all of explored space. An engineering marvel, the Acrim site provides almost a tenth of the freshwater produced on Bluefall—more than 30 trillion liters a day. The desalination plant takes up more than 10 acres of precious land on Hughes Island, but no one begrudges the use of the land. Recent expansions to the site have extended it farther into the surrounding bay.

The facility, like the independent corporation that owns and operates it, is split into four divisions. The actual desalination plant lies on the coastal side of the Acrim facility. Within it, as the public relations slogans say, the magic happens. Powerful pumps draw in seawater at a terrific rate. In one of three five-story buildings, the water is pooled in a gigantic freestanding water tank reinforced by gravitic stabilizers and mass neutralizers. There, Bluefall's brackish ocean water is transformed into freshwater and piped to the export division.

The corporate export division moves the water all over the planet and throughout the Verge. From the west wing, numerous pumps drive the water either into the Hughes Island pipes or onto cargo vessels that carry it to other worlds. The south wing of the facility is devoted to research and development. Finally, the center of the operation is a 12-story building housing Acrim's administration division where Claris Acrim (Hf/Solar/DTO-5) oversees her grand creation.

The facility has just entered its tenth year of operation. When it was originally constructed, many analysts predicted that Claris Acrim had constructed the next Olaris dam—in other words, a useless piece of overpriced engineering. The project demanded more than 10,000 engineers and workers. At the time, the population of Bluefall was at 200 million. Put simply, neither Bluefall nor the Verge needed the Acrim project.

In retrospect, Claris Acrim seems a brilliant visionary. With the return of stellar nations and a new flood of colonists, both Bluefall and the Verge need Acrim's water. Since 2497, more than a billion sentients have found their way to the Verge. Acrim's investment led more than a few to wonder whether she somehow heard about the end of the Second Galactic War before the rest of the Verge. The rumors of Acrim's Old Space connections have never been substantiated, and the company continues to operate safely and ethically.

The Acrim facility has kept abreast of the latest advances in civil engineering. Like most desalination plants on Bluefall, Acrim relies on flash electrolysis. Acrim laboratories, located nearby, continue research into an easier way to produce fresh water. If an easy method is discovered, the Acrim laboratory could destroy its parent's profit margin. It's an interesting conflict of interest.

## KALDEN

### COMMANDER, REGENCY ISLAND

#### Level 9 weren Combat Spec

STR 14	(+2)	INT 10	(0)
DEX 8	(0)	WIL 8	(0)
CON 12		PER 8	
Durability: 18/18/9/9		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: sprint 22, run 14, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 1	

#### Attacks

Unarmed—power 16/8/4 d4+2w/d4+4w/d4+2m LI/0

#### Defenses

Cerametal armor: d6+1 (LI), d8+1 (HI), d6 (En)

#### Skills

Armor [14]—combat [18]; Athletics [9]; Unarmed [14]—power [16]; Modern [8]—rifle [11]; Stamina [9]—endurance [10]; Knowledge [11]—computer [12]; language: Standard [15]; language: Weren [15]; System [10]—sensors [12]; weapons [12]; Tactics [10]—infantry [12]; vehicle [12]; space [12]; Administration [10]; Awareness [10]; Interaction [11]; Leadership [8]—command [12].

#### Gear

Uniform; computer gauntlet; comm gear; X3D with recent briefings.

In 2459, when he was 15 years old, Kalden of Kurg left Orlamu space to join the Ericis Military Academy, an elite Orion military institution on the planet Ericis. Inspired by tales of glory on the Austrin-Orion border, Kalden wanted nothing more than to earn fame and honor fighting in the Second Galactic War. At the academy he mastered the use of human technology. It was also at the academy that Kalden met his mentor and idol, Christopher Hale.

Hale's enviable battlefield prowess attracted Kalden's notice, and becoming a member of Hale's inner circle of friends changed Kalden's destiny forever. Hale spoke of honor and dignity—and the need for peace. Kalden found his outlook changing quickly. And when academy officials put Hale under arrest, it was Kalden who led his rescue. Kalden joined the exodus out of the Stellar Ring, taking a privileged place by Hale's side as they journeyed to the Verge and to the Aegis system. There wasn't much fighting, but the never-ending task of overseeing the migration of 5 million sentients kept Kalden busy for years.

Immediately after resettling Bluefall and establishing Regency Hall, Christopher Hale charged Kalden with the defense of the island. It's a post that the 57-year-old weren has filled with distinction, though rumors regarding his recent betrothal to Raiaza, a weren who maintains her Orlamu citizenship, made some question his loyalty to the Regency. Kalden's spirited defense of the island against Thuldan aggression in 2498 quelled any remaining doubts regarding his loyalty. His devotion to the Regent is absolute. Still in his prime, Kalden is expected to stay in his current position for years to come, despite opportunities for promotion.

Kalden keeps himself in top physical shape with daily martial arts workouts.

## REGENCY ISLAND

At 1,153,732 square kilometers, Regency is the largest of Bluefall's islands. Three shield volcanoes, now dormant, raised the landmass from the ocean depths. The largest of these volcanoes, Mt. Tribane, rises 6,745 meters above sea level. It towers over its neighbors, Mt. Hekla, at 4,342 meters and Mt. Kohn, at 2,542 meters. Together, the three broad mountains created the broad, flat slopes that make Regency Island the giant of Bluefall.

Regency Island, if not for its strategic importance, might have developed into a popular vacation destination like Hughes Island. The original explorers and colonists recognized that Regency is not only Bluefall's largest island, but also the most spectacular. The three mountains and winding river have produced a scenic wonder framed by deep blue seas, plunging waterfalls, and beautiful flora. In more than one sense, it's the crown jewel of the Verge. Indeed, Regency Island once served as a private resort for high-ranking Orion officers on vacation and Orion officers stationed on Bluefall.

Back then, it was called Tribane Island, after the first Orion governor assigned to the Aegis system. Governor William Tribane remains famous for his impossible moods and mercurial temper. Diagnosed with an obsession disorder, he nonetheless proved an able administrator, and his famous invitation to allow unrestricted immigration was a stroke of genius—even though it complicates Bluefall's politics a century and a half later. Before taking his own life in 2347, Governor Tribane established the island as the bureaucratic center of the planet, and hence all Orion activity within the Verge. Regency is still the planet's capital, and its political and military center.

Much of the island's population serves the government in the bureaucracy, the military, or both. For some, military service is among the highest honors a Regency citizen can aspire to; for others, service is just a means to fame and fortune. Regardless of a candidate's motivation, the military's popularity allows it to enlist only the most qualified and dedicated. The Regency naval and stellar forces are the best trained independent forces in the Verge.

By long-standing practice, reinforced by government edicts, Regency Island is closed to most visitors. Even Regency citizens must obtain government permission to set foot on its shore. Only those with reason to visit—military, government, and agricultural personnel—are allowed onto the island. The tight security proved its value during the Thuldan attack of 2498. While Hale's militocracy may sometimes look for threats where there are none, even the most populous planet of the Verge can't ignore the dangers of the frontier.

## REGENCY MOUNTAINS

The towering peaks of Tribane, Hekla, and Kohn form a classic volcanic chain of descending size, pointing roughly toward Hughes Island. Weathering by ocean and wind has tamed some of the mountain slopes and provided the island with flat land as well as plunging canyon walls.

The volcanoes of Regency have been asleep for more than 500 years, according to Orion scientists. The occasional rumblings produced by Mt. Tribane and other islands in the chain would indicate that they're dormant, not extinct. At present, volcanologists are studying the subsurface volcanic rifts surrounding Regency Island in hopes of predicting a disastrous eruption. Fortunately for the inhabitants, recent studies don't reveal a buildup of activity. The Regency takes great pains to publicize these findings, which is a comforting reassurance to the inhabitants.

## PHLEGETHON RIVER

The island's largest river is the Phlegethon or "flaming" river, a strange body of water that flows from headwaters near the island's volcanic peak of Mt. Tribane. On its way to the sea it winds east and south through the island's best preserved wilderness and parks. As the river carves out a waterway, it also changes nature dramatically.

Near its source, the river runs quick. Many small waterfalls near the mountains keep the river exciting for tourists and amateur sailors. Even more exciting is its high temperature. Geothermal energy heats the river's upper reaches to a balmy 30° C, and this heat gave the river its name. For those lucky enough to visit Regency Island, the upper reaches of the Phlegethon are rightfully a standard stop on any tour.

It seems a different river by the time the Phlegethon winds past Kohn on its flat stretch to the sea. Here, the river is cooler and slower. No longer of much interest to the casual tourist, it remains a good source of freshwater and provides easy transport to the city. In addition, the river feeds a canal system that enables vessels to sail directly into the island's industrial centers from the river. Every day, cargo ships loaded with food and raw resources navigate the river to provide goods to Regency Island's 10 million inhabitants.

## REGENCY HALL

Concealed in the shadow of the island's largest mountain is the island's largest manmade structure: Regency Hall. The enormous complex of buildings, barracks, hangars, public halls, record depots, and supply centers has taken its name from the fact that it also serves as the personal residence of Christopher Hale and his immediate subordinates.

More important, Regency Hall's offices form the seat of government. From the bunkered depths of the island's comm network, Hale commands the Regency government and military. By extension, he influences citizens, planets, and stellar nations. An honor guard consisting of a thousand of the planet's finest infantry patrols the grounds. While they wear full dress uniforms to impress visiting diplomats, the Regent's Guard is also an elite unit expected to provide the last line of defense in the event of attack.

The heart of Regency Hall is composed of more than a dozen buildings that together form the apparatus that leads the Regency. The oldest buildings form a complex called the Office of the Regent, built into the northern slope of Mt. Tribane itself. About a dozen stories tall, the Office contains Hale's living quarters and his offices. While he has been the subject of dozens of holofilms, Hale surrounds himself with relatively few luxuries. The Spartan, military-style quarters he lives in make him even more popular with his troops and the population at large.

The Office of the Regent is not just an executive residence. It is also a bureaucratic and decision-making center, full of meeting rooms and chambers for public ceremonies. Behind the scenes, the Office is fully equipped with satellite links and land lines to various government centers on the island, in orbit, and undersea. Hale confers with his advisors and subordinates in the Dome of the Admiralty, at the top of the structure and with a view over both sea and mountain.

The Office also reaches almost a kilometer into the mountain rock. Here, the better protected half of the Office houses a full command and control center where government officials can issue orders to any Regency military asset in the Aegis

system—or beyond, using Nectaris Station's drivespace communication relay. To date, the equipment buried within Mt. Tribane has seen use only once, during the Thuldan attack of 2498.

Three fortified buildings adjacent to the Office are devoted to the Regency Army, Stellar Navy, and Sea Navy. The generals and admirals who command troops and vessels issue their orders from these three buildings, sometimes called the Regency Triangle. Each Secretary has an entire floor within the walls of the Triangle as well as a smaller office within the Office of the Regent.

Also within Regency Hall are the instruments of bureaucracy. Ministries of trade, commerce, transportation, labor, energy, education, and diplomacy each have their headquarters within a kilometer of one another. Surprisingly, the proximity of the various Regency power bases has fostered an esprit de corps rather than friction.

## SIGMA ONE

The starport and headquarters of the Regency Stellar Navy rests inland, near Mt. Hekla. Only naval personnel, naval contractors, and escorted guests are allowed on the Sigma One premises; base security is maintained by a detachment of 200 Regency marines.

Sigma One is the nerve center for all Regency military operations in the Aegis system or beyond. More than 200 landing pads and hangar bays allow more than half of the Regency Stellar Navy to land at a time. The base also provides satellite and ship repair, a munitions dump, and a security zone for foreign dignitaries. These VIPs land under protection before being whisked away to Regency Hall.

Fully half of the Stellar Navy's ships date back to the voyage from the Stellar Ring. Another third, mostly patrol vessels, were constructed in Bluefall's small shipyard facilities. The rest, including all of the Navy's largest craft, were constructed outside of the Aegis system—mostly in the established shipyards of Alaundril.

## SIGMA TWO

The Sigma Two military installation lies almost 400 kilometers away from Sigma One, on the island's western coast near the mouth of the Phlegethon River. Sigma Two is the primary base for the Regency Sea Navy. Although admirals navigate from desks back in Regency Hall, the operators who do the work at Sigma Two are the real strength of the navy. Eight major piers extend out into the sea, and at any given moment more than two dozen military vessels can be found in port. Some of these await crews or orders, and some are always being refitted and upgraded in the Navy's five drydocks.

Adjacent to Sigma Two itself are the naval shipyards that construct the Regency's naval craft. To maintain its superiority and state-of-the-art readiness, the Regency orders the construction of six to ten new vessels every year. And since many ships take two to five years to build, more than a dozen shipyards are kept in constant operation. The construction services are privately owned, but they are all supervised by the officers of the Sea Navy.

The Sigma Two base is obsessed with security; its sentries take no threat lightly. Hundreds of pillboxes, batteries, and fortifications encircle the docked naval vessels. Fishing and kelp farming are forbidden within a 50-kilometer radius. Fifty or more Navy craft maintain a defensive perimeter about 20 kilo-

meters from shore, and another dozen ships patrol the waters immediately surrounding Sigma Two. Ships and aircraft that don't heed the orders to leave the island's waters are fired upon and destroyed.

## HUGHES ISLAND

Mt. Hughes and the surrounding island rest a short 600 kilometers northeast of Regency Island; in fact, Mt. Hughes is part of the same volcanic chain. Like Regency, Hughes is claimed and owned by the Regency government; unlike it, Hughes is a free island. Visitors, merchants, and foreign diplomats are welcome to visit or live on Hughes. Those willing to pay a nominal fee can become permanent citizens of Bluefall.

Even from low orbit, it's easy to distinguish Hughes Island and its neighbor. Not only is Hughes smaller by half, but its long, spindly shape contrasts with the rectangular Regency Island. The island measures 780 kilometers long, in slow curve. It averages 110 kilometers wide, and has a single volcano, Mt. Hughes, the most active of the Regency volcanoes. The volcano's outgassing and occasional rumbles make it a popular destination.

The island's greenery and its long beaches have made Hughes a resort-filled paradise. For sightseers, Hughes is the ideal place to enjoy the best the frontier has to offer. The surfing on Hughes's beaches, both natural and gravity-assisted, is among the finest anywhere. With the glut of temporary residents, the island's shores glitter with commercialization. Merchants compete to profit from the arrival of each shipload of newcomers. Guides and tour agencies greet each shuttle as it lands at the Del Christo Spaceport.

Resorts, hotels, and attractions such as the Submarine Park and Volcano Mountain advertise fiercely. The Regency government rakes in the tax revenues of tourism, but it in turn reinvests much of the revenue in services that keep Hughes popular. Modern spaceport facilities, dependable skylanes and air traffic control, and a well-funded infrastructure go a long way toward making demanding visitors from the first worlds of Old Space happy. For many of these wealthy, soft-skinned aristocrats, Bluefall is the only place in the Verge worth honoring with a visit.

The overcrowding on Hughes can't be completely attributed to its guests. About 200 million Regency citizens live and work on Hughes. The dearth of land means that most of them live in condominiums or in skyscraper communities. Most of these citizens avoided direct service to the Regency government or military. They work in Bluefall's industries: desalination and chemical engineering, aquaculture, or plastics and petroleum. The Acrim desalination plant on the island's eastern shore is the largest.

As the largest Regency-owned island open to the public, Hughes is the center of Bluefall's economy. Most corporations native to Bluefall have headquarters on Hughes, and the Verge Stock Exchange can be found here. Recent advertisements boast that Hughes is no longer the place for businessmen of Bluefall to do business; it's the place for businessmen of the entire Verge to do business.

Hughes' interests are further divided by the needs of the Regency government and the diplomats. The state department has its primary offices here, and Orion Way—the ambassadors' row—is filled with consulates of every stellar nation. Important closed-door negotiations often move to other islands, but on Hughes the ambassadors attend frequent informal meetings with one another. As part of its efforts to foster peace, the Concord encour-

ages the ambassadors to keep lines of communication open.

For all this sunny splendor, the final group to make its home on Hughes darkens the island's charms. Organized crime finds the wealth of the residents of and (especially) the visitors to Hughes Island impossible to resist. Petty criminals can make a living through robbery, preying on the steady stream of tourists. More sophisticated rogues enjoy the opportunities for fraud. Finally, malfeasance on a grand scale influences Bluefall's politics. More than one stellar nation has enlisted support from illegal sources. Hughes is one of few places where Verge criminals can make a career.

Fortunately for the law-abiding islanders, the criminal groups operating on Hughes have been partially suppressed. Regency law enforcement uses a military code of justice that doesn't leave any opportunity for legal trickery and doesn't tolerate repeat offenders.

## NORTH BEACH

Hughes's longest beach stretches for 100 kilometers along the island's north face. North Beach is the center of the tourist trade, and its balmy waters are devoted to relaxation and recreation. Sailing is especially popular, thanks to a public navigation net that allows even amateur sailors to find their way home. Grav-assisted surfboards allow surfers to soar 12 meters into the air. Weekly surf team competitions draw a huge holo audience. At the same time that grav-surfing soars, freehand surfing has gained popularity as well. Finally, despite several deaths each month due to Moore's sharks, diving remains popular among tourists, much to the consternation of many locals.

The long stretch of developed coastline is divided into public and private beaches. Wealthy urbanites consider it a status symbol to own a villa along the hilly shore, even if they don't live there more than a week or two each year. Celebrities from the holofilm industry enjoy the climate as well, as the homes of Andrea Ceapure, Jack Everstar, Taizo Shirai, and Marybelle Kezzus attest.

While the high price of real estate on North Beach denies the average citizen a home or summer house on the shore, it has not prohibited the construction of hundreds of hotels. Serving foreign dignitaries from Old Space as well as family vacationers and even petty thieves looking for a nice place to hide, the hotel resorts of North Beach do a brisk business.

## JUBILEE RESORTS

The luxury hotels on Bluefall should be no surprise; Orion hospitality has always been among the finest. The first Jubilee Resort opened its doors in 2346, 30 years after the system's exploration. In 100 years following, the Jubilee Corporation opened another 24 hotels on Hughes Island. Jubilee Hughes, as the first hotel became known, has suffered only a single interruption of operations since its opening—the hotel's guests, staff, and management disappeared along with the rest of the population in 2452.

Twelve years later, Jubilee Hughes reopened its doors. A former restaurateur, Malcolm Doncaster (Hm/Orion/NP), paid 8,000 Orion dollars to the Regency for the hotel. Today, Jubilee Hughes charges that much for a single night's stay. The return of the stellar nations threatened the Doncaster monopoly, but the Jubilee Corporation wisely negotiated a settlement. In exchange for a percentage of the profits, Doncaster kept the hotel and its famous name. The Jubilee Corporation reopened many resorts that had lain dormant, using the fine reputation that Doncaster had built.

## Regency Island

1 cm = 900 km

Githorn Farms

Stade

Welcome  
Point

3

## Petroleum drilling Jungle

## Forest

Port

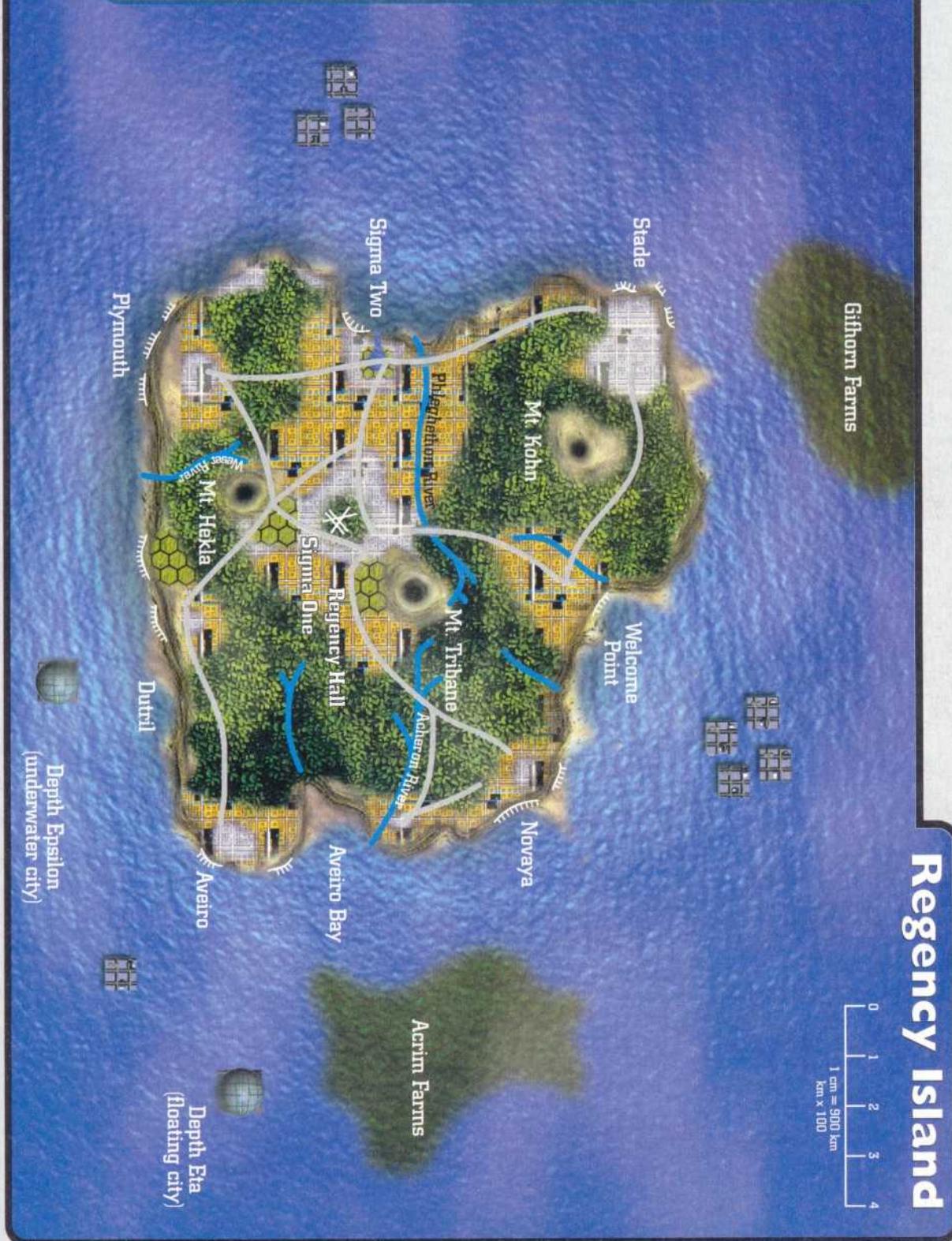
Starport

Bridge

## Major Road

Plymouth

Depth Epsilon  
(underwater city)



## VERGE STOCK EXCHANGE

The Verge Stock Exchange, or Vessy, is the only stock exchange on the frontier, as well as the largest commodities exchange. Every business day, the stocks, bonds, and options of more than 3,000 corporations are traded on the market floor. The Vessy is a rough market, and newcomers are warned that the sharks of local industries don't always play nice. Insider trading, for example, is a fact of life. About the only restriction is the responsibility of corporations not to deceive their shareholders. How shares are traded and how the Vessy's brokerages operate is largely unregulated.

As a result, the brokerage business on the Vessy is booming. While it was once known as the Bluefall Stock Exchange, now investors and corporations within 100 light-years come to make fortunes and fund their economic empires. For the average citizen, it's easy to lose a fortune, and even long-term investors have to be wary. Whole businesses, entire economies, can dry up on short notice. Residents of Verge systems without a drivesat rely on conservative investing controlled by a reputable agency on Bluefall.

## BASTION OF LIGHT

Among the consulates of the stellar nations along Orion Way stands a towering church topped by glowing golden towers: the Bastion of Light of the Church of Humanity Reformation. The church employs a staff of 100 and is both a mission and outreach center for the faith. Rumors that the Bastion participates in Bluefall's complex web of diplomacy and espionage remain unconfirmed. However, Reformers have been prominent in defusing several high-profile crises lately, and continue to advise members of the Regency government. Public sentiment seems to be on their side.

The Bastion is the headquarters for the entire Reformer presence in the Verge, and is led by Bishop Kasaya Yoriko, (Hi/StarMech/DFA11). Yoriko has recently been posted here from the more stable bishopric of the StarMech Collective capital of Chance but has ambitious plans to bring the Verge into the fold. Her most recent push into the public has come with the creation of an Immigrant Assistance Center.

## OTHER ISLANDS

More than 3,000 islands dot the surface of Bluefall. Most show only a few square kilometers above the surface. As a result, many remain unoccupied, unindustrialized, and largely unused by the sentients of Bluefall—despite the overcrowded planetary conditions. The 21 islands larger than 250 square kilometers are the only ones big enough to support significant cities or outposts.

Today, these islands are divided between the Regency and the stellar nations. The Regency claims six, including Regency, Hughes, and Lenub. Every stellar nation has settled at least one of the remaining islands; the Galactic Concord, the Thuldans, the Orion League, and the Thuldans are distinguished by owning two medium-sized landmasses in close proximity. On more than 100 smaller islands, independent settlers live simpler lives without the intrusion of spaceships or stellar nations.

## FILTRANE

Filtrane demonstrates the strength and power of the Thuldans. Under the baleful eye of the active volcano Mt. Filtrane, the Thuldans have claimed Bluefall's second largest island. The

island is divided into five military districts, and military bases and commanders here coordinate all Thuldan activity in the sector. Generals and admirals reside in relative comfort on Bluefall while issuing orders to the Thuldan Verge fleets.

The Empire has eradicated all native Bluefall flora and fauna from the island. Following standard Thuldan practice, genetically tailored plants and animals—most of them with Terran pedigrees—have been imported. The conquest of the native life-forms, while expensive, has been successful. Every few years, Thuldans bioengineers exterminate the native life on the island. Thuldans are proud of the project, despite its high cost. To most observers, the Thuldan efforts to standardize colonies seems wasteful; to Thuldans, it's a matter of making the servants of the Empire feel comfortable and at home no matter where they travel. Visas to the island are limited, but many Vergers enjoy the opportunity to see plants and animals that they would otherwise only know from holos. Few Vergers ever make it to Thuldan Prime or Earth.

Following the attack on Regency Island in 2498, the diplomatic staff of Filtrane was replaced. Cynics claim that it wasn't for ordering the assault, as Thuldans spin doctors report, but for failing. The current ambassador, Andrew Stott (Xm/Thuldan/CS-8), has attempted to repair the rifts between the Empire and the Regency. In meetings with Christopher Hale, Stott has promised that the Empire has no desire to interfere with the internal affairs of the Regency government. Thuldan donations to several local charities and communities of Bluefall have helped to soften the image of Thuldans as remorseless conquerors. Simultaneously, Stott has requisitioned assets from the Empire to increase military presence on the planet and in the system, despite a Concord request to reduce Thuldan assets in the system. Stott's real goals are known only to him and his inner circle.

## SABER

This island was named for its shape, which vaguely resembles a sword and basket hilt. In 2499, after a year of negotiations about a Regency reunification with the Orion League had gone nowhere, Orion diplomats successfully negotiated for Saber Island. Since then, Orion military and civilian contractors have hurried to construct multipurpose buildings on the island. Both hope to cash in on Bluefall's near-legendary reputation in the Orion League.

Besides serving as a base for Orion diplomatic and military interests in the Verge, Saber has become a highlight of any Orion's vacation to Bluefall. Each year, the long Saber Island coastlines compete with Hughes for the title of the best beaches of Bluefall. Saber's single advantage is that, at present, it's still underdeveloped. Away from the masses, Saber Island boasts a relaxed atmosphere that Hughes can't match.

As for the Orions, they find themselves in an interesting quandary. Their ties to the Regency are undeniable; Christopher Hale is the classic example, son of a famous League president and the older brother of an Orion senator who may be the next League president. Holofilms dramatizing family reunions between Orion and Regency family members are a popular subject of the Bluefall media. Indeed, many of those films have been financed with Orion funds. Yet the Orions are divided on how to proceed. Some press for outright reunification, hoping that as the years pass Bluefall's citizens will recognize its benefits. Others take a more cynical view, noting the value of having a "neutral" system in the Verge governed by former Orions.



## JORT

The Orlamu Theocracy purchased the rights to Jort soon after the *Monitor* entered the system. Once, the island was home to a small pre-Vanishing colony. The Regency never developed the island, and the Orlamus hoped to search for evidence of the Vanishing. Jort's environment is the least polluted by post-Vanishing development.

At first, Jort was only an object of study. Orlamu scientists and priests scoured the island for evidence to support the current theories. In turn, the Orlamus developed their own, ever more exotic ideas about the Vanishing. The popular theory among the Orlamus on Jort today points to a massive drivespace accident. They believe that Orion researchers on Bluefall were working on drivespace-linked teleportation. Both the Regency and the Orion League have denied the outlandish theory.

Today, Orlamu investigations of the Vanishing continue, but Jort Island has opened to wider resettlement. Orlamu citizens, always interested in matters spiritual, can't completely ignore the physical advantages of their newest possession. To serve the growing populace, many new buildings, including the Orlamu consulate, have been built within the caldera of Mt. Jort, the extinct volcano at the center of the island. Many wealthy residents have even built homes on the rim of the crater, gaining spectacular views over both the interior of the volcano and the hill down to the ocean.

## DIANDES

The Galactic Concord generally runs its operations from a mobile base such as a fortress ship, a dreadnought, or the *Light-*

house. The importance of Bluefall diplomatically and of Aegis geographically has led the Concord to develop a strategic center on Diandes Island. Eventually, Diandes will be home to Concord administration, Concord Marines training facilities, and a Star Force port.

Today, less than a third of the construction is complete, and Concord personnel on Diandes live in a chaotic hodgepodge of temporary cottages and shelters. The island's primary perimeter defenses and military assets have the highest priority and should be in place by the end of the year. The Concord's consulate on the surface was completed in 2499, and it's already the site of important negotiations affecting all of the Verge.

LENUB

Lenub is representative of Bluefall's numerous smaller islands, settled but not developed. Clusters of cottages and stilted huts line the coast. Measuring only 221 square kilometers, the island doesn't attract much interest from either the Regency or stellar nations. Independent settlers have lived on Lenub ever since arriving with Hale's fleet from the Stellar Ring. The total population is estimated at 22,345. Officially, they're subject to Regency law; in reality, they're largely ignored.

While some small islands have been developed by research foundations or recreation companies, Lenub has become a spiritual retreat. For the most part, the colonists have rejected the use of advanced technology. Some, though not all, of Lenub's populace follow the Hatile faith. They all share a desire to live simply and avoid the plagues of interstellar wars and planetary conflicts. Their sparse technology is largely old

## ELIZABETH IANNOTTI CAPTAIN OF THE *GLORY*

### Level 12 human Diplomat (Tech Op)

STR 9	(0)	INT 11	(+1)
DEX 10	(0)	WIL 10	(0)
CON 9		PER 12	
Durability: 9/9/5/5		Action check: 12+/11/5/2	
Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4			#Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 2	
Psionic energy points (talent): 5			

### Attacks

9mm ch pistol 12/6/3 d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m HI/0

### Defenses

Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

### Skills

Athletics [9]; Modern [10]—pistol [12]; Vehicle [10]—water [15]; Stamina [9]—endurance [10]; Knowledge [11]—computer [12]; Navigation [11]—surface [14]; System [11]—engineering [14], sensors [13], weapons [14]; Tactics [11]—vehicle [16]; Administration [10]—bureaucracy [12]; Awareness [10]—perception [11]; Interaction [12]—bargain [13], taunt [13]; Leadership [12]—command [15]; Telepathy [12]—contact [15], datalink [13].

### Gear

Navigation gauntlet; comm link; 9mm charge pistol; scuba gear; navy uniform.

Captain Elizabeth Iannotti is one of a growing number of Regency officials who don't remember the long trip from Orion space. Her youth works to her advantage, as many consider her a Verger first and an Orion second. Until recently, however, it's been difficult for this generation to take charge. In 2498 Iannotti became the first officer without Old Space training to be given command of a Regency vessel.

Born during the boom years following resettlement, Iannotti followed in her parents' footsteps. Until the encounter near Filtrane Island, her career had gone well. As the ambassador to a new species, she's a celebrity on Bluefall and beyond. The only interview with Iannotti, recorded after her promotion to captain of the *Glory* and rebroadcast many times since, reveals a charming personality.

Motivated by a powerful sense of duty, Iannotti entered military service because she believed it was the best way to serve the Regency. For a naval officer, Iannotti is unusually introverted, almost shy. However, in the many interviews with *Glory*'s crew, Iannotti is praised by her crew for demonstrating clear thinking under pressure.

After less than a year commanding the *Glory*, Iannotti has become the clandestine administrator of Depth Epsilon. She doesn't enjoy the assignment, leaving many duties to others. Instead, she spends her days with the deepfallen, exchanging cultural information and history. Iannotti longs to return to the helm, and she's petitioned to have the *Glory* secretly transferred to Epsilon duty at the earliest opportunity. Hale has delayed the request, but he's likely to grant it to keep his young ambassador happy.

and outdated, powered by the energy released by ocean tide, not a reactor powered by hydrogen fusion or dark matter.

## THE OCEAN

Water dominates Bluefall as no stellar nation can ever hope to. The oceans control climate, weather, and the survival of every living thing on the planet. For the people of Bluefall, the ocean provides two staples, food and water. For a few, it can be shelter as well, as the Depth Epsilon undersea city began to prove. Only the highest mountain and volcano peaks can rise above the water's surface. Oceanic trenches extend more than 20 kilometers beneath the surface.

The watery depths are anything but featureless. Hidden from view are mountain ranges, powerful lava flows, and deep volcanic rifts. Extensive petroleum deposits lurk just below the seafloor. Life abounds throughout the biome, from the algae at the surface to the thermal bacteria resting on the ocean floor. Currents and tides create underwater weather systems at least as complex as those above.

The oceans represent the future of Bluefall. As the population continues to soar with 13% annual growth, sources of land—especially arable land—are growing more and more scarce. The best option is undersea settlement. Already, the Regency government has constructed the first underwater domes near Regency Island.

Another riskier option has been proposed by terraforming firms; some of the most advanced terraformers believe that they may apply terraforming principles to increase volcanic activity in a precisely controlled way to raise the seafloor. Unfortunately, this technique hasn't been tried before, so Bluefall would become a test case.

## DEPTH EPSILON

Only two years ago, Depth Epsilon was one of the Regency's crowning achievements. Without the assistance of any foreign government, Bluefall's engineers built a sealed underwater environment on the undersea ridge off Regency Island. While the stellar nations had corporations devoted to similar projects in the Stellar Ring, the Regency government began the project on its own in 2478, almost 20 years before the stellar nations returned to the Aegis system.

It was difficult work, vulnerable to setbacks. The Regency probed the ocean depths and learned the best means of building on the mountainous seafloor. The first three sites were abandoned after flaws in the design were discovered. If the Regency was to build ocean cities, the designers and engineers had to discover methods that could be repeated flawlessly. Ultimately, the success story of Depth Epsilon showered everyone involved with praise. Five thousand applicants from Regency Island were accepted to join the scientists and technicians living in Depth Epsilon.

In August 2500, disaster struck Depth Epsilon. Media reports filled the Grid from corporate boats and helicopters above the choppy ocean waves. Hundreds of submersibles and lifeboats rose to the surface. A victim of an underwater earthquake, Depth Epsilon was being evacuated; those who escaped reported that large sections of the underwater habitat had been flooded. After the three days of rescue efforts ended, more than 1,000 people were dead, drowned, or missing, including most of Depth Epsilon's scientists and support staff.

Depth Epsilon is a ruined city of the watery dead, a memorial to those who lost their lives. Regency submarines patrol to



keep away the curious, and its only visitors are a few Regency-sponsored teams. These engineers analyze the causes and dangers of the Epsilon disaster as the Regency government considers whether to try again.

It's a good lie, and it appears that no one has caught on.

The earthquake cover story was reinforced by graviton pulses measured on islands nearby, including some independent scientists who were conveniently visiting Regency Island at the time. As for the 5,000 civilians who used to live in Depth Epsilon, they believe the story; compartments in Depth Epsilon were flooded to lend credence to the tale. The evacuees believed they were fleeing for their lives. Only a few candidates with special skills—almost all of these without a family to mourn them—were taken aside and briefed before the Epsilon disaster was staged.

The radical scheme had been planned much earlier. The faked evacuation was conceived as a response to an attack by a stellar nation; Depth Epsilon could be publicly destroyed while the government relocated there during a war. Contact with the deepfallen changed the timetable for the contingency plan, and the purpose of Epsilon itself. Now, Depth Epsilon has become one of many embassies on Bluefall. Here, the Regency government has organized its campaign to educate the deepfallen and introduce them to the human and sentient cultures. Almost 1,000 humans and other sentients live in Depth Epsilon. Just over 100 of them are deepfallen, representatives of the culture that lies in the ocean rifts. For the most part, they live in the flooded sections of the habitat. The human denizens of Depth Epsilon have resigned themselves to a life that never allows them to return to the surface. Unmanned supply ships visit every few months to make sure that the scientists have what they need.

The true state of affairs in Depth Epsilon is the Regency's

most closely guarded secret, and the government is taking extreme measures to keep it secret. The Regency is convinced that stellar nations, corporations, and greedy individuals would take advantage of the deepfallen, and Depth Epsilon seeks to prevent this. The Regency leaders are determined to forge a friendship with the new sentient species and similarly determined to gain a new ally.

Only a few highly placed officials have been informed of the actual situation; Hale and his immediate subordinates keep abreast of developments. Elizabeth Iannotti, captain of the *Glory* and the first human to make contact with the deepfallen, spends most of her time on board. Concord Ambassador Mohan has been informed, and he has to date neglected to notify his superiors in Old Space; a single Concord representative has been transferred to Depth Epsilon to monitor the situation. Fortunately, most Regency citizens accept the official version of events. The crews of naval vessels that patrol the region have no idea what they're protecting, and the Regency falsifies the tapes of research teams making occasional visits to "ravaged Depth Epsilon."

### DEPTH ZETA

The Regency's most ambitious seaborne project began in 2493 with Depth Zeta. While the Epsilon project was doing well, the scientists and engineers of Bluefall proposed a new way to increase the planet's living space: submersible floating cities. Depth Zeta, today still incomplete but operational, is the first of a series of new urban centers that can relieve the stress of Bluefall's exploding population.

The planet's powerful hurricanes had already crippled several similar projects, so Zeta's designers chose to use the ocean's protection. Depth Zeta encloses a city 10 kilometers

## JACK EVERSTAR

### HOLOFILM ACTOR

#### Level 17 human Diplomat (Free Agent)

STR 9	(0)	INT 11	(+1)
DEX 10	(0)	WIL 11	(+1)
CON 10		PER 14	
Durability: 10/10/5/5		Action check: 11+/10/5/2	
Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 3	
Perks: Great Looks, Celebrity			

#### Attacks

Acrobatics—defensive	12/6/3	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
Unarmed	4/2/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0

#### Defenses

Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

#### Skills

Athletics [9]; Acrobatics [10]—defensive [12], *dodge* [14]; Vehicle Operation [9]; Stamina [10]; Business [11]; Knowledge [11]—computer [12], *deduce* [13]; System Operation [11]—communications [12], *sensors* [14]; Awareness [11]—intuition [12], *perception* [14]; Creativity [11]—playwright [14]; Resolve; Culture [14]—diplomacy [16]; Deception [14]—bluff [16], *bribe* [16], *gamble* [17]; Entertainment [14]—act [22], *dance* [15], *sing* [15]; Interaction [14]—*bargain* [16], *charm* [18], *seduce* [17], *taunt* [16]; Leadership [14]—command [15], *inspire* [16].

Born Douglas Rerby, this 25-year-old Regency native was told by his onetime agent that he needed a stage name with more pop. After temporarily settling on Jack Everstar in 2497, the actor played a single part in *Children of Mars*, a low-budget feature about the survivors of the Second Galactic War. The producer could only promise a percentage of the profits, assuming there ever were any. Without any signs of another decent part on the horizon, Jack decided to give up on acting for a while and joined a group of Concord-licensed explorers who left the more cosmopolitan worlds of the Verge behind and sought adventure in the unknown. A year later, Everstar returned to Bluefall for a vacation, a happy survivor of a trip to exotic, dangerous locales.

Jack's destiny changed when his agent caught him at the Hughes starport just about to ship out on another risky voyage to an unexplored system. Unknown to Everstar, his film had become a critical success and a cult classic in his absence. *Children of Mars* was a raving success both in the Verge and the Stellar Ring. The disappearance of the film's lead had only increased its fame; now that Everstar had returned, he was both rich and famous.

With some regret, Jack put aside his career as a Concord explorer. After a few months brushing up his skills on a live performance tour on Bluefall, he starred in a new generation of holofilms for Mask & Bauble Studios, beginning with *The Silent Years* and *The Vanished Colony*, two Verge historical epics. Bluefall's leading man has yet to have a sophomore slump, leading four films to blockbuster success. His current project is rumored to be a sweeping treatment of the Flight from Ericis, with Everstar (of course) playing the part of Christopher Hale.

square, anchored near Hughes Island. While its sluggish movement prevents the city from outracing storms, its protective dome and ballast tanks allow it to dive up to 100 meters below the surface. Readyng the city requires day-long diagnostics; at the end, it fills its ballast tanks with water and slowly sinks. Once below, Depth Zeta can wait out a storm in comfort. Air is both recycled and brought down from the surface via snorkels. Emergency supplies can be brought in via submersible craft if the city's stocks run low.

The success of Depth Zeta has led the Regency to plan a timetable for three identical models. Construction of the first, Depth Eta, has begun near Regency Island. By 2508, the planet's first four diving cities should be fully developed.

## BLUEFALL ORBIT

The 50 kilometers about the blue planet are a crowded, chaotic place. While the Aegis system can't match the maelstrom of Sol or Thuldan Prime, it is the most populous space of the Verge. Traffic fills the system. At any moment, more than 1,000 vessels can be found in the Aegis system—most of them clustered around Bluefall. Half of these bear Regency registry, whether military, civilian, or corporate craft. The rest come from anywhere in the Verge or beyond.

If the Stellar Navy fails to spot a threat or fails to keep it out of the inner system, Bluefall's orbit provides the Regency's next tier of defense. The orbital defenses have grown even tighter with the unexplained destruction of the Silver Bell colony at Hammer's Star. Of the 3,800 satellites in Bluefall orbit, hundreds are purely military, including sensor satellites, jamming satellites, missile platforms, and energy weapon stations. Vessels that refuse to put in at the Nectaris Orbital Station or acknowledge communications from Regency relays are flagged as a threat. Regency vessels close on the scene and attempt to identify the vessel by sensor scans and hailing. If a vessel can't be identified, a barrage of energy weapons and missiles quickly follows.

## NECTARIS ORBITAL STATION

The Regency government brought Nectaris back into operation soon after the Ericis fleet's arrival on Bluefall. Left with a shrinking crew and nothing but silence from the Stellar Ring, the few Orions left in the system had largely abandoned the station. To Hale's military, however, Nectaris was vital. As a home to millions, Bluefall had to be protected. Today, the Nectaris Orbital Station again serves as the clearinghouse for visitors to the Aegis system and Bluefall. Newcomers are directed here by satellites scattered throughout the system.

Once they've docked at Nectaris, visitors are welcomed to Bluefall by Regency officials. Tourists and visiting businessmen are typically given a visa that allows passage to any public island; national officials aboard Nectaris can authorize access to the various national islands.

Most visitors pay a nominal fee to dock here and take a shuttle down to the surface. Most shuttles make their way directly to Hughes Island; not only does this boost the planet's transportation net, but it also helps the military by carefully channeling all extraplanetary travel. While they wait, visitors can visit many luxurious establishments. If a visitor wishes to avoid planetfall, three hotels on the station offer lodging and six restaurants offer dining with a spectacular view.

The Nectaris shipyard facilities can repair most malfunctions. It's not a complete ship construction yard, however, and

Nectaris forwards the most damaged vessels to the Alaundril shipyards in the Tendril system. Larger shipyards exist on Hughes and Regency Islands, but they're usually devoted to private contracts; they also require that space vessels navigate the atmosphere. The station's business syndicate pays the Regency an annual fee for service and thus avoids competing with a state-sanctioned public facility.

Nectaris sells drivespace communication services to everyone in the Aegis system and beyond. From the station, messages can be sent to Tendril, where they're routed to the Stellar Ring or ferried to nearby systems. They can also be sent to Hammer's Star at the edge of the Verge. Naturally, a strong courier business is based around Nectaris, carrying drivesat messages to the many outlying systems that do not have a drivesat relay of their own. Merchants fill their cargo bays at Bluefall, and they often take the time to load their computers with message traffic as well. The Concord licenses all couriers, and rejects criminals. While it's tough to make a living in the message service, it can turn a marginally profitable run into a worthwhile venture.

The Concord has made reliable communications a priority in the Verge, and the Concord Communications Commission (CCC) has offices aboard Nectaris to prove it. Bluefall's obsolescent Grid worries many, and the Concord is rightfully concerned about the reliability of a Regency-controlled network. The sharply increased message traffic since 2496 has placed new burdens on communications, and Concord technicians are aboard to ensure that the station operators maintain the drivesats properly. Concord Administrators guarantee that messages are delivered without interference.

## MELAS STATION

The Concord's Melas Station functions primarily as a listening point for Concord assets in the Aegis system. The Concord stations as many as a dozen cruisers within the system, awaiting orders that will take them on missions throughout the Verge. The *Marshal Ngombe* and the *Revealer*, the Concord's two dreadnoughts assigned to Verge patrol, are a common sight.

Melas Station is manned by 300 Concord officers and citizens. On occasion, it serves as a conference point for ship captains and force commanders as they are briefed by Concord military and diplomatic staff.

## REDCROWN

Redcrown is not an inviting giant. Probes into its atmosphere reveal nothing attractive beneath the red planet's surface, and Redcrown's poisonous fumes and crushing pressure are no friend to humanity. Yet its hydrogen, helium, and rarer noble gases make the construction of a gas mine inevitable.

Both the Orlamu Theocracy and VoidCorp have negotiated with the Regency and the Concord and secured the right to build collectors in Redcrown's upper atmosphere. VoidCorp construction is already under way on an equatorial site, led by PI794 34NUW (Wayne Baily) (Hm/VoidCorp/DFA-7). Orlamu plans for a site near Redcrown's southern pole are nearing completion, with an estimated operational date of May 2503. Both operations must overcome Redcrown's intense magnetic field and the terrible storms of charged particles the field creates. While the gas giant has room for dozens or hundreds of gas collectors, the first few years of mining will determine their long-term success.

## REDCROWN'S RINGS

The ring structure around Redcrown isn't as spectacular or developed as the famous ones in the Delta Taurus in Rigunmorn space or even those of the Sol system. What makes the rings unique is their distorted shape. Redcrown's rings are full of metals and charged particles that form a secondary ring running almost perpendicular to the primary ring about the planet's equator. Redcrown's magnetic field forms this smaller ring along the flux lines between its north and south magnetic poles.

The rings' trace minerals have yet to attract significant prospecting; a small group of independent traders have made a marginal profit by harvesting charged particles—energy—from the secondary ring. Most inhabitants of Aegis appear content to enjoy Redcrown's unique beauty and leave the mining to someone else.

## REDCROWN'S MOONS

Ten moons circle Redcrown, but most are featureless iron rocks, covered with craters. Nevin was the first to be mined, with platinum mines dating back before the Vanishing. The planetoid contains a wide variety of metals, primarily copper, chromium, and platinum. Platinum, essential to refractioning processes, is vital to Bluefall's petroleum industry. Private corporations control the Nevin mines, as well as those on Nosredna, Reiso, and Aocho. Each contains rich mineral deposits and has been exploited by the Regency.

Other mines have been established by the stellar nations, such as the Orlamu Theocracy's titanium mine on Nirb and the VoidCorp base on Vomisa. Since the base isn't operational yet, many wonder whether VoidCorp actually intends to develop Vosima's resources, or just hold the rights for future use.

The Galactic Concord has claimed Kralc, a small moon in the lowest orbit. The original Concord plans proposed that Kralc become the starport and ship repair facility that Jetsam never became. Unfortunately, the strain on Concord resources has prevented anything more than prospecting. The current timeline for construction delays work on a Concord station until 2505. Until then, the Concord employs prospectors and surveyors to chart Kralc's surface.

Raeb and Avob remain unclaimed and uninhabited.

Lhop, the outermost moon, is largely silicon and carbon. The Thuldans have dug into Lhop with enthusiasm, building fortifications. The small starport has been crowded with Thuldan military ships—three cruisers, six destroyers, and more than a dozen frigates and smaller craft—but the Empire's soldiers have yet to construct anything of economic value.

## JETSAM

Jetsam is an unremarkable chunk of rock and frozen water. In another system, Jetsam's ice might be a valuable commodity, but Bluefall's oceans have devalued Jetsam utterly.

An abandoned base built by the original Orion colonists is the only artificial structure on the planet's surface. The Orions intended the base to serve as a starport and ship repair facility for ships making a quick passage through the Aegis system, as unimaginable as the idea of not enjoying Bluefall's pleasures may have been. At present, no plans have been made public for its reconstruction or the establishment of a second Orion foothold.

## FLOTSAM

Jetsam's only moon, Flotsam is a tiny sphere of frozen methane held in close orbit about its parent. Remarkably, though it lacks a protective atmosphere, Flotsam's surface is almost completely devoid of craters. The few craters that have been found all date back less than a century. The most popular theory is that Flotsam was a rogue asteroid, captured recently when it passed too close to Jetsam. Other scientists hypothesize that volcanic action raised the moon's surface temperature in the recent past, allowing a flood of liquid methane to erase older craters. For years, scientists interested in studying the moon petitioned for Regency funding. In 2498 the Regency granted the request and built Research Station Echo.

The most unusual explanation of Flotsam's smooth surface has been proposed by Hatire missionaries. These missionaries established a colony on Flotsam a year after the Regency and conducted their own inquiries. After a few months, the Hatire announced that Flotsam's protection was provided by the holy Cosimir. Hatire priests are meditating over what ended the Cosimir's benevolence in the Aegis system.

## RESEARCH STATION ECHO

Research Station Echo, a small facility administered by the Regency, serves a variety of functions in the distant outer reaches of the Aegis system. The station's official purpose is to investigate the formation of Flotsam as a moon and to discover an explanation for its unusual surface properties. However, the station's real function bears little in common with the station's official function.

Echo Station operates the most sophisticated and sensitive sensor technology in the Verge. Most of these probes and detectors, however, are focused away from Flotsam's surface. Regency officials have praised the use of these long-range sensors to fulfill Echo's secondary purpose: astronomical surveys of the deep frontier. Every few months, Echo station's scientists release data about distant stars, including those of the Perseus Arm, the center of which lies approximately 4,000 light-years away. Two mass transceivers keep Echo Station constantly in touch with military and bureaucratic Regency officials on Bluefall.

Few denizens of the Aegis system, even its permanent citizens, trust the cover story. With so many Regency military personnel on Echo, more is going on. The station's radar and sensor equipment has a defensive purpose that goes beyond stellar cartography.

In fact, Echo Station does serve as a forward observation post for the Regency fleets; the government wants as much advance notice of any inbound traffic as possible. Failure to detect a foreign power's approach could be fatal. But well-placed strategic analysts believe nothing can approach the Aegis system undetected. After the arrival of a major but unreported convoy from the Stellar Ring in 2500, a drivespace detector has been quietly installed on the station. Even if the drivespace relay in Bluefall's orbit fails, the Regency government will have more than four days' warning of approaching ships—enough time to prepare its defenses and, if necessary, institute an evacuation plan.

Captain Diana Fox (Hm/Orion/DCS-8) supervises Station Echo and its 200 personnel. She makes sure that the disciplined staff makes the best possible use of the station's well-tuned instruments, for both scientific and military purposes.

## SYSTEM LOG

The Aegis system is the perfect location for an intrigue-based campaign. The Thuldans, VoidCorp, and even the Orions all have their hopes set on ruling Bluefall, the Verge's richest prize. As long as the Regency is light on its diplomatic feet, it may retain its independence, but it's by no means a sure thing. Spies, saboteurs, assassins, ambassadors, and consuls will determine this system's future.

### T'SA COLONY SHIP ARRIVES

The one-kilometer-long TSV *Guardian* (K'Chal) arrived in-system recently carrying more than 1.2 million t'sa immigrants in cryogenic deep sleep. The vessel's captain, Teelok T'chan Tesser, has filed the proper papers with Regency authorities for his passengers to adopt Regency citizenship.

Speculation has intensified since Regent Hale requested a one-month delay before offering the t'sa citizenship, purportedly because of Bluefall's housing shortage. However, the t'sa have insisted on their right to citizenship, and have sent several shuttles to the surface. These vessels have so far all been turned back by the Regency Navy, but each confrontation increases the pressure on the government. Events seem to be heading to another diplomatic crisis.

### THULDAN NAVAL LAUNCH

The *Striker*, the first ship of the new Thuldan deepwater navy, will soon rush down the slipway at the Verge Imperial Shipyards. Despite protests by a radical mechalus pacifist group and formal condemnation by Concord Ambassador Demerol, the Thuldan goal of a deepwater navy seems to be within the Empire's grasp. Speculation is split regarding the Regency's tolerance of this threat to its command of the seas. Though sources close to the Sea Navy claim the Regency has acquired detailed blueprints of the Thuldan ships—and that Regency vessels are markedly superior—doubt remains about Thuldan intentions. Regent Hale had no comment on allegations that Regency spies have infiltrated Thuldan ranks. Thuldan governor Stott denies that the Thuldans intend to contact the deep-fallen or draft them as employees.

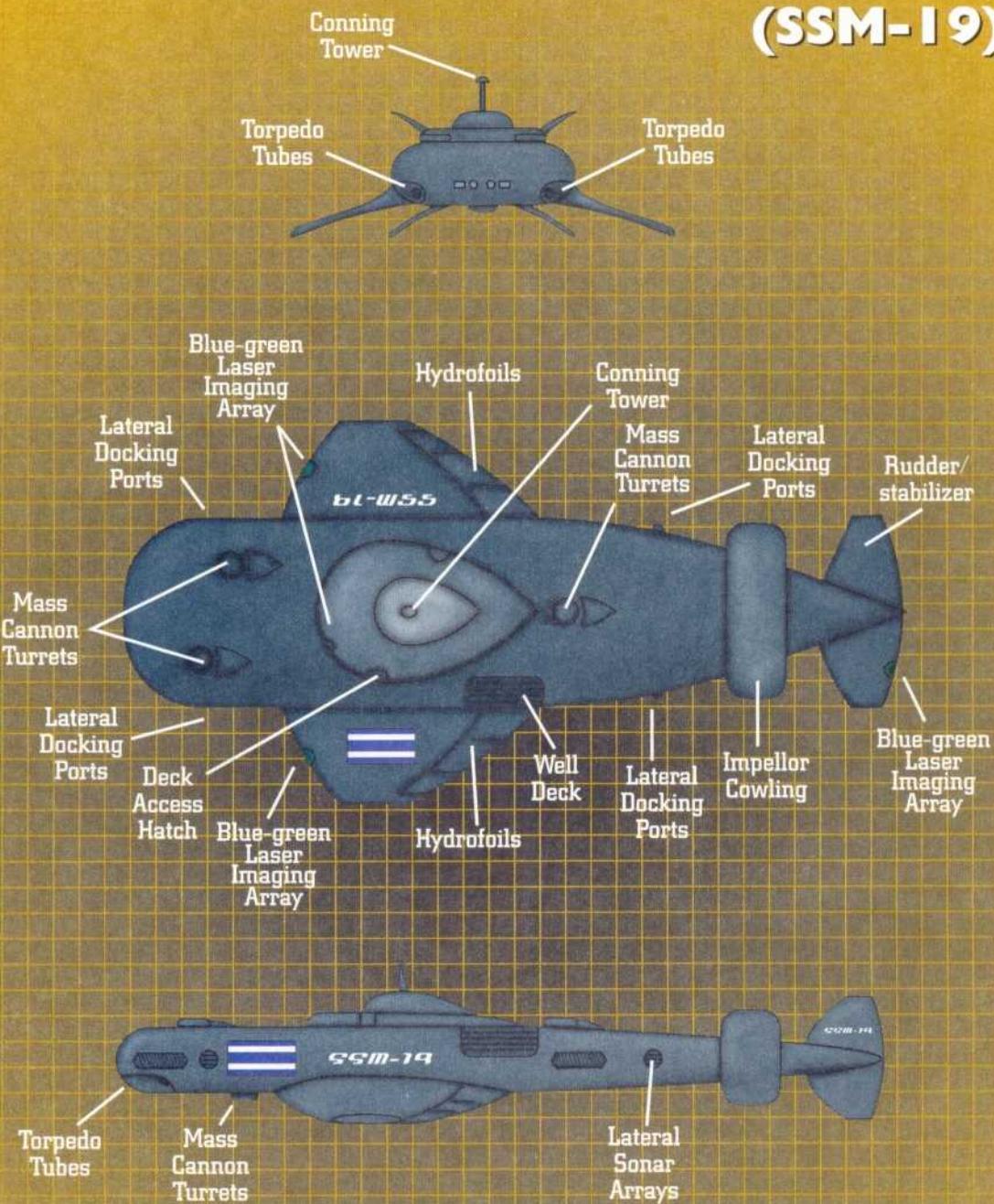
### FOUNDER'S DAY DISRUPTED

Threats of violence have marred the upcoming celebration of Founder's Day, a day commemorating Bluefall's resettlement. An anonymous caller claiming to represent the Citizens for a Free Republic left bomb threats against prominent local businesses and the Regency government itself. Regency Security Chief Kalden has downplayed the threat, but he has deployed additional security forces to maintain order along the parade route. A reward exists for anyone able to offer information leading to an arrest.

## HEROES OF AEGIS

The natives of Aegis are primarily of Orion stock, and gain the benefits of that stellar nation. However, more than any other system, Aegis is flooded with immigrants, and heroes from every stellar nation have settled here. Though the natives are very loyal to the Regency and justly proud of their achievements, some now question the value of immigration. Tourists and outsiders are no longer guaranteed the warm Aegis welcome that made the system famous.

# RBV Glory (SSM-19)



## RBV Glory (SSM 19)

Length: 120.5 meters

Beam: 30 meters (60m hydrofoil span)

Mass: 4,860 metric tons

Max Speed: 158.7 kph at 500 m

Acceleration: 10 kph/sec

Crew: 75 enlisted/12 officers

Main Armament: 8 C26 Mass Cannons (4 x 2)

Secondary Armament: 24 Mk 70 Long-range Torpedoes

Main Armor Belt: 0.25 m polymeric armor

Secondary Armor Protection: 0.1 m polymeric armor

Small Craft: 1 *Mako*-class scout submersible



# ALGEMRON

The Second Galactic War isn't over yet, not by a long shot. The fight continues in the Verge as two planets, Galvin and Alitar, struggle for control of the Algemon system. A century ago, Algemon was perhaps the single most promising system in the entire Verge, blessed with not one but two Earthlike worlds and a host of secondary planets, asteroids, and moons. In the dark, tension-filled days before the outbreak of the war, Algemon was a peaceful example of a system shared between two rival nations. War tore it all apart.

Despite the fact that both sides of the Algemon conflict are now well aware that the Second Galactic War has been over for 30 years, they're still locked in battle. Outsiders entering Algemon must pass a cordon of military ships, ground batteries, and security forces just to set down on either planet. In addition, the military forces of both planets routinely attack neutral ships in interplanetary space on the suspicion that they might carry valuable cargo bound for the enemy planet. Some traders from neighboring systems have made fortunes running critical war supplies to the combatants, but even more have lost their ships, their cargoes, and their lives to the merciless commercial raiding employed by both Galvin and Alitar.

Beyond Galvin and Alitar, the outer reaches of the system contain a wasteland of drifting hulks, ruined installations, and decimated stations. Over a century of intermittent warfare, the fragile network of space-based industries and domed colonies that once existed in the system has been largely destroyed. With the return of the stellar nations to this war-torn system, both Galvin and Alitar seek new allies, new technologies, and new economic power to renew their fight.

## HISTORY

In 2326, two ships arrived in Algemon to conduct the first human survey of the system. On May 4, the Austrin-Ontis scout *AOV Roland* made starfall near Halo and commenced a detailed survey of the system, claiming Algemon for its nation. Two weeks later, on May 20, the *ITV Exploit*, a Thuldans survey cruiser, appeared as well. By all the normal standards of system exploration, Austrin-Ontis owned Algemon, but the Thuldans had several distinct advantages. The *Roland* had no drivesat communication, which meant that it would have to leave Algemon to carry news of its discovery back to Aegis for transmission back to Old Space. If the Austrins left, the Thuldans could simply seize the system and dare Austrin-Ontis to reclaim it. In practical terms, the Thuldans also possessed superior tactical positioning and military strength. The Verge was a lot closer to the Thuldans Empire than it was to Austrin-Ontis territory, and the Thuldans outnumbered the Austrins ten to one in the Verge.

Similarly, the Thuldans captain of the *Exploit* realized that the *Roland* could leave to report its find the minute the *Exploit* left to do the same. If the *Roland* logged the Austrin-Ontis claim, Algemon—a very desirable system—would legally default to Austrin control. If the Thuldans flew in the face of established claim and survey conventions, and the Austrins refused to give in, the interstellar community (particularly the still-powerful Solar Union) would back the Austrins, thereby aligning all of Old Space against the Thuldans. In short, the Empire wanted Algemon, but it wasn't ready to fight the next Galactic War over it—not yet.

The standoff continued for weeks, until Captain Erhardt of

the *Roland* offered Captain Kozlov of the *Exploit* a compromise. Since the system contained two Earthlike planets, why not divide their claims? Both sides would be free to continue with their exploration and settlement of the Verge instead of locking horns over Algemon. Kozlov was inclined to destroy the *Roland* with the *Exploit's* superior firepower, but Erhardt commented that he'd just fired off a direct radio burst containing the Austrin-Ontis claim toward Aegis. The *Roland's* message wouldn't reach human ears for more than 10 years, but if the *Exploit* destroyed the *Roland*, sooner or later evidence of the Thuldans' perfidious actions would surface. Kozlov reluctantly agreed to Erhardt's proposal, and they divided the system.

The Thuldans Empire began intensive development and settlement of Alitar within six months. It wanted Algemon to be its fortress in the Verge, a springboard from which the Empire could dominate this new sector of space. Austrin-Ontis didn't have the resources to match the Thuldans' planetary buildup, so the Austrins concentrated their industrial development on the rich belts and moons of the outer system. Over time, the wary truce between the Austrins and Thuldans grew into friendship. The Austrins had no expansionistic plans to threaten the Empire's hold on the Verge, and the Thuldans viewed the loss of one planet as a cheap price to pay for gaining their foothold in the frontier.

## THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

During the early years of the Second Galactic War, Alitar and Galvin were not in conflict with each other. In fact, the people of Algemon eagerly followed news of the war, cheering on their respective nations as they marched over their nearest neighbors back in the Stellar Ring.

The two colonies also fought the settlements of other stellar nations on behalf of their parent nations. From their base on Alitar, the Thuldans mounted an assault on the Sothvec Industry colony at Vieron, capturing the outpost early in the year 2349. In addition, the Austrins raided nearby Coulomb, an outpost of the Leodal States.

The warm relations between these powers in the Verge cooled when rumors of the Thuldans Empire's alliance with Void-Corp reached the Verge in 2361. For several months, the two worlds of Algemon drew apart, anticipating a break between their patron states. Late in the year, Austrin-Ontis joined the Profit alliance and declared war on the Expansion Pentad (see page 85). War had come to the Algemon system.

The initial clashes were fierce, as the Thuldans of Alitar pushed hard to subdue their foes. The first stages of the war consisted of naval engagements and assaults on outlying installations and industrial facilities throughout the system. To the Thuldans' surprise, the Austrin edge in space industry and defense blunted their attack. Thus, the great invasion of Galvin was limited to a handful of commando raids because of the stalemate between the two nation's navies.

After an initial flurry of attack and riposte, the war settled down to a long period of naval buildup, punctuated by fierce clashes during the portion of the year that Galvin and Alitar were both on the same side of the sun (at their closest approach, the two worlds are only four-tenths of an AU apart, or about 63 million kilometers). Both sides came up with new weapons and new tactics for the annual Close-Approach Campaign fought between the planets.

In 2375, the Stellar Ring fell silent after the destruction of the Kendai relay station. Grimly determined to finish their struggle, the Austrins and Thuldans continued to fight.

### THE CEASE-FIRE OF 2404

After more than 40 years of warfare and several near-treaties that resulted in nothing more than watchfulness, Austrin leaders offered the Thuldans a cease-fire. Grudgingly, the Thuldans accepted, and for a long time it looked as if the Second Galactic War might come to an end in this system of the Verge. Both sides rebuilt their battered fleets and cities, and a trickle of trade opened up. Merchant vessels from outside the system found both worlds desperate for goods of all kinds, and for the first time in years trade from other portions of the Verge flowed through Algemon un molested by commercial raiders and enemy patrols.

Despite the cease-fire, neither world felt that it could make peace while the war continued back in the Stellar Ring. Every now and then, a scout or trader from the Stellar Ring reached the Verge during the Long Silence, but these visitors never brought news of peace. The Thuldans of Alitar maintained a show of loyalty to their distant Emperor, keeping their colonial government intact underneath an Imperial Potentate. During the fighting, the Austrins abandoned their corporate structure in favor of a military dictatorship better suited for the conduct of total warfare. Social development and growth were secondary

concerns to both states, and each prepared for the day when the cease-fire would end.

Skirmishes in the outer reaches of the system continued on and off for years, as the opposing fleets maneuvered for advantage and seized opportunities to interfere with the other side's shipping and commerce. On several occasions, the two worlds fought minor engagements, but neither planet chose to end the uneasy truce.

As it turned out, the cease-fire of 2404 lasted until August 6, 2461, when the Galvinites committed a betrayal of shocking magnitude. Under the guise of a diplomatic mission, the Galvinite ship *FSA Ajax* landed in Beronin, the capital of Alitar, and then detonated a massive fusion bomb. To this point, the Austrins had conducted the war with honor; the Thuldans were caught completely by surprise. The *Ajax* incident killed over 500,000 Thuldans, almost 5% of the entire planetary population at the time, and caused immeasurable damage to Alitar's government, industrial base, and infrastructure. The new leaders of Alitar swore that nothing but Galvin's unconditional surrender could possibly end the war.

### THE INVASION OF ALITAR

The Thuldans were hammered back on all fronts even as they tried to rebuild their government and capital. It soon became clear that the dictator of Galvin, Supreme Commander Blayne Reuter, had planned the renewal of the war for a long time.

TABLE S12: ALGEMRON SYSTEM

	Calderon	Ilmater	Galvin	Alitar	Darius
Primary	Algemon	Algemon	Algemon	Algemon	Algemon
Planetary Class	Class 4	Class 4	Class 1	Class 1	Class 5
Gravity	G1 (0.47 g)	G1 (0.63 g)	G2 (0.99 g)	G2 (1.04 g)	G3 (1.29 g)
Radiation	R4 (100 rem/day)	R3 (50 rem/day)	R1 (5 rem/yr)	R1 (0.7 rem/yr)	R4 (400 rem/hr)
Atmosphere	A0 (vacuum)	A0 (vacuum)	A2 (N <sub>2</sub> , O <sub>2</sub> )	A2 (N <sub>2</sub> , O <sub>2</sub> )	A1 (H <sub>2</sub> , He)
Pressure	P0 (0 atm)	P0 (0 atm)	P2 (0.91 atm)	P3 (1.33 atm)	P5 (gas giant)
Heat	H0-4 (400° C)	H4 (300° C)	H2 (27° C)	H2 (30° C)	H0 (-120° C)
Orbital Distance	0.24 AU	0.48 AU	0.89 AU	1.31 AU	2.08 AU
Diameter	5,580 km	6,812 km	11,758 km	14,302 km	46,210 km
Year	45.3 days	128 days	323 days	577 days	1,154 days
Day	198 days	34 days	29.5 hours	22.8 hours	19.7 hours
Axial Tilt	4.9°	49.4°	18.3°	1°	20.1°
Density	1.07	1.18	0.97	1.02	0.35
# Satellites	0	0	1	0	6

	Wreathe	Argelos	Reliance	Havrym	Palshizon	Halo
Primary	Algemon	Algemon	Algemon	Algemon	Algemon	Algemon
Planetary Class	Class 3	Class 4	Class 3	Class 5	Class 14	Class 5
Gravity	G1 (0.6 g)	G2 (0.56 g)	G3 (1.31 g)	G4 (3.26 g)	G1 (0.49 g)	G3 (1.51 g)
Radiation	R2 (15 r/wk)	R3 (40 r/wk)	R2 (10 r/wk)	R4 (500 r/hr)	R2 (5 r/wk)	R5 (800 r/hr)
Atmosphere	A4 (SO <sub>2</sub> )	A0 (vacuum)	A1 (H <sub>2</sub> , CH <sub>4</sub> )	A1 (H <sub>2</sub> , He)	A0 (trace)	A1 (H <sub>2</sub> , He)
Pressure	P1 (.07 atm)	P0 (0 atm)	P3 (1.3 atm)	P5	P0 (.02 atm)	P5 (gas giant)
Heat	H1 (-100° C)	H1 (-110° C)	H1 (-120° C)	H0 (-183° C)	H0 (-195° C)	H0 (-220° C)
Orbital Distance	3.10 AU	3.20 AU	4.59 AU	7.0 AU	12.1 AU	20.05 AU
Diameter	2,198 km	1,792 km	21,840 km	105,960 km	6,302 km	40,250 km
Year	5.7 years	6.03 years	10.3 years	19.52 years	44.3 years	94 years
Day	29.5 hours	134 hours	17.5 hours	58.6 hours	12.1 days	2.6 hours
Axial Tilt	144.9°	69.0°	59.4°	23.7°	16.5°	38.7°
Density	3.51	3.95	0.76	0.36	0.99	0.48
# Satellites	0	0	0	10	0	5

Early in 2468, Galvin landed an invasion force of almost half a million soldiers in the heartland of Alitar. They exploded out of the beachhead in a whirlwind campaign, capturing almost one-fifth of Alitar's cities and citizens within one year of landing. Victory was in reach for the first time.

Yet, despite its initial successes, the Alitarin campaign bogged down. The Thuldans defenses stiffened, and Galvin's long supply line (through interplanetary space down to the ground) was vulnerable to attack. Although the Galvinite navy had grown significantly stronger than the Alitarin forces, it had to cover too much territory. Alitarin missile boats, hastily constructed in subterranean shipyards, took a heavy toll on Galvinite convoys and escorts. Two years after the landing, at a time when Galvin's orbital path brought it to the opposite side of the Algemron system, the Alitarins launched a counterattack that liberated about half of the (planetary) territory the Austrins had captured. However, this counterattack faltered before the Alitarins could completely repulse the invaders.

To this day, the Galvinite army holds a slice of Alitar's heartland 1,000 kilometers wide and almost 2,000 kilometers long. Within this area, Galvinite soldiers ruthlessly put down partisan movements and drive the hapless Alitarins to manufacture arms and grow foodstuffs that the Galvinite army's own supply lines can't deliver.

### THE MONITOR MANDATE

In 2497, the *Monitor* and its task force arrived in Algemron after visiting Tendril, Lucullus, Corriale, and Aegis. The yearly Close-Approach Campaign halted in confusion as both Galvin and Alitar assessed the strength of the Concord and renewed contact with representatives of their old patron powers. Neither power had any kind of navy that could stand up to the Concord task force, but the Concord could not intervene in the conflict without either taking sides or fielding a permanent peacekeeping force.

The Thuldans and Austrin-Ontis ambassadors aboard the *Monitor* argued vehemently for intervention on the side of their respective colonies, and when the Concord hesitated, both promised to bring vast military forces from the Stellar Ring to settle the war. The fragile peace of the Verge teetered precariously as the Austrins and the Thuldans squared off to fight over Algemron on behalf of their long-missing colonies. The Austrins' old partners in the Profit alliance supported the Austrin claim, while VoidCorp quietly backed the Thuldans position. Within the space of two weeks, negotiations had broken down into shouting matches and at least one gunfight.

Clearly, the Concord could not endorse either the Thuldans or the Austrin claim, since doing so would gravely anger one of the nations. If the Concord didn't take any action, however, both the Thuldans and Austrin-Ontis Unlimited would reclaim their respective colonies, and Galvin and Alitar would precipitate the Third Galactic War. Undersecretary Michael Thayne of the Galactic Consulate finally came up with the solution to the problem, and on September 13, 2497, he issued the *Monitor* Mandate.

The *Monitor* Mandate endowed both Alitar and Galvin with full independence, recognizing them as sovereign states. All Austrin and Thuldans ties to the system were officially abolished. Both nations were enraged, but neither could complain that they'd been treated worse than their enemy—the *Monitor* Mandate hit them both. The Algemron system was designated as a demilitarized zone barred to Austrin and Thuldans ships, as well as arms shipments of any origin. The Concord created an Al-

gemron Neutrality Patrol to enforce the Mandate, protect neutral shipping in the system, and provide a trip wire against overt Thuldans or Austrin intervention.

### ALGEMRON TODAY

The war between Alitar and Galvin continues. Both sides are pushing hard to obtain the best position possible in case the Concord decides to step in and force another cease-fire and round of negotiations. Galvin has become a virtual police state under its military dictatorship. The Galvin Intelligence Directorate is feared throughout the system by its enemies and its own citizens. Alitar, on the other hand, clings to an Imperial colonial structure and uses numbers to counteract Galvin's edge in intelligence, technology, and position.

In general, the Alitarins seem willing to talk, under the condition that no Galvinite forces remain on the surface of Alitar. The Galvinites, on the other hand, have proven unusually resistant to any offers of negotiation or arbitration, pushing hard to finish off Alitar once and for all. Currently, the Galvinites hold the upper hand; left to their own devices, they might muster the forces necessary to triumph within two to five years. However, the Neutrality Patrol's protection of food shipments and nonmilitary supplies is giving Alitar a new breath of life in the conflict.

### THE WORLDS OF ALGEMRON

Algemron is a class G5 star orbited by nine planets and one major asteroid belt. It is one of fewer than a dozen known systems that contains two naturally occurring Earthlike planets. While neither Alitar nor Galvin is perfect from a human point of view, both were attractive enough to draw settlements and colonists within a year or two of their initial surveys.

### TRAVEL IN ALGEMRON

Interplanetary travel is dangerous in Algemron. The Neutrality Patrol can only protect a finite number of ships entering the system. Vessels that venture into the inner system without Concord escort are liable to undergo search, seizure, or outright destruction by either belligerent power.

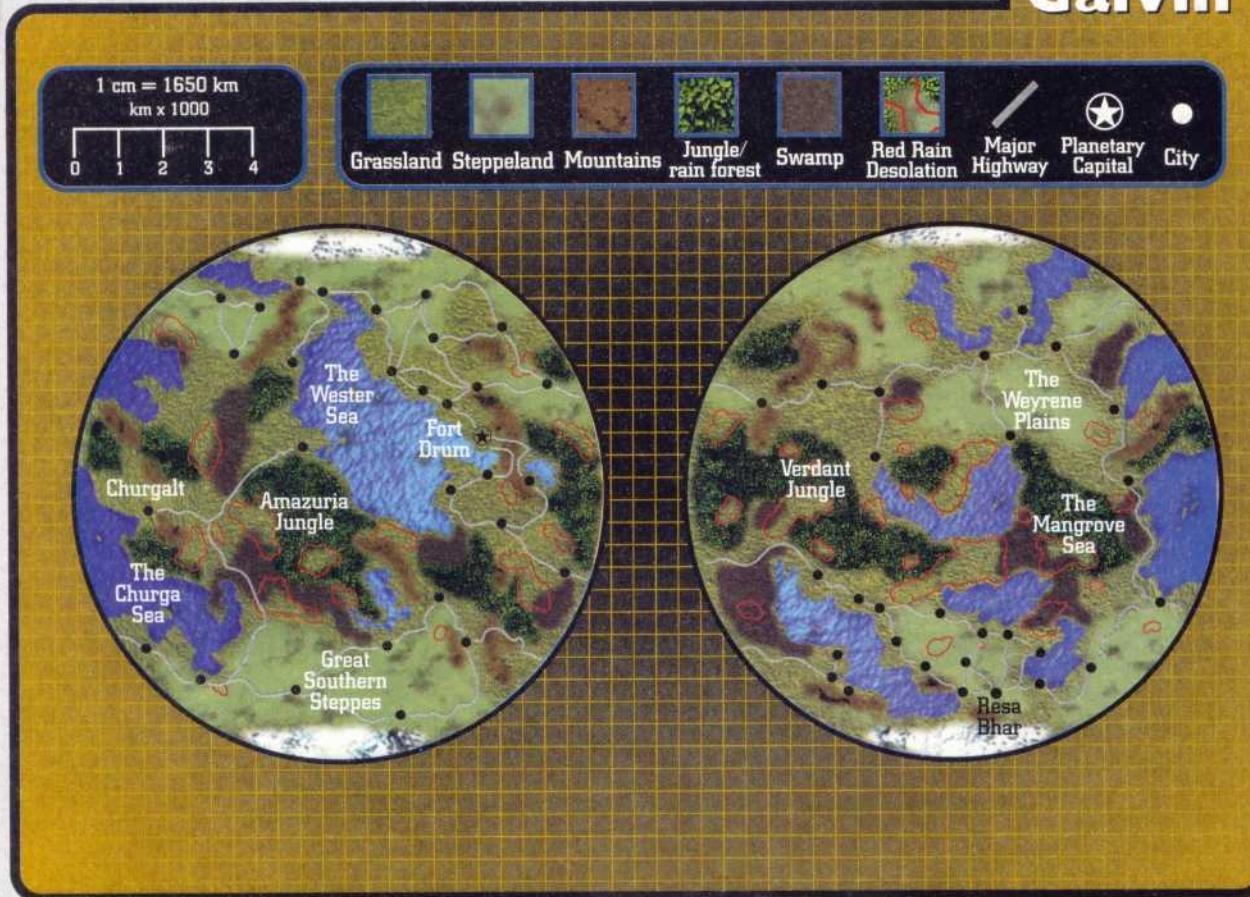
Ships seeking Concord escort are advised to arrive in the outermost portions of the Algemron system. A tiny Concord post at Palshizon functions as the center for escort convoys. If a ship doesn't report to Palshizon before entering the inner system, the Concord accepts no responsibility for its protection. Sometimes, through poor astrogation, neutral ships heading for Palshizon exit drivespace right into the demilitarized zone outside the Concord's protection. In addition to the protection afforded by the Concord, each planet also protects neutral shipping destined for its own spaceports. The Galvinite navy, for instance, doesn't attack shipping bound for Galvin.

Partisan shipping (vessels under the flag of Alitar or Galvin) may not claim Concord protection, as their homeworld military vessels guard them. Unfortunately, partisan shipping often suffers attacks dozens of light-years from Algemron by Galvinite and Alitarin commercial raiders scouring the space lanes of the Verge. Every year, dozens of Alitarin merchantmen (and a smaller number of Galvinite vessels) are destroyed at Aegis or Lucullus by marauding warships.

### CALDERON AND ILMATER

Seared by Algemron, these two worlds are blasted, airless husks. Of the two, Calderon is more interesting, as it's a metal-





rich molten world that harbors significant reserves of a number of strategic elements. Ilmater, on the other hand, is a larger and slightly cooler world with little to offer but rock.

The technical challenges of sustaining a mining post on a planet of Calderon's temperament are formidable, and any outpost of this kind is very vulnerable to enemy action. The Thuldan facilities here were destroyed within 10 years of the opening of the war; however, the Austrins have had better luck maintaining extraction plants on the planet's surface. Currently, five plants, each guarded by automated defense systems, sit on various points of Calderon's surface; nearly a dozen more posts—some Alitarin, some Galvinite—now exist only as slagged ruins.

Ilmater played an important role early in the war. At closest approach, it's only about four-tenths of an AU (about 61 million kilometers) from Galvin, making it an ideal site for an Alitarin base—especially when Alitar is on the other side of the system. For almost 20 years, the Alitarins fought to establish a naval platform on Ilmater, while the Galvinites struggled to block their efforts. The Alitarins abandoned their efforts during the cease-fire, and neither side has tried to open this theatre of the war again. The debris of countless battles still litters the surface of Ilmater.

### GALVIN

The first of Algemron's two Earthlike worlds, Galvin is a planet covered with vast marshlands and low-lying, humid grasslands. Teeming with life, it is home to a powerful and aggressive industrialized colony known as the Federal State of Algemron. For more than 100 years, the FSA has strictly controlled access to Galvin's surface for the purpose of wartime security; consequently, few outsiders have ever visited Galvin. Even with the

opening of the Verge, the Federal State continues to monitor all scientific, mercantile, and casual contact between its citizens and the rest of human space.

Galvin currently holds the upper hand in the century-old war that divides Algemron. Every week, military transports and supply vessels ferry soldiers and arms to Galvin's forces on Alitar. While Galvin's industrial base and population suffered heavily early in the war, they've fared better than their enemies in the last two decades, and with every passing month a Federal State victory creeps just a little bit closer.

### PLANETOLOGY

Warm and verdant, Galvin might have been a twin to Earth except for two major differences: Its moon is nothing more than a tiny rock without any geological effect on its parent planet, and it has very little tectonic activity. Without tidal stresses or any significant heat from radioactive decay to drive its crustal activity, Galvin never developed the processes that built mountains and raised volcanoes on other worlds. Humid flatlands, swamps, and shallow seas cover its surface, unbroken by any mountains more than a kilometer in height. Most of Galvin's heavy metals remain locked inside the planet's core, far out of human reach.

Galvin experiences a seasonal range much like Earth's—though Galvin is somewhat warmer than Earth. Winters on Galvin rarely produce temperatures below freezing, but the summers are nearly unbearable, with temperatures routinely soaring to 60°C over much of the planet's surface. Galvin's low altitudes and unusual axial tilt strongly discourage glaciation and snow. In fact, the planet has virtually no ice caps, another factor that contributes to its overall humidity.

Galvin's seas are landlocked, covering about 50% of the

planet with water; many continental areas are watersheds of vast, sluggish rivers and immense marshes. The planet's summers are humid beyond belief, and its winters consist of unending downpours.

### RED RAIN

In retaliation for the treacherous destruction of their capital city in 2461, the Thuldans bombarded Galvin in 2462 and 2463 with a biological agent known only as Red Rain. This horrifying weapon released a voracious microbe into Galvin's ecosystem that converted any kind of organic matter into a lethal mycotoxin. Precipitated through Galvin's warm and humid atmosphere, rain tainted with gummy red toxin spread the poison over vast stretches of the planet's surface. Hundreds of thousands of Galvinites died from exposure to the agent, and the damage to the biosphere was incalculable—almost 10% of the planet's surface remains uninhabitable today.

An area poisoned by Red Rain is an unforgettable sight. Waterways, grassland, and forests alike disappear, replaced by stinking pools of scum-covered putrescence; the bare skeletons of trees protrude from the waste. In hilly regions, the slopes are nothing but bare soil and rock, as all the vegetation has sloughed off and sagged to the ravine and valley floors. The only way to prevent the spread of the poison is to scorch the affected area and anything downwind; this chemical agent has forced the Galvinites to incinerate vast regions of their planet in order to contain the damage. Red Rain doesn't flourish at sea, as the organisms die in salt water.

### RED RAIN EXPOSURE

Heroes who enter an active Red Rain area take their lives into their own hands. Red Rain is a necrotoxin (see pages 59–60 in the *Gamemaster Guide*) with an onset time of one hour and an attack duration of 5–10 (d6+4) days. Exposure to Red Rain requires heroes to make Constitution feat checks every hour. The severity varies from a -3 step bonus to a victim's Constitution feat check in low concentrations or cold weather, to a +3 step penalty in high doses or hot weather (check TABLE G17: POISON on page 60 of the *Gamemaster Guide* for damage ranges). If the victim fails a Constitution feat check, the damage indicated on the table is inflicted on him or her, but not all at once. Divide the damage given on the table over the attack duration to determine how much damage is suffered each day.

Full-body chem warfare gear with self-contained breathing systems (or e-suits or body tanks) offer sufficient protection against the agent (no Constitution feat check required), but rigorous decontamination procedures are necessary to clean up after entering a Red Rain area.

### GOVERNMENT

Before the Second Galactic War broke out, Galvin was an Austrin-Ontis corporate colony and the centerpiece of the Austrins' efforts in the Algemon system. The unrelenting warfare of the second half of the 24th century eventually destabilized the Austrins' Algemon Exploration Company (the Austrin equivalent of a colonial administration), leading to the rise of a military dictatorship. In 2383, General Janik Stenerude seized power as Supreme Military Commander, ousting the Director of the AEC. Supreme Commander Stenerude dictated a realignment of the company structure, shedding commercial interests and absorbing all government functions into the new Federal State of Algemon. The move was surprisingly well received by the people of Galvin; they knew that they were in a war to the fin-

ish, and Austrin-Ontis hadn't done anything for them in more than 20 years.

In the 118 years since the establishment of the dictatorship, six Supreme Commanders have held power. The current leader is Supreme Commander Haila Sheref (Hf/Algemon/DCS-11). She is an experienced general who led the initial assault on Alitar following the *Ajax* incident, and under her leadership the Galvinite forces have captured a vast amount of territory. Only the disruption of supply lines and the threat of Red Rain prevented her from ending the war 30 years ago. Fiery and charismatic, Sheref has a reputation as a woman with nerves of steel gained from her days as an armor commander.

### CLIMATIC ZONES

During more peaceful days, Austrin scientists divided Galvin into six general climate systems: the polar plains, the polar littoral, the mid-latitude lowlands, the mid-latitude highlands, the tropics, and the tropical littoral. Like any Class 1 planet, Galvin displays an endless variety of landforms, vegetation, weather, and habitats—so these climate systems are only generalizations.

**Polar Plains:** The planet's poles are the most arid regions on Galvin; during summer, the unending sunlight bakes out water in this area, and during winter the cold air can't hold much water vapor. The polar plains are arid grasslands and steppes that ring the world above and below the arctic and antarctic circles, respectively.

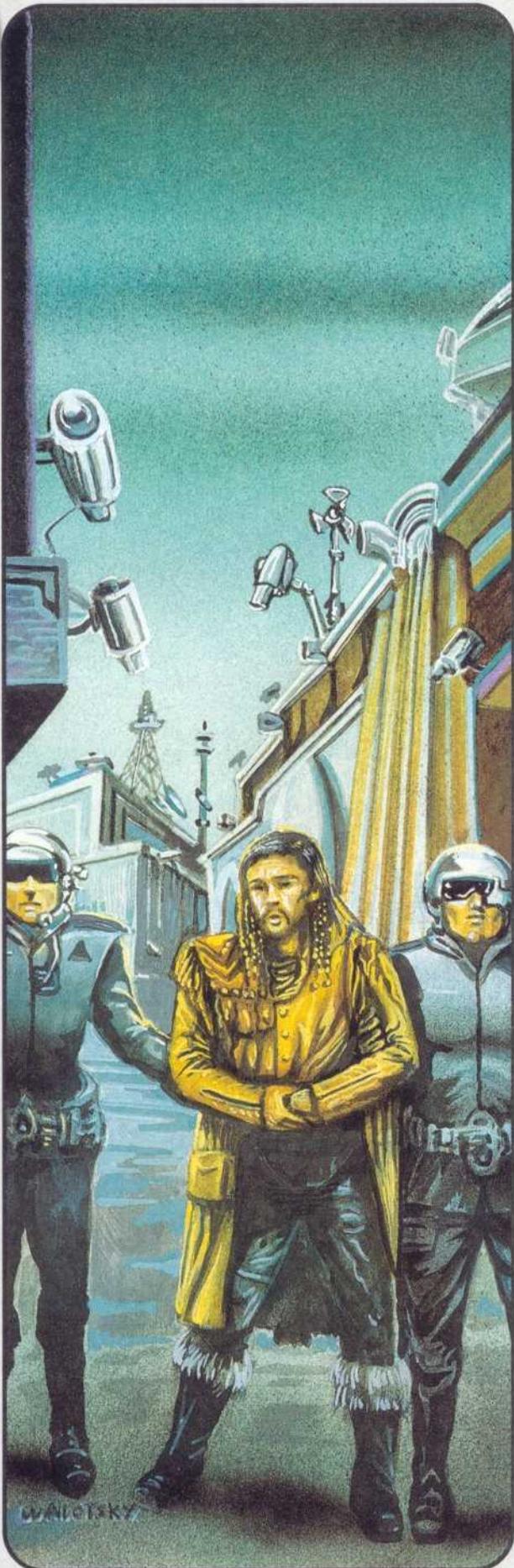
**Polar Littoral:** Numerous human settlements exist on both poles, since they're some of the best territory on the planet. The polar littoral is especially pleasant, as nearby seas moderate its seasonal temperature extremes. The northern littoral is the breadbasket of the planet, containing endless fields of grain and well-ordered apple and pear orchards.

**Middle Latitudes (lowlands):** The lowlands are marked by great expanses of temperate grasslands, marshes, narrow seas, and rolling highlands. In fact, wetlands, regions of sawgrass, mud, and reeds extend for dozens of kilometers around each of Galvin's seas. So far, the Galvinites haven't bothered to drain or develop these areas.

**Middle Latitudes (highlands):** Many Galvinites make their homes in one of Galvin's highland regions. These green hills are also quite suitable for human settlement, as they are drier and more suitable to industrial development than the sodden plains around them.

**Tropics:** Galvin's tropics are too warm and too wet for human comfort. Extensive forests, jungles, and mangrove swamps cover this region. Human settlements are few and far between, and consist mostly of logging camps and military installations designed to take advantage of the equatorial area.

**Tropical Littoral:** The tropical littoral is probably the least habitable part of the planet; it's a world-girdling swamp of mangroves, drowning forest, and vast mud flats. Uncounted thousands of major species populate this area, but few human expeditions have ever penetrated all the way to the ocean shore.



On paper, a War Powers Council, composed of several ministries, governs Galvin. These ministries include the Directorates of Defense, Intelligence, Industry, Finance, Internal Security, Social Planning, Resource Management, and State Affairs. In addition, the Supreme Commander oversees the Command Directorate, a branch of government that exists to regulate the interaction of the other Directorates and preserve the Supreme Commander's power. Galvin's District Governors, the officials who administer the planet in the name of the Commander, also belong to the Command Directorate.

When it's time to select the next Supreme Commander, the various Directors of the War Powers Council engage in months of scheming, maneuvering, and deal-making in order to elevate one of their number to the post. Supreme Commanders have fallen in the past through a confidence crisis in the War Powers Council, unpleasant developments in the war, poor decisions, or ill health. Supreme Commander Sheref rose from the Defense Directorate after her predecessor died in 2488, and no one's challenged her competence.

### FORT DRUM

Galvin's capital is the city of Fort Drum, a sprawling metropolis and military base. It's located at the head of a bay in the Western Sea, Galvin's largest body of water, about 1,000 kilometers north of the equator. Rail, water, and air transport systems all meet at Fort Drum, and the low Verdant Mountain range surrounding the city conceals the center of Galvin's scant mineral wealth. Fort Drum is Galvin's political, industrial, and military leader.

This city wasn't always the planetary capital; Resa Bhar, located in the southern hemisphere, was the site of the original Austrin-Ontis colony, and it still boasts a higher population than Fort Drum. Galvin's first Supreme Commander, General Janik Stenerude, moved the seat of government from Resa Bhar to Fort Drum in 2387, four years after he seized power. At the time, Fort Drum was an important industrial region and the location of Galvin's most powerful military base; Stenerude deemed it more important to the war effort and more defensible as a capital than the original colony site.

In the decades since the shift of the capital, Fort Drum has grown astronomically. A dirty factory town and labor camp in the late 24th century, Fort Drum has become the personal demesne of the Supreme Commander. From the start, the city functioned as a military base, and its major structures and districts are spread out over an immense region in order to minimize the damage of a nuclear or mass weapon strike. Power plants, emergency services, communications facilities, and crucial transport junctions are all buried in vast underground bunkers. Consequently, large regions of the city's surface exist as open parkland and lightly populated residential districts. Fort Drum is now a strikingly attractive city.

The pristine appearance of the city belies a very ugly truth: Galvin is held by a ruthless dictatorial government. The planet's leaders acknowledge few civil rights or liberties. Common citizens are subject to swift and final execution of "justice" if they take any actions that could conceivably weaken the war effort—including speaking out against the regime, demonstrating a lack of productivity in war-critical industries, avoiding military service, or traveling without authorization. Dissension and disloyalty are simply not tolerated on Galvin. The Internal Security Directorate maintains a force of thousands of uniformed police to monitor Fort Drum's civilian population; the Intelligence Directorate fields hundreds of plainclothes secret police, too.

The Alitarins are well aware of Fort Drum's strategic value. They've raided the city a number of times, but the local defenses are quite formidable, and their losses were staggering. They haven't tried to attack the Austrin capital in almost 10 years.

### ERHARDT FIELD

Erhardt Field functions as the spaceport and airport for Fort Drum. It's a sprawling apron of tarmac and concrete located about 20 kilometers from the city center in a high bowl-shaped valley of the Verdant Mountains. Vigilant air defense batteries ring the hillsides, tracking every arriving ship, while field controllers interrogate visitors extensively. Any deviation from an assigned course results in an immediate engagement with Galvinite defense forces.

Fort Drum is one of only a handful of Galvin's cities cleared for foreign traffic. Most of the planet is off limits to visitors, and the Galvin Defense Directorate remains deadly serious about dealing with anyone who makes unauthorized landings outside of designated port zones. Offworlders are free to roam almost anywhere they like within city limits. However, leaving the city without authorization is a capital offense.

### PriCom

The Primary Command Installation (referred to as PriCom by most native Galvinites) is a fortress armed with massive ground batteries and manned by thousands of crack troops. No one gets into PriCom without a search and background check that routinely takes an hour or more, and most newcomers find themselves accompanied by armed guards at all times. At the heart of PriCom lies the Commander's Dome, a massive building that protects Galvin's communication and control facilities. Vast airfields and spaceports surrounding PriCom stand ready to scramble squadrons of interceptors at a moment's notice.

Supreme Commander Sheref makes her home here, as the preceding three Commanders have done. From this spot she can speak to any field officer in Galvin's military, call on the computing resources of one of the most extensive databases in the Verge, and consult with her advisors and experts anywhere on the planet.

### THE MILITARY INSTITUTE OF GALVIN

Sprawled out along the northern edge of Fort Drum is the Military Institute of Galvin, one of the harshest military academies in the Verge. The institute trains the next generation of Austrin battle leaders using a rigorous five-year program that emphasizes tactical skills and discipline over esoteric academics. The program instills the Austrin virtues of quick thinking, courage, and independent action into its cadets. Since most of the high officials in every Directorate are either active-duty or reserve military officers, the Institute serves as a training ground for Galvin's highest leaders in all fields.

Galvin's system of patronage begins during the Institute years. Instructors and administrators earmark the most promising upperclassmen, looking out for their interests and pulling strings to get them the choicest assignments. An Institute connection is a highway to power, wealth, and success—as long as the cadet has what it takes to meet the challenge her superiors put in front of her.

### AUSTRIN LIMITED

Galvin's independence divested Austrin-Ontis officials of most of their governmental responsibilities, but the corporation still exists as only one more arms manufacturer among Galvin's independent industries. The company's leadership has changed

## MAJOR GARTH NORRIK ID SECTION LEADER

### Level 17 human Free Agent

STR 9	(+1)	INT 12	(+1)
DEX 13	(+3)	WIL 13	(+2)
CON 10		PER 9	
Durability: 10/10/5/5		Action check: 15+/14/7/3	
Movement: sprint 22, run 14, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 0	
Perks: Tough as Nails, Observant <sup>1</sup>			

<sup>1</sup> Norrik receives a -1 bonus to all Awareness-perception checks.

### Attacks

Unarmed-power	11/5/2	d6s/d6+2s/d4w	LI/0
Laser pistol	18/9/4	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	En/0

### Defenses

CF long coat: d4 (HI), d4(LI), d6-2 (En)

### Skills

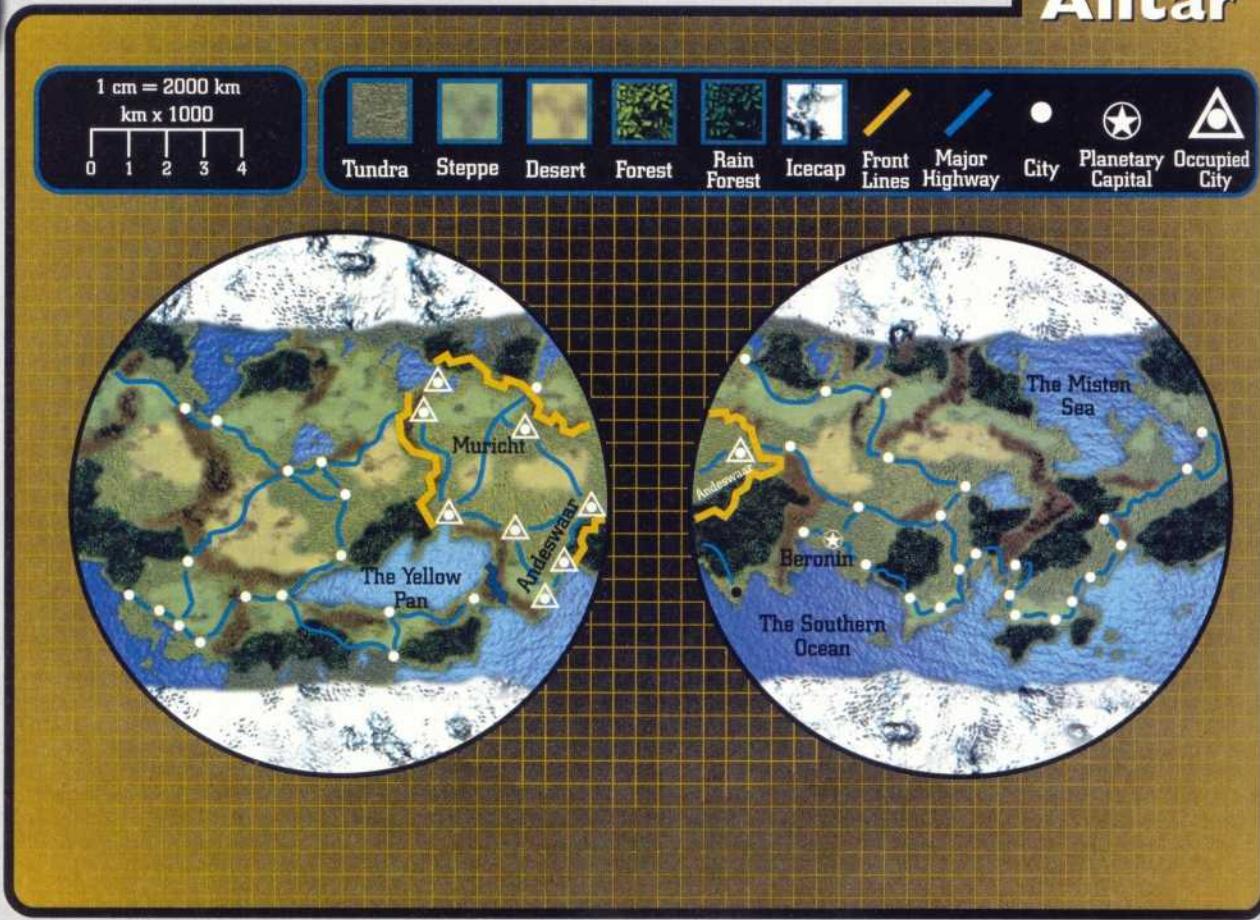
Athletics [9]-climb [11], throw [11], Unarmed [8]-power [11], Modern<sup>2</sup> [13]-pistol [18], SMG [15], Stealth [13]-shadow [15], sneak [14], Vehicle [13]-air [14], Movement [10]-race [11], swim [11], Stamina [10]-endurance [12], Knowledge [12]-computer operation [14], deduce [15], language: Standard [15], Verge system: Algemon [15], Security [12]-devices [14], protocols [14], System Operation [12], Awareness [13]-intuition [15], perception<sup>1</sup> [14], Investigate [13]-interrogate [17], search [15], track [14], Resolve [13]-mental [15], physical [14], Deception [9]-bluff [11], bribe [10], Interaction [9]-charm [10], interview [10], intimidate [11].

<sup>2</sup> Norrik receives a -1 bonus to all Modern Ranged Weapons skill checks.

Major Norrik is a top-notch intelligence operative, the best agent for wetwork and surveillance assignments. He's the deputy chief of Field Operations, the Directorate division responsible for raids, ambushes, and assassinations. Norrik climbed to his position through ruthless efficiency and an unblemished record of success, first as a field operative, then as a team leader, and finally as an administrator. Many of the most notable acts of espionage and terrorism perpetrated against Alitar in recent years have been his handiwork.

Garth Norrik is careful to cultivate a suave, almost dashing, public personality. People who don't know what he does for a living generally find him a likable and confident fellow who always thinks ahead. Beneath this polished surface, however, lurks a cold and merciless killer, an assassin ready to kill at a moment's notice. On occasions of stress or disappointment Norrik's facade slips, and the bleakness of his barren soul shows in his ice-cold eyes.

About five years ago, Norrik was infested by a parasitic organism (see the teln description on page 186) during a jungle operation in a remote region of Galvin. This organism is a telepathic sentient, capable of controlling Norrik's actions. It's no coincidence that Norrik emerged as a leader at this time, and he's been climbing steadily in the ranks ever since. Norrik doesn't realize that he is infected, and the teln tangle carefully guides his actions within normal bounds.



several times, and the current executives are generally loyal to the Federal State. The Austrin manufacturing complex is located in the mountains, about 30 kilometers west of the city's center; most of its facilities are deep underground, shielded against Alitarin attack.

With the restoration of contact with Old Space, Austrin Limited has quietly extended feelers on the issue of reuniting with its "parent" company, Austrin-Ontis Unlimited. So far, they've met with little success; the leaders of the Federal State of Algemron are content with independence as long as they're winning the war.

#### THE INTELLIGENCE DIRECTORATE

Cloaked in shadow and secrecy, the Federal State's Intelligence Directorate is one of the most powerful and most feared organizations in the Algemron system. In addition to ferreting out Alitarin spies and gathering intelligence on Alitarin activities, the Intelligence Directorate maintains a presence in the major systems nearby. Shadowing Alitarin diplomats, arranging illegal arms shipments to Galvin, and watching vigilantly for arms and supplies bound for Alitar, the ID has a very long reach indeed.

The Directorate is housed in a secret facility located somewhere in the mountains outside Fort Drum, hundreds of kilometers from the capital. Few people taken to the Directorate for questioning ever see the light of day again. The Directorate sponsors an extensive covert strike force, and it supports routine raids of Alitarin stations and posts. The ID also involves itself in weapons development, the assassination of prominent Alitarin leaders, and civil terrorism campaigns against the people of Alitar. No tactic or weapon is beneath the Directorate.

#### LODGINGS

The Internal Security Directorate carefully monitors travel on Galvin—though travel permits are usually available to citizens who haven't attracted any government suspicion. There are a number of decent hotels in Fort Drum, ranging from luxurious to spartan. The red-light districts and sleazy flophouses found elsewhere in the Verge don't exist in Fort Drum, as the police crack down on any kind of vice and require business operators to meet basic standards of decency and cleanliness. The best hotel in the city is the Galvin Interstellar Arms, a government-sponsored complex often used for diplomatic receptions and conferences. A room costs about \$150 per night (the prices are low because the Directorates of Finance and Social Planning control prices throughout Galvin's economy). Hundreds of rooms are usually available.

#### SITES OF INTEREST

Most offworlders don't get a lot of opportunities for sightseeing in Fort Drum. The Department of Hospitality, a division of the Internal Security Directorate, provides guests with official escorts. The police immediately take any non-Galvinite found wandering about without his escort into custody and question the prisoner severely; an escort who falls down on his job suffers even graver repercussions for his mistake.

#### RESA BHAR

Galvin's original colonial capital, Resa Bhar is a sprawling metropolis located in the southern grasslands. The early Austrin settlers established vast ranches in this region, and Resa Bhar

served as a center of livestock business, a transport hub, and a light industrial city. Snaking along the Bhar River for over 40 kilometers, it's much more vulnerable to attack than Fort Drum. Consequently, the Alitarins have attacked the city as recently as three years ago.

As the old capital and the second-largest city on Galvin, Resa Bhar also functions as the center of opposition to the rule of the Federal State. Agitators frequently speak out here in favor of reunification with Austrin-Ontis, ignoring the fact that their sponsor nation cannot take them back without flying in the face of the Concord. Police of the Internal Security Directorate deliberately exercise a light hand in repressing dissent here, choosing to wait and watch in order to see which dissidents might pose a serious threat to the Supreme Commander's regime. In the meantime, Resa Bhar is a trendy and vital city, illuminated by the highest level of art, debate, and political awareness found on Galvin.

Visitors deemed too suspicious or too unimportant to merit a pass to Fort Drum are often routed to Resa Bhar instead. Several stellar nations and Verge systems maintain consulates here amid the stately boulevards and monuments of the old planetary capital. Intrigue and espionage are a way of life here—although the ID routinely interrogates foreigners suspected of espionage.

## THE CHURGALT INSURGENCY

No Federal State officer will admit it, but Galvin faces the threat of revolution. In the densely forested Churgalt region, a small number of partisans have taken to the hills, refusing to acknowledge the Supreme Commander's authority. In fact, the leaders of the insurgency claim that the leaders of the Federal State are actually in league with some unknown aliens. So far, the Churgalt rebels haven't produced any evidence for this outlandish claim, but the government's response—grim silence followed by fierce campaigns to kill or capture every revolutionary involved—would be appropriate whether the claims were true or not.

The leader of the Churgalt insurgents is an old veteran by the name of Colonel Bender Davis (Hm/Algemron/DCS-7), a canny guerrilla who grew up on the Churgalt frontier. Using his superior knowledge of the hills to escape ambush after ambush, he's assembled a force of about 500 men and women. More important, Davis has established tenuous contacts with dissidents in several Galvinites cities, building a network of support among intellectual circles and a handful of retired veterans. Colonel Davis may have several friends or patrons highly placed in the Defense and Industry Directorates, but at the moment the Churgalt rebels are too busy staying alive to worry about overthrowing the Supreme Commander.

## THE DEFENSE NET

The Defense Net, a system of satellite weapons that can engage any hostile ship approaching the planet, guards Galvin against space attacks. Controlled from PriCom or one of three SecCom (Secondary Command) stations scattered around the globe, the Defense Net consists of three distinct satellite constellations, plus the associated sensor and communication equipment needed to keep the Net operational.

The highest constellation consists of 20 satellites in geosynchronous orbit (about 28,000 kilometers above the surface for Galvin), spaced equally over the planet's surface. Each satellite orbits about 21,000 kilometers from its three nearest neighbors. These satellites carry twenty missiles each, including nuclear weapons and anti-radiation devices. Any ship that approaches

Galvin must pass within range of at least three satellites in the first constellation.

The middle constellation consists of forty satellites in carefully timed polar orbits at an altitude of about 10,000 kilometers. They're typically spaced anywhere from 2,000 to 8,000 kilometers apart ( $2d4 \times 1,000$  km) and carry a quad-battery of four IR lasers. The satellites in this ring are maneuverable and can respond to a concentrated attack.

The third constellation, orbiting only 1,000 kilometers above Galvin's surface, consists of twelve satellites equipped with two heavy particle cannons and two point-defense guns each. These satellites are typically spaced about 2,000 to 5,000 kilometers

## CLIMATIC ZONES

Planetologists divide Alitar into several climatic zones: equatorial grassland and rain forest, temperate savannah, temperate forest, interglacial tundra, and glacial.

**Equatorial Grassland and Rain Forest:** Alitar's warmest and most humid region, the equatorial grasslands and rain forests form a narrow belt of tropical vegetation and balmy warmth that girdles the world. It's cool and dry by tropical standards, and quite comfortable for humans. Just south of the equator lie the Yellow Pan—Alitar's second-largest inland sea—and the Southern Ocean, an area that covers the planet's southern latitudes.

**Temperate Savannah:** North and south of the equatorial region is an arid belt created by the steady circulation of wind currents. Unlike on Earth, these weather patterns do not shift north or south at different times of year. Alitar doesn't have true desert regions, but the arid savannah of the temperate regions comes fairly close. Broad grasslands and plains stretch for thousands of kilometers in this zone.

**Temperate Forest:** Beyond the arid belt lies a second humid region in the middle latitudes. The temperate forest is what most people think of when they hear the name Alitar. This area contains a cool and rainy belt of mixed evergreens (without any seasons, Alitar's trees don't lose their foliage).

**Interglacial Tundra:** The forests of Alitar give way to an interglacial tundra around 55 to 65 degrees north latitude, where the temperature approaches the freezing point. Scalloped into glacial lakes, moraines, bogs, and other such features, the interglacial region marks the boundary zone of Alitar's permanent snow cover. Tiny orbital variations, local conditions, and climatic shifts have caused the glacial boundary to drift north and south by a few hundred kilometers over time.

**Glacial Zone:** Because there's no summer to melt off snow, Alitar's glacial zones begin at about 60 degrees north and south latitude, extending to the poles; the planet's ice caps are vast compared to Earth's polar caps. However, Alitar's ice caps are also comparatively warm and never see the extreme cold of sunless polar winters experienced by worlds with significant axial tilts. The poles of Alitar receive 11 hours and 24 minutes of both daylight and darkness each and every day of the year, just like every other part of the planet. Alitar's poles are much more habitable than most visitors expect; many life-forms have adapted to this glaciated environment.



apart, and like the weapons of the second constellation, they can independently maneuver to respond to serious attacks. The formidable firepower of these weapons is sufficient to deter anything short of a capital ship attack.

The Galvin Defense Net is not automated in any way; controllers on the ground interrogate incoming ships and simply destroy anything that doesn't answer their questions satisfactorily. The Defense Net operators would rather err on the side of safety by destroying a friendly or neutral vessel than risk their homes and lives by allowing an Alitarin to slip through with weapons of mass destruction.

## ALITAR

Galvin's larger and cooler twin, Alitar is a world fighting for its life. Since 2468, a Galvinite invasion force has held on to a vast stretch of Alitar's surface, occupying more than 10% of the colony. Unlike their foes on Galvin, the Alitarins held on to their original loyalty throughout the years of the Long Silence, proudly raising the flag of the Thuldans Empire above their cities. The *Monitor* Mandate dashed Alitar's hope for reunification with its parent nation and the possibility of Thuldans warships and soldiers driving the Galvinites back to their own planet.

Today, Alitar is home to the Imperial State of Algemon, a government formed from the old colonial administration of the Thuldans Empire. Ironically, it's a constitutional monarchy much more open and liberal than the Galvinite Federal State of Algemon. Unlike Galvin, Alitar must constantly seek arms and assistance from its neighbors in order to continue the fight; the leaders of the Imperial State cultivated diplomatic ties with Aegis, Oberon, and the Lucullan League before the Arrival, and

they continue to seek recognition from the old stellar nations. In the meantime, the *Monitor* Mandate prevents Alitar from forming any direct ties to states that might become involved in Algemon's conflict.

## PLANETOLOGY

Alitar, like Galvin, is a Class 1 world, well suited for human habitation. It is somewhat cooler than Earth, and it has an unusual characteristic: virtually no axial tilt. Thus, Alitar is a world without seasons, stratified into permanent temperate and subarctic zones by nothing more than latitude. Despite long decades of warfare, it remains a beautiful planet of snowy forests, majestic mountains, and mist-wreathed seas.

Of the two Class 1 worlds in this system, Alitar was considered the more desirable prize by the exploring stellar nations. It's more comfortable for human colonization, and its mineral wealth and potential for industrialization are significantly greater than Galvin's. Naturally, the Thuldans claimed this "better" world as their prize during the division of the system back in 2326. In 180 years of human settlement, the Thuldans have successfully introduced numerous Earth species and strains to Alitar's temperate regions; plains of golden wheat and ranges filled with longhorn cattle surround Alitar's settlements.

Because Alitar has no true seasons, the weather and climate for any particular point on the planet's surface remains constant throughout the year. Minor orbital variations, weather patterns, and ocean currents may create minor fluctuations in temperature and rainfall, but for the most part latitude completely determines the climate. The equatorial regions are much like Earth's tropics, with a year-round temperature of about 30°C.

The average daily temperature falls by about 5°C for every 10 degrees of latitude (a distance of about 1,250 kilometers) north or south of the equator. For example, at 40 degrees north latitude, the average temperature is about 10°C year round.

### FLORA AND FAUNA

Alitar is blessed with a biosphere nearly as complex and diverse as Earth's. Some of the native creatures of this biosphere are dangerous to humans. For example, the drexen of the savannah are fierce, predatory arthropods armed with poisonous lance-claws, and the thraat of the interglacial zone are carnivores that could easily kill a polar bear. In addition to native creatures, the original Thuldian colonists introduced a number of terrestrial species that are flourishing in Alitar's wilderness area.

### THE MISTEN SEA

Alitar's largest inland sea, the Misten, stretches almost 7,000 kilometers across the northern hemisphere along the edge of the ice cap. Warmed by currents circulating from its southern waters, the Misten isn't cold enough to support any kind of permanent ice pack, so its northern arm arrows deep into latitudes normally covered by ice. Since the Misten is located on the other side of the planet from the original colony, it's one of the last regions of Alitar to be settled by humans; only in the last 30 or 40 years have people come to the Misten's cold and rocky shores to stay.

When the Alitarins finally settled the Misten region, they found quite a surprise waiting for them—a race of sentients known as the xe'reen, or sealphins. The planetologists who surveyed this area early in the colony's history noted the existence of a species of intelligent aquatic animals, but never suspected they were dealing with sentients. In recent years, it's become clear that the xe'reen are a sentient, nontechnological race, perfectly at home in the fog-wreathed northern waters. The xe'reen are skittish and generally avoid human contact; there are rumors that some xe'reen have attacked human fishing vessels for intruding on their hunting grounds. If the war in Algemron ever simmers down again, the Alitarins plan a lengthy xeno-contact effort to learn more about their neighbors.

### GOVERNMENT

Until the declaration of the *Monitor* Mandate, Alitar was simply a Thuldian colony isolated from home for a long time. However, the Concord decided that the existence of a war between an Austrin-Ontis and a Thuldian colony was far too inflammatory for comfort, and it chose to divest both stellar nations of their colonies in Algemron. Neither side liked the deal, but they couldn't complain of unfair treatment.

With independence forced upon them, the Alitarins elected to transfer their colonial administration to the Imperial State of Algemron (ISA). Thus, Alitar remained a Thuldian colony in everything but name.

The former Imperial Governor rules the Imperial State as a potente. Normally, Thuldian Prime would have appointed someone to this post, but during the course of the Long Silence it became necessary for the Alitarins to choose their own leaders. Traditionally, the previous governor appointed her successor directly, subject to the approval of the Colonial Assembly (now known as the State Assembly). The ISA has held onto that tradition.

There are only two branches of government in the Thuldian colonial system: the administrative and the legislative. The potente oversees a cabinet of Lord-Ministers representing the departments of War, Commerce, State, Industry, Health, and Ed-

### GENERAL WILKEN MURRAD OF ALITAR

#### Level 9 human Combat Spec

STR 11	(+1)	INT 12	(+1)
DEX 8	(0)	WIL 9	(0)
CON 10		PER 11	
Durability: 10/10/ 5/5		Action check: 15+/14/7/3	
Movement: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 0	

#### Attacks

Unarmed-brawl	12/6/3	d4+1s/d4+2s/d4+3s	LI/0
11mm pistol	10/5/2	d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m	Hi/0
Plasma gun	13/6/3	d8w/d8+3w/d12+3w	En/G

#### Defenses

Powered attack armor: d6+1 (LI), d6+2 (Hi), d6 (En)

#### Skills

Armor [11]-powered [12]; Athletics [11]-throw [12]; Heavy [11]-direct [13]; Unarmed [11]-brawl [12]; Modern [8]-rifle [9], pistol [10]; Vehicle [8]-air [9], land [9]; Movement [10]-swim [11]; Stamina [10]-endurance [12]; Knowledge [12]-deduce [14], language: Standard [15], military history [14], Verge system: Algemron [15]; Tactics [12]-infantry tactics [16], vehicle [15]; Awareness [9]-intuition [11], perception [11]; Interaction [11]-bargain [12], intimidate [13]; Leadership [11]-command [14], inspire [12].

<sup>1</sup> This specialty skill uses a -d4 base situation die.

A living legend among his troops, General Murrad is the commander of the 22nd Powered Infantry division, called the Snow Tigers. Boisterous and overbearing, he is a battle-scarred veteran 50 years of age who believes in leading from the front. Murrad's manners need more than a little refining; he's coarse, abrupt, and quick to dismiss anyone who wastes his time. Murrad's Snow Tigers played a key role in the successful assault on the Big Slate Mountains three years ago, and he's always pressing his superiors to allow him to resume the attack.

In the absence of any large-scale military action, General Murrad has taken an intense interest in the skirmishing and warfare of the Andeswaar region. He personally leads raids into Galvinitate territory and has been known to join partisan bands for a short time in order to offer what help he can. The Galvinitate Intelligence Directorate has placed a bounty of \$50,000 on General Murrad's head, but so far he's personally incinerated three assassins attempting to claim the purse. Although he chafes under the restrictions, General Murrad allows a couple of bodyguards to stay near him when he places himself in harm's way.

ucation. In addition, fifteen Lord-Governors act as regional leaders in the Imperial State's Administrative Divisions, the equivalent of provinces or states. The Potente and the Lord-Governors have the power to convene or dismiss their respective Assemblies, they command the personal allegiance of Regional Ministers in each of the major bureaucracies, and they're also considered commanders-in-chief of any military forces stationed within their territory. The ISA, like the old Thuldian Empire, believes in placing great personal power in the hands of a



few selected men and women. Currently, two of the Lord-Governors hold their offices in exile, since the Galvinites occupy their territories. A third Lord-Governor is responsible for ISA ofworld holdings scattered throughout the system.

The current Potentate is Prince Banda Korov (Hm/Algemron/DCS-15), an aging man still possessed of great vigor and force of character. As Lord-Minister of Defense 40 years ago, he wasn't present in Beronin at the time of the *Ajax* attack; thus, he survived as the ranking lord of the colony. Korov rebuilt the government and the city, and is now overseeing the transition to independence. It's been Korov's misfortune to preside over the worst part of the war for Alitar, but most of his countrymen believe that Alitar would have fallen years ago without Korov's leadership.

### BERONIN

Once the largest city of Alitar, Beronin was almost completely destroyed by Galvinitre treachery in the *Ajax* incident. Located in the verdant coastal plains of the equatorial belt, Beronin was a beautiful city of open verandas and cool sea breezes, bordered on two sides by glittering white beaches. After the *Ajax* leveled three-quarters of the city, the new leaders thought long and hard about relocating the seat of government before deciding to remain in the devastated city. Moving the capital would simply make another city a prime target for Galvinitre attack.

Once the new government settled on this course of action, they rebuilt Beronin as a fortress city. Instead of reconstructing the city's devastated center, the Alitarins used the surviving suburbs as the heart of the new city, expanding it outward by hundreds of square kilometers. Government offices, key industries, and transportation networks are now separated by dozens of

kilometers. Engineers created huge earthen dikes to isolate sectors of the city and deflect blast effects. They also buried vital emergency and command facilities in hardened subterranean bunkers. Finally, extensive air/space defenses were added to the formidable defenses already in place, making Beronin a difficult target indeed.

The result is a city that appears eerily empty. More than 250 square kilometers of the old city center is nothing more than rubble and debris, wreckage that was never cleared from the *Ajax* blast. Ten years ago, Imperial Potentate Korov (then the Imperial Governor) decreed that the blast district of Beronin would remain a ruin forever as a memorial to the citizens who died there.

Alitar is home to a more open society than that of their neighbors on Galvin, but the risk of Galvinitre commando raids, terrorism, and espionage has forced Alitarin police to adopt very stringent measures. Offworlders are free to go where they like, with the exception of a few restricted spots; however, disobeying the restrictions results in swift and final punishment. The Alitarin response to Galvinitre terrorism is a well-armed, loyal, and well-informed populace willing to report suspicious activity and help local police commanders ferret out Galvinitre activities. Every shopkeeper carries a sidearm and keeps his eyes on everyone. Heroes accustomed to blustering their way through the peaceful citizens of other planets might find a very ugly surprise when they try the same tactics in Beronin.

### BANKER ISLAND

Beronin's original spaceport was located near the center of the *Ajax* blast zone. The landing field still exists, but all of its supporting structures were seared to ash by the bomb. The city's new spaceport, Banker Island, is on an artificial island in the

bay. Two causeways—one for civilian use, the other for military use—connect the city to Bunker Island. Both are heavily guarded, and offworlders can expect lengthy security checks before they're allowed to leave the spaceport. Bunker Island is a primitive facility, even by Verge standards; the Alitarins planned out a magnificent new spaceport to replace their old one, but they ran out of money only three years into construction. Huge sections of the spaceport are simply empty concrete shells, unfinished after 20 years of work.

### LODGINGS

Most of the city's grand old colonial hotels were destroyed in 2461. Only a handful have been rebuilt in the new Beronin—including the Algemonian Arms, the Borr-Mikalton, and the Old Bay. A few years ago a stay in any of these facilities would have cost a traveler an arm and a leg, but in the last five years, Alitar's economy has fallen to pieces. The Concord dollar buys a lot on Alitar these days, and a stay at a fine hotel typically runs only \$20-\$50 per night. Visitors should be warned that Alitar's crumbling economy has spurred a rise in criminal activity; Beronin isn't a safe place.

### SITES OF INTEREST

By far the most striking feature of Beronin is the Blast Zone. Block after block of rubble and ruin extend throughout this old city center. Some of Beronin's original skyscrapers survived the blast but were gutted by its effects; their lonely skeletons mark the former downtown district. Visitors are advised to stick to the main roadways and avoid entering any buildings; many are unsafe, and a small number of dangerous Alitarin scavengers called drexen make their homes deep in the ruins. Every year at least one or two tourists die from drexen stings received in the rubble.

### THE IMPERIAL CAPITOL

The Imperial Capitol was built to house the Colonial Assembly after the destruction of the old Assembly House. The new Assembly Building is a small, plain structure equipped with deep underground bunkers and formidable air defenses. Alitar's Imperial Assembly, consisting of 45 Lord-Ministers, convenes here at the potenteate's invitation. In addition, the Capitol building houses their offices, chambers, and support services. Alitar's Senators are elected to their posts and represent the populace to the Potenteate. While the administrative branch is much more powerful than the legislative branch, the whole Assembly has the power to censor or dismiss the potenteate through impeachment proceedings and votes of confidence. Prince Korov, the current Potenteate, has generally maintained good relations with the Assembly throughout his reign.

### DEFENSE RESEARCH CENTER

Located across the bay from Beronin, Alitar's Defense Research Center is a sprawling complex of munitions plants, laboratories, and testing grounds. The Red Rain agent afflicting Galvin was developed in the DRC Bioweapons Lab, and there are rumors that a counteragent for the mycotoxin exists in cold storage here as insurance against a Galvinite effort to introduce Red Rain on Alitar. Naturally, this facility utilizes the highest security precautions imaginable.

### THE UNIVERSITY OF ALITAR

One of the few portions of Beronin that escaped total destruction in 2461, the University was shielded from the worst of the *Ajax* blast by virtue of its location in the outlying suburbs of the city.

## MARA DEVRONA CONCORD ADMINISTRATOR

### Level 16 human Diplomat (Combat Spec)

STR 8	(+1)	INT 12	(+1)
DEX 11	(+2)	WIL 11	(+1)
CON 11		PER 12	
Durability: 11/11/ 5/5		Action check: 16+/15/7/3	
Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 0	
Perks: Reflexes, Tough as Nails			

### Attacks

Unarmed	4/2/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
Mass pistol	14/7/3	d6w/d6+2w/d6m	En/G
Tri-staff	12/6/3	d8+2w/3d4+1w/d6+2m	En/O

### Defenses

CF softsuit: d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)

### Skills

Athletics [8]; Melee [8]—powered [12]; Modern [11]—pistol [14]; Vehicle Operation [11]; Stamina [11]—endurance [13]; Knowledge [12]—computer [13] deduce [13], first aid [14], stellar nation: Galactic Concord [16], Verge system: Algemon [13]; Law [12]—court [15], enforcement [16]; Security [12]—devices [13], protocols [15]; System [12]—communications [14], weapons [14]; Administration [11]; Awareness [11]—intuition [14], perception [13]; Investigate [11]—interrogate [14], search [14]; Culture [12]—diplomacy [16], etiquette: Austrin [14], etiquette: Thuldan [14]; Interaction [12]—bargain [15], charm [16]; Leadership [12]—command [13], inspire [13].

Administrator DeVrona is a hard-nosed, no-nonsense cop on one of the toughest beats in the Verge—the Neutrality Patrol at Algemon. She is a small, athletic woman with close-cropped iron-gray hair and a forceful, commanding manner that demands attention. She is decisive and abrupt, inclined to form strong first impressions and then act on them while other people are still sizing up the situation.

While her current assignment as head of the Patrol forces her to make use of her background in security and law enforcement, Mara DeVrona's true talents are in the art of gunboat diplomacy. She's used to representing the Concord in a variety of unofficial roles, using veiled threats and blunt suggestions to make her thoughts known when more subtle methods might fail outright. Her experience made her a logical choice for a position traditionally held by Star Force officers.

Beyond her tasks in organizing the convoys, monitoring Pariah Station, and hosting what diplomatic efforts she can, Mara DeVrona has a higher mission—she means to bring the war in Algemon to an end. She aggressively seeks out any development that might erase the military edge Galvin currently holds, hoping that the Galvinites might prove more tractable should they lose some of their “toys.” In particular, DeVrona believes that a major Galvinite defeat might bring down Supreme Commander Sheref, possibly elevating someone more reasonable to power. Naturally, she has to hide her partisanship in the conflict carefully; if DeVrona is caught favoring the Alitarins, the political fallout for the entire Concord would be disastrous.

Given the censorship of the Internal Security Directorate on Galvin, the University of Alitar is far and away the most vital and creative institute of higher learning in the Algemon system. It's also a favorite target of agitators seeking to stir up anti-war opinion—though it's hard to win such sentiment in sight of the ruined skeleton of downtown Beronin.

### THE OCCUPATION

The invasion that followed the end of the cease-fire in 2461 very nearly brought Alitar to its knees. With their air and space superiority assured, the Federal State's forces landed at will, supplied their ground forces, and called down massive firepower to disrupt any Alitarin counterattacks against their beachhead. For almost three years, the Galvinites pushed their way out of the narrow landing zones, smashing any kind of organized resistance to their moves. However, the advance didn't go unopposed. The Alitarins ringed the main body of Galvinites with a net of hastily assembled units; even though hundreds or thousands of these men and women were cut off and captured by Galvin's vertical assaults, the Alitarins always found more cannon fodder to contain the beachhead and prevent a crucial ground breakthrough.

Today, over two million Federal State troops hold the administrative divisions of Andeswaar and Muricht—a swath of territory almost 2,000 kilometers by 1,000 kilometers in extent. The front lines are a nightmare tangle of minefields, defense stations, barbed wire, and free-fire zones; both sides are dug in. The last major offensive occurred three years ago, when the Alitarins retook the rough terrain of Big Slate Mountains on the eastern edge of the beachhead; the Galvinites lacked the supplies and manpower to push the Thuldans back at that time. In the last six months, the Federal State Invasion Commander, General Marken Ghuirere (Hm/Algemon/DCS-15) has created a plan designed to cut off the Alitarin forces along the plains south of the large mountain chain.

Large-scale military campaigns are rare in the Alitarin ground war, as both sides are approaching economic and military exhaustion. Platoon and company-level actions focused on neutralizing minor defense stations, observation posts, and terrain advantages still occur along the front lines. Unfortunately, any concentration of Alitarin hardware invites devastating orbital attacks from Galvin's navy. Likewise, the Galvinite forces must contend with relentless partisan activity and sabotage whenever they try to muster a major attack. It's a nightmare war of attrition.

Behind the lines, millions of Alitarins live under martial law imposed by the Federal State conquerors. Despite fierce local resistance and sabotage, most of the agriculture and industry of Andeswaar and Muricht have been restored to something approaching their prewar level. Battalion after battalion of Internal Security Directorate police oversees production in the Occupied Zone and neutralizes guerrilla activity.

Travelers passing into Galvinite-held territory do so at their own risk. Such persons are subject to extremely intrusive scrutiny, and security forces often detain them for weeks before they're allowed to proceed. The only reason the Alitarins allow any traffic at all into the Occupied Zone is that they hope to alleviate the suffering of their fellow citizens held captive. Traders carrying nonmilitary supplies, entertainers, medical personnel, and technicians are usually allowed to pass through the Alitarin lines. However, there's no guarantee that the Galvinites will allow them to return.

### DALIUS

Beyond the two Class 1 worlds of Algemon lies a system full of worlds both deadly and fascinating. Dalius is the first of these; it's a small gas giant hovering on the edge of the so-called "ice line"—the point in a system at which water may or may not freeze during planetary formation. Beneath its atmosphere of hydrogen and helium lie dilute seas of ammonia and water. Some early Austrin planetologists speculated that Dalius might conceal a narrow band in which Series I or Series II life could exist, but no one has ever found any evidence to support this theory.

Dalius boasts six moons, four of which are nothing more than captured asteroids a few hundred kilometers in size: Garian, Iona, Ouros, and Nemos. The innermost moon, Antigone, is an Io-like volcanic moon torn by tidal forces. The sixth moon, Clytemnestra, is the largest in Dalius's system, almost 4,700 kilometers in diameter. It's a cold and arid desert moon with a scant atmosphere of carbon dioxide. Both Alitar and Galvin possessed a handful of mining colonies and research posts on Antigone and Clytemnestra, but all of their outposts here were destroyed or damaged beyond repair in the early stages of the system war.

Today, the major force on Dalius is the omnipresent VoidCorp. Interested in terraforming and developing Clytemnestra, this giant corporation has purchased Alitar's interests on the moon and is currently building a domed colony and atmosphere plant. It's rumored that VoidCorp's presence here is simply an excuse to position a military force for a potential intervention in the system's conflict, but neither Thuldans Prime nor Austrin-Ortis would allow the corporation to involve itself.

### WREATHE AND ARGOLOS

Between the orbits of Dalius and Reliance lies a thin, scattered asteroid belt formed by the collision of a planet with the gas giant Havryn. Hundreds of thousands of minor asteroids now follow a variety of eccentric orbits in this region, but two are particularly noteworthy: Argolos and Wreathe. These two asteroids are remarkably large for bodies of this type, and some astronomers have speculated that together they once constituted about 60% of Algemon's missing planet. Both asteroids are rich in heavy metals and represent major mining finds.

In the early days of the system, the Austrins of Galvin claimed Argolos, and the Thuldans of Alitar claimed Wreathe. Domed mining towns still survive on both asteroids—though raids and bombardments have caused much destruction. Wreathe is extremely unusual in that it actually possesses a wisp of an atmosphere—mostly sulfur dioxide—and native Series IV life. One of Wreathe's primitive lichens, the plant known as whitespike, is exceptionally dangerous because it is the only known source of the hallucinogen baxinin. The Alitarins do what they can to hinder independent prospectors from collecting whitespike, but there's always someone willing to risk his life for the fantastic sums whitespike commands elsewhere in the Verge. Spikers—those humans and aliens addicted to this substance—will pay large amounts for their daily dosage. Wreathe's native lifeforms include several predators that have been known to attack humans, and more than a few whitespike prospectors have met their death at the hands of a veerkiller or a terragin.

## RELIANCE

The fourth life-bearing planet in the Algemon system, Reliance is an ice-world shrouded in a murky atmosphere of methane, hydrogen, and nitrogen. Its core of rock and metal lies deep beneath a mantle of water and ammonia ice, a frozen and featureless plain that covers the planet. The planet is marked by its extreme axial tilt and its long seasons: Reliance's summers and winters last for more than two and a half Earth years each. During this time, the hemisphere in summer has time to warm up to a near-tolerable temperature, while the hemisphere in winter falls into a deep freeze in which even the most resilient creatures must hibernate until the return of the sun.

Reliance is home to hydrogen-breathing creatures that were nurtured in its shallow, icy seas of water-diluted ammonia. Most of Reliance's creatures are primitive and unsophisticated by Series I standards, but they thrive in an environment that frequently experiences temperatures as low as -200°C.

Other than scientists, few people have any interest in Reliance. Its wealth of CHON elements (carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen) may be useful in synthesizing air, water, food, and organic compounds elsewhere in the Algemon system, but as long as the war persists, no one's going to make the necessary investments in atmosphere plants and refineries.

## HAVRYN

The largest of Algemon's planets, Havryn is a gas giant of Jovian proportions, a titan marked by bands of green, white, and blue. Unlike many gas giants, Havryn possesses few moons and rotates at a slow and stately pace. Astronomers have determined that this is a result of the collision that created Wreathe and Argolos; millions of years ago, another star with a retinue of planets passed through the outer reaches of the Algemon system, and the planet that was destined to become Wreathe got in Havryn's way. The head-on impact slowed Havryn's spin and removed enough velocity to cause Havryn to shift its orbit outward by almost half an AU. Only a few of Havryn's moons survived the approach and impact; the 10 satellites charted today are all tiny fragments of debris—none more than 100 kilometers in diameter.

Havryn is a potential site for gas mining in the future, but no one in the Algemon system can spare the infrastructure or capital to begin the project at this time.

## PALSHIZON

This frozen and useless rock offers almost nothing of interest to human colonists or miners. Palshizon is nothing more than an oversized carbonaceous asteroid, coated with a thin dusting of oxygen and ammonia ice. Despite its unattractiveness, though, Palshizon has become one of the keys to the Algemon system; its outer-system orbit made it an ideal place to locate the headquarters of the Concord Neutrality Patrol—the dark and silent space fortress called Pariah Station. Here, in the gloomy shadow of this frozen world, the Concord works to end the conflict tearing the system in two.

Both Alitar and Galvin grudgingly recognize a Cease-fire Zone (CZ) extending for one-tenth of an AU around Palshizon. Belligerent warships may not enter this area, and both sides must refrain from attacking ships in the CZ, regardless of their flag. Misunderstandings are, however, fairly common. Merchant vessels from all over the Verge exit drivespace here in order to join the list of neutral ships awaiting Concord escort to one of

the belligerent worlds. Neutral ships that enter the inner system without the company of a Concord escort do so at their own risk.

Pariah Station, the Concord HQ, simmers with tension and lethal arguments. Here Alitarin and Galvinites merchantmen, diplomats, and spies rub elbows. Brawls, gunfights, and outright murders are not uncommon—despite the best efforts of the station security forces. It sometimes takes weeks for a ship to work its way through the convoy lists, and bored spacehands looking for something to do contribute to the dangerous and seedy atmosphere of the station.

## HALO

A small gas giant marked with cool bands of blue and white, Halo was probably captured from a star that passed through Algemon millions of years ago. It seems generally out of place in Algemon, and detailed spectrographic analysis has shown that Halo contains the wrong chemical profile to have formed from the same protostar system that spawned Algemon and its original planets. Like any gas giant, it contains vast reserves of hydrogen and helium that might one day be tapped through gas mining, but Halo presents a strange natural barrier to such exploitation—namely, the energy aura for which the planet is named.

Halo's aura is created by the sweep of its powerful magnetic field through a faint ring system heavy in metal particles and conductive gases. The planet possesses a remarkably rapid rotation, and its magnetic pole is off its axis by thousands of kilometers, resulting in a broad sweep of magnetic force across its rings. A trickle of electricity incites these otherwise invisible gas and dust clouds to a dim fluorescence, illuminating the planet in a flickering glow.

Five moons orbit Halo, but only two of them are of any note. Abdiel, the closest moon, is an ice-surfaced orb about the size of Earth's moon. Uriel, the fourth moon, is the largest satellite in the Algemon system. It's covered in a frigid smog of nitrogen and hydrocarbons. Due to Halo's remote location, no humans have settled in this region.

## SYSTEM LOG

Algemon is a good example of the troubles that plague the Verge to this day. Distrustful of the return of the stellar nations, the people of Algemon remain firmly mired in their own version of the Long Silence, fiercely fighting the battles of the last Galactic War. Sensing that their conflict may invite the interference of powers they can't resist, both Alitar and Galvin are intensifying their efforts to achieve a clear victory before it's time to shift their battle to the negotiating table.

As a continuing battlefield, Algemon has attracted the worst sort of mercenary scum, arms dealers, and war profiteers imaginable. The fragile neutrality of the outer system is shuddering under the ruthless greed and agitation of merchants and soldiers looking for a way to make a buck from Algemon's war. Meanwhile, the deadly blows landed earlier in the conflict—the devastation of Beronin, Red Rain, the invasion of Alitar—may still overwhelm the struggling worlds.

## BREAKOUT!

Last week, the Imperial State of Algemon unveiled a long-awaited addition to their fleet with the commissioning of the battlecruiser *Relentless*. Years in the building, the *Relentless*

emerged from her subterranean shipyards in a daring breakout attempt, driving hard for open space. After scattering the Galvinite transport fleet over the Occupied Zone, the *Relentless* fled into the outer system and made starfall. Military analysts believe that the cruiser will undertake commerce raiding in the neighboring system, forcing Galvin to institute naval escorts for her merchant vessels throughout the Verge. The Federal State Navy has responded by assembling a task force composed of the heavy cruisers *Tamurlane*, *Nestor*, and *Chiron* to hunt down and destroy the *Relentless*.

It's rumored that the *Relentless* has a much more important mission than simple commercial raiding, but the Imperial State has been silent on the topic. What the mission might be, no one outside the Admiralty can say.

### BIG SLATE OFFENSIVE LAUNCHED

Early this month, the Austrin forces occupying the district of Andeswaar launched a heavily supported counteroffensive to drive General Murrad's Snow Tigers out of the Big Slate Mountains. The Austrins have introduced a number of new weapons in this attack, and the suddenly hard-pressed Thuldan defenders are falling back on all fronts. It looks like it might develop into an all-out rout—unless Murrad is simply setting a trap for his overeager adversaries.

### SMUGGLERS FIGHT BACK

Several times in the last four or five months, Concord patrol vessels attempting to interdict the whitespike smugglers working from the asteroid world of Wreathe have come up against black, alien vessels armed with extremely formidable firepower. Ignoring all attempts to communicate, these dangerous vessels typically cripple their pursuers and then make their escape. Some people have speculated that the Galvinite navy is using the vessels to trade in whitespike secretly, while others blame independent drug lords or Old Space speculators. A handful of alarmists claim that a new and previously uncontacted spacefaring species is behind the recent spate of confrontations, but this seems extremely unlikely.

### HEROES OF ALGEMRON

More than 99.9% of the humans native to Algemon come from either Galvin or Alitar; only a few thousand miners and space workers live in the domed cities and stations of the rest of the system. Galvinite heroes descend from Austrin-Ontis stock and retain all the normal benefits ascribed to heroes of that stellar nation (see page 45). In general, Galvinites have become much more regimented and predictable than their Old Space kin. The Austrins believe that guns allow the individual to protect his liberties against the demands of society, but on Galvin, no one questions the power of the state.

Alitarin heroes are still very Thuldan in outlook and temperament. They held onto their roots in the Empire much longer than their foes held onto their Austrin heritage. Consequently, Alitarins begin play with the benefits specified for Thuldan characters (see page 65). Many Alitarins feel as though they've been abandoned by their homeworld, and they're determined to show that they don't need the Empire.

### TELN

If their existence was even suspected, the teln would be classified as an external species (not of known origin). As it is, the teln have secretly invaded the Algemon system and begun their own insidious form of conquest. These wormlike parasites are harbingers of fear, paranoia, and suspicion for the people of Algemon and, perhaps, the rest of the Verge.

**Description:** The teln are a parasitic breed of wormlike creatures that combine in tangles to form group minds. An individual teln measures about 1 centimeter in length and possesses more instinct than intelligence. It isn't until a tangle—consisting of anywhere from 10 to 100 teln—forms a group mind that true intelligence emerges. A typical "larva" tangle consists of twelve creatures, a "brood" tangle contains 40 teln, and a "cluster" tangle includes 100 teln.

A group mind has a variety of psionic abilities upon which to call, as well as a vast network of intelligence. Each teln can connect with other group minds over great distances, providing support and advice as needed. In fact, teln can use their Telepathy-contact skill over a range of up to 5 AU without penalty; that's more than enough for planetside tangles to contact group minds in orbiting ships.

On the teln homeworld, each teln tangle resides within a symbiotic creature called a teln'og. A teln'og resembles an eyeless eel and measures about 40 centimeters long, with a diameter of 4 centimeters. The elongated, snakelike body houses the creature's internal organs, as well as its parasitic tangle of teln. Its large head features a circular mouth and short, suction-cupped tentacles. A teln'og isn't intelligent, but the teln mind within it can command it to do its bidding. Within a teln'og, a tangle has effective Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution Ability Scores of 6. In addition, its durability rating increases to 8/8/4/4.

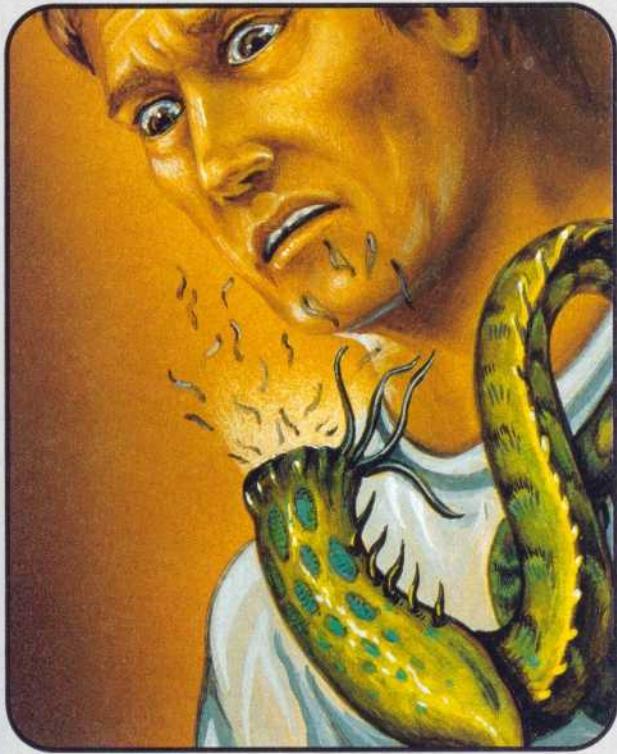
When the teln finds another creature to host a tangle, its teln'og crawls up to the creature's mouth and expectorates the tangle into it. (Usually, the tangle first renders its next victim unconscious through the use of Telepathy-mind blast.) The tangle works its way into a cavity inside the new host, where it can settle and issue mental suggestions.

**Encounter:** Though little is known or even suspected concerning the mysterious teln, there are a number of the creatures active in the Algemon system. Yet even in Algemon, Vergers and Arrivers might encounter a teln host and never realize it. A teln tangle can reside within a human, fraal, sesheyen, weren, or t'sa host. Mechalus physiology has thus far been able to resist teln infestation.

Teln hosts may not immediately realize that their bodies have been invaded. This is especially true if the host was rendered unconscious by teln mental attacks prior to the tangle's transfer. The group mind doesn't issue overt commands to the host. Every suggestion is subtle and insidious. The tangle observes and researches information about humans and their alien partners, so that every suggested task indirectly benefits a host's teln master.

The first stage of infestation lasts anywhere from four to eight weeks as the larva matures into the adolescent brood stage. At this point, the teln exercises a greater degree of control over its host, reflecting by the tangle's higher Telepathy-suggest skill score. After 8 to 12 months within a host, the brood tangle transforms into an adult cluster.

It's in this last stage of teln infestation that a host is totally dominated by the group mind inside it. At this point, the tangle



must direct the host completely, as the victim's own will and native intelligence has deteriorated. In addition, the teln can no longer take advantage of its host's skills; most physical actions now occur at the untrained level.

A cluster host changes to such an extent that casual observers can see evidence of the tangle intrusion. The most obvious evidence is the plural mindset adopted by a host: Such a victim speaks of "we" instead of "I." In addition, cluster hosts have sickly appearances and off-kilter mannerisms. In this last stage, hosts don't appear comfortable in their own bodies.

After reaching the cluster stage, a teln consumes its host until the host dies. Each week that a teln cluster remains, its host permanently loses 1 point from its wound and stun durability ratings, and 1 point from its Intelligence and Will Ability Scores. The host gradually becomes weaker and more crazed, until the group mind must assume total control. Once the host dies, the tangle must immediately find a new host; it can only survive outside a host for a short time—no longer than a few hours.

**Habitat/Society:** Almost nothing is known about the teln or teln'og. With the exception of the teln'og, teln hosts eventually die as the parasites consume them from within. Teln'og have developed so as to produce what the teln need, and thus aren't consumed as a byproduct of the relationship.

Teln hosts don't immediately realize their predicament, though close scrutiny by others may reveal physical and mental changes over time. A thorough medical scan may also reveal a teln tangle; a successful Medical Science—*xenomedicine* or *treatment* skill check, with a +1 penalty, is required. A Medical Science—*surgery* skill check, with a +3 penalty, is necessary to remove the tangle from its host. Of course, the teln and its mentally dominated host resist—physically and psionically—all such attempts. Usually, a tangle leaves its host (much the same way as it is passed on by the teln'og) before arousing undue suspicion. Once freed from its teln, a teln host eventually recovers from the side effects of the infestation. Durability ratings and Ability Scores return at the rate of one per week.

### TELN LARVA TANGLE

STR 1	(0)	INT 6	(-1)
DEX 1	(0)	WIL 6	(-1)
CON 2		PER 8	
Durability: 2/2/1/1		Action check: 7+/6/3/1	
Move: walk 2		#Actions: 1	
Reaction score: Marginal/1		Last resorts: 0	
Psionic energy points: 9			

#### Attacks

Mind blast	10/5/2	d4+1s/d4+2s/d6+2s	n/a
As host			

#### Skills

Knowledge [6]; Awareness [6]—*intuition* [12]; Investigate [6]—*search* [14]; Resolve [6]—*mental* [8]; Deception [8]—*bluff* [10]; ESP [6]—*mind reading* [8]; Telekinesis [6]—*levitation* [8]; Telepathy [8]—*contact* [10], *mind blast* [10], *suggest* [11].

### TELN BROOD TANGLE

STR 1	(0)	INT 10	(0)
DEX 1	(0)	WIL 10	(+1)
CON 3		PER 12	
Durability: 3/3/2/2		Action check: 10+/9/4/2	
Move: walk 2		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 2	
Psionic energy points: 15			

#### Attacks

Mind blast	18/9/4	d4+2s/d6+2s/d8+2s	n/a
As host			

#### Skills

Knowledge [10]; Awareness [10]—*intuition* [12]; Investigate [10]—*search* [12]; Resolve [10]—*mental* [14]; Deception [12]—*bluff* [14]; Leadership [12]—*command* [14]; ESP [10]—*clairaudience* [12], *clairvoyance* [12], *mind reading* [16]; Telekinesis [10]—*levitation* [14], *psychokinetics* [14]; Telepathy [12]—*contact* [16], *illusion* [16], *mind blast* [18], *mind shield* [16], *suggest* [18].

### TELN CLUSTER TANGLE

STR 1	(0)	INT 15	(+3)
DEX 1	(0)	WIL 15	(+5)
CON 5		PER 18	
Durability: 5/5/3/3		Action check: 15+/14/7/3	
Move: walk 2		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 4	
Psionic energy points: 22			

#### Attacks

Mind blast	28/14/7	2d4+2s/2d6+2s/2d8+2s	n/a
As host			

#### Skills

Computer [15]—*hacking* [18]; Knowledge [15]—*deduce* [18]; Awareness [15]—*intuition* [18]; Investigate [15]—*search* [18]; Resolve [15]—*mental* [24]; Deception [18]—*bluff* [22]; Leadership [18]—*command* [22]; ESP [15]—*clairaudience* [18], *clairvoyance* [18], *mind reading* [20]; Telekinesis [15]—*levitation* [18], *psychokinetics* [18]; Telepathy [18]—*contact* [22], *illusion* [22], *mind blast* [28], *mind shield* [24], *suggest* [24].

# OBERON

*"Come to the Oberon system and make your fortune. Riches beyond your wildest dreams!"*

-A Rigunmor Grid Ad

Such were the promises of the Rigunmor recruiting campaigns more than a century ago. The old propaganda posters and celebrity endorsements are common items in museums today, shining examples of the best marketing campaign in mankind's recorded history. These promotional items depict men and women working together in the mines of Lison for a few hours each day before retiring to the comfort of the pleasure domes on the planet's sunny surface. For the Vergers living in this system today, the words of those old advertisements and commercials are a cause for bitter laughter.

The Oberon system is a large and complex one. It contains two stars, Titania and Oberon, set some 350 AU apart. Titania, the larger of the two solar bodies, is a blue supergiant. However, no planets orbit this star—perhaps due to its great size and forceful solar wind. Oberon, on the other hand, possesses nine planets. Two of them, Spender and Mindara, are near-molten worlds in close orbit to Oberon. Another three, Leen, Lison, and Hux, are terrestrial worlds with moderately distant orbits. Farther out, two gas giants, called Werth and Kreshaw, revolve around Oberon, and two rocky worlds, Iris and Norn, mark the edge of the system. Both of these planets could be former moons of Werth or Kreshaw that escaped into independent, though unstable, orbits.

Lison is the center of human interest in the Oberon system. A first glance at this planet, however, would make such a statement seem unlikely, as Lison's ecology is only slightly more hospitable than the ecology of Oberon's molten worlds. Like most of the inner planets in this system, Lison has become tidally locked due to the inexorable slowing of its rotation; thus, Oberon's radiation constantly bombards one side of the planet, while the other side lives in perpetual darkness.

## HISTORY

Exploitation appears throughout the entire recorded history of the Oberon system. Humans came here in order to strip valuable metals from Oberon's planets and moons. In the process, they have made themselves slaves of the system's economics.

Rigunmor records, made public during the Second Galactic War, reveal that a group of independent scientists aboard the research vessel *Cyclops* were the first to visit the Oberon system. Reconstructed logbooks tell the story of a group of young researchers exploring this area of space in 2323. Apparently, these scientists wanted to make precise measurements of Titania's outer corona and use the data to further their academic careers. The curious explorers soon became sidetracked and stopped to map out the details of the entire system.

What they found on Lison changed this system forever. After only 16 hours of surveying the surface, scientists discovered quantities of rhodium beneath the topsoil. Immediately upon making this discovery, the *Cyclops* departed for the Tendril system. Upon making starfall, they sent a message about their find to the Stellar Ring and immediately returned to Oberon.

Unfortunately, an anonymous drivesat technician sold the information to another stellar nation. The greedy technician "erroneously" routed the researchers' messages to the *Aeneas*,

a Rigunmor battlecruiser patrolling the area. Three weeks later, the *Aeneas* arrived at Oberon and claimed the system. The *Cyclops* and its crew were never heard from again, and the Rigunmor Star Consortium explored Oberon and Lison.

## COLONIZATION

Greed soon proved itself the most powerful force in the Oberon system. A fleet of twelve Rigunmor military vessels quickly assembled about the orange star. Within four months after the doomed *Cyclops* sent her message, the Rigunmor fleet had seized complete control of the system and instituted an immediate blockade: Foreign vessels were not permitted to enter the system. Meanwhile, high volumes of Rigunmor traffic, most of it shipping cargo, landed on Lison.

Motivations of wealth and power made the work of setting up a mine on Lison pass by quickly—if not safely. 2319 saw the first rhodium mine begin production. In the haste surrounding the mine's construction, more than 1,000 technicians died in accidents. It is unclear whether those first miners were coerced, or if they volunteered for the task hoping to retire rich. Regardless, the long periods of work and substandard conditions bore a terrible cost in lives. The Rigunmors didn't finish construction of a functional colony with permanent living quarters until 2330.

Leaders for the Rigunmor outpost soon found that the small population of miners on Lison severely limited production. By 2334, more than a dozen fertile rhodium quarries sat quiet and unused. Fearing reprisals from the Star Consortium capitalists who wanted the mine to meet its projected rhodium output, Lison's governors struggled to increase the work force. Their first initiative offered bonuses and vacation time for the "production" of children, and the plan met with a healthy amount of success. Still, a decade would pass before the Rigunmors could "harvest" a crop of humanity and put it to work in Lison's mining operations.

Thus, they drew up a supplementary plan. In a brilliant fit of marketing, the Rigunmor governors hired publicists from the entertainment and political industries of the Stellar Ring. These professionals built Lison's now-famous image as a planet of opportunity. Throughout much of Old Space, Grid advertisers neglected to use pictures of Lison's ugly, cratered surface or dark subterranean shafts. Instead, they displayed images of miners working short days for excellent pay. Rigunmor vessels had to make many trips to collect the thousands of volunteers desperate for a chance to make their fortunes. The population of Lison soon swelled to a million underpaid, overworked sentients of mixed species and nationalities. The Rigunmor recruiters were well paid for each volunteer they brought to Lison. At best, they were liars and con artists; at worst, they conscripted citizens of all nationalities in the dark of night. Nothing stood in the way of their greed.

## THE SECOND GALACTIC WAR

The Lisons' experiences during GW2 were unique within the Verge. Unlike many of its neighbors, the Oberon system never truly experienced the Long Silence. Of course, the Rigunmor Star Consortium became just as entrenched in the intergalactic war as any of the stellar nations. Unlike most empires with Verge colonies, however, the Rigunmors thought their Verge

asset too valuable to lose. Rigunmor warships, growing fewer in number, continued to patrol the system and protect Lison's resources.

## REVOLT

Rigunmor history texts express surprise and disgust at the actions of the colonists on Lison during GW2. How many Verge worlds begged for their parent empires to care for them? How many were protected from invasion or piracy? How many worlds devolved into barbarism and savagery without support? These are the questions Rigunmors ask when criticizing the Revolt of 2373.

From the Lisons' point of view, the revolution seemed inevitable. More than 90% of the population had relocated to Lison under false pretenses (or were the children of those who had), and their loyalty to the Rigunmor government simply didn't exist. Despite the riches in Lison's crust, its miners saw very little of its wealth, and their working conditions remained intolerable. Stories of cave-ins and losses in the thousands circulated despite official denials of any accidents. The presence of a strong military force was the only factor that held the planet together.

During the war, the local Rigunmor fleet started to run short on both ships and personnel. They couldn't replace ships, but personnel was another matter; Lison boasted a large, if untrained, population. In 2354, Guilder Canary opened his protectorate government to young locals. Eventually, the Lisons

filled positions on military craft, too. Canary did not live to regret his decision.

Nineteen years later, imported Lisons numbered more than half of those under Canary's command. The miners had found an outlet for their seething anger and unfulfilled greed—namely, military life. It wasn't long before they used it. A miner's strike in the city of Tribon met with the typical response from Guilder Canary. He ordered the military to silence the "radicals." It refused. The resulting revolt wasn't bloodless, but it was brief.

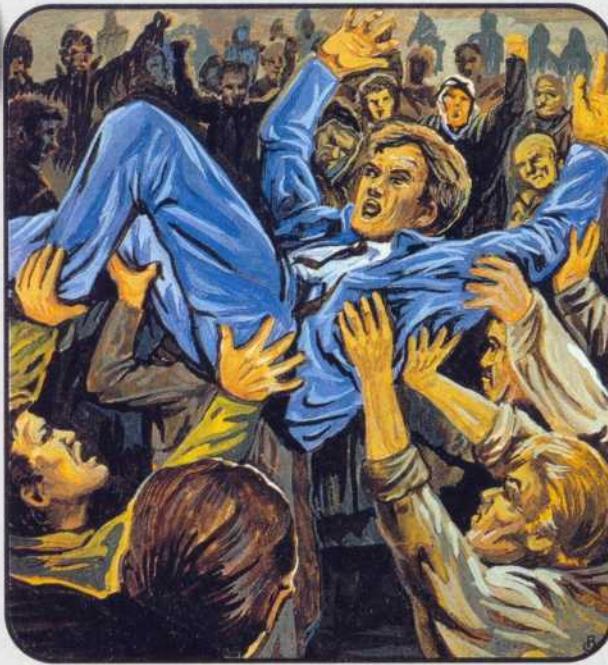
In 2375, the destruction of the drivesat at Kendai sealed the Rigunmor decision, cutting the Verge off from the rest of civilized space for more than a century.

## REUNIFICATION

The reaction of the Oberon system's inhabitants to news of the stellar nations' return to the Verge varied widely. A few individuals, still thinking of Lison as their prison, saw reunification as a blessing of the highest order. Many of these Vergers hitched a ride with the *Monitor* as it made its way back from the Hammer's Star system in 2497. Most of the Lisons, however, were surprised by the Return; they had forgotten their sufferings under the Rigunmor regime. One hundred and twenty-four years of independence had passed (more than the lifespan of an overworked colonist), and a generation of Lisons had grown old under the new democratic government. Despite a fine educational system, none of the Lison youth had personal experiences of the horrible conditions in Lison's past.

TABLE S13: OBERON SYSTEM

	Spener	Mindara	Leen	Lison
Primary	Oberon	Oberon	Oberon	Oberon
Planetary Class	Class 5	Class 5	Class 2	Class 3
Gravity	G1 (0.26 g)	G1 (0.29 g)	G2 (1.14 g)	G3 (1.64 g)
Radiation	R3 (61 rem/day)	R3 (46 rem/day)	R1 (0.4 rem/yr)	R2 (8 rem/wk)
Atmosphere	A0 (trace)	A0 (trace)	A3 (N <sub>2</sub> , O <sub>2</sub> )	A1 (N <sub>2</sub> )
Pressure	P0 (0.021 atm)	P0 (0.044 atm)	P3 (1.61 atm)	P2 (1.06 atm)
Heat	H4/H0 (-211° to 496°C)	H4/H0 (-228° to 436°C)	H2 (10.3°C)	H4/H0 (-190° to 290°C)
Orbital Distance	0.19 AU	0.24 AU	0.76 AU	1.20 AU
Diameter	3561 km	4316 km	15,614 km	14,752 km
Year	33.8 days	48.0 days	270.5 days	536.7 days
Day	33.8 days	48.0 days	54.8 hours	536.7 days
Axial Tilt	3°	22°	14°	19°
Density	0.92	0.85	0.93	1.42
# Satellites	0	0	2	0
	Hux	Kreshaw	Werth	Iris
Primary	Oberon	Oberon	Oberon	Oberon
Planetary Class	Class 3	Class 5	Class 4	Class 4
Gravity	G1 (0.29 g)	G4 (3.15 g)	G2 (0.88 g)	G0 (0.14 g)
Radiation	R2 (14 rem/wk)	R4 (28 rem/hr)	R3 (43 rem/day)	R3 (78 rem/day)
Atmosphere	A3 (CO <sub>2</sub> )	A1 (H <sub>2</sub> , He)	A1 (H <sub>2</sub> , He)	A0 (trace)
Pressure	P1 (0.21 atm)	P5 (gas giant)	P5 (gas giant)	P0 (0.08 atm)
Heat	H3/H0 (-180° to 89°C)	H0 (-218°C)	H0 (-233°C)	H0 (-240°C)
Orbital Distance	1.84 AU	12.04 AU	18.88 AU	23.54 AU
Diameter	3976 km	164,232 km	64,432 km	4842 km
Year	4.99 years	46.70 years	91.70 years	127.66 years
Day	4.99 years	39.88 hours	8.31 hours	53.6 hours
Axial Tilt	76°	36°	98°	172°
Density	0.92	0.24	0.17	0.36
# Satellites	0	3	5	0



The *Monitor* spent only two weeks in the Oberon system in 2497. During those days, emissaries from the Galactic Concord and various stellar nations made numerous trips to Lison. These emissaries brought with them examples of the newest fashions, products, and technologies that Lison had never seen. In fact, the Rigunmor delegation would often hand out samples of finely crafted materials at public demonstrations; these samples quickly became a mark of status; desire for Old Space objects waxed. The campaign to win over the Lisons seemed successful.

Three days before the *Monitor* was scheduled to make starfall, calls went out for an immediate referendum on reunification with the Rigunmor Star Consortium. Despite the vehement objections of many—mostly older—Lisons, polls indicated that more than 66% of Lison's population would vote for assimilation into the Rigunmor Star Consortium.

### CONSPIRACY

The night before the referendum, the Rigunmor representatives held a clandestine meeting aboard the *Monitor*. In this conference, the Guilders, desperate to return a profit, laid out a quick timetable for the restoration of Rigunmor rule on Lison. Plans were set out for the arrival of Rigunmor military forces to preserve the "transition government." The Rigunmor delegates' language revealed their true intentions, however. Sentiments such as "The servants of our Consortium could be troublesome if they resist us" and "Unskilled labor is easy to replace, and then we wouldn't have to worry about this little democracy" were bandied about frequently.

Unfortunately for the Rigunmors, some agency had bugged the meeting. To date, the details of the covert operation remain a mystery. Officially, Lison's government claims no knowledge of the incident. Perhaps independent Lisons were behind the operation. Other theories point to agents of another stellar nation interested in seeing a Rigunmor defeat.

Whoever it was, they sent the recording to a Lison media service. Remarkably, the journalist who received the tapes sent copies to President Kevik instead of broadcasting them.

### COUNTER PLOT

Acting under presidential orders, the media suppressed the Rigunmor tapes, and the referendum to join the Consortium passed. President Kevik said nothing to disturb the referendum, and instead made plans to nullify the decision without starting a war. Meanwhile, officials were sent to meet with the Rigunmor delegates and discuss plans for a mutual future.

President Kevik met with representatives of the Galactic Concord and several stellar nations over the next few days. During the assembly, Kevik drafted a document recognizing Lison independence. He expressed interest in integrating Lison into a stellar nation within a few years. Seeing both an opportunity for profit and a chance to wound the Rigunmors, the stellar nations agreed to recognize Lison's independence. As a final step, the delegates drew up a plan for a Galactic Concord base in the Oberon system.

Two hours before the *Monitor*'s starfall, the United Lison government broadcast the Rigunmor tapes over the planet and the system. The Lison populace was, to say the least, shocked that their recent allies demonstrated such a low opinion of their newest citizens. The Rigunmors' low opinions of Lison government severely damaged their cause, and the Lison government annulled the referendum for reunification. An hour later, the Galactic Concord, the Orlamu Theocracy, and Insight led the twelve stellar nations in a simultaneous announcement recognizing Lison's right to independence.

### GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

The return of the stellar nations to the Verge has had a drastic effect on the order and stability of the Oberon system—as it has everywhere in the Verge. Already encumbered by overpopulation, industrial pollution, and a capricious political system, the people of Lison must confront issues of integration and assimilation into the whole of a galaxy and its nations.

### TECHNODEMOCRACY

Lison's government reflects the simplicity of a human dream and the complexity of the realities of human interaction. After the revolt in 2373, the Lisons—like many people in the past—attempted to construct a completely democratic society. This technodemocracy, as they now call their political system, consists of an elected president, who controls the daily operations of the United Lison, and the citizens themselves, who form the only lawmaking body of the state. Elected senators serve only to inform the public and advocate a position, but any citizen can propose a piece of legislation. When enough sponsors have been found, the entire citizenry votes on the legislation.

History has proven that a completely democratic government eventually disintegrates into chaos or unites under a single dictator—or both. Teetering between both extremes, the United Lison State (ULS) has survived for more than a century—though challenges still remain. While the Lisons possess an almost fanatic nationalism and pride in their form of government, their system is highly reactive and is subject to frequent "mood swings." For example, a single mining accident brings forth dozens of proposals for increased regulation, and a single hostile encounter with a foreign power brings out declarations of war within minutes. This political structure is inherently unstable, and it falls to the president to balance and moderate public opinion with good sense.

Corruption remains another constant problem. The system

depends on fast and accurate technology to gather each citizen's vote. Parties both domestic and foreign have infiltrated the United Lison State's mainframes in the past to alter the results of an election.

## TODAY

Under Kevik's administration, the state has remained relatively placid. Economic conditions have generally improved, and until recently the Lisons have had no real threats; they even view the pirates of Oberon as a part of their system rather than an external threat. However, Kevik's moderate position has come under fire from both sides of the assimilation debate—especially as the stellar nations move in to the system. Some citizens, even after the Rigunmor experiences, desire a quick reintegration with a stellar nation; other xenophobes would go to war with them all. In his eight years as president, Kevik has gathered more political weight and power than any of his predecessors. Now it will largely fall to him to keep the United Lison State intact.

The various stellar nations have also had mixed reactions to the political system of the ULS. "An interesting experiment" was the most common remark heard from interstellar travelers. Others noted that such a system of government was "doomed to fail."

## THE GALACTIC CONCORD

The young Galactic Concord has found the Oberon system a good location to exercise its authority. Here, ties to stellar nations have largely dissolved, and the primary planet has grown independent. Yet, the system's resources attract the interest of the greedy nations, and it is the Concord's role to ensure that small differences in opinion do not grow into open conflict that could spread out of the system.

Concord Ambassador Cynthia Veil laid out her plan for the system soon after her arrival on the *Monitor*. Her first step was to categorize the United Lison State as officially independent. The ULS completed that step on its own, thanks to some deft political maneuvering. The next step, now under way, is the forging of formal diplomatic ties with the Lisons. The Concord, the Orlamu Theocracy, the Solar Union, and the Hatire Community have led the way by opening the first embassies in the Lison capital of Tribon.

Veil sees the Concord's involvement with the Lisons as necessary for their successful reintegration with the rest of the Stellar Ring. She believes that the Lisons' wealth will eventually force them to join themselves to a stellar nation. The constant onslaught of pirates and scavengers—not to mention the interference of the stellar nations themselves—will soon force this realization on the Lisons.

## THE STELLAR NATIONS

The stellar nations are more than aware of Veil's position on Oberon's future. Most of them can admit that the presence of a single strong stellar nation would work best for the future of the system; once established, it is unlikely that even the most aggressive of the stellar powers would provoke open hostilities over a single planet. With the exception of the Rigunmors—who protest that they have always owned the system—the stellar nations have supported Veil's plan to reintegrate the Lisons. Of course, all of the nations are taking steps to ensure that they will be the ones to shepherd the Lisons.

## MICHAEL KEVIK PRESIDENT OF UNITED LISON

### Level 14 human Diplomat (Tech Op)

STR 9	(0)	INT 10	(0)
DEX 10	(0)	WIL 12	(+1)
CON 8		PER 13	
Durability: 8/8/4/4		Action check: 12+/11/5/2	
Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 3	
Perk: Fortitude <sup>1</sup>			

<sup>1</sup> Kevik receives a -1 bonus to all Stamina-endurance checks.

### Attacks

11mm ch pistol 11/5/2 d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m HI/0

### Defenses

CF short coat: d4-1 (LI), d4-1 (HI), d6-3 (En)

### Skills

Modern [10]-pistol [11], rifle [11], Vehicle Operation [9], Stamina [8]-endurance [10], Business [10]-corporate [16], illicit [12], Knowledge [10]-computer [11], deduce [14], language: Standard [13], Verge system: Oberon [13], System Operation [10]-engineering, Technical Science [10]-mining operations [14], Administration [12]-bureaucracy [15], management [15], Awareness [12]-perception [13], Resolve [12]-mental [14], Culture [13]-diplomacy [14], Interaction [13]-bargain [16], charm [16], intimidate [14], Leadership [13]-command [14], inspire [18].

Once a successful free trader, Michael Kevik is the first man since the creation of the United Lison State to hold the presidency for more than two consecutive years. He is now in his eighth year as chief executive. Although some see his penchant for speaking honestly and bluntly as a weakness, his ability to form coalitions and broad bases of support is matchless. Kevik is generally well liked by his constituents, and his personal magnetism and good nature have made others reluctant to oppose him.

What most people don't know is that Michael bears a deep-seated grudge against the Rigunmor Star Consortium for their actions during the Return. Humiliating them during the final stages of the referendum simply wasn't enough for President Kevik. He wants to hurt them.

Kevik is fully aware of Concord Ambassador Veil's desire to have the United Lison State become officially connected to a stellar nation. Though he publicly shuns any mention of stellar nation affiliation, Kevik has privately established a small coterie of high-ranking Lison officials and business leaders who are eager to add the wealth and technology of a stellar nation to their own. Kevik takes great pains to keep the existence of this secret "cabinet" hidden from Ambassador Veil, and so far has been successful in this regard.

If the ULS joins a stellar nation, it will be one of Kevik's choosing. Although the Orlamus, the Solar Union, and the Hatires have all made overtures to Lison, President Kevik has been subtly playing each against the other. In addition, he has sent out several attachés to the Nariac Domain. It is his ultimate goal to join with the Nariacs and complete his revenge upon the Rigunmor Star Consortium.

## PAUL NEXTLER COMMISSIONER, UNITED LISON MINING

### Level 9 human Tech Op

STR 11	(+1)	INT 12	(+1)
DEX 10	(0)	WIL 10	(0)
CON 10		PER 8	
Durability: 10/10/5/5		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 1	

### Attacks

Unarmed-brawl 12/8/3 d4+1s/d4+2s/d4+3s LI/0

### Defenses

Battle vest: d6-3 (LI), d6-2 (HI), d4-2 (En)

### Skills

Athletics [9]; Unarmed [10]-brawl [12]; Modern Ranged Weapons [10]; Vehicle [10]-land [11]; Stamina [10]-endurance [11]; resist pain [11]; Business [12]-corporate [13]; illicit [13]; Knowledge [12]-computer [13]; Language: Standard [15]; Verge system: Oberon [15]; Law [12]; System Operation [12]; Administration [10]-bureaucracy [11]; management [12]; Awareness [10]; Street Smart [10]-criminal [12]; knowledge [12]; Deception [8]-bluff [9]; Interaction [8]-bribe [10]; charm [11]; Leadership [8].

### Cyber Gear

Cyberlimb (Good, 13 STR in left arm): Adjust all Strength-based skill checks and damage when Nextler uses his left arm.

Nextler walks the line between an engineer and politician. Three decades ago, a mining accident at station K24A4 left him the only survivor of his team. After his injuries healed, Nextler became a spokesman for government supervision of the mine sites. While his call for increased regulation angered many of the avaricious, independent miners who were trying to get rich quick, those Lisons who had been miners all their lives echoed Nextler's demands. In this way, Paul Nextler unwittingly began his political career. He has recently been elected to the office of Commissioner—and now supervises the regulating body that his campaigning helped to create.

Nextler is a hard-talking man who always stands by his principles. His unwillingness to yield in the face of opposition has earned him much support, but it has also made him many enemies. Despite being in what some would consider a precarious political situation, Nextler takes his duties as Commissioner very seriously, and he works tirelessly to defend the rights of United Lison miners.

Though he publicly supports President Kevik's actions and policies, Nextler doesn't completely trust the former free trader. The Commissioner believes that Kevik uses the harsh realities of life as a ULS miner as a political football. While Nextler is willing to accept the President's stamp of approval on legislation favorable to the miners as individuals and ULS as a group, he suspects that Kevik would sacrifice the good of miners everywhere for political expediency. However, Kevik's popularity with the general public has convinced Nextler to keep his opinions to himself.

The Orlamus approach this problem simply. Since Veil places great stock in the ability of the Lisons to determine their own destiny, the Theocracy has laid out an offer for the Lisons that allows them great freedom. To date, this proposal includes domestic independence, an archbishopric, and monetary assistance. The Orlamu reputation for tolerance has won them support on Lison. Kevik has authorized the construction of an Orlamist temple in Tribon.

The Solar Union and Insight have followed the Orlamu example. To all appearances, a bidding war has developed as the three empires court the support of the Lisons and their president. Unfortunately, once the "deal is done," the Lisons must trust their new parent to keep up its promises.

VoidCorp, on the other hand, plans to use a stick rather than a carrot. The stellar corporation has added to the tension in the system by quietly conducting its own campaign of piracy on Lison's rhodium-burdened cargo vessels. Because VoidCorp's privateers don't bear any markings, officials haven't found any evidence of their involvement. In addition to piracy, VoidCorp has tampered with the mainframes that electronically count the young technodemocracy's votes. Finally, the stellar corporation has begun construction of a planetside installation on the unclaimed planet of Leen. With VoidCorp's significant resources behind the project, the United Lison State stands an excellent chance of losing a future asset.

The Star Consortium's presence in the system has remained remarkably inconspicuous, but most Lisons remain vigilant against any activity—especially petty revenge. So far, the Rigunmors have avoided such actions. They cannot have their image so tarnished, lest others idly mock them.

## ECONOMY

Fortune has smiled on the Lisons. Their planet has a resource valuable enough to attract the interest of the stellar nations. Because of this, the mainstay of the economy revolves around the planet's conditions rather than its citizens.

## SURVIVAL

The primary industry of Lison is not mining, but survival. More than half of the economy is devoted to keeping its people alive on an unfriendly planet. Thus, most of Lison's population lives underground. Government offices must constantly track the state of the subterranean atmosphere and send quick-response teams to repair the damage done by wayward mining or survey teams. High pay is necessary to lure successful oxygen runners, hardy workers who make trips to the planet's surface for needed oxygen, to continue in their perilous occupation. In addition, industrial heaters must warm Lison's cities, and government-run gardens fight a constant battle to reduce the amount of food imported from neighboring star systems.

## MINING

Since survival consumes Lison's energies, it falls to the rhodium mines to fuel not only the planet's mass reactors, but also its economic structures. As the prices of rhodium rise and fall on the galactic market, so do the fortunes of a United Lison. This vulnerability to economic warfare and price-fixing by hostile states has not gone unnoticed by Kevik or any of the Lisons' leaders.

Mining procedures are fairly simple. Typically, teams of a dozen miners dig out sizable cavities of rock, seal the recesses, and fill them with breathable air. For the next several days, oxygen runners add more and more air as the miners excavate rubble in pursuit of rhodium veins. These veins are very thin and small, requiring precise measurements to pinpoint the location of the heavy metal. A good haul consists of 10 kilograms of unprocessed rhodium ore.

The market value of this purified rhodium would support the team members and their families for an Earth year, but mining teams only receive a percentage of the market price. Distributors and refiners must first clear a profit, and the government assesses a percentage, too. Most teams have sponsors who fund their transportation, equipment, and licensing; of course these sponsors demand commissions for their efforts. All told, the best a mining team can hope to receive is 10% of market price. Thus, many of the more avaricious miners turn to illegal mining to make additional money. Otherwise, the standard work month for legal miners on Lison consists of two week-long trips into the deep mines.

Each month, government surveyors constantly scan the planet and release information on good areas for future expeditions. Information on just how much rhodium is left in the planet's crust remains a closely guarded secret. Only President Kevik and Mining Commissioner Nextler possess truly accurate figures. Scientists place the lifetime of Lison's rhodium mines at anywhere from 30 to 500 years.

## TRADE

Prior to 2497, Lisons sold rhodium exclusively to other systems in the Verge. In fact, the United Lison government sold rhodium at highly discounted prices, and succeeded in luring merchants to the Oberon system. On their way through, of course, these merchants sold various goods and supplies.

Today, the Lison government continues its practice of offering low rhodium prices to independent vessels. Nevertheless, the presence of the stellar nations has radically changed the nature of this business. Any of the stellar nations could purchase Lison's rhodium production for an entire year—and several of them would like to do so. Kevik will not be tempted into tying Lison's consumer market to a single stellar nation, however. If the Thuldans Empire, for instance, were the only buyer of Lison products, the Thuldans could start dictating terms. So the Lison government continues to encourage independent commerce.

All of this will change on the day that the ULS elects to tie its destiny with one of the twelve stellar nations.

## PIRACY

Piracy in the Oberon system is so prevalent that it has evolved into a form of business. In fact, many of the pirates have ties to local merchants. Some of the pirates are former miners who gave up on the rhodium business, and others have families on Lison itself. Only the most extreme of these outlaws engages in acts of wanton violence.

Instead, most vessels caught by pirates find themselves subject to the Kind Tax. Named for the pirates' current leader, the tax demands 20% of the ship's cargo as a standard fee. Most Lisons accept these pirates as an unfortunate fact of life. Some even view piracy as a sort of game, the goal of which is to make a rhodium run out of the system without being caught by the net of pirates near Hux and Werth. On the other hand,

## THOMAS KIND PIRATE CHIEFTAIN

### Level 12 human Free Agent

STR 9	(0)	INT 10	(0)
DEX 11	(+1)	WIL 12	(+1)
CON 10		PER 11	

Durability: 10/10/5 Action check: 13+/12/6/3

Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4 #Actions: 2

Reaction score: Ordinary/2 Last resorts: 2

Perks: Heightened Ability (WIL), Danger Sense<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kind receives a -2 bonus to all Awareness-perception checks.

### Attacks

Unarmed 10/5/2 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/0

15mm sabot pistol 14/7/3 2d4w/2d4+1w/d4+3m HI/0

Chainsword<sup>2</sup> 12/6/3 d8+1w/d8+2w/d4+1m En/0

<sup>2</sup> +d4 base situation die

### Defenses

CF long coat: d4 (LI), d4 (HI), d6-2 (En)

### Skills

Armor Operation [9]; Athletics [9]; Melee [9]-powered [12]; Unarmed Attack [10]; Modern [11]-pistol [14]; Vehicle [11]-space [13]; Stamina [10]-endurance [11], resist pain [11]; Business [9]-illicit [13]; Knowledge [10]-computer [11], language: Standard [13]; Verge system: Oberon [13]; Law [10]; Security [10]; System Operation [10]; Tactics [10]-space [11]; Awareness [12]-perception [14]; Resolve [12]; Street Smart [12]-criminal [16]; Interaction [11]-intimidate [14]; Leadership [11].

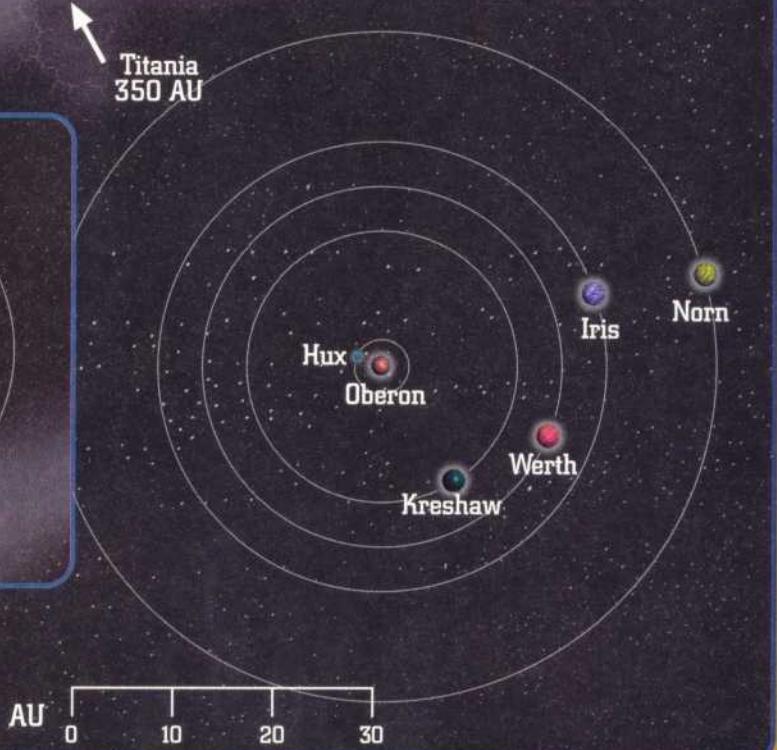
A dealer in rhodium, illegal software, and second-generation cyberware, Thomas Kind acknowledges no one as his master. Here in the Oberon system, he is pretty much left to himself, and he prefers to style himself as a businessman and entrepreneur rather than a thief or pirate.

Kind has frequent conferences with President Kevik, and an odd sort of friendship has grown between them. Thomas Kind, in addition to being a freebooter and rogue, is also a registered, voting United Lison citizen. However, his genteel exterior conceals the behavior of a known extortionist, thief, and murderer. To Kind, such conduct is a prerequisite for realistically and successfully doing business in his field.

President Kevik recently approached Kind and advanced the idea of creating a formal alliance with the Nariac Domain. The pirate chieftain hasn't offered an opinion either way—he is still running the numbers and weighing the benefits. It's clear that being affiliated with the Nariacs would allow Kind access to newer (and thus more profitable) cyberware, but he's not sure he's willing to risk the interference of a stellar nation in his business affairs. On the other hand, the Nariacs could offer a great deal of leverage against VoidCorp's outposts on Hux. Or, as another option, Kind could sell his knowledge about President Kevik's plans to the Rigunmors for a hefty price.

Only time will tell which path he will take. One thing is for sure: As is typical of pirates (and most other people, for that matter), whichever route Kind chooses will be the one that offers him the greatest advantage. If it happens to be good for Lison as well, that would be a convenient fringe benefit.

# Oberon System



none of the Arrivers has such a cavalier attitude. In fact, the Galactic Concord believes that it must eliminate the pirates.

The leader of the buccaneers, Thomas Kind, saves most of his venom for those stellar nations trying to gain a foothold in the Oberon system. While President Kevik may have acceded to the deal granting VoidCorp access to Hux, Kind views it as "claim jumping." For decades, the pirates and independent traders—most of whom paid tribute to Kind's organization—had sole use of Hux. Although the concentration of rhodium doesn't compare to that on Lison, enterprising merchants can still clear a profit here. Thus, the pirates have just about declared war on VoidCorp in this system.

Out here on the Verge, the pirates probably have the edge: They have more vessels in the local area, short supply lines, and the ability to react quickly. Ultimately, one has to question whether President Kevik was devious enough to bring this about intentionally. VoidCorp has made official protests to the United Lison government, but since President Kevik discovered VoidCorp's involvement in electoral tampering, his attempts to rein in Kind's corsairs have grown more and more halfhearted.

## SPENNER

Already tidally locked by Oberon, Spenner will fall into the star's corona in only a few blinks of the astronomical clock—at least several hundred thousand years. With each passing year, the planet creeps a few kilometers closer to oblivion.

Few will mourn its loss. Spenner's conditions are extreme; with no atmosphere to moderate Oberon's radiation, the sunward side of Spenner bakes with intolerable heat. The dark

side of the planet is actually quite cold. The planet itself has few valuable resources; its small supply of heavy metals makes mining expeditions unlikely. Last year, StarMech constructed a research base on Spenner to study Oberon's magnetic fields and unusual solar storms. The base was established near the terminator between the dark and light sides of the planet.

## MINDARA

Mindara is Spenner's twin. Conditions on its surface are slightly more mild than on Spenner—though it's still devoid of life. Mindara's barren, cratered surface has yet to attract enough interest to warrant a base. However, the original Rigunmor government took advantage of Mindara's location to construct a large orbiting refueling base. The station collected significant amounts of solar energy and easily gathered hydrogen from the solar winds that Oberon directs at Mindara. During GW2, the station fell out of use and is now abandoned.

## LEEN

If Lison is the king of the Oberon system, then Leen is its crown prince and heir apparent. The rhodium mines on Lison make it the political and economic center of the system. However, the tide will slowly turn. Lison's population continues to swell, and its ability to support human life is negligible. Artificially generated food products and underground farming have their limits. More important, one day the mines on Lison will run dry, and there will be no reason to stay. That's when all eyes will turn toward Leen.

Thanks to the gravitational influence of its two moons, Leen is unique among the inner planets of this system. Unlike Spenner, Mindara, and Lison, Leen is not tidally locked; the planet's rotation and atmosphere evenly distribute Oberon's radiation. Ironically, the extremely high concentration of oxygen—which makes up 30% of the atmosphere—presents an obstacle to comfortable human living on Leen. However, some smaller life forms already dwell on the planet, and its seas teem with organisms.

The ULS began sketching out plans for Leen more than a decade ago. Dozens of research ships have surveyed the third planet. Given Lison's wealth, terraforming the planet is possible: The addition of enormous amounts of hydrogen will reduce Leen's oxygen gas into harmless rain. Unfortunately, Lison didn't complete its long-term plans before the arrival of the stellar nations. Several stellar nations have released satellites over Leen, and their plan to found colonies and bases there is clear. If the United Lison State loses the race for Leen, its future could be held hostage.

## TRINKET AND BAUBLE

Trinket and its sister Bauble are barren, cold, and airless moons one-tenth the size of Lison and one-fifth the mass of Leen. The ULS constructed a base on Trinket and uses it for observing conditions on Lison.

Once the center of rule for the old Rigunmor government, "Bauble" has become synonymous with "tyrant" in the Lison vocabulary. After the revolt, Lisons looted the Rigunmor settlement and left it behind as a monument. Until recently, only curious tourists and historians visited Bauble. Lately, scientists on Trinket have reported energy readings and unmarked vessels on the surface of the moon.

## LISON

*If greed were good, Lison would be heaven. Here the lust for wealth spawned a Rigunmor colony, which spread its disease in order to lure thousands of desperate souls. Even I was dazzled by the famous rhodium vaults. During my stay, the Consortium tried several times to arrange debilitating "accidents" for me. The Rigunmor government doesn't want the rumors of slave labor on Lison confirmed by reporters like me. Either that, or they were looking for another worker.*

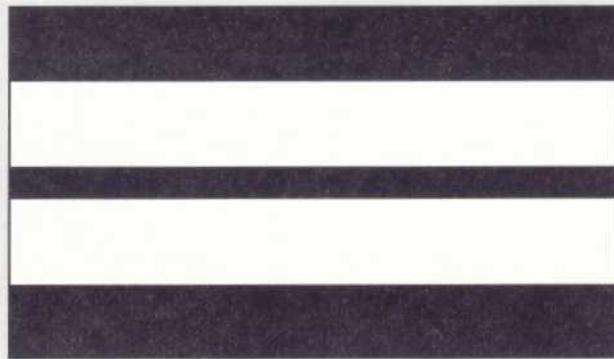
—Cook's Guide to Open Space, Vol. 13 (2364)

Rhodium is used as the primary active enamel in mass reactors. Neutron bombardment of dark matter causes rhodium shielding to break into technetium, which suffers quickened nuclear decay in the reactor. Thus, not only is rhodium rare and necessary in dark matter reactors, but its shield element deteriorates, requiring frequent replacement of rhodium.

Singing the praises of an inert metal may sound senseless, but poets in Old Space laud rhodium as much as primitive societies on Earth spoke of gold. The need for rhodium has made it a secondary currency; in fact, it has value in places where the Concord dollar may not. Without the rhodium, it is doubtful that anyone would choose to live on Lison.

## CLIMATE

Lison's climate is too cold, its atmosphere too dangerous, and its heavy elements too radioactive. The surface of Lison is a hopeless wasteland, half-frozen and half-boiling, and its air



## Flag of the United Lison State

consists almost entirely of nitrogen. On dayside, Oberon's rays maintain a temperature well over the boiling point of water; thus, water on Lison's dayside is scarce, as it quickly boils away. On nightside, mercury thermometers freeze and burst, and oxygen condenses to form a pale blue ocean. This ocean of liquid oxygen is the primary source for breathable air on Lison. Even though every effort is made to recycle air on Lison's colonies, the natural escape of gases demands the settlements constantly replenish their artificial atmospheres. City governments pay exorbitant prices for enterprising individuals to travel out to the nightside and collect liters of oxygen. Unfortunately, cold temperatures, radiation, and high wind claim about one-third of these oxygen expeditions. For this reason, United Lison uses convicted criminals to supplement the pool of workers willing to take the trip.

## GEOLOGICAL HISTORY

The planet's harsh environment is famous, and every Lison could reiterate the dangers of living on a planet torn apart by both superhot and supercold environments. However, Lison may have once supported life, as it wasn't always tidally locked. Over a billion years ago, it probably had a nitrogen-oxygen atmosphere much like Earth's. But as the rotation of the planet slowly came to a halt, the nightside of the planet grew colder. More and more of the atmosphere condensed and fell to the surface as rain. As the moderating influences of its atmosphere waned, the process accelerated. Eventually, pure oxygen fell from the atmosphere. If any creatures had actually lived on the planet during this time period, they would have died.

Once Lison's planetary evolution became common knowledge, several archaeological expeditions searched for signs of "pre tide" (before the planet was tidally locked) life. Despite a variety of interesting finds, scientists haven't discovered anything conclusive to date. In addition to scientific missions, many settlers on Lison's surface have reported alien sightings of all sorts. However, objective recording equipment has never captured an image of these aliens.

## FLORA AND FAUNA

There have been few discoveries of native flora or fauna on Lison—though scientists have found fossils that they believe to be millions, or even billions, of years old. To many, the existence of these fossils confirms that the surface of Lison was once habitable.

Today, the most common form of life on the planet is the algae kept in the urban centers to recycle oxygen. Pools of algae are common everywhere, and each family and residence must care for a tank. These algae supplement the Lison diet.



### GENERAL POPULATION

Life on the surface is limited to a small number of settlements strung out on the terminator between nightside and dayside. Locked in a perpetual sunset, these scattered and disorganized little colonies find themselves exposed to extremes of wind and radiation even though the temperature is moderate. Within their shielded domiciles, Lisons seldom remove their e-suits; sudden exposure to the conditions outside is a death sentence. These so-called "topsiders" represent less than 5% of the planet's population.

Thus, life on the surface is the exception rather than the rule, and popular opinion holds that surface dwellers don't operate on full thrusters. The bulk of Lison society thrives in vast cities, miles beneath the crust's exterior. These cities are former

mining camps that have had their centers enlarged and cleared. Protected from the climate's madness, the subterranean Lisons lead normal lives. Visitors used to the open reaches of space typically find conditions underground harsh and oppressive. Native Lisons, however, have adapted to these conditions. The domed cities contain everything necessary for a habitable world: Breathable air fills the enclosed caverns, and artificial light is abundant. In imitation of a biosphere, tailored gardens and processing plants provide food sources and means of recycling oxygen. Housing, always scarce in the expanding cities, remains crowded and inconvenient.

Where once the Rigumor leadership paid little heed to the maintenance of comfortable (or even safe) environments for the miners, the United Lison State has worked hard to provide for the safety of its citizens. A series of government programs has ensured that life beneath Lison's surface is not life in a tomb.

Extending away from the core of these cities are kilometers of weblike caverns that twist in every direction. Lison miners have drilled most of the shafts, but a few of the caverns predate human presence on the planet. On occasion, mining parties in pursuit of rhodium strike one of these old caverns. Although they appear natural and weathered, their existence near rhodium deposits remains suspicious. Many Lisons point to the pirate Kind and his crew as the likely creators of those tunnels.

Many of the caverns reach up to the surface. Airlocks seal these shafts against the loss of their environment; they also serve as checkpoints to control the flow of traffic into urban centers. Incidents of crime and oxygen larceny require the constant presence of armed sentinels at each of the airlocks. The Air Guard, as they are called, contains some of Lison's best-trained and highly skilled military personnel. In the event that

### LISON POPULATION 116,611,042 SENTIENTS

Human	94%		
Orion	1%	Austrin	1%
Thuldan	1%	Nariac	1%
Orlamu	6%	Insight	3%
Rigumor	78%	Hatre	0%
Solar	2%	Borealin	0%
VoidCorp	2%	StarMech	0%
Concord	3%	Independent	2%
Alien	6%		
Sesheyen	5%	T'sa	6%
Mechalus	27%	Weren	53%
Fraal	9%		

an enemy takes control of an airlock, the Air Guard can detonate explosives to destroy the surrounding tunnel. The Guard has carried out this final defense eight times in its history.

### MINES

In addition to caverns, mines stretch away from the cities in almost every direction. The working environment in Lison's mines has improved with each passing year, but they remain unpleasant. Cave-ins, suffocation, and worker riots claim more than 100 lives in the mines each month. Still, the ULS is entirely dependent on the rhodium trade, and the flow of rhodium must continue. Nearly one-half of Lison's population takes direct part in this mining, and even more work in some way to support the rhodium industry. Today, the miners are organized into independent teams licensed by the United Lison government; each team's pay is based on the amount of rhodium that it mines. Word of a good vein of ore brings dozens of teams to the scene; thus, teams don't generally talk to one another about business. Unauthorized mining is illegal, dangerous, and unfortunately common. Anyone caught mining illegally suffers permanent reassignment to oxygen-running teams.

With greed and demands for greater efficiency pushing them onward, many miners opt for cybernetic enhancements. Artificial lungs, genetically tailored eyes, and replacement limbs seem almost common in the city of Tribon. Black markets dealing in rhodium and cyberware have joined forces, producing a vast network of illegal trade.

### TRIBON

The city of Tribon possesses the largest population in this system. Almost 60 million Lisons call the 300 square kilometers of multilevel passages home. Within the crowded metropolis, citizens must walk to their destinations. The city allowed personal vehicles at one time, but the rising population of Tribon outpaced the city's expansion; there simply isn't room for such vehicles.

Tribon sits beneath Lison's terminator, between nightside and dayside. Its depth of 7 kilometers ensures that harmful radiation and winds do not plague the Tribonites. Fortunately, the Lison population has developed a remarkable resistance to claustrophobia; visitors are not so unaffected.

The High Road of Tribon forms the most common route into the city. Only the High Road can support interstellar cargo traffic. This traffic must travel down into Lison's crust, making its way through a maze of tunnels and a series of protected airlocks. Extremely large vessels cannot navigate this route and must offload their cargo on the surface, where Lison vessels stand ready to deliver the cargo to Tribon.

The government-owned Ortis Refinery, and most of Lison's industry, stands near Tribon's upper side and the High Road. Thus, Tribonites have access to interstellar transports for rhodium shipping and goods from outside the Oberon system.

The Ortis Refinery is the primary processing plant for all of the rhodium ore legally extracted from the planet. Nearby, several buildings monitor Tribon's air levels and recycle air, as needed. Given the Lisons' dependence on technology to create and maintain their artificial world, a certain paranoia has developed around the oxygen recyclers. Doomsayers fear that these machines will fail or suffer sabotage.

Besides serving as the economic center of activity for the planet, Tribon is the capital of Lison. The president lives and works in a series of buildings collectively called the Lower Hall. From here, Kevik carries out his duties. Well guarded against

## TURIN ZISEF COLONEL, LISON AIR GUARD

### Level 9 mechalus Combat Spec

STR 10	(0)	INT 10	(0)
DEX 13	(+2)	WIL 9	(0)
CON 10		PER 10	
Durability: 10/10/5/5		Action check: 15+/14/7/3	
Move: sprint 22, run 14, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 0	

### Attacks

Unarmed	10/5/2	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
Quantum rifle <sup>1</sup>	16/8/4	d4+3w/d6+4w/d6+1m	En/0

<sup>1</sup> -d8 base situation die.

### Defenses

Powered attack armor: d6+1 (LI), d6+2 (HI), d6+1 (En)

### Skills

Armor [10]-powered [12], Athletics [10], Unarmed Attack [10], Modern [13]-pistol [14], rifle [16], Vehicle Operation [13], Stamina [10]-endurance [11], resist pain [11], Computer Science<sup>2</sup> [10], Knowledge [10]-computer [11], language: Mechalus [13], language: Standard [11], Verge system: Oberon [13], System Operation [10], Tactics [10]-infantry [12], vehicle [11], Administration [9], Awareness [9]-perception [10], Resolve [9], Interaction [10]-intimidate [13], Leadership [10]-command [13].

<sup>2</sup> Zisef receives a -1 bonus when using Computer Science skills—provided he can merge with the computer (this process takes one round).

### Cyber Gear

NUJack; enhance program (-1 bonus to all Modern Ranged Weapons skill checks).

The appointment of Turin Zisef as leader of the Air Guard came as no real surprise. Zisef had served most of his military career under Kevik's leadership, and he shows the current president fierce loyalty. Most recently, Kevik and Zisef have met to discuss the reinforcement of the president's personal security force with Air Guard troops.

Turin is a military officer of the first order, highly disciplined and a formidable tactician. Though his number-one concern is the president's safety, Turin believes that he has a duty to protect all of Lison. As a result, he demands a great deal from his troops and does not rest until every soldier can meet his standards. Turin's devotion to the Air Guard is returned a hundredfold by the women and men who serve under his command.

Recently, Turin has uncovered several plots to assassinate President Kevik, but all rooted in radical Verge separatist groups protesting the Concord's presence in the Oberon system. What worries him more, however, is the presence of highly placed government officials who may have more on their minds than simply beating Kevik in an election. Already, Turin has compiled a list of possible traitors to the cause of a free United Lison State—including Commissioner Paul Nextler. What he does with that list remains to be seen. Certainly if Kevik were to die prematurely, the colonel's position and popularity might allow him to seize control.

intrusion, Lower Hall was built on the city's bottom edge, away from most of the existing tunnels. Lower Hall's neighbor is the Tower of Equality. The Tower transmits information to all of Lison's citizens, allowing them to communicate freely with one another and with government representatives. It also houses most of the state's recognized media.

## RAPHAL

Raphal's 300,000 inhabitants have surrendered to corruption and illegal practices. While ULS authorities officially control the city, a collection of competing gangs and criminal organizations represent the greatest source of power. All of the gangs owe some kind of allegiance to Thomas Kind's pirate organization.

Raphal is located on the opposite side of the planet, along the terminator, from Tribon. Generally, the city contains many of the same structures and features as Tribon—including a public hall, a refinery, a hospital, and numerous gaming and drinking establishments. The cost of goods is generally higher and the standard of living lower than in Tribon.

## THE GRID

The Lisons do not have a complete Grid system; instead, they make use of high-frequency carrier waves to communicate with one another over the surface of the planet. It is through this more primitive network that the Lisons stay abreast of news and cast votes on the day's referendums and proposed legislation. Ironically, this archaic system has made it more difficult for outsiders such as VoidCorp to tamper with the Lison's technodemocracy.

## HUX

Like Leen, the tiny planet Hux is not tidally locked. Still, Hux's distance from Oberon has chilled its surface into a dry, arctic environment. Explorers have discovered trace amounts of rhodium on Hux, but nowhere near an amount comparable to that found on Lison. Neither the old Rigunmor custodians nor the current United Lison governments saw any need to develop Hux's resources.

For years, independent miners and pirates visited this unguarded planet. They dropped explosives to strike its surface and dig up rhodium. Today, VoidCorp has negotiated a contract with the Galactic Concord and United Lison to cultivate Hux. In return, the Lisons gain access to more advanced technologies. The blast-mining system for extracting materials has changed little. VoidCorp satellites fire drilling beams from orbit into the surface, and then mining vessels descend to sift through the rubble.

## KRESHAW

Kreshaw possesses a prodigious size and mass for a Jovian world; it is slightly larger than Jupiter in the Sol system. Kreshaw's gases are fairly common, but its extremely fast rotation is quite unusual. In fact, Kreshaw spins about its axis every three hours. As a result, the planet's shape has become oval, with matter bunching at the center away from the poles.

## KRESHAW'S MOONS

Kreshaw's gravity field is unpredictable and destructive. The ring system about the gas giant is sparse, and only three tiny

moons—Rachle, Tin, and Jess—have survived. Exact predictions of the moons' orbits have proven erroneous, yet scientists do not seem eager to study the area further. Even the stellar nations have yet to advance a claim. Nevertheless, traffic in this area of the outer system remains relatively high, leading many to believe that a group of independent settlers has established some sort of outpost. Given the volume of smuggling in the system, many believe that an organization of pirates has established itself on Tin or Jess.

## WERTH

Classified as a sub-Jovian world, Werth is the outermost planet in the Oberon system. It has received little attention to date, and scientists have yet to visit most of its moons. Interestingly enough, Werth has collected neon in large proportions. During frequent electrical storms, the planet will flare up, its brilliance escalating by several orders of magnitude. This gas giant has a bright green color, and much of its light reflects into its ring system—especially during electrical storms.

The Orlamu Theocracy has opened negotiations with the United Lison State and the Galactic Concord to secure rights to Werth and its moons. President Kevik demonstrated initial reluctance, however, stating the need for staged development. In the past few months, the Orlamu negotiators have sweetened the deal, offering Lison the option of entering the Theocracy as a client nation. This would allow Lison to call upon the Theocracy for assistance in time of need. Under this provision, the United Lison State would maintain an independent military force that would receive significant financial support from the Orlamus.

Kevik has yet to answer this most recent Theocracy proposal. Many Lisons wonder why the Theocracy finds Werth so valuable; others believe that the Orlamus simply want to hurt their old wartime enemies, the Rigunmors.

## WERTH'S MOONS

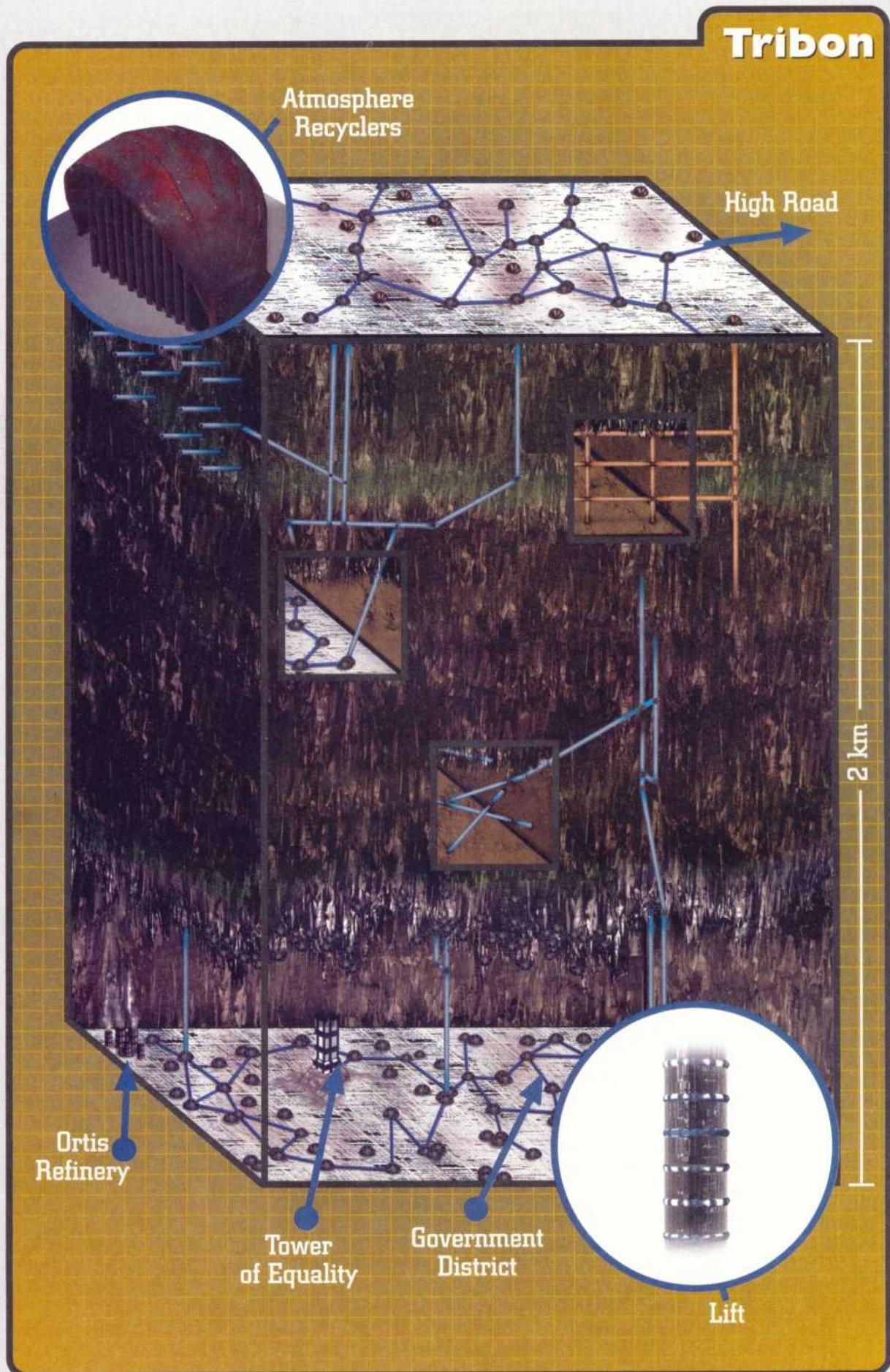
Five moons orbit Werth—though none of them are habitable. The closest moon, Hymn, has a diameter of over 100 kilometers and is the only one of Werth's satellites with an atmosphere. In fact, Hymn's atmosphere of nitrogen, nitrous oxide, and neon is so thick that no one has yet seen its surface. However, radar probes report a mountainous surface underneath its covering.

## IRIS

Iris has little to draw mining prospectors, but the ULS took a passionate interest in the little planet shortly after 2497. In two years, settlers have established a small domed city on Iris' cratered surface. One hundred scientists, each with military training, live in this dome. The station's purpose is simple: It acts as an early warning system against incoming ships—especially Rigunmor ones.

## NORN

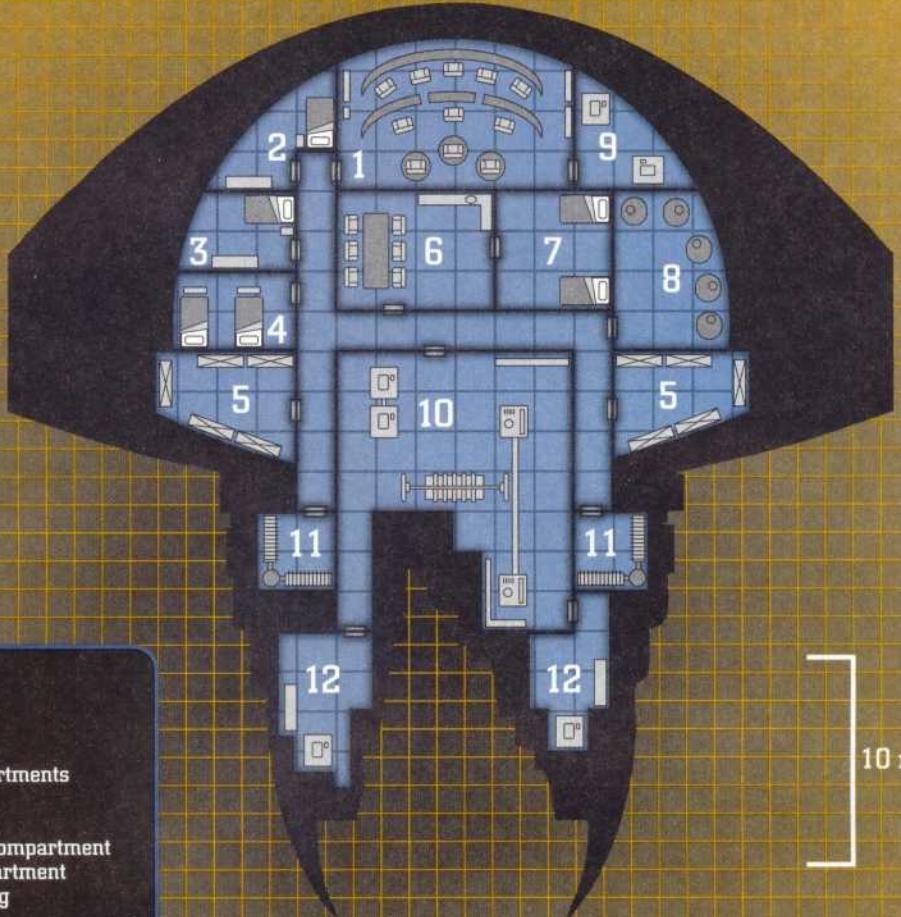
This planetoid of iron and silicon escaped Kreshaw's orbit a few thousand years ago, but Norn's eccentric orbit will guide it to smash into its former parent in 2503. Whispered rumors tell of a hidden pirate base on this small planet, but no one has been able to confirm this.





# CSV Bodkin (PCS 3931), Blade-class Scout

Length: 45.5 meters  
Beam: 44 meters  
Mass: 1,120 metric tons  
Crew: 12 enlisted/3 officers



## Concord Blade-class Scout

Compartments: 6  
Dur: 30  
Maneuver Rating: -1  
Acc: 3 Mpp  
Cruise Speed: 2 AU/hour  
Berthing: 12  
Armament: 2 mass cannons  
(Range 5/10/15 Mm)  
d6+2s/d6+1w/d6+3w (LI [p]/A)  
Defenses: Point-defense gun  
Armor: Moderate neutronite (3 dur)  
d6+1 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d6 (En)  
Computer: Good computer core, Good navigation  
and sensors dedicated computers  
Engines: Induction engine  
Power: 2 mass reactors rated for  
a total of 15 power factors  
Drive: 5 light-years per starfall

Roll	Compartment	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
1-2	Command	Point-defense gun (1/1) Good computer core (2/0) Multiband radar (0/0) EM detector (0/0) Radio transceiver (0/1) Reentry capsule (0/0) Induction engine (6/6) Stardrive (3/1)	6/6/3
3-4	Engineering	Airlock (0/0) Mass reactor (4/4) Autosupport (0/2)	18/18/9
5-7	Auxiliary	Mass reactor (2/0) Mass reactor (2/0)	12/12/6
8-10	Auxiliary 2	Airlock (1/0) Mass cannon (2/3)	6/6/3
11-14	Weapons	Mass cannon (2/3) Mass cannon (2/3)	8/8/4
15-20	Crew	Crew quarters (2/0)	4/4/2

# HAMMER'S STAR

The story of Hammer's Star is a tale of woe still in the making. From its initial discovery by Borealin explorers to the abandonment and ultimate destruction of its Borealin colony, Hammer's Star is a system whose tragic history unfolds with the blood of innocents.

The Hammer's Star system contains a young, yellow G5 star and four planets. Bruelt, the farthest planetary body, is little more than an asteroid captured by the star's gravity. Iniad, orbiting closer to the yellow star, is a gas giant that ranks among the largest planets in existence. If Iniad's size were to double, the planet could almost classify as a star. Iniad's gravity well is responsible for the destruction of two planets; their wreckage has formed asteroid belts on both sides of the gas giant. The larger Vicek Belt lies farther out in the system beyond Iniad, while the less populous Revik Belt is closer in.

Platon, the third planet of this system, is a small gas giant that must forever fight the solar winds of Hammer's Star to preserve its thick cloak of helium and hydrogen. In addition, Platon possesses one of the more interesting satellites in the system. Its third moon, Arist, has equatorial temperatures averaging -50°C. Thus, it can serve as a haven—albeit a chilly one—for life.

Spes, the closest planet to Hammer's Star, has attracted the most interest to the system's visitors. Spes's stellar positioning and moderate climate make it an ideal sanctuary for sentient life, and it was to this planet that the first Borealin explorers came.

Despite its obvious importance, Hammer's Star isn't truly the primary stellar object in this system. Nearly 923 AU from Hammer's Star lies a black hole called the Pit. The gravitational power of this black hole traps Hammer's Star and its planets in long, winding orbits that last thousands of years.

## HISTORY

Uncovering the events of Hammer's Star's past has been the objective of the Galactic Concord and the stellar nations since they returned to the Verge. For the most part, this has proven to be a simple operation; until 2489, the system's inhabitants kept exhaustive records. The mystery remains, however, as to what exactly happened in Hammer's Star during that last year—and what is happening now.

## EXPLORATION

Verge exploration reached its peak by the end of the 2330s and started to decline. After only two and a half decades, the great expansion of the Interbellum was ending. In short, the time had come for the stellar nations to stockpile their resources for war, and none of them could afford to waste the time, effort, or driveships to explore the unknown reaches of space.

For the independent explorers who made their living through contracted investigation of the Verge and other frontiers, it was the end of an era. Spes Research Association (SRA) was one such organization of trailblazers. The SRA had already sent out a dozen expeditions into the Verge—including an expedition that discovered and explored the Hathorn star system for the stellar nation Utopia Now. By 2339, exploration had slowed so much that the SRA was forced to solicit funding from all of the 24 nations then in existence. Even though the

Pit lay only 35 light-years from the SRA's last exploration of Hathorn, Utopia Now and the other stellar nations declined any support. Prospects looked grim for the SRA.

Of course, not everyone saw the coming conflict as clearly. The Borealis Republic continued to fund explorations into the unknown, heedless of what violence the future would bring. It might be more accurate to say that the Republic, still celebrating its revolution and rebirth, stubbornly refused to look ahead and see the possibility of a Second Galactic War.

Still, securing a grant from the Borealis Republic was no easy task. Dozens of corporations and hundreds of private individuals were competing and soliciting for shrinking research budgets. The Spes Association offered numerous incentives to its funding sources—including an offer to berth representatives of each supporting stellar nation on board its Orlamu-built vessel, the *Lightbringer*, so that they could witness the SRA explorations firsthand. The SRA also surrendered part of its "traditional" rights to name planets and moons discovered during the journey. Ultimately, these offers didn't secure the funds necessary for the expedition, and in 2340 the Spes Association cobbled together a desperate, final proposal to split the funding equally between the Orlamu Theocracy and the Borealis Republic. Both nations agreed.

Joined with their national observers, the SRA's expedition left the Stellar Ring and arrived in Tendril to begin its explorations. A 10-system tour at the distant edge of the Verge led the *Lightbringer* on a meandering course right toward its singular goal—the Pit. In February 2341, with rumors of an interstellar war chasing them all the way, the multinational force arrived in the Hammer's Star system and discovered its four planets. The Spes Research Association, as leader of the expedition, named the first planet, which was also the ninth and last Class 1 world discovered in the Verge. The world, called Spes, was an Earthlike planet home to abundant single-celled life. The Orlamus and Borealins on board the *Lightbringer* christened the other three planets and the system's asteroid belts.

Trouble occurred not long after. The Borealin contingent wanted to spend months devoted to the investigation of Spes, as it promised its own unique discoveries and wonders. The Borealins also wanted to enjoy planetary living after enduring months of cramped conditions on the *Lightbringer*. The Orlamus, meanwhile, demanded that the expedition's leaders press on to the Pit, which was the reason that the Theocracy agreed to fund the effort in the first place. The black hole, with its accretion disk easily visible from Spes orbit, produced energy in frequencies that no one had predicted, and the curious Orlamus wanted answers.

The crew of the *Lightbringer* decided to split their efforts. The Borealins and a few SRA officers remained on Spes with some shuttles to continue their work, while the Orlamus traveled to a point not far from the Pit. Fifteen days later, the Borealins on the planet received a radio signal from the Pit. The communications officer of the *Lightbringer* reported that the ship had been damaged and couldn't escape the singularity's gravity well. A month passed on Spes before the supplies of food and water ran out. Unfortunately for the Borealins, Spes required some terraforming before it could produce food edible to humans. The Borealins surmised that the black hole's tidal forces destroyed the *Lightbringer* when the vessel approached too close to the Pit, and they included this information in their planetary logs. Without food they could safely eat,

the planet-bound expedition didn't expect to survive for long. They were right.

## COLONIZATION

Six months later, Borealin craft came to the Hammer's Star system to investigate the disappearance of the *Lightbringer* and its Borealin observers. On the surface of Spes, they found the remains of 19 Borealins and twelve SRA employees. The recovery team was torn between the excitement of finding a habitable world and grief over the loss of their citizens. They left the Borealin camp behind as a monument and a marker to indicate a Borealin claim to Spes.

A year later, in August 2342, Borealin colonists descended to the surface of Spes. Whereas before the Borealin government was ambivalent about participating in the Spes voyage, now they praised its success. The Republic spared no expense to assist in the development of its new Verge colony—as it was built on the only habitable world in the region. Moreover, once Borealin leadership realized that war was imminent, Spes represented a sanctuary for them in case the Republic foundered.

The careful colonization plan occurred in several steps. First, the Republic's planetary engineers excised a mild concentration of harmful gases from Spes's atmosphere. Once they cleared the air, the colonists established a city—named Silver Bell for the shape of the mountainous plateau on which it rested—and burned out the native flora and fauna. The Borealins were in too much of a hurry to consider a more time-consuming integration.

Silver Bell rose in record time. Its engineers designed the city as a stronghold. Mountains cloaked the settlement on three sides, and its single land-based approach involved a steep grade easily monitored and protected. The Spes colony couldn't completely protect itself from space-based attacks, but powerful orbital defense satellites provided it with a level of protection that few Verge colonies could match. In addition, tunnels dug deep into the mountainside provided a haven 3 kilometers beneath the surface in the event of attack. In its first four years, the fortified walls of Silver Bell were torn down twice to allow for additional growth. Almost 300,000 Borealins emigrated to the edge of human space. By 2345, the Spes colony looked safer than the Stellar Ring.

One of the last gifts of the Borealis Republic arrived in October 2345, less than six months before the Mutant Uprising would incite the Second Galactic War. Even as the Borealis Re-

public reluctantly girded itself for war, it hoped to preserve contact with its distant city. So, at great expense, the Republic constructed a drivespace communication relay in orbit around Spes. Coupled with the relays in the Aegis and Tendril systems, the drivesats of Hammer's Star gave hope to both the Borealins in the Stellar Ring and those on Spes. The colony could still reach out to its distant parent in the event of trouble, and the Republic could listen comfortably to the growing success of its faraway colony even as war threatened the Stellar Ring.

## THE LONG SILENCE

Even as Borealin replenishment vessels grew fewer in number through the latter half of the 2340s, the drivesat served its purpose. In the Hammer's Star system, the inhabitants of Silver Bell were almost self-sufficient. The first crop harvests, facilitated by the Borealins' success at adapting and engineering well-known flora and fauna for healthy, stable growth on Spes, were an unparalleled success. Trade with nearby star systems, utilizing the colonists' few driveships, secured what few resources the colony didn't have.

In 2351, the failure of the drivesat relay in the Tendril system cut the link between the Verge and the Stellar Ring. At first, the colony didn't feel any measurable result from the loss of communications. The Borealins could still contact the Aegis system, and its colonists reported that everything was fine.

Spes continued to grow and develop, thanks to a continued influx of refugees from other Verge systems and beyond. The leaders of the Silver Bell colony allowed these immigrants to build their own settlements on Spes or to join the established city. In either case, new colonists had to obey Borealin laws. Many of these newcomers sought a place of refuge as the Long Silence brought out the worst features of humanity. Throughout the Verge—especially at the loneliest and farthest corner of the frontier—crime and piracy spread like cancer. Several criminal groups established homes on Arist or the Vicek Belt, and the planetary defenses orbiting Spes repelled attacks on a weekly basis. Underpopulated Spes presented a ripe target.

Hopes on Spes were further raised with the appearance of a Borealin battlecruiser in 2359. Jangir Batra, captain of the *Abstraction*, reported that his vessel had been routed during a conflict with the combined forces of the Thuldans and Hatires. Cut off deep within enemy territory, the *Abstraction* had spent a year navigating the "front" of the war as it made its way to Hammer's Star. What Captain Batra and his crew refused to

TABLE S14: HAMMER'S STAR SYSTEM

Spes	Platon	Arist	Iniad	Bruell
Primary	Hammer's Star	Hammer's Star	Hammer's Star	Hammer's Star
Planetary Class	Class 1	Class 5	Class 5	Class 4
Gravity	G2 (1.21 g)	G3 (1.30 g)	G2 (0.81 g)	G1 (0.21 g)
Radiation	R1 (0.08 rem/yr)	R2 (8 rem/wk)	R3 (17 rem/wk)	R3 (5 rem/day)
Atmosphere	A2 (N <sub>2</sub> , O <sub>2</sub> )	A1 (H <sub>2</sub> , He)	A2 (N <sub>2</sub> , O <sub>2</sub> )	A1 (H <sub>2</sub> , He)
Pressure	P3 (1.13 atm)	P5 (gas giant)	P2 (0.35 atm)	P0 (0.003 atm)
Heat	H2 (29.3° C)	H1(-104.8° C)	H1 (-67.1° C)	H0 (-187.2° C)
Orbital Distance	0.88 AU	1.42 AU	1,121,000 km	6.20 AU
Diameter	11,640 km	43,400 km	9,640 km	250,800 km
Year	317.7 days	651.3 days	(37.18 days)	16.27 years
Day	18.06 hours	48.22 hours	18.0 hours	12.88 hours
Axial Tilt	14°	9°	14.1°	0°
Density	1.21	0.38	1.04	0.17
# Satellites	2	8	0	21

speak about was their cowardice. The first few conflicts with the Thuldans had gone badly, and rather than watch the Republic become the latest victim of the Thuldans' war machine, Batra fled from the fight and the Stellar Ring.

To the ignorant citizens of Spes, the *Abstraction* represented a champion. The single battlecruiser bolstered the planet's defenses considerably, and its 25-light-year range, previously only matched by bulk freighters, promised an improvement in safe trade with the rest of the Verge.

### STRUGGLE

Unfortunately, the *Abstraction* ranks as one of the last good things to happen to the Hammer's Star system. Dark times had come to the Verge, and even the noble battlecruiser couldn't protect Spes. Word came of a civil war in the Algemron system, previously a trading partner with the Borealins of Spes. In addition, colonies throughout the frontier were failing, as Spes traders discovered to their dismay. The smaller colonies, among which Spes grouped itself, were especially vulnerable. Some fell apart from within, while foreign nations and powers attacked others. The Second Galactic War spread death to many systems in the Verge.

In 2367, the denizens of Tendril repaired their drivesat, and the citizens of the Verge could once again reach out to the Stellar Ring. Word came of the great alliances of the war, and many new combats arose in the Verge to reflect the war beyond. Since the stellar nations couldn't turn aside from their war to support the Verge settlements, the contact did little to improve affairs.

For Spes, the restoration of contact came at a terrible price. The leaders of the Borealis Republic denounced Captain Batra and the *Abstraction*'s crew. The response to this news divided the Spes colonists. In the eight years since Batra's arrival, many had learned of the real circumstances of the battlecruiser's flight from the Stellar Ring. However, the *Abstraction*'s contributions to the defense of Hammer's Star—even if motivated by guilt—had won them allies. Others pointed to the crew's outright cowardice and wondered aloud how long the colony could trust the *Abstraction* if it was so willing to abandon its obligations. Under orders from leaders on Sapphire, Borealin officers on Spes ordered the arrest of Captain Batra and his commanding officers. After a brief exchange of batteries, the *Abstraction* vanished into drivespace, never to return.

The subsequent weakening of Spes defenses did nothing to make the passage of years easy on the Borealins. Despite a fertile environment and a lush planet on which to expand, the population of Spes stabilized at just over one million inhabitants. Under the constant threat of attack from pirates and foreign nations, the stubborn guardians of Silver Bell did their best to survive.

As the decades rolled by, the colonists on Spes changed. Because of the constant stress of pirate attacks, they couldn't spare the time or effort for philosophical discussion. In fact, the insulated colony developed a system of thought much like the College of Justice Ethics that developed in the Republic toward the end of the Second Galactic War. This system presented a simpler view of the universe, one in which the survival of the community became paramount. It was a significant development for a society that prized the precise considerations and beliefs of the individual above all else. Ironically, while the philosophical movement on Spes wouldn't save its creators, it would eventually influence the Borealis Republic.

### SKIRMISH

Just as rumors trickled into the Verge concerning the end of the Second Galactic War, the colony's situation clearly took a turn for the worse. Throughout the Long Silence, the incursions of pirates and criminals into the system had been a cause of concern and occasional despair for the citizens of the Spes colony. Eventually, they had to abandon their attempts to control the star system and focused instead on safeguarding Spes itself. By 2480, almost half the resources of the planet were devoted to defense.

The frequency and threat of these pirate attacks grew. In addition, the depredations of time began to take their toll on the colony. Most of the Spes vessels—the few that had survived—dated back to before the Second Galactic War. The Borealins on Spes couldn't afford to purchase replacement vessels, and the older vessels started to break down. A similar fate claimed the orbital defense satellites around Spes. Logs of communication between Silver Bell and the smaller settlements on Spes also indicate that many of the towns on Spes's surface collapsed.

In 2486, a sweeping force of privateers and bandits assaulted Spes. This assault was unique in a number of ways. Typically, raiders attacking Spes would descend to the planet and its communities as soon as possible, with the intent of seizing as many valuables as they could. During this raid, however, the bandits operated with more focus and determination than ever before. An estimated three dozen unidentified vessels undertook a planned tactical effort to strip the Spes colony of its defenses. None of the rogue ships surrendered or fled; they fought until destroyed by the stalwart Borealin resistance. As a result, few clues were left to reveal the mastermind behind the assault.

### DISTRESS

Fate never gave the Borealins of Spes an opportunity to comment on this event. Three years later, in May of 2489, Spes faced an incredibly coordinated attack from an unknown force. Within a few hours, the perimeter defenses around Spes were neutralized, and the colony's military satellites were annihilated. The few remaining spaceworthy Borealin vessels defended their home, only to fall beneath the fury of their unknown attackers.

On May 3, swarms of unidentified craft descended into Spes atmosphere and began to destroy the surface settlements systematically. These foreign ships refused to communicate, even to respond to the Borealins' surrender. Desperately, the Borealins sent out a message via their drivesats still in orbit. Its content only reached the interstellar community seven years later:

*Borealis colony Silver Bell in Hammer's Star, calling any FreeSpace Alliance vessel . . . We are under attack by . . . Repeat, the colony is under heavy attack by unknown forces. Send help. Repeat, send help. It's May 3, 2489. We need help, damn it! Please—*

### IMPACT

The distress message represents the last recorded action of the Spes colonists. Evidence later unearthed on the planet reveals that the Borealins fled to avoid their attackers. The most popular destinations, indicated by the highest concentration of recovered bones, were the caves in the mountain surrounding Silver Bell.



After analyzing the data, scientists now conclude that a meteor probably struck Spes on the same day that the distress call went out. Information about the episode strongly suggests that the asteroid collision was more than coincidental, as the impact occurred in the midst of an attack by an unknown hostile force. In addition, examination of the crater site reveals that the asteroid's velocity reached close to  $0.01c$ —more than 10 million kilometers per hour. The likelihood of a free asteroid from the Vicek Belt—the asteroid's assumed point of origin—reaching such a speed naturally is infinitesimal. Finally, there's the precise point of impact. The asteroid landed squarely in the center of the plateau on which the city of Silver Bell rested. With its incredible size and speed, its violent landing created an explosion equal to millions of kilograms of dynamite. Even the tunnels beneath Silver Bell couldn't protect the colonists; they died instantly.

Only a month after the attack, ships from other Verge systems came to Hammer's Star, investigating the site of the distress call that Aegis continued to receive. They found Spes a smoldering planet of ashes and the city of Silver Bell nothing more than a crater that radiated heat. As for the smaller settlements, energy-weapon bombardment from air and space left them in ruins. Broken, unburied bodies littered the towns. From the wreckage of buildings and fortifications, it appeared that the invaders landed on the planet's surface to complete their devastation. Unfortunately, they left nothing behind to identify themselves, and the only remnant of Spes culture was the drivespace communication relay and its orbiting drivesats.

For the rest of 2489, systems as far away as Aegis tensed and shored up their defenses. Even the warring planets of the Algemon system took a moment to stockpile defenses rather

than consume them. No one could be sure where the attackers of Spes would strike next, much less predict what motivated them. Speculation over the origin of the assault took the Verge by storm. Hammer's Star had been one of the most well-defended planets on the frontier, and even distant Tendril felt a momentary chill.

As the next decade passed, the people of the Verge put aside their fears of another attack and went about the business of living. Some concluded that pirates, fighting long and hard with the Borealins of Spes, finally put an end to the war. Others speculated that the Thuldans of Alitar, or some other enemy of the Borealins back in the Stellar Ring, obliterated Silver Bell. What no one could explain was the ease with which the attackers overwhelmed Spes's fortifications and the dearth of any clues to their identity.

Within a short time, the pirates and criminals that the Borealins had once chased away came back to the system, setting up bases of operation on both Spes and the moons and asteroids of Hammer's Star. Nevertheless, daring ships would make runs to Spes's surface over the next few years and retrieve pieces of wreckage. More than a few of these intrepid explorers didn't return from Hammer's Star, and such tests of bravery soon diminished in popularity.

### ARRIVAL

On November 11, 2496, the Concord's reconstruction of the Kendai relay at the edge of the Stellar Ring allowed the stellar nations to hear Spes's cry for help. While its attempts to reply directly to the Silver Bell colony didn't meet with success, the Concord received information from the denizens of Bluefall and Alaundril, who updated them on the current situation as it was

known and confirmed that the aggressors of Hammer's Star remained unidentified. In response, the Concord mobilized a task force over the next several months, but the Galactic Consulate didn't consider the situation—or perhaps the Verge—serious enough to merit an emergency deployment.

Two months later, the *Monitor*'s task force meandered its way though the most populated and important Verge systems, stopping along the way to allow diplomats and delegates from the Stellar Ring to visit their lost colonies. As the Concord didn't want to take risks with either the first mission to the frontier or its prized fortress ships, they sent three dreadnoughts, two carriers, 21 cruisers, and numerous vessels of frigate class and smaller to escort the *Monitor*. With such a presence, it was certain that neither pirate, criminal, nor military force would offer a significant threat.

The *Monitor* emerged from drivespace in the Hammer's Star system on March 23. It didn't find anything on Spes, and it only logged a few pirate bands in the rest of the system. After patrolling Hammer's Star for less than a month, the *Monitor* left the system and wandered back to Tendril and the Stellar Ring. In its place, however, the Galactic Concord left behind the dreadnought *Vition*, one light carrier, the *Inamorata*, a battlecruiser, four heavy cruisers, and a reinforced division of Concord Marines (the Sanguine Outriders of the 145th). The recolonization of Spes and the Hammer's Star system began under their protective shield.

### TODAY

With the return of Borealins and the entry of the Galactic Concord, life in the Hammer's Star system begins anew. Of all of the diverse interests that the Concord has developed within the Verge's confines, Hammer's Star is the highest priority. Through the fortified defense of this system, the Concord hopes to render both the Verge and the entire Stellar Ring safe.

The Treaty of Concord gave the Galactic Concord responsibility for the entirety of Open Space. Despite the number of planets and star systems claimed by individual stellar nations, the Concord's control includes the length of the Verge. It has the right to recognize a stellar nation's authority over a specific site, preserve it as a Concord protectorate, or register a colony's independence. In the Hammer's Star system, the Concord has chosen to preserve its right to administer the system. As a result, almost 100,000 Concordans now live in the system. They're divided among the Concord Administrators and citizens in Terminal, the Concord's new town on Spes, marine fortifications on several of the planets, moons, and asteroids, and the many starships that the Concord has assigned.

Given the volatile nature of the star system—and the fact that the Concord is providing what amounts to free protection—the Borealis Republic has never voiced an objection to the Concord's decision. Yet it hasn't abandoned the system, either. In fact, the Republic still mourns the fate of the Borealins of Spes alongside those citizens killed in the Second Galactic War. Now, the Borealins act to preserve the inheritance that their lost Borealin brothers and sisters left behind. Beginning in August 2497, Borealin ships joined the Concord military craft already in the system. A few of the craft reinforced the already impressive defense of the system. Most, however, carried colonists and the means to guarantee the development of a new Borealin city on the surface of Spes.

The arrival of hundreds of Borealin vessels and thousands of Borealin colonists to Spes has gone a long way toward en-

suring that when (or if) the Concordans hand over control of the system, they'll give it to the Republic. In the meantime, the presence of both powers here on the frontier almost guarantees the safety of trade in the system. In fact, an economy has already grown around the Borealin and Concordan cities on Spes.

Interestingly enough, both Borealins and Concordans have discovered that their mass transceivers and mass detectors don't function within the confines of the Hammer's Star system. Although scientists have postulated that the system's proximity to a black hole might cause such a phenomenon, no one knows for sure. Radio- and laser-based comm systems normally function within Hammer's Star, however.

### PUNISHMENT

Many people have formed theories to explain the devastation of Spes. Among the most popular is one that postulates the existence of an alliance between the various pirates and brigands—many of whom were found in the star system when the *Monitor* returned. Star Force Vice Admiral Adranus Raastad, the senior Concord officer in the system, has declined to support any hypothesis or accusation. Nevertheless, he's made it one of his personal missions to eradicate the pirate threat.

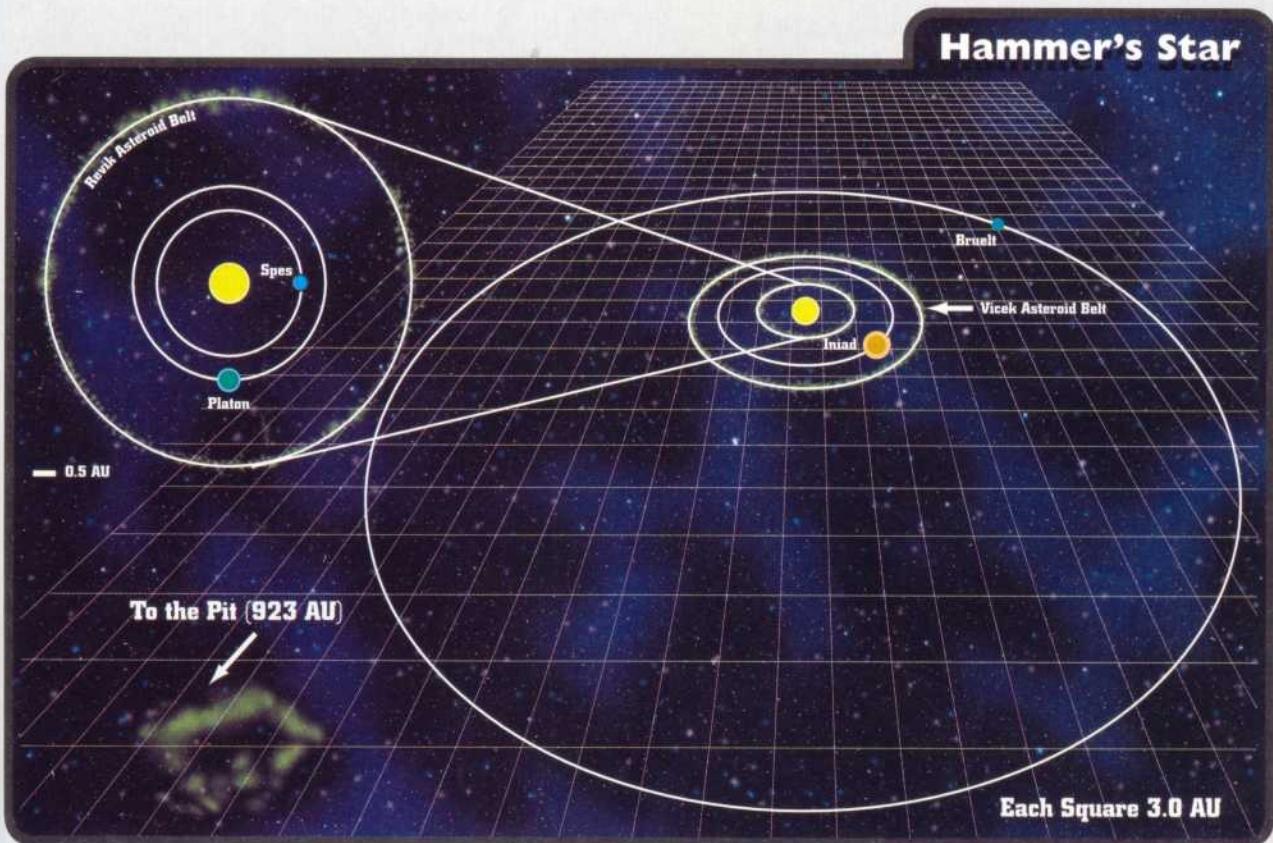
This mission began almost immediately after the Concord arrived within the system. First, Raastad offered a general amnesty for criminals who agreed to come forward and provide valuable information about the Hammer's Star system or the events of its past. As few accepted, Admiral Raastad's next step involved the direct use of force. First, he cleared Spes and the moons of Platon of all pirates. As Raastad ordered the *Vition* deeper into the system, however, he encountered a stiffening resistance. While no pirate ship or collection of ships could match his firepower, they managed to evade the harrying action of his fleet and return another day. Currently, Raastad believes that Spes, Platon, and the Revik Belt are free of pirates. Iniad and the Vicek Belt are projects of a more ongoing nature. Several bands of pirates have dug into the outer asteroid belt with an illogical stubbornness.

### THE SECOND ASSAULT

In February 2501, the defenders of Hammer's Star earned their hazard pay. While Admiral Raastad's fleet patrolled the system in hopes of locating a concentration of pirate activity, Concord sensors detected the movement of 19 unidentified, frigate-sized vessels moving quickly into the Hammer's Star system, on a course for Spes. While the *Vition* was on the other side of the star system, the Concord's light carrier *Inamorata* and a battlecruiser engaged their induction engines and moved to intercept at full speed. The two fleets met near the Rakke asteroid in the Vicek Belt.

Upon approach, the Concord vessels discovered ships of alien construction. Telescoping sensors revealed ships powered with drives of unknown energy signatures. All communication attempts failed, and the enemy opened the Battle of Rakke with a barrage of energy weapons.

It was a terrific conflict, and indubitably a learning experience for both sides. Fortunately for Star Force, their larger ships overpowered the smaller alien vessels. Eventually, the salvos from the light-carrier fighters and the battlecruiser shattered the alien ships. Unfortunately for the Concord Marines in their base on the asteroid below, the alien spaceships outnum-



## Hammer's Star

bered Star Force more than two to one. Three alien craft slipped through the lines of battle and descended to the surface of Rakke.

The second half of the Battle of Rakke pitted human infantry against alien infantry. The craft landed close to the marine installation on Rakke. As most of the base's systems weren't operational, the fight boiled down to a clash of troops and small arms on the asteroid's cratered surface. Only a small number of Marines survived.

Despite this tragic loss, the Concord gleaned a number of facts from the battle. First, they were able to name their enemy: the klicks. The alien corpses left behind formed the first part of the Concord's examination. While Star Force reported to its regret that none of the enemy ships survived, they could at least review the battle logs to discover more information about these aliens.

Most important, the Concord discovered that this external species possessed technology roughly equal to that of humanity. Since the aliens didn't originate from the Hammer's Star system, they must have access to drivespace or other faster-than-light travel. It was a new kind of first contact.

While no one could be sure that the klicks deserved blame for the destruction of the first Hammer's Star colony, they quickly became the scapegoat of choice.

As a response to the incident, the Concord further upgraded its fortifications on Spes and in the rest of the system. A battlecruiser was sent out to the Verge in order to replace the one that limped to Tendril's shipyards for repairs. Finally, the Concord renewed its commitment to patrol the length of the Verge by assigning two dreadnoughts to the task. If the klicks indeed have the power to traverse the distances between stars, no Verge system is truly safe.

## HAMMER'S STAR DEFENSES

*Defense of Hammer's Star is defense of humanity.*

Vice Admiral Adrianus Raastad, 2501

Raastad dictates Star Force—and thus the Concord's—policy in Hammer's Star. In the years since 2497, the system has transformed itself. What was once a desolate and unpopulated wasteland has become home to the most intense concentration of military force outside of the Stellar Ring. Even Aegis cannot equal the strength that the Concord has invested here.

In the months since the Battle of Rakke, six confirmed attacks by klicks have threatened Concord, Borealin, and independent outposts. As long as the klicks remain active in this system, the Concord will continue to devote resources here—but will it be enough?

Unlike several Verge governments, the Galactic Concord has adopted a policy of active defense. As of yet, the Concord hasn't had the time or resources to begin the construction of a number of well-fortified bases or fortifications within the confines of the star system. Moreover, fixed orbital defenses have already failed the system once. So, the Concord has placed a strong mobile force to secure the system. After dispersing lightly fortified bases throughout the system, Star Force and the Concord Marines are ready to move and reinforce defenses wherever necessary.

The first step in the Concord's defensive plan involves detection of the klicks. To this end, Star Force has scattered numerous sensors, probes, and satellites throughout the system in order to monitor all activity in Hammer's Star. The inability to use mass detectors within Hammer's Star severely weakens their efforts, however. The weakest sections of this sensor net exist in the Vicek Belt and the depths of the solar system.

## ADMIRAL ADRIANUS RAASTAD STAR FORCE VICE ADMIRAL

### Level 15 human Diplomat (Tech Op)

STR 7	(0)	INT 12	(+1)
DEX 9	(0)	WIL 14	(+2)
CON 10		PER 10	
Durability: 10/10/5/5		Action check: 12+/11/5/2	
Move: sprint 16, run 10, walk 4		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 2	

### Attacks

Unarmed	7/3/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
15mm sabot pistol	10/5/2	2d4w/2d4+1w/d4+3m	HI/0

### Defenses

CF long coat: d4 (LI), d4 (HI), d6-2 (En)

### Skills

Athletics [7]; Unarmed Attack [7]; Modern [9]-pistol [10]; Vehicle [9]-space [13]; Stamina [9]-endurance [10]; Knowledge [12]-computer [13], language: Standard [15]; System [12]-sensors [13], weapons [13]; Tactics [12]-space [20]; Administration [14]; Awareness [14]; Resolve [14]; Culture [10]-diplomacy [12], etiquette: Borealin [11]; Interaction [11]; Leadership [10]-command [16], inspire [12].

The years have not been kind to this 190-year old veteran. Today, Raastad is a humbled figure, much reduced by the ravages of time. Even the best gene therapy hasn't prevented his posture from stooping, his skin from wrinkling, and his immune system from weakening. Professionally, he stands at the summit of an extraordinary career. Once an enlisted seaman in the Solar Union's navy, Raastad served his nation with distinction throughout the Second Galactic War. In the meantime, he became an officer, a captain, and ultimately a respected leader.

When the Treaty of Concord brought the specter of retirement close, Raastad offered his services to the Galactic Concord. Once the Concord accepted his application, he joined Star Force in 2472 and played a significant role in transforming the group from an idealistic concept to a respected military force.

This work eventually became mundane to the war hero, and after the Hammer's Star message arrived in the Stellar Ring, Raastad found a new war in which to fight. Raastad's critics claim he's simply a bloodthirsty, inflexible butcher, not a visionary military leader.

The Hammer's Star system may well represent the greatest challenge that the fading hero has ever faced, and no one knows whether the veteran of the Second Galactic War can lead Star Force effectively. The lack of a significant victory against the klicks to date, coupled with the continued pestilence of smugglers and pirates in the system, has led many to question the true extent of Raastad's courage and ability.

Raastad offers no response to his critics, preferring to let his successes speak for themselves and to let his shortcomings go unacknowledged. In person, the admiral is cold, efficient, and highly demanding—though he does genuinely care about the men and women under his command.

beyond it. The sensor network itself is subject to occasional attack and destruction, and upgrading it is a project that consumes Concord engineers and resources.

Once the Concord detects a potential threat to the system, it falls to Star Force and the Concord Marines to act. However, more frequently than they might wish, the marines and Star Force find themselves adopting defensive postures as the klicks attack their bases. Until the Concord better understands the klicks, Star Force will never gain any ground in this system.

## BOREALIN DEFENSIVE GUARD

Although no one can deny that Galactic Concord forces form the center of Hammer's Star defenses, the Borealin people don't just stand by and watch. In fact, the Republic has posted members of the Borealin Defensive Guard (BDG) to the system. This move has also neutralized any allegations of favoritism or weakness against the Republic and the Concord.

Although the Republic doesn't divide its military into specialized naval and planetary actions, its main strength lies in its infantry, broken down into legions. Each Borealin legion consists of about 1,000 sentients. The most powerful Borealin ship in the system is the *Conviction*, a heavy cruiser. It spends most of its time in orbit around Spes. A dozen smaller military ships bear the Borealin flag. To date, they've seen little action against either klick or human opponents.

## STAR FORCE

Star Force has counted on its strategic superiority to turn the tide in the Hammer's Star's conflicts. First, Star Force enjoys the advantage of fighting on its "home court." The various pilots and commanders in Star Force know the ins and outs of this system.

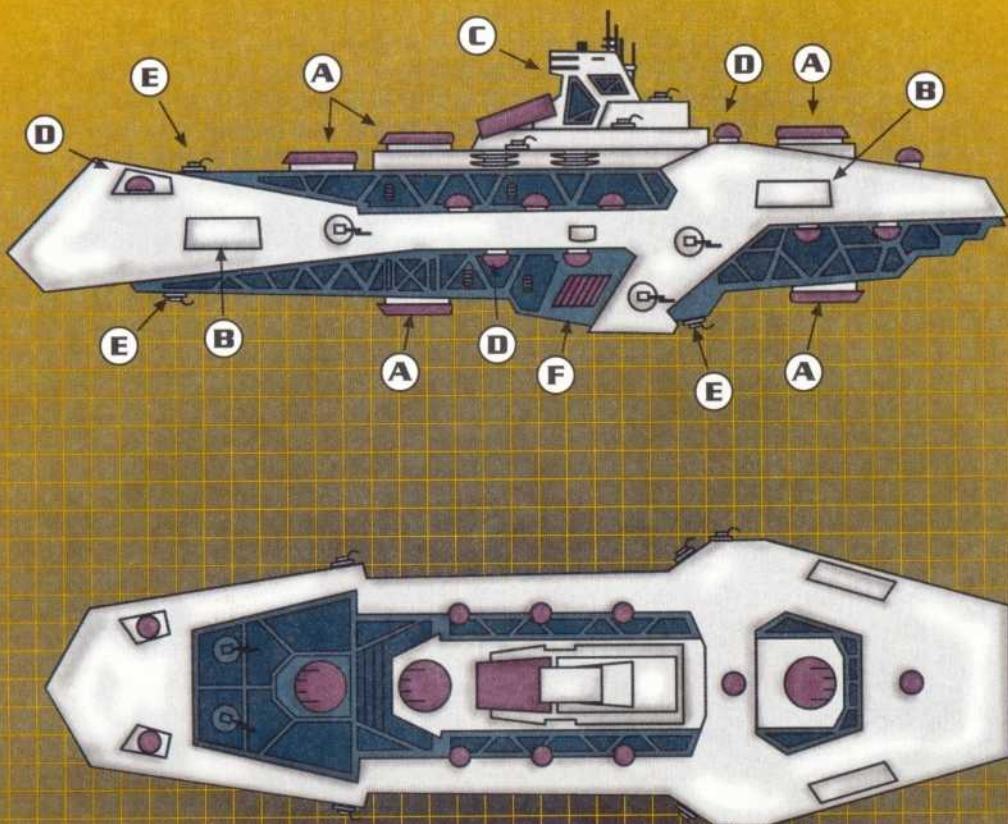
Unfortunately, the events of the last year have gone a long way toward humbling Star Force. It's true that Star Force, bolstered by its many military assets, can declare near-complete security in Hammer Star's inner system. As for the rest of the system, however, Star Force dominance remains tenuous at best—despite the "victory" at Rakke. Iniad's more distant orbit has made it the field for three conflicts, each of which were

## CSV VITION (BBD 674)

The second of the Concord's new *Academy*-class battleships, the *Vition* is the centerpiece of the Concord fleet based in Hammer's Star. It carries a complement of 3,950 Star Force personnel, plus an integral Marine battalion of more than 1,000 soldiers. The *Vition* is the most formidable vessel currently stationed in the Verge; its main armament of 20 Mk IX fusion beams and its heavy neutronite armor far outclass any other ship in the vicinity. The *Vition* carries a small scout and strike squadron of 20 *Meteor* aerospace fighters and 10 *Devastator* attack craft in its hangar bays. Like most capital ships, the *Vition* can carry a number of smaller vessels through drivespace, and its docking clamps can accommodate four destroyer-sized ships and ten smaller vessels. Its hangar bays

The *Academy*-class ships are considered to be slow and slightly undergunned in comparison to other dreadnoughts currently in production, but they make up for it with first-class protection and damage control systems.

## CSV Vition



- A. Main Batteries
- B. Hangar Bays
- C. Bridge
- D. Secondary Batteries
- E. Docking Clamps
- F. Main Tachyon Intakes

200m  
150m  
100m  
0



Gun Turret

**CSV Vition (BB 674)**

Length: 808.5 meters  
 Beam: 231 meters  
 Mass: 2,448,360 metric tons  
 Drive Rating: 32.5 light-years/starfall  
 Acceleration: 8,600 kph/sec  
 Crew: 3,650 enlisted/300 officers  
 Troops: 1,015 enlisted/44 officers  
 Main Armament: 20 Mk IX Heavy Fusion Beams (5 x 4)  
 Secondary Armament: 54 Ty 4 Mass Cannon (18 x 3)  
 Tertiary Armament: 80 N303 X-Ray Laser Cannon (20 x 4)  
 Main Armor Belt: 2.19 m cast neutronite alloy  
 Secondary Armor Protection: 0.55 m neutronite alloy  
 Small Craft: 20 aerospace fighters, 10 strike craft, 2 gigs, 2 repair boats



draws. As for the Vicek Belt, Star Force rarely sends ships out there alone, and it makes no promises about its ability to protect merchant or mining traffic. The system is simply too big, offering too many convenient hiding places for the klicks and the pirates who still prey upon Hammer's Star shipping.

Star Force has assigned almost 200 vessels to meet this challenge. Thirty-one of these vessels are capital class, and the total armada includes the *Vition*, the flagship of Star Force in this system, and the light carrier *Inamorata*, prized for its ability to project force and complete reconnaissance missions that the *Vition*'s brute power can't match. The rest of the fleet leaders are divided into a battlecruiser, four heavy cruisers, six light cruisers, nine destroyers, and six frigates. The remaining Star Force vessels are smaller craft manned by 50 or fewer crewmates.

Admiral Raastad has divided the Hammer's Star fleet into two principal task groups and a dispersed vanguard cluster. The *Vition* task group—composed of the dreadnought, two heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, three destroyers, and more than a dozen corvettes and escorts—maintains a position in the inner system. The *Inamorata* task group represents the sword to the *Vition* group's shield. In addition to the Shining Sabers squadron, a battlecruiser, two light cruisers, four destroyers, and a dozen corvettes join the light carrier on its patrols. The rest of the fleet waits for assignments while docked at space stations, patrols the system, or undergoes minor repairs and refits.

## CONCORD MARINES

Superior training and frequent drills make the Concord Marines one of the most potent infantry groups in the galaxy. The Concord has sent its best marine divisions into the Verge, hoping that this will make the difference in battle. However, these marines face significant challenges in the Verge—not the least of which is actually detecting the klicks' next attack. Of course, it's Star Force's job to find the enemy and deliver a payload of Concord Marines ready and willing to spread klick entrails all over the star system. Therefore, it's no surprise to the marines, or their leader Adjutant General Lois Strongbow (Hm/Concord/DCS-10), that they find themselves strung out on remote bases with help hours away.

Delegated to fighting a campaign based on strategic position, the Concord Marines take the brunt of an attack when the klicks appear on the scene. That's no surprise, given Raastad's strategy of placing marines in far-flung forts to test the Concord's control of Hammer's Star. In effect, the admiral uses these soldiers as bait.

The Concord Marines still talk about their only offensive action to date. A month after the Battle of Rakke, a Star Force scout uncovered a garrison of klicks on an asteroid in the Vicek Belt. After consulting with Raastad, General Strongbow assigned the 3rd battalion of the 1st Regiment to wipe out the klicks and seize their base. Major Anika Isakovic (Hf/Concord/DCS-7) gathered 500 marines aboard a Star Force heavy cruiser for transport. Raastad decided the risk in lives was well worth the opportunity to seize what could be the klicks' headquarters. The marines captured the base and destroyed the klick forces there. While the operation hasn't caused a significant decrease in klick activity, it has boosted morale. Despite the loss of 33% of the assault troops, the marines know that they can beat the klicks in combat.

Adjutant General Strongbow has more than 25,000 soldiers in the 145th division under her command. They're divided into five regiments of roughly equal size, each led respectively by Colonel Taro Petrik (Hm/Concord/DCS-8), Colonel Colin

McGillivray (Hm/Concord/CS-10), Colonel Utilien (St/Concord/DFA-9), Colonel Tamara Vellas (Hf/Concord/DCS-7), and Lt. Colonel Helio de Freitas (Hm/Concord/DMW-5).

## MERCURY COMPANY

The Mercury Company has earned a reputation for being the hard edge of the marine vanguard. In its two years of service in Hammer's Star, Mercury Company has distinguished itself for its consistently high level of readiness and its valor in combat. After the Battle of Rakke, this company spearheaded the 3rd Battalion's assault on a klick asteroid base. Ironically, Mercury Company suffered some of the lightest casualties of any assigned to that fight. Some of this good fortune can be attributed to the nature of the fight; the klicks spread out and struck out randomly at the invaders. To Mercury Company, their high survival rate is a source of pride. Clearly, they're the best.

Mercury Company spends most of its time aboard Vallis Station, the Concord's orbiting satellite base above Spes. There, the company is near the center of the action and can respond to a threat anywhere in the system. Since Vallis Station is also home to a drivespace relay and a communications hub within the system itself, Mercury Company is one of the best informed units. At a moment's notice, the company must be prepared to climb in the *Innsbruck*, a frigate that is usually its transport, or any other ship. As such, much of the Company's crew carries only essential gear—such as 11mm charge rifles and ceramic armor.

Captain Armand d'Estrees (Hm/Concord/DCS-8) has served as Mercury Company's commander since 2495. One of the first Concordans to command the marines, d'Estrees was 10 years old when his Austrin parents became Concord citizens. After completing his compulsory education, d'Estrees became one of the first graduates of the marines' elite Coughlin Academy, and subsequently one of the first graduates of its officer training program. Captain d'Estrees has proven himself a more than capable commander, and he has earned the respect of the marines who serve under him.

## MERCURY COMPANY AVAILABLE DATA

### Chain of Command

Commander-in-Chief	Chancellor Tor Rustoski
General	General Bien Trinh
145th Division	Adjutant General Strongbow
1st Regiment	Colonel Taro Petrik
3rd Battalion	Major Anika Isakovic
Company Commander	Captain Armand d'Estrees
Command Platoon	Lieutenant David Lieberman
1st Platoon	Lieutenant Thomas Hale
2nd Platoon	Lieutenant Marta Kael
3rd Platoon	Lieutenant Telpha Ril

### Personnel

Fraal	2	(2 male)
Human	123	(75 male, 48 female)
Mechalus	1	(1 female)
Sesheyen	1	(1 female)
T'sa	3	(2 male, 1 female)
Weren	6	(2 male, 4 female)

### COMMAND PLATOON

Despite its name, Command Platoon doesn't typically lead the marine charge. The 22 sentients of the Command Platoon function as the company heads and station chiefs, carefully observing and directing the actions of the combat platoons. This platoon typically takes position behind the other platoons during battle. It's the duty of Lieutenant David Lieberman (Hm/Concord/DCS-5) to ensure that Captain d'Estrees has both information from the field with which to make good decisions and clear lines of communication through which he can relay his orders. In point of fact, Lieberman performs the role of d'Estrees's second-in-command and adviser.

The final duty of the Command Platoon is to serve as Captain d'Estrees's personal guard, ensuring the security of both the captain and his headquarters. The rear of Mercury Company isn't far from the fight, and the Command Platoon receives its share of the action.

### CONCORD MARINE, 1ST PLATOON

#### Level 1 human Combat Spec

STR 11	(+1)	INT 9	(0)
DEX 11	(+1)	WIL 9	(0)
CON 11		PER 9	
Durability: 11/11/6		Action check: 14+/13/6/3	
Move: sprint 22, run 14, walk 4		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 1	

#### Attacks

Unarmed-power 12/6/3 d4+1s/d4+2s/d4+3s LI/0  
11mm ch rifle 14/7/3 d6+1w/d6+3w/d6+1m HI/0

#### Defenses

Cerametal armor: d6+1 (LI), d8+1 (HI), d6 (En)

#### Skills

Armor [11]-combat [12]; Athletics [11]; Unarmed [11]-power [12]; Modern [11]-rifle [14]; Vehicle Operation [13]; Stamina [12]-endurance [13]; Knowledge [11]-first aid [12], language: Standard [14]; Awareness [9]-perception [10]; Resolve [9]; Interaction [9].

#### Gear

11mm charge rifle; 9mm charge pistol; combat knife; cerametal armor; backpack; comm gear; first aid kit; imaging goggles; soft e-suit; trauma pack.

This information describes a standard Concord Marine private assigned to Mercury Company's 1st Platoon. However, it can serve as a model for any marine in service. Individual variation is common. Corporals may possess somewhat more advanced skills—including the basics of tactics and leadership. In addition, one or two members of each squad form a substitute for artillery; protected in recon body tanks, these artillerists arm themselves with heavy machine guns and bantam launchers that can take down any fortified target. Others may carry quantum rifles. At least one soldier in each squad is a Tech Op, with the knowledge and equipment to function as a paramedic. Finally, about one-quarter of Mercury Company consists of nonprofessionals, soldiers that don't have the stock to meet heroic standards.

### LUIS SANVICTORES PLATOON SERGEANT

#### Level 24 human Combat Spec

STR 12	(+1)	INT 9	(0)
DEX 13	(+2)	WIL 9	(0)
CON 12		PER 9	
Durability: 12/12/6/6		Action check: 17+/16/8/4 <sup>1</sup>	
Move: sprint 24, run 16, walk 6		#Actions: 3	
Reaction score: Good/3		Last resorts: 1	
Perks: Danger Sense <sup>2</sup> , Good Luck <sup>3</sup> , Tough as Nails			

<sup>1</sup> Use a -d4 base situation die for Sanvictores's action checks.

<sup>2</sup> Apply a -2 bonus to all Awareness-intuition skill checks.

<sup>3</sup> Once per scene Sanvictores can make a Good Luck perk check and receive a varying bonus (-1/-2/-3 depending upon his success) to his next action. Marginal success indicates Bad Luck; he suffers a +3 penalty to his next action.

#### Attacks

Unarmed-power 16/8/4 d6+1s/d6+3s/d4+1w LI/0  
11mm ch rifle<sup>4</sup> 20/11/5 d6+1w/d6+3w/d6+1m HI/0

<sup>4</sup> Use a -d4 base situation die for skill checks.

#### Defenses

Cerametal armor: d6+1 (LI), d8+1 (HI), d6 (En)

#### Skills

Armor [12]-combat [16], power [14]; Athletics [12]-throw [14]; Heavy [12]-direct [14]; Unarmed [12]-power [16]; Acrobatics [13]-dodge [17]; zero-g training [14]; Modern [13]-rifle [20]; Vehicle Operation [13]; Stamina [12]-endurance [16], resist pain [16]; Knowledge [11]-computer [12], first aid [12], language: Standard [14]; System Operation [10]; Tactics [9]-infantry [14]; Awareness [9]-intuition<sup>2</sup> [12], perception [12]; Investigate [9]-search [12]; Resolve [9]-mental [11], physical [14]; Teach [9]-Combat Spec [12]; Deception [9]-gamble [12]; Interaction [9]-intimidate [12]; Leadership [9]-command [12].

#### Gear

11mm charge rifle; 9mm charge pistol; combat knife; cerametal armor; backpack; comm gear; deck of cards; first aid kit; imaging goggles; sensor gauntlet; soft e-suit; trauma pack.

Sergeant Luis "Sweet" Sanvictores has many things in common with Captain d'Estrees: They both immigrated to the Concord with their families in 2472; they graduated together; and they've served together several times. Unlike his friend, however, Sanvictores has never pursued an officer's command in the marines. Instead, he has sought combat duty wherever he could find it. Serving every significant skirmish and peacekeeping action in the last decade has made Luis one of the most accomplished Concordan soldiers in the Concord's short history. Today, Sanvictores often discusses strategy with Captain d'Estrees—even if the captain's lieutenant isn't always present.

Of course, Sanvictores didn't earn his reputation or his position by sucking up to officers. Truth be told, he's one of the most difficult men to work under. This is especially true now that combat action has become a regular activity for Mercury Company. He expects his troops to be at their best at all times.

## THOMAS HALE

### LIEUTENANT, 1ST PLATOON

#### Level 7 human Diplomat (Combat Spec)

STR 9	(+1)	INT 11	(+1)
DEX 10	(0)	WIL 10	(0)
CON 10		PER 11	
Durability: 10/10/5/5		Action check: 12+/11/5/2	
Move: sprint 18, run 14, walk 4			#Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 2	
Perk: Heightened Ability (PER)			

#### Attacks

Unarmed-power	12/6/3	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
11mm ch rifle	14/7/3	d6+1w/d6+3w/d6+1m	HI/0

#### Defenses

Cerametal armor: d6+1 (LI), d8+1 (HI), d6 (En)

#### Skills

Armor [9]-combat [10]; Athletics [9]; Unarmed [9]-power [12]; Modern [10]-rifle [14]; Vehicle Operation [10]; Movement [10]; Stamina [10]-endurance [11]; Knowledge [11]-computer [12]; language: Galactic Standard [14]; language: Orion [14]; System Operation [10]; Tactics [11]-infantry [14]; Administration [10]; Awareness [10]-perception [11]; Interaction [11]; Leadership [11]-command [13].

#### Gear

11mm charge rifle; 9mm charge pistol; combat knife; cerametal armor; backpack; comm gear; first aid kit; imaging goggles; microcomputer; soft e-suit; trauma pack.

The younger son of Senator Bruce Hale of the Orion League, Thomas disappointed father and nation when he joined the Concord Marines in 2496, soon after he came of age. At 21, he's the youngest lieutenant in Mercury Company and one of the youngest in service. In some measure, his rise can be attributed to his family's good name and reputation. However, his lineage creates its own problems and advantages. Much is expected of him, but he can also enjoy some of the advantages of fame. He is often invited to special Concord social events and meetings that most low-ranking officers can only dream of. Hale himself attributes his success to the military academies he attended while in his teens.

Yet celebrity doesn't win battles, and it doesn't appear that Thomas Hale will ever have the opportunity to take after his interstellar playboy of a father. Hale takes his commission very seriously, and he's made the fight against the klicks a personal one. During the last battle, Hale's conduct earned him the Silver Cross for valor. Indeed, his reputation here is only increased by the willingness of others to carry word of his success back to the Stellar Ring.

As to where ambition and destiny will lead him, Hale has said little; it's not known whether he wants to make a career of the military, or if it's only a precursor to political office in the Concord. One thing is for sure: Hale's current achievements will spread the fame of his family name even farther throughout the galaxy.

The younger Hale is even-tempered and charismatic, a natural leader. In conversation, he often puts people at ease and seems genuinely interested in others' points of view.

## 1ST PLATOON

The 1st Platoon is the first group of marines to enter any fray. In March 2501, the marines of Mercury Company's 1st Platoon stormed into a klick base, destroying everything in their wake. The Company's newest corporal, Norman "Sticks" Ophir (Hm/Concord/CS-5), planted Mercury Company's standard into the cold ground of the asteroid and made himself the rallying point against the klick counterattack.

1st Platoon's lieutenant is Thomas Hale. Luis Sanvictores, the veteran platoon sergeant, does his best to shepherd the latest officer under his care. Like all of Mercury Company's platoons, 1st Platoon is composed of four squads: Alpha, Beta, Gamma, and Delta. A squad sergeant, assisted by two corporals, leads each squad. Six privates serve in each of the squads, as well. 1st Platoon includes a fraal, two weren, and a t'sa among its numbers.

## 2ND PLATOON

2nd Platoon performs a near identical function to 1st Platoon. It's sometimes known as right flank for its standard position relative to the 1st. The 2nd Platoon trains just as hard, and the real difference between the two platoons is simply their leaders. Unlike 1st Platoon, 2nd has a veteran leader in Lieutenant Marta Kael (Hi/Concord/DCS-8), and a younger, still-training platoon sergeant, Oscar Saywell (Hm/Concord/CS-4). Their operational differences aside, 2nd and 1st platoons manage to preserve a healthy competitiveness while off the battlefield and a fine sense of teamwork when the klicks storm in.

## 3RD PLATOON

The left flank, or 3rd Platoon, of Mercury Company is no weaker than either of the others. Indeed, the 3rd Platoon has historically possessed a number of close-combat marine specialists. Sometimes, 1st and 3rd platoons have exchanged positions when it became clear that chainswords and pulse batons were more appropriate to the battle.

Lieutenant Telpha Ril (Mi/Concord/CS-6) is fairly unique in the corps. She's left behind the typical revulsion against combat and war that her species feels in order to join the Concord Marines. Something of an outcast among her own kind, Ril is the only mechalus in the 145th Division.

## GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Despite the presence of a foreign threat, human governments and the species they have encountered still find time to struggle against each other. As the Hammer's Star system falls under the direct control of the Galactic Concord, standard procedure would call for the appointment of a Concord governor to take office here. Normally, this governor would administer and coordinate the actions of the system's inhabitants according to Concord law.

Such an assignment has never occurred. It's partially a result of the unique nature of the system; there are few issues that require a governor's attention. The Borealis go about a calm and steady recolonization of Spes, and the military forces of the Concord see to their own needs as they attempt to fight the klicks and the pirates.

## GALACTIC CONCORD

Despite its significant presence in Hammer's Star, the Star Force armada represents only a minute percentage of the Concord's total military assets. Similarly, months often pass with-

out the system being mentioned on the floor of the Galactic Consulate. Put simply, the Concord has its hands full keeping the stellar nations away from each other's throats back in the Stellar Ring. Thus, the first goal of the Concord in this system, as it must be throughout the Verge, is to minimize incidents. Most members of the Galactic Consulate have convinced themselves that the problems of Hammer's Star are just too far away to concern them. They're also confident that Admiral Raastad's forces can contain any actual threats.

Meanwhile, the single greatest deterrent to placing a governor in Hammer's Star is Vice Admiral Raastad himself. Raastad has absolutely no interest in sharing his authority with Concord civilian authority in the system. He's manipulated his contacts in the Galactic Consulate, as well as the laws of the Concord itself, in order to prevent such a thing from happening. Publicly, he's gone as far as addressing the citizens of Spes and various Concord bases, stating his opposition openly. As it stands, he's the military dictator of the star system. Although no state of war has ever been declared against the klicks—perhaps because no one knows how to communicate it to them—Raastad controls the system as if he wields all the powers of martial law.

Functionally, he is the highest-ranking military officer within the system and one of the five highest in the Verge. While he must consult with Adjutant General Strongbow on matters that involve the Concord Marines, he can command any of the hundreds of thousands of soldiers in the system. Fortunately, Raastad has taken his commission seriously. He's more interested in producing victories than micromanaging either Concordans or Borealins. As long as everyone "does his or her duty," Raastad is a tolerable commander. In time of conflict, however, his orders can seem harsh, even ruthless.

Raastad recognizes the need to delegate responsibility—especially when it comes to controlling the thousands of civilians who live in the system. The Concord Administrators, led locally by System Administrator Marissa Rolin (Hf/Concord/DFA-6), provide a sense of comfort and familiarity. As long as Rolin keeps the populace in order and relatively happy, Raastad allows her to administer justice as she sees fit.

### BOREALIN DEMOCRACY

With the Borealin capital of Sapphire more than 1,000 light-years away by ship and almost two weeks by drivesat relay, the Borealins on Spes unquestionably form their stellar nation's most distant community. Yet the Borealins living in their new homes on Spes remain citizens of the Republic, bound by its laws and customs.

Even more important to this new Borealin colony has been the absence of the rigid structure usually reinforced by the Colleges of Philosophy. In the Stellar Ring, the colleges play vital functions as they ordain their stellar nation's leaders with titles of Philosopher and Grand Philosopher. Here on Spes, however, almost all of the colonists were simple Students and Lecturers. Since no formal college has established a base on the planet, the colony's leadership formed in a vacuum of power. Ultimately, after much private consideration and weeks of public debate, the Borealins suspended the rules and chose a Dean and a council of Professors by public election. They held the first election in 2498.

It's an unprecedented threat to the status quo; no Borealin has ever received such honored titles of academia without sanction from the Colleges of Philosophy. In response, both the College of Justice Ethics and the College of Unism sent respected guest Lecturers to bring Spes back into line. The Unists, the old-

est and most traditional Borealins, have barely managed to contain expressions of outrage at the colonists' audacity. Both Colleges have erected branch campuses in Silver Bell.

### STELLAR NATIONS

Between the Galactic Concord, the Borealins, and the numerous aggressors, the Hammer's Star system doesn't have much to offer other stellar nations. Spes is a promising and still largely undeveloped world, but the forces arrayed to protect it—as well as the Borealin claims to ownership—have discouraged any serious national settlement programs. A few stellar nations have made an effort to open small businesses and trading opportunities in the system, despite the risks. For most, it's a long-term investment. Having a foothold in the Hammer's Star system, however small, could prove useful as humanity expands farther into unknown space.

There's another, more immediate reason to keep a few loyal citizens in the Hammer's Star system. While the Concord can claim that it's here to protect against pirates and unknown alien threats, no stellar nation wants to be surprised by a sudden repositioning of Star Force and the Concord Marines. Of all the stellar nations, VoidCorp has voiced the loudest objections to "this unnecessary concentration of offensive military assets."

Despite their protests, VoidCorp traders and freighters are among the most numerous visitors to the system. Perhaps they're driven by the demands of their corporate directors, but these traders often venture out to the distant points of the Vicek Belt to make deals with independent miners and settlers. VoidCorp has enjoyed good fortune. While a few ships have fallen to attack from pirates, VoidCorp has lost the fewest vessels.

### SPES

The planet that drew so much interest, and recently so much conflict, is a fairly young world that never had the chance to develop much of an active biosphere; while plants of various orders are common, multicellular animal life has yet to appear naturally. Due to the intrusion of humans and other sentients, it's not likely that Spes will ever do so.

The planet contains three large continents and numerous smaller islands. The largest continent, Utrecht, joins two landmasses subducted by two tectonic plates. Two mountain chains cross the continent, which is otherwise dominated by short stretches of grassland and an ever-growing desert. Corinth, the largest settlement on the continent, has fewer than 3,000 Borealins within its walls.

Hegel, on the opposite side of Spes, is the second largest continent. It's also largely undeveloped. No significant town or city exists on this continent, and only a few hundred rugged settlers live here. Hegel features the thickest vegetation on Spes, with forests and jungles along both of its coastlines. A mountain range near its eastern shore showcases the planet's tallest peaks. Only skycars and spaceships have scaled these mountains.

Mabillion, the smallest continent, has seen the most activity. The Borealins built three cities here. The primary city is, of course, the reconstructed community of Silver Bell, built in the asteroid's crater. Construction continues over the remains of the city, and the area now boasts more than 50,000 Borealins. Just over the mountains to the west of Silver Bell is the newest urban area, called Alcazar. Alcazar is the primary Concord military installation on the surface of Spes and the permanent residence of some 20,000 sentients—including citizens, military

officers, and enlisted personnel. Finally, the city of Whitehead dates most of its buildings from prior to the return of the stellar nations. The Borealins and independents living in Whitehead had an easy time of it; cleaning and rebuilding have proven easier than starting anew.

All told, Spes is still a virgin world, with many regions that have never known the trod of human foot. Exploring its surface is one of the few leisures that off-duty Borealins and Concordans enjoy.

### A TORTURED PLANET

All is not well on this virgin paradise, however. According to Borealin records, Spes's average temperature reported in the years from 2351 until 2488 was a relatively chilly 6.9°C—almost 10 degrees Centigrade below the average experienced on Earth. But today, the average temperature is 29.3°C. It's an incredible shift. In the four years since the Concord returned in 2497, the temperature has risen an impressive 9.4°C. In 2500, the planet warmed by more than 3°.

All of this change is producing incredible effects. Where once the polar ice caps stretched down a few hundred kilometers north of Silver Bell, today they sit more than 2,000 kilometers away. In addition, temperatures on the equator can easily exceed 45° C. It's this rise in temperature that is directly responsible for the existence and growth of Spes's deserts and more arid geography. The planet's climate isn't accepting all these changes happily; storms and unpredictable weather patterns are worse than ever.

What's causing the climatic shift? The planet's orbit is stable, and so is the solar radiation emitted from Hammer's Star. However, Spes's atmosphere is changing rapidly. As the planet began to heat slowly, gases were released into the upper atmosphere, in turn trapping more heat. It's all leading Spes into a runaway cycle that could potentially lead it down the Venusian cycle of planetary evolution.

The timing of these changes leads Borealin scientists to conclude that it must be tied into the asteroid impact in 2489.

### TERRAFORMING

The Borealins aren't going to surrender Spes to runaway greenhousing without a fight. Ever since they began resettling, they've been determined to stem the rise in temperature before it becomes impossible to control. Of course, this isn't the first time that scientists have used terraforming principles to cool a planet. It isn't even the first time that terraforming technologies have been brought to bear on degenerating worlds.

The Borealins plan on using Solar terraforming. Thousands of engineers and laborers are currently building atmospheric reprocessors. Unfortunately, terraforming is usually an operation that takes decades, or even a century. The Borealins don't have the time to wait for such mild change; in a decade, much of Spes could be uninhabitable.

The challenges confronting this effort have much more to do with local conditions than theoretical planetology, however. Resources are scarce within the system, and given the presence of pirates and klicks, the viability of supply convoys is never certain. Thus, the terraforming industry has enslaved the economy of Spes. Grants from the Borealis Republic and the Galactic Concord fund terraforming efforts—as well as the support operations that keep them running. In 2500, the temperature rose slightly less than predicted, leading many to hope that their efforts are succeeding.

### SPES POPULATION 313,707 SENTIENTS

Human	88%			
	Orion	1%	Austrin	5%
	Thuldan	1%	Nariac	0%
	Orlamu	1%	Insight	0%
	Rigunmor	0%	Hatire	0%
	Solar	0%	Borealin	42%
	VOIDCORP	1%	StarMech	0%
	Concord	42%	Independent	7%
Alien	12%			
	Sesheyen	1%	T'sa	4%
	Mechalus	6%	Weren	82%
	Fraal	7%		

Besides the standard scattered atmospheric reprocessor stations on Spes, scientists have proposed more radical plans to drop the surface temperature. The most popular of these include detonating atomic weapons on the surface; these weapons should spew enough heavy, opaque dust to reduce the amount of energy received from Hammer's Star.

### BOMAN TERRAFORMING STATIONS

Private enterprise, always looking for an opportunity to get involved in government contracting, hasn't ignored the terraforming effort. In 2498, the Boman Corp, an independent corporation with headquarters in Austrin-Ontis Unlimited, successfully bid for the rights to operate and coordinate the terraforming stations on the unpopulated Hegel continent.

This Austrin-Ontis corporation, better known as a military arms supplier, won the contract by submitting the lowest bid to the local Borealin government. In truth, the risks involved in working in both the Verge and the Hammer's Star system led the Borealins to believe that they would have to pay a contractor extraordinary sums. Compared to other bidders, the Boman Corp's bid was ridiculously low. Yet in the last three years, they've proven incredibly dedicated to the project, producing more than a dozen active reprocessors on Hegel's coast and interior. In addition, the Boman Corp has minimized its use of unmanned or robotic stations; more than 13,000 Austrins now live on Spes.

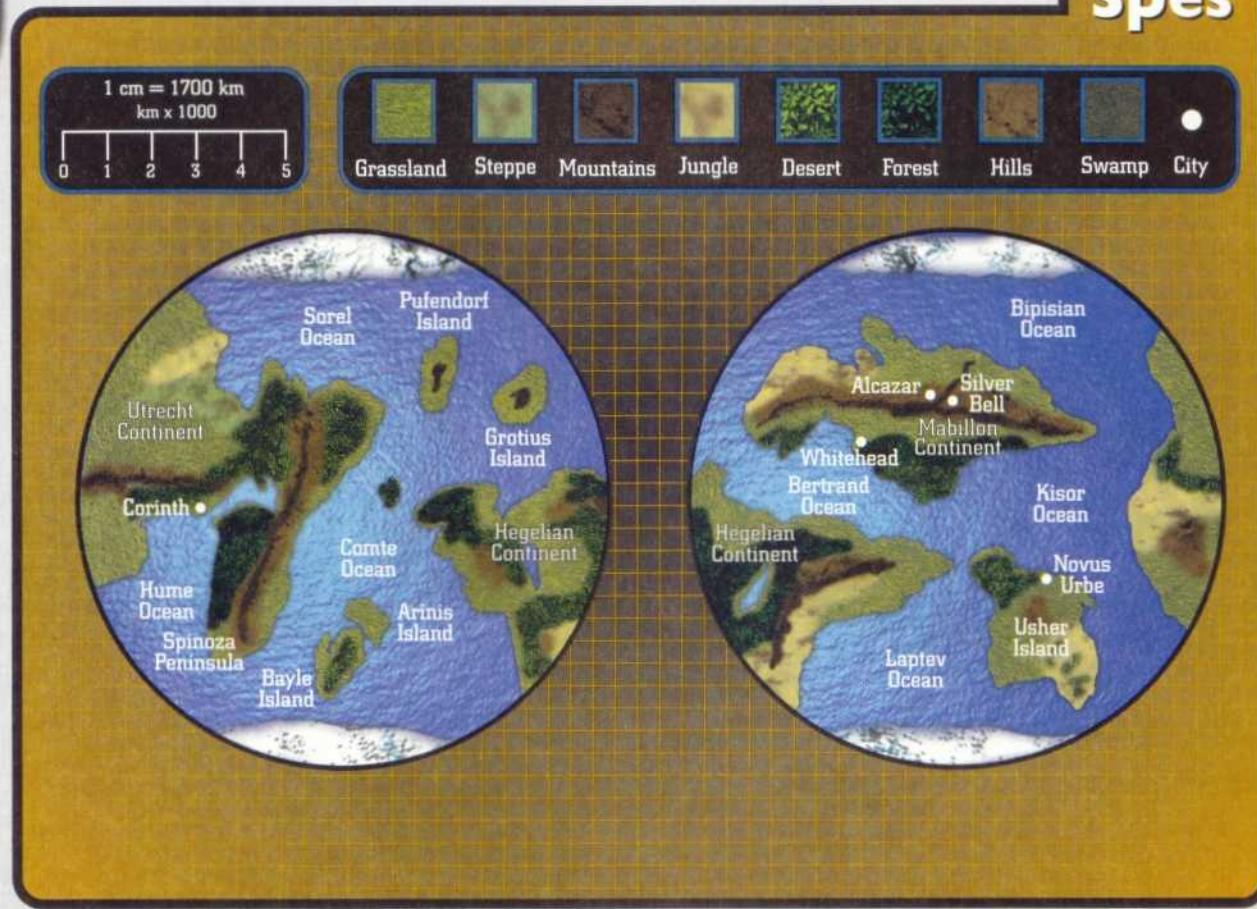
At first, the Borealins were afraid of the appearance of so many well-armed and well-trained Austrins. They were simply ignorant of the Austrins' heroic motivations until only a few months ago, when a rogue klick vessel penetrated a distracted Star Force defense group and made its way toward Spes. Without waiting for a call for help, the Austrins leapt to the offensive. When asked afterward, Austrin engineers responded with surprise at the Borealin interviews. "That's why we're here—to fight them bastard spiders," said one. "You think we really care about terraforming? You didn't think we came here to fight you weak-kneed academics, do you?"

### SILVER BELL

Once a city resting atop a mountainous plateau, Silver Bell now sits in an asteroid crater. It remains the most populous settlement on Spes, with 56,000 registered citizens—though its not a large colony even by Verge standards.

For the Borealins, Silver Bell represents renewal and rebirth. Thus, many of the Republic's best and brightest come





here, trying to make a name for themselves in a new era of philosophy and contemplative thought. In less than four years, the Silver Bell colonists have demonstrated remarkable independence. This energy and vigor are a source of pride to the Philosophers of the Republic on Sapphire. However, the willingness of Spes theorists to break from their colleges' traditions is a source of concern for more traditional-minded Borealins. While the storms of conflict and war rage outside their university walls, the Borealins spend their time in contemplation, research, and debate—like Borealins everywhere. Unlike traditional Borealins, however, the Spes colonists no longer restrict themselves to the use of convoluted references and arcane styles of debate; these younger Borealins are filled with a pulse of adrenaline that's almost unheard of. In fact, they've taken the College of Justice Ethics desire to protect the liberty of Borealins as far as they can.

In 2498, the citizens of Silver Bell elected Hanna Palmquist (Hf/Borealins/NP), an undoctored Student, to the position of Dean and leader of the city. Electing a Dean by popular vote was an unprecedented step in Borealins political thinking. In reaction, the Republic sent two visiting Professors to Spes, hoping to bring Silver Bell back in line with the rest of mainstream Borealins culture. Ironically, the Borealins' choice of Anthony Darrokin (Hm/Borealins/DFA-4), Professor of Justice Ethics, proved a terrible mistake. After conversations with a number of his clone brothers, Darrokin "converted" to the new ways of Spes, taking his college's local support with him.

The colonists finished rebuilding the Branch College of Justice Ethics before any other city structure. As the first building was completed, it became the municipal and philosophical center of Silver Bell. The youngest of the twelve colleges, the Jus-

tice Ethics branch has proven the most willing to accept radical new lines of thought and philosophy—even ones that would brand it as an apostate in the rest of Borealins culture.

The Branch College of Unism, constructed a year ago on the edge of the settlement, is the Republic's answer to this radical way of thinking. The Unist tradition is the oldest and most powerful within the Republic. The government-funded effort, led by irate Lecturer Clea Hitiro (Hf/Borealins/NP) hopes to mend Silver Bell's growing rift with Sapphire. Hitiro and her followers constantly try to reverse the philosophical direction in which the colony is moving.

As the largest population center in the system, Silver Bell has also become a center of local economic activity. Most of the system's corporations and businesses have built their headquarters within the city's walls.

## ALCAZAR

While Star Force concentrates its strength aboard the *Vition*, the *Inamorata*, and *Vallis* Station, the Concord Marines erect planet-side bases and fortifications. Located just over the Rowdown Mountains from Silver Bell, Alcazar occupies twice as much space and contains half as many occupants as Spes's main city. Defensive pillboxes and fortifications encircle the base and take up most of the room. Bunkers and armored rally points also exist throughout Alcazar. Alcazar has a substantial amount of ground-based offensive assets—including plasma cannon batteries, surface-to-air missile racks, tactical nuclear weapons, and mass-reaction bombs. Several dozen skytanks and gravity-propelled dronefighters round out Alcazar's military hardware.

The Concord divides the base into three sections: The

bureaucrats—including Concord Administration—reside in the southwest sector, the Concord Marines take the northeast and southeast sectors, and Star Force claims the northwest sector of the base. Marissa Rolin, the ranking Concord Administrator in the system, has the authority to dispense legal rulings and execute justice. In addition, a dozen Administrators answer directly to her—although they spend only a fraction of their time in the base. Mostly, these administrators travel across Spes or to other star systems that lack direct contact with the Concord.

The housing, training, and entertainment facilities of the 2nd and 3rd regiments of the Concord Marines occupy the southeast sector of the base. Off-duty marines often lounge about this area, making it difficult to organize. The marines' administration, weapons, storage, and repair facilities take up the northeast sector.

A landing strip allows ships of corvette size and smaller to land within the city—although theoretically even the *Vition* could land in the grasslands outside of Alcazar proper. Star Force uses Alcazar as a secondary base of operations; it also serves as a repair yard for damaged military vessels.

For all this regimented military order, rumors mention two underground organizations within the base. The first underground community in Alcazar has ties to the pirates of the system; these independent raiders and criminal gangs have done their best to infiltrate Alcazar whenever possible. Arms smuggling seems to be their chief goal, but these groups also have a strategic interest in anticipating Concord military movements and objectives. Unfortunately, many of the military personnel in Alcazar have demonstrated a willingness to look the other way where petty crime is concerned, comforting themselves with minor gratuities as long as it doesn't interfere with their major objective—fighting klicks.

The second underground organization concerns the mining operations dug deep into the planet's soil before construction on Alcazar began. It's said that within those buried vaults lie the bodies of vanquished klicks. If the tales are true, more than 100 klick corpses lie beneath Alcazar, all of them being studied by military scientists and xenobiologists. Another version of the story holds that Star Force engineers are examining a captured klick attack ship—most say from the Battle of Rakke—beneath the surface of the base. Whatever is going on, access to the subterranean levels of Alcazar is nearly impossible to secure—especially since Concord officials deny their existence.

## FIDES AND CHARITAS

Two significant natural satellites orbit Spes. Both satellites contain insufficient atmospheres for colonization, and the Borealins have never warmed to the prospect of domed settlements because of the close proximity of a Class 1 planet. In the last year, however, the Borealins on Spes surprised everyone by announcing plans to construct a large enclosed city on Fides. The city, named Refuge, will serve as a rallying point for the Spes populace should the terraforming of Spes fail. The project should take more than a decade to complete.

Fides appears to be the result of an ancient collision with Spes; its geological composition is a precise match for that of its planet. Charitas, the smaller moon by far, is simply an exceptional asteroid.

## VALLIS ORBITAL STATION

For eight years, no one set foot upon this deserted station. Many Borealins felt that it suffered from a curse, as if the colonists

who died defending Vallis still haunted the station. Surprisingly, Vallis Station endured those years without maintenance or refitting, high praise for the Borealins who constructed it.

Today Vallis Station serves the needs of the Concord and its Star Force—even though the Borealins retain legal ownership. The Concord brought Vallis back into operation soon after the *Monitor* arrived, and it now is a crucial link in the communications and defense network of the Verge. Vallis sells its communication services to anyone. The station can send messages to Aegis, whose commssats route the signals to Tendril. The Tendril drivesat relays route these messages to the Stellar Ring or contract ships to carry them to a nearby star system.

The Concord Communications Commission (CCC) has offices aboard Vallis. Here, CCC does more than simply administrate; it controls the communication system directly. If anything seriously threatens the Hammer's Star system (such as the klicks), Vallis would function as the crucial link to the full might of the Concord military. As such, the station is one of the best defended points in the system. The *Vition*, in orbit around Spes, is never more than an hour or two from Vallis Station. Locally, Vallis counts on its escort of one cruiser and five corvettes to protect it from attack. This escort has proven more than enough to ward off ambushes from Hammer's Star's more ambitious renegades.

Newcomers to the system are immediately directed to Vallis Station. Once they've docked, they receive a briefing from Concord personnel about the risks of doing business in the system. The Concord can't promise safety—although it tries its best. Despite the somewhat grim warnings, visitors will find Vallis Station a friendly, if somewhat stark, residence.

Vallis also serves as a repair shipyard for both military and civilian craft. However, Star Force has misgivings about tying so many critical functions to a single station; no matter how determined its defenders, Vallis Station could suffer great damage, thereby compromising the operations of the Galactic Concord. Admiral Raastad didn't have to push too hard before visiting Concord Undersecretary Michael Thayne (head of the Committee on Verge Integration) allotted funding for a second space station. Construction will begin in orbit around the gas giant Platon before the end of 2501. The Concord denied Admiral Raastad's request for a drivespace communication relay for the second station, however, deeming it an unnecessary expense.

## PLATON

Platon, like Spes, resembles a blue world when viewed from space. However, this gas giant's color comes from the high volume of methane in its upper atmosphere. Like all gas giants, Platon is an inhospitable stellar body that attracts only the avaricious or foolish. Enterprising companies could easily collect and sell methane gas, but there aren't any major industrial facilities on the planet; smaller organizations and business concerns do most of the work here.

## ARIST

Arist is the third and largest of Platon's moons. Unlike its sister satellites, this cold moon possesses a breathable atmosphere—although at a pressure of only one-third of a standard atmosphere, it's not especially hospitable. Arist's frosty temperature represents another obstacle to human settlement. In fact, non-domed settlements can only exist along the moon's equator, where temperatures average -41°C.

## ARIST SENTIENT POPULATION 13,291 SENTIENTS

Human	56%	Austrin	1%
Orion	0%	Nariac	0%
Thuldan	0%	Insight	0%
Orlamu	2%	Hatire	0%
Rigunmor	0%	Borealin	7%
Solar	2%	StarMech	0%
VoidCorp	1%	Independent	83%
Concord	4%		
Alien	44%		
Sesheyen	0%	T'sa	3%
Mechalus	3%	Weren	92%
Fraal	2%		

Both weren and independent human colonies exist on Arist; they endure the extremes of cold in order to preserve their absolute freedom. For the weren, who fled the harsh servitude of VoidCorp, it's an opportunity to live together, sharing their culture as it exists on Kurg, without surrendering the advances of Gravity Age technology. For their human neighbors, Arist represents a chance at a new life. Some of these colonists are buccaneers and other miscreants who put aside their reckless lives in order to settle down. Others became lost during the time between the destruction of Silver Bell and the return of the stellar nations. This heterogeneous collection of humanity shares only one of two traits: the tenacity to make a new life on Arist, or the inability to leave the moon itself.

## REVIK BELT

At 3.2 AU from Hammer's Star, the Revik Belt is the smaller of the two asteroid rings located in the system. It is neither especially dense nor interesting; therefore, it doesn't receive much attention from the stellar nations. Of course, its planetoids do offer a prize of metals and minerals easily accessed by any space vessel or excavation team.

Psyche, the largest of the belt's asteroids, has a diameter of 815 km and serves as home to more than a dozen mining teams that relish the relative safety of the system's inner belt.

## INIAD

Iniad stands as a pale red titan, twice the size of Sol's Jupiter. During the planet's first few million years, it radiated with a dull brown light, the product of slow fusion within its core. Today, these fires have burned out and left behind a very heavy ball of gas.

Iniad is a planet that demands respect to this day. Its gravitational well is enormous, and it most likely created both the Vicek and Revik belts.

## INIAD'S MOONS

A total of 21 moons circle the gas giant. Most of them are featureless rocks of iron, covered with wholly uninteresting craters. However, the events that usually occur on these moons have captured everyone's interest.

Occasionally, unregistered vessels descend into the inner system. At least one klick outpost has been found within the

Revik Belt, and pirate vessels often sneak through defense perimeters while masquerading as simple freighters. But it's at Iniad's moons and beyond in the Vicek belt that the Concord usually fights its battles with criminals and aliens alike.

## VICEK BELT

The Concord's policy toward the dense and chaotic Vicek Belt changes daily. It's clear that Star Force would like to put an end to the menace that lurks within the swirling planetoids 10.4 AU from the system's star; it's equally clear just how difficult a task Star Force has set for itself. Millions of distinct asteroids lie within this wide belt, and thousands of these asteroids display energy signatures. Some energy signatures stem from the pirate bands that use the Vicek Belt as a base of operations, and others come from innocent independent miners. However, klick fighters often emerge from unknown places within the belt. Star Force and the Concord Marines must fight a holding action until they gain more information about the klicks and their ultimate plans.

## BRUELT

The tiny planetoid Bruelt lies at the farthest reaches of the system. While a modern induction engine starship could reach the distant planet in a day, there's little incentive to do so. Ancient surveys and newer Concord ones, taken upon the *Monitor*'s arrival, indicate that the rock doesn't possess anything of value.

## THE PIT

Contrary to many people's fears, the gravitational pull of the Pit has had little effect on the Hammer's Star system, since it's more than a hundred billion kilometers away.

Millions of years ago, the black hole passed near enough to the Hammer's Star system to capture its star in a long, elliptical orbit. Back then, the black hole would have been a brilliant thing to see, flashing with explosions of light and energy as it consumed the occasional comet and rogue asteroid from the outer parts of the system.

Today, the Pit is almost always invisible. Occasionally, it demonstrates its power when it pulls in some stellar debris, and once every few months its gravity disturbs comets in Hammer's Star's Oort cloud, sending them spiraling off into interstellar space or into the heart of the system. For the most part, though, the Pit is ignored by humanity.

## SYSTEM LOG

The Hammer's Star system is an area of space ripe with conflict and tension. Like much of the Verge, this system's dangers attracts many of the bravest (and most foolish) sentients in the known galaxy. Only a very small percentage of these heroes emerge from Hammer's Star unscathed.

## TROUBLE IN THE PIT

Recently, Concord scientists detected an aberration in the Pit's projected orbit. The black hole must have had contact with another phenomena of sufficient force to disturb its normally implacable course. As soon as the scientists completed their analysis, they informed Star Force of their findings. As a result, the Concord has doubled its watchfulness in the system. Many military strategists fear that this latest event points to some new

weapon designed by the klicks; Star Force has sent two dreadnoughts to investigate.

## I, SPY

Recent skirmishes with the klicks have ended badly for Star Force, so badly, in fact, that many officers believe that someone in Star Force is feeding information to the klicks. How else to explain the fact that klick forces have easily outmaneuvered both Star Force task groups and countered several ground-based assaults. Concord military officials are very concerned, and rumor has it that the Concord has dispatched several counterintelligence groups to the Hammer's Star system.

## HEROES IN HAMMER'S STAR

Borealin heroes native to Hammer's Star don't suffer from the Oblivious flaw. The history of combat and tension within the system has caused them to remain ever-vigilant. Whether scanning for klick warships or corsair vessels, the Borealins must concentrate on their survival.

## KLICKS

The klicks are an alien species that present an actual threat to humanity. Their unbridled aggression and ferocity represent a new experience for the humans and their allied species. Thankfully, the stellar nations have only encountered the klicks in the distant Hammer's Star system, where the determined actions of the Galactic Concord hold them back—at least for now.

**Description:** Klicks resemble arachnids; six multi-jointed legs propel their wedge-shaped bodies. Each of these legs ends in wickedly pointed pincers. A klick's wedge-shaped body measures about 2 meters long and about 1 meter thick at its widest point. It's covered with smooth, chitinous armor across its top, and plates of the same material protect its belly. Only the creature's bulbous sensory organs lie exposed. These organs cover a large globular mass that descends beneath the thinner, forward portion of its body. Two forelimbs reach out from beside these sensory organs. The pincers at the end of these limbs are more dexterous than those attached to the legs and can manipulate weapons or technology.

The Concord Marines dubbed these aliens "klicks" based on the disturbing sounds they make. The creatures produce a number of eerie and irritating clicking sounds that assault human ears. When they scuttle along a hard surface, the klicks' pointed pincers rap against the floor. When agitated or excited, they tap the smaller branch of their pincers against the longer portion, creating an ominous melody. It's these clicking sounds that the Concord Marines have come to dread.

**Encounter:** Klicks possess a high degree of intelligence, demonstrated primarily by their cooperation and teamwork. The use of technology—both starships and their "blacklaser" energy weapons—confirms an applied intelligence of some kind. Concord

scientists have been unable to decipher their language—if indeed the series of clicks and sounds really is a language. In addition, scientists know nothing about klick social structure or origin. Researchers have classified klicks as external—that is, they are not native to the Hammer's Star system or any other charted system.

Klick teams make excellent use of ambushes. They often attack in greater numbers, swarming quickly over small groups, and they fight savagely, without taking prisoners. Klicks are extremely resistant to glancing blows and stun damage. In addition, captured klicks quickly die.

### Klick Attack Ship

Compartments: 8	Durability: 40
Maneuver Rating: 0	Acc: 2 Mpp
Cruising Speed: 2 AU/hour	Berthing: 24

Armament: 2 particle beams Range 6/12/18 Mm  
 $d6+3s/d4+1m/d4+3m$  En (e)/A

Defenses: Jammer, damage control [Good]

Armor: Moderate [unknown] (4 dur)  
 $d6+1$  (LI),  $d6+1$  (HI),  $d6+2$  (En)

Computer: Marginal computer core

Engines: Induction engine

Power: 2 grav-fusion cells rated at 20 power factors

Drive: None

Roll	Comp't	Systems (Dur/Pow)	Dur
—	Engineering	1 Grav-fusion cell (5/*)	10/10/5
1-2	Command	Mass detector (1/1) Multiband radar (0/0) Spectroanalyizer (1/1) Radio transceiver (0/1) Damage control (Good) (2/2) Jammer (0/1) Airlock (0/0) Marginal computer core (0/0)	8/8/4
3-4	Engineering	2 Induction engine (6/6)	12/12/6
5-6	Auxiliary	Grav-fusion cell (5/*) Autosupport (0/2)	10/10/5
7-9	Cargo	Fuel tank (2/0)	4/4/2
10-12	Crew	Crew quarters (4/0)	8/8/4
13-16	Weapons 1	Turret: particle beam (5/5)	10/10/5
17-20	Weapons 2	Turret: particle beam (5/5)	10/10/5

To date, klick vessels have appeared in as many as four variants—including scouts, cutters, attack vessels, and frigates. According to Star Force rumor, long-range scouts in the depth of the system may have encountered "more significant vessels."

Klick system operators have average scores of 12 in Vehicle Operation—space, Technical Science—repair, and all System Operation specialty skills. Like the klick warriors, these klicks have action check scores of 12.

### Klick Weapons

Weapons	Skill	Acc	Md	Type	Damage	Actions	Clip Size	Hide	Mass
Blacklaser pistol	Modern-pistol	-1	F	En/O	$d4+2w/d6+2w/d4m$	4	10	+3	1
Blacklaser rifle	Modern-rifle	-1	B/A	En/O	$d6+2w/d8+2w/d4+2m$	3	30/10	-	4
Blacklaser SMG	Modern-SMG	0	F/B/A	En/O	$d6+1w/d6+3w/d4+1m$	4	-/6	+1	3



Humans have encountered klicks throughout the Hammer's Star system—including the Vicek Belt, on many of the outer moons, and, according to rumor, once on Spes itself. These aliens travel in fast spacefaring vessels made up of a black, unidentified material. As a whole, these vessels are of unknown design—though some claim that they can enter drivespace and carry particle beams and other weapons of mass destruction. However, most encounters with klick ships end quickly; klick vessels favor hit-and-run tactics that don't leave the Concord Star Force time to respond.

One aspect of klick encounters that scientists have yet to document fully is the weakness that washes over humans and other aliens when in close proximity to these aliens. All major species—with the exception of the telepathic fraal—grow weaker the longer they remain in close contact with a group of klicks. For this reason, marines prefer to battle klicks from a distance whenever possible.

**Habitat/Society:** Little is known about klick society; despite the many stories sweeping the Verge, only a few humans have actually encountered them. Humanity does know that these aliens are fearless, well-organized aggressors. When encountered on a planetary surface, a klick war party consists of no fewer than six individuals. The largest klick war party thus far recorded consisted of 120 creatures that ambushed Concord Marines. After this battle, the klicks destroyed their own dead, making it hard for Concord scientists to study this unknown species.

Though many people speculate that the insectlike klicks must have some sort of hive mind or group mentality, scientists argue that such an observation is probably mistaken. Insects are a human analogue, they say, and their characteristics do not necessarily translate to alien species.

### Klick Warrior

STR 11	(d4+8)	INT 9	(d4+6)
DEX 11	(d4+8)	WIL 8	(d4+5)
CON 10	(d4+7)	PER 6	(d4+3)
Durability: 20/10/5/5		Action check: 13+/12/6/3	
Move: sprint 26, run 16, walk 6		#Actions: 2	
Reaction score: Ordinary/2		Last resorts: 0	

#### Attacks

Pincers (x2)	14/7/3 d6w/d6+2w/d8+2w	LI/0
Blacklaser SMG	12/6/3 d6+1w/d6+3w/d4+1m	En/0

**Bioweakness field:** Opponents within 10 meters must make Stamina-endurance checks at the beginning of every round. Failure indicates that the opponent suffers d4-1 points of stun damage. For every additional klick in the area, affected heroes must make their skill checks with a +1 penalty, up to a maximum of +6.

#### Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Armor: d6+1 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d6+2 (En)

#### Skills

Athletics [11]-climb [16], jump [12]; Unarmed [11]-brawl [14]; Modern [11]-SMG [12]; Movement [10], Stamina [10]-endurance [14]; Stealth [12]-hide [14], sneak [13]; Awareness [8]-perception [11].

# IGNATIUS

Located about halfway between Tendril and Corrivale, Ignatius is home to the second Class 1 world in the Verge—the massive, hothouse ocean-planet known as Antigua. Although the Taurean Star Republic originally claimed this system, they never established permanent human settlements before the onset of the Second Galactic War. In fact, the Taureans quickly abandoned their tenuous holdings here as the war turned against them back in Old Space. Today, Ignatius stands as an unresolved claim waiting to be settled by the Galactic Court.

## HISTORY

Ignatius was first charted by a joint Thuldan-Taurean expedition during March and April 2321. At the time, the two stellar nations often collaborated in diplomatic and scientific endeavors; the Taureans were natural allies for the Empire, and the corrupt Senators who ruled the Republic eagerly took Thuldan money and arms in exchange for their friendship. Already involved in other settlement efforts in the Verge, the Thuldans ceded the rights to develop Antigua to the Taurean Star Republic in exchange for a full alliance and the right to place military bases in the Ignatius system.

The Taureans eagerly set about the process of establishing their own foothold in the Verge. In 2325, the first colonists landed on the Iskandera Archipelago near Antigua's equator. They were met with great violence by primitive natives of Antigua who called themselves ke'kekt. Xenophobic and warlike, these powerful and supposedly slow-witted creatures delighted in wrecking colonial installations as quickly as the Taureans could build them. Over the course of 20 years, the Taurean construction efforts slowed to a crawl, as the Republic sent thousands of soldiers to deal with native insurrections. Despite the constant fighting, the Taureans secured the colony of Iskandera by the mid-2330s.

When the war broke out in 2346, the Taureans entered the fight as allies of the Thuldan Empire, launching an attack against the Sultanate of Fomalhaut. It didn't work out well. Instead of the easy victories promised them by the Thuldan emissaries, the Republic found itself fighting a tenacious and skillful adversary. In desperation, all Taurean military forces were recalled in 2348. At this time, large portions of Iskandera were overrun and looted by ke'kekt war bands, and the surviving colonists holed up in impregnable island-fortresses, waiting for help.

Unfortunately, they didn't receive any. In early 2349, forces of the Thuldan Empire invaded and occupied the collapsing Taurean Star Republic. By 2353, the Thuldans completely absorbed the Republic. The stranded Taurean settlers struggled to survive, eventually seeking arms and economic aid from neighboring colonies in the Tendril and Corrivale systems. During the Long Silence, several Alaundrin merchant families invested in Iskandera, reclaiming large portions of the old Taurean colony from the marauding ke'kekt.

Today, Antigua is technically an independent colony under the protection of the Concord. In terms of economic and political affiliation, the small settlement of Iskandera is now an Alaundrin colony, as well as a trading post and way station for the few ships that come out this way. It's a quiet and isolated place, even by Verge standards.

## ANTIGUA

Ignatius is home to a family of five planets and the usual debris of comets and asteroids, but Antigua (G3/R1/A2/P3/H2) is the only world of interest to humans. Massive and hot by terrestrial standards, its gravity is twice Earth's, and its atmosphere is oppressively thick. Antigua's high gravity created much flatter landforms than those on Earth, and its oceans cover a correspondingly greater percentage of the planet—about 80%, in this case.

With a metal-poor crust, hostile natives, and marginal conditions for human settlement, Antigua remains largely undeveloped. The old Taurean "shoot-first" policies won humankind few friends among the native ke'kekt, and to this day the primitive species remains a constant threat to settlers and traders alike. Currently, the Concord oversees Antigua—although several Alaundrin families with financial interests in the planet would prefer to see it remain ungoverned and unregulated.

## THE KE'KEKT

Antigua possesses a rich and complex biosphere centered on its extensive coastal regions and shallow sea floors. Numerous creatures dangerous to humanity inhabit Antigua's oceans—including giant urchins and powerful sand rays. However, the ke'kekt remain the most dangerous species of all. Resembling the echinoderms (or starfish) of Earth's seas, the ke'kekt are an enormously strong, slow-moving species driven to destroy anything outside their own community. The ke'kekt are true amphibians, at home in water and along coastlands. Land-dwelling ke'kekt are gradually adapting to the human presence on their world, but those living in the sea fiercely resist any contact with human "invaders." The Concord is now establishing a contact mission to evaluate the ke'kekt and open up friendly relations.

## ISKANDERA

The original Taurean settlers founded their colony among the Iskandera islands for two reasons: The equatorial gravity is slightly more bearable than the gravity at higher latitudes, and the islands possess some of the best terrain available on the planet. Extending for thousands of kilometers across the face of Antigua's vast seas, only a few of the archipelago's islands have been settled by humans. Most are wild, left to the ke'kekt and the tough, scrublike Antiguan jungle.

The main colony is located at Cape Maris on Arandia, the largest island in the chain. Cape Maris is home to about 1,000 Antiguan settlers, and it serves as a trading post and port-of-call for passing vessels.

Recently, a number of seaquakes and other geological events have shaken the fault lines near the island chain. Scientists are unsure of the cause of the increased geothermal activity, but many colonists feel that the ke'kekt are somehow responsible. In fact, Antiguan colonists living in the Iskandera islands have begun to put pressure on those Concord officials trying to open up friendly relations with the native ke'kekt. Simply put, many of the colonists don't trust the ke'kekt and wish to prevent them from acquiring even the simplest items of advanced technology.

# KARNATH

More than 30 light-years from the nearest major system, Karnath supports a family of thirteen planets—including the Class 1 world of Bhruusil. This cold steppe-world is home to an intelligent race of grazers known as the bhruu, a highly socialized species just beginning to master the basics of human technology. Carefully avoiding any formal incorporation with their human neighbors, the bhruu are patiently studying humankind even as human scientists and sociologists are studying them.

Once the property of VoidCorp, Karnath was secretly subverted during the Long Silence by Insight sympathizers and handed over to the new nation when Insight broke away from their corporate masters. Obviously, VoidCorp strenuously objected to this development and demanded the return of Karnath and Bhruusil to its control. While it hasn't succeeded in reestablishing its foothold on Bhruusil, VoidCorp is very busy building mining posts and military bases on neighboring planets.

## HISTORY

Although the Verge lay on the opposite side of human space from the bulk of their holdings, VoidCorp was intensely interested in establishing a strong presence in the new frontier during the explorations following GW1. A VoidCorp exploitation team surveyed Karnath in 2335 and secretly reported the discovery of a Class 1 world to their executives. VoidCorp dispatched a contact team to Bhruusil in early 2337 in order to forge a binding contract with the bhruu. (This contract was similar to the one with which they'd ensnared the sesheyans.)

The entrapment of the bhruu failed miserably. Before any chieftain agreed to sign a document binding all bhruu everywhere, the bhruu herds met to discuss the offworlder proposal. In typical bhruu fashion, they returned to VoidCorp's representatives with a simple request: "Explain your legal system to us. Don't leave anything out." VoidCorp's contact and exploitation specialists resigned themselves to a much more involved negotiation process, while the corporate executives back in the Stellar Ring prepared a pacification contingency to dominate the bhruu through military means.

The military expedition to Karnath was never launched. Delayed on three occasions by developments back in the Stellar Ring, the Tau Ceti incident pushed any military efforts in the Verge to the back burner. The Chief Executive of VoidCorp's new Karnath Development Division was ordered to continue negotiations and await further instructions. With none forthcoming, most of the VoidCorp personnel took ship and returned to Old Space in the 2350s.

In 2449, a VoidCorp base construction team and colonization division of 3,000 settlers arrived at Karnath without warning. In the midst of the Long Silence, the hardened VoidCorp survivors still on the planet were surprised by the arrival of this new group. Over the next three years, they built the future planetary capital of Kansas Station in Bhruusil's temperate equatorial regions. But the new executives of the Karnath Development Division harbored an astonishing secret: They worked for Insight, not VoidCorp. A year after Insight broke away from VoidCorp, the Karnath Development Division mysteriously followed them, leading some historians to speculate that Insight must have had some means of covert communication with the otherwise isolated Verge. No proof of this unknown communication channel has ever surfaced, and Insight refuses to comment on the question.

# BHRUUSIL

Slightly larger and colder than Earth, Bhruusil (G2/R1/A2/P3/H1-2) possesses a much more pronounced axial tilt and a smaller hydrographic percentage. It's a cooler, drier planet circled by vast, arid plains through much of its temperate latitudes. Winters on these vast steppes are harsh in the extreme, with temperatures dropping as low as -70° or -80° C during the coldest months. Most Insight settlers built their towns and homesteads well within the planet's so-called tropics, a region of temperate forests and grasslands much more comfortable for human habitation.

Bhruusil is home to a rich and complex biosphere and a native sentient race—the bhruu. When first contacted by humans, the bhruu had a nontechnological society, but after decades of working with Insight colonists, the bhruu have shifted to semi-permanent agricultural settlements and light industry. They lack the hands and expertise of human engineers, but they're learning fast. In fact, a small number of bhruu have left Karnath altogether to learn more about the Verge and the vast expanse of human space.

Insight's Planetary Administrator is a driven man by the name of Heoren DeValk (Hm/Insight/DTO-6). Determined to establish Bhruusil and the bhruu as clients of Insight, he's pressing the chieftains of the bhruu to accept more and more human guidance. So far, the bhruu have resisted his overtures with polite refusals.

## CHEERGHUN

The next planet out from Bhruusil, Cheerghun (G2/R2/A3/P2/H1) is the "roaming star" of the bhruu, lighting up the night sky of its sister planet. Cheerghun is a world of brilliant yellow and white deserts shrouded in a thin chlorine haze. Rich in minerals, Cheerghun supports a fragile biosphere of Series III (chlorine-breathing) life. Humans require breathing masks and heated suits to survive in Cheerghun's splendid desolation.

While VoidCorp failed to reclaim the Insight installations on Bhruusil, they still retained the development rights to the rest of the Karnath system. It was a slim wedge, but it was enough. Barred from direct action against Bhruusil (or any Insight territory, for that matter), VoidCorp chose to develop everything else in the Karnath system that seemed worthwhile, and Cheerghun fit their bill perfectly. A mining property of considerable value, it also has the potential to become a Class 1 planet through terraforming—although this would destroy its chlorine-breathing lifeforms.

Despite this, VoidCorp is proceeding with the initial terraforming efforts. They're developing a tailored microbe to fix atmospheric chlorine into salt; this will scrub the chlorine from the atmosphere. Next, they intend to process vast amounts of the planet's crust to release oxygen from the rocks. Finally, they will tow small, icy moons from the outer system into collisions with Cheerghun, restoring water to the desiccated planet. It's an ambitious plan, and both Insight and the bhruu ambassadors are seeking ways to stop it. So far, the Concord has expressed no official opinion on the case, but those in the know are sure that its sympathies lie with the existing lifeforms.

# TERIVINE

Known as a navigational way point since the first Verge explorations, Terivine is a common rest stop for ships traveling between Lucullus, Aegis, and Corrivale. It's a trinary system consisting of two G-class stars orbiting each other at a distance of only 0.8 AU, and a third K-class orange dwarf about 100 AU from the first two stars. Since Terivine A and B, the system's two yellow stars, prevented any kind of planetary formation at the center of Terivine, the area didn't receive much attention from explorers. Thousands of ships passed this way over the years, drifting through the silent system while their stardrives recharged for the next leg of their journey.

## HISTORY

Ten years ago, an Alaundrin freighter named the *Desert Wind* made an astrogational error of epic proportions: It missed the inner part of the Terivine system altogether. Arriving in the vicinity of Terivine C, the orange dwarf, the crewmen of the *Desert Wind* were astonished to discover a Class 1 world orbiting the third at a distance of only 0.3 AU (about 45 million kilometers). A small planet marked by dramatic cliffs and towering mountains, this world instantly attracted the attention of the Verge powers of Tendril, Aegis, Corrivale, and Oberon. The captain of the *Desert Wind* named it Rivendale.

## TERIVINE TODAY

Of all the Verge powers, only Alaundril in the Tendril system and the Regency of Bluefall in the Aegis system were able to establish colonies before the arrival of the *Monitor*. In 2492, Tendril and Aegis agreed to a 70-30 split of Rivendale (the only planet worth developing) in favor of Aegis. A small number of settlers arrived on Rivendale—mostly survey teams and scientists—to build the groundwork for Rivendale's first colonies.

The colonization of Rivendale ran into a complication in 2494, however. A fraal scientist studying the native lifeforms of the planet discovered that a sentient species—the graceful riglia—already inhabited Rivendale. These avians eschewed any form of technology or artifice, relying entirely on the formidable powers of their minds. The riglia resented the human incursion on their world. In response to their wishes, Alaundril and the Regency have throttled back the colonization program to a trickle while Regency scientists study the planet at greater length.

## RIVENDALE

Only about half the size of Earth, Rivendale (G1/R1/A2/P2/H2) exhibits classic low-gravity geographical features. Its mountains are enormous, separated by seemingly bottomless rifts and canyons, and these canyons possess walls kilometers high. The planet itself has an unusually slow rotation (the effects of tidal braking from its parent sun), equaling about 7 standard days in length. This leads to extreme hot and cold weather alternating every week. Despite these drawbacks, Rivendale is a planet of spectacular beauty, a wild and unspoiled place that humans may doom by their presence.

The largest human settlement on Rivendale is the cliff-town of Sunbreak. Sitting in the cleft between two mountain peaks, this lofty aerie is almost 9,000 meters above sea level. Sunbreak is the Regency's colonial capital, but fewer than 2,000 people inhabit the base. A handful of homesteaders have es-

tablished isolated farms on the nearby mountains, relying on condenser arrays for fresh water and careful terracing for level plots of ground. It's said that the riglia are quite incensed by these homesteaders' activities.



# MANTEBRON

Mantebron is a dying system and one of the loneliest outposts in human space. Three billion years ago, it was a G2 star quite like Sol. Currently, however, Mantebron is nearing the end of its main sequence. Within 20,000 to 50,000 years, Mantebron will exhaust its hydrogen fuel and enter its red-giant phase—incinerating the inner planets of its system. A million or so years from now, Mantebron will nova.

Eight planets orbit Mantebron—including the Earthlike desert world of High Mojave. Just as Mantebron has aged, so has High Mojave; over the course of geological time, its seas have vanished, its atmosphere has thinned, its rotation has slowed, and its tectonic activity has faded to a mere fraction of its former level. High Mojave is now more like Mars than Earth; it's a cold and desiccated planet with an unbreatheable atmosphere. However, it's still close enough to an Earthlike environment to attract a few especially tough settlers.

## HISTORY

Mantebron was charted by an Orion survey mission in October 2328 and quickly claimed by the League. While it was clear from the beginning that long-term colonization presented a problem, many people decided that the impending destruction of the system was not a significant deterrent to colonization. After all, since recorded human history only encompasses 6,000 years, who could care about something 20,000 or 30,000 years in the future? High Mojave's Class 2 environment and physical remoteness served as more effective barriers to colonization than its fading sun.

The Orions who colonized High Mojave were the toughest and most independent type of settlers. They dispersed themselves across the planet's arid surface, carving out a few hundred homesteads and farms in the dead plains and seabeds of the dust-wreathed world. The Colonial Charter, signed in 2339, reflected above all else the Orion respect for self-determination, minimalist government, and individual rights. By the outbreak of the Second Galactic War, High Mojave's capital and largest town was Olympus, a small trading post and landing field of only 500 residents.

The years of the Long Silence were hard on the Mojavians. Not only were they forgotten by the Orion League, but they were virtually forgotten by their Verge neighbors, too. This isolation was not entirely a bad thing during the height of GW2 and the Long Silence. Unlike more populous or centrally located colonies, Mantebron was largely overlooked by the corsairs who flourished during the absence of the stellar nations. The settlers' main challenge came from a lack of materials and machinery they needed to survive and prosper in their new home.

When the *Monitor* arrived in 2497, Mantebron renewed its affiliation with the Orion League. No other stellar nations or Verge systems had serious interests here—until the revelation that the settlers of High Mojave had discovered the ruins of an ancient alien civilization during the Long Silence. Today several nations—including the Hatire Community and the Solar Union—agitate for Mantebron's independence in the hope that they can claim primacy over the Precursor ruins on the planet.

## THE PRECURSORS

The galaxy is ancient beyond human reckoning. Billions of stars coalesced, ignited, warmed planets, and then died long before the rise of humankind. A handful of these dead stars and forgotten worlds are home to the wreckage of civilizations vanished for millions of years—the ruins of the assorted alien species collectively known as Precursors.

By most estimates, the earliest Precursor races couldn't have evolved in the Milky Way galaxy until about one and a half billion years ago; the first generation of stars created in the formation of the galaxy had almost none of the heavier elements necessary for life in their planetary systems. The earliest second-generation stars needed a couple of billion years for Earthlike planets to form from the primordial soup and develop intelligent life. On the other end of the scale, the most recent Precursor races vanished or died out within 100,000 years. At most, the remains of perhaps five or six Precursor races have been discovered in all of human space; the Precursors of Mantebron are locally known as the Glassmakers.

The Glassmakers lived hundreds of millions of years ago, in the days when High Mojave still had seas and a full atmosphere. Their ruins show a high level of silicon-based technology, but little metallurgy. Hundreds of xenoarcheologists are now studying the Glassmaker ruins across Mantebron, but results have been disappointing so far—the Glassmaker ruins are just too old.

## THE DYING PLANET

Roughly 10,000 homesteaders inhabit the windswept wastes of High Mojave (G2/R2/A3/P1/H1). The typical homestead consists of a small family living in a habitat dome surrounded by hundreds of acres of moisture condensers and tough crops engineered to succeed in nitrate-depleted soils. Many are hundreds of kilometers from their nearest neighbors, self-sufficient for all but the most unusual supplies and commodities. People out here have a tough pioneer outlook and enjoy the isolation.

High Mojave's revolution equals ten standard days in length, leading to long, cool days and bitterly cold nights. The thin atmosphere doesn't hold heat well, and temperatures can drop as low as  $-100^{\circ}$  C by the end of the night. Its two moons, Salton and Baja, loom large in its skies, eventually falling inward with the eons-old decay of their orbits. However, colonial astronomers predict that neither will fall for at least 30,000 years or more.

The leader of the High Mojave colony is Colonial Governor Giles Sandoval (Hm/Orion/NP). Sandoval is a new transplant from Old Space who wants to make up for lost time. He's intent on bringing the light of 26th century Orion civilization to this cold and lonely backwater, an attitude that doesn't endear him to the new Orion citizens under his rule. They'd just as soon be left alone, but they can't be bothered to throw the governor out, either. Mostly, Sandoval is simply stymied or ignored.

# PTOLEMY

An outlaw system that's preyed for decades on the shipping and outposts of the Verge, Ptolemy is the feudal fief of one ruthless man—Vardye Hellis. Heir to a dynasty of pirate lords, Lord Hellis (Xm/Ptolemy/DCS-15) is the unchallenged king of the system. He commands a pirate flotilla that terrorizes the coreward edge of the Verge to this day. Ruling from the storm-wrecked world of Hurricane, Lord Hellis carefully seeks an Old-Space patron who will allow him to remain the uncontested master of Ptolemy.

## HISTORY

In 2329 an entrepreneurial firm by the name of Verge Explorations Inc. surveyed the Ptolemy system and sold the rights to the Nariac Domain. Although the Nariacs were much more interested in colonization efforts on their side of the Stellar Ring, the Central Committee decided to establish a foothold in the newly opened Verge. The Workers' Colony of Ptolemy was established in the acrid wastes of Hurricane on January 7, 2336. The Nariacs quickly installed a small amount of terraforming machinery to speed the transition of Hurricane's atmosphere into a breathable one.

Nariac support for the colony gradually tapered off as the Domain became embroiled in GW2. The news of VoidCorp's virtual takeover of the Domain reached the Workers' Colony early in 2351, just before the Long Silence. The Nariacs of Ptolemy were outraged by the development in home politics, and they severed all ties to the Domain rather than become slaves of VoidCorp. The leading military officer of the colony, Colonel Barak Durenko, recognized his opportunity. Backed by his small but loyal security force, he seized power in 2355.

Like many tyrants, Durenko soon learned that his citizens expected him to solve problems that were beyond his ability. By the early 2360s, the Hurricane colony teetered on the brink of collapse. Desperate for replacement parts and supplies, Durenko authorized a raid against nearby Lucullus. Rationalizing that the Solar Union was the enemy of the Domain anyway, he refitted what was left of the Nariac Verge squadron and attacked. The raid proved highly successful, and Durenko began a campaign of out-and-out piracy against every system in the vicinity.

Colonel Durenko died in 2374 at the hands of an ambitious and charismatic underling, Cero Hellis. The leader of a pirate squadron, Hellis had built up a loyal following of increasingly ruthless and desperate men. Declaring himself Lord of Ptolemy, Hellis continued his raids. Winning a reputation as a corsair

lord, he began to attract new followers, mostly captains and crewmen eager for plunder. When Hellis died in 2409, he passed the rule of Ptolemy to his son, Uric Hellis, who in turn passed his reign to Vardye Hellis in 2445.

Vardye Hellis has faced only one serious challenge to his rule during his time as Lord. In 2466, Lord Hellis raided the newly established Regency of Aegis. The Regency Navy fought off his corsair squadron, followed him back to Ptolemy and destroyed his shipyards and fortifications. In the aftermath of the disastrous raid, Vardye Hellis was forced to put down a widespread mutiny among his followers, but he survived the turmoil through the judicious application of force.

## PTOLEMY TODAY

Today, the Nariac roots of Ptolemy are all but forgotten; the entire system exists to support the ragtag pirate flotilla at Lord Hellis's command. However, the defeat he suffered in 2466 greatly weakened his military power, and despite 30 years of rebuilding, he lacks the ships and industrial base to mount a serious attack on the major systems around him. Realizing that Ptolemy can't compete on its own meager resources, Lord Hellis is waiting to see which of the returning nations will make him the best offer. According to popular rumor, Hellis is dealing with VoidCorp, the Rigummers, and the Thuldans in search of money, troops, and ships to renew his naval power.

## HURRICANE

Ptolemy is a young, dim, and unremarkable K8 star. Its seven planets include few resources deserving of commercial exploitation. Its only world of note is Hurricane, a terrestrial planet only one billion years old. Hurricane (G2/R2/A3/P4/H3) seethes with volcanic activity, acidic seas full of organic chemicals, and a violent, toxic atmosphere. One day Hurricane may develop into a Class 1 world, but that day won't come for at least 100 million years.

Hurricane has about 50,000 people, scattered across four major settlements. All of these settlements are domed towns surrounded by fields open to the atmosphere, as the planet's current atmosphere is not a barrier to plant respiration. Humans do require breathing masks and a self-contained air supply on the surface, however. The atmosphere itself is intolerably thick, hot, and humid. A century of terraforming is just now transforming Hurricane's atmosphere, and lightning-shattered downpours cover about 45% of the globe around the clock.

Given the uneven heating of volcanic activity, the lack of seas to store heat and stabilize climate patterns, and the rapid rotation of this young and hot world, ferocious winds often scour Hurricane. In fact, its calmest days still give rise to screaming gales, and real storms can create winds of up to 300 kph. Human towns, structures, and farmlands are built low to the ground and in the lee of hills or ridges, but even these measures don't guarantee safety. Landing conditions for visiting spacecraft are dangerous at best, and often impossible—a factor that dissuaded the Regency from invading Hurricane back in 2466.

Hurricane's largest town is the pirate citadel of Groundfall, a rough and tumble port full of the worst the Verge has to offer. The Lord's Tower is the center of what passes for government in this system; Hellis's legbreakers guard the place against all intruders.



The personal flag of Lord Hellis

# COULOMB

A red dwarf hovering near the limits of human exploration, Coulomb sits at the lower edge of a starless rift that reaches down from the edges of galactic space. Nearly one-quarter of the celestial sphere appears virtually empty from this lonely outpost. Coulomb is home to only one planet, Ohmel, and a small community of colonists from the Leodal States, a now-defunct stellar nation. Most of the worlds once held by this nation have been incorporated into the Concord. Thus, Coulomb has become a Concord colony.

Like its neighboring system of Mantebron, Coulomb is an old sun, and Ohmel is a planet past its prime. Explorers have discovered a handful of Precursor ruins buried in Ohmel's frozen glaciers. Coulomb's ruins have aged poorly, however. Explorers have unearthed few archeological finds of note here. What's left of the Ohmel ruins strongly resembles the ruins of High Mojave, and it seems clear that the Glassmakers of Mantebron lived here, too.

## HISTORY

During the years following the opening of the Verge, the Leodal States were too poor to engage in serious exploration or colonization. Some of the leading citizens of the nation felt otherwise, though. In 2332, Lord Karim Ngongwe—a noble of the Leodal monarchy—personally financed and led an expedition to stake out a Leodal claim in the Verge. Lord Ngongwe's mission arrived at Coulomb in February 2334 after surveying dozens of other stars in the vicinity.

Lord Ngongwe claimed Coulomb and returned to his home-world in order to raise funds for a colonization ship. In keeping with Leodal law, Ngongwe gained ownership over any planet whose colonization he financed. The troubled economy of the postwar States aided his efforts; millions of Leodans were out of work and looking for a chance to start fresh. Lord Ngongwe purchased a ship, the *Hope*, and oversaw the manning of the expedition and the purchase of the colony's equipment. He led the *Hope* back to Ohmel and established the Crown Colony of Coulomb in September 2337.

Ohmel was not ideal, but it had remnants of an ancient biosphere and plenty of room for a colony to grow. The Leodans quietly built a small but prosperous city in the twilight of their lonely world during the early 2340s, while war loomed on the horizon.

Neither the Leodal States nor its colony fared well in the Second Galactic War. Cut off from any hope of resupply, the Crown Colony settlers fended off numerous corsair attacks and the occasional raid from their larger neighbors. The Ngongwe family, already political masters of the small settlement, continued to finance Coulomb's development. They grew into a powerful Verge mercantile enterprise, eventually fielding a small flotilla of tradesmen in Algernon, Aegis, and Lucullus. By the end of the Long Silence, the Ngongwes literally owned Coulomb lock, stock, and barrel.

## COULOMB TODAY

The return of the *Monitor* heralded the end of Coulomb's long isolation. As a Crown Colony of the long-dead Leodal States, Coulomb belonged to the nation that had inherited most of the old States—Concord Prime. The largest of the three sectors donated to create the Concord, Prime includes most of the old Leo-

dal States within its territory. It's legally recognized as the successor state to the older nation, and now controls a handful of colonies such as Coulomb across known space.

The Ngongwes recognized that the arrival of the Concord could break their hold on Coulomb, and they immediately petitioned to secede, hoping to retain their independence. The Concord is intent on keeping its claim at Coulomb and cleaning up the corrupt Ngongwe government. However, Austrin-Ontis has taken up the banner of Coulombian independence. This is a very unusual development, since Austrin-Ontis was principally responsible for the defeat of the Leodal States in GW2. Some Verge locals suspect that Austrin-Ontis is looking to pick up spoils of war from its victory in the conflict, while others say that the stellar corporation is trying to get even with the Concord for its interference in the Algernon system. In any event, the Austrins are watching carefully to make sure that the Concord plays by the rules in its dealings with Coulomb.

The Concord must deal with Lady Kfira Ngongwe (Hi/Coulomb/DFA-3) as an independent head of state, and Lady Kfira is doing everything she can to make the Concord leave her alone. Beneath the Ngongwe aristocracy, thousands of common Coulombians agitate vociferously for the end of the Ngongwe dynasty and reunification with the closest thing to their old patron stellar nation. The Coulombians are tired of pouring their money into Ngongwe's coffers, and they're convinced that they'd be better off without their current government. Meanwhile, Austrin-Ontis mercenaries are appearing on Ohmel, helping Lady Ngongwe to keep her increasingly restive population under control.

## OHMEL

The planet Ohmel (G1/R2/A2/P1/H1) is a world caught in its final ice age. The planet follows a highly elliptical orbit, coming as close as 0.4 AU to Coulomb at perihelion but drifting out to a frigid 2.9 AU at aphelion. During its long sojourn away from Coulomb, Ohmel enters a deep freeze that lasts for three Earth years. As it approaches Coulomb again at perihelion, a short summer thaws the planet. During these months, Ohmel's surviving species rouse themselves for a burst of growth, life, reproduction, and death. As the summer fails again, Ohmel's simple plants and animals enter a hibernation far longer and deeper than anything known to Earth's creatures. During the summer, humans can walk on the surface of Ohmel with nothing more than a warm coat and a breathing mask, but the depths of winter actually condense part of the atmosphere onto the planet's surface. For most of the year, Coulombians live in domed habitats, supporting themselves with networks of surface greenhouses and subterranean hydroponic farms.

The capital of Ohmel is the trade port of Charlotte. It is the largest settlement in Coulomb, with a population of 15,000 people. Most offworlders soon discover that Charlotte is nothing more than one big company store, a city in which every business is owned by a member of the Ngongwe family.

A handful of other towns are scattered across Ohmel, ranging in population from a few dozen to a thousand or more. The total population of Ohmel is about 40,000.

# RINSTOKE

Rinstoke is a small orange dwarf surrounded by six uninhabitable planets. It's served as a navigational way point and neutral meeting ground in the Verge for years. While none of the system's planets are tolerable to humans, the gas giant Caina supports a huge moon system—including the ice moon of Hudson. This frozen world is home to an independent observatory, trading post, and emergency repair station called Baffin Island. Rinstoke's location between Aegis, Oberon, and Algemron ensures a slow but steady stream of traffic from these metropolitan Verge systems.

## HISTORY

Unlike many of the other systems in the Verge, Rinstoke is currently unclaimed by any stellar nation. The old Orion colonial government of Bluefall built the Baffin Island station back in 2415, and the Regency assumed sponsorship of the post when they took over the Aegis system. Faced with growing population pressure at home, the Regency is aggressively investigating the potential for terraforming Hudson and settling the Rinstoke system as a fourth world (the colony of a colony of a colony of Earth) colony. Regency scientists have set up several permanent research posts in and around Baffin Island to study the moon's biosphere and conduct field tests of a number of different terraforming techniques.

Beyond Hudson, Rinstoke is poor in strategic minerals and metals. Its only worthwhile resources are the CHON elements—carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen. These are valuable as sources of water, synthesized foods, and manufactured plastics, but they're also found in almost every star system. What Rinstoke offers is a system in which these resources can be exploited without undue space hazards or conflicting claims of ownership.

## THE MOONS OF CAINA

Rinstoke and its six planets are unremarkable in most respects. Its worlds include a pair of Class 3 desert planets, a Class 4 airless world at the edge of the system, and two small gas giants. The gas giant Caina—the third of Rinstoke's planets—is an exception. Its vast moon system is one of the largest satellite complements charted to date. Eleven major moons (satellites more than 1,000 kilometers in diameter) and an estimated twenty-nine minor moons orbit Caina.

The moons of Caina are divided into three general regions: the inner moons, the middle moons, and the outer moons. The inner moons are five of Caina's largest satellites; three of these are sulfur-worlds marked by endless volcanic activity, and two are airless rocks. The middle moons include five major and six minor satellites. Hudson is the first in this group; it's the largest of Caina's moons. Its companions are generally composed of light rock and water ice. The outer moons consist of one major and 23 minor satellites. Caina is also surrounded by the remnants of three ring systems. None of these rings is particularly intact or spectacular.

Pirates frequently use the moons of Caina as hiding places and lairs. Rumors of hidden colonies, pirate shipyards, bootleg laboratories, and other unmarked installations abound; these secret bases conceal themselves in the debris and electromagnetic noise of the Caina moon system. Like many Jovian worlds, Caina possesses a rapid rotation and a core of con-

ducting metallic hydrogen—the ingredients of a very powerful magnetic field. Navigation, sensor performance, and communication within the inner moon system are frequently degraded by EM interference. The Baffin Island station on Hudson relies on a series of powerful navigation beacons in high Caina orbit to guide visiting ships to its landing field; other hidden stations simply disguise their beacons as naturally occurring radio noise.

## HUDSON

A frigid ice-world, Hudson (G2/R3/A2/P2/H1) orbits its majestic parent once every 37 days—although its actual year is almost four Earth-standard years in length. Because Hudson is fairly close to Caina and orbits in the plane of the gas giant's equator, the moon endures days-long eclipses on a routine basis. When Hudson is directly between Rinstoke and Caina, the interaction of stellar winds with the gas giant's magnetic field causes the moon's auroras to flicker brightly—even in full daylight.

Although its core should have frozen solid eons ago, Hudson remains volcanically active. Caina's overwhelming tidal forces and the influence of its companion moons drives crustal flexing somewhat akin to that of Io in the Sol system. Unlike Io, Hudson is poor in sulfur and emits steam, carbon dioxide, and molten rock. Hudson's volcanoes are therefore directly responsible for the creation of a working biosphere on this otherwise barren moon.

Hudson's creatures have adapted to cold so intense that even the hardiest Terran transplants rarely survive a single night. At its warmest, Hudson sometimes gets within 10 or 15 degrees of the freezing mark. At its coldest, significant portions of the atmosphere condense onto the moon's surface. Most of Hudson's creatures respond by endless migrations toward areas of volcanic activity or seas heated by geothermal vents. A few species engage in extended hibernation, waking only when their territory warms.

## THE SUNHAWK

Drifting through the silent darkness at the outer edge of the Rinstoke system lies the *Sunhawk*, an Algemronian cruiser destroyed almost 20 years ago in the Rinstoke system. The *Sunhawk* was a warship of the Federal State of Galvin that embarked on a campaign of commercial raiding in the systems near Algemron. At first limiting its depredations to merchants under the Alitarin flag, the captain of the *Sunhawk* decided to expand his target list and attack neutral shipping of any flag bound for Algemron. The Regency Navy interceded and mounted a hunt for the *Sunhawk* in 2484—eventually catching her at Rinstoke. The cruiser's riddled hulk remains here to this day, but dozens of her prizes were never found. Many people speculate that the *Sunhawk*'s victims lie hidden in the moons of Caina.

# ENDOMAR

Located about halfway between Corrivale and Oberon, Endomar is a binary system composed of a K2 and an M4 star orbiting each other at a range of about 2 AU. A handful of small, barren ice-worlds drift dozens of AU from the two primaries far outside the temperate reaches of the system. Nothing but vast fields of rubble and debris fill the potential habitability zone of Endomar, the wreckage of planets that never formed.

Despite its lack of habitable planets, Endomar is not empty. Its asteroid fields and dust clouds are rich in heavy metals and CHON elements. Space miners from all over the Verge come here to seek their fortunes, bringing with them robotic refineries, seedy R&R stations, shipyards, corsairs, and the odd trader looking for a place to make a living. Anywhere from 10,000 to 20,000 people live in battered stations and crowded ships scattered throughout this vast and desolate wasteland; these people thrive in open space unclaimed by any nation or power.

## THE MOËBIUS BELT

The Moëbius Belt is Endomar's largest asteroid belt. Most of the bodies in this area orbit at an inclination of almost 20 degrees to the ecliptic plane of the system. The revolution of Alpha Endomar and Beta Endomar causes the asteroid ring to twist braidlike in its orbit—hence the name. Most of Endomar's space-based industry and settlement can be found in this region of the system.

The Moëbius Belt is unusual in that it receives a great deal of insulation for an asteroid belt, placing it at the fringes of the habitability zone. Organic molecules in this region have actually

evolved into space-based life adapted to microgravity and vacuum. Most of these creatures are harmless diaphanous organisms of living gas. Other creatures—such as the sailors and jetties that leap from asteroid to asteroid across thousands of kilometers of open space—are much more tangible.

At least one denizen of the Moëbius Belt is dangerous to man. The spikespore is a voracious predator that preys on any carbon-based lifeform. It has the nasty habit of hitch-hiking on passing ships in a dormant stage, only to awaken and attack days or weeks later. Many of the miners and travelers who vanish in the Endomar system each year undoubtedly fall victim to this monster.

## CASA GRANDE

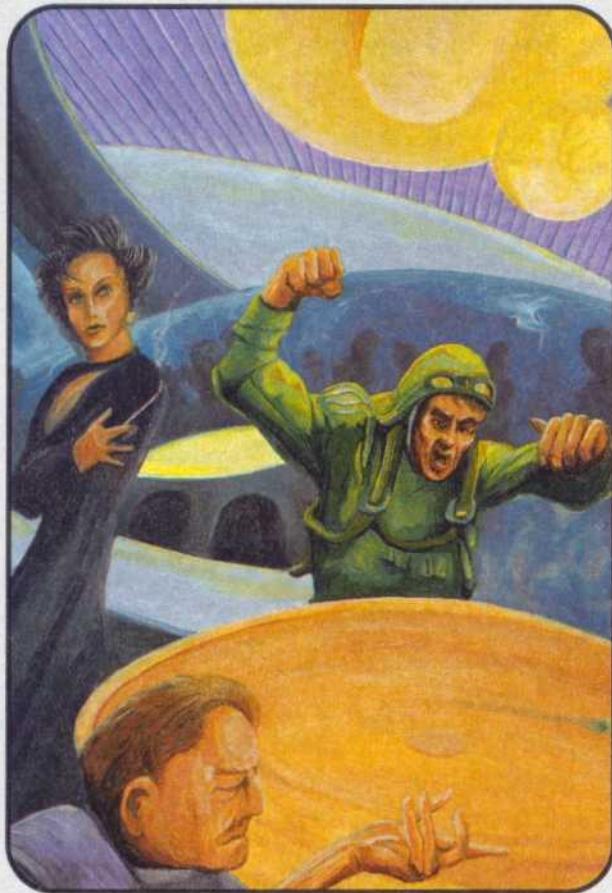
The largest of Endomar's mining towns, Casa Grande is a rough-and-tumble station carved from the heart of a mined-out asteroid. Its shipyard constantly refits and repairs miners' vessels, its weigh-in office purchases ore from the space prospectors and pays them off, and its red-light district provides all the entertainment a lonely asteroid miner might look for after a long haul in the outer system. Casa Grande is run by a businesswoman who calls herself Ms. Zofia (Hi/Endomar/DFA-4). She cheerfully separates hard-working miners from their money in any legal or illegal manner she can, hiding a thug's business tactics behind a show of sophisticated decadence. Ms. Zofia shows greenhorns no mercy, but she rarely robs or injures an experienced miner—regular customers get a bit of a break.

Recently, a small group of sesheyans pirates have made Casa Grande their home. So far, the sesheyans and Ms. Zofia have managed to live amicably, despite the fact that the aliens are now financing and organizing their own operations. Those who visit Casa Grande frequently have figured out that something big is about to happen—whether it is an all-out turf war or a peaceful business merger is anyone's guess.

## ENDOMAR MINING GUILD

This small, loose organization of miners has its main offices in Casa Grande. EMG represents the closest thing to a union that an independent miner working in the Endomar system can hope for. The EMG constantly agitates for standard wages, increased safety, and systemwide training. Unfortunately, the EMG is virtually powerless, since no company or miner is bound to follow the Guild's suggestions. However, a growing number of miners and mining support staff are becoming members of the EMG each year. In fact, the number of miners claiming membership in the guild outnumbers the total independent miner population in the system. Clearly, things are changing. However, it is unclear just how long the EMG can continue to grow without attracting the attention of large, entrenched mining interests such as VoidCorp.

The current leader of the EMG is Solaren Vri (Hi/Endomar/DTO-7). Solaren is a no-nonsense leader whose worked all of her life developing mining technology. As such, she is intimately familiar with the conditions and experiences of the mining industry. Short and physically unassuming, Solaren has a strong personality and a tenacious, bulldoglike way of dealing with opposition.



# VIERON

Every system was affected in one way or another by the titanic clashes in the Stellar Ring, but every settled world (the Vanishing of Bluefall and the recent attack at Hammer's Star aside) survived intact—except for Vieron.

Vieron has the distinction of being the only major Verge colony to suffer defeat in a belligerent action associated with the war. Formerly a colony of the conglomerate known as Sothvec Industries, Vieron fell to the Thuldans of Alitar in the Algemon system within three years of the opening of the war. Occupied by the Thuldans for almost 100 years, Vieron was abandoned when the 2404 cease fire in Algemon failed. Alitar, hard-pressed in its home system, recalled the garrison in 2405. Vieron and its installations are now home to a small settlement of fewer than 2,000 people, visited only by a handful of passing ships.

## HISTORY

Vieron was first charted in 2334 by the Sothvec Industries Survey Mission 5952. One of the smaller powers of Old Space, Sothvec was a latecomer to the Verge. At first, the Sothvec mission commander didn't even bother to claim Vieron; none of its worlds seemed at all suitable for permanent colonization efforts. However, as the mission turned up star after star without usable planets, Vieron began to look marginally attractive. In March 2435, Sothvec Industries formally claimed Vieron and established an outpost on Corazón de Fuega, Vieron's most promising planet.

Colonizing Corazón de Fuega was no easy task. The giant planet's ferocious windstorms, volcanism, and crushing gravity demanded the most advanced engineering. Despite Sothvec's late start in the Verge, the corporation poured money and resources into the taming of Corazón de Fuega, cybernetically modifying thousands of new colonists and rapidly building a basic repair and refitting station to support further explorations of the Verge.

The Second Galactic War caught Vieron in an extremely vulnerable position. Unlike the Thuldans, SothVec Industries didn't succeed in building up its Verge holding as a base of military operations. Pushing ahead with the best preparations it could make, SothVec was outnumbered and outgunned by the Thuldan expeditionary force that set out from Algemon in 2349. On June 12, the Thuldans landed more than 5,000 troops on Corazón de Fuega and conducted a simultaneous assault on all major Sothvec installations. Sothvec patrol ships interfered with the invasion as best they could, but they too were outgunned, and the Alitarin fleet drove them off.

On the ground, the Thuldans struggled against Corazón's murderous gravity and climate, sustaining more casualties from the environment than they did from enemy action. The Sothvec security forces scored a few small successes initially, stretching the campaign over several months through guerrilla action and sabotage. However, the remaining Sothvec guerrillas formally surrendered in May 2350. The Occupation had begun.

For almost 100 years, the Thuldans held onto their prize. Fewer than 5,000 Sothvec employees inhabited Corazón before the war began, so it didn't take much for the Alitarins to keep the planet under control. In the early years, sabotage and small-scale insurrections were not unusual, but as the decades passed and no Sothvec relief force showed up to contest the Thuldans, the spark of resistance guttered out. Vieron became a lonely

outpost, useful only as a command post and naval base for the Alitarin fleet.

In 2461, the Alitarins found themselves thrust back into the midst of a war by the Ajax incident, a treacherous Galvinite attack of Alitar. The great expense of maintaining facilities on Corazón, and the demand for the troops at home, eventually forced the Alitarins to abandon their conquest. Only about 1500 native Vieronites remained behind.

## CORAZÓN DE FUEGA

Vieron is a young F9 star, a hot yellow-white giant with ten planets in its retinue. Of these, Corazón de Fuega ("Heart of Fire") is the only one that humans can inhabit. Corazón (G4/R2/A3/P4/H3) is a massive, metal-rich world over six times the mass of Earth. Its average surface gravity is a crushing 4.4 g, requiring gravity generators in human colonies and significant genetic or cybernetic engineering for any long-term residents who must venture out of the colony's protection. In most outposts, the gravity generators are set to about 2.8 g. Acclimated to this level of gravity, the Vieronites are able to move about carefully outside their gravity-damping fields, while visitors from standard-g worlds are completely immobilized.

Like many young worlds, Corazón's rotation is very fast (its day is only about five hours in length). Combined with its dense atmosphere and volcanic outgassing, this leads to an extremely turbulent and dusty atmosphere. Corazón's winds often reach 200 to 250 kph. Despite these formidable conditions, Corazón de Fuega harbors the beginnings of complex Series I life; primitive plants and one-celled animals thrive in its steaming seas and tortured landscapes. The air is undergoing conversion; the current oxygen content is about 10%, not quite suitable for humans. In a few hundred thousand years (without terraforming), humans should be able to breathe Corazón's air without assistance.

## VIERON TODAY

No space-based installations survive in the Vieron system; all of the system's inhabitants live in one of three small equatorial settlements on Corazón. The Vieronites retain barely enough technology and industry to keep the gravity generators running, and a handful of battered old Thuldan launches and shuttles provides Vieron with minimal space capability. Rumor has several stellar nations seeking formal ties with Vieron, in hopes of establishing significant colonies here.

In fact, the Thuldan government is currently sponsoring an extended relief project for the beleaguered colonists on Corazón de Fuega. The Thuldans hope that their support of the Vieron system will sway the opinion of the Alitarins in Algemon. If their PR campaign works, the Alitarins will look favorably upon the Thuldan Empire and reunify with the empire. The Vieronites, for their part, are quite happy to receive the help from Thuldan Prime, but they are also interested in the promises made by the other stellar nations—especially the Rigunmor Star Consortium.

# TYCHUS

Virtually forgotten during the Long Silence, Tychus was one of the last stars colonized before the onset of the Second Galactic War. A class K2 orange dwarf, Tychus is located almost 20 light-years from any other settled system on the very fringe of human space. The system includes thirteen planets—most of them frozen worlds drifting through the depths of the outer system—and a single sparse asteroid belt. The world of Yellow Sky, the second of Tychus's planets, contains the only settled site of the system.

Tychus was first surveyed by the Orlamu Theocracy in the year 2336. Compared to the airless rocks and frigid orbs found in nearby systems, Yellow Sky offered a reasonable prospect for colonization. Its location at the very end of the Verge also seemed a good spot for a serious push toward the Perseus Arm—a long-term goal of the Orlamu Theocracy. In early 2346, a few short months before the Mutant Uprising, the Orlamus established the colonial base of Mount Illumination on Yellow Sky.

The Second Galactic War quickly seized the full and undivided attention of the Theocracy, leaving few resources or forces available for reinforcing their new colony. Around 2350, an Austrin-Ontis raiding force hit the Orlamu capital world and inflicted serious damage on government offices and records. In 2369, the planet of Hopewell—the original home of most of the Tychus colonists—was destroyed by an orbital bombardment. The Yellow Sky colony was literally forgotten; the government records of its existence were gone, and very few personal relations of the Tychus settlers remained alive in the Stellar Ring.

Completely deprived of any support from their parent nation, the Yellow Sky colonists did the best they could. They'd been left without a ship after their landing, and the great portion of the initial colony freight consisted of basic construction supplies, agricultural materials, and livestock; all of the advanced communications, defenses, and sensors were slated for a later shipment that was never sent. As the years of the Long Silence passed, more and more of the colonists' technology broke down, and they were simply unable to repair it. By the time of the Return, Tychus was effectively a PL 3 (Renaissance) settlement; it retained only a few items of industrial and post-industrial technology.

## TYCHUS TODAY

The arrival of the *Monitor* heralded the end of a long century of isolation for Tychus. The Orlamu Theocracy is busily resuming commerce, industrialization, and development on Tychus. Modern communications, medical technologies, and manufacturing techniques are transforming this quiet backwater world into a viable colony. Regrettably, two of the four major shipments of Orlamu supplies and equipment since the Return were hijacked on their way to Tychus. The installation of up-to-date tech has been delayed for months by these unfortunate incidents.

While Mount Illumination and its immediate surroundings look like a modern colony, many of the outlying regions still lack anything more sophisticated than running water and steam-powered machinery. However, the colonists of Yellow Sky are not ignorant savages; they know exactly what they've lost, and they've been very careful to educate each generation in the technology and science of the early 2300s. Lasers, mass transceivers, and gravity induction may be rare on Yellow Sky, but no one regards these devices as incomprehensible magic.

## YELLOW SKY

The only world currently settled in Tychus, Yellow Sky (G2/R2/A2-3/P3-4/H3) presents a very strange dichotomy of environments. Eons ago, a series of massive impacts raised a belt of vast highlands across the planet's major continent. Averaging 6 to 8 kilometers above sea level, these highlands are generally tolerable to humans. However, the lower altitudes rapidly become uninhabitable due to heavy concentrations of chlorine and carbon dioxide, and the atmosphere soon becomes uncomfortably thick. This divides Yellow Sky into two distinct biospheres: an oxygen-breathing, Series I biosphere on the high plateaus, and a chlorine-breathing, Series III biosphere in the hot, swampy lowlands.

The old Orlamu settlement of Mount Illumination is still the center of the colony, and therefore the Tychus system. It's a town of about 5,000 people. Hundreds of contractors and local laborers are busy changing the landscape, extensively improving the town's spaceport, industrial base, and government buildings. The remainder of Yellow Sky's 20,000 colonists live all over the highlands—some in isolated farms dozens of kilometers from their nearest neighbor. Almost 1,000 of Yellow Sky's colonists are Orlamu who accompanied their Orlamu patrons to this world. They easily adjusted to the lack of technology imposed by the Long Silence, and they flourished in the interregnum.

## THE STONEBURNERS

Deep in the chlorine-choked swamps of Yellow Sky's lowlands lies a world full of alien ruins. Black monoliths of stone and forgotten cities mired in mud rise from the green mists, hinting at a Precursor race long vanished. It seems that this forgotten species possessed an advanced technology that replaced metallurgy with complex enzyme and biochemical reactions. Since open flame can't burn in the chlorine-thick atmosphere of Yellow Sky's lower altitudes, the locals call this ancient species the Stoneburners.

The original Orlamu settlers had every intention of surveying these ruins as soon as Mount Illumination was on its feet, but a lack of breathing gear and e-suits prevented them from venturing into the lowlands during the Long Silence. Consequently, scientists and xenoarcheologists are only now beginning serious explorations of the Stoneburner sites.

The lowlands of Yellow Sky are a dangerous place. The environment is potentially deadly to a human expedition, and very little is known of the plants and animals that inhabit these regions (again, the Orlamu settlers intended to explore the lowlands generations ago but simply lacked the hardware). Of the dozen expeditions mounted to Stoneburner sites so far, three have failed to return. The others report mixed success: While four expeditions brought back both plant and animal samples, only one recorded the details of a Stoneburner site. Five expeditions had to turn back due to equipment failure; the atmosphere and the swamp waters are both more corrosive than was initially thought.

# ARGOS

Not far from the cosmopolitan Aegis system lies the Argos system, one of the more interesting places in the Verge. Argos is a binary star system that has attracted explorers, scientists, and colonists. The first billion years of the Argos system passed in fairly mundane fashion; twelve planets formed orbits about a yellow G5 star. These planets were a mixed collection of Jovian gas giants and terrestrial worlds—the most famous of which is Marybelle. Eventually, this star's course took it close to a second star, and the two systems became one.

## HISTORY

In 2322, explorers from Bluefall came to the Argos system and discovered worlds ripe with potential. Instead of claiming the system for their new united stellar nation, citizens of what used to be New Columbia settled the Argos system independently. These colonists belonged to political groups that had opposed the Orion unification for various reasons, and they hoped to make a fresh start. Since the Argos system didn't have a Class 1 world, it didn't hold much interest for the stellar nations; no one wanted to fight over it. Thus, these colonists made their claim unchallenged by any other nation or system.

During the Long Silence, the worlds of the Argos system became a haven for refugees and independents. The first leadership councils opened Marybelle for colonization without regard to stellar origin, species, or nationality. As a result, the Argos system—a common milepost for travelers moving from the center of the Verge to its further edge—became home to diverse interests.

In general, the inhabitants of this system ignored the return of stellar nations—even though their presence improved the local economy. Currently, the stellar nations have offered the use of technology to advance the terraforming of Marybelle, and representatives from the nations of the Stellar Ring have expressed a desire to bring the planet and the system into their individual folds. The local population has simply declined.

## ARGOS A AND B

Only four worlds orbit Argos A, a K5 star that has already seen the passage of more than 12 billion years. Two of these worlds are gas giants large enough to influence the orbit of their parent star. Another is a lifeless rock without interest to anyone. Proteasa, the fourth planet, lies just beyond the lifebearing orbit of Argos A and has developed sulfur-based organisms that include both animal and vegetable life. However, scientists haven't confirmed the presence of sentient life on Proteasa.

The pleasant warmth of Argos B bathes its young planets; however, none of these worlds has developed life. Given time, either Marybelle (G2/R1/A3/P3/H2) or Hartrest (G2/R1/A3/P4/H3), two planets that lie within Argos B's habitable ring, may one day produce their own biosphere. The arrival of sentients, though, has changed the planets' destinies; these colonists have their own plans for both worlds. Native life won't be given enough time to develop on its own.

## MARYBELLE

For more than 100 years, scientists have struggled to alter Marybelle's planetology. The first stage focused on releasing the hydrogen and oxygen locked within the planetary crust.

Stage one ended successfully in 2450 with the planet cloaked in a primitive atmosphere dominated by water vapor. The second stage focused on cooling the planet. This stage has also been successful—the water vapor has condensed in great rains for the last fifty years. Although once a landlocked world, Marybelle now possesses several oceans.

As stage two draws to a close, scientists have begun the third and final stage of terraforming. Dozens of stations located all over the planet transform Marybelle's atmosphere. Some chemically break down molecules in the air. Others follow the model of Earth's own evolution, releasing millions of bacteria and tiny plantlike organisms into Marybelle's virgin seas. Through photosynthesis, the young plants take in carbon dioxide and water to produce energy; the byproduct of this process, oxygen, is what interests the planetologists. Already, the planet's oceans brim with photosynthesizing life. Scientists promise that within a decade, no one will require filter masks and e-suits when walking about on the planet's surface.

Politically, Marybelle's government is a republic; citizens choose members of their governing council through annual elections. Of course, the terraforming factions wield considerable sway over planetary politics, but their very successes may soon render these scientific conglomerates obsolete. After all, why support a huge team of terraformers when the project is complete?

## VERGE CONFEDERATION

Since its formation in 2468, the Verge Confederation has used one of Marybelle's cities as its headquarters. Originally, the Verge Confederation served as a unifying political body for all of the systems of the Verge. It's said that the Regent of Bluefall once hoped that the Confederation could someday form the basis of a Verge League that functioned much like the Orion League in the Stellar Ring. In the early days of the Long Silence, anything seemed possible.

Circumstances of history have done away with the possibility of a united Verge. Instead, the Confederation lives on as a talent and employment agency for explorers, operatives, and troubleshooters of all types. When someone needs special assistance, they can hire someone in the Confederation to help. Atilis Jil Utir (Fm/Argos/DMW-8) oversees the Confeds (see *The Verge: History* for more information on the Confederation).

Rumors have recently surfaced among would-be explorers and operatives indicating that a rather large corporation (or a stellar nation) has asked the Verge Confederation to organize a small expeditionary force headed somewhere beyond the Hammer's Star system. Such an event is obviously unlikely, because the chance of a klick attack (or other such catastrophe) destroying any expedition foolish enough to travel through the Hammer's Star system is quite high. However, other rumors have "identified" this expedition as an attempt by the Concord Investigative Bureau to unearth information on the klicks—lending credence to the possibility of such an expedition's existence. So far, no concrete details have become apparent.

Hardened mercenaries, relentless lawmen, oily free traders, charismatic spies—heroes in the balkanized Verge come in all varieties. The heroes you create in a **STAR\*DRIVE** campaign are by far the most important feature of the setting. Heroes define the style, tone, and flavor of a campaign, and each new hero created for a campaign adds a little background, a little story, to the **STAR\*DRIVE** universe.

This chapter contains information for creating heroes in a **STAR\*DRIVE** cam-

paign. The universe is a big place, with room for almost any kind of heroic character imaginable. In general, any character created using the rules presented in *Chapter 2: Hero Creation* in the **ALTERNITY Player's Handbook** is fine for a **STAR\*DRIVE** game. The process described in that chapter is a good place to start. When you're more familiar with the setting and the game system, you can always experiment with more exotic character concepts and generation methods.

## CHAPTER 15 HERO CREATION

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## HERO CONCEPT

It's not a bad idea to begin the hero creation process by thinking about what kind of hero you want to play, and then discussing your idea with the Gamemaster. While the creation of heroes is purely the player's prerogative, the Gamemaster can fill in critical details about the hero's background and the reasons for her involvement in the story. For example, if you want to create a top-flight spy, it makes sense to let the Gamemaster help you decide whom she spies for and upon. In some cases, the Gamemaster might ask you to rethink your concept altogether. If the rest of the players in the group are playing heavily armored space marines who specialize in bug-hunting, a suave spy might not fit with the group's concept.

If the Gamemaster doesn't know exactly how your new hero will fit into the game, don't be afraid to volunteer information. Any background you create for the hero—old enemies or a little bit of color about the hero's homeworld and past exploits—might help the Gamemaster flesh out details on a relatively undeveloped section of his campaign.

## SPECIES

Humans dominate the STAR\*DRIVE universe. There are literally forty times as many humans as there are aliens within the bounds of human space. Despite this disparity, the stellar nations are truly cosmopolitan bodies, containing citizens of all recognized sentient species. Naturally, some aliens are far less common in some regions and far more common in others.

Regrettably, the specter of bigotry is not dead among the stellar nations. Many humans assume that their dominance of the Orion Arm is a kind of manifest destiny at work, a clear indication of human superiority and a mandate to rule over all other species. These attitudes prevail, especially in the Union of Sol, the Hatire Community, and the Thuldan Empire. Some regions of these states virtually bar aliens by law, and others present numerous dangers to aliens. More than one fraal or mechalus has met with harassment, battery, and even death simply by straying into the wrong part of space.

Fortunately, there are even more nations and individuals who have left species-based discrimination of any kind behind. Aliens are fully integrated into Orion, Orlamu, and Riganmor society. Even VoidCorp recognizes that any sentient has the opportunity to advance to the highest levels of management—though most sesheyans begin in the lower ranks of the corporation. Even with its individual exceptions, the Galactic Concord is an especially good example of an organization with no tolerance for xenophobes.

In the Verge, attitudes about different species tend toward ambivalence, as individuals of all recognized species survived and flourished during the long years of isolation. With the exception of the sesheyan colony on Grith, no species has, by law or preference, isolated itself from its human neighbors. Thugs of all species haunt the bad neighborhoods of the Verge; these areas are dangerous for any creature—human or otherwise.

## FRAAL

As humanity's oldest allies, the fraal live in every corner of the Concord. Fraal generally fall into one of two categories: the Wanderers and the Builders.

The Wanderers are fraal who dwell in starfaring city-ships and try to maintain the ancient ways of their people—although their separation from the fraal homeworld has made this diffi-

## CULTURE, LANGUAGE, AND KNOWLEDGE

As noted in the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook*, it's not necessary for a hero to purchase a specific Culture skill in order to understand the cultural mores of her native society. Just assume that an Orion can function in Orion society. In the most extreme cases, a simple Personality feat check can determine the degree to which a hero succeeds or fails in understanding an obscure or long-forgotten element of her culture.

When you choose a specific system or nation of origin for your new hero, you may also add a specialty skill (at rank 3) under Knowledge entitled *stellar nation* or *home system*. This represents the general education of any character native to that planet or nation.

Characters native to the Verge tend to have a much narrower but deeper knowledge of their home. After all, they regard but a single system as home. They'll know of most major cities or outposts anywhere in their home system, as well as unusual districts or monuments in a number of cities. Arrivers, on the other hand, generally have a broader but shallower knowledge of their nation of origin. They'll know the major worlds of their nation or alliance, and a few of the most famous cities or monuments on each.

For example, if you've just created a free trader from Aegis, add Knowledge—*Aegis* (3) to her hero sheet. Likewise, a Diplomat from Pax in the Stellar Ring would add Knowledge—*Orion League* (3) to her list of skills. Note that these skills are free, as long as your hero has the Knowledge broad skill. If the character doesn't have the Knowledge skill, she loses this benefit.

Communication is especially important in nations and communities that literally span the vastness of space. Thus, all STAR\*DRIVE heroes begin play with 3 ranks in any one of the following Knowledge—*language* specialty skills\*:

Aleerin	Fraal	Galactic Standard
Hatire	Nariac	Old Earth**
Riganmor	Sheyan	Thuldan
T'sa		Weren

\*Gamemasters can increase the language stratification by ruling that different major factions within each alien species or settlement speak separate languages. For example, weren clans may each have their own distinct dialects. Thus, heroes must choose or purchase a specific dialect as a specialty skill in order to communicate with speakers of that dialect.

\*\*Heroes selecting this specialty skill must specify a particular Old Earth language—French, for example.

Heroes receive these 3 ranks for free, as long as they have the Knowledge broad skill. Otherwise, their characters do not get this benefit. Remember, heroes can learn additional languages by purchasing Knowledge-based specialty skills.

Galactic Standard is the lingua franca of Concord space, trade, and diplomacy. Therefore, players are strongly encouraged to choose Galactic Standard as their primary language or purchase it as a Knowledge specialty skill.

In addition to providing a basic history, outlook, and background for your character, choosing a stellar nation or Verge system also provides specific game benefits (see *Chapter 3: Stellar Nations* and *Chapter 4: The Verge* for more details).

cult. In many cases, the Wanderers have created their own tradition to replace the customs of their long-lost ancestors. Conservative and (in some cases) somewhat xenophobic, they show the human nations and states only the barest recognition. Each Wanderer city-ship is its own master, loosely affiliated with a patron stellar nation. No Wanderers live within the bounds of VoidCorp, the Thuldan Empire, or the Hatire Community; these nations offer nothing to secure the loyalty of a fraal city-ship. On the other hand, more than 100 such communities exist within the Orion League. This is the greatest concentration of fraal within the galaxy, as well as the heart of their ancient culture.

In general, the most powerful fraal Mindwalkers come from the Wanderers. Closer to the ancient traditions of their species, these fraal maintain a purity of vision and culture unknown to the Builders. Unfortunately, they're also a little haughty.

The Builders, on the other hand, have integrated themselves completely into the society and fabric of a human state. In the days before human contact, the Builders favored the idea of settling down and creating terrestrial communities. Willing to set aside the wanderlust of their people, they chose to live side by side with their human counterparts. Most human cultures absorb these Builder communities; there are few distinctly fraal settlements or neighborhoods among the human-dominated stellar nations. Furthermore, many Builders have lost touch with their own culture. A few individuals have even developed some very unusual and aggressive philosophies concerning the nature of psionics and their role in the universe at large. The Wanderers view this as a great tragedy.

At present, there are no city-ships in the Verge. Almost all fraal native to the Verge are Builders. The Aegis system, with its ties to the Orion League, possesses the highest fraal population of any Verge system. Fraal Arrivers might come from either fraal faction, at the player's discretion.

Fraal heroes, both Wanderer and Builder, may choose a stellar nation or Verge system affiliation. However, they receive none of the special game benefits described for those origins—though they do receive their normal species bonuses (see *Chapter 2: Hero Creation* in the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook*). The racial identity of the fraal is much more important than allegiance to any human organization.

## HUMAN

Descriptions of the human-dominated Concord, the various stellar nations, and the systems of the Verge appear in great detail elsewhere in this book. As a player, you have a wealth of options available if you want to create a human hero. The first question is a simple one: Do you wish to run a Verger or Arriver hero? Of course, your Gamemaster may have a strong preference, depending on the type of campaign he or she wants to run. Generally, though, the decision is yours to make.

Verger heroes should select a native system or homeworld, while Arriver heroes should choose a stellar nation as their home (Arrivers can hail from any station, colony, or world within their nation's boundaries.) Feel free to add as much detail as you wish to your character's origins. Describing the exact planet, city, or even neighborhood from which your hero comes opens up numerous roleplaying options that the Gamemaster can tap later in the campaign.

## MECHALUS

Sought throughout human space for their technical proficiency and uncompromising dedication, most mechalus heroes retain a

close association with their human patrons, the Rigunmors. Many of the Rigunmor elite count mechalus technicians and bodyguards among their entourage. More than any other race, mechalus need reasons to leave their home system behind and head out into the human maelstrom. Wanderlust, curiosity, or profit are not motives that speak to the aleerin soul; the typical mechalus hero is likely to view the pursuit of adventure, knowledge, or justice simply as a duty to his species.

Mechalus heroes fall into one of three broad categories: *leased*, *contracted*, and *independent*. A *leased* mechalus simply participates in a commercial agreement between the Rigunmor Star Consortium and the aleerin people. Under the articles of alliance, the aleerin provide millions of workers to the Rigunmors in exchange for Rigunmor goods, protection, and representation in the Concord. While no individual mechalus is forced to fulfill this obligation, volunteers are plentiful. In performing this duty to their species, mechalus can secure wealth, financial benefits, and a great opportunity to learn within Rigunmor society. Leased mechalus typically serve in the military as technical experts for major trading blocs or firms, or more rarely as personal assistants to Rigunmors of high station.

*Contracted* mechalus are those individuals who chose to pursue employment outside the Rigunmor Consortium. Beyond the legal protection guaranteed by the mechalus-Rigunmor alliance, these individuals are generally on their own. The quality, safety, and reliability of their employment varies wildly, depending on the situation. Mechalus who undertake a contract do so because they want to specify exactly what their duties are, not because they're after long-term financial security. It's simply a matter of making sure that they're engaging in a worthwhile endeavor. Freely contracting with any organization that can use their services demonstrates the relative freedom of spirit evidenced by these mechalus. If you create a contracted mechalus hero, you should then decide whom or what he serves.

The rarest mechalus of all are the *independents*—those who do not undertake long-term agreements or promises of work. Driven by a relentless desire to master a particular technology, or to add to the species in some way that a lease or contract could not satisfy, these individuals are considered somewhat unbalanced by their peers. Independents embody the mechalus paradox: While they've abandoned the cooperative harmony and attention to duty that characterize their species, independents often achieve things that no other mechalus could.

Most mechalus live within the Oberon system in the Verge. A Rigunmor colony long before the outbreak of the Second Galactic War, the newly independent government of Lison has established continuing contracts with the native mechalus communities of the system.

Mechalus heroes do not receive any special game benefits other than those described for their species in *Chapter 2: Hero Creation* in the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook*. However, leased characters are temporary, but full, Rigunmor citizens for purposes of travel, protection of the law, and freedom of trade.

## SESHYAN

Most humans know sesheyans only as the slaves and assassins of the monolithic entity known as VoidCorp. Acting as the agents, soldiers, or impressed laborers of the corporation, sesheyans have spread throughout human space, mirroring the growth of their faceless owners. However, mythological references and role models define sesheyan culture; they craft personas incorporating the characteristics of heroes, ancestors, or mythological figures they admire.



In order to gain any semblance of free movement or independent action, a sesheyans must demonstrate unwavering loyalty to the captors of his race. Therefore, all sesheyans heroes exist as *indigenous, employees, or outlaws*.

*Indigenous* sesheyans are known among their own kind as Free Hearts. They live as their ancestors lived in the days before contact, hunting the forests of Sheya. VoidCorp views Free Heart sesheyans as less than reliable, and it assigns them to hard labor. Few sesheyans heroes come from this primitive class, but employees and outlaws almost always begin here.

Sesheyans who willingly (or unwillingly) enter VoidCorp's employ and leave their homeworld behind are known as Ghostwalkers. In the eyes of their people, these *employees* have died and passed on to another existence. If they ever return to Sheya, their former friends and relations will ignore them.

Some employee sesheyans turn their backs on the old ways of their people and immerse themselves in the corporate culture, rendering full and willing service to VoidCorp. Sesheyans heroes who choose this path gain a freedom of movement and level of corporate trust unknown to Free Hearts. Others battle constantly to maintain some shred of dignity, some glimmer of a conscience; they serve VoidCorp in order to work toward the liberation of their people.

Finally, a number of sesheyans have escaped VoidCorp's grasp over the years. Unwilling to sell their souls for their freedom and incapable of enduring the servitude of the Free Hearts, these sesheyans flee rather than compromise their values. These *outlaws* are sometimes called Windspirits. Under constant threat of termination by any VoidCorp asset or operative they run across, Windspirits survive in only the most protected havens. Even full citizenship in another stellar nation may not sufficiently

protect them from the vengeful arm of VoidCorp. Denied the legal protection of any organized states, many Windspirits consider themselves outlawed throughout the galactic arm.

An entire colony of Windspirits lives on the jungle moon of Grith in the Corrvale system. VoidCorp claims that these sesheyans are the descendants of rebels who fled from the heart of the stellar nation during the chaos of GW2. Many of the Windspirits of Grith have turned their backs on the aboriginal ways of their ancestors, seeking the technological, military, and economic power necessary to hold their own in galactic society. These modernized sesheyans feel that a return to their old customs would render Grith vulnerable to VoidCorp's return. The price of their freedom is the loss of their ancient culture. However, a few sesheyans still retain ties to their ancient beliefs, and they struggle constantly to restore true faith to their planet.

Sesheyans heroes have two choices: They may begin play in the service of VoidCorp, or they may begin play as Windspirits. As employees of VoidCorp, heroes may be Free Hearts or Ghostwalkers—although heroes in VoidCorp's labor camps will be restricted in their movements. Windspirit heroes may come and go as they please, but must always watch for VoidCorp operatives. These characters may be true outlaws, or they may be native to Grith, free to travel about the Verge at their own risk.

Sesheyans heroes gain the benefits noted in *Chapter 2: Hero Creation* in the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook*, but—with the exception of sesheyans in Corrvale—they don't receive special bonuses for stellar nation or Verge system affiliations.

## T'sa

Free of human patrons or supervision, the t'sa truly come and go as they please. T'sa are Concord citizens in the absence of

any other affiliation, and they may secure travel, trade, or work visas to visit other stellar nations. Some t'sa have legally emigrated to other stellar nations—most notably the Orion League, StarMech, and the Riganmor Star Consortium—and are citizens of those states.

While the T'sa Cluster is a single recognized state in the eyes of most human stellar nations, it is not a seamless edifice. In fact, the organization of t'sa society looks like sheer anarchy to human sensibilities. Thousands of competing clans, associations, conglomerates, and guilds exist within the Cluster. Each has dozens of unpredictable goals for human interaction. In addition, every t'sa aspires to win his own measure of fame and fortune by forging a new guild or company. Thus, millions of t'sa glory-seekers have spread throughout human space. Some take employment with human governments or corporations, some pay for the privilege of studying at human institutions, and many others leap from occupation to occupation as they scent opportunity and the chance to see something new.

T'sa heroes may be representatives of a t'sa power bloc, a corporation, or faction "back home" with interests in the Verge. They might serve as scouts, scientists, spies, or merchants for the organization they represent, acquiring knowledge, power, and wealth to suit the purposes of their parent organization. Just like a human in the service of a human organization, an employed t'sa can expect some basic compensation for his loyalty.

Self-employed t'sa can be found anywhere, doing anything. Driven by the insatiable t'sa desire to learn and explore, an independent t'sa might take up any occupation that catches his interest. T'sa of this type are especially common among the great number of free traders, smugglers, and freight-haulers that ply all corners of human space. Their knack for engineering is a virtual guarantee of a job, and the wide-open lifestyle of a star merchant appeals to the t'sa mindset.

T'sa heroes begin play with the normal benefits of their species (see page 27 in the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook*), but they don't gain any stellar nation or Verge system bonuses.

## WEREN

Fierce warriors and staunch allies, the weren have journeyed to the stars on the shoulders of the Orlamu Theocracy. Millions now live scattered through the myriad worlds of the Theocracy, dozens or hundreds of light-years from their homeworld of Kurg. Unlike VoidCorp, the Theocracy believes in full sentient rights for its clients, and all weren are free to emigrate to any nation or world that will take them. Most weren heroes are Orlamu citizens loyal to the Theocracy. A significant number, however, are expatriates who have chosen to find their own way in the galaxy.

As citizens of the Theocracy, weren are free to travel within its borders or to seek permits and visas for travel to any nation that maintains relations with the Orlamus. The weren kingdoms of Kurg are generally concerned with homeworld affairs only; thus, few weren heroes still serve their native lands. Instead, weren who leave Kurg but remain within the Orlamu fold do so to seek employment with the Orlamu government or Orlamu corporations. Military service of some kind is the preferred out-world occupation for most members of this species, but weren artisans, craftsmen, diplomats, merchants, and scouts have also found a home among the stars.

Adventurous or restless weren often leave Orlamu space altogether—finding little in Orlamu culture that appeals to their warlike natures. In fact, mercenary companies across the galaxy include expatriate weren. Some of these warriors are

honorable and fair, seeking nothing more than an opportunity to test their skills in the ultimate contest. Others are ruthless villains who have turned their backs on the warrior's code, embracing the cold human notions of profit and expediency. Weren who remain faithful to their age-old warrior traditions do not have any mercy on these "dishonorable" weren.

Weren heroes who remain affiliated with their Orlamu patrons can begin play with an allegiance to the Orlamu government. They're soldiers or operatives representing the Theocracy in the Verge and are subject to the orders of their lawful superiors. Other Orlamu weren may serve a company or commercial interest native to the Theocracy. There are any number of Orlamu merchants and scholars who travel with weren bodyguards or assistants.

Expatriate weren heroes no longer have ties to the Theocracy and are free to make any life choices they deem necessary. Weren bodyguards, operatives for hire, or mercenaries exist throughout the Verge. There is only one noteworthy community of weren (on Arist in Hammer's Star) in any of the Verge systems—although there are plenty of individuals who seek to find their own fortune and honor in the stars beyond Tendril.

Weren heroes begin play with the normal benefits of their species (see *Chapter 2: Hero Creation* in the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook*), but they gain no stellar nation or Verge system bonuses.

## PROFESSION

Heroes of all professions are found in a *STAR\*DRIVE* campaign. An extensive sample of potential career paths, grouped by profession, follows later in this chapter (see "Careers" on page 237). Since each profession embraces a great variety of character types, it's easier to discuss particular *types* of combat specialists (for instance) than it is to discuss combat specialists in universal terms. Many *STAR\*DRIVE* adventures incorporate elements of combat, intrigue, espionage, and trade, so that every profession has a chance to shine.

Note that psionics are an accepted part of the *STAR\*DRIVE* universe. Mindwalkers exist in every stellar nation, although they're more common in some nations than in others.

## ABILITY SCORES

In a *STAR\*DRIVE* campaign, the Ability Score generation method described in *Chapter 2: Hero Creation* in the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook* is considered the standard method. Each player distributes 60 points among the six Ability Scores—Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Will, and Personality—in any order he chooses. Cybernetics, mutations, perks, and some stellar nation affiliations may give beginning heroes a bonus of 1 or 2 points to their Ability Scores, raising their total to more than 60 points.

## HOMEWORLD OR NATION

One of the most important decisions you'll make when creating a hero for the *STAR\*DRIVE* setting is choosing a Verge system or stellar nation. Heroes from different nations begin play with very different notions about the state of the galaxy, how it came to be that way, and ways to fix it. As part of a hero's background, a planet or system of origin provides the Gamemaster with a set of instant story handles. Developing an origin also gives you the ability to craft a plausible history for your hero, a fictional account of who she is and why she does what she does.

Finally, the choice of origin provides special game benefits for human heroes, reflecting the unique training, outlook, and common traits of the people of that setting.

Take a few minutes to skim through the stellar nation and Verge system descriptions in Chapters 3 and 4 of this book. Remember, these are just guidelines. For example, millions of Rigunmors don't make their livings as independent traders, there are atheists and apostates who grew up in the Orlamu Theocracy, there are Thuldan pacifists, and there are humanitarian employees of VoidCorp. Creating heroes who transcend national restrictions and biases is one of the best steps toward making your character a memorable part of the story.

## CAREERS

While the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook* and *Gamemaster Guide* present a number of general career paths, these careers lack the specific background that makes them part of the *STAR\*DRIVE* universe. All of the career packages detailed in the *Player's Handbook* are available in a *STAR\*DRIVE* campaign.

The careers presented here are intended to jump-start the character creation process. Each career identifies a block of Core Skills that all heroes choosing that career should possess. You're not much of a pilot if you can't fly a starship, for instance (refer to *Chapter 6: Sample Careers* in the *Player's Handbook* for specific details). Gamemasters can expand or alter the Core Skills suggested for each career to reflect particular nuances of their campaign settings. In addition, many careers have special considerations or roles in the *STAR\*DRIVE* universe.

Careers are entirely optional, and the ones presented below are built around a human hero. You don't have to choose a career for your hero. In fact, there are hundreds of great character concepts that aren't covered by the following list. The best characters stretch the definitions and expectations of the Gamemaster and other players.

### COMBAT SPECS

With an unknown threat lurking on the horizon, Combat Specs are in high demand in the Verge. In the absence of any central authority, Verge corporations and governments have become accustomed to achieving their goals through the use of force. As organizations rush to meet the challenge of contact with Old Space and the arrival of the Galactic Concord, new rivalries and old feuds are sparking into a hundred brushfire conflicts across the Verge.

### BODYGUARD

Political leaders, prominent merchants, and crime lords of the independent Verge colonies are always looking for a strong right arm. Thus, professional bodyguards can always find work. While many bodyguards spend the majority of their time watching out for their employer's personal safety, other bodyguards function as free-roving security consultants who ferret out dangerous plots, work in advance of their client's movements, or check up on known troublemakers.

**Core Skills (25 points):** Modern Ranged Weapons—pistol 2; Security—protection protocols; Awareness—intuition, perception; Interaction—intimidate.

*In the Verge:* The Verge is crawling with shady merchants who need protection. Rigunmor traders, A-O arms dealers, Lucculan smugglers, and Alaundrin nobles are all in the market for this hero's services.

### BRAWLER

Ruffians, thugs, street fighters, and low-quality "muscle" generally fall into this career. Some brawlers fight for hard-won purses in a variety of illegal street and station matches, while others might hone their combat skills simply by surviving in the worst ghettos of overcrowded cities or fortress ships. Brawlers who don't go into the protection or prize-fighting businesses might end up in a military organization—every command has its share of barracks-room brawlers. However, hand-to-hand fighting doesn't offer much opportunity for long-term success. The best a brawler can hope for is to hire on as muscle or to climb to the top of whatever fighting circle or underworld den in which he happens to land.

**Core Skills (20 points):** Unarmed Attack—brawl 2; Street Smart—street knowledge; Interaction—intimidate.

*In the Verge:* The pit-fighters of Penates in the Lucullus system are famous throughout the Verge. These hardened street gladiators frequently fall in with all kinds of shady characters—including free traders in search of muscle, or smugglers looking for extra hands.

### CORPORATE SECURITY SPECIALIST

In most parts of Old Space and the Verge, corporate warfare is a fact of life. Industrial espionage, sabotage, and terrorism are accepted as commonplace. The return of the mega-national corporations of Old Space to the independent worlds of the Verge signals a new era of competition and security concerns.

Like any person employed by a large organization, the corporate security expert spends most of her time working. However, the best and brightest security specialists are often assigned as roving troubleshooters, free to come or go as they please (within reason). Of course, these experts must produce results in exchange for their pay and perks.

**Core Skills (30 points):** Modern Ranged Weapons—pistol 2; Security—security devices; System Operation—defenses, sensors; Awareness—perception.

*In the Verge:* Stellar corporations such as VoidCorp or Starmech, or smaller companies—such as those found within the Rigunmor Star Consortium, the Orion League, or the Union of Sol—often employ security specialists. Arriver organizations are building vast new installations to solidify their return to the Verge, and these installations will have considerable security requirements. Local Verge companies from Alaundril, Bluefall, and Leen are also increasing their security as companies such as VoidCorp establish a presence in their home systems.

### GUNNER

The long years of isolation imposed by the Second Galactic War left the Verge in anarchy. In most systems, anyone who wants to wield power must do so by fielding his or her own private army. This is especially true in Tendril, Grith, and Lucullus, where the Rule of Gross Firepower applies: The person with the biggest guns makes the rules. Even criminal gangs, smuggler rings, and privately held companies have fallen into the habit of arming dozens or hundreds of fighters to watch out for their own interests. In this climate, Combat Specs with the skills necessary to employ heavy weapons are prized commodities.

Gunners might serve in the military of a stellar nation or a Verge system, or they might work as mercenaries for a private organization. Accepting employment with an organization means that a hero must fulfill certain duties in exchange for a paycheck and a place to stay.

**Core Skills (35 points):** Heavy Weapons—direct fire 2;

Demolitions, System Operation—*defenses, weapons*; Technical Science—*repair*.

*In the Verge:* Thousands of Austrin-Ontis mercenaries and gunslingers, demobilized since the end of GW2, have streamed into the Verge seeking work—especially in the battle-torn Hammer's Star system.

### LAW ENFORCER

With the exception of Lucullus, every Verge system has some kind of recognized police authority. Systemwide, planetary, or municipal police departments vary wildly in jurisdiction, professionalism, and power. In some systems, the police are mere puppets of the real power groups, while in others the police function as respected peacekeepers who keep corporate and criminal elements in their place. As clouded as this picture is, it's growing even more confusing as the various stellar nations pour their own law enforcement arms into the Verge. Legally, the only nations that can police sections of the Verge are ones who retain claims to Verge systems, and even then they're limited to the particular systems in question. For example, StarMech's Security Division believes that it can police the Tendril system, since Tendril was formerly a StarMech colony. Conflicts of jurisdiction between the SSD and the Alaundrin System Patrol have broken out into open fighting more than once.

The only law enforcement universally recognized throughout the Verge is that of the Galactic Concord, and in many cases the Concord's true authority is limited—systems such as Lucullus and Corrvale are not yet member states and don't recognize Concord Administrators.

**Core Skills (35 skill points):** Melee Weapons—*bludgeon*; Modern Ranged Weapons—*pistol*; Law—*court procedures, law enforcement, Investigate, interrogate*.

*In the Verge:* More than any other hero, it's important for the law enforcer to define which organization or nation commands her allegiance. Outside of her home jurisdiction, a law enforcer is nothing more than a bounty hunter.

### MARTIAL ARTIST

Like the brawler, many martial artists make a living as hired muscle or professional prizefighters. A few are highly trained close-combat specialists reserved for special tactics units in standard military or police forces. The typical martial artist doesn't really care about his profession; the pursuit of perfection in his chosen art is all that concerns him. True aesthetics might live in poverty and squalor or roam the Verge as homeless vagabonds—despite the fact that their skills might command thousands of credits in the right place.

**Core Skills (35 points):** Unarmed Attack—*power martial arts 2, Acrobatics, Dodge, Stamina, endurance, Resolve, physical resolve*.

*In the Verge:* A new order of martial artists has formed in the wastes of the Hammer's Star system. Touting brutal physical combat and survival skills, the Order of the Black Tiger has attracted a small following loyal to Jessrin "the Grand Master" Mirison. This old human claims to have seen a vision of the system's invaders and supposedly teaches ways to stun the alien klicks with an unarmed attack..

### ALIEN COMBAT SPECS

While fraal and t'sa Combat Specs are extremely unusual, weren, mechalus, and sesheyan heroes often choose this profession. Weren often become brawlers, bodyguards, or mercenaries, while mechalus heroes make outstanding gunners and soldiers. Sesheyan Combat Specs usually serve as bodyguards,

corporate security specialists, or mercenaries—although many sesheyan don't respond well to military discipline.

### MERCENARY

Soldiers for hire have always been plentiful in the Verge, and the influx of new traffic from Old Space has only increased opportunities for mercenaries. While many mercs are freelancers, hiring on with any organization or team that can meet their price, other mercenaries band together into companies (entire combined-arms military units with support and command echelons), providing anyone with enough money the chance to purchase a private army. Service in a mercenary army isn't all that different from service in a standing military force. Heroes who choose this career must show up when their company fights.

**Core Skills (20 points):** Armor Operation—*combat armor*; Modern Ranged Weapons—*SMG*; Interaction—*intimidate*.

*In the Verge:* Many independent mercs belong to an organization known as the Verge Confederation, a clearing house that provides good sources for jobs, logistics, and weapons for its members. This group has safe houses all over the Verge.

### SOLDIER

Under the Integration Act of 2498 many military personnel were detached from their national forces to serve with local governments, private corporations, and allied nations. While most soldiers serve in standing forces under normal military discipline and authority, a significant number of officers and enlisted personnel now pursue their nation's defense as detached soldiers. It's not for everybody, but many heroes prefer this career path for the flexibility and freedom of movement it allows. Such free-serving soldiers are still subject to changes of duty status and specific assignments; it's not unusual for a character to be called up for duty with a standing force. The privilege of detached service is usually offered only to enlisted personnel and officers with a few years of regular service under their belts; a detached private or junior lieutenant is very unusual.

Every stellar nation maintains a sizable army, and most have commands or detachments serving in the Verge. Naturally, many Verge systems have their own armies, too.

**Core Skills (25 points):** Armor Operation—*powered armor*; Modern Ranged Weapons—*rifle*; Movement; Tactics.

*In the Verge:* The Concord Marines are an elite corps of space-to-ground assault troops. While they're often outnumbered and sometimes outgunned, they're also the only military force free to operate within the borders of all Verge systems. The 191st Marine Expeditionary Brigade, commanded by Brigadier General Walther Kiell, uses the *Lighthouse* as its base.

### SPACEHAND

Every tramp freighter, every battered miner, every rough-and-tumble station has its share of seasoned spacehands. Jacks-of-all-trades who work hard and relax even harder, spacehands bring a little bit of everything to a group of heroes. As able-bodied spacers, spacehands typically sign on with a ship for a specified number of voyages, working in any field with which they are familiar. Unlike the highly qualified pilots and engineers retained by reputable captains, spacehands are overworked and underpaid. At the end of their term, they'll take their meager savings to the nearest bar and spend their hard-won money in one long binge—only to drag themselves down to the docking ports when they sober up and do it all over again.

**Core Skills (30 points):** Unarmed Attack—*brawl*; Modern Ranged Weapons—*pistol*; Technical Science—*juryrig*; Vehicle Operations—*space vehicle*.

*In the Verge:* Systems with large numbers of traders are the best places to find spacehands. Lucullus, Oberon, and Tendril contain some of the better prospects. A significant number of spacehands are Arrivers, shipping in with the restoration of trade to the Verge.

## DIPLOMATS

Serving a stellar nation, corporation, or space station is a popular job in the Verge. This is especially true of the Galactic Concord, which has thousands of diplomats at work throughout the Verge in an effort to smooth over the arrival of the Concord. Many diplomat heroes begin play with strong allegiances to a government, military unit, or corporation, and spend the majority of their time and effort forwarding its agenda.

## AMBASSADOR

Most beginning heroes don't actually hold ambassador rank; they're professional Foreign Service types who serve as assistants to a politically appointed ambassador, or consuls who serve as unofficial representatives to another nation. While many corporations are large enough to maintain diplomatic relations with other powers, most ambassadors in the Verge are government representatives. They represent the interests of one of the stellar nations as they seek to reestablish their nation's power and influence in the Verge, or they're native Vergers cautiously negotiating their future status with the Concord and its member states. Independent space stations of importance, such as Darkhold in Tendril, also have their own ambassadors.

A hero never simply becomes the ambassador who speaks for her government or corporation. Instead, she's assigned small tasks in which she can demonstrate her diplomatic skills. These can range from closing an important grain shipment deal (at lower levels) to negotiating the end of a bloody civil war (which would probably grant an immediate promotion to full ambassador). Social status (see *Chapter 7: Attributes* in the *Gamemaster Guide*) is a good way to measure how fast an ambassador moves up through the ranks of her government.

**Core Skills (35 points):** Law—court procedures; System Operation—communications; Administration—bureaucracy; Culture—diplomacy, etiquette (specific) 2, first encounter; Deception—bluff.

*In the Verge:* Human diplomats in the Verge typically choose a stellar nation or a Verge system as their native culture of choice. Fraal, sesheyen, t'sa, or mechalus are the most likely alien cultures in which a hero might specialize—although there are a handful of system-contained sentient species native to this region of space.

## CLERGY

It's possible to find clergymen of every faith in the Verge—including Hatire, Insightful, Human Reformists, Orlamu theocrats, and representatives of most of the Old Earth faiths. Like everyone else in the Verge, local priests and religious authorities were cut off from their parent faiths by the isolation of the Second Galactic War. In the absence of any higher direction, these clergymen carried on with their missions of evangelization and ministry to the poor and unfortunate, learning to rely on their own judgment. With the restoration of contact with the Stellar Ring, each of the major faiths currently finds itself engaged in the delicate process of bringing its long-lost Verger children back into the fold. In some cases, significant questions of doctrine and authority have arisen, since Verge faiths grew in a different direction than their Old Space counterparts.

## FAITHS OF THE VERGE

Each of the major faiths of the STAR\*DRIVE setting has its own unique outlook, strengths, and weaknesses. Some of the faiths heroic characters might choose to represent include:

### The Hatire

Clergymen of the Hatire Community never take technological skills involving the use of intrusive hardware—such as Armor Operation—powered armor and Computer Science—hacking. Members of this faith do use computers, but they believe computers and other technology shouldn't merge with humanity. To provide leadership through example, many Hatire clergy deliberately develop physical skills of self-reliance and endurance. Skills such as Athletics, Unarmed Attack, Stamina, and Survival are popular, as are many psionic skills.

### The Insightful

An Inseer always trains in as many technical skills as she feels is necessary—especially those that allow access to the Grid or further knowledge of computers. Obviously, Computer Science and its specialties (especially hacking) are absolutely mandatory. A few Inseers are exploring the ultimate in human-Grid interaction: psionic skills such as datalink that allow the mind to link directly to the machine with no interface at all.

### Humanity Reformation

Reformists generally train in a variety of skills, representing both personal interest and a desire to possess a balanced array of skills and abilities. Unarmed Attack—power martial arts, Modern Ranged Weapons, Stamina, Knowledge—first aid, Physical Science, Resolve—mental resolve, and Interaction skills are all appropriate. Administration—bureaucracy and Teach—Reformation doctrine are almost mandatory.

### The Ancientists

Worshiping the long-vanished Precursors who inhabited this portion of the galaxy millions of years ago, the Ancientists aggressively seek out alien ruins and new alien species, hoping to uncover revelations for their faith. Culture—first encounter, Life Science—xenology, and Knowledge—xenoarcheology are all good skills for the Ancientist hero.

### Shamans

While most sesheyen religious leaders choose to remain on their homeworlds, a few have journeyed to the stars to provide guidance to their spacefaring people. Shamans often serve as healers among their people, and might choose Medical Science or Life Science to go along with Deception—bluff.

### Orlamu Theocracy

Orlamists are generally quite knowledgeable with all things related to drivespace. Skills such as Navigation—drivespace astrogation, Technical Science—drivespace principles, and a healthy dose of other skills are core requirements.

Heroes of the cloth aren't necessarily faith healers and miracle workers. More often, they're diplomats, missionaries, leaders, and teachers. In some systems, they serve as the voice of those who otherwise could not speak for themselves. Whether or not a clergyman speaks for a higher power is up to you.

**Core Skills (30 points):** Knowledge—first aid 2, theology; Resolve—mental resolve; Teach; Culture—etiquette (specific); Leadership—inspire.

*In the Verge:* Three major centers of faith exist within the Verge. The Hatire Community's Forest Cathedral is the centerpiece of the Brethren settlement on Grith. Bluefall, in the Aegis system, contains the Bastion of Light, a major center of religious and secular power for the Church of Human Reformation. Both of these organizations are native to the Verge and are struggling to rejoin their parent faiths under their own terms. The largest Old Space faith is the Orlamu Theocracy. Operating from their vast shrine aboard the *Lighthouse*, the Orlamus are working tirelessly to build a network of temples throughout the Verge.

### CONCORD ADMINISTRATOR

An Administrator is a wandering official of the Galactic Concord, a judge, diplomat, and law enforcer charged with bringing order to the wild reaches of human space. In many places, an Administrator is the first representative of the Concord to visit since the galactic union was established. Some hate Administrators, others fear their quick rulings and swift justice. Many welcome them, for they are symbols of hope and law in a galaxy still reeling from civil war. Administrators carry their authority like shields, display their commitment like lanterns in the darkness, and wield their tri-staves with the strength of their convictions.

Concord Administrators have the power to remove corrupt politicians, law enforcement agents, and other Concord appointees from their positions of authority. This power is hardly given out to rookie Administrators, however. Only Administrators who prove their worth receive full authority. High-ranking Administrators can commandeer any Concord asset in the vicinity—including capital warships and sector bases, as long as they deem the situation deserving of such extreme measures. Naturally, prospective Administrators are subjected to the most rigorous examinations of physical fitness, intelligence, intuition, and moral fiber before they're allowed to wield their power.

**Core Skills (45 points):** Melee Weapons—powered; Modern Ranged Weapons—pistol; Law—court procedures, law enforcement 2; Administration—bureaucracy, management; Leadership—command 2. (Note: Most Administrators choose Combat Spec as their secondary profession.)

*In the Verge:* Julius Baynes, Sector Administrator for the Verge, operates from the *Lighthouse*. Most Vergers are extremely suspicious of the broad jurisdiction and sweeping power allotted to the Concord Executive Authority, and they resent the intrusion of Baynes's operatives into their affairs. Any Administrator in the Verge takes orders from Baynes and must answer to him for their decisions.

### CORPORATE EXECUTIVE

Managers, planners, negotiators, problem-solvers, these are the type of people any business needs to stay ahead. The vast corporations of Old Space and the Verge are no different. As a beginning hero, the corporate executive is young, smart, and hungry, an up-and-comer throwing herself at the toughest problems her company faces. She's not afraid to play hardball to put her company ahead, and she expects everyone around her to play by the same rules. Young execs receive little or no help in their assignments; they haven't shown that they can handle major assets, and they won't be trusted with manpower or expensive equipment until they've built a track record of success.

**Core Skills (35 points):** Business—corporate 3; Knowledge—computer operation; Administration—bureaucracy 2, management 2; Deception.

*In the Verge:* Heroes in the service of a native Verge corporation work for a (comparatively) small business. They're familiar with the people, the places, and the intangibles of life in the Verge. On the other hand, heroes working for a stellar corporation—especially the big ones such as StarMech and Void-Corp—command much more formidable resources and operate with a lot more freedom of movement.

### ENTERTAINER

While there are many talented individuals who have the charisma and drive to accomplish one-man shows, most of the entertainers in the Verge are part of larger companies or troupes. Musical groups, Shakespearean stage actors, comedians, Grid celebrities, and others come to the Verge for brief tours before returning to the comfort of Old Space. Hundreds of promoters, charities, foundations, and societies seek to bring the culture of Old Space to the Verge. It's possible that an entertainer hero could have been lured here by any of them, only to get caught up in the grander mystery of the Verge.

**Core Skills (30 points):** Creativity; Deception—bluff; Entertainment—act 2, dance 2, sing 2, musical instrument; Interaction—charm, seduce 2.

*In the Verge:* The Society for the Arts, a Hatire-backed charity, contracts with a variety of entertainers to bring their shows to the Verge. Their only requirement is that everything in the production must be handcrafted—they won't tolerate computer-generated scenery or special effects. They contract for around a dozen performances throughout the Verge and pay quite well. The Orlamu Operatic Theater is always performing its *Sendir and the Divine Unconscious* production, spreading the word of the Cosimir throughout the Verge. It frequently changes the lead actor in the opera, always utilizing a famous personality.

### FIRST CONTACT CONSUL

A rare occupation at best, most first contact consuls act as special agents in the diplomatic branches of major governments or large corporations. Trained in assessing alien biospheres, evaluating signs of sentience, and establishing contact, a first contact expert only gets a few opportunities to apply her knowledge in the course of her entire career, since sentient aliens just aren't that common. In rare cases, first contact consuls have been hired away from their parent organizations by independent outposts in areas where the possibility for alien contact exists.

In addition to the five spacefaring species known to humankind, there are several dozen other sentient species within the bounds of Old Space and the Verge. For various reasons, these lesser-known species have been left in peace, isolated by the unbridgeable gap of interstellar space. Some are developing races whose cultures have been protected by enlightened rulings on the part of the discovering nation, while others are so noxious or insidious that it was deemed necessary to bottle them up in their home system and quarantine them forever. Finding new alien species in the Verge and determining their status offers a great challenge for first contact consuls.

**Core Skills (30 points):** Life Science—biology, xenology; Awareness—intuition, perception; Culture—etiquette (specific), first encounter 3; Interaction—bargain.

*In the Verge:* Most first contact consuls are part of the Galactic Concord's diplomatic service, assigned to an embassy near the particular region of space in which they serve.

### FREE TRADER

The Verge is starving for trade goods upon which to rebuild its citizens' quality of life. This newfound demand attracted mer-

chant fleets from the Stellar Ring and independent traders—each eager to make their fortunes on the “frontier.” Of course, thousands of native Vergers have had decades to establish their own routes and markets, and they’re not at all happy sharing the wealth with a horde of green Arrivers. So far, the natives have maintained a slight advantage over the newcomers, as they know which systems are interested in specific cargoes.

A successful free trader must be part pilot, part businessman, and part scoundrel. It’s a dirty and ruthless business; even the best traders resort to the occasional smuggling or gunrunning voyage in order to stay profitable.

**Core Skills (20 points):** Modern Ranged Weapons—pistol; Business—small business; Interaction—bargain 2.

*In the Verge:* In an effort to stop Old Space conglomerates from seizing the Verge market, some Verge traders have banded together. For example, Par-Tech, based on Darkhold in the Tendril system, deals exclusively in Old Space technology, while The Mary Rose, a mysterious free trader stronghold in the Lucullus system, specializes in hard-to-find military components for starships and large weapons.

### MILITARY OFFICER

Most military officers don’t belong to the Combat Spec profession; they’re Diplomats who choose Combat Spec as their secondary profession. Officers are often competent fighters, but their real value is in their leadership ability and tactical acumen. A military officer (as opposed to a naval officer, below) understands all aspects of planetary combat—including aerospace superiority and “conventional” naval warfare above and below the surface of the sea.

Military officers—like soldiers or corporate employees—begin play with allegiance to an armed force of some kind. They must report for duty assignments, follow orders, and generally devote most of their attention to their job. However, officers are considered some of the most reliable operatives a government possesses, and they receive free-ranging assignments far more frequently than enlisted men.

**Core Skills (40 points):** Armor Operation—powered armor; Modern Ranged Weapons—pistol; Tactics—infantry tactics; Administration—bureaucracy; Leadership—command 2.

*In the Verge:* Naturally, every stellar nation maintains extensive military forces. However, no other nation maintains more forces in the Verge than the Concord itself. A number of officers on detached service from various military branches currently roam the Verge, assessing native system military capabilities and defense requirements. The only military force that’s allowed free movement throughout the Verge is the Concord Star Force—although officers of Verge nations such as Aegis or Alaundril are obviously free to move around in their home systems.

### NAVAL OFFICER

Serving in the spacegoing navy of a stellar nation, a naval officer possesses skills in the highly technical fields of navigation, drive engineering, and space combat, as well as the art of command. In addition to leading the personnel assigned to their ship or station, many naval officers find themselves serving as impromptu ambassadors for their nation—especially when their vessel is the only national asset or representative in a particular region. Otherwise, most of the discussion about military officers (see above) still applies to naval officers.

Most naval officers are Diplomats with secondary training as Tech Ops. In addition to shipboard service, officers often work in embassies or joint service commands as naval attaches, or they serve in the merchant marine as reserve officers.

**Core Skills (55 points):** Modern Ranged Weapons—pistol; Vehicle Operation—space vehicle; Navigation—drivespace astrogation, system astrogation; System Operation—communications, sensors; Tactics; Administration—bureaucracy; Leadership—command.

*In the Verge:* At this time, almost every stellar nation has at least a handful of small warships scattered through the Verge, and some—such as the Thuldans, VoidCorp, and the Rigum-mors—have significant fleets. Beginning heroes might command a minor vessel such as a corvette or scout, but it’s more likely that they serve as department or division officers on board larger vessels.

### STELLAR NOBLE

Of all the stellar nations, only the Thuldans, the Borealins, the Solars, and the Hatires have anything resembling a titled aristocracy. In other nations, the “nobility” may consist of families commanding unusual wealth, prestige, or political power. These oligarchs, merchant princes, and corporate directors pass their fortunes and interests to their descendants, just as the landholding lords of old passed their fiefs to their children. A stellar noble hero is a scion of one of these families, born to wealth and power beyond the dreams of most people.

Stellar nobles adventure for a variety of reasons. Some are philanthropists, dedicated to using their position and fortune to bettering the world around them. Others are merchant-lords charting the course of a powerful privately held company in a universe of monolithic corporations. Still others are simply bored dilettantes looking for thrills.

Many of the noble families of Old Space sent out favored relatives to the Verge when it was first colonized. The Verge nobles spent a great deal of their wealth settling into their new homes, virtually eliminating their ties with Old Space altogether. When the war cut the Verge off from Old Space, the new nobles of the Verge found themselves stranded. Many of the Verge noble houses dissolved; others were destroyed in riots. Those that survived held little love for their Old Space founders.

**Core Skills (25 points):** Culture—diplomacy, etiquette (specific) 2; Deception—bribe 2, gamble; Business—corporate.

*In the Verge:* There are more than thirty noble houses in the Verge. Some of these are survivors of the original nobles. Others are houses that have emerged as the Verge has grown in power and prestige. The houses detailed below are some of the more prominent in the Verge.

**House Kaitors:** Kaitors Industries is the leading producer of electronic components in the Verge. With its supply of high-technology parts from Old Space reestablished, Marilyn Kaitors will most likely capture more of the technology market from her home planet of Leen in the Oberon system.

**House Maritec:** Thomas Maritec, the patron of the House, is a retired admiral from the Borealis military. Upon his retirement, he received an area in the Argos star system to oversee for the Borealins. With the return of the stellar nations to the Verge, Admiral Maritec is aiding the Galactic Concord, as directed by his government.

**House Hale:** Christopher Hale led his fleet of renegade ships to Aegis and proclaimed himself the Regent of Bluefall. Despite an earlier attempt by the Thuldans to remove him from power, Hale has remained the undisputed ruler of Bluefall.

### SWINDLER

Many swindlers describe themselves as “independent businessmen.” In truth, many are just con men and cheats who travel from system to system before word of their deeds spread. They

seldom belong to any organization save those that can further their latest plot to make money. Swindlers range from two-bit scoundrels surviving on confidence schemes to elegant impostors who attach themselves to the wealthy and elite. All swindlers have two things in common: a knack for pretending to be someone they're not, and a long list of enemies.

**Core Skills (30 points):** Manipulation—*pickpocket*; Deception—*bluff 2, bribe*; Entertainment—*act*; Interaction—*charm 2*.

*In the Verge:* In some cases, the Verge is about the only place to which a swindler can run; rougher and less civilized than the Stellar Ring, it's a good place to lose oneself.

## FREE AGENTS

Independent operators can net high profits in the Verge. Of course, such work contains a high element of risk, as well; Free Agents don't normally possess military, corporate, or private resources. There aren't any safety nets out here.

## BOUNTY HUNTER

It's easy to vanish in the Verge, and some people seem to do it with surprising regularity. Bounty hunters are then sent to find the poor, lost souls and return them to where they're supposed to be—normally a prison cell. They're then paid their fee and leave to find the next lost person. Bounty hunters get two kinds of jobs: bond work and contracts. Bond work is more common. A hunter checks to see who has a price on their head, and then goes after that person. In many cases, bond work is perfectly legal, and the local justice system guarantees the reward. In other cases, bond work is simply another word for an open contract; the first bounty hunter that finds the wanted person can claim the reward.

Contract work shows up on a hero's doorstep after he's proven himself with bond work. When a bounty hunter earns a reputation, powerful people seek him out and offer him lucrative jobs. As a bounty hunter advances in level, successfully completing more and more missions, word of his efficiency gets around and more work comes his way.

**Core Skills (30 points):** Modern Ranged Weapons—*pistol*; Stealth—*shadow*; Investigate—*interrogate, search, track*; Street Smart; Interaction—*interview*.

*In the Verge:* The most notorious outstanding bond is for the corsair lord Kalt Terenz. Last year he captured and looted a space yacht belonging to House Blackmore of Alaundril, owners of Solar X Industries. Two members of the family were killed in the attack, and Kalt took a third one prisoner. Maura Blackmore, leader of her house, has offered a reward of \$2,500,000 for Kalt Terenz, dead or alive.

## CORSAIR

While a few corsairs claim to operate as privateers under letters of marque, even the best of them command some illegal operations. It's a brutal and ruthless lifestyle lived among the very dregs of human and alienkind. Like the spacehand, a corsair moves around a lot, shipping with one crew for a few months, squandering his ill-gotten wealth ashore, then signing on with another crew for a new spree of blood and terror. Heroic corsairs limit themselves to piracy against hostile corporations or enemy nations, and they spare lives whenever possible. Unfortunately, most corsairs aren't very heroic.

**Core Skills (30 points):** Melee Weapons—*blade*; Modern Ranged Weapons—*pistol*; Vehicle Operation—*space vehicle*; Street Smart—*criminal elements*.

*In the Verge:* Every corsair needs a place to call home, a

safe port to dispose of her prizes. One of the most notorious havens in the Verge is the lawless domed city of Santiago, located in the barren belts of the Lucullus system. This dismal city is one of the best places to buy or sell "pre-owned" goods.

## EXPLORER

Despite the high levels of traffic along the Tendril-Hammer's Star corridor in the Verge, there are still hundreds of star systems that human eyes have never seen. Some of these may be the homes of new alien species, others might hold mineral wealth beyond imagining, and still others might possess the greatest of all prizes—an Earthlike world ready for settlement. But there are dangers in open space, and a few exploration vessels have disappeared in search of the unknown.

**Core Skills (40 points):** Movement—*swim 2, trailblazing*; Survival—*survival training 3*; Modern Ranged Weapons—*rifle*; Navigation—*surface navigation*.

*In the Verge:* The Concord Survey Service (part of the Concord Star Force) employs explorers on a continuing basis. They're looking for volunteers to investigate certain areas of the Verge and the Lightning Nebula.

## GAMBLER

High stakes, fast living, and a little bit of luck are all a gambler needs. Most Verge star systems have legalized gambling of one sort or another, and there are a variety of big-stakes events that attract huge numbers of gamblers from both the Verge and Old Space alike. Gamblers spend a lot of time traveling from one system to another, so it's not unusual for them to try their hand at smuggling and errand running between big games. However, very few gamblers have a connection or allegiance to anyone, let alone a government or corporate entity.

**Core Skills (30 points):** Manipulation—*pickpocket*; Street Smart—*criminal elements*; Deception—*gamble 2, bluff*; Interaction—*charm, seduce*.

*In the Verge:* Aegis hosts an annual Poker Pentad (five days and nights of blue-chip poker), drawing the best gamblers from around the Verge. Every gambler worth her salt tries to find a sponsor to put up the formidable stake of \$100,000 if she can't swing the stake from her own funds.

## GUIDE/SCOUT

Computer-generated maps, charts, and diagrams of a specific area can only reveal so much. A knowledgeable scout or guide can point out ambush spots, negotiate hostile terrain, and warn travelers away from dangerous areas more efficiently than any computer. Travelers, hunters, and even military units hire guides (a good guide is always ready to fight if the need arises).

**Core Skills (30 points):** Movement—*swim, trailblazing 2*; Stamina—*endurance*; Survival—*survival training*; Animal Handling—*animal riding*; Vehicle Operation—*land vehicle*; Knowledge—*first aid*.

*In the Verge:* Scouts familiar with some of the lesser-known planets of the Verge are in great demand as Old Space scientific and survey expeditions return to chart planets, catalog new species, and record geological phenomena.

## INVESTIGATOR

Crime, vice, and sordid activity of all kinds fills the Verge. Investigators are heroes who have learned to sift through the worst that humankind has to offer in order to bring the darkest and dirtiest secrets to light. Skilled at examining crime scenes, tracking down people who disappear, and piecing together evidence, a professional investigator is a tremendous addition to

any party of heroes. Investigators may serve with a dozen different law enforcement agencies—such as the national police of a stellar nation or the system police of a Verge world—or they may choose private employment.

**Core Skills (40 points):** Modern Ranged Weapons—*pistol*; Stealth—*shadow*; Knowledge—*computer operation, deduce, Investigate, search*; Street Smart—*street knowledge 2*.

*In the Verge:* Blightworth Security Consultants of Leen, in the Oberon system, are the best private investigators in the Verge. A dignified agency with a 100-year history, it's said that there's nothing a Blighter couldn't find out if he tried.

### OUTLAW

A marked man in every system, an outlaw must pay for each moment of freedom with endless vigilance and constant awareness of his surroundings. One misstep and he's doomed to twenty years in a labor camp—or worse. Not all outlaws are predatory criminals: some are innocent, framed for the crimes of another; others are political exiles; a few are rebels against a corporation or government they find intolerable. Regardless of how they gained their illegal status, outlaws now exist within a shadowy world filled with crime lords and desperation.

**Core Skills (20 points):** Modern Ranged Weapons—*pistol, Security*; Street Smart—*criminal elements*.

*In the Verge:* On a strictly numerical basis, the sesheyans of Grith in the Corrivate system are the most prevalent outlaws on the Verge. Ignoring their contract with VoidCorp, the rebellious sesheyans often turn to crime to finance their stand against the return of the giant stellar corporation.

### REPORTER

There are two primary media forms supporting professional reporters: holovids and the Grid. Holovids represent the most popular means of communication; they consist of holographic images that can project virtually anywhere. The reporter simply wears a holocam and projects himself into a scene to report the news. Holocasts rarely leave the system in which they're broadcast, but popular stories are transmitted to data merchants, who carry the projection with them to other systems.

The Grid is an easier form of communication. By jacking into the Grid, a reporter gains access to all of known space—even though Grid stories are often unpolished and slanted, but they're also considered the most authentic news reports.

**Core Skills (20 points):** Knowledge—*deduce, Creativity, journalism, Administration, Investigate, interrogate*.

*In the Verge:* There are a variety of news organizations that a reporter can serve. The Galactic News Agency was the only tie to Old Space and was in the Verge to report the trials and tribulations of the area during GW2. Many Vergers consider GNA newshounds the most bothersome of reporters, since they concentrate on heartache, suffering, and catastrophe to sell news back in Old Space.

TransVerge Network (TVN) is the most independent and unbiased of the major players. TVN pretty much gives its reporters free rein in reporting their stories, allowing ratings to weed out the bad reporters from the good.

### SMUGGLER

All good smugglers maintain a cover of some kind, operating openly as free traders, working spacers, or corporate couriers. Smugglers are creatures of opportunity, awaiting the chance to haul illegal or restricted goods for more profit than regular cargo can offer. While smuggling can be quite lucrative, it has its own risks. First, the character who places his ship on the

wrong side of the law risks heavy fines, jail time, or even execution if authorities catch him. Secondly, a smuggler has no one to whom he can complain if he's shortchanged or robbed, since he can't even admit he was carrying the cargo in question.

**Core Skills (30 points):** Vehicle Operation—*space vehicle*; Business—*illicit business 2*; Deception—*bluff, bribe 2*; Interaction—*bargain, taunt*.

*In the Verge:* The best market for smuggling is the Algon system, a stretch of space currently quarantined against arms shipments by the Concord. A smart gunrunner can make millions supplying Alitar or Galvin with the latest ordnance.

### SPY

Many stellar nations and Old Space corporations are moving intelligence assets into the Verge. Espionage specialists loyal to any one of a dozen major players are now operating in the area. Spies spend their time gathering intelligence for their employers while denying enemy spies the same opportunity. Military intelligence, industrial espionage, communications security, counterintelligence, sabotage, sophisticated turning operations, electronic intelligence—the list of potential missions for a spy is virtually endless. In between high-profile missions, most spies carefully maintain several cover identities, crafting imaginary careers and backgrounds against the day that they'll need to assume a different identity.

Spying is a dangerous game. Most governments and corporations object violently to espionage efforts, and every day secret operatives are compromised and eliminated by the organization on which they're spying. Worse yet, parent agencies often disavow their most secret operatives if a mission goes bad. Spies often require extensive support teams to "handle" them in the field, providing up-to-the-minute intelligence and backup in case of failure.

**Core Skills (40 points):** Unarmed Attack—*power martial arts*; Athletics—*climb, jump 2, throw*; Stealth—*sneak*; Investigate—*interrogate*; Interaction—*seduce 2*.

*In the Verge:* VoidCorp and StarMech both employ legions of spies in an effort to protect themselves from espionage. Spies even exist in religious organizations; ironically Hatire spies are "forgiven" for using technology to achieve their goals—though others of the faith may consider them spiritually tainted.

### THIEF

A good thief can mean the difference between an easy resolution to a problem and a bloody firefight. By swiping a pass code from a nearby guard, sneaking past a watchful sentry, or recovering a much-needed antidote under dead of night, a thief can offer nonviolent solutions to problems that would otherwise require direct confrontation. These professional cat burglars might not even earn their living from their heists; covert entry is a field in which the top experts can command lucrative salaries from various corporate sponsors, working as part of an espionage team.

Other thieves make their living by preying off the weak, destitute, and the unaware. By turning around and fencing what she's stolen, a thief can earn around 30% of the item's value (modified by her business ability, if any). Naturally, a hero of this sort is a criminal.

**Core Skills (35 points):** Acrobatics—*defensive martial arts*; Stealth—*hide, sneak*; Security—*protection protocols, security devices 2*.

*In the Verge:* Corporate espionage is the place to go for big money in the Verge. Valuable personal possessions or financial documents are too hard to dispose of; a skillful thief can make



a good living by stealing confidential business plans or documents and selling them to the highest bidder.

### TECH OPS

Tech Ops run the entire gamut of hero archetypes. Doctors, scientists, pilots, computer techs, engineers—they're all valued commodities in the Verge. Employed by local governments, stellar corporations, or as freelancers, Tech Ops have a great number of choices open to them.

### CREWMAN (HELMSMAN)

The military vessels, freighters, space stations, and defense posts of the Verge demand thousands of highly trained crewmen to maintain and operate cutting-edge equipment. In naval forces, crewmen are typically enlisted personnel with ratings for particular ship systems or operations. Spacemen, petty officers, or chief petty officers are usually part of a military chain of command and assigned to a particular ship or base. However, the Integration Act allows military personnel to serve on active duty with civilian or corporate entities.

Civilian crewmen often serve as contract workers with free traders or corporate transports. They're a cut above the typical spacehand (see page 238), serving as mates or deck officers on board any ship that can meet their price. Illegal vessels, such as those used by corsairs and smugglers, also need crewmen, and a fair number of these characters serve on ships of this sort.

**Core Skills (35 points):** Vehicle Operation—*space vehicle*; System Operation—*communications, sensors, weapons 2*; Navigation—*drivespace astrogation, system astrogation*; Technical Science—*repair*.

(Crewmen who don't specialize in helm systems might have

a different array of System Operation skills and therefore don't need to take the Navigation skill. This reduces the Core Skills cost by 10 points.)

*In the Verge:* A crewman can find work in any major spaceport; some of the best places to look include Bluefall, Leen, Alaundril, and Penates.

### COMPTECH

Specialists in hardware design, installation, and repair, comptechs are vital personnel for sensor, communication, weapon, power, and engineering installations. Most comptechs possess hacking skills in addition to their technical ones. After all, they're the techs who set up system defenses against unwanted Grid intrusions; they have to know their opponents' tactics and capabilities. While comptechs do not suffer for a lack of employment opportunities with any technical facility or driveship, the elite techs often support covert operations and provide computer security for corporate or national espionage divisions.

**Core Skills (25 points):** Computer Science—*hacking, hardware 2*; Knowledge; Technical Science—*repair*.

*In the Verge:* To keep up to date on the latest technical breakthroughs, many comptechs belong to the Brotherhood of Computer Technicians, an organization that provides technical updates and job opportunities. For a mere \$2,000 a year, an independent comptech can stay on top of his profession.

### GRIDPILOT

Accessing information on the Grid can be a dangerous and tricky job. Corporate security teams and rival hackers routinely send out their own shadows to attack those who try to access proprietary information. In some instances, a sloppy attempt at information gathering can allow a trace to the gridpilot's physi-

cal location—a mistake that often proves fatal. Despite the risks, gridpilots rarely hesitate to take on the most dangerous missions; they are often caught up in the exhilaration of the Grid and the challenge of proving oneself.

Gridpilots are known by their shadows, electronic creations that allow them to seek out information in a system's Grid. For example, other hackers don't know Maya Tsulevic of Landfall City; they know Nightblade, a ruthless Grid assassin and Maya's alter ego in the Grid's electronic world. Most gridpilots are strongly independent; they vigorously defend their right to work for whomever they please or to tackle any job that intrigues them. In fact, some pilots are so fanatically independent that they've become electronic anarchists, lashing out against any kind of authority or government simply because it exists. Grid sabotage is considered the greatest security challenge facing any big company or government agency in this day and age.

**Core Skills (30 points):** Computer Science—hacking 2, hardware; Knowledge, Security—security devices; Street Smart.

*In the Verge:* Gridpilots in the Verge have formed several loose organizations for mutual defense and company. Prospective members must earn their place through shadow combat or some epic feat of Gridwork.

*Gridlock:* This secretive organization doesn't exist as far as law enforcement is concerned. The group is sworn to make life as difficult as possible for the Arrivers by locking their pilots out of the Grid with constant attacks against their shadows and the encryption of common information needed for routine activities—such as docking with a space station or standard orbital maneuvers.

*Shade:* This is a combination group for gridpilots and hackers, serving as a storehouse of information for breaking into systems. The organization stores information from previous raids at Shade's citadel on the Grid. However, the group only grants access to those who have won their trust and shown their dedication to freeing information. Many people "in the know" strongly believe that Shade is a front for Insight.

### DOCTOR

The miraculous medical technology of the 26th century can replace human physicians to some extent, but the advanced training required to use modern medcomps and surgical theaters is just as demanding as medical school. In frontier regions such as the Verge, humans live with environmental hazards such as decompression, toxic atmospheres, and intolerable temperatures—not to mention the proliferation of dangerous weapons, new alien diseases, and genetic tampering. Doctors are still some of the most highly trained and overworked professionals in a typical settlement or colony.

Most doctors begin play with a firm allegiance or contract of employment to some government or corporation. Medical school isn't cheap, and most people with this level of training have to pay for their schooling with years of service to their sponsor. Of course, there are plenty of unscrupulous professionals who renege on their obligation and disappear, seeking employment in places where no one asks questions about medical degrees or credit history.

**Core Skills (40 points):** Life Science—biology, xenology; Medical Science—medical knowledge 2, surgery 2, treatment 2, xenomedicine.

*In the Verge:* While doctors may serve a variety of organizations, governments, or hospitals, all members of this profession share one thing in common: They belong to the Galactic Medical Authority. The GMA was one of the few Terran Empire structures to survive the upheaval of GW1 and the long, bitter

isolation of GW2. The Authority's Verge sector office, located at Sunfall on Leen, provides testing and certification for doctors throughout Verge systems. However, several systems—Lucullus, for example—ignore GMA certification.

### ENGINEER

Every good starship on the Verge has an equally accomplished engineer who makes certain that the vessel remains operational. Engineers aboard starships aren't the only engineers in the Verge, however. Every space station, industrial facility, defense installation, or power plant requires engineers to maintain and monitor the equipment and machinery involved. By using the Technical Science—technical knowledge skill and designating a particular specialty, a hero can specialize in structural engineering, mechanical engineering, power system engineering, or any other technological field within reason.

**Core Skills (25 points):** Knowledge—computer operation; System Operation—engineering; Technical Science—juryrig 2, repair 2, technical knowledge.

*In the Verge:* While many engineers are military specialists or corporate employees, thousands of these professionals make a marginal living serving in the battered free-trader fleets of the region. It's a dirty, low-paying job, but outstanding credentials and character references aren't part of the application process.

### INDEPENDENT PILOT

Legendary for their exploits of romance, gambling, and (naturally) flying, independent pilots are throwbacks to an earlier day. Independent pilots are tough and alert. Often, they are skilled barterers, always looking for their next paycheck. Independent pilots charter their vessels to any merchant, smuggler, or fugitive who can meet their price. They often operate on the fringe of the law, maintaining contacts with clients both legal and illegal.

**Core Skills (35 points):** Modern Ranged Weapons—pistol; Vehicle Operation—air vehicle, space vehicle 2; Navigation—drivespace astrogation, system astrogation; Interaction—bargain.

*In the Verge:* The Verge might be one of the best spots in the galaxy for an independent pilot to make a living. With the near-total absence of central authority, ship owners can pick the registration and operating base of their choice.

### MEDTECH

Doctors aren't generally found on the battlefield. They're normally hidden away on some hospital ship or medical base, waiting for wounded upon which to operate. Medtechs, on the other hand, are ground-based medical personnel whose job it is to patch up the wounded so that they can reach the doctors. A good medtech has to know a variety of combat and survival skills in order to help those people who are under her care; combat rescues and covert operations are her forte. Medtechs are a common component of most military units sent into hostile territory, but not all medtechs belong to the military. Many medtechs serve on survey expeditions, corporate security teams, science posts, and other high-risk jobs.

**Core Skills (35 points):** Movement—swim; Modern Ranged Weapons—pistol; Knowledge—first aid 2, language (specific); Medical Science—treatment 2, xenomedicine.

*In the Verge:* Medtechs in the Concord Survey Service are currently posted throughout the Verge, working for aid stations and liaison missions with local governments. Their mission is to bring medical care and up-to-date technology to colonists without access to first-world care facilities.



### SCHOLAR

Planetary universities and government think tanks are the best places to find scholars. Their extensive knowledge and ability to offer expert insight on a broad range of esoteric topics make them valuable resources for any adventuring band—though most scholars avoid conflict, looking for opportunities to use science and learning to solve problems. While some heroes place their lives on the line for money or for the opportunity to test their skills, scholars don't usually think that way; when a scholar places herself in harm's way, it's because she's after a discovery or revelation in one of her chosen fields.

**Core Skills (30 points):** Life Science—*biology*; Physical Science—*planetology*; Technical Science—*invention*; Awareness—*perception, intuition*.

*In the Verge:* The Aegis Academy on Bluefall boasts some of the most esteemed scholars in the Verge. Dr. William Withby grew up in the Verge and has spent his life studying the strange relics and artifacts found within its confines. Dr. Sharla Merideth is well known for her knowledge of fraal customs, history, and language.

### SCIENTIST

Scientists fall into much the same mold as scholars, but they're often engaged in cutting-edge research, experimentation, and development. Governments, corporations, and universities all compete to attract the best and brightest scientists to their employment, offering research grants, the opportunity for publication, and lucrative salaries. Some scientists are laboratory experts, working in theoretical research, but many heroes take to the field, collecting data through observation and experimentation in a variety of real-world settings.

**Core Skills (35 points):** Knowledge—*deduce*; Physical Sci-

ence—*astronomy 2, chemistry 2, physics 3*; System Operation—*communications, sensors*.

**Note:** This skill selection reflects a field physicist. Other science packages could include a biologist (substitute Life Science—*biology* and *zoology* for Physical Science—*physics* and *chemistry*), a roboticist (take Technical Science—*repair* and *technical knowledge (robotics)* for the science skills), or any other combination of Science and Knowledge skills that seems appropriate. Secondary skills often include Computer Science, Navigation, Administration, and Culture.

*In the Verge:* The Concord Navy and the Concord Survey Service both include large communities of science officers. These staff officers aren't eligible for command, but their skills and knowledge make them indispensable to any ship or station.

### MINDWALKERS

Psionics are an accepted part of the STAR\*DRIVE universe. Every stellar nation fields Mindwalker operatives and agents in its police force and intelligence organizations; Mindwalkers are simply too valuable to ignore. A number of Mindwalkers conceal the extent of their talents by adopting another career as a cover. For example, a biokineticist might portray himself as a doctor, while a biowarrior might work as a soldier.

Some stellar nations, such as VoidCorp, go to great lengths to control Mindwalkers. They set up Mindwalker academies where students are instructed in matters of corporate responsibility as it relates to their special abilities. Mindwalkers within VoidCorp flush out traitors, expose lackluster employees, and interrogate captured spies. At the other extreme is the Hatire Community, which encourages the development of psionics. There, Mindwalkers are free of government interference; they can follow any path of learning that they desire.

### BIOKINETICIST

Known far and wide as psionic healers, biokineticists are often sought out by those who distrust modern medical technology. More than any other Mindwalker, a biokineticist feels a calling to ameliorate suffering and pain wherever he finds it. Quite naturally, biokineticists are often loners who feel constrained by the narrow, scientific views of the medical community. The same impulse to help others in pain often drives biokineticists to become champions of the poor and the weak, using faith and perseverance to cure the illnesses of society just as they cure the illnesses of the body.

**Core Skills (35 points):** Biokinesis—*heal 3, morph, transfer damage 2, rejuvenate*; Knowledge—*first aid*.

*In the Verge:* A sect of the Hatire faith known as the Chorus believes that only faith in oneself heals injuries. The Chorus views biokineticists as masters of the Hatire faith, adepts who have perfected the ability to heal themselves and others without using technology. The largest Chorus settlement in the Verge exists in Greenvale on the planet Grith.

### BIOWARRIOR

The biowarrior believes that the ultimate test of a warrior's heart is the battle she must fight armed with nothing but the weapons given her by Nature. Thus, technology is a crutch, a distraction from the true martial path. Trained to fight with whatever weapons are at hand, the biowarrior often works as a bodyguard, mercenary, or corporate security agent; her ability to manipulate psionic energy allows her to escape the notice of weapon scanners and mundane security devices.

**Core Skills (35 points):** Melee Weapons—*bludgeon 2,*

Biokinesis—bioweapon 2, control metabolism, rejuvenate; Leadership.

*In the Verge:* The Regent Guard, an elite unit of the Aegis Defense Force, includes dozens of skilled biowarriors among its ranks. Skilled in all forms of unarmed, melee, and mental combat, the Regent Guard is one of the toughest and most loyal units found in the Verge. The leader of the Guard is the renowned mechanus martial artist, Talok Mirkwen.

### ESPION

Perhaps the most prized of Mindwalkers, ESPions are seers who turn their talents to the investigation of crime or the stealing of secrets. Many powerful movers and shakers in the Verge retain the services of at least one ESPion to advise them in personnel matters and screen potential employees or operatives. Unscrupulous ESPions sell their services to various criminal organizations, earning staggering salaries in exchange for their unique talents.

**Core Skills (35 points):** ESP—battle mind, mind reading 3, psychometry 2, clairvoyance 2; Knowledge—deduce.

*In the Verge:* During the long years in which Lucullus was a prison system, the Solars relied on a cadre of ESPion guards to keep the population under control. When the inmates of Penates revolted, Solar Mindwalkers were killed in a number of horrible ways. To this day, Mindwalkers must conceal their abilities in the Lucullus system or risk a public lynching.

### MYSTIC

Feared and revered by the general populace, mystics use their mindwalking abilities to delve into the distant past and the uncertain future. Their specialty is clairsentience, the science of divination and prediction through psionic talents. Most mystics prefer a contemplative lifestyle, adopting the quiet resolve and nonmaterialism of a religious community in order to attune themselves to their inner voice. Some political leaders and corporate executives seek out the best mystics in order to gain their powers of precognition, but many others view mystics as unreliable and unstable seers whose visions may be nothing more than a sophisticated charade. After all, only the mystic herself knows whether or not she speaks the truth.

**Core Skills (25 points):** ESP—clairvoyance, clairaudience, precognition 2, postcognition 2.

*In the Verge:* Mystics who follow the Cosimir (the deity of the Hatire faith) have gathered a small following, known as the Seers of Torai, at a lonely temple complex in the desert of Alaundril. Polfoal Liquurl, a fraal, serves as the Seers' religious leader. The Seers of Torai have documented a number of startling predictions over the last 10 years, but they refuse to aid those bearing technological implants and other poisons.

### TELEKINETICIST

Like the biowarrior, the telekineticist's destructive powers often leads her to a career as a bodyguard, mercenary, or operative of some kind. Equipped with potent abilities rivaling the fire-power of a well-armed Marine, a telekineticist's weapons elude detection by mundane examination. Other Mindwalkers tend to regard telekineticists (TKs for short) as crude bruisers, but they'll still move aside when one comes by on the street.

**Core Skills (35 points):** Modern Ranged Weapons—pistol; Telekinesis—kinetic shield 2, levitation, photokinetics, psychokinetics, pyrokinetics 2.

*In the Verge:* Serving in the ultra-secure Division 8 of the Concord Executive Authority, several extremely powerful TKs have appeared at the *Lighthouse* with an unknown agenda.

These Concord Mindwalkers are quietly seeking out information regarding the mysterious ancient ruins on Atlas.

### PSIGUARD

Like the other militant Mindwalkers, psiguards normally find employment in the personal security forces of political leaders, corporate executives, and ambassadors—or they hire out as special operatives. Their special talents augment the abilities of existing security, allowing a force to react both offensively and defensively to a wide variety of threats. Unlike the biowarrior, psiguards tend toward materialism and pragmatism; they use their talent as a tool to get ahead in the world, not as an end in and of itself.

**Core Skills (40 points):** Modern Ranged Weapons—pistol; Security—protection protocols 2; Telekinesis—electrokinetics 2, levitation, photokinetics 2; Interaction—charm; Knowledge—computer operation.

*In the Verge:* The most noted psiguards are the Guards Templar of the Orlamu Theocracy. While not all of the Guards are actually psi-capable, a great number of them are skilled Mindwalkers. A small detachment of Orlamu Guards Templar can be found at the shrine aboard the *Lighthouse*.

### TELEPATH

A small group of telepaths can function as an entire battery of security cameras and listening devices. The information they relay is instantaneous, secure from electronic espionage, and difficult to jam. Telepaths are especially useful in covert operations with special forces, acting as a living command link that provides a strike commander with an amazing level of intelligence and flexibility. Most telepaths find it useful to pick up a number of Free Agent skills to round out their covert surveillance and coordination capabilities.

**Core Skills (30 points):** ESP—mind reading; Telepathy—contact 2, illusion, suggest 2.

*In the Verge:* Telepaths of all training levels are currently in demand by several major Verge powers that seek to level the playing field against the stellar nations. In particular, the Regency of Bluefall is hiring telepaths in order to facilitate communication with the mysterious Deepfallen of their own world, while guarding against interference from enemy powers.

### MIND KNIGHT

Considered by some as the most dangerous and insidious of Mindwalkers, mind knights specialize in the mysterious art of telepathic combat. Other Mindwalkers stand above the general masses of humanity through their talent, discipline, and force of will; mind knights hone these skills and stand above all other Mindwalkers. Those who fear psionic attack or espionage constantly search out mind knights to counter the efforts of enemy psionicists, making sure that they are the only ones who can successfully exploit psionics in business, intelligence, or warfare. As mental warriors, mind knights often serve as bodyguards, advisors, and agents to anyone who can meet their price and standards.

**Core Skills (35 points):** Telekinesis—psychokinetics; Telepathy—contact 2, mind blast 2, mind shield 2.

*In the Verge:* The Mindanaoth Academy, a school of the Hatire settlement on Grith, is the finest facility for training mind knights in the Verge. Academy graduates have three concentric circles tattooed on their left palm as a symbol of their profession and loyalties. Some people who have witnessed Mindanaoth knights using their powers report a strange nimbus of light radiating from the palm tattoos.

## ALLEGIANCE & EMPLOYMENT

One of the biggest decisions you'll make for your new STAR\*DRIVE hero is whether or not she's employed, enlisted, or commissioned in a larger organization. There are virtually thousands of potential employers. Stellar nation governments, system governments, planetary governments, even municipal governments (in some cases) maintain administrative agencies, intelligence organizations, police forces, investigative agencies, and military forces. In addition, there are millions of corporations, companies, and other private enterprises for which a hero might choose to work.

Why tie yourself down? Well, working or serving in some organization provides your hero with a steady salary (usually), a pool of resources to draw from, and an occupation that could explain her mission in the adventure. Government investigators, military personnel, and corporate troubleshooters often find themselves in the middle of adventures and mysteries, working to resolve a particular situation to the satisfaction of the organization or company they serve.

Of course, there's a downside to accepting employment with a government or major corporation: An employed hero can not come or go as she pleases. In exchange for her salary, she's expected to work as directed by her superiors. Military and civilian employers don't view unexplained absences and ignored orders in a good light. Sometimes, they dock a recalcitrant hero's pay, file official reprimands, or even fire the hero in question. In some organizations (most military forces, for instance) dereliction of duty or desertion are court-martial offenses, carrying lengthy prison terms or death penalties!

In general, groups to which heroes owe allegiance fall into one of four categories: corporate, government service, government agency, or military. Heroes don't begin play as corporate presidents or military commanders. They're more likely to start in the middle ranks, reflecting the fact that these heroes are a cut above normal but still too young to have climbed very high on the organizational chart.

Not all organizations use the same terminology or same rank structure. In fact, just about every company or government has its own distinct progression and nomenclature. Table S14, below, is provided simply as a rough guideline.

Typically, there are three entry levels into a corporate or government body. Heroes without any skills except a desire or compulsion to work begin at the bottom end of the untrained ranks. Heroes who bring skilled technical knowledge to a job, or who've acquired such knowledge after coming on board as a green recruit, begin at the bottom end of the skilled ranks (a fair number of heroes might meet this qualification). Finally, highly educated go-getters whose primary skills revolve around organizing and managing other people occasionally join organizations as executive trainees. It's more common for skilled technicians and proven agents to reach this level through years of service and a little bit of internal politicking.

### CORPORATE EMPLOYMENT

Rising through the corporate ranks reflects quite an accomplishment in certain circles. Not only does climbing the corporate ladder increase a hero's authority in the corporation, it also increases the amount of money he earns. For some, material wealth is the manner by which to judge an individual.

Heroes of any profession or career—even soldiers—can serve a corporation. The advantages for serving a corporation are primarily financial. While salaries are low at the bottom rungs, corporations tend to recognize outstanding performers, raising them to an appropriate level in the organization. In addition, corporate employees sometimes have access to corporate assets for special missions and can earn bonuses for outstanding work accomplishments.

The qualifications for advancement through corporate ranks vary widely. VoidCorp allows its employees to advance through removal of their superiors, while StarMech promotes its employees based on service. Each corporation has its own incentive program to award employees for achieving set goals.

### CORPORATE DIVISIONS

Large corporations consist of a variety of different divisions, each of which has its own pecking order. Thus, a corporation might have more than a dozen presidents, each of whom answers to the CEO about matters concerning his division. Departments found in almost every corporation include:

*Diplomatic Corps:* Employees of this department concern themselves with large-scale business deals, discussions with

**TABLE S15: CORPORATE AND GOVERNMENT STATUS**

UNTRAINED RANKS			
<b>Corporate</b>	<b>Government Service</b>	<b>Government Agency</b>	<b>Status*</b>
Trainee	Intern	Recruit	0-3
Employee	Employee	Agent Trainee	2-4
SKILLED RANKS			
<b>Corporate</b>	<b>Government Service</b>	<b>Government Agency</b>	<b>Status*</b>
Assistant Technician	Specialist	Agent	3-5
Technician	Senior Specialist	Field Agent	4-7
Assistant Manager	Supervisor	Special Agent	6-9
Manager	Regional Supervisor	Department Head	8-11
EXECUTIVE RANKS			
<b>Corporate</b>	<b>Government Service</b>	<b>Government Agency</b>	<b>Status*</b>
Assistant Director	Deputy Undersecretary	Division Chief	9-13
Director	Undersecretary	Deputy Director	11-15
Vice President	Assistant Secretary	Assistant Director	13-17
President	Secretary	Director	15-20

\*See "Social Status" in Chapter 7: Attributes in the *Gamemaster Guide*.

foreign governments and colonies, acquisitions of smaller companies, and other matters that require lengthy negotiations. Many of the careers from the Diplomat profession are applicable to this department.

**Finance:** The most powerful force in the universe is still the Concord dollar. Finance employees account for every dollar and regulate the budgets for every department. Bureaucrats, investigators, comptechs, and hackers all work in this department.

**Manufacturing:** The bottom line for any corporation is product. By far the largest department in most corporate entities, the Manufacturing department operates the industrial facilities needed to create the corporation's commodity of choice.

**Medical:** A good corporation is only as strong as its weakest member, so many corporations provide medical benefits to their employees through this division. Doctors, medtechs, psychologists, and other health professionals work in this division.

**Personnel:** This department always handles the hiring and firing of employees. Mindwalkers, investigators, and other information-gatherers verify the integrity of new employees.

**Public Relations:** Finding the right hook for a holocaust, advertising the latest product or service, or performing damage control from the latest internal security leak are all jobs of the PR department. Reporters, entertainers, stellar nobles, and other people with good interaction skills can work in Public Relations.

**Research & Development:** Creating new products, researching new production techniques, and other creative endeavors are left to the hands of R&D. The specific tasks vary by corporation, of course, but scientists, scholars, engineers, and people with similar careers usually work in this department.

**Security:** Protecting factories from sabotage, terrorist attack, espionage, or other infiltration is the job of the Security division. Most Combat Specs are assigned to this division. However, comptechs, investigators, and other people who can hamper transmission of valuable corporate data often find themselves working for the Security division.

**Systems:** Computers and other electronic devices weave their way through a corporate structure like an intricate web, allowing access where it is most needed but providing only what is required for an employee's assigned duties. Engineers, comptechs, and similar workers can be assigned to this division.

**Trade:** Transportation of goods, contract fulfillment, warehousing, and similar concerns are handled here. Corporate merchants and free traders are the most common employees of Trade departments.

## GOVERNMENT EMPLOYMENT

Just like a corporate career, working for a stellar nation or world government provides resources that many heroes would not have access to on their own. Ease in dealing with other government agencies, military transport, and access to government information are just a few of the benefits available to a hero who chooses to work for a government. Of course, such benefits are not available all at once (and certainly not whenever the hero thinks he needs them).

Government employment is divided into two classes: government (or civil) service and agency service. In general, government service is employment in a major department of the government, while agency service reflects a more specialized career in an enforcement division of a governmental branch. Intelligence, police, and surveillance organizations are typical agencies, while foreign service, civilian support for defense, and internal administration represent government service.

Most government employees advance up the ranks of their

bureau or agency based on their personal accomplishments, official patrons, and the amount of time they've spent in their current grade. The highest-ranking positions are elected offices or appointed positions; they are generally beyond the scope of the typical STAR\*DRIVE campaign (although election to an office might be a nice—or cruel—way to retire a hero).

## MILITARY SERVICE

Virtually any hero profession or career can describe a character who serves in a military organization. A military enlistment or commission carries with it a much more serious service obligation than simply signing on with a corporation or taking a government job. Enlisted men (or conscripts) are typically required to serve two to four years after signing on. Military authorities frown upon anyone who leaves (deserts) before his tour of duty expires. Officers sometimes receive lifelong commissions, but most officers serve only a few years on active duty before retiring or resigning to follow other vocations.

Most nations divide their military establishment into two or more departments. Naval forces consist of spacefaring fleets manned by naval personnel. Military forces include aerospace

TABLE S16: ENLISTED RANKS

JUNIOR ENLISTED PERSONNEL		
Military	Naval	Status*
Recruit	Spaceman Recruit	0-2
Private	Spaceman Apprentice	1-3
Private 1st Class	Spaceman	2-3
SERGEANTS AND PETTY OFFICERS		
Military	Naval	Status*
Corporal	Petty Officer 3rd Class	3-4
Sergeant	Petty Officer 2nd Class	4-6
Staff Sergeant	Petty Officer 1st Class	5-7
SENIOR ENLISTED PERSONNEL		
Military	Naval	Status*
First Sergeant	Chief Petty Officer	6-8
Master Sergeant	Senior Chief Petty Officer	7-9
Sergeant-Major	Master Chief Petty Officer	8-10

TABLE S17: OFFICER RANKS

JUNIOR OFFICERS		
Military	Naval	Status*
2nd Lieutenant	Ensign	8-10
1st Lieutenant	Lieutenant j.g. (junior grade)	9-11
Captain	Lieutenant	10-12
FIELD OFFICERS		
Military	Naval	Status*
Major	Lieutenant Commander	11-13
Lieutenant Colonel	Commander	12-14
Colonel	Captain	13-15
FLAG OFFICERS		
Military	Naval	Status*
Brigadier General	Commodore	14-16
Major General	Rear Admiral	15-17
Lieutenant General	Vice Admiral	16-18
General	Admiral	17-19

\*See "Social Status" in Chapter 7: *Attributes in the Game-master Guide*.

and ground forces used for planetary attack and defense. Note that the distinction between military and naval organizations rests upon whether a force is primarily space-oriented or planet-oriented.

Heroes in military organizations begin at the bottom of their respective ladders; in other words, most enlisted heroes start out as recruits, and officers begin as second lieutenants or ensigns. Depending on the force in question, advanced enlistment options for technical experts (for example, assigning a medtech corporal rank to reflect his training and experience) may or may not be available. The equivalent in officer ranks is the staff officer—a chaplain, doctor, engineer, science officer, military lawyer, or similar specialist who's assigned a beginning rank of captain or lieutenant due to his extensive premilitary education. Note that the naval rank of "captain" does not always denote ship command; many smaller vessels are commanded by lieutenants and lieutenant commanders.

Your Gamemaster may allow you to begin your military hero as a veteran with a promotion or two under her belt. This is primarily a roleplaying decision—although the Gamemaster might also choose to assign your hero a starting level higher than 1 to reflect your character's experience. Command of driveships of any size is rarely given to an officer of lower than lieutenant commander rank (a level 3 to level 5 in game terms), although this isn't always true.

The advantages of working for the military include access to advanced (and sometimes experimental) weapons, free food and shelter while in an area containing a base, the respect of others, and access to military spacecraft. In return, the hero is subject to the orders of her superiors, recognized as an enemy of any state that currently disagrees with her government, and required to report for duty as the organization demands.

Numerically, junior enlisted personnel make up the bulk of a ship or base's manning. Generally, one NCO (noncommissioned officer) exists for every two to five privates or spacemen, and one senior NCO exists for every two to five NCOs. Roughly one in ten personnel are officers, with one field-grade officer for every three to five junior officers. Most military units or bases have only one commanding officer—although political officers or staff officers may wield unusual power in certain national organizations and situations.

### GETTING OUT

Heroes don't have to live forever with their initial choices of allegiance or employment. People change jobs all the time. In most corporate or government service jobs, the hero can quit in any fashion he chooses; telling off the boss, submitting a letter of resignation, or not showing up for work for several months are just a few choices. The company or government then takes a "separated" employee off the payroll. Naturally, a hero may lose other benefits or perks associated with the position—such as a retirement plan, a company car, access to special equipment or resources, and so on.

Some corporate entities are much harder to leave than others. For example, VoidCorp's employment contract is for life; Employees do not have the option to terminate the agreement (although VoidCorp retains the right to cancel an Employee's contract at any time). In other cases, characters with highly desirable skills or access to sensitive information may find that their employers are very reluctant to let them go.

Most government agencies won't hold on to a person who wants out, but there are exceptions—especially in intelligence organizations. A hero who's worked on the inside for years sim-

ply knows too much to walk out and vanish. Even if the person in question is perfectly reliable and doesn't have any sinister intentions, an agency can't risk the possibility that their enemies or rivals will pick up the individual in order to wring secrets from him. Such an agency might let a hero retire, only to place him under surveillance for the rest of his life. Alternatively, they may have ways to "sanitize" a retiring hero before letting him out into the open.

Military enlistments normally run for several years at a time. When a military character's time is up, she can choose to re-up for another tour, or she can walk away free and clear. If a hero can't wait until her enlistment expires, she can always seek a discharge. However, dishonorable discharges or bad conduct discharges tend to follow a person around for the rest of her life. Hardship or medical discharges are less common, but don't carry any stigma with them.

### SKILLS

After a player chooses his hero's species, profession, career, and nation or system of origin, he should pick the hero's skills. The careers described in the previous section of this appendix list a Core Skills package describing the basic skills required for that package and the cost to purchase that package. However, these Core Skills are completely optional. Feel free to alter, exchange, or disregard the skills as you wish (subject, of course, to your Gamemaster's approval) when you create your hero. Even if you choose the Core Skills package, you'll probably have a number of unallocated skill points with which to customize your hero's skills to your taste—especially if your hero has an unusually high Intelligence score.

Don't overlook the bonus Knowledge skills that belong to all heroes in the STAR\*DRIVE universe—see the "Culture, Language, and Knowledge" sidebar on page 233.

### GAME OPTIONS

All kinds of heroes exist within the STAR\*DRIVE universe. The optional chapters of the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook*—detailing mutants, psionics, and cybertech—are all valid for a STAR\*DRIVE hero. Since each of these systems presents the potential for unusually powerful or specialized heroes, make sure you check with your Gamemaster before you create a hero featuring one of these game options. Heroes who actually combine two or more of the optional systems (mutant cyberneticists, cybernetic Mindwalkers, or mindwalking mutants) should be quite unusual, and the Gamemaster is free to approve or disapprove such characters on a case-by-case basis.

### MUTANTS

Minor genetic drift and engineering is quite common among some stellar nations—such as the Thuldan Empire. By the end of the Fusion Age, scientists had completely mapped the human genome. Since then, some scientists have undertaken extremely selective genetic engineering, and genetic technology has allowed for the creation of hundreds of distinct varieties of mutants over the last 150 years. In addition to the ongoing efforts to perfect the human form, the exploration of the galactic arm has increased human exposure to strange new environments and phenomena—markedly increasing the rate of unusual natural mutations. The definition of what we call "human" expands every day.

*Engineered communities:* These communities, also known

as mutant breeds, are subspecies designed for a particular environment or task. One of the most notable is the Thuldian warlion, an altered human designed for strength, speed, and durability in battle. Other nations have engineered humans for survival in aquatic environments, high gravity, or (one of the more distasteful examples) lifelong service as mindless drudges.

*Engineered individuals:* These mutants are much rarer than their counterparts who belong to a specific breed. They're created for specific purposes, such as a career in espionage or covert action. In some cases, however, engineered individuals serve as test cases for a new breed that never fully develops due to a combination of unfavorable traits, lack of additional funding or resources, or some other reason. Thrown aside after extensive evaluation and research, these flawed examples are left to make their way in life as best they can.

*Natural communities:* These breeds slowly rise throughout human space as the people of various planets and settlements change to fit their home environments. Only the most unusual planetary environments exert a mutagenic effect on human populations, however.

*Natural individuals:* These mutants represent isolated instances of the same effects that naturally create new mutant strains. Altered before birth by the environment in some unique manner, the randomly occurring mutant individual is the rarest of all mutants.

The rights, privileges, and social acceptance of mutants vary widely from culture to culture. The Thuldans experiment extensively with genetics, seeking to accelerate human evolution. The Hatires, on the other hand, view any mutation as a blasphemy in the eyes of the Cosimir. In most systems, mutants are greeted with a fair amount of fear and persecution, since many normals still recall the gene-altered killers and genetic refuse spawned by careless research in the darkest days of the Second Galactic War. At best, these war-bred mutants were born assassins and agents with frightening powers above and beyond those of humankind; at worst, they became violent criminals and brigands who preyed on the urban populations of their parent worlds.

## PSIONICS

Every stellar nation fields Mindwalker agents and operatives, relying extensively on psionic surveillance, security, and espionage assets. Mindwalkers are just too useful and dangerous to ignore. Corporate psionicists fill many of the same roles, providing executives with industrial intelligence and performance predictions that no mundane computer or evaluation process could possibly rival. A psionic gift is a punched ticket to wealth, prestige, and authority in the right hands.

On the downside, psionics are *so* valuable that some organizations view them as material assets, prized possessions that need constant watching. By Orlamu law, for instance, any psionic talent must serve the Theocracy. They're barred from emigrating to other states, working in the private sector, or even from ignoring their gift and making a life in another field. As a child, an Orlamu psionic must enroll in a temple academy to develop his talents for the improvement of Orlamus everywhere. Of course, more than a few Mindwalkers of Orlamu descent have managed to conceal their abilities and avoid the Theocracy's attention, but they live in fear of the day when the Theocracy's agents shows up on their doorstep. VoidCorp has a similar but more draconian policy: All employees must undergo screening for psionic talent. Those talents detected by the screening must then undergo a rigorous training program; they can never leave of their own will.

## THE THULDAN WARLION

Bred as the perfect soldier, Warlions were an elite corps of engineered mutants who served as assault troops and commandos during GW2. A number still serve in the Thuldian military, but others have mustered-out to build their own lives. Warlions generally have the following mutations: Redundant Vital Organs, Enhanced Strength, and Night Vision. The strain isn't perfect (few mutants are), and a Warlion is marked by his muzzlelike leonine features (Minor Physical Change drawback) and his lack of cunning (Slight reduced Ability Score, Intelligence).

Even in societies that don't compel psionic talents to serve the government, many Mindwalkers require very expensive education to bring out their latent talents. In order to pay off their debts or patrons, they must serve in private industry, military organizations, or civil service. Eventually they'll complete their obligation and gain the freedom to seek employment where they desire, but this might take years.

Most legal systems have incorporated psionic crimes and procedures since the dawn of the Gravity Age. Reading someone's mind is considered an invasion of privacy by most societies, and is reserved as a police power in many states. In addition, the Concord considers the use of psionic powers to compel another person to act against his will as a felony. Like any law, these dictates are conveniently overlooked by particularly powerful or ruthless people.

## CYBERTECH

While mutants and Mindwalkers are characters who clearly surpass the human norm in some manner, cybernetic heroes are simply people who avail themselves of a particular technology. They're not viewed as freaks. A cybernetic limb might operate at a stronger level than a human limb, but it's quantifiable and understandable to the average person. Medical prostheses and artificial organs prolong too many lives for most people to entertain a real hatred or suspicion of cybertech. The exception, of course, is the Hatire Community. In their eyes, cybertech is the instrument of damnation, a twisted mockery of humanity's natural state.

While cybertechnology generally suffers from little of the discrimination that surrounds mutations or psionic powers, most people have a healthy respect for its potential. Everyone knows that heavily cybered characters are dangerous and that too much cybertech is a weapon that cuts both ways. Cybertech is also expensive enough to be out of reach of the average person, which means that it often ends up in the hands of criminals, corporate security types, secret government agencies, and other unscrupulous sorts. If someone's carrying a lot of cyberware, it's a good sign that they might entertain violent intentions, so average people tend to give them a wide berth.

In some organizations or settings, cybernetic characters need to register with local police and possibly deactivate dangerous systems such as battle claws or subdermal weapons. Various stellar nations and Verge systems have banned specific cybernetic systems or implants. For example, exoskeletons and body plating are illegal in the Solar Union, as they're considered military hardware. Heroes with this kind of cyberware must obtain special permits to enter the Solar Union legally. The Hatires, naturally, ban almost all forms of cybertech.

## EQUIPMENT

Your Gamemaster has three basic options for equipping a new hero in the Verge. First, she can just assign your hero the equipment that she deems appropriate to the character concept. Clearly, an expert gridpilot probably owns a top-notch gridcaster and a wide array of computer programs. Secondly, the Gamemaster might allow you to choose any equipment you deem reasonable for your character and then review your decisions. Finally, the Gamemaster may assign your hero the normal starting funds for a character of his profession and career, allowing you to purchase equipment within the restrictions of cost and availability. Ask your Gamemaster which option she'd like you to use when you create a new hero for the STAR\*DRIVE setting.

## PROGRESS LEVEL

In general, any item or device appearing at Progress Level 6 is available anywhere in the Verge. Isolated for almost a century, many Verge worlds and heroes native to the area must make do with dated technologies. Weapons and devices of the Gravity Age (PL 7) are available in the more cosmopolitan Verge systems (Tendril and Aegis). Arriver heroes often have access to Gravity Age equipment, since they're assumed to have equipped themselves before they left their home nations to travel to the Verge.

In addition, devices or weapons of Progress Level 8 are not available. Make sure you check with your Gamemaster before you choose PL 8 equipment for your new hero; such items should be the exception, not the rule, in the lawless regions of the Verge!

## AVAILABILITY

Heroes who begin play without any kind of employment or allegiance to a corporation, government, or military service are limited in their access to top-of-the-line hardware. In general, independent heroes and heroes serving in nonmilitary corporate divisions, government branches, or agencies can only choose items of Common or Controlled availability (see *Chapter 9: Goods & Services* in the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook* for more details). Heroes with military backgrounds, paramilitary government backgrounds, serious organized crime ties, and corporate security links may acquire equipment of Military availability. Finally, items or weapons of Restricted availability are only open to active-duty military personnel during deployment to hazardous areas.

There are a couple of notable exceptions to this guideline. Austrin-Ontis and Rigunmor heroes tend to have access to weapon markets that just aren't legal in other nations. Vergers who call the Algemron or Lucullus system home have access to flourishing black markets and criminal gunrunners bent on arming every sentient in the system. If your hero comes from this kind of background, your Gamemaster may allow him to begin play with hardware that most new heroes couldn't dream of possessing.

## SHIPS

Depending on the kind of campaign your Gamemaster wants to run, it may be absolutely essential for your heroes to own and operate their own ship. This is a significant decision for the Gamemaster; it influences the types of adventures she can cre-

ate, the options available to the heroes in the course of an adventure, and the amount of detail necessary to create a living, breathing game universe. While several of the careers listed in the *Player's Handbook* list a ship as signature equipment, you should check with the Gamemaster before you assume that your hero has a ship of his own.

## DRIVESHIPS AND SYSTEMSHIPS

Ships in the Gravity Age come in two basic varieties: driveships and systemships. Driveships possess stardrives; they're capable of independent interstellar travel. A hero with a driveship at his command can go anywhere he wants, voyaging from star to star at a whim. It's an enormously powerful plot device that offers a Gamemaster hundreds of potential stories, but it also creates a number of administrative headaches and design challenges for the campaign.

Systemships are spacecraft that lack a stardrive, and are thus confined to operations within a single star system. However, systemships routinely travel to neighboring systems by hitching a ride on larger driveships. The mighty fortress ships that occasionally visit the Verge provide this service for a nominal fee; smaller driveships—such as the *Lighthouse*, commercial drivefreighters, or drivehaulers—also carry systemships from star to star. A systemship doesn't offer the same degree of freedom provided by a driveship, but a star system is a vast place, and heroes shouldn't underestimate the ability to travel from planet to planet in a matter of hours or days.

## YOUR FIRST SHIP

There are many ways that your hero might obtain a systemship or driveship. If most of the heroes in the group are military personnel, they might be assigned as officers and crew to a military vessel (major warships are probably a little out of reach for beginning heroes). Free traders, corsairs, explorers, independent pilots, and corporate merchants often begin play with a ship of their own and a debt to go along with it. Major corporations or governments might assign beginning heroes to specific vessels, or they might place vessels at the heroes' disposal for various missions. Heroes working for an underworld organization might likewise gain the use of a stolen ship for brief periods of time.

There are only three ways to own a ship legally. The first is to purchase a new ship, an expensive proposition that most heroes can't do on their own. The second method is to buy a used ship. This is cheaper than buying a new vessel, but heroes don't have any control over the legality or quality of the transaction; they might be buying a stolen vessel or a ship on the verge of breaking down. Finally, heroes might have an opportunity to salvage a derelict vessel. Salvage is free, but often requires extensive work to recondition and refit the derelict.

**Purchasing a New Ship:** By and large, the best way to own a new ship is to buy it outright. You don't have to worry about dealing with banking officials and signing your rights away. Having that much cash available likewise gives you a good bargaining position when it comes down to purchasing the various components of the ship. Unfortunately, few heroes are ever going to accumulate the millions of Concord dollars necessary to purchase their ship. Most ship owners must deal with monthly or quarterly payments of thousands of dollars in order to keep the bank from repossessing their ship.

If a hero is unable or unwilling to obtain a loan from a financial institution, criminal organizations such as the Shadow Syndicate can make loans to their members. This is by far the

more dangerous manner of owning a starship, since underworld organizations don't operate within the boundaries of the law. The interest rates charged by such financiers is typically twice that of a bank loan—though they do make exceptions from time to time for those captains willing to do favors for them.

While the terms of purchase might vary greatly, it's reasonable to assume that a hero trying to pay off a brand-new vessel begins play with a monthly payment equal to 1% of the ship's purchase price. If she's flying a brand-new trader worth \$750,000, assume that she has a loan payment of \$7,500 per month. Most new ships are financed for 15 years, but higher or lower interest rates can either raise or lower the monthly payment (or lengthen or shorten the term of the loan, for that matter).

A leased vessel cuts this payment in half, but the hero will be required to turn the vessel in at the end of a prespecified period (3 to 5 years is fair). She's also liable for any unusual damage while the ship is in her possession.

A new ship requires upkeep and maintenance equal to 1% of its value every 12 months. In the example above, it costs about \$7,500 (or \$625 per month) to keep the trader flying all year long. Flying a ship that hasn't been properly maintained results in the accumulation of performance penalties (+1 step to all attacks due to bugs in the fire control system, +2 steps to maneuvers of a certain type, and so on) as the Gamemaster sees fit. The maintenance and upkeep fee doesn't account for crew salaries, supplies, or the expense of repairing battle damage. Maintenance and upkeep takes time, too—about 2 days per month for a brand-new ship.

Only the smallest and most common ships are available for immediate delivery. It takes a shipyard weeks or months to construct a vessel, and even the best yards are often backlogged with work. A hero who needs a ship right away might not have too many choices available when he decides to buy. If, however, he can wait a few months to place an order and let the shipyard build to his specifications, he can buy exactly what he wants.

**Buying a Used Ship:** Through a variety of reasons, used ships are always coming up for resale. Ships of the Fusion Age retain only 20–50% (d4+1, times 10%) of their listed purchase price. Used ships of the Gravity Age retain 50–80% (d4+4, times 10%) of their listed purchase price. Thus, the hero's 1% monthly payment on his ship will be lower than it would if he'd bought the ship new. For example, if the hero bought his trader used, he'd only pay between \$375,000 and \$600,000 for the ship. Therefore, he'd pay only \$3,750 to \$6,000 per month in loan payments. In addition, a used ship is typically financed over 10 years instead of the usual 15.

The downside of used ships is their maintenance and upkeep costs. These amount to 1% of a ship's purchase price (paid every 12 months) for each 10% break the hero received for buying used. Thus, if a hero bought a used trader at 60% of its listed price (\$450,000 instead of \$750,000), he would pay 4% of the ship's used purchase price every twelve months—\$18,000 in this example (about \$1,500 per month). Used ships also take d4+1 days of maintenance per month in order to stay in top working order. It's still cheaper than a new ship, but not without its own set of headaches.

The new owner might pick up the payments of the previous owner for a small fee, or he might buy a paid-off ship outright. Financing is normally a bit easier on used ships, but banks are still careful about giving out large loans. A used ship usually requires more extensive maintenance than a brand-new ship, and

the prospective buyer should check it out thoroughly before parting with his money.

A new ship "degrades" into a used ship after 2d4 years if ignored, 2d6 years with average maintenance, or 2d8 years if lovingly looked after with craftsmanship and care.

**Salvage:** Discovering a floating hulk adrift in the wastes of space is a rare occurrence, but more than one spaceman has discovered an intact space ship that he claimed as his own under the Concord's salvage laws.

The rules of salvage are pretty simple. The salvager must bring the derelict to the nearest shipyard for inspection and identification. The prospective owner must tow (or pay another person to tow) the derelict. In-system towing costs about \$1,000 per durability point of the ship. Towing prices double if the wreck journey through one starfall, and quadruple if the destination is more than one starfall distant from the wreck's location.

Once the shipyard identifies the ship's original owner (if possible), it turns the ship over to the bank (if it had an outstanding loan) or transfers it to the salvager. This salvager must pay a modest transfer fee—normally around \$5,000—for the filing of paperwork. Government and military vessels always warrant a salvage fee (see below) instead of a transfer.

If a loan remains on the vessel, banks allow the salvager to take over payments on the vessel (as long as they believe him capable of paying). If the bank doesn't want to transfer the loan to the salvager, or if the salvager isn't interested, the bank pays a 5% salvage fee (based on the fair market value of the ship). Sometimes, however, previous owners of a wreck might step in to the picture. They're allowed to reclaim their property, but only if they're willing to pay the salvager 50% of the ship's current value (or whatever percentage the salvager agrees to take).

Assuming that no one steps in to interfere with the transfer of title, the salvager can refit the ship at her own expense. Typically, a ship wrecked in combat or collision requires repairs equal to 5–30% percent (d6 × 5%) of its current value. Some shipyards or banks may loan the hero the money necessary to repair the ship, but these institutions expecting the salvager to repay them at 2% of the loan per month, over a period of 5 years. For example, a free trader fights off a pirate attack and captures the pirate's vessel. The ship was a used cutter worth \$700,000; a random roll indicates that it will cost 15% of its value (or \$105,000) to repair it. If the hero wants a loan for this sum, he'll have to pay \$2,100 per month for five years.

As a final note, it's very rare to find an abandoned ship in total working order; generally, there's a reason why someone abandoned it in the first place. Life support failures are a rare cause for ship abandonment; sudden decompression and heavy damage are much more common. Many hulls are commonly cannibalized for spare parts by pirates, leaving little more than a shell behind. Purchasing new equipment and retrofitting everything together can become an expensive proposition—but it's still generally cheaper than purchasing a new vessel.

**Illegal Vessels:** Sometimes, traders might acquire control of a ship without paying anyone for it. Either they steal the vessel from someone else, they salvage it and never report it, or they default on a loan they were supposed pay. The advantage of an illegal ship is that the owner doesn't have to give anyone money for it; the downside is that he's wanted by any law agency that takes offense at piracy, theft, or criminal fraud.

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