

THE THIRD IMPERIUM

Reft Sector



TRAVELLER

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Reft Sector

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INTRODUCTION

CONCEPTS & TERMINOLOGY

This book uses certain concepts which will be explained below. Most of these are standard throughout all **Traveller** materials published during the game's long history, and apply equally to any other **Traveller** materials.

THE OFFICIAL TRAVELLER UNIVERSE (OTU)

The **Official Traveller Universe** (OTU) was first created in the 1970s. It was gradually added to and developed through many years to become the standard setting for **Traveller** games. The body of information set in the OTU published over the years has become known as the **Traveller Canon**. However, since canon was developed by different people at different times there are inevitably a few inconsistencies and even contradictions.

This means that at times it was necessary to choose between conflicting versions of 'canon' or to eliminate concepts that conflicted with either the remainder of the setting or with common sense. Where this was done, we have tried to make any changes as subtle as possible.

However, canon is something that game designers worry about. It is a baseline used to ensure that published materials do not clash or contradict one another. Once an individual **Traveller** Referee starts running a game, the **Official Traveller Universe** becomes that Referee's **Traveller Universe**. Fans often use abbreviations like MTU (**My Traveller Universe**) and YTU (**Your Traveller Universe**) when discussing this.

What this all means is that once you get your hands on this book, the **Traveller Universe** (TU) becomes YOURS. You decide what concepts to ignore, which ones to use and which ones to replace with something that fits the setting you want to play in more closely.

There are also a few places where we have not mentioned something that can be found in another supplement covering the same area. Unless we have specifically said it is not there, we are not saying it isn't. That is up to you. If you have an old magazine that says that planet X has a moon made of cheese strings and we do not mention it, you get to decide whether you want cheese-string-moon in or out of your TU. This sourcebook is a starting point, not a straitjacket.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Martin J Dougherty has been at times an engineer, a teacher, a defence analyst and a self-defence instructor. These days he makes his living as a freelance writer specialising in military history and technology.

Martin's books include volumes on weaponry, space exploration, self-defence and military history. He has written numerous **Traveller** supplements for various publishers as well as other game materials for Mongoose.

In his spare time Martin is a fencer, martial artist and military historian, and has been known to play roleplaying games from time to time.

CHARTED SPACE

The region that has been explored by humans is referred to as Chartist Space. Within this region there are many areas that are quite densely populated and well travelled by starships. Other areas are backwaters or have never been more than cursorily mapped.

The most prevalent sentient species in Chartist Space is humans, and the most powerful human state is the Third Imperium. There are many other great and small powers plus independent worlds and political groups within the region.

Of course, there are few areas about which absolutely everything is known, and even if an area had been properly explored the data may not be publicly available or the public version may be entirely incorrect. There is still plenty to be discovered even in the settled regions of Chartist Space, and beyond the core areas many mysteries still await discovery.

DIRECTIONS IN SPACE

Directions like North or Southwest are meaningless in space even on a relatively small scale. Within a star system most objects move in orbit about the star or a planet, and movement can be defined with reference to a suitable point. Most bodies in a star system orbit in the same general plane, known as the Ecliptic. One direction at ninety degrees to the ecliptic is defined by convention as 'System North' or 'Up' and the other as 'System South' or 'Down'.

Most movement within a system is defined in terms of being towards or away from a given body, usually the main world of



the system or the star itself. The terms 'In-System' (towards the inner planets of the star system and the star itself) or 'Out-System' (away from the star) are also used. These are rather general terms but as navigation in three dimensions, whether along an orbital path or a straight line, is a complex business they serve well enough for casual conversation. Of course, starship astrogators produce rather more detailed course plots using highly advanced mathematics...

Outside the confines of a star system, some frame of reference is needed to indicate relative positions. By convention the following terms are used:

Coreward refers to the direction towards the galactic core.

Rimward is the opposite direction to Coreward, i.e. towards the galactic rim.

Spinward means in the direction in which the galaxy is rotating.

Trailing is the opposite of Spinward; away from the direction of galactic rotation.

Note: Some Imperial citizens also use the term Coreward to mean towards the Imperial heartworlds, i.e. the 'Imperial Core'. This usage is generally obvious from context. For example, it should be fairly obvious that a magazine called **Coreward Gazette** deals with matters in the Imperial central region and not the centre of the galaxy several thousand light-years away.

DISTANCES IN SPACE

Concepts like metres and even kilometres are inadequate in the face of the vast distances in space. Over relatively short distances such as in orbital space near a planet thousands or millions of kilometres are used as a measure. Larger distances in-system are measured using the Astronomical Unit, or AU. This is based on the distance of Earth's orbit from the Sun and is about 160,000,000km.

The light-second is sometimes also used, defined as the distance light travels in a vacuum in one second. This is 299,792.458km, usually rounded to 300,000km. One AU is 499 light-seconds.

Over greater distances still larger measures are needed. The light-year (defined as distance light travels in one standard Earth year) is sometimes used. It equates to 63,241 AU. More commonly the Parsec (3.26 Light-years) is used as this is the maximum distance that can be covered in a single Jump by a Jump-1 capable starship.

Most **Traveller** starmaps use a system of 1 parsec to 1 hex.

ASTROGRAPHIC FEATURES

Charted Space contains no major astrographic features such as black holes and only one rather unimpressive nebula. It does, however, have a few anomalies and interesting features. Stars tend to occur in groups (termed **clusters**) or long snaky chains (known as **mains**). Trade and commerce tends to move along the mains as they allow vessels to navigate between systems with ease. Crossing to another main requires a ship with a longer range or some means to refuel in deep space.

Many clusters and segments of a main have their own cultural, astrographic or economic identity. These are sometimes named, e.g. the Bowman Arm in the Spinward Marches is a segment of the Spinward Main centring on the Bowman system.

The empty space between clusters or mains is sometimes referred to as a rift. These small rifts are usually no more than 1-4 parsecs wide and are hardly worthy of the name. Even the Great and Lesser Rifts of Charted Space are nothing compared to the vast gulf between spiral arms of the galaxy. However, they are a significant navigational obstacle to vessels using a Jump drive.

A few odd features have been reported, though some may be nothing more than wild spacers' tales. They include a rosette system of five equidistant worlds orbiting a common star. This could not have occurred naturally. Nor could the rumoured ringworld located in the Vargr Extents. There are also a number of broken planets and shattered moons that seem to indicate a war of titanic proportions in the distant past.

STAR SYSTEMS AND MAINWORLDS

Most star systems are identified by their mainworld. That is, the most important planet, moon or planetoid belt in the system. This is for the simple reason that people visit worlds, not stars. The mainworld of a system is usually the most habitable, but not always. It may be a moon of a gas giant or a planetoid belt, but most commonly it will be a planet of some kind.

The nature of the Jump drive is such that unless there is a good (usually economic) reason to visit the other worlds of a system, vessels tend to ply between mainworlds in different systems rather than the less important worlds in the same system. It takes as long to Jump a few hundred AU to an outsystem rockball as it does to travel to the much more important mainworld of the star system a parsec away.

For this reason the remainder of a star system can be quite underdeveloped, though in many cases there will be outposts, mining stations and other installations, not all of them legal or above-board, scattered about the various bodies and planets of a given system.



STARPORTS AND SPACEPORTS

By convention, a world has only one Starport but can have many Spaceports. The designation Starport is given to the world's main port, where most commercial and passenger traffic goes. Any other port is designated a Spaceport. This can cause problems on Balkanised worlds where several governments exist; most will claim that their port is the main one.

Usually, but not always, the Starport is the best port on the planet and others will be of inferior types. Normally there will be a main port accompanied by a 'Startown' which is often the planetary capital. The Startown is usually geared to offworld visitors and doing business with other star systems, and may have more relaxed attitudes or even laws than other regions of the planet. This is not always the case however.

The Third Imperium considers that a Starport (but not usually a Spaceport) is Imperial territory, i.e. Imperial law and not local law applies there. In practice there is often a compromise in place, with shared jurisdiction in terms of law enforcement. Outside Imperial territory, this is not the case and starports are usually part of the territory of operating government. However, private starports do exist, some of which are effectively self-governing city-states. Others are corporate installations which enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy.

Law levels vary from place to place, but even where laws regarding weapons possession are fairly lax, a well-regulated starport tends to restrict visitors to sidearms and hand weapons. Among other factors, this ensures that the portside security force outguns most visitors, and reduces the chance of serious damage to the port resulting from a dispute or crime.

The groundside part of a starport or spaceport is termed the 'Downport'. There may also be an orbital component termed the Highport. In some cases this is big enough to be a city in space, in which case there may be no need to go groundside at all if business can be conducted in orbit.

As an example, an important system might have a large Highport serving a Downport at the capital. Big ships dock at the Highport and use shuttles for passenger and cargo transport; smaller vessels can land if they choose. From the orbital Highport it is possible to go to the main Downport or to Spaceports in each of half a dozen cities, plus a commercial port serving an industrial complex somewhere. Meanwhile there is a dedicated military port, a small government port and a couple of spaceports serving small installations on other bodies in the system, e.g. a mining colony on a moon of one of the gas giants. A minor system, on the other hand, may have little more than a shed and a marked landing area.





FASTER-THAN-LIGHT TRAVEL AND COMMUNICATIONS

In the *Traveller* universe there is no Faster-Than-Light (FTL) radio or other instantaneous communication medium. The only way to get a message to a given point is to send a starship there. In civilised areas a system of courier ships is used to maintain communications, with mail and additional information moving aboard commercial starships.

This creates a system not unlike Earth in the Age of Sail, whereby a vessel on a distant station might be months from base and the orders of its captain's superiors. Colonial governors, corporate officials, lawmen and all sorts of other individuals find themselves waiting for literally weeks if instructions are requested. Thus individuals have to take responsibility and act as they think best.

FTL travel is possible using the Jump drive. Essentially a ship enters Jumpspace and stays there, cut off from the rest of the universe for roughly a week. It then returns to normal space some distance from its starting point. A Jump-1 rated ship can travel up to 1 parsec in a single Jump (which always takes more or less a week, regardless of distance). Higher Jump-rated ships can cover greater distances but despite the occasional rumour or secret prototypes and alien vessels, reliable Jumps of more than 6 parsecs have not been achieved.

It is possible to travel more than 6 parsecs in a single Jump, but this is only one of several possible outcomes of what is known as a Misjump. Misjumping can be a slight inconvenience, bringing out the vessel a bit late or a few AU from its intended emergence point... or it can result in an unpredictable Jump of highly variable duration and distance.

There are no reliable reports of a vessel surviving a Misjump that carried it more than 36 parsecs, though there are the usual wild spacers' tales. It is assumed that those vessels that Misjumped and were not seen again were destroyed. It is definitely known that some vessels have been destroyed by Misjump accidents; debris was found.

DATING SYSTEMS

Many, indeed most, worlds have their own local dating system and many have more than one. However, the standard Imperial calendar is in use on most worlds. Within the Imperium it is generally the main dating system, and even outside it is often used as a handy frame of reference.

The system uses a seven-day week (named Oneday, Twoday and so forth) and a 365-day year. Dates within the year are given as Day-Year. For example, 054-1105 is the 54th day of the 1105th year since the founding of the Third Imperium.

CURRENCY

The standard unit of currency within the Third Imperium is the Credit. Tendered as coins, notes or high-value credit plaques, Credits are accepted in most places but may have to be converted to local currency in some regions. The Credit is widely accepted in Reft Sector, and is sometimes used as a stable baseline currency to base local transactions upon. However, some worlds require offworld currency (including Credits) to be changed into local funds. Exchange rates often change as a result of changes in the political situation, with a world government offering better deals on the currency of a friendly power.

Since there is no faster-than-light communication system other than sending a message aboard a starship and waiting at least a fortnight for an answer, electronic banking is not widely used beyond a local level. Local systems will allow users to draw against funds deposited on-planet or assets pledged as collateral. Large and reputable organisations are generally permitted to draw funds against their reputation, so to speak, as local loans which are then paid in due course. In the Islands, this is mainly the prerogative of large shipping and interstellar commerce firms.

Large transactions may use hard currency or bearer bonds, or may involve letters of credit. Another common way to handle large transactions is to use physical or economic assets as currency – for example, the ownership of stock in a major corporation or even a starship may be transferred as part of a deal, perhaps as security while the banks on two different planets sort out the details of the cash transaction or as the actual payment.

LANGUAGE

Many people throughout human-inhabited space speak Galanglic as their first language, and it is widely understood elsewhere. Local dialects and accents vary considerably, and on some backwater worlds basic Galanglic is so mangled that it sounds like a foreign tongue. However, as a rule a Galanglic speaker can make himself understood anywhere.

Various pre-Starflight Terran languages are in use within the Islands subsectors. On some worlds, the local language has been polluted with fragments of Galanglic; others have retained their local tongue more or less intact.

TRAVELLERS AND TRAVELLING

The vast majority of people in the *Traveller* universe never go far from their home, at least in astrographic terms. They might go to other cities on the same world or to an orbital station; perhaps even to an outsystem colony, but even this is relatively unusual. People only move about for a reason and if there are



adequate opportunities at home then the average citizen will stay there. This is particularly true within the Islands, where interstellar travel is less common than in Imperial territory.

Some individuals attend offworld universities and a percentage of those go on to dwell for a time or even settle permanently on a different world. Others serve in the military or with a big corporation that may move them around from time to time. Others move from world to world as part of their job; diplomats, roughnecks, entertainers and a wide range of other types of people will go from place to place to follow the salary or assignment.

However, these people are not Travellers (with a capital T). That distinction is reserved for a certain type of individual, and the connotations are not always positive. There is no precise definition of a Traveller; it is instead a label applied to a person who moves around a lot by choice as much as out of necessity.

Travellers are varied. Some are simply well-off tourists, some are mercenaries or freelance professionals of various types. Others work aboard small starships unaffiliated with any government or major shipping line. Some are pursuing a personal goal which might be anything from scientific research to vengeance. Some just travel for the fun of it and a handful are professional adventurers who undertake dangerous jobs for high-paying clients.

What these people all have in common is an apparent inability to put down roots. Most will eventually (or intermittently) settle down somewhere but for the present time they wander about. Travellers have a bad reputation in some quarters as unreliable, or as troublemakers who poke into things better left alone.

In other places they are welcomed either for the skills they can provide during their stay or for the Credits they will pay for their accommodation and recreation. Travellers can be a useful temporary asset to some governments and organisations – resourceful, intrepid and deniable – or they can be nothing but a nuisance. It depends very much on the individuals concerned – there are few hard-and-fast rules concerning Travellers.

Free Traders

Considered by some to be a subset of Travellers, Free Traders are something similar but slightly different. The term is applied in different contexts to a class of starship and to the personnel that crew them. It is also loosely applied to anyone or any ship engaging in a general type of activity.

Thus 'Free Trader' can define a specific type of starship, i.e. a small merchant craft suitable for free-trading operations, or it could refer to any ship or crew engaging in opportunistic independent tramp trading without a set route.

Most of the goods and passengers moving along the spacelanes travel aboard large freighters, freightliners or dedicated passenger ships. These are generally tied to a set route and call regularly at their stopovers. Smaller ships ply the same routes and less profitable ones, picking up the slack in the system. Many minor trade routes are not profitable at standard freighting rates, but it is considered desirable to have vessels on the route. The result is the subsidized merchant.

The 'subbie' is both a specific class of ship and a general activity. Subsidised routes are partially paid for by commercial activity and partly by government money from local worlds or trade alliances that feel the need for a regular service. Note that while ships of the class termed Subsidized Merchants are well suited to such activity, they can do other things such as free trading, and a subsidized route can be plied by craft of other types.

Although the big shipping lines and the subsidized routes move most of the cargo and passengers, there is some slack in the system; enough that a small merchant ship can make an honest living, just about.

These Free Traders wander on and off the main shipping lanes engaging in whatever commercial activity seems to offer the best prospects. This could be a charter to deliver something or carry out a mission, standard-rate freighting, a mail contract, a short-term naval auxiliary commission or speculative trade whereby the crew buy a cargo and try to sell it at a profit, rather than shipping other people's goods for a fee.

Most of the time a Free Trader can get by, with lean patches and the occasional bonanza caused by a good speculative investment or a lucrative urgent job. However, it does not take much to drive a Free Trader into the red. A crew that are in need of funds may be inclined to take risks or break the law. They might go down the route of risky high-stakes speculative trade in restricted items or take a job they know is going to be trouble.

Some crews may cross the line into illegal activity ranging from the relatively minor such as smuggling (the 'small package trade') or trafficking in illegal but not very harmful items all the way through to outright piracy. The majority of pirates are not career buccaneers but are 'ethically challenged merchants' who cross the line between legitimate commerce and piracy when it suits them.

Free Traders tend to frequent backwater ports where the markets are not sewn up by the big shipping lines. These can be dangerous places so crews are usually made up of clued-up and 'handy' individuals. Armament (personal and ship-mounted) is common, as is a willingness to use it at need.

This does not mean that all Free Trader crews are down-at-heel desperadoes one step removed from pirates; most are



professional spacers who sometimes frequent dubious places and take appropriate precautions. However, it can be hard to tell streetwise good guys from the bad apples.

Free Traders are common in the Imperial parts of the sector, but in the Islands they are not as frequently encountered. Some worlds have enough outsystem outposts, stations and colonies that sublight trading within a single star system is viable. Such systems often have a small but healthy Free Trader community. Interstellar traders also operate on these in-system runs, but this is not as lucrative due to the costs of Jump drives and space for fuel.

Many worlds, within the Imperium and elsewhere, that own significant outsystem assets subsidise merchant craft to serve the in-system routes. These are often not profitable for the merchant without a subsidy, but it is necessary to make some provision for movement of goods and people. This method is often much cheaper than building craft dedicated to in-system trading at government expense.

THE MAIN INTELLIGENT SPECIES OF CHARTED SPACE

Humans, of one sort or another, are the main intelligent race in the Spinward Marches and much of Chartist Space in general. There are, however, several other major and minor intelligent species.

The term 'Major Race' has two meanings. Imperial scientists apply the term precisely to mean any race or species that invented the Jump Drive independently. In this context a Minor Race is a species that either received Jump-drive technology from another source (e.g. buying it or reverse-engineering an example found in a wreck) or has not developed interstellar travel at all.

However, the terms are sometimes used rather more loosely to refer to the power and prominence of a species. By this definition some 'major' races are actually quite unimportant while some 'minor' species are very influential.

Humaniti

Exactly when 'Humanity' became 'Humaniti' is no longer known. While the word 'humanity' has various meanings, 'Humaniti' has only one – it is the name of the dominant species in the Third Imperium.

There are three Major and many Minor (by the definitions above) human races. All are offshoots of the same basic genetic stock and most, but not all, can interbreed. There are also vast numbers

of cultural groups who may seem very different from the rest of Humaniti but are in fact genetically identical. Sometimes these are mistakenly identified as minor human races.

To truly be a minor race rather than a social or cultural group requires some significant genetic difference from the rest of Humaniti. This can occur gradually, as a result of a restricted gene pool over many millennia or as an adaptation to harsh conditions. It can also be deliberate. Some minor human races have been deliberately altered, and in a few cases this was quite radical. A few altered themselves, some were adapted as part of colonial programs and some were changed by outside influence.

It is generally thought that the ancestral homeworld of Humaniti in all its many forms is Terra, or Old Earth. Other locations have been postulated, but currently the most widely-accepted theory holds that humans originated at a single point, which was most likely to be Terra, and spread across the galaxy in the distant past, becoming disparate racial and cultural groups before the modern period.

The spread of Humaniti is generally attributed to a group known as the Ancients, a powerful and technologically advanced species or group which dominated the region 300,000 years or so in the past. Some claim that these Ancients were in fact humans; others suggest that humans were servitors or allies of the Ancients who were left behind when the Ancients disappeared.

Whatever the reasons, modern Humaniti displays an amazing diversity of cultures, philosophies, religions, and personalities. As a result, some of the most alien cultures encountered are Human. Humans are also amazingly adaptable, many times even able to fully integrate into alien run societies. Despite this diversity, all human races are amazingly similar in their physiology, even those who have been genetically engineered, such that most Human races are capable of interbreeding with each other.

There is considerable variety in skin tone, eye and hair colour, height, build and similar physical characteristics. Presumably this is because the originally transplanted humans were very diverse. It does mean that it is not possible to tell by looking at someone whether he or she belongs to any given racial group unless there are cultural clues. Dress, mannerisms, accents and such like will usually indicate a person's cultural origin.

SOLOMANI

The Solomani often claim to be the true 'root stock' of Humaniti as they developed on Terra itself. Others point out that these are the people who were left behind when humans went or were taken to the stars during the Ancients period.



societies; even after their arrival in the Islands, the slow nature of sublight travel between star systems ensured that the gene pool remained relatively isolated.

The colony ships left earth before the development of the Jump drive, spent their trip in isolation, and then developed colonies without outside influences. As a result, despite the arrival of outsiders in recent history, the societies of the Islands subsectors are, in some cases at least, 'living fossils' of pre-Jump Terran societies.

These people are, for the most part, pureblood Solomani, but they predate the whole 'Solomani' concept. Their cultures have drifted over time, but as a rule the people of the Islands are closer to the reality of old-Earth cultures than the examples used by most modern archaeologists and historians. Indeed, the 'Pre-Jump French Culture' depicted in most Imperial documentaries and period dramas is only barely recognisable as related to the culture of Amondiaque, which was settled by what were effectively Pre-Jump French settlers.

Culturally, the Solomani tend to lean towards being explorers and inventors, and are highly individualistic. Their societies tend to be in a constant state of change and development, which is not always positive. However, as a result of this the Solomani have expanded far out from their distant home and their cultural enclaves can be found almost anywhere, often melded with local societies.

There is a Solomani state, named the Solomani Confederation, which broke away from the Imperium just over a century ago and retained its independence, more or less, in what became known as the Solomani Rim War. Although Terra and the surrounding regions were retaken by the Imperium, the subsequent peace settlement created the Solomani Confederation, which has its own cultural outlook. Most humans of Solomani descent feel little sympathy with the Solomani Confederation, which is both physically and culturally distant.

THE ISLANDERS

The Islands Subsectors were settled by humans from earth using a combination 'sleeper' and 'generation' ship method that ensured that the people who arrived in the Islands maintained strong ideological and cultural ties to the societies that sent them. Genetically, these people are close to their original

The cultures of the Islands are distinct, but have evolved from their parent societies. Some aspects would be startlingly familiar to a person from those parent cultures; other aspects are quite different.

VILANI

The Vilani are more culturally homogenous than the Solomani or most other large human groups. According to the best current theories, the Vilani are descendants of humans who were transplanted or made their way to the world of Vland during the Ancients period. After a long and troubled period struggling against their homeworld, which was only borderline-habitable to humans, they eventually made their way back into space.

The Vilani were probably the first humans to regain the stars after the Ancients departed. They gradually built an empire that is said to have included 15,000 worlds. Known as the Ziru Sirka, or Grand Empire of Stars, this Vilani empire is sometimes referred to as the Vilani Imperium or the First Imperium. It was highly conservative and restricted the development of many worlds in the name of stability. This seems to have worked; the Ziru Sirka lasted for over 7,000 years.

Vilani tend to be highly conservative in outlook. Tradition is a powerful force in society, and traditional methods are applied to



most problems. Of course, 7,000 years is long enough to have developed an effective traditional response to most situations.

Vilani society is very group-oriented and is built around guilds and bureaus that run the various services needed to keep a society working. Some of these are today Imperial Megacorporations with fingers in many pies all across the Imperium. However, the very nature of Vilani society is such that cultural Vilani are not as widespread as Solomani. Small groups can to be found almost anywhere but the main concentrations are located in the region around Vland.

Pureblood racial Vilani tend to live very long lives. However, this trait is heavily diluted by interbreeding. Mixed-blooded Vilani will tend to live only marginally longer than Solomani or any other mixed-race human. Most cultural Vilani are not pureblood members of the Vilani 'race'.

Typical Vilani view scientific and technological progress with disdain. Stability is more important than progress, and societies dominated by Vilani culture will be very resistant to change. The Vilani culture is dominant in a fairly large area of the Imperium. In these areas new initiatives from Capital tend to meet considerable resistance. Conversely, Vilani regions tend to be stable, orderly and, usually, prosperous.

Within the Reft Sector, the Vilani culture is not dominant except in small areas on a few worlds. Most humans in the region do not hold traditional Vilani views.

ZHODANI

The Zhodani are the third major human race. Their home region is to Spinward-Coreward of Reft Sector, beyond Deneb and Spinward Marches Sectors, and has never been part of the Imperium. Indeed, four major wars have been fought between the Zhodani Consulate and the Third Imperium.

The Zhodani Consulate is the largest of the human states and also the oldest. It is extraordinarily stable by human standards, and according to available evidence, internally peaceful. The Consulate has remained stable in terms of size for many hundreds of years; it is claimed that further expansion was curtailed when the Consulate reached the maximum size that could be effectively governed.

Relations with client states along the borders are reportedly good, though the distances involved mean that little information is available to Imperial analysts. It is known that the Zhodani are active in one area. Several large and many small expeditions have been launched over the centuries, all aimed down a corridor of space leading directly towards the Galactic Core.

The purpose and result of these 'Core Expeditions' remains unknown.

The Zhodani are the only major human group to make extensive and open use of psionic powers. Testing for abilities is routine and apparently mandatory, and is central to the Zhodani system of government. The upper echelon of society are nobles, who are the only class entitled to vote in what is ostensibly a democratic system. Most of the work of governance is undertaken by the Intendant class, with the majority of the population being Proles.

Given the huge cultural differences and the Zhodani lack of interest in expansion, there is little interbreeding between Zhodani and other humans. As a result, there is a fairly distinct Zhodani physical appearance, which is an exception to the general trend. Zhodani tend to be tall and slim, and seem to exhibit psionic talents more commonly than other humans. This however, may be due to the fact that these are actively tested for and accepted in Zhodani society, which is not the case elsewhere.

Other Humans

Most humans within the Reft Sector (and the rest of the Imperium, with some exceptions) tend to be of mixed blood. Solomani, Vilani and many of the minor human groups have been interbreeding for centuries, creating a fairly 'generic' human type.

Cultural influences are generally more important than racial ones, though local conditions will influence the general characteristics of a planetary population over the centuries. Thus as already noted most cultural Vilani or Solomani are actually of mixed blood.

People being what they are, local associations tend to be more important than more distant ones. Thus the population of a given world tend to identify themselves as citizens of that world first and as Imperial citizens a long way second.

A planet is a big place; about as big as most people can identify with. As a result, the average person identifies closely with their town or city, and their homeworld to a lesser extent. Far-off things like the fact that they are citizens of the Imperium rarely intrude into daily life for most people.

Cultural pollution has caused many worlds, especially those on major trade routes, to move towards a "standard-starfaring" culture, though even this is subject to local variations and tends to be more pronounced near the Starport than elsewhere. Some worlds are very different to this standard-starfaring culture.



Diversity (within limits) is more frequent than commonality. However, radically different societies are normally either located in remote areas where there are few visitors, the product of deliberate isolationism, or both. Within the Islands, this cultural pollution is considerably less than in areas that see more traffic.

There are a number of minor human races. The Jonkeereen, for example, were genetically engineered by Imperial scientists. They breed true, creating a human offshoot race specifically tailored to survival in a desert environment. Their homeworld is in Deneb sector but they can be encountered anywhere. The Geonee are shorter and of heavier build than most other human types as a result of conditions on their homeworld. It is probable that the Geonee became adapted to the conditions there after being transplanted by the Ancients, though the Geonee have another explanation.

Within Reft sector there is at least one positively identified minor human race. This distinction is used to indicate a human offshoot race that has significantly different characteristics. The line between being a 'minor human race' and simply a population that has adapted to local conditions is a fine and somewhat indistinct one.

The Tapazmal, a minor human race native to Dlaekan, are physically very similar to 'mainstream' humans but have apparently been genetically engineered in the distant past. The main effect of this process was to give the Tapazmal a very low birth rate, presumably to limit their population as resources were very limited on their homeworld.

The Tapazmal were contacted around -4700 (Imperial calendar) by another minor human race. This was the Loeskanth, who were native to Gushemege sector. The Loeskanth received Jump drive technology from a Vilani client state and set about raiding the Tapazmal homeworld, Dlaekan, for artworks and similar valuable objects.

These raids continued until the Vilani themselves reached Dlaekan some centuries later. In return for becoming a client state of the Vilani Imperium the Tapazmal received protection and technological assistance.

After the fall of the Vilani Imperium, the Tapazmal attempted to return to their original culture, stripping away the changes imposed by membership of the Vilani Imperium. This was partially successful, but Tapazmal culture was again influenced by outsiders, this time the Solomani. As the Solomani-ruled Second Imperium expanded, the Tapazmal entered into a deal whereby they provided a base in the region in return for technology and a policy of non-interference. Solomani influence on Tapazmal culture was less severe than that of the Vilani, and

the Tapazmal weathered the fall of the Rule of Man (the Second Imperium) without undue difficulty. In the absence of major interstellar powers they expanded into the surrounding area.

Today the Tapazmal occupy six worlds in Reft sector – Dlaekan, G'haenbaz, Bokilborn, Pamraeltan, P'hakar and Hoilhapuli as well as Choltonrul in Gushemege sector. The low population of the Tapazmal are artistic and mystical people whose society is very conservative, with strictly defined roles for individuals. This, along with their low numbers, has prevented them from becoming much of a force in Imperial politics.

Other Terrans

Enhanced, i.e. sentient, versions of several Terran species have been created. Most notable and widespread are Dolphins, who inhabit the oceans of many worlds and travel among the stars when it suits them to do so. It is difficult for aquatic creatures to do so but technology has enabled Dolphins to join the starfaring races. Some Orcas (Killer Whales) were also uplifted to sentience and can be found on various worlds, sometimes co-existing with Dolphins.

Among the other Terran species uplifted to sentience were various apes. These were, in general, less successful than the Dolphin project and have tended to fade away. Some worlds nearer Terran have populations of Apes, either in mainstream society or in enclaves living in remote areas. They are rarely encountered away from their homes, though the occasional Ape does turn up in an unexpected place.

It is also generally accepted that Solomani genetic experimentation created enhanced humans. These 'Supermen' were few in number and do not exist today. The Solomani Confederation is strangely reticent on the subject.

Other Intelligent Species

Charted Space contains a large number of non-human intelligent species. Some, such as the Jagd-II-Jagd, are very alien indeed. These are gas giant dwellers and unlikely to be encountered far from their home system of Jagd in Lishun sector. Others share environmental needs with humans and can be encountered on the same worlds or even living in the same communities.

ASLAN

The first human explorers to encounter this humanoid race thought they looked somewhat lion-like and used the name 'Aslan' (Turkish for lion) to describe them. The label stuck and has been in use ever since, though the similarity is vague and Aslan have no connection with any Terran species, let alone the great cats.

The Aslan have a clan-based martial society with over 4,000 clans making up the Aslan Hierate, a region of space located



to Spinward of the main Imperium. Relative to the Spinward Marches, the Hierate lies to Spinward-Coreward across the Great Rift.

Aslan society is divided along strict male/female lines. Males are leaders and warriors; females are businesspersons, scientists and technicians. The divide is so ingrained that some Aslan males are unable to understand the concept of money (or so they claim) and will address a female human soldier as male (fighting is a 'male' preserve) or a male scientist as a female (since the individual is in a 'female' role).

Aslan culture holds that only the first son inherits, so landless second sons (*Ihatei*) often go adventuring in search of land and glory. This can lead to friction with neighbours who do not appreciate the activities of the *Ihatei*.

DROYNE

The Droyne are something of an oddity. They have enclaves are scattered all across Charted Space. Some are stone-age primitives while others possess advanced starships mounting fearsome weaponry.

Vaguely humanoid with both reptilian and bird-like features, the Droyne are divided into six castes. Members of different castes have considerably different physical and mental characteristics depending upon their role in Droyne society.

The Droyne never explain their actions. At least, not in a way that makes sense to humans. At times they are quite active, with trade ships visiting many ports and other vessels sighted all over Charted Space. There have been many unexplained lulls in Droyne activity as well.

HIVERS

Hivers resemble very large six-armed starfish and communicate visually by wagging their digits. Most wear a device called a Voder, which translates the waggles into Galanglic.

The Hivers are the 'first among equals' (or so they claim) in the Hive Federation, leading a wide assortment of other races. The Federation is far to Trailing-Rimward of Reft Sector on the far side of Imperial space, with a neutral area in between. Hivers are thus rare in the region, though they have been sighted.

K'KREE

The K'Kree, or Centaurs, also dwell far to Trailing, across the entire Imperium and also a region of independent space. They are even more rarely seen in the Reft Sector than the Hivers.

K'Kree are militant herbivores who have never made any secret of their 'manifest destiny' to wipe out all meat-eaters in the

universe. This puts a strain on relations, though there is some trade and diplomatic contact between the Imperium and the 2,000 Worlds of the K'Kree.

VARGR

Vargr are candidates for the 'Other Terrans' label, but as a Major Race they are dealt with here instead. The Vargr were genetically engineered from Terran carnivores (the word Vargr means 'Wolf') in the distant past, presumably by the Ancients.

The Vargr dwell mainly to Coreward, in the Vargr Extents. This is a large area of Vargr and mostly-Vargr worlds forming large numbers of great and small polities that rarely remain stable for long. Many Vargr live in the Imperium; they are the second commonest species in Spinward Marches Sector, and many live in Deneb Sector too. Vargr are occasionally encountered in Reft Sector; most are traders but small enclaves have settled in the area for various purposes.

Vargr are pack creatures whose culture and civilization are based around the concept of individuals with 'Charisma'; i.e. Alpha individuals. Vargr will give their loyalty to charismatic individuals and thus gain reflected glory, but a leader who loses face may find himself without followers rather quickly. Vargr society tends to be somewhat more fluid and turbulent than human civilization, though Vargr are capable of deep loyalty to an individual or ideal that has earned it.

Minor Races

There are many minor sentient races. Most are limited to a single world, and many have pre-industrial or even stone-age levels of technology. Others are starfarers. Many live alongside humans and others on dozens of worlds, having migrated to take a job or join a colonial mission.

Most minor races are naturally occurring species, though some are obviously variants or offshoots of other races. This might have been the work of the Ancients or could have other causes. Minor races sometimes cause a certain amount of head-scratching in the scientific community. For example, there may be two or more apparently identical species dwelling on homeworlds which are vastly distant from one another, with no evidence of a starfaring past.

Among the most commonly encountered minor races in Charted Space are the Bwaps (sometimes called Wabs or Newts). Their native-tongue name for themselves is Bawapakerwa-a-a-awapawab. Bwaps are small humanoids who originated in swampy terrain and need a humid environment to be comfortable. They are natural bureaucrats, and large numbers have entered the service of the Imperium as well as various worlds as administrators and accountants.



Chirpers (named for the calls they emit) are another minor race that can be encountered in various areas, though for different reasons. They are small and reclusive humanoids that exhibit some bird-like physical characteristics. Some observers suggest that they are little more than animals; others think that Chirpers are in fact very clever but not interested in the usual trappings of civilization. Chirpers are an oddity in that they seem to be native to many worlds all across Charted Space yet they have no technology or any sign of having ever possessed it.

There are many other minor races across Charted Space. Individuals and small groups from these species can be encountered going about their business almost anywhere.

The Ancients

Little is known with any certainty about the Ancients, and it is probable that most of what is known will turn out to be inaccurate. Various theories have been put forward about them, most of which have insurmountable flaws.

Most scientists agree that the Ancients reached the height of their power several hundred thousand years ago, and that their

disappearance coincides with a fair amount of damage to this region of space. There are several asteroid belts and devastated worlds dating from that period. The most likely explanation is that they fought each other or someone else to mutual destruction.

Various Ancient devices and sites have been found, along with larger numbers of mistaken and outright fraudulent finds. Trade in Ancient artefacts is heavily restricted but there are always those who will pay top dollar for a working item.

The Ancients are thought to have been responsible for transplanting many species including humans and Vargr. They may have terraformed worlds or seeded them with life, and are probably responsible for the presence of Terran plants and animals on worlds only now being charted by humans.

The wonders of the Ancients are mostly lost, and those that can be found are often incomprehensible. Devices turn up that have no known function, and even those that can be used remain mysterious. The Ancients and their technology are something of a modern superstition; any unexplained phenomenon tends to be blamed on the Ancients.





REFT SECTOR

Reft Sector is an astrographical oddity. It contains two groups of stars, of relatively standard density, separated by a wide rift. Much of this rift is entirely empty, as the name suggests, but deep within it lie two relatively dense subsectors. These were settled by sublight expeditions from Earth and remained isolated from the rest of Charted Space for most of their history.

Known as the Old Islands and New Islands subsectors, these regions developed apart from the great events of wider history. Exploration, colonisation and communication between the worlds of the Islands subsectors was by way of sublight vessels, with voyages taking years at a time.

That all changed when an Imperial scout ship misjumped into the region and sought local assistance in repairing its drives. This led to the acquisition of Jump drive technology by one of the Islands states, altering the balance of power in the region. A misguided attempt to even up the situation only made matters worse. Now in possession of Jump-capable ships, the states of the Islands set about expanding their spheres of influence, and conflict became inevitable.

The history of the region since that time has been troubled, with periods of war interspersed with relative peace. The existence of many small powers, each with distinct cultures and political systems, led to the creation of a shifting web of alliances and rivalries. As a result, it is likely that at least one dispute or conflict is ongoing in the Islands at any given time, and other powers are on the verge of being drawn in or are offering assistance of one form or another.

Since the Islands Subsectors offer a route across the rift, cutting weeks of the transit time from, say, Imperial territory in Verge or Gushemege Sector to Spinward Marches or Deneb Sectors, events in the Islands are of interest to the Imperium as a political entity, and to Imperial organisations such as shipping corporations, mercenary groups and traders. There is money to be made in the Islands and via them, but the hazards are considerable.

Elsewhere in Reft Sector, the situation is quite different. There are two areas of relatively dense stars, both of which are Imperial territory. However, as they are separated by long transit times (something much more important than physical distance), these areas are culturally divergent. Within the rift are also a number of scattered worlds, some of which are inhabited by humans and other species. Contact with these worlds is rare, resulting in some major cultural differences.

Most of Reft Sector is not Imperial territory, though it lies between two Imperial regions and has Imperial communications routes running through it. Thus those areas of the sector that are not under direct Imperial control can be considered to be an area of interest and do receive diplomatic visits, naval patrols and the like along with expeditions by Scout Service ships. However, Imperial citizenship is not a guarantee of safety on the worlds of the Rift, and wise travellers take appropriate precautions.

A Note About The Islands Subsectors

The worlds of the Islands subsectors have been isolated from the rest of Charted Space for centuries. Recent contact has resulted in a certain amount of cultural pollution but many differences remain. For example, within Imperial space the word 'humanity' gained a different spelling at some point, becoming 'humaniti' when referring to the various human races. The Islanders never got this habit and still use the original spelling.

Many other small differences are observable when visiting the Islands from Imperial space. Terminology is often subtly different from the standard Imperial usage, and many concepts differ. For example, the Islanders do not use the term 'system defence boat' for a small defensive craft, and do not make much distinction between Jump-capable and non-Jump-capable vessels. Centuries of sublight interstellar flight have resulted in a different mindset that the availability of Jump drive has not yet erased.

Notable differences exist between the attitudes of the Islanders and the Imperium towards psionics and robotics. The Imperial attitude was radically shifted in a negative direction by the PsionicsSuppressions of three centuries ago. The Islands were isolated at this time, and were not touched by the Suppressions. However, widespread psionic interest never took hold in the Islands, not least because individuals with provable powers were so rare among the folk of the Islands subsectors.

Since contact with the Imperium, awareness has been gradually creeping into the Islands that psionic phenomena are real and that there are even societies built around widespread psionic use. However, awareness is vague within the majority of the population. A few psionically active individuals will always appear within each generation, but even after contact with the outside universe most of these tended to live out their lives thinking that they were alone.

Occasionally, psionic individuals within the Imperium have hit upon the idea of travelling to the Islands in the hope of escaping



the blanket ban on psionic activity. Some of these have found others like them and founded tiny enclaves of psionically active people. Of course, the founders of these enclaves brought with them a fear of persecution and tendency to be secretive about their abilities.

Local psionic groups also do exist, though they are extremely rare. These, too, are secretive but for different reasons. Most still feel that they are some kind of freak and tend to keep their powers secret from society out of a general worry that others 'will not understand' – which is probably well founded.

Thus, although psionic activity is not subject to a blanket ban as it is in the Imperium, those psionic groups that exist are small and secretive, having little or no contact with one another. Most of the founders and leaders of these groups were low-powered or barely-trained individuals, who often had little understanding of their talents. Some were entirely wrong about various facets of psionic ability, and of course all of this ignorance and misinformation has been passed on to their pupils.

Psionic individuals are about as rare in the Islands as they are in the Imperium, though they are not officially persecuted. They might become so, if a world government felt that they were a problem but for now the very rarity of psionic activity ensures that governments worry about more tangible problems than the possibility that rumours of telepaths and other psionic individuals might actually be true.

Another Imperial prohibition that does not exist in the Islands is the ban on weaponry fitted to robots. The Imperium does permit lightly armed security robots to be deployed, subject to proper licensing, but 'warbots' are prohibited. The various powers of the Islands have different attitudes to autonomous military systems. Some feel that the technical issues are insurmountable; others are mistrustful of heavy weapons in the hands of a hackable robotic platform.

Some Islands powers make modest use of 'autonomous weapons platforms' and 'smart combat vehicles' while others prefer remote-operated drones with limited auto-evasion and self-guided attack modes. There are no hordes of warbots however; large-scale use of robot weapons has never been seen in the Islands.

It is possible to encounter security robots or even battle-bots armed with quite heavy weapons. There are even research projects looking into the possibility of fielding either giant robotic tanks or a mob of smaller combat-bots directed from a human-crewed vehicle. However, these are unusual. Most combat vehicles contain a lot of electronic assistance for their crew or remote operators, but there will almost always be a human in the loop somewhere.

LANGUAGES IN THE ISLANDS

In the Imperium as a whole, most people speak Galanglic as either their first language or a *lingua franca* used to communicate with offworlders. Galanglic is a mix of old Terran languages, notably English, with words and concepts borrowed mainly from the Vilani tongue but also from various other human and non-human languages.

Galanglic is spoken, with considerable variations in accent, idiom and dialect, almost everywhere in the Imperium and widely beyond it. Within the Imperium there are more regional dialects than unique tongues, making translation relatively easy. Most personal comm units contain translation software and phrase-guides for common dialects.

Some worlds speak what are apparently distinct languages, but in many cases these turn out to be heavily distorted versions of old Terran languages, ancient Vilani, or a mixture of several other tongues. This linguistic drift usually occurred as a result of the Long Night, and with some effort it is possible to translate these mangled versions of languages spoken elsewhere back into something that can be understood by an outsider. A fairly cheap piece of software adds limited translation capability for these more difficult language/dialects to the function of a typical personal comm.

Thus, it is possible for a Galanglic speaker to communicate freely in most places, and with some difficulty in most others. Only on the worlds of alien races are truly distinct languages normally encountered, and even there it is likely that Galanglic will be spoken as a second language.

The situation is somewhat different in the Islands. Until the arrival of the first Imperial ships, the Islanders had no exposure to Galanglic, and for many years after contact there was little need to learn it. Thus the linguistics of the Islands are a little different from elsewhere.

Each of the three colony missions had a primary national identity, and aboard each there was a primary language. Aboard **C-Jammer** it was English, aboard **van der Lubbe** it was German, and the colonists of **Voyageur** primarily spoke French. English was the common language of the colony project.

Other languages were spoken by the colonists of these ships, but these gradually faded away after contributing a few words, figures of speech and an accent to the main language of their ship. Small groups may have, in some cases, kept their ancient languages alive but for the most part they have vanished among the Islanders.

The colonies established by **C-Jammer** derived their languages from the version of English spoken aboard that ship, though



linguistic drift began as soon as each colony was set up. The same applies to the French-speaking colonies set up from Amondiage and the secondary colonies of Neubayern, which spoke a version of German.

These colonies were largely isolated for a thousand years, with only occasional visits from sublight vessels. The local language of each world drifted considerably in this time, though recorded media slowed the process somewhat. Thus the 'French' spoken on Amondiage is somewhat different from that of Sansterre, though the difference is one of dialect rather than a completely different language. The same applies across all of the Islands.

Since Galanglic is largely derived from English, and this was the parent tongue of some of the colonies (notably New Home and Serendip Belt), the Galanglic-speaking Imperials who first visited the Islands had little difficulty obtaining a workable translation. English, of a sort, had remained in use on most other worlds too, and so communication was possible. However, the majority of Islanders saw no real need to learn Galanglic. Only those dealing regularly with outsiders were likely to do so.

Today, Galanglic is growing in popularity as a second language in the Islands, but the majority of the population do not speak it. Most speak languages they call English, French or German, though these are quite different to the languages of those names spoken on Old Earth in the 21st Century, or on Terra today, in the 57th Century.

Imperials visiting the Islands can communicate well enough through a comm-based translator package, and most starport staff will speak enough Galanglic to get by. Those that intend to blend in, or want to make a good impression for business or other purposes, should consider learning a local language. English is both the easiest for a Galanglic speaker and the most common either as a first or second language in the Islands, but German and French remain good choices.

A character who can speak rudimentary English can make himself more or less understood everywhere, and making the effort at any local language is worth some goodwill in most areas. The variation in dialect within the Islands is such that speaking a very bad version of local language may not identify the speaker as a non-Islander. It is not uncommon, for example, for Imperials trying to speak Sansterre-version French to be mistaken for Esperanzans, Neubayerners, or sometimes as ignorant outback farmers from Gloire.

It is possible to encounter small communities that speak obscure languages or impenetrable dialects on any world, and the version of any parent tongue spoken will vary from one world to another. However, the official languages of the various Islands worlds are as below

THE GREAT RIFT

Reft Sector is named for its main Astrographic feature; a more or less starless gulf several parsecs wide. Although tiny in comparison with the vast spaces in between the spiral arms of

World	Main Language	Common Secondary Language(s)
Zuflucht	German	Galanglic
Wellington	English	
Esperanza	English	
St Hilaire	French	
Nebelwelt	German	English
Gloire	French	
Serendip Belt	English	
New Colchis	English	
Herzenslust	German/English	
Orphee	Orphee (non-human)	
Topas	German	
Elysee	French	
Besancon	French	English
Berlichingen	German	
Joyeuse	French	
Sturgeon's Law	English	
Quichotte	French	
Neubayern	German	
Schlesien Belt	German	
New Home	English	
Colchis	English	Galanglic
St Genevieve	French/German	
Acadie	French	
Sansterre	French	
Achille	French	
Amondiage	French	Galanglic
St Denis	French	



the galaxy, the gap is a sufficiently major barrier to navigation to be known as the Great Rift.

The Great Rift is shaped somewhat like a lobster claw whose supporting arm runs through Reft Sector. As a result, regions such as Spinward Marches Sector, which are separated from the core of Imperial space by the Great Rift, are referred to as lying 'behind the claw'.

Reft Sector itself is divided into three distinct sections by the Great Rift. In Imperial parlance, the region on the far side of the rift from the main Imperial territories (i.e. on the Coreward side) is known as 'Behind the Claw'. The worlds on the Rimward side of the Rift, closer to the central region of the Imperium, are referred to as lying 'Below (or Beneath) the Claw'. Those within the Rift are naturally (and not, strictly speaking, correctly) known as lying 'Within the Claw'. They are sometimes referred to as 'Riftworlds'; this is more common among non-Imperials such as the Islanders.

Crossing the Rift

Since no known starship can Jump more than six parsecs, crossing the Rift presents a problem as ships must refuel along the way. There are thus four ways to cross the Great Rift:

1. **Transit via known star systems.** Ships with sufficiently high Jump capability can transit from worlds on the fringe of the Rift to the Islands subsectors, obtaining fuel at their various planetfalls, then Jump across the gulf into less sparsely populated space. This is still quite an undertaking, but it offers the least technological problems. Much depends on the political situation within the Islands subsectors, however.
2. **Use Tanker Relays.** If large numbers of fuel-carrying ships are available, it is possible to make a transit of the Rift at almost any point. However, since the tankers themselves need refuelling from other tankers as they head more deeply into the Rift, the resources needed to get even a single ship across the Rift are quite considerable. There is no possible way to make this commercially viable. A diplomatic mission, an important message or a covert operation might be worth the effort, but otherwise the only advantage is that this method is totally independent of political conditions in the Riftworlds.
3. **Use Refuelling/Calibration Stations.** Another expensive and highly technical solution, though again free from political problems, is the use of deep-space stations to refuel vessels as they pass through. These stations need to be themselves refuelled and resupplied, creating a huge logistical overhead, but once set up a chain of stations can

support regular transits by patrol and messenger ships. Deep-space stations also allow crews to get out of their vessel for a while and to conduct drive calibration, which is difficult in the empty frame of reference of rift space.

4. **Scavenge a Route.** A vessel with extremely good sensors could, in theory, locate deep-space bodies where ice could be obtained for cracking into hydrogen and oxygen to support the ship. Even space as empty as the Great Rift contains a number of comets and perhaps even rogue planets. However, even if a comet's location were known, Jumping close enough to find it would be tricky. Just Jumping into the Rift and hoping to come out close enough to a comet to reach it and refuel before the air ran out would amount to an extremely expensive and slow form of suicide.

Thus most traffic across the Rift goes via the Islands. The Imperial Navy and Scout Service do not acknowledge that they maintain deep-space refuelling stations in the Rift, but it is an open secret that they do. It is thought that at least one Imperial Megacorporation has its own chain of stations allowing fast courier transits which presumably translate into corporate advantages.





The Trans-Islands Run

Crossing the Great Rift, even via the Islands subsectors, is not possible for a Jump-6 vessel without some kind of deep-space refuelling. Tankers are used by naval, diplomatic and some extremely high-value corporate vessels, but this is not cost-effective for most starship operators. A standard route has been established, which can be used by a Jump-4 vessel, or one carrying additional fuel for two consecutive Jump-2 transits.

A vessel crossing the Rift from Rimward-Trailing to Spinward-Coreward will normally transit as follows, though some variation in route is possible within the Islands subsectors. Vessels going the other way will obviously reverse the route.

The usual launching-point for trans-Rift voyages is Filentred, in Moibin subsector. From here, vessels can make a Jump-4 (or a rather tedious 2-Jump-2) transit to the rather prosaically named Riftspan Station. This is a small starport and refuelling station built on a rogue planetoid drifting in deep space.

Riftspan Station receives regular resupply shipments, including large quantities of fuel, from Filentred. However, the cost of maintaining the station means that everything is fabulously expensive there. The crew of the station, numbering several hundred personnel, have one of the most lonely and isolated postings in all of Charted Space, and traffic volume is very low.

The crew of the station are rotated regularly and monitored for mental health issues arising from being stuck on a rock in the middle of a whole lot of nothing. Despite a good set of recreational facilities, boredom is a problem. This is alleviated to some extent by inviting every passing spacer to an impromptu party. Refusal to attend can cause grave offence, as the crew see very few new faces.

Riftspan Station has extremely good sensors and powerful navigational beacons, as even normal variance in Jump emergence location can make it difficult to locate the station. Jumping into the Rift with a worn or baldy calibrated drive or a bad astrogator is tantamount to a death sentence, even though the station does maintain a tug that can in theory rescue ships that emerge a little too far away or suffer some sort of disaster. The authorities at Filentred require a stringent drive check before a vessel is allowed to Jump into the Rift.

From Riftspan Station the next port of call is Amondiage, another Jump-4 (or 2-Jump-2) away. Most vessels then proceed via New Home, Elysee and thence to Serendip Belt. Gloire is an alternate destination but this is discouraged by the government of Serendip Belt, which owns Gloire. A final four-parsec transit takes the vessel to Zuflucht, on the very outer edge of the Islands.

Zuflucht is the exit (or entry) point for virtually all trans-Rift traffic. Its small orbital starport receives most of its revenue from

passing traffic, and from a subsidy paid by the Third Imperium in return for the right to maintain what is grandly termed a naval base there. The base is little more than a docking station for one or two patrol vessels, plus associated support facilities.

Quite often there are no Imperial vessels present at all, as the handful assigned to the Islands Patrol are usually out among the worlds of the Islands. When ships are present, they are often in pieces for maintenance. An Imperial fighter squadron and a single system defence boat protect the station even when the patrol ships are away.

Transit on from Zuflucht requires another deep-space refuelling operation, this time at a purpose-built deep-space installation named Chandler Station. Chandler Station is located in free space, but obtains most of its fuel within the Rift. A squadron of Jump-1 capable tankers ply to and from half a dozen nearby comets, where ice-mining operations obtain ice and crack it to make hydrogen fuel.

The station has extensive hydroponic gardens, which are large enough to include a small park of sorts. The gardens provide some oxygen and food for the crew, though the original intention of making the station as self-sufficient as possible fell far short of expectations. The immense cost of this bold experiment is still being loaded onto the already astronomical prices for food, accommodation, fuel and consumer goods at the station.

Chandler Station receives resupply ships from beyond the Rift, and is frequently visited by Imperial Scout Service and Naval vessels whose crews do not acknowledge that they are engaged in trans-rift patrol and scouting operations but politely maintain that their vessel has called on a courtesy visit, just like it would at any other Imperial starport. In this, Chandler Station differs considerably from Riftspan Station; Chandler is very much Imperial territory, complete with a squad of Imperial Marines to defend its tiny Imperial Consulate. The latter is little more than an office for a couple of clerks who log passing ships and any other events of note. Riftspan Station does not have these Imperial trappings, and is less 'Imperial' and more 'Islands' in feeling despite being operated by an Imperial-registered corporation.

From Chandler Station, the first port of call on the 'Rift Shore' is at Tonnurad in Usher subsector, an extensive B class port maintained by an Imperial corporation with some subsidy from the world government. This corporation, Riftshore Navigation LIC, is engaged in expanding the D class port at Helifil, which is the obvious next destination.

The expansion is slow going due to shifting goalposts imposed by the government of Helifil, and as a temporary measure Riftshore Navigation LIC bought up a number of ex-Imperial Navy tankers some decades ago, offering an alongside refuelling to vessels



wishing to proceed deeper into Imperial space. This is not much of a problem for vessels headed into the Rift, but a crew that has just made the long transit through a very sparse region of space will often become frustrated by the lack of shore leave.

After Helifil, vessels can take a number of directions if they are headed into Imperial space. However, the handful of regular trans-Rift services turn around at Tonnurad, with cargo or passengers headed into Imperial space transferring to other vessels.

Of course, many vessels do not simply cross the Rift. Some undertake regular or one-off cruises among the worlds of the Islands subsectors, or visit a particular world to trade and then turn around to head back into Imperial space.

Shipping in the Islands

Within the Islands, there are obvious Jump-2 trade runs. It is possible to go from Serendip Belt to New Colchis via Topas, Berlichingen, Neubayern, Sturgeon's Law, Elysee and Herzenslust. This route is generally termed the 'Crescent Run'. Another transit, known as 'The Loop' runs from Neubayern via Schlesien Belt, St Genevieve, Sansterre, St Denis, Amondiage, Acadie and Colchis to New Home. It is possible to loop back to Neubayern via Sturgeon's Law, or to cross from the Crescent to the Loop.

All but eight of the worlds of the Islands are accessible to Jump-2 traffic via The Loop and the Crescent Run, or parts of them. The major powers of Joyeuse and Esperanza are outside this trade zone and see less traffic as a result. The limited number of destinations available to a Jump-2 ship make traffic movements fairly predictable.

Perhaps curiously, these Jump-2 routes are served by as many Jump-1 vessels as Jump-2 ones. The region was settled at a snail's pace using sublight ships, and for centuries trade was carried on in this way. A voyage lasting a couple of weeks is blisteringly fast by comparison, so what would be considered a very slow transit elsewhere is quite acceptable in the Islands. A vessel capable of two or even three consecutive Jump-1s costs less to build and maintain than an equivalent Jump-2 or Jump-3 ship, and thus represents a better investment for non-urgent cargoes.

Imperial Free Traders have begun to make an appearance in the Islands. By using collapsible fuel tanks in the cargo hold, a Jump-2 trader can make the long reach out to the Islands and once there can revert to normal Jump-2 trade operations. A number of Jump-2 trade ships are already operating on the Islands trade runs, but as noted previously much of the local

trade tonnage moves by consecutive Jump-1. Imperial Jump-2 traders have found a niche for themselves, moving cargoes faster than most of the competition.

This has of course prompted local shipping operators to obtain J-2 vessels, but the process is slow and for the time being there is an opportunity for what would elsewhere be regular trade ships to command 'fast courier' and 'urgent cargo' rates for their services.

Starship Classes in the Islands

Many standard Imperial designs have found their way into the Islands. Of those built locally, some are manufactured under license, some are blatant copies of Imperial designs, and some are derived from vessels in common use elsewhere. The latter are generally adapted to the unique conditions prevailing in the Islands. The commonest modification is the conversion of some cargo space to additional fuel tankage, allowing a Jump-1 ship to operate in the sparse star systems of the Islands subsectors.

Other vessels were built in Imperial space and have been brought into the Islands by their operators, for various purposes. However, the majority of starships in use within the Islands are of local manufacture. Even those conforming to Imperial designs are often given different class names and type designations. This is largely because the budgets involved are so much smaller in the Islands. A warship that would be considered a destroyer or even a large escort in the Imperium represents a major force in the Islands, and would be named accordingly.

While the defence of their home systems and core assets is the primary concern of every power in the Islands, increasing numbers of Jump-capable vessels are deployed by all navies. This is partly due to the need to protect assets in other systems, partly to allow territorial ambitions to be indulged, and partly an acknowledgement that if war breaks out, it can only be won by offensive action.

In general, the same terms are used for sublight and Jump-capable versions of the same vessel type. However, vessels fitted with a Jump drive are given the title 'Jump-Capable' in their designation in formal usage. This is a reversal of the Imperial practice, where a warship that does not have a Jump drive is designated as such.

In normal use, a ship is simply referred to by its general class, e.g. a news report might refer to 'the frigate **Von der Tann**' without reference to Jump capability or lack of it. The vessel's formal title in naval despatches would be 'Frigate (Jump-Capable) **Von Der Tann**'. Informed observers would know from the vessel's class what its capabilities were just from its name and class.



NAVAL TERMINOLOGY AND SHIP DESIGNATIONS

Naval terminology evolved, like everything else in the Islands, in isolation from the mainstream of Imperial space. Some Imperial terms are in use, but most Islanders use their own, local, class designations rather than the standard terms used in the rest of human space. It occasionally amuses Imperial Navy destroyer captains to hear the locals referring to their little tin can as a capital ship but in many cases thus is apt; some major Imperial warships outgun the entire naval strength of the Islands powers.

The worlds of the Islands subsectors use, with some local variations, a system of ship designations derived from Terran traditions. As already noted, ships tend to be much smaller in the Islands than in the Imperium, with the exception of huge asteroid-hulled ships which often have massive amounts of unused (or unusable) tonnage. Thus the designation system varies considerably from that used elsewhere. The exception is small craft such as fighters; these are given designations little different from those used in the Imperium.

Some powers build two versions of the same vessel, one with fuel and Jump drives and one without. The extra space is used for additional stores, accommodation or sometimes armour. This is not efficient in terms of optimising combat capability but it does allow a single production facility to build both sublight and Jump-capable vessels, and streamlines training and maintenance by using exactly the same systems on both types of craft. Most powers build different designs for the in-system and Jump-capable roles however.

Minor Combatants

Most navies in the Islands consider any vessel under 300 tons displacement to be a minor combatant, suited to local patrol around a base or starport, or combat as part of a squadron. Such craft tend to be commanded by junior officers and are rarely encountered operating independently. Most will spend their entire career within radio range of a base, parent vessel or squadron commander.

All navies of the Islands make at least some use of fighters. These are quite similar to the designs used elsewhere, as there are only so many ways to pack a weapon, pilot and drive into a small unit. However, fighter doctrine is somewhat different from that prevailing elsewhere. Since the average size of warships is much lower in the Islands than the Imperium, a fighter force is a more credible military asset.

Those fleets that make extensive use of fighters generally use one of two squadron structures. The 'New Colchis System' deploys fighters in 'vics' of three craft, with three 'vics' forming

a nine-craft squadron. A 'vic' is a roughly V-shaped formation used by fighters under the New Colchis System. This doctrine emphasises small fighters with a very limited endurance, usually operating from a parent craft or station.

The 'French Model', originating on Amondia and worlds settled from there, emphasises somewhat larger fighters with a greater endurance. This permits them to undertake longer patrols or missions at a greater distance from base. Under the French Model, a fighter squadron consists of two 'combat flights' of four fighters, with are further subdivided as pairs that fight together.

The combat flights are supported by a two-craft 'command flight'. One of the craft in the command flight is a single-seater with additional electronics and sensor equipment, while the other carries the squadron commander in addition to the pilot. Ideally, the command flight hangs back and directs the combat flights in action, though all craft use the same drive, hull and weapons so the command fighters often enter action once the battle has degenerated into what fighter jocks call a furball.

The New Colchis System makes use of small, low-endurance fighters while the French Model uses larger craft with extra space for additional life support, stores and equipment. This model trades outright combat efficiency for the ability to remain on station for longer, translating to a greater chance of being able to engage an enemy and the option to wait for a good opportunity to attack. These larger craft are sometimes termed 'patrol fighters' to differentiate them from the standard models.

All navies in the Islands make use of various craft which are larger than fighters but not significant combatants. These range from overgrown fighters through to about 300 tons displacement. The 100-ton 'small craft' breakpoint used in the Imperium is of little consequence in the Islands. Instead, craft are designated according to their role.

The term FAC (Fast Attack Craft) is used for any highly manoeuvrable craft, whatever the armament shipped, while PC (Patrol Craft) designates slower vessels, usually with greater endurance. SC (Support Craft) is a catchall term for small combat-capable vessels that fit neither of the other designations.

Most navies favour FAC (Gun) designs armed with beam weapons and PC (Missile) designs for patrol work, though mixed squadrons of FAC (gun) and FAC (missile) are maintained by certain powers. This permits the strike and support elements to operate closely together. Support Craft are sometimes armed with all beam, sometimes all missiles, and sometimes a mix of both.



- **Patrol Craft** are designed mainly for patrol work, including customs inspections and protection of commerce. Jump-capable PCs are not uncommon but are of negligible combat value, and are normally used as pickets or simply to provide an 'armed presence' in an area of interest.
- **Fast Attack Craft** are designed for high-speed close combat, usually as part of a squadron. Jump-capable FACs are unusual; more commonly they are carried by a parent ship or operate from a base.
- **Support Craft** carry out a variety of roles including courier work and various odd jobs within a fleet or around a base. If armed primarily with beam weapons they will normally revert to an escort role when with a fleet, protecting higher-value assets. Some support craft are armed with missiles and provide fire support for other minor combatants.
- **Frigates** are typically multi-role vessels capable of contributing to a fleet or carrying out a solo deployment. Armament tends to be mixed, though usually slanted more towards beam than missile, as frigates usually act as heavy escorts to the larger assets when operating with a fleet.
- **Destroyers** are specialised vessels within the medium-combatant class. Most are fast and heavily armed with either beam or missile weapons. In the Islands, destroyers often operate as squadrons of the same class, or at least the same general type.

Small Combatants

Small combatants range from 300 tons up to about 1,900 tons displacement. These vessels are large enough to be considered true warships – at least in the Islands – but are best suited to patrol and escort work, or operating as part of a squadron.

As with other vessel types, some small combatants are optimised to a particular role and are designated accordingly, while others are general-purpose warships. A vessel whose armament is primarily or entirely composed of missile launchers will carry the designator (missile) after its type. A vessel that carries fighters or other small craft is given the designation (aviation) in keeping with ancient Terran tradition. Other designators are relatively rare, but specialist electronic warfare, fighter-control or intelligence-gathering ships do exist.

- **Sloops** are warships in the 300-900 tons displacement range. They are normally used for minor guardship deployments, escort of larger vessels and a range of tasks that do not require a larger ship – or for which larger vessels are not available.
- **Corvettes** are warships in the 900-1,900 tons displacement range. Corvettes are often optimised for a single role such as missile support or close-range beam combat.

Medium Combatants

Medium-sized combatants form the backbone of most fleets in the Islands. They range from 2,000-4,000 tons displacement. Classes are not differentiated by tonnage but by role, so a frigate class can be bigger or smaller than a destroyer.

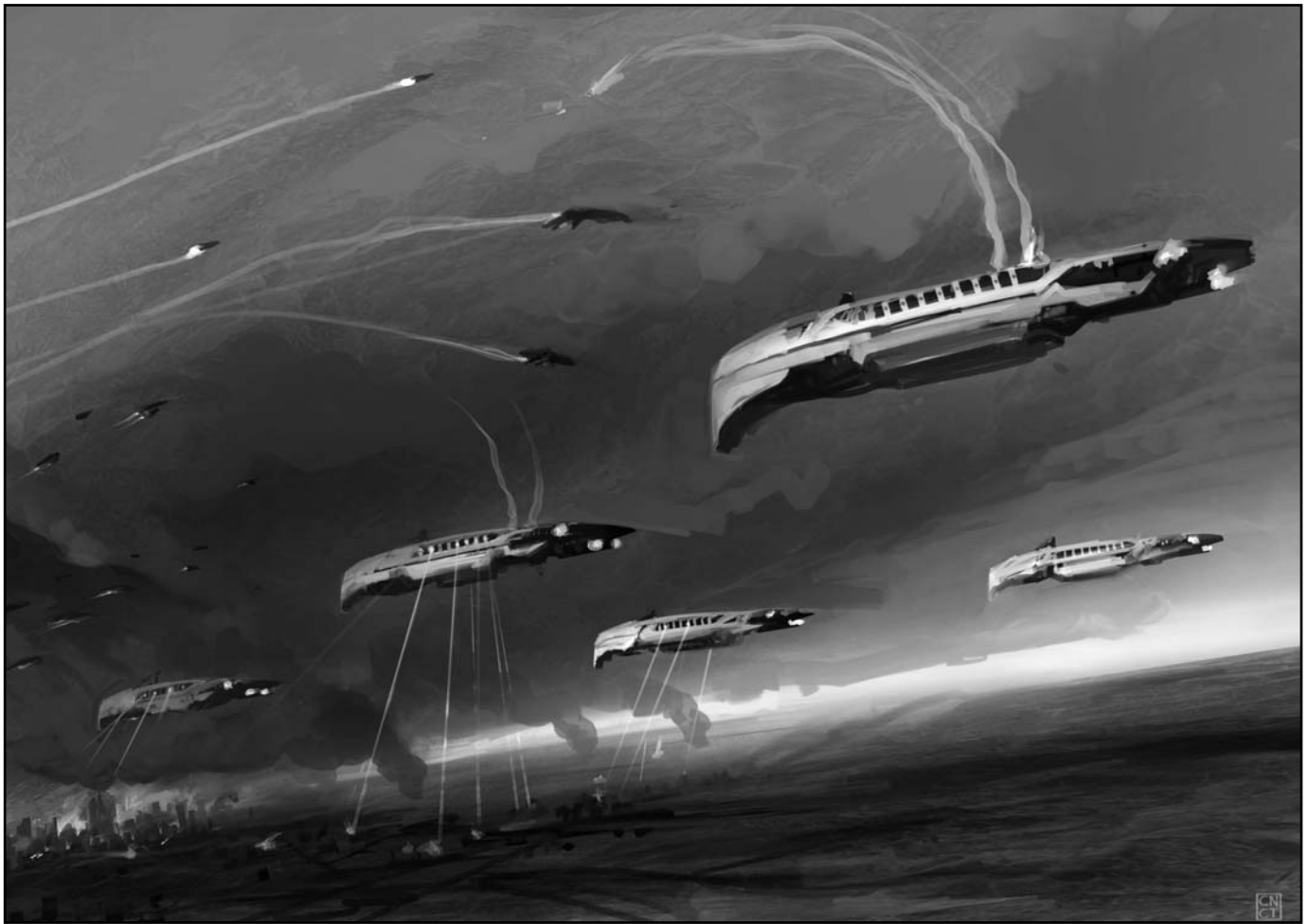
As a general rule, if a medium-sized combatant is operating entirely alone or as part of a task group or fleet, it will be a frigate. If it is in a group of 2-6 vessels with very similar performance and armament, it will almost certainly be a destroyer.

Major Combatants

Within the Islands, any vessel over about 4,000 tons displacement is considered a major combatant. Sizes vary considerably, and vessels are designated according to role rather than tonnage. By convention, most major combatants are termed 'cruisers' in keeping with Terran traditions from the late pre-starflight era. Generally speaking, major combatants tend to be specialised rather than multi-role combatants. Many use planetoid hulls.

Some powers make extensive use of armed merchant cruisers for combat. These are normally armed with missiles and a contingent of fighters and/or FACs, as they are extremely fragile in close combat. Armed merchant cruisers are cost-effective in many ways, as they can be taken up from the trade fleet when needed and return to commercial activity later – assuming they survive. However, as a rule, AMCs are more useful as fleet auxiliaries and support vessels than first-line combat assets.

- **Destroyer Leaders** are essentially oversized destroyers carrying extra command and control facilities. They are designed to act as the flagship of a destroyer flotilla, but are often reassigned as the flagship of a small task force.
- **Aviation Cruisers** carry squadrons of fighters and fast attack craft. Some Aviation Cruisers are what would elsewhere be recognised as 'pure' carriers, while others have a powerful armament to back up their FAC and fighter complement. This is usually, but not always, biased towards missiles, allowing the cruiser to stand off at a safe distance but still contribute to the fight.
- **Battle Cruisers** are designed for heavy combat, and are usually optimised for close-range action with beam weapons. They are usually well protected with good armour and defensive systems.
- **Flag Cruisers** are dedicated flagships, usually equipped with a balanced armament. They are used as the centrepiece of a task force.
- **Heavy/Light Cruisers** are general-purpose vessels with a balanced armament and possibly a contingent of fighters or FACs. They are designed to undertake solo cruises or a protracted duration. The Heavy or Light designation sometimes indicates tonnage but has more to do with role



– a heavy cruiser carries more and heavier armament, which does not necessarily mean greater tonnage. A cruiser with huge fuel tank capacity for long missions might be designated 'Light' as it cannot carry the same armament as a shorter-range vessel built on the same tonnage.

- **Missile Cruisers** are armed primarily with large missile batteries. Their normal role is to support other vessels in combat, though some navies give their missile cruisers augmented command and control facilities, allowing them to act as flagships for task forces.
- **Protected Cruisers** are extremely heavily armoured vessels designed to soak up punishment and keep fighting. Most are planetoid-hull vessels.

Capital Ships

The breakpoint between a cruiser and a capital ship is vague. It can be difficult to determine the combat capability of a vessel based on its size. Some planetoid hull ships are truly huge, yet mount armament equivalent to a frigate. Thus designation as a capital ship has as much to do with the amount of national pride invested in the ship as anything else. Generally speaking,

most capital ships will be over – often greatly over – 10,000 tons displacement.

Most capital ships use planetoid hulls and are heavily protected, though their use of tonnage is very inefficient compared to constructed vessels. Many carry large numbers of fighters and FACs, and use missiles for combat. High manoeuvrability is rare in planetoid hull ships, so the ability to fight at long ranges is important. Constructed capital ships do exist, but these are less common.

Many of the larger naval vessels in the Islands are one-off designs, or are members of a very loose class which varies considerably from ship to ship. The generic term 'warship' is used for such vessels, and can in theory refer to anything from a gigantic patrol ship to a fleet flagship. The 'warship' designation is not very helpful in delineating the capabilities of a vessel, but there are relatively few major warships in the Islands; many local officers can reel off the capabilities of a specific vessel once they hear its name.



Naval Warfare in the Islands

Naval warfare in the Islands subsectors is in many ways similar to that conducted elsewhere. Jump-capable ships are used to project power and sublight craft are used to defend home systems. However, there are some notable differences. These originate mainly in the development of the Islands powers and their long history without access to Jump drive. In the Imperium, Jump-capable warships are the norm and the naval world-view, so to speak, encompasses interstellar distances on a subsector or even sector scale. In the Islands, a star system is considered a big place, and this affects naval thinking at all levels.

The concept of the 'System Defence Boat' (SDB) is prevalent throughout the Imperium but is not used as such within the Islands. More correctly, all navies maintain squadrons of FAC and PC that can be used in the system defence role, but they are not specific designs for that role; the same FAC and PC can be carried by a parent craft and used for offensive operations in other star systems. Imperial observers would normally refer to the FAC and PC squadrons they saw operating on system-defence deployments as SDBs, but to an Islander they are simply vessels to be deployed as needed, with no requirement for a special term.

All navies within the Islands subsectors make extensive use of non-Jump-capable vessels for local defence. Such craft are more cost-effective than Jump-capable warships of the same tonnage as they do not give up space for fuel and need not incur the expense of a Jump drive and personnel trained to operate it.

As with smaller craft, these vessels are not thought of as 'system defence' assets as such, they are simply warships without intersystem mobility. Since most of the Islands powers have all their major assets in a single star system (as opposed to being scattered across several thousand of them, in the case of the Imperium), the mindset is different. Up until relatively recently, each star system was effectively the whole universe to each of the Islands powers. Going anywhere else took so long that a single-system way of thinking was inevitable. Despite over a century of Jump capability, this habit has not entirely been lost.

Large (by local standards), slow-moving vessels are common for the sublight role, often hollowed out of asteroids rather than built in a yard. This means that every craft is different, but general characteristics are much the same. An asteroid hull provides a considerable degree of protection, though weapon mountings are inefficient due to the irregular shape of most asteroids.

Asteroid ships tend to be armed mainly with missiles and often carry squadrons of fighters or FAC. They are more like mobile forts than warships as such, and some powers have defended their mainworlds by placing asteroids in orbit as fortresses rather than building warships. In almost all cases, these forts

have at least a minimal manoeuvre capability to avoid disaster and to enable the fort to change orbit unpredictably. This prevents an attacker from simply accelerating a chunk of rock on a ballistic course to intercept the fort and waiting a few months for the results.

Medium-sized sublight warships are also in use by many powers. These tend to use constructed hulls rather than asteroids. Imperial observers would normally refer to these ships as monitors, a term derived from a type of military vessel suitable only for coast defence in the centuries before space flight on Terra. Islanders do not use this term, as to them a warship capable of operating anywhere in the star system is not in any way a 'short range' vessel. Instead, these craft are given the same class designations as their Jump-capable cousins – to the Islanders, a frigate is a frigate whether it can operate in one star system or Jump to others.

Defence is far easier than attack over interstellar distances and in the Islands subsectors this is even more true. The logistical support required to launch a major attack is enormous, making it unlikely that any assault by a single power on the home system of another could succeed. Thus conflict is likely to take the form of raids and skirmishes, with attacks on outposts and economic targets used as bargaining chips or to draw out the capital ships of the enemy for a decisive action.

The capital ships of the Islands powers are objects of great pride among their people. In the case of Serendip Belt they are literally carved out from the same asteroids as the habitats in which the population dwell. The loss of a capital ship would be a tragic blow to its owning world, possibly bringing its government to the negotiating table. It is more likely that a war would end as a result of a negotiated settlement after one side lost some of its capital ships than being won by a knockout blow.

However, a knockout blow or catastrophic economic damage remains a possibility, so the major fleet assets must be deployed with caution. Skirmishes between cruisers and mid-sized combatants, perhaps operating in squadrons, would likely characterise any war that broke out in the Islands. The power that staked everything on a masterstroke might become the dominant power in the region, but could well end up as a cautionary footnote to history.

A HISTORY OF REFT SECTOR

Human history stretches back several thousand years, though parts are fragmentary or inferred from archaeological finds. However, it is possible to build a reasonably clear picture of what conditions were like in Reft Sector during most of what can be termed the 'human era'. Before this, much less is known and a significant proportion of what is known is likely to be distorted or just plain wrong.



The Distant Past

It is generally accepted that some time in the far distant past the beings now known as the Ancients arose. These were not the first intelligent beings in the universe, but they are thought to be the first to possess convenient interstellar travel in the form of the Jump drive. It appears that the Ancients were responsible for spreading various species across Charted Space and for influencing the development of others.

The Ancients are thought to have settled humans on one or more of the worlds of the Rift, notably Dlaekan. There is some evidence that populations may have been settled elsewhere, though it is scanty and open to question. Droyne are known to have been present (or are currently present) on Zamoran, Bانشonno and Esperanza, and there are Chirpers on Undrelyn and Uxors. The presence of these groups may or may not be connected with Ancient activities; at present the scientific community is divided on the subject.

The Ancients' heyday seems to have been around 300,000 years ago, and ended rather suddenly with a titanic war. This may have been a civil war or, as some theorists believe, an external conflict. Another somewhat credible theory is that some of the Ancients' servitor races rose up against them, perhaps with assistance from some of the Ancients themselves.

Exactly what happened will probably never be known, but the after effects are there for those who look. Whole planets were shattered and populations were wiped out. Many of the races seeded here and there by the Ancients were wiped out on their homeworlds or entirely. The rest lost the use of technology provided by the Ancients and reverted, for the most part, to barbarism.

There is a huge gap in history between the great works of the ancients and the rise of the first human interstellar state. It is possible that other species, perhaps using Ancient technology or possibly their own inventions, ascended onto the cosmic stage in this time. Occasionally an archaeological dig locates items which are labelled 'pseudo-Ancient' as they use the same technology but are of a different age. It is entirely possible that in the hundreds of thousands of years between the Ancients and their next known successors, all manner of civilizations might have risen to greatness and fallen back into the darkness.

At least some of the worlds of the Great Rift are known to have been inhabited for some or all of this period, though there is little evidence of starfaring travel. Thus the history proper of Reft Sector begins with the first arrival of humans... or perhaps with the beginning of their journey to the area.

The Colony Missions

In 2050AD, the European Space Agency launched an extremely long-range colonial expedition. This is known to have consisted of three specially created vessels: **Voyageur**, **C-Jammer** and

Marinus van der Lubbe. A mix of personnel was present aboard each vessel, but each had a distinctly national character as the names suggest. Thus **van der Lubbe** was dubbed the 'German ship' and carried primarily German, Austrian and East European personnel. **C-Jammer** was 'British' in character and drew its personnel largely from Britain, Scandinavia and some of the Russian republics. **Voyageur** was 'the French ship' and crewed largely by French, Italian and Spanish personnel.

A fourth ship was initially planned, and work was well advanced before funding shortfalls caused efforts to be shifted to a three-ship programme. The fourth vessel, at that time unnamed, was mothballed for the time being. The others set off on their immense voyage, which was projected to last for about 2,000 years.

The 'ships' of the ESA colony mission were not really starships as such; they were hollowed-out asteroids. Thousands of people were already living in such habitats all over the solar system, so other than the isolation of an interstellar voyage there was little difference in lifestyle of the crews.

The voyage was separated into several sections: Crewed Phase, Coasting Phase, Search Phase, Approach Phase and Arrival Phase. The Crewed Phase was the critical first few years, in which a crew maintained (and in one case, finished work on) the vessels, made course adjustments, and set the ship up to coast onward for the next few centuries.

These crewmembers gradually grew old and died as the voyage went on, but in many ways they lived much like asteroid colonists back home in the Sol star system, communicating between the three ships by radio and occasionally even transferring from one to another to deal with a crisis.

There is no precise date at which the Crewed Phase ended aboard any given ship. The last of the crews eventually retired and lived out their years in relative comfort, but by then most of the ships' various problems were ironed out and the voyage had settled into a slow routine, so the mission was well into the Coasting Phase before the crews ceased their work.

The population to found the colonies at the end of the voyage travelled in suspended animation. 100,000 colonists were carried aboard each ship, of which 750 or so were 'awake' at any given time. These personnel each came out of cold sleep for a 5-year period, undertaking essential work to keep the ships running and inheriting skills from the crew, whose children in some cases joined the frozen colonists and in others lived out many generations as officers and crew of the colony ships.

Wake periods were staggered at 6-month intervals, with all adult colonists serving for a period during the flight. Some elected not to re-enter suspended animation, often raising children



who either joined the colonists or the permanent crew. As a result, the population who disembarked from the ships at their destination retained strong cultural connections with their home countries back on 21st Century Earth. Even those born on the journey, to several generations of permanent crew, grew up in a recognisably 21st Century European culture.

After hundreds of years in the Coasting Phase, the shipboard computers judged that the mission was far enough from Earth that humanity's eggs were no longer in one fragile basket, and began looking for stars that might have habitable planets around them. The Search Phase went on for decades, until a group of promising stars was located.

The ships then began their deceleration, scanning for signs of a new home. As the signs firmed up, the critical decision was made – to enter the Approach Phase and commit to the star group ahead. If no suitable world were found, the ships could not accelerate to their previous speed and would have to crawl onwards for more centuries, hoping to find somewhere to land before their systems began to break down.

Now committed, the crews anxiously studied the data that came in, creeping closer to their destination with agonizing slowness. Finally, confirmation came in – one of the worlds ahead showed definite signs of habitability. It had breathable air, liquid water and the right temperature. There were even indications that a healthy biosphere existed.

The mission went into the Arrival Phase as the ships approached the promising word, which was dubbed New Home. Increasing numbers of frozen colonists were awakened and began preparations for landing. A deliberate programme of population expansion was begun in those last years; the slow speed of sublight travel ensured that children born at the start of the Arrival Phase would set foot on their new world as adolescents.

Then came an incredible discovery. Other worlds in the cluster seemed to show signs of habitability. Some were fairly marginal but others were almost ideal. The decision was made to disperse, with one colony ship heading for each of the best prospects. These worlds were all within 16 light-years of one another. After a voyage of centuries this was seen as a relatively minor obstacle to communications, so **van der Lubbe** changed course for the world designated Neubayern. **Voyageur** bid farewell to **C-Jammer** and headed for what would become Amondiage.

C-Jammer carried on to New Home, using the gravity of the system's sun and then the planet itself to set up a braking orbit. The first colonists landed on New Home in 4512AD. According to one never-proven tale, the very first creature they encountered was a rabbit identical to those of Old Earth. If true, this would have raised some serious questions among the colonists, but whatever the case New Home was found to be a welcoming

place. Humans, along with the livestock and plants they brought with them, thrived on their new world.

Meanwhile, **van der Lubbe** reached Neubayern and began colonial operations in 4516AD. Amondiage was settled in 4518AD by **Voyageur**. Just three years later, very far away, the Third Imperium was founded.

The Fourth Mission

The unnamed fourth colony ship lay semi-derelict in a deep orbit for many years, forgotten as Terran scientists invented the Jump drive in 2089 and exploration of nearby star systems began. This led to contact with another group of humans, who called themselves the Vilani. Theirs was a huge empire, old and stagnant, and contemptuous of the barbarians on the border, who clawed their way into space aboard ramshackle ships. War followed inevitably, beginning in 2113AD.

The shock of encountering hostile starfarers of great power revived interest in spreading Terran society as widely as possible. A number of Jump-capable colony ships were hurriedly thrown together and sent out. These went mostly to Rimward, away from the Vilani Imperium, and were followed by a number of asteroid-hulled 'sleeper ships' similar to the ESA missions of 2050 though much smaller in scale. The fate of most of these missions is unknown, suggesting that they either failed in flight or passed beyond Charted Space. This attempted exodus is referred to as the 'Great Runaway' in many historical texts, though in reality it was quite a small-scale event.

Meanwhile, a consortium of governments, corporations and shipbuilders quietly placed a team aboard the unfinished fourth ESA ship and began making some modifications. Volunteer colonists were selected and the ship was provisioned for a mission to Rimward. However, during the second phase of reactivation, in which a number of Jump-capable scout and transport craft were being placed aboard the asteroid vessel in newly-carved berths, news came in that the Vilani had just destroyed another Terran squadron.

The project was crashed through to completion, with the result that there was no time to align for a Rimward acceleration out of the system. Instead the fourth ship, now dubbed 'Shining Hope' began a slingshot orbit out of the system using a course plan formulated decades earlier. With no time to update navigational data, the crew used information transmitted back by the ESA missions, following their path at first with the intent of implementing a course change en route.

The asteroid ship was under very low power during its initial acceleration, and to most of the available sensors it resembled a large, cold, slow-moving rock. In the confusion of the early Interstellar Wars, tracking was quickly lost and the fate of this fourth mission remained unknown on Terra for centuries.



The Interstellar Wars and the Long Night

Unknown to the colonists, their cousins back on Terra were fighting against the Vilani Imperium, also known as the First Imperium. The Vilani were at that time in decline and their complacency meant that the Terrans faced only frontier forces rather than the main battle fleets of the Imperium. Nonetheless, the Terrans faced incredible odds and were defeated repeatedly.

Frantic innovation, reverse-engineering of Vilani technology, and desperate courage enabled the Terrans to avoid defeat long enough to establish a real starfaring fleet. Their conflict with the Vilani was not a single unbroken war. It was instead a series of fairly limited conflicts, interspersed with local ceasefires, treaties and lulls. So many flare-ups of violence occurred, many of them very localised, that modern historians use the term *nth Interstellar War* for any given conflict.

The end result was that the Terrans staved off defeat as they grew in power, and finally began to win. The Vilani Imperium, old and tired as it was, fractured and began to disintegrate. The Terran fleet did not so much conquer the Imperium as take possession of parts of it as it broke up.

Under Terran rule, the Vilani Imperium became known as the Second Imperium or the Rule of Man. It is today often referred to as the Ramshackle Empire, as the decline continued albeit at a slower pace. Within 400 years the Rule of Man had begun to collapse and the period known as the Long Night began.

The Long Night was not a total collapse, but in many areas interstellar travel all but ceased. Habitable worlds went their own way while those depending on interstellar trade for necessary resources were either evacuated or their inhabitants died out. Technological levels underwent a general slump, and some worlds fell all the way back to barbarism. Most lost the ability to maintain interstellar links, though some groups of worlds did continue to trade among themselves. One such was the Terran Mercantile Community; another was the Sylean Federation.

After centuries of struggling to survive, the Sylean Federation began to expand at about the same time as the ESA colony mission detected its destination systems. Not long after the first colonists landed on Amondiage – 4521AD, or Year 0 in the Imperial Calendar – the Sylean Federation reinvented itself. It took the title of the Third Imperium, giving it a claim to all of the former territories of the First and Second. The worlds within the Great Rift were never part of that territory, however.

Colonising the Riftworlds

While some of the crews of the three colony ships joined the colonists on the surface of their three new worlds, the majority did not. Their reasons varied considerably, but the outcome was the same; they preferred to live aboard their vessels.

Some of the colonists joined them, and together they set off on a new voyage. This one was much shorter, though still prodigious in scope.

The three colony ships set about a sublight exploration of the local cluster. The colonists already knew that they had entered a small group of stars isolated by many light-years of empty space. However, exploring even this limited region would take centuries at sublight speeds. The descendants of the crews aboard ***van der Lubbe*** and ***Voyageur*** eventually returned to their base worlds with a wealth of data about the local cluster.

The mission had already succeeded beyond all expectations, finding not one habitable world but three. Now the exploration ships came home with news that there were yet more worlds to settle. Some were marginal, it was true, but here was a chance to disperse the species still further as insurance against disaster or simply because it is the nature of life to spread.

Some personnel from the exploration ships had elected to remain on the worlds they found, creating tiny colonies that remained cut off from the rest of humanity by the vast gulf of space. Too small to be viable, these colonies mostly died out before other ships came. But some were there when the first colony missions arrived from Amondiage, and Neubayern. They provided the newcomers with a wealth of information about the new worlds and assisted in the development of thriving societies.

It was centuries before ***Voyageur*** and ***van der Lubbe*** arrived back at their colonial bases, in both cases finding a well-developed society that could support colonisation missions. The two ships then became ferries for colonial expeditions, settling people on the worlds they had found. In the meantime, ***C-Jammer*** had made an epic voyage beyond what would become known as Old Islands subsector and had begun exploration of the worlds to Spinward of the new colonies, in what became known as the New Islands subsector.

C-Jammer was, like the other colony ships, an asteroid habitat that could propel itself through space. Its people were used to life aboard such a habitat, rather than a planetary existence. Thus when a survey of an asteroid belt showed rich resources, the decision was made to settle there. ***C-Jammer*** was guided into a stable orbit and its engines mothballed, becoming essentially a new asteroid in the field and the first inhabited body in the system. Mining and industrial settlements were established throughout the belt, and gradually habitation spread to other bodies in the system including gas giant moons and planetoids in distant orbits.

New Home was the first to build its own colony ship, which was launched in 4788AD. Like the original vessels, this was a hollowed-out asteroid. Although on a smaller scale than the earlier missions, colonists from New Home were able to reach



Colchis aboard this vessel. A second ship was launched towards what became Esperanza in 4810AD.

Amondiage built no less than four ships to join *Voyageur* in carrying colonists to other worlds. In the next four centuries Amondiage settled St Denis, Acadie, Quichotte, Sansterre and Joyeuse. The latter launched further missions to St Hilaire and Topas. Neubayern settled Herzenslust and Berlichingen, while the colony at Colchis rapidly matured enough to send a mission to settle New Colchis.

Besancon was settled by a new mission from Amondiage, and from there colonies were set up on Elysee and Gloire. *Voyageur* arrived at Topas in time to resettle refugees from a war at a new home which became Zuflucht. The Amondiage vessels were true spacegoing craft rather than asteroids, and were capable of landing on a planetary surface. This was fortunate; the colony ship *Infinité* was forced to crash land on Sturgeon's Law with a cargo of settlers from New Colchis.

Infinité was the only one of the first- or second-generation vessels lost during the colonisation of the Riftworlds. Its crew and settlers were isolated on the distinctly inhospitable world

of Sturgeon's Law for centuries and had to learn to live in their hazardous environment. The other ships plied among the colonies of the Old and New Islands, carrying personnel and cargo at an incredibly slow pace and maintaining tenuous contact among the people of the Riftworlds.

The Rise of the Third Imperium

The Third Imperium arose around the same time that the ESA colonists arrived in the Islands subsectors. It was not founded as such but was 'restored' on Sylea by the arch-businessman Cleon Zhunastu, later Emperor Cleon I. The Sylean Federation at that time consisted of 30 or so worlds, and these formed the basis of the new Imperium. Their charter, which was largely a free-trade agreement with collective-defence causes, formed the basis of the Imperial Charter. The planetary and business leaders of the Federation became the early nobility of the Imperium.

The new Imperium launched a military campaign to crush the warlords that nibbled at its borders, then began to reintegrate the worlds of what is now Core Sector. This was mostly a diplomatic and economic exercise though there was some fighting. Other sectors followed, and eventually the Third Imperium expanded to fill almost all the space available to it. Initially this process was





rapid and deliberate, with large areas annexed in economic, diplomatic and military campaigns. This gradually tailed off after a little more than a century. From then on expansion was gradual, by a process referred to as 'border creep'. Eventually the borders came up against natural or political obstacles such as rifts or the outer edge of another polity's territory.

The Third Imperium found a natural frontier to Spinward-Coreward when its scouts encountered the Great Rift. This provided a suitable point to curtail expansion, allowing resources to be reallocated elsewhere. There was little incentive to set up the enormously expensive infrastructure required to explore into the Rift and across it, so the Islands remained undisturbed. Those worlds of Reft Sector which could be easily reached from Imperial space were of course developed, and today have a very different character to those within the Rift itself.

To Spinward, the Imperium encountered the Aslan, a non-human race that controlled a large area of space. After much conflict a border region was agreed, which has remained fairly stable – though not untroubled – ever since. The Imperial region 'beneath the claw' became something of a backwater; one of the few border regions that did not face a potential external threat. It was several centuries before the worlds of the Rift aroused any interest in Imperial circles.

Imperial explorers heading Coreward found a large area of space filled with small states and single-world polities, dominated mainly by Vargr. This region, collectively known as the Vargr Extents although it contained other races too, was the source of some trouble for the Imperium. Corsairs from the Extents found Imperial shipping a tempting target, and outright war flared up from time to time. However, the small size of the Vargr states made it relatively simple to deal with any given threat even though Vargr politics tended to create new conflicts as fast as they could be resolved. The Extents at the time (and to this day) resembled a smouldering brushfire rather than a massive conflagration; a nuisance that threatened to escalate rather than a serious threat to Imperial security.

Beyond the Great Rift

Between the Vargr Extents and the upper 'claw' of the Great Rift lay a narrow corridor of navigable space, through which first explorers, then colonists, then traders, gradually filtered. This brought them to Deneb Sector and thence to the Spinward Marches. There, the Imperials encountered another major group of humans, the Zhodani. Tension with the Zhodani Consulate was inevitable. Although the Zhodani were not expansionistic, the Imperial land-grab caused alarm and led to a series of conflicts that became known as the Frontier Wars.

Immediately after the First Frontier War, the Imperial commander in the region 'behind the claw', Grand Admiral Olav hault-Plankwell, took his fleet to the Imperial capital and seized

power, beginning a long period of civil war which allowed the resurgent Zhodani to launch the Second Frontier War. Two more Frontier Wars followed, of which the Third was of massive significance to the people of the Riftworlds. The conflict itself did not affect them, but a single Imperial ship entered the Islands region, unintentionally bringing the secret of faster-than-light travel to the Islands.

Contact With the Islands

In 5501AD, an unidentified vessel arrived in the Serendip Belt. Rather than decelerating from high but sublight speed over several years, it simply appeared in the system and began broadcasting a distress call which included several almost recognisable words. A hasty rescue mission found the ship to have battle damage and to be constructed using very high but recognisably human technology. The crew turned out to be mostly humans.

The vessel was the Imperial Navy strike cruiser **Eldorado**, heavily damaged in battle during the Third Frontier War. It had escaped destruction by making an emergency Jump, which resulted in a huge Misjump and crippling damage to its drives. The crew of **Eldorado** struck a deal with the Serendips, receiving assistance in repairing their ship in return for not being particularly careful about what the local technicians and scientists learned.

Eldorado was heavily converted at Serendip Belt, losing a number of her systems to make room for auxiliary fuel tanks, and was eventually able to return to Imperial space. There, her crew reported on what they had seen at Serendip and during their transit home. Scout Service vessels were despatched to investigate and confirm the reports. Entering the Islands, subsectors, the Scouts found that the local situation had been massively altered.

In order to repair the Jump drives of **Eldorado**, a number of critical systems had to be fabricated locally and a mock-up of the drive built to test the components. Using the knowledge they had gained, plus some hazardous trial and error, the people of the Serendip Belt built their first Jump-capable vessels. This created an effective monopoly on space travel and, coupled with weapon systems reverse-engineered from Imperial examples, allowed the Serendips to begin establishing control over the region.

The Scout Service commander on the spot was concerned at the results of the (understandable) interference in local affairs by the crew of **Eldorado**, and decided to distribute knowledge of the Jump drive among other local powers. This was not so much out of a sense of fair play or a desire to 'fix' interference as an attempt to restore the strategic balance of the region.

It seemed possible that a regular route across the Great Rift via the Islands could be set up, and control of the region by a single



power might jeopardise this. Thus the decision to give the Jump drive to the Islanders was made primarily for strategic reasons, in the hope of creating a patchwork of small states friendly to the Imperium rather than a single large power that might cost more to influence.

In the years after the widespread introduction of the Jump drive, there was little new colonisation in the Islands subsectors. This was mainly due to the fact that the best worlds had already been settled long ago by sublight missions. Small-scale missions were undertaken however, such as the settlement of Achille by a utopian group from Sansterre and the relocation to Genevieve of a reclusive band of wealthy individuals.

More significantly, it became viable to set up colonies at uninhabitable locations to exploit their resources. Thus Neubayern settled the Schlesien Belt and Esperanza settled Wellington. Population movement from the more crowded worlds became possible, and in some cases led to political changes at the far end. Thus Herzenslust became a New Colchis colony due to a gradual takeover by new arrivals.

Economic and military conquests also took place as a result of the Jump drive. Serendip Belt took control of Gloire by direct military means, while Sansterre annexed St Denis by economic means. In other cases, the shift in the power structure resulted in realignment of minor colonies; Quichotte requested annexation by Joyeuse in order to receive protection and economic support.

BEHIND THE CLAW

Through a process of gradual expansion and occasional warfare, a fairly stable situation has come to prevail 'behind the claw'. The Imperium has a border with the Zhodani Consulate in Spinward Marches Sector, and an open frontier to Spinward. Many of the worlds between the Marches and the Great Rift are independent or part of small polities, but there is also a significant 'finger' of Imperial territory which stretches down to the edge of the Great Rift. This area is connected to the rest of the Imperium by a long route around the Great Rift through Corridor sector, or a shorter but scarcely easier route across the Rift via the Islands subsectors.

To Spinward of this region lies an area of independent worlds, small polities, and areas controlled by Aslan clans. The latter have their own Jump-5 route across the Great Rift, making communications with the rest of Aslan space relatively straightforward. Nevertheless, the Rift is a significant obstacle to large-scale trade and bulk movement of goods, so the Aslan clans on the far side of the Rift from their core regions are, most of the time at least, left to their own devices. The Aslan have exerted little influence on events 'within the claw' but do occasionally send trade expeditions into the Islands. Bands of

Aslan have attempted landgrabs among the Riftworlds from time to time, though little more than a tenuous finger-holed has ever been established. Imperial and non-Imperial humans from both sides of the Rift have been a greater influence on the Islands, but even this is on a very small scale. Thus the events and troubles of the Riftworlds are, for the most part, home grown.

RECENT EVENTS IN THE ISLANDS SUBSECTORS

In the 90 or so years since the distribution of Jump technology throughout the Islands subsectors, tensions have increased gradually and military budgets have accordingly grown much larger. Exactly what is purchased with these budgets varies from one world to another. Most seem intent on expanding their territory through economic or military conquest and even New Home, the least expansionistic of all the major worlds in the region, has built up a considerable fleet to protect its trade interests, plus a powerful system defence force.

A shifting pattern of alliances and pacts has thus far ensured that no single world rises to dominance. The first to be curbed in this way was Serendip Belt, which was forced to give up its dominance over Topas, Elysee and Besancon in 5542AD. The threat of an alliance between the other major worlds of the Islands subsectors was effective in forcing compliance, although bickering between potential alliance members began before it had even formed.

The Concordat of Topas, signed in 5542AD, established the concept of planetary sovereignty, essentially stating that each world was self-governing but could voluntarily give its allegiance to another. This permitted those signatories with colonies to retain control of them. The Concordat more or less fell apart in 5576AD, when a coup on Herzenslust produced a government that immediately offered allegiance to New Colchis.

In 5575AD, the Convention of Interdiction, signed by all the major powers, declared that Orphee was a closed world in order to protect the local non-human population from outside interference. Thus far this convention has been upheld by all parties, other than to land the occasional research team. The people of Orphee have only the most primitive technology and thus little to offer outsiders.

At the present time (5626AD, or 1105 by the Imperial calendar), increasing tensions suggest that war is likely in the near future. Skirmishes and border incidents have become both more frequent and larger in scale over the past decades. The presence in the Islands of Imperial vessels representing a range of interested groups with varying agendas adds an additional dimension of uncertainty to the situation. Political agendas seem to be moving from a cold-war or tension-in-peace-time situation to pre-war manoeuvrings, as various worlds acknowledge that war is coming and try to place themselves in the best position to fight and win it rather than seeking to keep the peace.



TIMELINE OF REFT SECTOR

Major events occurring elsewhere, but with implications for Reft Sector, are also indicated.

Date (AD)	Date (Imperial)	Event (AD)
–4723	–9235	Vilani develop Jump drive and found First Imperium
–894	–5415	Zhodani develop Jump drive
–179	–4700	Loeskanth begin raiding Tapazmal homeworld
1718	–2800	First Zhodani-Vargr contact
2050	–2462	ESA colony missions leave Earth
2089	–2431	Jump Drive invented on Earth
2022	–2499	Terran Confederation founded
2113	–2399	First Interstellar War
2317	–2204	Terran Confederation becomes Second Imperium (Rule of Man)
2518	–2000	First Zhodani-Vilani contact
2522	–1999	Aslan invent Jump drive
2541	–1980	First Aslan-Human contact
2742	–1776	Rule of Man (Second Imperium) collapses. Long Night begins
3403	–1118	Aslan-Human border conflicts begin
3477	–1044	Aslan explorers make first crossing of Great Rift
3594	–924	Darrian sun destabilises.
3871	–650	Sylean Federation founded
4119	–399	Sword Worlds colonisation begins
4491	–30	Sylean Federation begins moves towards establishment of the Third Imperium
4512	–9	C-Jammer enters orbit around New Home
4516	–5	Van der Lubbe enters orbit around Neubayern
4518	–3	Voyageur enters orbit around Amondiage
4521	0	Founding of Third Imperium. Long Night ends
4568	50	First Imperial-Zhodani contact
4578	60	Imperial colonisation of Spinward Marches begins
4588	76	Third Imperium begins Pacification Campaigns, integrating former First and Second Imperium territories by military, economic and diplomatic means.
4608	87	C-Jammer enters Serendip Belt
4632	120	Imperial Pacification Campaigns complete
4666	148	First Imperial-Darrian contact
4741	220	Third Imperium begins border campaigns against Vargr states
4788	267	New Home launches first ship, Outward Bound
4814	293	Outward Bound lands first colonists on Colchis
4860	339	Van der Lubbe and Voyageur return to Neubayern
4861	340	Amondiage launches first colony ship, Asterix
4869	348	Imperial Vargr Campaigns end
4901	380	Imperial-Aslan border settled by Peace of Ftahair
4941	420	First Survey of Imperial astrography and demographics completed
4979	461	First Zhodani-Aslan contact
5018	500	First Imperial exploration into Zhodani territory
5107	589	First Frontier War begins
5112	604	First Frontier War ends. Imperial Civil War begins
5113	615	Second Frontier War begins
5138	620	Second Frontier War ends
5140	622	Imperial Civil War ends
5171	650	Upsurge of interest in psionics within Imperium
5225	704	Imperium creates Solomani Autonomous Region, centred on Terra
5232	711	Infinité forced down on Sturgeon's Law
5236	718	Imperial Express Boat (Xboat) system completed



Date (AD)	Date (Imperial)	Event (AD)
5268	750	Zhodani Seventh Core Expedition begins
5318	800	Imperial Psionics Suppressions begin
5392	871	Solomani Autonomous Region reorganises itself as Solomani Confederation, claiming descent from the Terran Confederation
5461	940	Oppression of non-humans in Solomani space causes Imperium to revoke Solomani Confederation charter. Attempts at diplomatic resolution begin
5500	979	Third Frontier War begins
5501	980	Imperial strike cruiser Eldorado Misjumps into the Islands
5504	983	Serendip Belt vessel C-Breaker makes first Jump
5507	986	Third Frontier War ends
5511	990	Imperial-Solomani diplomacy breaks down. Solomani Rim War begins
5523	1002	Solomani Rim War ends
5534	1013	Imperial Scout Service mission spread Jump technology through the Islands
5542	1021	Concordat of Topas establishes principle of planetary sovereignty
5575	1054	Convention of Interdiction declares Orphee a closed world
5576	1055	Coup on Herzenslust; government declares allegiance to New Colchis. Several major signatories repudiate Concordat of Topas
5586	1065	Second Survey of the Imperium completed
5600	1082	Fourth Frontier War begins
5602	1084	Fourth Frontier War ends
5626	1105	Present day





POWERS IN REFT SECTOR

There are two groups of powers in Reft Sector – powers OF Reft Sector (i.e. political groups and states whose home territory lies within the sector) and powers IN Reft Sector, which includes a number of stateless organisations as well as influential groups whose power base lies somewhere else.

POWERS OF REFT SECTOR

There are ten major – at least by local standards – powers with their base in Reft Sector. Of these, eight are major worlds, each of which is a state in its own right. The major worlds have varying amounts of outsystem holdings, mining bases, colonies on planets and moons throughout their own system, and in many cases one or more colonies in other star systems. The fleets that can be fielded by such small powers are tiny in comparison with those of the Third Imperium or even the typical Aslan clan, but they are important by local standards.

The military forces and naval fleets of each major world vary considerably in terms of design philosophy and tactical doctrine, mainly as a result of local conditions. A number of ship designs used in the Islands are unique to the world that designed them, though this situation is complicated by the occasional sale of vessels or designs, and the even less common capture of a repairable vessel after an incident.

There are also two ‘stateless powers’ in the region, which have holdings on various worlds and wield sufficient power to deal with world governments as an equal. These organisations have been known to enter into alliances with one world or another, often to gain political or economic concessions. Their influence varies from place to place depending on the attitude of local governments. The stateless powers are, as a rule, influential rather than powerful. Their strength is subtler than that of battlefleets, and is not coincidentally harder to estimate.

Esperanza

‘A heavily populated paragon of organisational excellence located on the Spinward fringe of New Islands subsector.’

Esperanza is a three-system power, controlling the Esperanza and neighbouring Wellington systems as well as St-Hilaire in their entirety. These systems lie as far to Spinward as it is possible to travel without heading out into the void of the Great Rift. They can only be reached from the inner regions of the Islands by a long Jump-3 transit via Serendip Belt, Gloire and Wellington, or by a Jump-2 ship using tanker refuelling to cross from New Colchis to Esperanza.

This ‘moat’ around the systems loyal to the Esperanza government influences both military and economic affairs, and this in turn ensures that Esperanza is somewhat isolated in the politics of the region.

Esperanza itself is the most populous world in the Islands subsectors, with a fairly high technological level. Its colony in the Wellington system is little more than an outpost, and is mainly present to support the Jump-3 link through to Gloire. Far more important is the ‘second homeworld’ of St Hilaire.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL

Esperanza is a dictatorship, though the dictator uses the title of President. The present system has come down from the original colonial mission, albeit with a few twists and turns along the way. The original colony governor established a workable system that struck a balance between having executive power vested in one individual with a suitable amount of individual opportunity and responsibility. This enabled the colony to deal effectively with whatever problems presented themselves but also created a social safety valve to avoid tension within the general populace.

Over the years, however, the dictatorship has gradually cemented its control over all aspects of Esperanzan life, resulting in a rigidly-controlled society with rules, laws and guidelines for just about everything. This is accepted by most of the populace, partly because they have never seen any other way of doing things, and partly because the isolation of the world is a constant reminder of just how fragile human society can be.

Esperanza is not a drab, grey hive of faceless workers. Most people are so used to the plethora of laws and regulations that guide their lives that they scarcely notice them. Indeed, in some ways the strict nature of society is a source of comfort to the populace. Not only do they know that nobody is going to rock their fragile, isolated boat, but they also know exactly what they have to do in order to qualify for advancement, promotion and betterment.

The nature of Esperanzan society is such that it is unthinkable that someone might meet the criteria for advancement and not receive it. A looser social structure might actually frighten many Esperanzans; without strict rules and firm enforcement, how can an individual know that others will not behave in a manner that results in them gaining an unfair or undeserved privilege or reward?



The political structure of Esperanza uses multiple levels of command, with a single individual in control at each level but enjoying the support of a suitable group of bureaucrats, advisors and executives. Each offworld colony has a governor, for example, to whom the governors of the cities on that moon or planet answer. On Esperanza itself, there are regional governors to whom the city governors answer, and a Planetary President of Esperanza who is second only to the President of Esperanza. Outsiders are sometimes confused by these two titles, but to a local it is obvious – one runs the planet of Esperanza, the other is dictator over all holdings of the political body Esperanza, including the planet of that name.

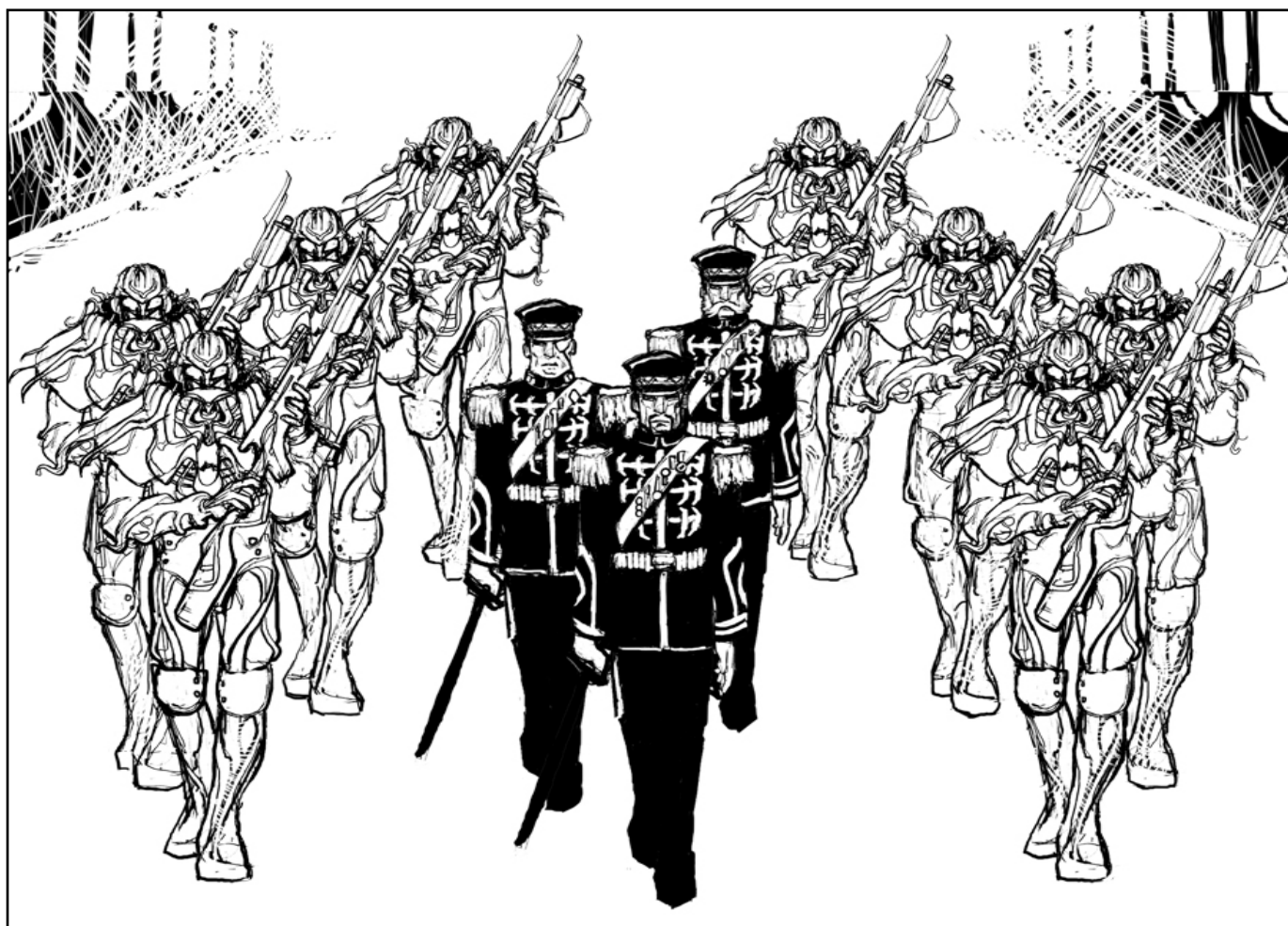
Industrial and mercantile corporations, as well as military forces, are all integrated into this political structure. All economic, military and industrial activity is subordinated to political control. Thus a corporate official takes his orders from his immediate superior, but that superior answers to the political director responsible for overseeing the city or colony where the official's facility is based.

This would be inefficient in some societies but Esperanza is sufficiently integrated that it is hard to tell where political control

ends and other aspects of society begin. This is illustrated by the existence of a corps of executives and workers who are frequently tasked to do similar work within what elsewhere would be separate areas of responsibility – military, economic and industrial. Thus a party of engineers might move from a civil engineering project, say building a new section of sewer on the homeworld, to assisting a military force building a bunker complex, then be reassigned to assist with the installation of heavy industrial machinery.

The Wellington colony is insignificant, other than acting as a starport site for the link to Gloire. As such, the whole Wellington system is under the jurisdiction of a single governor, who is less highly ranked than the governors of most cities in the Esperanza system.

Esperanza also owns the St Hilaire system, which is slowly being developed into a significant industrial asset. This system is less dense than Esperanza, with no gas giants or significant concentrations of planetoids. Outposts are maintained on some moons and three of the system's rocky planets but these are small, specialist installations such as prisons, research facilities and deep-space observatories. Significant industrial assets are confined to the mainworld.





St Hilaire itself has a modest industrial base concentrated into several fairly large cities, each of which serves as the hub for smaller settlements surrounding it. These cities are located on the world's few small landmasses, widely separated by deep oceans which provide considerable amounts of food to feed the homeworld and outsystem colonies in Esperanza. As with the home system, most in-system travel uses sublight craft.

Esperanza also maintains a small enclave on Nebelwelt, though for political reasons it has never pressed a claim to the world or even its small starport. The port was largely funded from Esperanza, but has never done much more than break even as the mid-tech locals do not provide an especially lucrative market.

ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRIAL

The Esperanza system is fairly dense, with multiple planetoid belts and several moons suitable for colonies of various sizes. A number of planets also exist, but the innermost is too hot for colonisation. Several fair-sized cities have been built on the other planetary bodies in the system.

As already noted, these colonies are subject to strict political control and generally specialise in one area of activity. Thus while all cities have support industries, education facilities and the like, some are primarily heavy-industrial sites, others scientific or economic centres. A number of asteroid mining facilities are in operation, along with petrochemical-harvesting plants in low orbit around the system's gas giants.

For the most part, in-system cargo and passenger transport is carried out by sublight vessels, which are far more cost-effective than Jump-capable craft. Huge ore barges and commercial freighters ply regular runs within the system, moving raw materials and finished goods from the industrial centres to the end user.

There is relatively little trade with outsiders and Wellington is resupplied by Jump-1 capable freighters every few weeks. It produces too little to need a major freighting infrastructure. As a result, Esperanza has a very small Jump-capable trading fleet, consisting of vessels optimised for the route they were built for – Jump-2 ships for tanker-assisted trade runs to New Colchis and internal freighting to Saint Hilaire, and Jump-3 vessels assigned to the Gloire route. The latter use Jump drives bought on New Home, which can be maintained but not reproduced locally.

Tanker assets and Jump-2 ships have been reassigned from the New Colchis run at times, transiting direct to Serendip Belt to conduct large-scale trade when the situation required it. It has been suggested that additional J-2 ships might be built and assigned to this route rather than purchasing more Jump-3 drives from New Home when the existing J-3 craft begin to become obsolete. This would require a shift in policy, from

maintaining a trade mission on Gloire to trading direct with Serendip. The current set up is more efficient from the point of view of Esperanza, so will probably be maintained for the foreseeable future.

MILITARY

Esperanza is not especially militarised despite its political structure. Its first line of defence is inaccessibility; for every warship inserted into an Esperanzan system, several tankers are needed to convey it there and ensure its capability to retreat. An attempt to attack the core holdings of Esperanza would require an investment in logistical support far beyond the capability of any other power, or even an alliance of two or three.

The majority of the Esperanzan military budget is spent on sublight vessels for local patrol and defence operations, and on ground or orbital forts capable of engaging spacecraft with missiles. Esperanzan ships tend to be fairly roomy and well supplied, enabling them to remain on-station or to undertake long sublight transits without undue crew fatigue.

For Jump-capable operations, Esperanza favours vessels capable of making two consecutive Jump-2 using their own fuel. This permits a transit to or from St Hilaire under the vessel's own power, or a raid into Serendip Belt or New Colchis and a return to tankers waiting at the midpoint of the trip, if the need ever arose. These vessels do occasionally venture far from home, using tankers and refuelling at friendly ports to make flag-showing visits to the Trailing worlds of the New Islands subsector or even visiting the Old Islands for diplomatic purposes.

Esperanza's ground forces are relatively light, consisting of a well-equipped 'Naval Infantry' force for shipboard and station security plus small conventional units for defence of key points on the homeworld. This is backed up by an extensive reserve system that could quickly field huge numbers of light infantry, with some more heavily equipped formations. However, it is extremely unlikely that Esperanza would ever face a threat necessitating the activation of these reserves.

OTHER NOTES

A modest force of ground troops is maintained on Nebelwelt. Part of this force provides guards for the Esperanzan enclave at the starport, but most of it is based in a remote region for reasons that have never been disclosed. Personnel rotate through the Nebelwelt garrison from other units, possibly for training purposes.

When the first colonists arrived on Esperanza, they found an intelligent species dwelling there, who were dubbed 'batwings'. Since that time, these sentients have been identified as Droyne. Nothing now remains of their mid-tech society but for a few archaeological sites; the 'batwings' were eradicated within two centuries of humans landing on their world.



The Esperanza government refuses to discuss the matter and has never released any details, but it is an open secret that conflict between humans and Droyne was widespread in those two centuries. Whether the Droyne of Esperanza were deliberately exterminated or died out as an unintended consequence of the conflict may or may not be known to the government of Esperanza; outside that small circle it is not even known how or why the conflict started.

New Colchis

'A showcase of high-technology excellence, the economic heart of the New Islands.'

New Colchis calls itself a two-system power, largely for prestige reasons as control of additional star systems is one of the simple (and often misleading) benchmarks used in interstellar politics. Governments are not impressed with the ownership of semi-worthless real estate, but populations often are. Thus in addition to the high-population, high-technology world of New Colchis and its surrounding system, New Colchis also directly controls the far less important world of Herzenslust and the surrounding system.

New Colchis is part of a four-world 'main', a chain of systems that can be reached by a Jump-1 ship travelling from one to the next. This chain, known as the New Islands Central Region in local charts (the term 'main' is an Imperial concept and is not generally used in the Islands), connects via Jump-2 to most of the worlds of the Old Islands subsector. Thus trade with Neubayern, New Home, Amondiaje and Sansterre is relatively common, though most economic activity is within the New Islands Central Region.

New Colchis enjoys technological parity with most of the other major powers of the region, being inferior only to New Home. It manufactures considerable amounts of Tech Level C components for Esperanza when relations are good, but steadfastly refuses to assist its Spinward rival with a technological uplift programme.

Due to its location, New Colchis is somewhat involved in the politics of the Old Islands subsector, and is less isolationist than Esperanza, Joyeuse or Serendip Belt. Although astrographically located in the New Islands, New Colchis is spiritually a part of the Old Islands. This can lead to an attitude of being somehow better than the New Islands colonies, causing New Colchis citizens to seem a little arrogant.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL

New Colchis is a dictatorship, as it has always been since the colony was founded. At some point in the past, the dictatorship formally became hereditary. It had been passed down a single family line for some time previously, but this was not at that

point a legal requirement. Once the ruling line was established and hereditary succession was written into the constitution of New Colchis, attempts were made to trace the genealogy of the ruling family back to Old Earth.

Somewhat tenuous links were found (some would say 'invented' as the only records proving the matter are archived on New Colchis) to several noble houses of Earth's history including the Duchy of Wurttemberg and a number of Andalucian noble houses. This is considered to be a curiosity more than anything else; the legitimacy of the New Colchis ruling house is derived from successful leadership from the colonial days to the present. However, it did prompt the rulers to take the title of King or Queen for the past few centuries.

The ruling house has a number of branches, and inevitably other noble houses have come into being since the trappings of royalty were introduced. These great houses produce most of the political, military and economic leaders and are widely respected by the general populace. Indeed, the system enjoys considerable support and confidence among the citizenry.

Mechanisms are in place for successful or meritorious individuals to be elevated to the nobility, a system which feels familiar and comfortable to those Imperial citizens visiting the worlds ruled by New Colchis. However, there is plenty of opportunity for talented commoners to better themselves without needing a noble name to help them along.

New Colchis itself is subdivided into several principalities, each of which is governed by a hereditary ruler supported by a civil governmental apparatus. This is not a feudal system however; central control is strong and administered by a bureaucratic system answering to the monarch. The king (or queen) of New Colchis is more dictator than oligarch; the crown is a symbol of power, but the dictator would rule just as effectively without it.

The New Colchis system has no gas giants or planetoids, and only a handful of rocky planets. As a consequence its population is concentrated on the mainworld, with only fairly small settlements on other worlds in the home system. A small migration of settlers to Herzenslust was for many decades the only real outward movement for New Colchis.

On New Colchis itself, this attitude is obvious. Most of the population is concentrated into major cities, sometimes just one in any given principality. A wide area of agricultural land surrounds each city, punctuated by farming towns. Beyond the immediate area of the city, much of the land is unused and in more or less virgin condition. There are of course a few smaller settlements scattered around each principality, but for the most part the population of New Colchis is very concentrated, consisting of city dwellers and the agricultural workers that support them.



New Colchis does own a colony, gained in 5576AD. Herzenslust had a substantial population when the settlers from New Colchis began arriving, but it was never a very successful colony. Technology was limited and most developments were of a subsistence nature. The parties from New Colchis generally arrived with good equipment and money to spend, and gradually became the foremost citizens of Herzenslust, owing and operating businesses and industry needed by the rest of the population.

As a result, a ruling class gradually emerged on Herzenslust which was dominated by the arrivals from New Colchis and those who had joined forces with them. Eventually, this group launched a bloodless coup, displacing the former government with one loyal to New Colchis and ruled by a governor appointed there.

Although this move caused consternation on other worlds, it was generally accepted on Herzenslust since nothing really changed. The New Colchis immigrants had been running everything of importance for some decades anyway, and formalising the situation brought Herzenslust under the protection of New Colchis. Modest investment followed, bringing Herzenslust's economy out of the subsistence rut and allowing the locals access to offworld markets.

Herzenslust's starport is listed as being E class, a minimal installation. This is accurate for vessels coming in from anywhere but New Colchis. The original port is open to any passing ship – which is not a large number – while vessels registered out of New Colchis can use the new purpose-built port completed in 5612AD with money from New Colchis. This installation would probably be rated as C class if it were open to general traffic.

The population of Herzenslust are more dispersed than those of New Colchis, though new arrivals tend to congregate at the new capital. A New Colchis-style city-state is emerging there, while the rest of the planet is settled by small communities. These are as self-sufficient as they can be, and generally contribute relatively little to the world's overall industrial and economic base.

ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRIAL

As already noted, the industry of New Colchis (and of the capital city-province of Herzenslust) is very concentrated. Large, efficient industrial plants and complexes are favoured over smaller installations, so different cities tend to each have one major industrial focus and a number of secondary areas of interest.

New Colchis has traditionally built large numbers of commercial starships for export, often taking payment for these vessels in raw materials brought in by ships previously sold by New Colchis. New Colchis' larger moon is the site of an integrated starship-manufacturing process which begins with mining and

processing installations. These work the moon's extensive nickel and iron deposits and feed into a factory complex that uses their products to build hull components.

Additional raw materials are landed from trade ships at the industrial spaceport, and these are processed in another industrial complex. The components are then moved to the assembly yards where a skilled workforce converts them into New Colchis' main export product. A number of standard designs are in use and can be encountered in service all over the Islands subsectors. The yards do not do custom work, though there are smaller shipbuilders on New Colchis that will.

In recent years the demand for trade ships has tailed off somewhat. This is largely as a result of increasing tensions and war preparations. New Colchis has declined to produce warships for any other power, but has its yards have begun to turn out naval auxiliaries, transports and tankers based on existing merchant vessel designs. These have found a ready market among worlds seeking to expand their navies.

A significant fraction of New Colchis' wealth comes from trade, with its merchant cruisers at times plying the Jump-2 lanes as far as Berchlingen and Sansterre. Major trading partners include Colchis, Amondiage and Neubayern. Traditionally New Colchis has preferred to export finished goods and import raw materials. This is partly due to economic factors and partly political, establishing New Colchis as the source of advanced goods and its market worlds as lesser partners in the trade process.

However, trade with New Home is increasing as the political situation reduces demand elsewhere. Ships are being reassigned to the New Colchis – Besancon – Sturgeon's Law – New Home run, carrying higher-tech goods from New Home to markets on New Colchis and sometimes onward to end consumers further away.

MILITARY

New Colchis has traditionally maintained a defensive military set-up. Since most of its assets are concentrated on one world, it is most efficient to use short-range vessels to defend them. The main naval base is located on New Colchis' smaller moon, serving as home to a sizable flotilla of system defence boats and small monitors. This is backed up by a formidable armada of short-range strike craft and fighters.

A number of orbital forts armed with missile launchers defend the approaches to New Colchis. These have low-power manoeuvre drives, enabling them to constantly shift orbit to reduce vulnerability to coasting ballistic weapons. These forts serve as bases for the strike formations, launching their fighters and gunboats to deal with a threat and following them up with a hail of missiles.



Jump-capable naval assets have never been very important to New Colchis, though the present situation requires some measure of power projection capability. A number of armed merchant cruisers have always been maintained, and these have been recently augmented by gunship carriers converted from standard Jump-2 freighters. Thus the New Colchis fleet consists mainly of fragile merchant craft whose gunships make them highly capable under the right circumstances.

Ground forces consist mainly of city garrisons, who man aerospace defences and secure critical areas. These units are primarily equipped as light infantry, and trained for urban combat more than anything else. However, some forces do exist which are more geared towards full-scale war. These are small grav-cavalry 'battle groups' using fast but lightly protected combat vehicles and lightly armoured troop transports. These forces can project power rapidly to any part of New Colchis or Herzenslust, but are better suited to fast strike-and-withdraw operations than protracted combat.

At present New Colchis' stance is defensive, looking to protect its industrial and trade assets in a troubled time. Its forces are not well suited to winning a war, though it could provide very effective support to a power that had suitable first-line combat units.

OTHER NOTES

The capital of Herzenslust is defended by similar forces to the cities of New Colchis, though on a smaller scale, and there is now a small orbital defence installation in place. This is a converted freighter hull, to which a number of additional components have been added. It serves as a launch platform for a gunship squadron and a fairly good missile armament, but it is very vulnerable to damage. Ground-based missile batteries secure the capital spaceport.

The rest of Herzenslust is not well defended, relying on local defence associations – essentially volunteer militia – equipped with small arms provided by the government. This concentration on protecting central assets is entirely in keeping with New Colchis' general philosophy but leaves the dwellers of outlying settlements feeling like they have been abandoned. Moves to form a response group of grav-capable forces at the capital have been welcomed by the populace, but so far little progress has been made.

Joyeuse

'Charting our own path, and prepared to fight for our right to do so'

Joyeuse is a heavily militarised two-system power whose policies vary from isolationist to merely stand-offish. This stance originates partially from the fact that Joyeuse is somewhat isolated in astrographic terms. Its only close neighbours, i.e.

systems within Jump-2, are Quichotte and Orphee. Quichotte is a colonial possession, whilst Orphee is off-limits to development by agreement with the rest of the Islands powers. Questions are frequently asked about Joyeuse' readiness to pass up a potentially useful world in its vicinity, but no definite answers have ever been found.

The citizens and government of Joyeuse have a traditional rivalry with, and general dislike of, New Colchis, though this has never prevented Joyeuse from taking advantage of trade opportunities there. A significant fraction of the naval support vessels and tankers used by the Joyeuse navy originated in the yards of new Colchis.

Joyeuse enjoys technological parity with most of the other major powers of the region, and is one of the few states to routinely build Jump-3 capable vessels for both trade and military purposes. Its primary field of technological excellence is military; Joyeuse builds (or at least, repeatedly claims to build) the best warships and weapons in the islands.

Joyeuse has always stood a little apart from the politics of the Islands. Its population has a vague traditional affinity with Amondia, from whence the world was colonised, but this is of relatively little importance in political affairs. Even before the spread of Jump drive throughout the Riftworlds, Joyeuse possessed a navy of sorts, and the world has remained ahead of the curve as the general trend towards militarisation began to accelerate.

Generally speaking, Joyeuse remains neutral in most political debates, largely because events in the Islands tend to pass it by to some extent and are thus seen as less important than issues back home. The exception in recent years was firm support of the Convention of Interdiction, which declared Orphee a closed world. Joyeuse provides most of the vessels that monitor the approaches to Orphee, which makes some other powers suspicious that they have locked the door but given the only key to Joyeuse.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL

Joyeuse is a military dictatorship. While its laws are less strict than Esperanza, enforcement is harsher and the regime is much less popular. The dictatorship has traditionally passed down the chain of command from the original colonial governors, though with some major interruptions.

Joyeuse was actually a democracy of sorts for several decades. A series of weak governors lost power to an emerging class of senior officers, business owners and popular figures among the citizenry. This oligarchical system worked well enough for a time, but gradually the leaders became figureheads and representatives of their interest groups. The result was a society governed by the block votes of segments of society;



social, industrial, military and economic agendas clashed as often as they meshed.

A determined and credible effort was made to make the system work, and for a time it did. However, the agendas of the various interest groups were too entrenched, as were the rivalries between factions. A period of political instability resulted, with governments forming then voting themselves into deadlock or even out of existence.

Finally, enough of the factions managed to agree on a solution, which was to appoint a president with dictatorial powers. The candidate chosen represented one of the military factions, resulting in a military dictatorship that was democratically voted into existence. Almost immediately, the factions within the government began infighting once more, and refused to implement policies that they had appointed a dictator specifically to oversee.

The dictator used military force to bring the factions to heel, entirely legally as this was one of the powers granted under the new governmental charter. Violence was minimal at first, but a series of rebellions had to be put down with increasing ruthlessness. Within a decade, Joyeuse had gained a paramilitary police force which enforced harsh edicts from the dictator, and the various factions were dissolved. To this day, some resistance continues in the name of the old factions or an idealised longing for the 'the old days' – even though the democratic period was short-lived, chaotic and brought the economy of Joyeuse to the brink of collapse.

Harsh central control permitted an economic recovery and the reintegration of some areas of Joyeuse that had seceded from central governmental control. Unpopular but perhaps necessary economical measures reduced the standard of living for most citizens in the short term, but permitted long-term growth. Joyeuse thus overcame its economic difficulties and established a strong economy. The eventual relaxation of the austerity measures brought resistance to the government down to a fairly trivial level, and removed the main barrier to integration of Quichotte.

Quichotte, also settled from Amondiage, was much less successful as a colony and despite determined efforts could never quite achieve the critical mass needed to become a credible interstellar economy. Assistance from Joyeuse helped the colonists overcome a string of crises, and finally a request was made to become a province of Joyeuse. Soon afterward, the union was agreed by the dictator and became a formality.

The population of Joyeuse itself is extremely centralised, with one truly enormous city and several very large metropolises containing the majority of the populace. The cities are generally located on the coasts of Joyeuse' small land masses, and in most

cases have spilled over onto the continental shelf nearby. Thus a significant proportion of most cities will be located underwater, with the tops of buildings emerging from the waves.

Society is heavily militarised, with most citizens belonging to one of a range of reserve military, labour or civil-defence formations. Military-style uniforms are common; even the civil service dresses in a military style. All government employees receive basic small-arms training and are required to be familiar with a range of procedures ranging from reporting suspected dissidents to dealing with an emergency evacuation of a city segment.

Quichotte is gradually turning into a smaller-scale version of Joyeuse, though the more dispersed population and smaller size of communities has greatly slowed the process. As a rule, communities close to the centre of government more closely resemble the Joyeuse model than those located in far outback.

ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRIAL

Joyeuse has a well-developed high-technology manufacturing base. This is geared more to local needs than trade output, and tends to produce utilitarian, reliable items of moderately high performance rather than top-end cutting-edge products. There is a significant market for consumer goods, especially those that have the approval of the dictator and his immediate circle of advisors.

The 'Approved' logo can push the price of any given item up 20-30% above that of identical products. This is nothing to do with the popularity of the ruling elite, which is not great. It has more to do with a habit of conformity that has been bred into generations of Joyeuse citizens.

Moving goods between the great cities of Joyeuse by overland travel is possible in only a few cases, where the cities are located on the same land mass. Even then, most trade routes go around the coast rather than over the ground. Grav transport is used for fast travel and transport of urgent items, but for the most part Joyeuse uses submersibles for cargo transport. Once built, these are extremely cheap to operate, normally travelling awash on the surface and trimming down to avoid bad weather. They cannot go very deep, but do submerge to enter the underwater docking areas of the coastal cities.

The rest of the Joyeuse system contains a number of fairly small colonies located on gas giant moons and rockball planets. The greatest concentration of people off Joyeuse is found among the moons of the outermost gas giant. A small naval base is located there, protecting a community that mines minerals on the moons and skims petrochemicals from the gas giant's atmosphere. This is a fairly large operation, with a supporting population numbering in the millions, and requires a substantial fleet of sublight transport craft to carry personnel and goods between the homeworld and the outsystem base.



Quichotte is of relatively low population density and has little more than cottage industries everywhere but the capital. This is a city of nearly half a million people, with its own spaceport, and differs considerably from the rest of the planet. While the local sustainable tech level of Quichotte is 6, the capital has a limited amount of TL 12 industry. This is dedicated mainly to supporting the military forces on the planet, but there is sufficient excess production to provide the capital's citizens with a good standard of living.

By comparison with the capital, the remainder of the planet is economically worthless except as a source of raw materials. A technological uplift project is ongoing but progress is slow. However, advanced mining and ore processing equipment is increasingly being deployed by corporations using local labour, creating a familiarity with high-tech equipment and a desire for advanced consumer goods. This, more than the deliberate project, is gradually accelerating the development of the outback communities.

The remainder of the Quichotte system is fairly dense, with several rockball worlds and gas giants. The latter are used for petrochemical skimming and there are mining bases on various bodies around the outsystem. Rather than shipping the produce of these sites back to the mainworld, a central industrial terminus has been set up in orbit around one of the rockball worlds. From here, sublight ships carry supplies to the industrial outposts and bring their produce back. Jump-capable vessels connect the station to Joyeuse itself, cutting out Quichotte.

MILITARY

The military pervades all aspects of life on Joyeuse as well as providing the ruler and his immediate circle of elite personnel. The Joyeuse military includes a significant aerospace defence contingent, manning missile stations and grav-powered interceptors for atmospheric and orbital defence. A number of hardened installations atop remote mountains act as tracking stations for missile batteries concealed in shallow water or dug into armoured pits on otherwise deserted islands.

Yet more missiles are carried aboard submarines that hide in the deep oceans until called upon to launch their weapons. A class of submarine interceptor-carriers has recently been introduced. The theory is that these vessels can hide from any first strike, surfacing to launch their interceptors then submerge until they return from their missions. The validity of this concept has yet to be proven.

Ground forces include a paramilitary police force trained to fight in urban terrain as well as local defence reserves armed with smallarms and light support weapons. The main military force has a distinctly maritime flavour, as might be expected. Combat submersibles guard the sealanes while troop-carrying subs provide strategic mobility. Most units are trained only to



fight on land or inside underwater installations, but a significant combat-diver force does exist along with underwater-operations capable special forces units.

The development of a spacegoing military force posed no problem to the people of Joyeuse; combat diver units were in many cases retrained for combat aboard space vessels or on the surface of moons and asteroids. Joyeuse retains a somewhat oversized space-capable infantry force for reasons that are not altogether clear. This force is supported by an array of light grav vehicles and drone-mounted heavy weapons. It could in theory be used to seize the outsystem assets of another power.

In addition to sublight gunships and system defence boats, Joyeuse operates three 'tiers' of naval assets. These are somewhat confusingly named 'Tier 1', 'Tier 3' and 'Tier 6'. Tier 1 consists of Jump-1 capable vessels. These are typically heavily armoured defensive units whose drives enable them to relocate between Quichotte and Joyeuse, or to the far outsystem of either star system.

Tier 3 vessels form the backbone of the navy of Joyeuse. Capable of a single Jump-3, they can reach New Colchis and



most of its associated cluster in a single Jump, but require deep space refuelling to get to New Home or Colchis. The handful of Tier 6 vessels have enough fuel aboard for two consecutive Jump-3s, enough to hit Colchis and get home without refuelling, or to make a one-way trip to the Serendip Belt or Nebelwelt. Tier 1, 3 and 6 support assets also exist, including tankers that give the Tier 3 and 6 vessels a very impressive operating radius.

A small naval base is maintained in the Quichotte system, co-located with the industrial shipping terminus. It is mainly there to protect the various mining and skimming operations as well as commercial traffic connected with them, and thus operates mainly sublight craft. It is, however, quite capable of supporting Jump-capable ships and holds ready reserves of fuel that could easily support a short naval campaign against Colchis.

A small naval station is also maintained in orbit around Orphee. This acts as a monitoring platform and a base for small sublight craft enforcing the blockade of Orphee. Vessels from other powers are not permitted to use the station, reducing the duration that any given foreign vessel can stay on-station over Orphee and pushing up the cost of maintaining a presence. Unsurprisingly, coverage by other powers is intermittent and becoming less frequent with every passing year.

OTHER NOTES

It is an open secret that there is an insurrection going on in the outback of Quichotte. Although most of the population wanted union with Joyeuse, there was always some resistance, and disaffection has been growing over the past decades. The region around the capital has an entirely different character to the outback, though some regions are more well-disposed towards Joyeuse rule than others.

Visitors from other powers are forbidden to use the capital spaceport, but are also prohibited from landing at any of the outlying settlements. Instead they are directed to a barely adequate landing field near the capital and generally made to feel as unwelcome as possible. Visits were always infrequent and have recently tailed off to almost nothing, which suits the authorities on Quichotte.

A similar situation exists on Orphee. Various scientific groups are resident semi-permanently on the planet, but only New Colchis and Esperanza make any real effort to monitor the blockade. Support ships for the scientific missions come in at increasingly lengthy intervals, and some study groups have packed up and gone home. It is obvious that Orphee is quietly becoming the sole preserve of Joyeuse, whatever the wording of the Convention of Interdiction may have said. This might be the reason for Joyeuse' support in the first place; astrographical reality may well squeeze out all other powers without any effort on the part of Joyeuse.

Serendip Belt

'Dispersed yet united, pioneers of every frontier.'

Serendip Belt is at present a two-system power, though for a brief time it also controlled Topas, Elysee and Besancon. The first of the Islands powers to obtain Jump drive, Serendip Belt used this capability to carve out a small empire before pressure from the other powers, presenting a united front, forced Serendip Belt to give up its colonies.

Serendip Belt is the only one of the major powers of the Islands subsectors to have an asteroid belt as its 'homeworld'. The Serendip Belt star system enjoys a somewhat fortunate location as cross-Rift travel increases, as it possesses the last (or first) major starport on the trans-Islands run. This is of modest but increasing importance as Imperial courier and high-value-cargo vessels begin to make greater use of the crossing.

The original colonisation of the Serendip Belt was a grand endeavour, and one fraught with risks. The colony ship **C-Jammer** undertook a lengthy voyage beyond the Old Islands to find the belt, representing something of a gamble. Its crew then decided to settle a belt rather than a habitable world. True, after more than two thousand years living aboard an asteroid-hulled colony ship there was nothing new about rock-dwelling, but the consequences of failure were greater at Serendip Belt than anywhere else.

Had any of the planetary colonies met with unexpected difficulties, the colonists' chances of survival, perhaps as little more than hunter-gatherers, would have been reasonable. At Serendip Belt it was all or nothing; a successful technological society was necessary to survival in the long term.

This willingness to take risks and push the limits of possibility has been a major characteristic of the Serendips ever since. The same attitude drives explorers to the very edges of the Serendip Belt system in search of uncharted asteroids with possible new mineral deposits, and drives a healthy research programme that pushes the limits of science as known in the Islands.

Serendip Belt has parity with most of the other major powers (excepting New Home); it is the closest of them to breakthrough in a number of critical areas leading to Tech level 13. New Home has already achieved this and the scientists of the Serendip Belt are redoubling their efforts to catch up.

The arrival of the Jump-capable starship **Eldorado** was an unmissable opportunity for the Serendips, who quickly assimilated the new knowledge and made as much use of it as they could. Continued experimentation has led to a number of accidents and misadventures, but the Serendips seem



determined to wring everything out of Jump technology that they can.

Serendip Belt is expansionistic. Long content with ownership of Gloire as an agricultural colony, the acquisition of Jump-capable ships sparked a wave of almost imperialistic sentiment that turned to resentment when the other regional powers forced Serendip Belt to relinquish its newly acquired territories. The Serendips openly talk of regaining their colonies by military or economic means.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL

The population of Serendip Belt is the most dispersed in the Islands. Not only are habitats scattered throughout the main belt but the system's smaller belts are also extensively populated. Colonies also exist among asteroid clusters at the Trojan points that lead and trail the system's gas giants, and on far distant planetoids in the system's Kupier belt. The few rocky planets and larger number of moons in the system are also inhabited, though the population prefers to dwell in hollowed-out planetoids than on planetary or moon surfaces.

The drift outward to fill up the entire system began almost as soon as **C-Jammer** arrived in the main belt, with small parties heading out in search of mineral resources or just exploring. These were followed by more organised parties of settlers, who created the infrastructure required to support the growing mining and industrial communities. The greatest population density is still in the main belt, with several large planetoids forming a central cluster. The seat of government is aboard **C-Jammer**, now long settled into a stable orbit in the depths of the main belt. The population of **C-Jammer** is relatively low, only about 100,000 people, and most of these are government employees or workers in support industries.

The various communities, cities and settlements of Serendip Belt are self-governing in local matters, but answer to a central government on wider issues. Given the utter dependence on technology for survival, the emergence of technological feudalism was perhaps inevitable, and the system has worked well enough for centuries.

The ruling elite are those that control technological functions such as power generation and life-support. The route to power is, in most cases, one of study and fieldwork. After a period as an apprentice engineer in one of the critical fields, the political aspirant must make a name for himself as an engineer or perhaps scientist. At some point he will move into management and win promotions by overseeing successful projects. An engineer or scientist who advances far enough up the ladder eventually becomes a Technocrat, one of society's leaders.

In the smaller communities, the Technocrats control a variety of technical functions – life support, hydroponic farming support,

power generation, light engineering and any heavy industry that exists. Whatever their personal specialist area, the Technocrats of such communities must learn a little of the other fields and are in many ways closer to the more usual political leaders found elsewhere than their brethren in the major cities of Serendip Belt.

The larger communities tend to have more specialised technocratic power groups. For example the power generation experts of a given city control all aspects of their field but have little to do with life support or heavy industry. The top engineers in each field form a council that formulates policy. This process is fraught with infighting and each faction is careful to preserve its areas of interest, but a consensus can usually be reached. The problems inherent in this system are no different to those of any other political entity with many interest groups; the only difference is that they represent technical areas rather than political agendas.

The Technocratic Council of each large city appoints an Executive Body to implement its decisions. This body consists of senior lawyers, social advocates, medical personnel, political experts and military advisors who carry out the policies of the Technocratic Council through a corps of bureaucratic and physical workers.

The Technocratic Councils of the various cities answer to the government of Serendip Belt. This is comprised of the very most senior Technocrats in each critical area and is advised by social, military, legal and political experts. The government, known as the Supreme Technocratic Council, has its own Executive Board, headed by an appointed President.

The President's role is to execute the directives of the government rather than to lead it, but all the same he wields a considerable amount of power as the head of the Executive Board. The role is well respected and is not normally held by a senior Technocrat. Sometimes the President comes from a small-community, generalist-technocrat background but more often he is selected from among the non-technocratic Supreme Executive Board.

Outsiders often assume that the President of Serendip Belt is in overall charge, and are amazed at the level of hands-on leadership. The Serendips are quite happy for outsiders to misunderstand where the power lies in their government. The truth is actually very simple: the Supreme Technocratic Council decides what needs to be done, the Supreme Executive Board presents a plan how it can be achieved, and the President is charged with making sure that the plan is implemented. Details are left to the President and his staff for the most part.

The colony at Gloire is, as might be expected, a smaller version of the Serendip Belt set-up. A few outsystem installations do



exist, but for the most part the population is concentrated on Gloire itself. Other than a large city serving as the capital, the settlement model is one of modest sized towns surrounded by extensive agricultural lands. Produce from these towns is concentrated at the capital for shipment to the home system. Gloire boasts a good class C starport, but use of it by foreign ships is discouraged.

Gloire has a Supreme Technocratic Council and the smaller towns have generalist-technocrats in charge, just as in the home system. Standards of living are quite high; Gloire is more developed than the colonies of most other powers in the region, with an overall technology level of 9. As might be expected, distribution of this technology is quite even, with few backwater or undeveloped areas.

There is a strong feeling of kinship between Gloire and Serendip Belt, even though the way of life is very different in each case. Citizens of Gloire would, in most cases, not want to live on a rock in deep space, and most Serendips find the idea of planet-dwelling somewhat odd. Yet there are strong cultural ties and a feeling of siblinghood between the two populations, making Gloire feel less like a colonial possession and more like an outlying suburb of Serendip Belt.

ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRIAL

Serendip Belt was settled primarily for its extensive mineral deposits, and unsurprisingly is a major industrial centre. Most of the system's research installations are within the central cluster, along with the bulk of the heavy industry, but even in outlying areas there is significant industrial activity.

Space transport is of vital importance to Serendip Belt, as almost everything has to be moved from one asteroid habitat to another. Sublight transport is common, though Jump-capable craft are becoming more prevalent on the most lengthy runs out to distant outposts. Most transport craft are constructed relatively cheaply out of asteroids, with shuttles used for cargo transfer.

Serendip Belt has developed the art of asteroid-hull construction to a high level. Mobile construction units, resembling mining ships more than ship docks, are sent to a promising rock. They carve out the necessary tunnels and spaces then install critical components such as drives and a temporary control system. The asteroid is then taken under its own power to a fitting-out area close to the source of components.

The same process is used for naval ships as for transport vessels. Some conventional ships are built in Serendip Belt, but these are very much in the minority. Small craft are mostly constructed-hull designs as they have to fit into standard docking bays.

Serendip Belt engineering is technologically advanced, but components are almost always overbuilt, with fail-safes and backups to prevent catastrophic failure. This is important to a civilization dwelling in space and also makes Serendip technology popular for export. Lower-tech civilisations that cannot maintain advanced equipment properly favour Serendip produce for its longevity and robust nature.

Other than a modest amount of industrial output, Serendip Belt is not greatly concerned with interstellar trade and maintains only a small merchant fleet. A considerable number of transport ships do exist but these are dedicated to the Gloire-Serendip Belt run, bringing agricultural produce to the home system and shipping necessary components in the opposite direction.

MILITARY

Serendip Belt maintains an impressive fleet of warships, almost all of which are asteroid-hulled vessels. Many ships are very large, but make use of only a low proportion of their tonnage. The remainder is left as virgin rock, making Serendip ships very hard to kill.

For local defence, the Serendips use a mix of asteroid-hull warships and concealed fortress asteroids from which gunboats and fighters are deployed. Many of the asteroid habitats are well protected by thick rock walls and forts built on the outside. In addition, many of the in-system transport craft have the capability to be armed or carry weapon systems in 'mothballed' condition, allowing them to be brought to combat readiness in a matter of hours or days.

The Serendip defensive plan is to present an invader with a system full of rocks, some of which can move and shoot. Scattered among the uninhabited asteroids are automated missile launchers that can be activated in a crisis. Once active they will attack any vessel not transmitting the correct identification codes. The attacker's problem is further complicated by positioning dummy emitters on many asteroids. These mimic the electronic emissions of defence installations, mining settlements and habitats, hopefully causing an invader to waste time and ammunition attacking harmless rocks.

One oddity of the Serendip military set-up is the Mobile Industry Programme. Originally set up to allow critical industries to be moved close to sources or raw materials or to avoid collisions with rogue planetoids, MIP asteroids are equipped with low-power drives and can relocate themselves within the belt. The unintended benefit for the Serendips is that a proportion of their population and industry can be hidden from an attacker, and moved to avoid detection.

Serendip Belt maintains a significant force of space-capable infantry, plus a security force for combat within asteroid habitats.



The bulk of its conventional ground forces are based on Gloire and conduct training for planetary combat in remote areas. This force has been gradually expanded for many years and now represents a very respectable military capability.

OTHER NOTES

At all political levels there is open discussion of reclaiming one or more of the 'stolen' colonies, with Topas and Berlichingen as likely candidates. A rather blatant economic programme has recently been put in place, dumping Serendip goods in the markets of Topas and Berlichingen at discount prices in the hope of creating dependence. This is backed up by increasingly frequent shows of force and 'courtesy visits' by Serendip warships to the surrounding systems. It seems likely that it is only a matter of time before an overt move is made, probably while other powers are distracted by a crisis elsewhere.

Rather more ambiguous is a project which seems to have been going on for over a century. Asteroid-hulled vessels, possibly colony ships, have departed the Serendip Belt star system at long intervals. Most are headed out to Spinward, which seems odd given that once past Gloire there is nothing but empty space in that direction for many parsecs.

These craft were constructed after the acquisition of Jump drive but do not use it. Instead they proceed through an excessively complex series of acceleration periods and course changes which are apparently intended to make the vessel hard to track. Acceleration once out of the system is under very low power and on a non-constant vector. As a result these vessels tend to vanish from the sensors of foreign powers once they are a light-year or so out from Serendip Belt. Their final destinations are unknown, but given that some have been launched in entirely different directions to the majority, it is certain that at least some are bound for very different places.

Neubayern

'A beacon in the Great Rift, lighting the way to the future of Humanity.'

Neubayern controls the Schlesien Belt in addition to the home system. However, although it claims to be a two-system power, Neubayern is really a single-system polity with minor possessions elsewhere. The settlement at Schlesien Belt is very small, and is considered to be nothing more than an extremely remote industrial asset; it is certainly not a colony or second homeworld.

No suitable nearby worlds were available for annexation until recently; Sturgeon's Law and St Genevieve were fairly uninviting, while Topas and Berlichingen were claimed by Serendip Belt. That situation has now changed, but Neubayern has not yet made significant moves towards creating an interstellar empire.

Neubayern's position on the Coreward fringe of the Old Islands subsector, with nothing but Rift beyond, resulted in a certain amount of isolation from events and politics. This has changed somewhat since the advent of Jump-capable interstellar travel, but Neubayern retains a distinct culture that sets it further apart from the rest of the Islands than astrology already has.

Neubayern does lie on both the main Jump-2 trade routes, known as the Loop and the Crescent. Foreign trade ships are not unwelcome, but regular trade is a relatively new thing and has not brought Neubayern into the mainstream Islands culture.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL

Neubayern was one of the first worlds to be colonised in the Islands subsectors, by colonists from Germany, Austria and Eastern Europe. Elements of these cultures remain strongly apparent, with grand buildings serving as centres of government, commerce and religion. Architectural influences can be traced all the way back to Medieval Europe, and the same threads can be seen running through society.

One major cultural facet is a deep mistrust – almost a collective phobia – of any form of extremism. Ironically, this has led to strict laws against extremism, which raises some eyebrows elsewhere. Other laws, equally strict, enforce a number of social freedoms and punish those that deny them to others. Outsiders are puzzled by this apparent contradiction, but the citizens of Neubayern simply take this as proof that they have achieved a degree of social development unequalled elsewhere.

Overall, society is fairly moderate, tolerating a wide variety of political, social and religious convictions. There is even a general consensus about how much variation is good and where the line must be drawn between freedom of speech and the 'right' to hold views that harm others. The underlying principle of this system is the concept of social responsibility, which is instilled into all citizens at an early age.

Neubayerners are taught that the rights and privileges that they enjoy only exist because society as a whole upholds them and ensures through law and custom that they are extended to all citizens. Thus it is the responsibility of each citizen to uphold and enforce the rights of others, out of self-interest if nothing else. Outsiders keep trying to put labels on this system. Some of the ones that amuse the Neubayerners most include 'Socialist Fascism' and 'Police State with Enforced Liberalism'. Neubayerners normally just refer to their system as 'working very well, thanks'.

Neubayern does have a large body of law, and enforcement is surprisingly harsh. Those that reject the society which upholds their rights – for example by becoming a career criminal or engaging in extremely selfish behaviour – are considered to have



also rejected most of their rights. The state is not deliberately cruel to criminals, but arrest procedures are vigorous, to put it mildly. The average Naubayerner actually feels reassured at seeing a truckload of paramilitary cops smash someone's door in and deliver a beating as they cart him off – it means that the police are doing their job.

High-security penal institutions are harsh enough that sentients' rights groups in the Imperium would be horrified, but this is balanced by an earnest attempt at rehabilitation and a range of social-restitution programmes for lesser offenders. Again, the average Naubayerner is quite happy with this set-up – criminals damage society and thus harm everyone by their actions, and have turned their back on the body that grants them their basic rights. And they have had fair warning in any case.

Most outsiders cannot make up their mind as to whether Neubayern is some kind of social paradise where honest people can live happy, productive lives and enjoy the protection and support of a diverse but well-integrated society... or whether it is a police state whose brainwashed inhabitants cannot tell that their freedoms are illusory. Whichever is the case, Neubayern is a generally content society, whose citizens enjoy considerable freedom despite (or possibly because of) a high law level.

The leadership of Neubayern is a semi-hereditary political class which has produced a number of powerful political dynasties. New blood does find its way into the ruling elite but for the most part the 'old names' are well entrenched and enjoy a high level of almost habitual confidence and support among the populace.

The origins of the ruling class vary considerably. Some families are descended from the original colonial leaders while others became politically important as a result of military or economic prowess. Some are descended from popular entertainers whose celebrity status helped elevate themselves or their children to a leadership role. Today, the commonest route into the political class is via grass-roots political leadership. Community leaders are well respected and can gradually climb the ladder to greater responsibility. Thus a city governor might have started his career as a workers' advocate or community advisor.

The settlement pattern on Neubayern is fairly typical, with several very large cities forming a central region around the site of the original landings, and smaller cities scattered across the globe. Cities are subdivided into what amounts to villages, each having a strong community spirit and its own leaders who answer to the city government. This in turn sends representatives to the world government at the capital. Governmental style is dictatorial in many ways; villages and cities have their say and present their wants and needs, but a decision is reached by the ruling class and handed down to society. Requests for revision are possible but until this is agreed, the government's ruling must simply be accepted.

ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRIAL

Neubayern has a fairly well distributed industrial base, which is largely self-sufficient. Minerals and raw materials are brought in from outsystem mining operations in the system's planetoid belts, and from the mining colony at Schlesien Belt. Curiously, sublight transport is still used for a significant proportion of the materials sent from Schlesien Belt. The system was already in place by the time that Jump drives became readily available and there was simply no need to change it.

The vessels used to ship ore from Schlesien Belt are hollowed-out asteroids fitted with low-powered engines. They are almost entirely automated; a crew carries out safety and functionality checks at each end of the voyage but apart from some maintenance the vessels need little human assistance. Roughly one per year arrives at each end of the trip, carrying a vast amount of processed ore.

Once the ore vessels had started to arrive, there was no real need to switch over to Jump-capable transport. Ore does not spoil, and it does not matter if this year's shipment was mined decades ago or far more recently. Thus the sublight ore shipments continue alongside more modern vessels carrying similar produce more expensively but far quicker.

Neubayern has relatively little industry in the outsystem; everything is concentrated on the homeworld, with outlying installations carrying out mining and some scientific work. The only major offworld installation (other than orbital forts) is a large research station located on a dwarf planet at the very outer edge of the Neubayern system. The nature of research carried out there is not disclosed, but it seems likely that Jump drives and associated technologies are at least part of the station's remit.

Neubayern sees a fairly large number of trade ships coming through due to its location on both major trade routes. However, its participation in trade is relatively low. Neubayern makes more money from service contracts and sale of supplies to passing ships than it does from actual trade. Up until recently, many shipping operators preferred to refit their vessels in Neubayern's commercial yards than their port of registry, though with increasing tensions this policy is changing. Some powers are now applying pressure on ship operators to obtain their support at home and not put cash in foreign coffers.

Neubayern does maintain a sizable fleet of merchant vessels, though less than most other powers. Its main trading partners are Sansterre and New Home. Accusations have been made in various quarters that Neubayern's trade ships, when they do call, spend more time on intelligence-gathering operations than commercial activity. There is nothing unusual about using traders to gain information about rivals and potential enemies, but Neubayern offends its neighbours by being more open about it than most.



MILITARY

Neubayern has a small standing military which is primarily equipped for orbital and aerospace defence, and to dislodge any toehold an enemy might obtain on the homeworld. To this end its forces deploy a large number of ground-based interceptors and strike aircraft. These are backed up by dual-role aerospace fighters carried aboard orbital forts. The fighters can engage targets in close orbit or dive down into the atmosphere to deal with incursions.

If a landing cannot be prevented by orbital defences, enemy forces will be softened up by strike aircraft then overwhelmed by grav cavalry. These formations are equipped with light, fast grav vehicles whose firepower outweighs their survivability. These are accompanied by infantry-carrying vehicles which can land ground troops to secure an area or assault a position, then support them with light weapons.

In the worst-case scenario, if an enemy cannot be dislodged with dash and firepower, then the Neubayerners plan to retreat to their cities. These each have a small military garrison which operates under the same command structure as the paramilitary police, fire and ambulance services. Army units are trained to carry out auxiliary civil-defence and rescue work in peacetime, and at need the other services become part of the military defences for each city.

The city garrisons would be unable to hold out unassisted of course, but they are backed up by large volunteer reserve forces. Most of these are trained as light infantry for city defence, but a proportion are trained to operate armoured vehicles, artillery and to operate in a warfighting role. Thus an enemy that managed a lodgement on Neubayern would find its cities well and determinedly defended, while a large-scale response by conventional forces could be assembled in time.

Reservists using mothballed and probably outdated equipment are of course inefficient compared to front-line troops, but up until recently Neubayern has not seen the need for large conventional armies. This seems to be changing, with a number of regular army units – some of them obviously assault formations – being formed. The mothballed equipment has recently begun to be overhauled and in some cases replaced, suggesting that Neubayern may be expecting trouble in the near future.

Ground forces are of lesser importance to Neubayern than space combat assets. Defensively, Neubayern uses heavily armed asteroids as semi-immobile forts close to the homeworld. These carry large numbers of small craft and are armed primarily with long-range missiles.

For system patrol away from the homeworld, Neubayern uses another class of asteroid based ships, termed Mobile Bases. These, too, are equipped with large numbers of small craft. They never return to the homeworld, spending their entire career on patrol in the system's planetoid belts resupply and crew changes are carried out by Jump-capable vessels. The Mobile Bases are more like slow-moving fortresses than true warships.

Unlike most other powers, Neubayern's power projection capability is mainly comprised of cruisers, destroyers and frigates. These all use constructed rather than asteroid hulls, and are generally set up for raiding missions rather than conquest or heavy direct combat. They are supported by a small number of Jump-capable Mobile Bases, which are less combat-capable than foreign vessels of a similar size as they are primarily support assets. These are asteroid-hulled craft however, and are very robust.

Neubayern depends less on commercial shipping than most other powers, and not coincidentally is well equipped to raid commerce. It would not be easy to fight a war of conquest with this force mix, but Neubayern does not apparently wish to do so.

OTHER NOTES

There are persistent rumours that Neubayern has built two special projects, both asteroid-hulled vessels and both derived from the Mobile Base concept. The first has been given the fanciful name of ***The Devourer***. It is claimed that this huge asteroid ship contains an entire industrial city, with hordes of mining ships carried aboard.

If it exists, ***The Devourer*** could in theory Jump into system with planetoid belts or clusters and conceal itself among them, using locally mined resources to build whatever seemed necessary. Wild claims have been made for a horde of robotic combat ships or automated missile launchers to be seeded among the planetoids to attack foreign mining vessels. Slightly less crazed theorists have suggested that ***The Devourer*** could strip-mine a planetoid field, denying its resources to the rightful owners. This would take many, many years however so is not much of a threat.

The other claimed special project is somewhat less far-fetched, but equally unlikely. It has been claimed that Neubayern is building a super-capital ship built out of a huge asteroid (or a small moon, in some versions of the theory). This Jump-capable super-vessel would be indestructible due to its massive bulk of rock, and hugely well armed. It might even be capable of carrying whole destroyer or cruiser squadrons into action. Such a craft is theoretically possible, but it is unlikely that it could ever be built.



New Home

'Humanity's new homeworld.'

New Home is a single-system power, though it enjoys equal or greater prestige among the Islands worlds for other reasons. New Home was the first world to be settled in the Islands subsectors, by colonists from **C-Jammer**. It was the source of several secondary colonisation missions, and thus gained a status as a sort of origin-world-once-removed for the colonists. New Home holds an elevated status in the minds of citizens on most worlds, though Neubayern and Amondiage are exceptions due to their own first-generation colony status.

New Home also boasts the highest technology level in the Islands, and exports considerable amounts of consumer goods for sale on other worlds. Its culture thus exerts an influence far beyond the New Home system. Imperial traders and corporations tend to gravitate to New Home to set up their offices, treating the world like a de facto capital of the Islands subsectors. This has proven a costly mistake in some cases, but New Home's central location and considerable trading fleet makes it attractive as a commercial centre.

New Home enjoys a fortunate position more or less in the centre of the Islands subsectors, with most systems reachable by Jump-2 craft. It is also at the centre of interstellar politics much of the time, partly due to its status in the minds of many other governments and partly due to its location. New Home hosts a significant proportion of interstellar conferences and political meetings, if only because the travel time (and thus the lag in communications) is much the same for most participants.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL

New Home is a rich world, with extensive tracts of habitable land. There is somewhat less ocean coverage than on Earth, leading to large areas of semi-desert and rocky badlands in the continental interiors, but even so New Home can comfortably support a very large population.

In fact the planetary population is somewhat smaller than on other major worlds such as Neubayern or Amondiage, though it still numbers in the hundreds of millions; entirely enough to support a major industrial base. This population is distributed fairly evenly across the well-watered lands, with settlements in the arid regions being very sparse except where an important resource is located.

The settlement pattern of New Home is one of fairly large cities surrounded by smaller settlements in a belt that includes agricultural lands and large areas of unspoiled countryside. There is no one city that is obviously much larger than the others and New Home has several major downports rather than a single starport. Thus the location of the capital is not immediately apparent from a population distribution map.

The seat of government is a purpose-built city of modest size, with its own small spaceport. This is located in a high valley with fairly restricted ground access; not a problem for a society that employs primarily grav transport. The government, which takes the form of a feudal technocracy, conducts its business in the capital and deals with the cities and settlements via a corporate-style bureaucratic and legal apparatus.

New Home has been referred to as a 'Corporate Republic' by some observers. Technological functions such as power generation, provision of transport and the worldwide data net are provided by corporate-style bodies that derive much of their budget from payment for services or sale of products to the consumer. Governmental bodies are not corporations in the strict sense but the line between commercial activity and provision of governmental services is blurred.

More than one provider of each service is available in many areas, creating a rather unusual situation where government departments vie with one another for the loyalty of the populace. The various technological blocs provide representatives to



the government, making up a Senate. Votes in the Senate are determined by the consumer base of a given department, further intermixing commercial and governmental factors.

Outsystem settlements, and the corporate-government departments that run them, also have a say in the governance of New Home. Some of these settlements are very large, with populations numbering in the millions. Trade corporations and shipping lines, which operate within the system and in the wider cosmos, are also granted a share in government if they bring in enough revenue. Thus a small shipping concern might start out making a modest profit as a purely commercial institution and gradually gain a franchise in government as its market share grows over the decades.

The New Home governmental system promotes a corporate lifestyle among its citizens, but not unduly so. Those with no interest in gaining prestige and wealth as good little corporate (or government) drones can find fulfilling avenues for their own advancement. Indeed, New Home is sufficiently prosperous that it can support a high proportion of artists, authors, entertainers and sports personalities.

Internal politics and foreign policy on New Home are influenced by the same factors as anywhere else, though the fact that the major shipping corporations have a direct vote in government does lead to an outward-looking society which has a tendency to become involved in affairs on other worlds.

The New Home system was not heavily settled at first. With such a rich world, the settlers were content to spread out and make the most of their planet. Those that wanted to look outwards tended to launch great expeditions to other star systems in search of more 'new Earths' rather than setting up domes on a rock in the outsystem. Indeed, it was several centuries before New Home set up much more than token settlements in the outer system.

The outward move was sudden, and considerable in scale. The 'New Home Rockball Rush', as it is referred to in many historical texts, was a period of 80 years during which large-scale colonisation of the system was undertaken. Despite the name, this was a deliberate and well-planned operation that sent construction teams out decades ahead of the intended habitation date, following them up with waves of carefully selected personnel as the outsystem cities became able to support them.

Today, the New Home system is quite densely populated, with multiple cities on some gas giant moons and airless planets. These settlements are considered to be part of the general population of New Home for governmental purposes. Indeed, while some have their own small service-provision corporation-departments, many are supplied with power, consumer products

and other necessities by the same governmental groups as back on New Home.

For the purposes of governmental vote share, it is not relevant whether a corporation provides its power to a city on New Home or several small habitats in the outsystem, or both. The number of people supplied and how much they use is all that counts. Because of this policy, the outsystem population has as much say in government as the homeworlders.

INDUSTRIAL AND ECONOMIC

New Home's industrial output has always emphasised quality over quantity, and has been augmented by a steady increase in technological capability. As a result, New Home enjoys the highest tech level in the Islands. This capability is fairly evenly distributed, with few backwater areas that do not have access to a local high-tech industrial centre.

Not coincidentally, New Home exports considerable quantities of high-value goods to a number of destinations. Exports far exceed imports, as New Home can almost always manufacture something equivalent or better than the goods its trading partners have to offer. Thus most imports are either raw materials or unusual goods that cannot be obtained locally.

Trade is important to New Home. A large in-system commercial fleet exists, plying the lanes between the homeworld and the outsystem colonies. As is typical elsewhere, most ships on these runs are asteroid hulled vessels supported by fleets of shuttles and cargo lighters at each end. Some of these vessels have been on a given run for centuries, with occasional breaks for refit and upgrading of their systems.

Only a minority of the New Home Jump-capable trade fleet is made up of asteroid-hulled vessels. It is considered inefficient to build Jump engines and fuel tanks to haul around vast quantities of rock. There are exceptions, notably a pair of truly gigantic merchant cruisers that carry huge quantities of goods and even have small manufacturing plants aboard. One of these ships is assigned to 'the Loop' and circulates via Colchis, Amondiage, Sansterre and Neubayern. The other plies between New Colchis and New Home one run, then out to Serendip Belt and back the next.

Most trade ships are more modest than these behemoths however. Different operators have their own favoured designs but most vessels are smart, well-designed craft capable of two consecutive Jump-1s. Their efficient and well turned out crews spend large quantities of cash in the ports they visit but are renowned for their restrained and professional conduct even whilst out carousing.

New Home is the main hub for trade with the Imperium and for ships passing through the Islands from one side of the Rift



to the other. Several Imperial corporations have set up trade missions at New Home, though the Imperial Megacorporations have, as a rule, not yet moved into this market. For all its status within the Islands, New Home is not a particularly lucrative market by Megacorporate standards, and the long transit times involved make any trade within the Islands problematical. Thus for outside trade organisations New Home is a niche market rather than a sector that must be dominated.

New Home does not, as a rule, export weapons, warships or military technologies on the open market. It has at times entered into treaties of alliance which allow partners to buy advanced weapon systems. Indeed, this is a strong political lever used by the government of New Home to obtain alliances and friendly relations where they are seen as desirable. Outside corporations are forbidden to trade in military and naval systems out of offices on New Home, except where a political agreement is in place.

MILITARY

The military capability of New Home is very much based on quality rather than quantity, utilising the technological advantage it possesses to maintain a credible military force without incurring huge costs.

Ground forces make extensive use of semi-autonomous weapons and systems drones. These are grav-mobile platforms used for reconnaissance and combat missions in support of human ground troops. They are not 'warbots', and tend to resemble small vehicles rather than humanoid robots. Nor are they fully autonomous; a remote operator remains in the loop to override the drone's programming if something goes awry. Most of the time, however, the drone follows a set of commands and set-piece procedures that cover most normal battlefield occurrences.

Ground troops normally ride in armoured grav transports, which mount light support weapons. Infantry formations are also heavily supported with grav tanks and artillery. New Home's army is not large but it is very capable. Its main weakness, if one exists, is an over-reliance on technical systems and technological support rather than basic soldiering skills.

Infantry are, for the most part, equipped with armoured suits equivalent to Imperial combat armour. Even vehicle crews are protected by light armoured coveralls which mate up to a sealed helmet and gloves. This does mean that New Home's ground forces can operate in a hostile environment such as vacuum using just their standard equipment.

The army of New Home is thus formidable, but it lacks depth in some ways. There is little in the way of provision for replacements or rapid expansion of the armed forces in times of crisis. Most personnel are long-service career soldiers, and the

training establishment is set up to simply replace retirees. Since virtually every system in use by the military is complex and requires extensive training to use, it would not be practicable to expand the military quickly, other than by throwing together a large force of scantily-trained riflemen.

Naval forces, too, are formidable but difficult to replace if losses are incurred. Most vessels are designed to be highly survivable, with good electronic countermeasures and defensive systems as well as speed and hull armour to protect their crews and vital systems. Armament is secondary to survivability, but this is offset by the technological advantage New Home enjoys. Thus a New Home vessel will be about as offensively capable as a ship of similar class deployed by another power but much harder to kill.

New Home favours large vessels, preferring to concentrate combat power in a smaller number of hulls. This is in keeping with the general military philosophy – one excellent ship might come through a given engagement intact where one of two merely good ones might be lost. New Home does not like to take losses; indeed, it is possible that its forces might become demoralised by a level of casualties that would be acceptable to another power.

The extensive commercial fleet requires protection, and to this end New Home deploys a sizable force of multi-role frigates and a handful of cruisers, all based on constructed hulls. For defence of the home system and power projection, capital ships are deployed. These are 'self-escorting', i.e. capable of dealing with a range of threats on their own and not requiring small and vulnerable escorts for protection.

Unusually, all of New Home's capital ships use constructed hulls. This is mainly for reasons of efficiency when building in fuel tanks. Armoured planetoids are used for home defence however as Jump fuel is not a consideration for such vessels.

OTHER NOTES

New Home is probably the least interested of all the Islands powers in military conquest. There is no need; cultural and economic factors will eventually make New Home the Islands' capital in fact as well as spirit. Conversely, New Home is one of the few worlds that has something nobody else has – its technological capability. Thus it is a potential target for conquest or blackmail.

It is quite unlikely that New Home itself could be stormed by offworld forces, but sufficient casualties among its naval forces or the capture of outsystem cities might force the government to make a deal. High-tech weapons supplied by New Home might tip the balance in a general war among the Islands powers, even if its fleet could not be persuaded or coerced into assisting an ally.



Although New Home sees itself as the centre of the Islands in terms of culture and politics, a wider world-view is gradually emerging. New Home goods are traded in the Imperium on both sides of the Rift, and ships out of New Home are beginning to be sighted outside Reft Sector. Thus far these have been exploratory trade missions but there are moves towards the construction of a third giant trade ship.

This vessel would make extremely long (possible multiple years at a time) cruises out into Imperial space, trading as it went. Such an undertaking would be unthinkable to most Imperial traders, but to an Islands power a six-year voyage is not a particularly daunting prospect. There is even talk of a trade mission all the way to Terra and back, though such an undertaking may have to wait for more settled times.

Amondiage

'First among equals.'

Amondiage is a two-system power, controlling Acadie in addition to its own star system. Its territory lies on the Trailing edge of the Old Islands subsector, with nothing but Rift space for many parsecs in most directions. However, Amondiage is located on The Loop, a major trade route, and sees regular contact with other worlds.

Amondiage is heavily involved in local politics, and enjoys considerable status as one of the first three colonies established by the ESA mission. This status is not quite so great as the ceaseless propaganda from the office of the Director (Amondiage's charismatic dictator) would have everyone believe, however.

Enjoying technological parity with most of the other major powers of the Islands, Amondiage maintains its status as a major player in industrial and military terms by importing large quantities of raw materials. These come largely from the colony at Acadie and are also obtained by offworld trade.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL

Amondiage is a dictatorship, and has been for all of its history. The Director, as the world's ruler is termed, can trace a lineage back to the first Colony Director who oversaw the original landings. This lineage is not hereditary as such, though the inheritance has passed from parent to child at times. More commonly, the Director chooses a worthy successor who has distinguished himself in the field of military, commercial, industrial or political endeavour – ideally more than one of these fields – and adopts the candidate into his household. This idea was borrowed from Ancient Rome on Terra and has thus far worked well.

The Director is advised by a council of four individuals, representing the military, commercial and industrial sectors as well as the general populace. A fifth advisor, representing spiritual and religious matters, has at times been appointed. At present, however, interest in such matters is at a low ebb among the general population so no advisor is in place and the social advisor deals with any matters arising.

Amondiage is an arid world, and settlements were constructed where abundant water was available. Relatively few suitable locations existed, so huge cities grew up separated by wilderness. Even today, much of the planet is very sparsely inhabited. The small groups that dwell on marginal land contribute little to the world's economy and thus are largely ignored so long as they pay lip service to the world government and cause no trouble.

Traditionally these groups are reluctant to ask for help from the city-folk. They represent little drain on resources even when disaster strikes, as they tend to just deal with their problems as best they can. Settlements have simply disappeared between one visit by government officials and the next.

For the most part, the populace dwell in comfortable, high-technology Arcologies, insulated from their harsh world by the efforts of a corps of environmental engineers. The environmental and recycling technologies of these Arcologies were originally derived from the systems used aboard the ESA sublight colony ships. They are extremely robust and overbuilt to a considerable degree. Failures are so rare that they make headlines and provoke an indignant reaction among the populace, who tend to forget that the systems that make their lives comfortable are even there at all.

The Arcologies are widely separated, and are linked by high-speed Maglev rail systems that run in straight lines across the desert and under mountains. Grav transport is available for the wealthy or those on government business, but most citizens do not venture out of their home Arcology and rely on the excellent internal public transportation system. Some citizens do use 'internal' grav or ground vehicles, which tend to be lightly built and not particularly fast. Craft intended to operate outside an Arcology are less common; most citizens never see one.

Each Arcology has a governor, who maintains his own council of advisors. This is usually a four-member council, but the actual membership varies. Some Arcologies replace the military advisor with a security expert, or roll this area of responsibility into the social agenda and appoint an advisor for an area of local importance.

Arcologies have been constructed elsewhere in the star system, but these are quite small. None contains more than a million



people, and industry tends to be limited to what is needed for subsistence. The rest-of-system populace could not survive without the homeworld, which is a deliberate policy on behalf of successive Directors.

The colony at Acadie is also maintained purely for the benefit of the homeworld. Its Colonial Director answers to the Director on Amondiaage, and is expected to run the colony in the best interests of Amondiaage rather than Acadie. Directorship of Acadie is one of the commonest routes to overall Directorship of Amondiaage, so there is a strong incentive to pursue the agenda dictated from central authority.

This does mean that Acadie is at times a troubled place, with labour disputes and social issues arising on a frequent basis. However, a policy of creating deliberate economic dependence and what amounts to bribery of the populace with homeworld-supplied luxuries keeps problems within an acceptable limit most of the time. When this fails, corrective action tends to be rapid and harsh.

The colonists on Acadie are essentially offered a choice between fairly liberal laws and cut-price consumer goods, or periods of martial law and hardball law enforcement. Either way, they are still vassals working to the good of Amondiaage. How cheerfully they accept this dictates how unpleasant their lives are made by the authorities.

ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRIAL

As already noted, Amondiaage suffers from a lack of natural resources compared to many other worlds in the region, and has to make up for this somehow. Materials are recycled as far as possible, and industrial processes are extremely efficient. Products are robust and often overbuilt, as Amondiaage engineers believe that it is better to pay a high initial cost for equipment that will last a long time than to replace it or waste resources on frequent overhauls.

These measures greatly improve efficiency, but there is still a vast demand for raw materials. Although Amondiaage is deficient by the standards of other planets, it is still an entire planet and considerable quantities of various materials can be obtained using high-technology mining and processing methods. This is augmented by strip-mining among the moons of Amondiaage's gas giants and on Acadie.

Amondiaage depends more on trade for its basic requirements than most other powers. Where possible, deals that are heavily biased in favour of Amondiaage are brokered with 'lesser' worlds. Sometimes these deals include a provision for the set-up of mining or resource-extraction installations by Amondiaage-based companies. Amondiaage has backed away from a policy implemented some decades ago, whereby it attempted to obtain exclusivity wherever possible. New Home in particular objected

to the closure of markets to its goods, and applied economic pressure backed up by the threat of more robust measures.

Where a heavily one-sided arrangement is not possible, such as when dealing with a state of equal power, Amondiaage tries to bias the deal by insisting on providing shipping assets and building these costs into the deal. Careful management of the Amondiaage shipping fleet usually results in the actual shipping cost being lower than that paid by the trade partner.

Amondiaage maintains a very respectable trade fleet, using a number of very efficient designs to transport different types of cargo. Non-perishable items such as minerals are often left at the point of sale until a specialist ship can make the pickup. Storage costs would normally wipe out any profit, but Amondiaage insists, wherever possible, that the sale not be time-sensitive, i.e. that the seller has to hold on to the goods until it suits the Amondiaage shipping timetables to pick them up.

Of the various Islands powers, Amondiaage is the most willing to sell weaponry. Indeed, a significant proportion of its exports are military-connected in various ways. High-value exports are favoured where possible, since they bring in more cash for the same investment in resources.

Amondiaage will sell weapons to clients that others will not, and works hard to create dependency in this sector, too. Small arms and support weapons use slightly different calibres to most other powers, while most components use non-standard fittings. Power supplies use different voltages and frequencies, ensuring that support contracts and repeat buys come back to Amondiaage. For a client who bought a shipment of anti-spacecraft missiles and launchers at a good price, the choice between buying more of the same or extensively refitting vehicles to use more standard systems can influence procurement decisions for some years to come.

MILITARY

The military forces of Amondiaage are very much a political instrument. While combat capability is important, the military can create political and even economic advantages as well. Thus all units are smartly turned out, with impressive uniforms and equipment. Personnel receive training in how to be the most effective ambassador for Amondiaage power and prestige.

The armed forces of Amondiaage, especially the navy, spend much of their time on 'flag-showing' duties, i.e. making sure that they are seen and identified by foreign and independent personnel. The fleet contains a much larger than usual complement of sloops and corvettes for this purpose. These small vessels undertake cruises around The Loop, calling at ports along the way to make sure that everyone knows that Amondiaage still has a navy.



A class of Patrol Frigate was specifically constructed for flag-showing duties. These roomy vessels are light on weapons and defences but can undertake long cruises without undue crew fatigue. This, along with the ability to make two consecutive two-parsec Jumps, permits them to visit ports as far as Nebelwelt, Esperanza and Zuflucht. A vessel of this class is often deployed to Orphee to monitor the blockade there, though this is not a standing deployment and months can pass between one visit and the next.

Larger vessels follow a fairly typical pattern; frigates for commerce protection plus large asteroid-hulled capital ships for warfighting, supported by a range of cruiser and destroyer types. As with other technologies, Amondiage warships are built to last. Space is left in most designs to allow upgrades during the lifetime of the vessel. It is common anywhere in the Islands to find asteroid-hulled ships in service that are centuries old, but constructed-hull ships tend to have a shorter service life. Amondiage seems to be trying to buck this trend; a handful of first-generation Jump capable vessels are still in commission, albeit with many-times-upgraded systems.

Ground forces are similarly smart and well turned out, with embassy guards in particular being renowned for their gorgeous uniforms and immaculate drill. Troop types are fairly conventional, with grav-mobile infantry brigades being the standard combat formation. These incorporate artillery and armoured support, and are grouped into ad-hoc divisions with additional supports as and when needed. Higher formations are routinely put together for exercises then broken up again, fostering a doctrine of flexibility.

Amondiage maintains a 'peacekeeping and intervention force' which is unique within the Islands. This is a military formation with extensive engineering, medical and disaster-assistance capabilities. Its ostensible purpose is humanitarian, allowing Amondiage to respond quickly and effectively to a crisis, alleviating suffering and restoring order. Of course, this raises the prestige of Amondiage and creates political goodwill, but to the victims of a disaster this ulterior motive is usually of lesser interest.

The intervention component of the peacekeeping and intervention force is a front-line grav-mobile infantry formation, with lavish tank and artillery support. Peacekeeping units are light infantry backed up by light grav vehicles, with personnel trained in policing and security skills as well as straight combat techniques. The usual pattern is for the combat units to flatten any opposition, then move on to the next target as peacekeepers arrive to help the locals rebuild. A barrage of newsvids showing army engineers fixing water mains, erecting power cables, and shaking hands with local leaders then explodes onto screens all over the Islands.

OTHER NOTES

Amondiage is openly expansionistic, but prefers to conquer through being invited in than at gunpoint. Thus the government seeks excuses to deploy its forces to assist in any disaster that occurs on a nearby world, and offers quite generous assistance packages to communities on Acadie, Achille, St Genevieve and St Denis. As some of these worlds are possessions of other powers, this can lead to tension.

There are strong indications that Amondiage also deploys small units of special forces troops to train guerrillas or to foment trouble on various worlds. Accusations have been made that Amondiage has actually caused some of the conflicts it has intervened to alleviate. Whatever the truth of this, Amondiage has at times been caught stirring the pot while some other power was trying to deal with what should have been an internal problem.

Amondiage lies at the extreme Rimward-Trailing edge of the Old Islands, and is the main entry point for ships coming through from the Imperium. This has brought considerable trade, but the government is concerned about the leakage of high-technology Imperial goods into the Islands – or rather, into the hands of anyone but Amondiage. Attempts to impose trade restrictions or tariffs have in the past led to serious problems, but this may not deter Amondiage from trying again.

Sansterre

'A haven of civilisation and liberal values.'

Sansterre is a two-system power located on the Coreward-Trailing edge of the Old Islands subsector. It is, unusually for the Islands, a democratic state. Sansterre lies on the Coreward-Trailing fringe of the Old Islands, with nothing for many parsecs in those directions but the odd rogue comet.

Sansterre is very much part of the main Islands political and economic grouping. Lying on the Loop, Sansterre receives regular trade ships and has a sizable fleet of its own. However, it is often treated as slightly second-class by Neubayern and particularly Amondiage, as Sansterre was a 'second wave' colony rather than one of the initial worlds chosen as the new cradle of humanity.

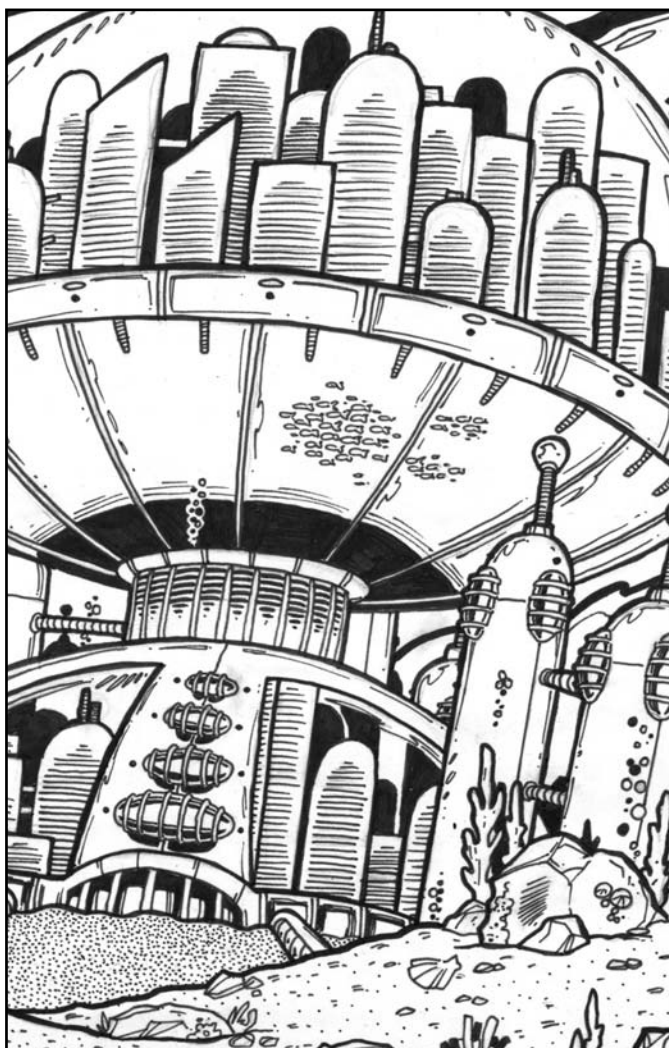
Sansterre owns the colony of St Denis. This was peacefully acquired by means of economic domination many years ago, and is fully integrated into the Sansterre political system, with the populace having full voting rights and representation. However, St Denis is kept dependent on Sansterre for high-tech items. Local industry is limited to tech level 7, with tech-enhancement projects proceeding at a very slow pace. There is some TL12 industry on St Denis, but this is owned and operated by firms based on Sansterre and cannot be duplicated on St Denis.



SOCIAL AND POLITICAL

Sansterre is a water world, with very little land above sea level. Most of what exists is unusable, taking the form of tidal swamps or sharp mountain ranges. Thus almost the entire population dwells in seabed cities. These are mostly located in fairly shallow waters, atop seabed mesas and seamounts. However, there are some deep-water cities which are inaccessible without specially constructed submarines. These are common on Sansterre of course, but transit between deep and shallow cities is still sufficiently time-consuming not to be very common.

Each city (on St Denis this includes outlying settlements in the surrounding region) has an elected government, which sends representatives to what is still called the World Parliament even though it contains representatives from an entirely different star system. St Denis is generally considered to be located on Sansterre, at least spiritually and culturally. This attitude is shared by residents of both worlds; St Denis is so culturally dominated by Sansterre that its people think of themselves as Sansterrans who happen to dwell on St Denis.



Both worlds have fairly liberal laws, other than some fairly strict safety legislation on Sansterre. Most crimes carry civil penalties, mainly along the lines of supervised (and unpaid) work for the good of society. Persistent and dangerous offenders are incarcerated in custom-built penal institutions located on remote asteroids in the Sansterre system. This is not so much a punishment as a way to keep them well away from mainstream society.

Most of the penal asteroids are also mining colonies, with inmates required to earn enough credits to pay for the air, water, food and power needed to keep them alive. Those that do not or cannot are not deprived of these things, but time served against a sentence is only counted if the inmate paid his way. Thus, the only way to be released from prison is to work for it.

Curiously, Sansterre has at times imported inmates for its prisons. More accurately, it has offered other powers the chance to send dangerous criminals and annoying dissidents to penal institutions in the Sansterre outsystem in return for a straight payment or as part of a trade deal. Since, in theory at least, inmates pay for themselves by working, Sansterre can make money on this deal. How effective this is remains an open question but some powers and independent worlds have taken advantage of the offer in the past, mainly to get rid of dissidents.

Outside observers find it interesting that a nation that proclaims itself as a beacon of civilisation and liberalism operates a gulag-for-hire system. Sansterre itself justifies this by pointing out that only very dangerous or persistent offenders are sent to the prison asteroids, and that foreign prisoners-for-hire are offered extensive rehabilitation and even the chance to earn citizenship. A significant proportion actually do leave the prison asteroids to live productive and hard-working lives as citizens of Sansterre or, more commonly, St Denis.

ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRIAL

From the first settlement, Sansterre's population found it difficult to operate heavy industry in seabed cities. There is some large-scale manufacturing, much of it using geothermal power, on the planet itself, but much of the world's industry is in orbit.

Orbital factories were set up by the first colonists, in order to build necessary components for the seabed cities. It proved easier to expand these than to move the heavy industries to the seabed, so gradually a space-based industrial system began to develop. Minerals come in mainly from asteroid mining – it is cheaper and easier to coast a block of semi-refined ore across the system and into a capture orbit than it is to raise it up the planet's gravity well – and are processed, refined and utilised in large industrial stations. Some of these stations are located on Sansterre's large moon, but most are greatly expanded versions of the original orbital factories.



Shipbuilding is almost entirely orbital, with a balance between asteroid and constructed-hull vessels. Not surprisingly, much of the output of these orbital shipyards is used to increase the defences of the orbital industry. In this respect, Sansterre is extremely vulnerable to attack; its cities are well protected by deep water but without the orbital industrial plants and shipyards the world's power would be entirely broken.

One of the main export products of Sansterre's orbital yards is a line of Jump-capable mining ships. These are sold to clients all across the Islands, though Serendip Belt is a major competitor in this field and does not buy foreign-made vessels. Sansterran mining ships can be encountered in independent hands or serving world governments, and are often lightly armed. Disputes over claims or licensing are becoming increasingly common, with ship-to-ship actions between mining vessels generally favouring the Sansterran designs.

Lighter industries are generally located on-planet, producing consumer goods and technical items necessary to support life in the deep-sea Arcologies. These also produce a significant amount of goods for export. Sansterre is especially dominant in the field of consumer electronics and communications equipment.

St Denis had a modest but stable industrial base when it was annexed by Sansterre. This was entirely adequate to support local society but has atrophied somewhat in the past decades. This is at least in part because Sansterre's higher-technology industries can build similar but better goods more cheaply. The death knell for St Denis' local industries was the establishment of an orbital factory complex which supplies most of the world's needs at very competitive prices.

What industry remains on St Denis is either small-scale or fills local needs that are not economical for Sansterre-owned firms to cover. The quality of life for the population on St Denis improved as a result of Sansterran medical care and industrial produce, but the world is now entirely dependent on Sansterre. The remaining TL 7 industry would not be sufficient to maintain a technological society. A collapse, or at least a rapid drop in technical capability, combined by severe hardship, would result from the cutting-off of Sansterre support.

MILITARY

Sansterre maintains a generally defensive military posture, with bases at both Sansterre and St Denis. Strategy revolves mainly around defending the home systems and the orbital industries located there, with lighter forces harassing an enemy and attacking supply lines. Sansterre's high command has repeatedly asserted that it considers waging a war of conquest to be impossible over interstellar distances.

In keeping with this strategic concept, major warships are generally not Jump-capable. Those deployed at St Denis were

built there using mobile construction vessels and local asteroids. These powerful craft are normally kept close to the main worlds, making a successful assault by an invader virtually impossible.

A handful of Jump-capable major warships and cruisers are maintained, but for the most part Sansterre's striking capability rests with its destroyer squadrons. These are normally 4-ship groups, with three identical vessels and a fourth 'destroyer leader' of slightly increased displacement and equivalent performance, which carries enhanced command facilities as well as electronic warfare systems to support the squadron as a whole.

It is an open secret that a programme exists to rapidly convert asteroid mining ships to gunship carriers. These could function equally well as raiders or light escort craft, using high-capability fighters and fast attack craft for their striking power. The parent vessel, however, would remain a lightly armed asteroid mining ship and thus would be very vulnerable to attack.

As might be expected, ground forces are fairly minimal. If a war ever came to the point where ground combat was ongoing, Sansterre would have lost its orbital industrial base and thus be broken as an interstellar power. Thus ground forces receive a small budget and are set up mainly to conduct counter-insurgency and city-security operations rather than large-scale war-fighting.

OTHER NOTES

Although Sansterre lacks the means to conduct a war of military aggression, political and economic conquest are both tools it is willing to employ. The gulag-for-hire programme brings in a steady stream of disaffected citizens of other powers, some of whom provide information in return for early rehabilitation. Others enrol in programs to train infiltrators and agents for employment against their home states. Mostly this is as tutors, but some former prison inmates have chosen to go home under a new identity as agents of Sansterre's intelligence agencies.

The extent of this infiltration is unknown, but it seems likely that far more agents are in place on nearby worlds than in distant star systems. Mostly the agents just supply information but in some cases active attempts have been made to stir up disaffection or set up revolutionary organisations. Presumably these will be employed if and when open conflict erupts in the Islands, as a distraction or nuisance to weaken an enemy's war effort. It is highly unlikely that the government of a major power could be toppled in this manner, however.

Economic conquest is an overt aim of Sansterre's trade sector. Much is made of the way St Denis was brought under Sansterre's control and is now a happy and prosperous place. The fact that this is true helps the Sansterre cause considerably. Thus far, Sansterre-based firms have not achieved anything like the



dominance they need to control a world or even a part of one, but a steady encroachment into local markets is ongoing. In some cases, firms pushing into these markets receive subsidies from the Sansterre government, allowing them to undercut local companies. This has increased tension with some other powers, but Sansterre simply claims that business is business, and that those that can compete are welcome to try.

Islandbridge Trading Corporation (ITC)

'The largest commercial conglomerate in the Islands subsectors.'

The Islandbridge Trading Corporation (ITC) is a stateless commercial organisation with offices and facilities on several worlds. Its registered headquarters is on Elysee, a TL 9 world with no atmosphere. Elysee is hardly inviting as a place to live, but as a commercial centre it has much to offer.

Elysee possesses a good (class B) starport and a liberal government that imposes few restrictions on trading operations. Access is relatively easy to the shipping lanes of both the Loop and the Crescent, and above all Elysee is neutral. ITC can therefore operate as its directors think best without undue political interference.

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL

ITC is not a state as such, but its personnel often come to view the corporate enclaves as a sort of surrogate homeworld, wherever they are located. ITC generally maintains a compound or even a small company-town for its employees wherever it has holdings. These enclaves are separated from the general populace of whatever world or orbital habitat they are located in by walls, fences and security stations. These are not especially intrusive but they serve to insulate ITC personnel from local culture and politics.

Within the company enclaves, living standards are high even for low-grade workers, and social status is very much in evidence from an individual's quarters or housing. High-technology consumer goods are readily available either as imports or locally manufactured in small factories. The latter often use imported high-tech manufacturing equipment, and tend to be found only in the larger enclaves and towns.

There are few hard and fast rules against selling company-provided goods to non-company locals. After all, ITC is a trade organisation and accepts that an individual can do whatever he likes with his property, including making a profit by selling it. However, the laws of supply and demand make it impossible to maintain high-volume sales; if enough of a market exists it will be quickly sewn up by a branch of the company. Plus, high-tech comforts are status symbols. An individual who sells his off and does not replace them risks the quiet derision of his neighbours.

The corporation as a whole is, in theory, politically neutral. It will deal with anyone who wants to buy or sell on terms that the company finds acceptable, and will accept a deal that precludes trading with a rival if the price is right. Money and commercial advantage can buy ITC's political favour for as long as the deal remains sweet. This is no secret; indeed powers that try to influence ITC officials are often told that they do not need to play politics with the corporation. All they have to do is offer something the company wants in return.

As a result, ITC has a large number of ever-changing rules about what can be traded where and with whom. These rules are strictly obeyed by corporate executives and enforced with great vigour to ensure that ITC maintains its trustworthy image. After all, a considerable amount of additional revenue is earned through deals that push up ITC's price or reduce the cost of raw materials in return for an embargo on certain goods to particular customers.

ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRIAL

ITC is a trade corporation more than an industrial conglomerate, but it does undertake a considerable amount of manufacturing on various worlds and outsystem facilities. Products tend to be of the mass-market consumer sort rather than heavy industry or shipbuilding, but there are exceptions. A number of niche manufacturing firms operate under the ITC umbrella, such as minor, specialist shipyards and rare-minerals extraction companies.

ITC has gradually absorbed a number of specialist firms over the years, and is in a position to begin pushing for a monopoly on certain services, at least in a limited area. For example, ITC runs all of the deep asteroid mining operations extracting Lanthanum for Jump drives in the Elysee, Besancon, Herzenslust and New Colchis systems. New Colchis finds it cheaper to buy from ITC than to develop its own Lanthanum mining industry, even though it is risky to rely on outsiders to provide this vital resource.

This is a typical ITC trait; offering a necessary resource at a price far lower than the cost of developing the skills and obtaining the equipment to get it direct. By making life easy for its trading powers, ITC has made itself indispensable in some market sectors.

As already noted, trade is the main activity of ITC and its subsidiaries. Merchant factors are maintained at most starports and many outsystem spaceports as well. ITC brokers will source materials or goods for a client, arrange shipping, and generally oil the wheels of interstellar commerce. Of course, they are in competition with local brokers, and in a few cases have been banned from operating. However, this is rare; mainly because ITC makes sure that expelling its merchants will harm the local economy in some way that will be very obvious to the local government.



Suspicion is growing in some quarters that ITC is more powerful and influential than it would appear. Its web of deals and contracts makes it virtually impossible to get rid of ITC brokers, who are undercutting local merchants, without losing access to some vital service or resource. It may be that in time ITC will virtually control interstellar trade in the Islands.

The one area where ITC has made few inroads is with Imperial traders. A foray into trans-Rift shipping proved uneconomic; Imperial firms could do it better and cheaper. However, ITC is attempting to form a consortium with some of the Islands powers in the hope of setting up a trans-Rift run that does not rely on Imperial corporations and gives the Islands powers access to Imperial markets – to the benefit of everyone concerned, but mainly ITC.

ITC factors have made good deals with Imperial traders, and in some cases strategic partnerships have been set up. For example, the Imperial Megacorporation Ling Standard Products quickly decided that the Islands market for its equipment was not worth a major investment. Rather than setting up a web of offices and trade facilities, LSP simply cut a deal to supply ITC's large trade base on Colchis with goods at a price that was acceptable to both parties, and left the details of selling LSP goods in the Islands to ITC factors who knew the local market.

ITC does own and operate a fleet of trade ships. These are mostly fairly big freighters capable of the usual two-Jump-two operations, though specialist ships are in operation for the Esperanza and Serendip Belt runs. ITC freight ships rarely sell cargo space to outsiders; they are specifically tasked with supporting ITC trade operations rather than trying to make money from commercial shipping.

The main exception to this rule is Islandbridge StarLines (ISL), a subsidiary corporation that operates a fleet of liners and passenger vessels. Most are assigned to the Loop and the Crescent, but ISL vessels can be encountered anywhere. They carry a little cargo but are mainly passenger transports. ISL also operates a handful of fast (by Islands standards) courier ships capable of Jump-3.

MILITARY

ITC is a corporate body, not a political power, and as such has only a small security arm to secure its facilities and company towns.

OTHER NOTES

ITC is involved in joint projects with various powers, all of which are bound by confidentiality agreements. However, most of its major projects are undertaken on worlds not connected with the main Islands powers. These include infrastructure construction projects and uplift programmes designed to help local industry achieve

higher technological levels. The exact extent of ITC involvement on the minor worlds is unknown, but considerable. It may be that ITC has more fingers in more pies than anyone suspects.

The Universal Siblinghood of Disunity (USD)

'We are legion, each of us standing alone. Disunited we resist the forces of Entropy.'

The USD, or 'Siblinghood' is not, as many imagine, a religious organisation. It is instead a political-philosophical movement whose members subscribe to a broadly similar set of values. The Siblinghood is decentralised and anything but monolithic in its belief structure. Apart from a core set of values and a general sense of 'us and them' the USD is extremely loose.

In general, members believe that they share a secret, or that know something that non-Siblings just 'don't get'. Not for lack of being told; the average Sibling goes around handing out Universal Truths to anyone who will listen at the slightest provocation. The problem is that most people are too wrapped up in their mundane lives and burdened by conventional thinking that they cannot grasp the significance of what has just been handed to them. Ironically, the average Sibling thinks that this is just as well.

Most outsiders would rephrase the Siblings' core beliefs as: "The USD is a bunch of fairly harmless but annoying nutcases. They talk rubbish most of the time, but occasionally something stands out. As in just when you think you've heard it all they go and say something **truly** daft."

The USD preaches (if that is the right word) that everyone and everything is linked by a universal structure. Information passes along this structure, linking all the sentient beings in the universe. This is dangerous, say the Siblings, supporting their argument with a diatribe consisting mainly of badly mangled physics. How much of a resemblance this bears to real science depends on the background and education of the speaker.

According to real physics, energy tends to seek its lowest possible state, effectively spreading out evenly through the universe. The laws of Thermodynamics state that energy tends to move from higher energy states to lower ones – so a hot cup of coffee gets colder as its energy (in the form of heat) is lost to its cooler surroundings.

According to the laws of thermodynamics, eventually all energy in the universe will reach an even state, and with no uneven areas of energy there will be no interactions – literally, nothing at all will happen anywhere in the universe. This concept is known as the 'heat death'; once it happens, the universe will exist forever but be inert and meaningless.



The USD has somehow 'discovered' that something similar happens to information and has inferred that information is affected by entropy too. According to advocates of the USD, informational-entropy will eventually result in there being no secrets left in the universe; a sort of 'information-death'. With all information evenly spread out, the universe will, according to some USD members, become a terribly boring place.

However, the more rabid Siblings are less tongue in cheek. They maintain (at great length) that everyone is part of a huge unity of thought that must not be allowed to recombine. Telepathy in particular is a threat to the universal disunity, as it allows total and instantaneous transfer of information.

Exactly what terrible thing will happen once everyone knows everything is open to interpretation. Most Siblings claim that there are things that 'people weren't meant to know' and that somehow all information was separated to protect humans and other sentients from these secrets. Informational-entropy could cause the fragments to flow back together and damn everyone nearby to Knowing... with a capital K. This would be bad in an unimaginable sort of way.

The Siblings are (mostly) realistic enough to understand that people have to talk to one another, and that entertainment broadcasts contribute little to informational entropy. However, there are some that openly oppose large-scale dissemination of information by broadcast, and who are deeply suspicious of the increased flow of data across the Rift and through the Islands in recent years. It is these individuals that claim that humans were guided to the Islands (they do not say who or what did the guiding) so that they could be cut off from the information flow and the associated disasters that it seems to have caused – and will cause.

The history of Charted Space is filled with examples that 'prove' the Siblings' point. The Vilani Imperium united thousands of worlds, and died (obviously) of informational collapse. The subsequent Long Night was the best thing to happen to Charted Space for a long, long time, but now this Third Imperium is linking everyone up again, with its Xboat network and corporate couriers. Disaster is surely imminent for the Imperium.

The more rabid Siblings want to go back to the days before Jump drive, when the Islanders dwelled separately in the Great Rift, isolated from the rest of the universe and capable of communicating with one another at a slow and safe pace. If only the Jump-capable ships would stop coming, perhaps it might be possible for the Islanders to escape the impending Informational Armageddon.

After all, does not the very word Apocalypse, normally taken to mean great universe-ending disaster, actually mean 'time when all is revealed'?

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL

The USD is about as disorganised and fragmented as it is possible to be. A surprisingly large number of people are vaguely sympathetic to its general precepts, but it has few hard-core members. These are a varied lot, including groups who insist on living in remote areas without communications technology, prophets of doom who rant in starport concourses, and pseudo-intellectual philosophers who sit around in coffee shops with their equally deranged friends discussing the form that The End of Days might take.

ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRIAL

The USD has no large-scale assets.

MILITARY

Like any set of beliefs, the USD philosophy could be used to twist individuals into fanatics, and there are probably a few leaders who have a band of bodyguards or enforcers who would fight for them. For the most part, however, the USD is just a common belief and has no organised military forces.

OTHER NOTES

There is no organisational structure to the USD as a whole, but there are various charismatic leaders, each with their own unique style and following. There are also other groups riding the coattails of the USD. These include a range of cranks who hate technology, anti-psionic groups, and several organisations that do not like the growing Imperial presence in the Islands.

The latter are happy to use the USD to garner support, citing the evils of fast information transfer by trans-Rift courier and suggesting that the Islanders are better off without the 'informational pollution' brought by Imperial ships from beyond the Rift. This has been quite successful on some worlds; anti-Imperial sentiment is spread along with coffee-shop philosophy and suspicion towards telepaths.

POWERS IN REFT SECTOR

In addition to the various powers and political groups originating in Reft Sector, the region is influenced by a range of powerful organisations whose home territory lies elsewhere.

The Third Imperium

The Third Imperium has territories on both sides of the Great Rift. The region on the far side of the Great Rift (to Coreward and Spinward of the Islands subsectors) is generally referred to as lying 'behind the claw' while the region on the 'home' side of the Rift (to Coreward and Trailing) is said to be 'beneath the claw' by those who care about the regions' position relative to the Rift. Those that dwell 'beneath the claw' consider their proximity to the Imperial Core far more important, and tend not to think about the Rift at all.



THE IMPERIUM BENEATH THE CLAW

To Trailing and Rimward lie some of the core sectors of the Imperium, such as Gushemege and Ileish sectors. This area has a long history of habitation by humans and other sentient races. It was part of the Vilani Imperium, then the Rule of Man. The worlds of this region struggled through the Long Night as best they could, and were eventually incorporated into the Third Imperium.

For the past millennium or so, the worlds of these sectors have been ruled by the Imperium. Each region does have its own unique culture, but almost all worlds have tended to move towards an Imperial-standard culture to a greater or lesser extent. The folk of this region think of themselves as living on the Imperial frontier, with the huge emptiness of the Great Rift as the outer border of their world view. Those that spare a thought for what lies outside their home region are vaguely aware of a region on outworlders in the Rift, and then a backwater region of the Imperium beyond that. Neither is of any great consequence for the average Imperial citizen in Ileish or the surrounding sectors.

The Imperium does maintain a full Sector Fleet in each of the sectors bordering the Rift, with the exception of Verge and Reft

sectors. These fleets have the same composition as other sector fleets, within the usual variance that exists between fleets. The battleships and cruisers of these fleets are not expected to have to deal with a trans-Rift invasion. Instead they function as a strategic reserve for other regions and can put down any rebellions that might erupt.

The most likely wartime deployment for these fleets would be against Aslan incursions through Reaver's Deep sector or perhaps as a deep reserve for conflicts to Rimward if a new Solomani Rim War ever erupted. The Great Rift itself makes Aslan incursions directly into Ileish or Verge sectors very unlikely, except perhaps in the form of small raiding missions that could be dealt with by local resources. The Islands powers are not considered any form of threat by the Imperium.

Verge sector has a small sector fleet, composed mainly of older cruisers and a few obsolete capital ships. In contrast, a small number of extremely advanced 'Rift Cruisers' operate out of bases along the fringe of the Great Rift, patrolling systems deep in the Rift and occasionally deploying Corewards into Reft Sector.



The region of Reft Sector lying 'beneath the claw' has no sector fleet as such, just a small detachment under the flag of the Verge Sector Admiral. As with Verge sector, this force is composed mainly of obsolescent and even obsolete vessels. These are, generally speaking, more than a match for anything likely to come out of the Islands.

There are no Rift Cruisers normally based in this end of Reft Sector, though one will occasionally be sent up from Verge. The existence of a refuelling station makes the transit into the Islands possible for a Jump-4 vessel. This is 'fleet mobility' standard for the Imperial Navy, so almost any Navy ship can be used for an Islands cruise.

The Imperial Navy tends to send relatively small ships into the Islands. Fleet destroyers, normally considered to be minor vessels, are large enough to impress in the Islands. Thus most patrols are undertaken by destroyers, with the occasional light or heavy cruiser undertaking a flag-showing tour. The vessels used for these missions tend to be older designs but are still very capable by Islands standards.

Imperial Navy vessels out of the region beneath the claw generally operate in the Old Islands subsector, returning home after a lengthy cruise. Some proceed through the New Islands to the naval base at Zuflucht and back again after a stopover, but this is not usual. More commonly, ships out of bases in the Rimward-Trailing end of Reft sector make a tour of worlds in



the Old Islands then transit back home. Their main areas of responsibility are the protection of the transit route through to Amondia and flag-showing in the systems immediately surrounding Amondia.

THE THIRD IMPERIUM BEHIND THE CLAW

The region of the Third Imperium lying 'behind the claw' is culturally and politically very different from areas nearer the Imperial core. This region is linked to the central sectors of the Imperium by a long transit via Deneb and Corridor sectors, or via the trans-Rift route.

The area is a distant fringe of the Imperium, and has been part of it for a relatively short time. Local cultures are more varied than within the old-Imperium regions, and not coincidentally the area is less stable. Disputes between worlds, and even between certain worlds and the Imperial authorities, are not uncommon.

There is no sector fleet for this region, not in the sense of a large force of battleships and cruisers. However, there is a regional command structure that fulfils a similar function. Reft Sector Command oversees small local defensive forces organised in the usual manner – subsector fleets for those subsectors containing enough Imperial worlds to support one, and guardships deployed from Sector Command. An additional force of destroyers and a handful of cruisers are available to deal with larger-scale threats.

In any other sector, this structure would be granted the title of Sector Fleet or else appended to the forces of a neighbouring sector. However, the fragmented nature of Imperial holdings in Reft Sector makes this impractical, and command from the only neighbouring Imperial sector, Spinward Marches sector, is not practicable due to regions of neutral and sometimes-hostile space located in between Reft sector and the main Imperial-held part of Spinward Marches sector.

Thus, while the Rimward-Trailing systems of Reft sector fall under the auspices of the Verge sector fleet, and naval ships from that end of the sector do visit the Islands, the main responsibility for Imperial forces in the Islands (and the Spinward-Coreward end of the sector) lies with Reft Sector Command. Most Imperial Navy ships encountered in the Old Islands, and almost all in the New Islands, are based out of Zuflucht and are assigned to Reft Sector Command rather than the Verge sector fleet.

The Imperial Navy base at Zuflucht is a modest affair, capable of supporting only a handful of ships. At any given time it will usually have 3-6 vessels assigned to it. Usually this will be one or two destroyers (usually escort destroyers but sometimes a larger and more powerful fleet destroyer). The others are usually escorts in the 400-1,000-ton range. Fleet auxiliaries and couriers also pass through, either in company with patrol ships or on solo missions.

From time to time Reft Sector Command sends a small carrier or a light cruiser into the Islands, usually with a small escort force. Such deployments deprive the main Imperial-held region of assets for lengthy periods, so tend to be made only when the frontier region is particularly stable.

THE IMPERIAL NAVY IN REFT SECTOR

As a result of the need to refit and maintain vessels, and the time required for each Jump, it is uncommon to see Imperial Navy ships in the Islands sectors. Typically there will be one vessel either at Amondia or one of the surrounding systems, and possibly one other somewhere in the Old Islands, both out of the Verge command area.

There will usually be one or two ships from Reft Sector Command in the New Islands subsector and probably one from this command in the Old Islands, plus one down for maintenance at Zuflucht. Of course, some or even all of these ships might be in Jump at any given moment.

With just a couple of warships per subsector, the Imperial Navy has a very minor presence in the Islands unless there is a pressing reason to send several vessels. Once every 2-3 years a cruiser or carrier comes through to show the flag, and auxiliaries and couriers might also be encountered, but as a general rule encountering any Imperial Navy warship in the Islands is a noteworthy event. Two or more together means that something unusual is going on.

THE IMPERIAL INTERSTELLAR SCOUT SERVICE IN REFT SECTOR

The Imperial Interstellar Scout Service (IISS) has more of a presence in Reft Sector than the Navy, as might be expected. Although naval couriers make the trans-Rift run when necessary, the Scout Service maintains a regular courier link across the Rift. Using Jump-4 ships and making only short stopovers at each port, the IISS can typically get a small cargo and a large amount of information from one side of the Rift to the other in 10 weeks.

From there, whatever has been brought across is fed into the normal express boat (Xboat) service and moved onward to the final destination. The trans-Rift vessels undergo maintenance and are then sent back, usually with a different crew. The crew of one courier normally take the next one back, while the crew of that vessel enjoy a rest from what has become one of the most unpopular duties of the IISS Communications branch.

IISS trans-Rift couriers are 800-ton Jump-4 vessels, which carry additional fuel for an extra Jump-1 to allow for self-rescue in the event of a Misjump or other disaster. They are lightly armed for self-defence. A trans-Rift courier mission is normally sent out every four weeks. Thus at any given time there will usually be one vessel undergoing maintenance at each end, plus two in transit each way.



A number of additional vessels are available to carry urgent messages or to undertake odd jobs. Some of these can be encountered carrying out various missions in the Islands or in Imperial territory along the fringes of the Great Rift. Others may be at base for refit or 'borrowed' for mundane tasks when no other ships are available.

The IISS also conducts long-range missions out into the Great Rift from time to time. Even for a high-Jump vessel, reaching many deep-Rift systems requires support from tankers or pre-positioned refuelling caches located in deep space. Large Scout Cruisers are normally used for these missions, which can be many months in duration.

The Scout Service also carries out its normal duties – communications, exploration and survey – within Imperial territory along the Rift edges. The web of Xboats and their support tenders, plus couriers and packet boats, extends right to the edge of the Rift. The region 'beneath the claw' is better served by Scout Service communications assets than the 'behind the claw' part of Reft sector. There, Scout vessels are more likely to be encountered on survey and exploration missions.

IMPERIAL MEGACORPORATIONS

The Imperial Megacorporations have a tendency to go where the money is, and for the most part there is relatively little to be had in the Islands and the part of Reft sector lying behind the claw. Such frontier regions offer opportunities for smaller business groups to expand, though not without some risk, precisely because the Megacorps have a relatively small presence.

The region beneath the claw is of course part of the Imperial core territories, so most of the Megacorps have a strong presence there. Some do have interests in the rest of the sector, and some use the trans-Islands route to speed communications with their branches in Spinward Marches and Deneb sectors. Thus most of the comments in this sector refer to the Islands and the Spinward-Coreward part of Reft Sector. The region beneath the claw sees much more Megacorp activity; things there are little different to any other settled part of the Imperium.

There are thirteen Imperial Megacorporations. These (and many other corporate bodies) often use the suffix LIC after their name. This stands for Limited-liability Imperial Charter. Some older (or more pretentious) corps use archaic terms, many of them derived from Terran usage.

Three of the Megacorporations (Makhidkarun, Sharurshid and Naasirka) are descended from the three great ruling bureaus of the Vilani (or First) Imperium. Although today they are little different from other Imperial corporate bodies, they are still largely dominated by traditional Vilani philosophy and strongest in the region around Vland, homeworld of the Vilani people.

These three Megacorporations have little interest in Reft sector, even as a conduit for communications. Their core territories lie close to Corridor sector, making communications with the region behind the claw more convenient. Additionally, the people of the Islands are culturally close to the Terrans who, not long after the Islands colonisation missions left Terra, fought a series of interstellar wars with the Vilani, eventually toppling the First Imperium. This creates something of a cultural barrier between the Vilani Megacorporations and the Islanders.

Delgado Trading, LIC

Delgado started out as a manufacturer of military hardware and moved into other industries including mining and refining of heavy minerals, publishing, antiques and toys. Delgado is well known for its work in miniaturisation and for its distinctly suspect employment practices. Most employees are underpaid and kept in line by a combination of penalty clauses in their contract and the possibility of promotion to 'Favoured Employee' status.

As the most recent of the Imperial Megacorps, Delgado is active in seeking new markets and has made an effort to open up the islands and the 'far' part of Reft sector. Delgado Shipping, a subsidiary which incidentally is one of the worst offenders in terms of unfair employment practice, operates a trans-Rift shipping service and routinely sends trade vessels into the Islands.

General Products, LIC

General Products is primarily concerned with heavy industry; notably the construction of starships and heavy machinery. It also manufactures a range of 'general basics' such as tools and kitchen utensils which are adequate for their purpose and more importantly, cheap.

General Products has found a market niche in the Islands, notably supplying what would be fairly basic items on a tech level 12 or 13 world in the Imperium but which are quite advanced compared to what is made in the Islands. TL12-13 items are built in General's factories in the region beneath the claw and shipped in bulk into the Islands, mainly to Colchis from where they are sold on in bulk or as single items.

Even with shipping costs, General can make a good profit on these items. Rarity makes it possible to charge high prices for items sourced quite cheaply in the Imperium. This creates friction with New Home, which is the only source of TL 13 equipment within the Islands. Amondia is also opposed to this trade, but for different reasons. Amondia has a deal with Ling Standard Products and does not like the competition.

This has led to General Products-registered vessels being harassed as they passed through Amondia, a practice that stopped quickly when an Imperial Navy task force arrived in the system. The point was made bluntly but without violence: General Products is an Imperial corporation and its ships have the protection of the Imperial Navy. Overt harassment of



any Imperial-registered ship will not be tolerated. Since then, opposition has taken a more low-key form.

Geschichtkreis Sternschiffbau AG

GsbAG is a shipbuilding corporation, and has little interest in opening a large-scale operation in the Islands. However, teams of advisors have been hired by various Islands powers to assist with their own shipbuilding efforts. Abbreviated to GsbAG and commonly referred to as 'Gasbag' Geschichtkreis Sternschiffbau AG claims descent from a consortium of Terran businesses. According to the firm's assertion, GsbAG was incorporated just thirty years after the ESA long-range colony mission was launched to the Islands. Indeed, some of the firms that allegedly joined forces to create GsbAG helped build and equip the ESA colony ships.

GsbAG is particularly friendly with Serendip Belt. A corporate delegation recently visited **C-Jammer**, seat of government for the Serendip Belt system. In a highly publicised ceremony they visited the control areas and engines built three thousand years ago, allegedly by their own firm, and presented a quantity of spares fabricated to the ancient design specifications for the colony ships. The Serendip government then ceremonially settled 'all outstanding affairs and payments owing' on **C-Jammer** – for the sum of one Imperial Credit. The whole episode was nothing but a PR exercise of course, but it served to demonstrate the close and friendly relations being built between the Serendips and GsbAG.

Hortalez et Cie, LIC

Hortalez et Cie is a financial corporation which owns numerous businesses (including shares in other Megacorporations) but does not operate them under its own corporate identity. Its activities under its own name are almost exclusively limited to the financial sector. It has little interest in Reft Sector, other than the region beneath the claw.

Hortalez et Cie is well known for bankrolling colonial operations and construction projects, but seems to have decided to stay out of the Islands market for its own reasons.

Instellarms, LIC

Instellarms is primarily a military hardware manufacturer, and as such has found a ready market in the rapidly militarising Islands powers. Although Imperial export regulations forbid the sale of top-end hardware to non-member worlds, Instellarms has found that TL 13 equipment, otherwise obtainable only on New Home, is popular.

However, there is a limit to what the Islanders can afford, so at present Instellarms has found itself shipping small amounts of gear to one power, then another, as each tries to maintain parity without overspending.

Ling Standard Products, LIC

LSP is primarily concerned with asteroid mining, petroleum skimming from gas giant atmospheres, ore processing, bulk transportation and heavy industry. It is also active in the fields of electronics, computers and software, vehicles and high-technology equipment. Its starship components division manufactures mining and prospecting vessels as well as starship weaponry, drives and power systems. LSP also produces a range of simple and easy-to-use power systems and machines aimed at the colonial market, and a cheap but effective range of smallarms that are also popular along the frontiers.

LSP is one of the few Imperial Megacorporations to be highly active beyond the Imperial border, and as such naturally began to move into Reft sector as soon as this became possible. LSP has a contract with Amondiaque, which acts as a factor for products and components. These are shipped to Amondiaque aboard LSP starships, after which sales and distribution are locally arranged.

LSP does have a few mining operations in the Islands, notably in the outsystems of worlds not directly claimed by any power. Shipping ore and minerals back to Imperial space would not be viable, so these concerns sell to local industry, effectively becoming part of the Islands economy rather than the Imperial one.

Makhidkarun

Makhidkarun is one of three Vilani Megacorporations (Naasirka and Sharurshid being the others) that have their origins in the Bureaus of the Vilani Imperium. Each was responsible for overseeing a part of the Vilani Imperium. It has a relatively minor presence in that part of Reft sector that lies beneath the claw, and virtually none in the rest of the sector.

Naasirka

Naasirka is the second Vilani Bureau-turned-Megacorporation. It is a general and diversified corporation dealing in electronics, software, computers and robotics as well as transportation and energy production. Naasirka is at the cutting edge of robotics and artificial-intelligence research, and is known to hide its research centres on remote asteroids or moons. There are rumours that a major Naasirka research centre is located somewhere in the Great Rift, but this is probably just crazy-talk.

Schunemann und Sohn, AG

Also known as SuSAG, LIC, SuSAG is the premier Imperial chemical and pharmaceutical corporation. Its biochemical warfare division has a particularly bad reputation for safety, which is not entirely undeserved. As a result of a lot of bad press as well as concerns about security and safety, SuSAG normally sites its production and research plants in remote and uninhabited areas or on planetoids.



SuSAG has extensive interests outside the Imperium, and one of the largest Megacorporate security forces. The firm has shown that it is entirely willing to interfere in local affairs in order to protect its interests. It has also been accused of illegal research and involvement in the development of psionics-related drugs despite an Imperial injunction.

SuSAG officially has no presence in the Islands or Spinward-Coreward end of Reft sector, but conspiracy theorists like to point out that such remote areas are ideal for SuSAG's more dubious purposes. Non-Imperial or frontier worlds would make an excellent testing ground for new chemicals and drugs.

Sharurshid

The third of the Vilani Bureaus, Sharurshid produces little but makes a vast amount of money buying and selling other firms' produce. It operates a large fleet of trade ships, many of them plying long-distance routes to bring rare goods to the markets of the core worlds. Sharurshid operates a trans-Rift shipping service, trading a little in the Islands along the way. This route is primarily concerned with bringing rare goods across the Rift from Spinward Marches sector and the non-Imperial territories beyond.

There are persistent rumours that a trade lane has been forged up to Coreward through Foreven sector, and that somewhere there is a neutral port where goods from the Darrian Confederation, the Sword Worlds Confederation, the Aslan Hierate, various powers in Foreven sector and beyond, and even the Zhodani Consulate are traded. Sharurshid starships then bring these goods back into the Imperium via the Rift and sell them in the markets of Illeish and Zarushagar sectors.

Sternmetal Horizons, LIC

Sternmetal is primarily a mining and manufacturing consortium, which also undertakes some heavy engineering and construction projects. It manufactures power generation and transmission equipment for starship, vehicular, industrial and civil uses.

Sternmetal is also the foremost producer of food synthesis equipment in the Imperium.

Sternmetal tends to do things on a large scale if they are worth doing at all, and does not consider the Islands to be worth that kind of investment. Its presence is minimal, being restricted to a few executives keeping an eye on the activities of other commercial concerns and watching out for opportunities that may be worth a large-scale investment.

Tukera Lines, LIC

Tukera is the premier Imperial shipping corporation. In some areas it has a virtual monopoly on large-scale freighting and passenger travel. Tukera's assets range from huge bulk freighters and impressive liners to specialised fast couriers and mid-sized mail ships.

The firm's revenue mostly comes from regular, dependable routes rather than speculative trade. The Islands are not considered lucrative enough to be worth setting up a regular service, so Tukera's presence is restricted to the region beneath the claw.

Zirunkariish

Zirunkariish is a Vilani firm, but one without roots in the great Bureaus. It is primarily an investment and banking firm, and is the largest insurance under-writer in the Imperium. It also funds the development of mid-tech worlds and starports on major routes.

Zirunkariish is a majority shareholder in several major starport projects, though it rarely takes much interest in direct ownership. It put up the money for one of the trans-Rift stations, which was allegedly a mistake. Corporate forecasters were expecting considerably more trade coming through the Islands, making the station an expensive disappointment. Having had its fingers burned, the corp has stayed out of the Islands ever since.



WORLDS OF REFT SECTOR

As already noted, Reft Sector is divided into three distinct areas: Imperial territories 'behind the claw', the Rift itself and the Imperial worlds 'beneath the claw'. The latter is very much a core territory of the Imperium, while the region behind the claw is a frontier.

The Rift itself consists of two distinct regions; the Islands and 'the rest'. The Islands region is considered to consist of most of Old Islands and New Islands subsectors, i.e. the region where there are inhabited worlds relatively close together. 'The rest' is generally forgotten about by most travellers, and perhaps rightly so; empty space is of little use to most people.

There are entire subsectors within the Rift that have no stars at all, which of course translates to no worlds, no people, no economy and no reason at all for going there. Of course, even 'empty' space is not entirely devoid of matter. There are occasional comets and possibly even rogue planets floating about in the deeps of space. However, finding such an object is a challenge at multi-parsec distances.

If a suitable comet could be located, it might serve as a refuelling point, allowing a ship to crack frozen gases to obtain hydrogen fuel. Artificial refuelling stations are also feasible, though any state or organisation with the resources to build a string of refuelling stations across the Rift (or leading to a location within it) will usually have the means to prevent outsiders from using them.

A number of extremely isolated star systems do exist within the Rift but outside the Islands region. Some of these are home to populations of humans and non-humans. These worlds see very few visiting starships; these are mainly Scout Service cruisers conducting research rather than trade vessels.

There are also all manner of wild tales about what lies hidden in the deep Rift. Most of these are variants on the sort of 'here be dragons' tales that spring up about any remote region. The rest are the invention of drunks and braggarts. However, it is true that the Rift has not been thoroughly explored, so strange discoveries may await the intrepid (or foolish) starship crew that takes a leap of faith out into the deep night.

VESTUS SUBSECTOR

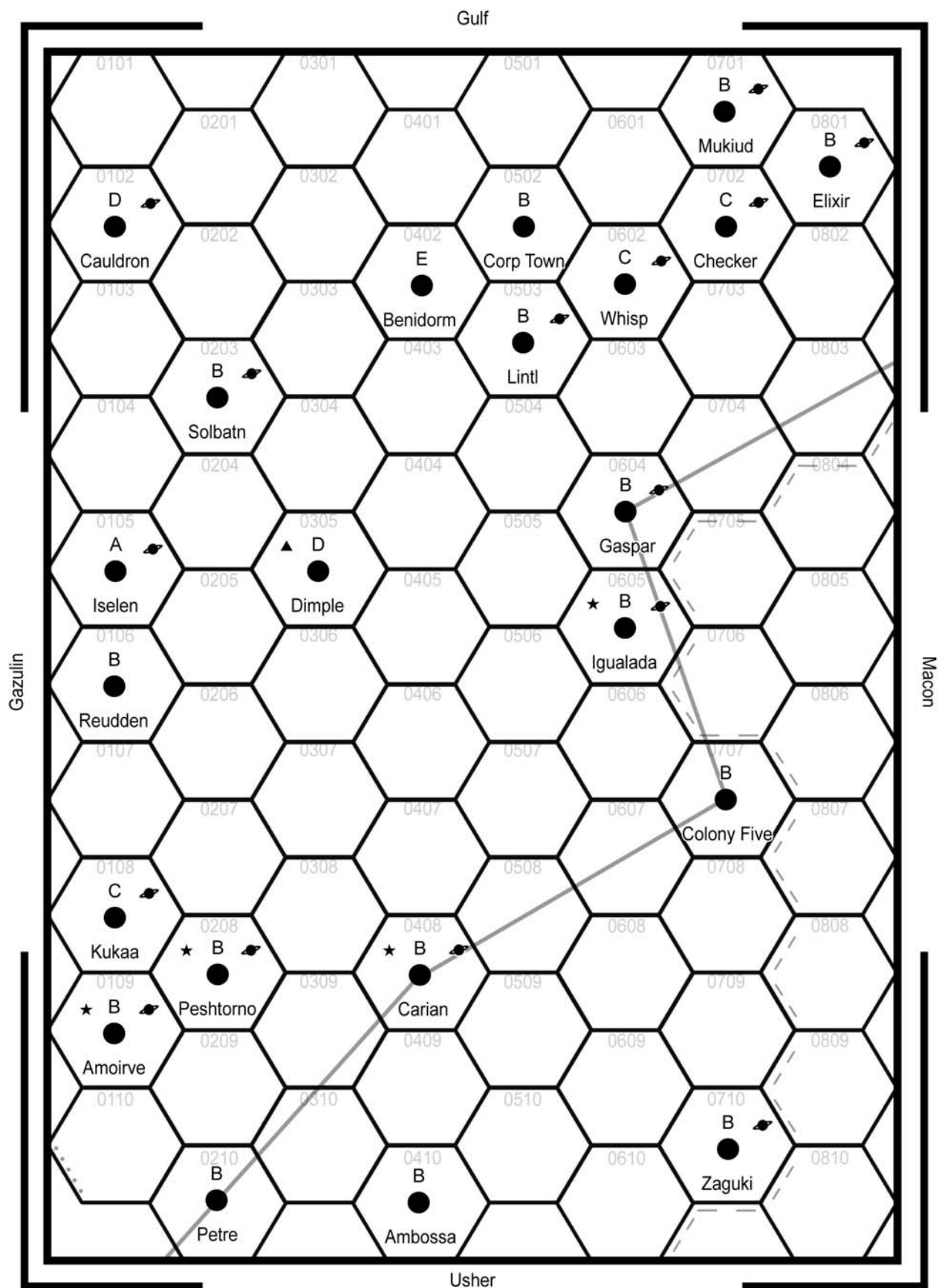
Vestus subsector is mostly Imperial territory. Lying 'behind the claw' it is very much a frontier region. The regional capital, such as it is, lies at Lintl. From here, a small bureaucratic apparatus oversees Imperial activities in Reft sector (other than the region 'beneath the claw'), answering to the Deneb sector capital.

The primary concern for the Imperial authorities of the Reft region is relations among and with the various small states of the local area, and with the Aslan Hierate's territories on this side of the Rift. The Aslan habit of sending out parties of land-seeking adventurers has at times led to conflict. While the Imperial assets in the region are scanty, they are entirely enough to deal with a few bands of adventurers seeking to make a land-grab somewhere. What they are totally inadequate for is dealing with conflict with an Aslan clan.

There is always the risk that an Aslan clan might be drawn into conflict with the Imperial authorities by a process of escalation. Local residents might evict Aslan settlers by force, or the Imperial Navy might be forced to fire on their ships. This would not necessarily lead to conflict, but a clan might decide to push the issue. For the Imperials, the question is whether to risk conflict or to allow parties of Aslan to occupy parts of Imperial worlds.

Inevitably, these enclaves will grow and eventually send out land-grab missions of their own, so a line has to be drawn somewhere. At present, that line is in Vestus subsector, and thus a mix of force and diplomacy is required to hold a firm frontier without provoking a serious incident that the Imperials lack the resources to deal with.

The Imperial centre of government is located at Lintl's orbital Highport, with only an embassy on-planet. This is largely to avoid entanglement in Lintl's internal affairs. The world is home to 39 Billion people, governed by a strict theocracy. Lintl's religion preaches that all sentients are part of a collective consciousness called the Totality. Conformity is enforced partially through harsh law enforcement and partly through fear of retribution after death – those that defy the world's religious leaders are doomed to eternity in mental isolation rather than becoming part of the Totality after death.





The Imperial Charter permits worlds to govern themselves as they please, and the regional government has no interest in becoming involved in local politics, but Lintl's society is not conducive to supporting a bureaucracy serving a diverse range of worlds and peoples. The Highport does see a great deal of trade coming through, but access to the world itself (other than the Downport) is restricted.

The Imperial Navy maintains a modest Subsector Fleet in Vestus subsector. This is built around two cruiser-class vessels. One is a fairly new light cruiser, while the other (the subsector flagship) is an obsolescent strike carrier. The latter represents a fairly significant force at the head of its supporting task force. Most threats to Imperial authority could be crushed by a single vessel of this size. A more serious threat would be dealt with by capital ships sent down from Deneb sector.

Evidence has been found of Vilani settlements on some worlds in Vestus subsector. There are no records of deliberate Vilani

settlement in the region, and archaeological finds suggest that these were refugee colonies. Almost all finds date from between –2300 and –1700 in the Imperial calendar, though occasional earlier sites suggest that the crews of misjumped starships made the best life they could for themselves on various worlds.

It is theorised that Vargr raiding and piracy during the decline of the First Imperium forced the abandonment of some settlements within Corridor sector. Refugees from these worlds pushed on into what was at that time uncharted territory, seeking new homes in Reft and Trojan Reach sectors.

Most of these ad-hoc colony missions seem to have reached Vestus subsector and settled there, though the majority of the colonies died out before the coming of the Third Imperium. Those that survived were, for the most part, incorporated into the more successful later settlements.

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Cauldron	0102		D988222-4	Ga Lo Lt		Im	G
Iselen	0105		A543678-9	Ni Po		Im	G
Reudden	0106		B5536BG-7	Ni Po		Im	
Kukaa	0108		C544100-A	Ga Lo		Im	G
Amoirve	0109	N	B565476-B	Ga Ni		Im	G
Solbatn	0203		B87A443-A	Ni		Im	G
Peshtorno	0208	N	B783841-8			Im	G
Petre	0210		B696478-A	Ga Ni		Im	
Dimple	0305	S	D200201-8	Lo		Im	
Benidorm	0402		E546400-8	Ga Ni		Im	
Carian	0408	N	B300459-B	Ni		Im	G
Ambossa	0410		B684459-9	Ga Ni		Im	
Corp Town	0502		B574211-B	Ga Lo		Im	
Lintl	0503		B739AEE-C	Hi Ht		Im	G
Whisp	0602		C551110-6	Lo Po		Im	G
Gaspar	0604		B436337-D	Ht Lo		Im	G
Igualada	0605	N	B540567-9	De Ni Po		Im	G
Mukiud	0701		B433210-D	Ht Lo Po		Im	G
Checker	0702		C300225-9	Lo		Im	G
Colony Five	0707		B5759A5-B	Ga Hi In		Im	
Zaguki	0710		B560212-9	De Lo		Im	G
Elixir	0801		B768321-9	Ga Lo		Im	G



Cauldron D988222-4

Cauldron is a fairly typical backwater Imperial world, colonised by a handful of people and then more or less forgotten about. It lies off the main trade routes and has too small a population to develop much of an economy. There is little reason for trade ships to call, other than to buy and sell individual items in a manner similar to a mobile market stall. However, there are other reasons why starfarers might visit.

Cauldron itself is a large, wet world, about 80% covered in seas and with a dense atmosphere. This permits lush vegetation and a well developed ecosphere which includes a number of large predators. There is a zone of both temperate conditions and fairly mild weather in the mid latitudes north and south of the equator. Away from this band, violent storms are common. This is probably the origin of the world's name.

Agriculture is easy in the temperate lands, with multiple harvests possible in the same year providing crops are rotated and land is left fallow from time to time. Life is thus fairly easy for the 500 or so residents, of whom the vast majority dwell in a single village. The remainder are mainly hunters and trappers who ply their trade in the wilderness surrounding the settled area. Most of the planetary surface remains entirely unexplored; even the most adventurous locals rarely travel more than 100-200km from their homes on a trapping expedition.

Local hunters mostly use imported rifles to deal with larger predators, and make a reasonable return settling the pelts to luxury clothing manufacturers through a chain of intermediaries. Meat is another export, albeit on a very small scale. However, most of the world's income is derived not from the product of hunting expeditions but from the expeditions themselves.

Cauldron is popular with big game hunters and safari operators. Some wish to photograph the wildlife, some come to study it and some want to shoot the larger creatures. There is nothing the locals can do to stop a safari ship from landing anywhere on the planet, at which point the passengers can do as they please.

However, in recent years it has become fashionable to hire a local hunter as a guide and to learn the ways of the hunted creatures while seeing landmarks made famous in a documentary made a few decades ago. The locals derive a fair amount of income from this service and from the credits spent by safari parties. Many buy up local souvenirs or even animal pelts that they can claim they shot themselves.

There is also a growing interest in 'adventure retreat' type holidays, for which Cauldron is becoming a popular destination. The mildest of these involves a stay in the locals' village and tours of nearby wilderness areas for rafting or climbing





expeditions. More robust parties head out into the wilderness to try the life of a hunter or trapper for themselves, or fly to the mountains to go climbing.

Of course, there is little provision for safety or rescue, which deters many potential visitors but enthralls others. Bored, well-off workers and minor nobles thus come to Cauldron to live the rugged outdoors life for a couple of weeks before returning home with vids and the occasional scar to show what a tough guy they are.

The locals are somewhat amused by the idea that people want to pay them for the privilege of sampling their lives and the dangers of the outback. A minority dislike the intrusion but most are happy enough to accept the extra credits. Few compromises are made however, which just adds to the authenticity of the experience.

The locals have a sustainable tech level of 4, but use a variety of low-maintenance imported items to add a little comfort to their lives. They are familiar with the use of many high-tech items such as holocameras and personal comm units, and in many cases actually own them. However, little reliance is placed on these items. The locals distil a pretty good liquor out of their cereal crops using a high-tech fusion still, but would not be too dismayed if it broke down. The distillation process could be carried on using lower-tech systems, and even if it could not society would not collapse for lack of booze.

Cauldron's social system is both simple and complex, as such frontier systems tend to be. On the one hand it is easily categorised as a participating democracy, in which all adults have a say in what passes for governance. In practice, the set-up is quite complex as the opinions of different individuals carry more or less weight depending on the subject at hand.

There are few laws as such, and little in the way of formal legal process. In a society where everyone is known to everyone else, it is generally not hard to figure out who committed a given offence. Potential criminals tend to be discouraged at an early age by fairly mild punishments agreed upon by the community, and by the stigma attached to being called to account in front of the whole community. Serious offenders are likely to be driven out of the town without weapons, which is tantamount to a death sentence.

One subgroup within the community stands out enough to surprise visitors. This is the crew of a very old (and long since paid-for) Free Trader starship, who have 'gone native' and made Cauldron their home as well as their base. Their ship is in borderline spaceworthy condition, and makes semi-regular trade runs with a hold full of meat and pelts. When not out trading, the crew act as starport technicians (a handful of locals fill in for them when they are not available), patch up their ship and help out around town.

This sort of arrangement is not uncommon in frontier towns. It is not viable for a starship with a mortgage to pay but for an old vessel this sort of semi-retirement is a common way to see out the last years. One day the ship will fail to take off – if the crew are lucky – or will become too dangerous to operate. Until then the ship and her crew are part of the local community.

As already noted, most of Cauldron is unexplored. There are rumours of raider starships operating out of hidden bases in the outback and of lost Ancients sites, but those are common on any world with a significant outback region. More credible is the persistent story that a modest population of Vilani made their way to Cauldron in the last years of the First Imperium and built a settlement high on a mountain... or in a valley, or on an island, or somewhere suitably inaccessible.

There are reasons to believe that this story may be true. Artefacts have been found from time to time, though these could be from unwary safari parties that tackled a wild area without a local guide. If a Vilani group did settle on Cauldron, they must have died out or moved on before Imperial explorers arrived. If so, they may have left behind a city or town of some kind. While salvage of usable technological items is unlikely after all this time, a settlement might be of interest to archaeologists seeking evidence of Vilani culture in a survival environment.

Thus far, no reliable reports have appeared of such a settlement, but this does not prevent the occasional freelance survey party from searching for one. They usually depart empty-handed after a few encounters with local wildlife and weather conditions.

Reudden B5536BG-7

Reudden is a medium-sized world with a thin atmosphere and, not coincidentally, relatively little surface water. It lies in a fairly sparse star system, which has no major planetoid belts and no gas giants. Reudden Highport is thus the only ready source of fuel in the star system.

The port sees a considerable amount of trade passing through, and generates a great deal of revenue for the world government from sales of overpriced fuel, costly maintenance fees, and through taxation of all commercial activities at the orbital or ground facilities.

The Imperium considers Starports to be Imperial rather than local territory, but does allow the operators considerable leeway in how their installation is run. Thus, since Reudden Starport is owned and operated by an extremely high-law state, it shares some characteristics with the planetary society. However, Imperial High Law places restrictions on how far an operator can go. This prevents the port from becoming a police state.



Most Starports maintain a law level of 3 or so, allowing melee weapons and handguns to be carried for self-defence. Reudden Starport prohibits all weaponry, enforcing an effective law level of 9. The usual penalty is a stiff fine and deportation, which can cause problems if the offender does not have a berth on a ship awaiting him. In this event, the offender is given a short period to make arrangements (from a holding cell) and is held until he can be put aboard a departing starship. If he cannot obtain transport offworld, he is considered guilty of further offences and passes into the planetside justice system until either someone pays for his passage or else his sentence is completed.

Strict laws apply to all aspects of the port's activities. Customs and safety inspections are especially rigorous, and ships that fail a safety inspection may have to seek repairs before being allowed to leave. The only yards available are state-licensed and overpriced. This practice is monitored to ensure that it lies within the bounds of fair practice – the Imperium is prepared to tolerate extremely overzealous interpretation of its regulations by high-law member states, but will not accept blatant abuse of regs to sucker passing ships into paying for unnecessary work.

Reudden, not surprisingly perhaps, remains scrupulously legal in its dealings, but enforces every nuance of every regulation to its utmost extreme. Free Traders and similar independent ships are not often seen in Reudden's port, for the simple reason that they may not be able to pass the inspections or pay for work needed to get back out of the port again.

Reudden Downport is not located at the planetary capital. This is not all that unusual, but in this case deliberate care has been taken to isolate the Downport from the rest of the world. Often there is a 'Startown' co-located with a Downport, acting as a buffer between the world and the wider universe. Startowns are local rather than Imperial territory but are usually subject to laws (or at least enforcement practices) and social customs somewhere between those of the host world and the starfaring community.

Not so on Reudden. There is sizable town at the Downport, but it is entirely within the port's Extrality Line and therefore part of the port rather than being a local facility. The port is surrounded by a high wall topped by a fence, with a ditch and then another fence outside that. Beyond is a region of desert, with the only settlement within 20km being the compound that houses the customs and enforcement personnel employed at the port.

Access to the rest of the world is via a single underground monorail line for personnel and another for heavy goods. These are well guarded and subject to stringent controls. Grav and air vehicles are not permitted to approach or leave the port without special clearance, which is rarely granted. Even spacecraft are forced to keep to specific lanes on approach or departure. Craft

have in the past been fired on for deviating from traffic control instructions.

To a great extent Reudden keeps its citizens sealed off from the wider universe, and vice versa. Travel permits are obtainable. In fact, it is not all that difficult to get one for an individual who understands the local legal system. One advantage, if you can call it that, of a police state is that procedures are clear, though not always easy to follow.

The world itself is a dictatorship, run by the head of the Internal Security Forces. This is a paramilitary organisation that handles law enforcement, civil defence and also some aspects of bureaucracy. Laws are incredibly strict and pervade all aspects of everyday life, but they do seem to be fairly applied. Indeed, it would appear that rather than creating a police state as a tool to keep the population in line, the leaders of Reudden set one up because they believed it was the correct way to run a society.

It is not clear why Reudden needed such strict law enforcement, but at least the leaders seem to believe in following their own rules. As to the general populace, they are raised in a highly regimented environment and subjected from birth to propaganda that tells them that their way of life is the only correct one.

For the most part, citizens never come into contact with any other way of thinking. Those that are selected to work at the Downport and Highport are rigorously screened and are subject to harsh penalties for spreading ideas that do not have official approval back to their home communities.

The world's 4,000,000 or so citizens dwell in modestly sized cities separated by large expanses of wilderness. Travel between communities is restricted and not common, and as an additional precaution only some settlements are eligible to provide Highport or Downport staff. Residents of these communities are barred from certain governmental jobs and cannot join the military or the Internal Security Forces.

Sustainable tech level is seven, providing a comfortable basic standard of living for everyone. Access to luxuries is dependent as much on status as money, and status is awarded for achievements within a strict code. Basically, the closer to a model citizen one is, the greater chance of promotion, which leads in turn to a better lifestyle and the admiration of lesser citizens. This does, of course, promote a certain mediocrity as well as conformity.

Reudden is, above all, a stable society. There are legally enforceable procedures for everything, and these are for the most part effective and comprehensive. Thus even an unexpected disaster will be met with a well organised, if inflexible and formulaic, response. Recycling laws and rigid control of the



consumer economy reduce resource demands, enabling the world to remain self-sufficient even if offworld commerce were to suddenly cease.

Reudden's military system is based upon conscription. Internal Security Force personnel are all volunteers, but mainstream military forces are composed almost entirely of conscripts and reservists. A period of military service is mandatory for all adults, with the option to volunteer for extended service or a career. This is viewed favourably when applying to the ISF or for high-status jobs.

Training levels are not high, but with all adults receiving basic training and then refresher courses during a mandatory 15-year period after completing their conscript service, Reudden can field large numbers of broadly competent troops. Equipment is locally produced to be as simple and conscript-proof as possible, with an emphasis on infantry forces backed up by light vehicles.

There are no military elite units as such, as all such formations are part of the Internal Security Force. These top-end units are equipped with some offworld gear but mostly receive better versions of what the rest of the army is issued. They are highly trained and effective, and more importantly they are 100% reliable. Good soldiers that do not meet the requirements of the ISF can do well for themselves in an army career, but they can never join the elite.

It is not uncommon for worlds with such a high law level to be assigned Amber Zone status. Reudden does not have one, for two reasons. Firstly, it is quite difficult to come into contact with mainstream society. The ports are strict but within normal limits, more or less, while anyone wanting to foray onto the planetary surface would either receive fair warning as a result of the process of getting a permit, or would deserve what they got as a result of circumventing it. Accidentally falling afoul of local laws without realising that Reudden is a strict police state is virtually impossible.

In addition, the Imperium recognises that Reudden's system may be almost insanely tight but it is fair. The authorities are willing to protect Imperial citizens from abuse, but anyone who ventures into a high-law area without being very careful to obey those laws has made a choice that they will have to live with.

Petre B696478-8

Petre is a mid-sided world whose atmosphere is rated by IISS surveys as 'dense, tainted'. In fact, it just barely qualifies as dense, with an average pressure of 1.52 Atmospheres at sea level. Sea level on Petre is very low compared to that of, say, Earth. Although the world has roughly 60% coverage of surface water, this is fairly shallow, at least as oceans go.

The oceans tend to lie in the bottom of deep bowls, with a surrounding coastal plain. Inland from this the land rises rapidly, in many cases in spectacular sheer cliffs hundreds of metres high. It has been suggested that Petre once had far more water, and that the coastal plains are what was once the continental shelf.

Various theories have been put forward concerning the missing volume of water. As usual in these situations the Ancients have been blamed; presumably they took the water for some purpose or else used a device or weapon that caused it to vanish. There is a notable lack of evidence to back up such claims, though they are given more credibility than jocular explanations such as 'someone pulled the plug out'.

Strangely, the 'bathplug theory' was the subject of a major scientific investigation some years ago. It was theorised that the oceans drained into cracks in the crust caused by tectonic or volcanic activity, or perhaps by more of those Ancients superweapons. A lengthy study by robotic divers and submarines failed to uncover any evidence of deep-ocean crustal cracks, though by no means all of the seabed was accurately mapped in the available time.

Marks and weathering on rocks above sea level indicate that in some areas the sea level was once much higher, but this could be explained in some cases at least by tectonic or volcanic movement. If the deep-sea crack theory is correct, there may be vast basins filled with water beneath the surface of Petre, perhaps with their own unique environment. The intrepid scientist that undertook an underground-underwater odyssey to explore such basins would run grave risks but could possibly make wholly new discoveries.

Petre's coastal plan lies just above sea level, and is largely uninhabited. Most of the populace live on the high interior regions where air pressure is somewhat lower. They must still deal with the atmospheric taint, which in this case is simply a vast amount of airborne dust. Filter masks are only really necessary in a dust storm, but the rest of the time they tend to be worn to reduce the irritation caused by tiny airborne particles. Goggles at the very least are recommended to anyone working outside.

The high lands are more comfortable in that air pressure is not so great, but they are very dry. This can confuse visitors who insist on slavishly believing the Universal World Profile data provided by the Scout Service. The Scouts must follow certain rules and apply parameters that may not always be 100% correct for a given world. This is necessary in order to have any chance of creating a unified data system to cover thousands of star systems, but in cases like Petre it can be misleading.

Thus Petre does indeed have a dense atmosphere (just) which is tainted (though in a fairly mild way), and has 60% surface



water coverage. In fact, however, these conditions apply at sea level, which is where the Scouts are required to perform their observations on any world that has surface water. The data is correct according to the observations taken, but these do not reflect the conditions prevailing where most of the population live.

In the main populated areas, atmospheric pressure is on the high side of standard, the taint is a fairly minor nuisance most of the time, and the land resembles a rocky desert in most areas. The population, numbering about 80,000, dwell in widely separated communities centred on watercourses or underground artesian basins from which water can be obtained by drilling. Each community is self-governing, usually along the lines of a representative democracy or a colonial-style bureaucratic system with appointed officers running government functions.

Settlements tend to be fairly large, concentrating the population into several dense areas with untamed wilderness between them. This permits artificial irrigation of farmland or indoor gardening to feed the population. Industry is likewise concentrated, with a local technological level of 10. This is sufficient to support a reasonable export industry which centres mainly on low-volume, almost craftsman-made technological goods.

Most of what comes out of Petre's workshops is built to a standard design, albeit with great care by skilled craftsmen. However, the cities do offer a custom-build package for those prepared to bear the cost and the long wait. Some of the better luxury grav vehicles in use by business and political figures as far afield as Deneb and Spinward Marches sector are actually made on Petre to the personal specifications of the end user.

Petre has a large and extensive Highport, which is supported by Downports at all of the major settlements. The Highport is also used as neutral ground for delegations from the various cities to discuss any issues that might arise between them. These are far more likely to be commercial than territorial, as the cities are widely separated and not subject to much in the way of population or resource pressure.

The Highport is home to another Petren industry; the conversion of ex-naval fighters into one- and two-seater racing craft. The sport of small craft racing has been around for a long time but is enjoying an upsurge of interest from well-off individuals seeking to sponsor a team or complete directly. Events include manoeuvre challenges, straight speed courses, point-to-point and endurance races.

Petre has hosted a major small-craft racing event every decade for most of the past century, attracting competitors from very far afield. Local teams, often competing on a shoestring budget,

have won the hearts of sports fans all the way to Deneb (and occasionally won an event, too) and have occasionally been offered sponsorship or a place on a prestigious team. Not coincidentally, the Imperial Navy has shown an interest in recruiting racers as instructors or potential fighter jocks, and now maintains a small recruiting office at the Highport.

Overall, Petre is in many ways a typical low to mid population Imperial world. The planetary surface is mostly wilderness outside the cities, and many citizens forget that there is anything outside the cities and perhaps the farmed zones. Transit between the urban areas is quick and easy aboard grav vehicles, and it is scarcely more difficult to take a shuttle to the highport and buy a starship ticket to another planet.

Ambossa B684459-9

A medium-sized world with a dense atmosphere but little surface water, Ambossa was perhaps less welcoming than many prospective colony sites, but the world was eminently capable of supporting human life with a minimum of technological support. Large areas of the continental interiors are very dry, and can be prone to violent windstorms. However, Ambossa posed no real problem for the early settlers and a small community soon grew up.

With few major deposits of useful minerals and a climate unsuitable to large-scale agriculture, the population of Ambossa never grew beyond a few tens of thousands. The world was a reasonable enough place to make a living, but it was not a place that fortunes were made. The best and brightest tended to drift offworld following well-paid contracts or seeking greater opportunities. Those that returned after a period of offworld study or military service tended to find their homeworld had become frighteningly mundane in their absence, and often went back to the stars.

Thus Ambossa became the equivalent of a small country town. The folks that lived there were content enough, and those that weren't tended to leave. With little to encourage investment or immigration the early colony grew slowly though the natural process of modest population expansion and eventually set up a handful of smaller settlements in the nearby areas.

This situation might have gone on forever, but for a huge social upheaval that wracked Ambossan society about 300 years ago. It started with a string of natural disasters that affected all aspects of Ambossan life. Food production was reduced by damage from a series of major storms, while an earthquake severely damaged one of the subordinate settlements. These problems were serious, but surmountable, except for the fact that the government lost the confidence of the population. The result was large-scale anarchy and destruction of resources that might have been used to deal with the disasters.



Order was restored by the Imperial Army, which maintains response forces trained for this kind of situation. Once the Army arrived, an effective government was put in place. Martial law lasted only a few weeks, but that was long enough to prevent matters getting any worse. Critical industries were protected from destruction, then brought back on line to support the reconstruction, which was assisted by funds from the Imperial Colonial Office (ICO).

When the dust had settled, Ambossan society was considerably changed. The central city, site of the downport, capital and most major industry, was secured along with some of the outlying settlements. Of the remaining settlements, a couple were shattered while others had achieved a shaky self-sufficiency while the Army concentrated on the central region. This was necessary to long-term reconstruction but caused some resentment.

Some of these settlements declared themselves independent of the new government set up at the capital, though they were careful to show continued loyalty to the Imperium. The Imperial Army declined to take part in a forcible reintegration, as this was considered an internal matter. The Army had stabilised the situation, but it was up to the locals to decide what to do next. Mediators were offered, but they failed to achieve much in the face of intransigence on both sides.

Once the Army pulled out, fighting between the independents and the central government began. This was mostly fairly small-scale, as both sides had virtually no heavy equipment, little training and were fielding scraped-together militias for the most part. The superior numbers of the central government were counterbalanced by fervour and desperation on the part of the independents.

The Ambossan Civil War went on, in all, for nearly thirty years. It was fairly low-key for periods of months or even years during this time, but after each lull the central forces made a surge against one of the holdout settlements. This was not always successful, and often the casualties taken forced another long lull to rebuild forces or allow the dejection of defeat to wear off somewhat.

This period of small-scale skirmishing between ill-equipped militias was ended by the decision to mortgage the world's future in return for an ending to the conflict. Offworld mercenary units were hired and quickly demolished most opposition. Their superior discipline, weaponry and training was too much for the rebels, though in some cases a settlement inflicted sufficient casualties to be able to negotiate a semi-autonomous status, but overall the slow creep of governmental control became a rapid series of pacifications.

Some of the recon quests were very bloody, though many ended in reconciliation or (more often) surrender in the face of

overwhelming firepower. Soon the central government was in control of what remained of the outlying settlements. This did not end the war at once; significant urban guerrilla opposition continued, along with operations by forces based in the countryside. It was necessary to pay off the mercenaries and deal with these with local forces, and success was mixed.

Gradually a new order emerged. Central government controlled the main settlements, though some remained semi-autonomous. Some of the more distant settlements remained effectively independent, but with little industry they rapidly ceased to be relevant to the mainstream population. In addition, several thousand refugees had scattered into the countryside, setting up a subsistence lifestyle far enough from the main inhabited region to be left alone. Realising that this was about as good as things were going to get, and burdened by loans taken to pay for the mercenary units, the central government set about rebuilding that segment of society it could control.

Today, the central region of Ambossa is ruled by a Governing Council that controls important technological functions such as power generation, machinery construction and access to the starport. Laws are strict and the populace is kept in order by a force that still calls itself 'The Militia' but is essentially a paramilitary police force with some light-infantry capabilities.

Central government claims to own and control the outlying settlements. Most accept this, though some pay lip service to their notion of independence. The few that remain truly outside mainstream Ambossan society are semi-ruined, with little industry. Technological capability is much lower than the TL 9 enjoyed by the central region, with limited amounts of TL 7 gear available in addition to whatever can be scavenged, traded for or occasionally taken in a raid.

In addition, there is a sizable population of 'outbackers' who have set up modest towns and villages a few hundred kilometres from the main inhabited zone. Their technological base is typically 4-5 in most settlements, though examples of higher tech gear do exist. The Outbackers are openly hostile to the central government, but the two groups are too far apart to pose much threat to one another. Conflict is thus rare. Indeed, trade caravans will sometimes come into the central region and are (usually) dealt with in a wary but fair manner.

The passing of two centuries has allowed the fragmented parts of Ambossan society to learn to ignore one another where they cannot get along. To the independents, accepting the authority of the central government is unthinkable, while the centrals think the outbackers are idiots who could have a much better life if they would just accept it.

Between them are the independent settlements, who just get along as best they can and are usually too busy trying to make



a living to cause trouble. Raiding parties do sometimes attack other settlements or push into the central region, but this is usually more costly than beneficial and has become very rare in recent years.

The upshot of Ambossa's troubled history is that the world became even less important on the cosmic stage than before. Resources, already limited, were wasted in paying for the mercs or rebuilding war damage. The Governing Council satisfies itself with keeping order and enabling its citizens to go about their daily business, but it cannot offer them a bright future. Those that seek to better themselves usually go offworld, generally as members of the Imperial armed forces. Those that come back often find that Ambossa has nothing to offer them and leave again, in that, nothing much has changed.

Igualada B540567-9

Settled originally as a stopover on the Rift-edge route, Igualada is a desert world with a thin, tainted atmosphere. There is very little surface water; less than 2% of the planetary crust is covered with water of any sort, and this includes regions of swampland that dry up from time to time.

The atmospheric taint is quite harmful to humans. It is a product of life in such an arid environment; the only native life on Igualada is fungal, and the air is filled with spores that drift about on the desert winds. These grow rapidly wherever they encounter moisture, which normally means along the fringes of a swamp or oasis. However, these spores are able to anchor and grow in a human's mucous membranes, so pose a hazard to anyone breathing them in or even coming into contact via skin, eyes and so forth.

Complete protection requires sealed suits and decontamination systems, though a filter mask and goggles will reduce the chance of spore infection to virtually nil most of the time. This level of protection, coupled with good hygiene, is entirely adequate unless an individual approaches a fungal forest or is downwind of one when clouds of spores are released. It is sometimes, though not always, possible to predict and avoid this.

Conditions on the planetary surface are of little interest to most of the population in any case, as the majority will never go outside their environmentally-controlled city. There is only one known settlement on Igualada, a mostly-subterranean city with the same name as the planet.



Igualada City is mostly tunnelled into rock in an area of high ground which happens to be one of the driest on the planet. It is supplied with water by deep artesian wells, and has excellent recycling facilities. Food is grown in huge garden complexes located on the top levels where they can receive natural light through a glazed ceiling.

Being far from the nearest water, Igualada City is not much troubled by airborne spores, though maintenance crews working outside are protected by coveralls, gloves and masks as a matter of routine. Full suiting is used by personnel on the rare occasions where a visit to a fungus-infected area is necessary. Decontamination procedures are effective and well practiced.

This has not stopped the occasional individual from becoming infected and (even less often) fungal outbreaks in the city. If spores can get in, they grow rapidly and can cause a serious problem. However, fungicides are effective against infestation, as, ironically, is water. Too much water, even excessive humidity, will kill most



species of fungus and render spores unviable. The first line of defence against infestation is thus a good dousing with the fire-suppression sprinkler system, followed by a steam-jet clean of the infested area.

Individual infection is also fairly easy to treat. It is rarely fatal, but produces 'flu-like symptoms that can kill weak or elderly individuals. More often, the victim is more or less incapacitated for a couple of weeks then gradually recovers. Fungi growing in mucous membranes such as the lungs or eyes tend to die off due to excess moisture even if the body's own defences cannot cope with them. Antibiotics are ineffective against infection, but there are several drugs tailored to certain species of fungus, which will rapidly kill an infection and allow a rapid recovery.

Infection and internal outbreaks are rare, but they are accepted as facts of life. The possibility is real enough to ensure vigilance but not severe enough to provoke real fear. Most people know that fungus can make them sick and don't want that to happen, so are willing to go along with prevention measures even if they are uncomfortable. Most infections happen because someone was lazy or less than thorough, so there is also a social stigma attached to becoming infected.

The population, numbering around 900,000, are a typical mix of townfolk, garden-tenders, technicians and government officials. Most have comfortable, mundane jobs connected with usual activities of a society, such as small-scale manufacturing and commerce. Only in one sector is Iqualada unusual. Some of the fungal species found on-planet are used as the basis of a range of pharmaceuticals, and are 'farmed' in moist areas. This mostly entails seeding an area with spores and then waiting a few weeks before coming back to harvest the crop. Seeder missions normally use grav craft, while collection is undertaken by protective-suited personnel operating from heavy crawlers.

Harvested fungal material is taken by crawler to segregated areas of the city, dried, and packaged for collection by starships out of Gaspar. There is no reason why Iqualada cannot support a pharmaceutical industry of its own, but this is not allowed by the government of Gaspar, which owns the world and operates the collection operations as part of a state-owned business.

Gaspar also dictates policy and is ultimately responsible for overseeing affairs on Iqualada. Some, but by no means most, of Iqualada's high officials are actually citizens of Gaspar sent to oversee the colony. The arrangement is accepted by most of the populace, and is fairly beneficial to Iqualada. High-technology goods are shipped in at affordable prices from Gaspar, and hard-working Iqualadans can aspire to a job or university place on Gaspar, which can in turn lead to citizenship of that world.

Iqualada has a good Class B starport, which is also owned and operated by businesses on Gaspar. Significant income is derived

from service contracts to the Imperial Navy, which maintains a small base as an annex to the port. The base is home to two DesRons (destroyer squadrons) and a dozen small escort and patrol ships in addition to much of the Vestus Subsector support flotilla. The Flag Squadron for Vestus subsector, built around a small carrier with destroyer escorts, is based out of nearby Carian but also obtains a fair amount of spares and supplies from businesses on Gaspar, staged through the base at Iqualada.

As with many such worlds, there are really two entirely different places called Iqualada. One is a self-contained city of citizens going about comfortable, mundane lives. The other is a harsh desert environment with virtually no population. Most citizens would not be able to navigate, work or even survive in the desert, though they would be quite at home in almost any other city or starport.

A token 'desert work and survival course' is offered as part of the standard education package but passing it is not considered necessary; most of the time it is not even assessed. Only those likely to venture out into the desert are trained to operate there; even maintenance crews who routinely go outside tend to remain in physical contact with the city or its surrounding concrete apron.

However, every citizen knows how to use a filter mask, how to recognise signs of fungal infection, and how to effectively decontaminate a person, vehicle or item. Apart from being useful work skills and a way of avoiding social stigma, these activities are a staple plot device in entertainment vids. Iqualadans literally grow up seeing how to do these things right (and wrong, which usually identifies a villain) almost every day of their lives.

Colony Five B5759A5-B

Colony Five is a high-population world, with a population of some eight billion or so. It is a dry but otherwise entirely habitable world. With advanced farming techniques, the world is capable of supporting a much larger population, and living standards are high on average. The world's high technological level and large population allow considerable industrial output, much of which is exported. This in turn brings in offworld revenue and contributes to general prosperity.

Despite these advantages, Colony Five has had a troubled political history, which has recently produced something of an oddity, a liberal dictatorship. Absolute power is vested in the hands of one individual, who enjoys massive popular support. This is in part because the recent transition from a republic to a dictatorship affected the general populace relatively little. There are few very harsh laws and the new dictatorship has directed its powers towards solving problems rather than oppressing the people.



The origins of the name Colony Five are lost in antiquity, but are generally thought to relate to the designation of the settlement that rose to dominance during the settlement phase. It is known that several 'seeder colonies' were settled on-planet at about the same time. Some of these were unsuccessful for various reasons while others grew and even thrived. Those that did well attracted additional investment and pulled in more settlers, expanding into cities over the years.

Eventually Colony Five became unified, presumably under the leadership of a colony-turned-city of that name. If so, it follows that the name passed into common usage to refer to the state that Colony Five headed, and eventually to the world. Unification, however, did not last forever.

Around 850 (Imperial Calendar), Colony Five was wracked by a period of internal conflict that (mostly) stopped a little short of civil war. Regions and cities broke away from central government, forming alliances that absorbed other polities and shed original members as the political wind shifted. During this period, which lasted well into the early 900s, there was no world government as such, or rather there were several political bodies with a legitimate claim to be the official world government. The Scout Service re-designated Colony Five as 'Balkanised' on several occasions as a new world government emerged but failed to create a lasting stability.

There was some military conflict during this period, but mostly the disputes took the form of economic and political conflict, with money and industrial support used to cajole or coerce neighbouring cities and regions more often than military force. Troops were deployed on many occasions, usually to demonstrate serious intent, and there was some escalation, but Colony Five stopped short of major warfare.

By the mid 900s, the world was thoroughly Balkanised, with dozens of small nations and even city-states. Alliances gradually stabilised and the rapid transfer of political support became less useful as a bargaining tool. This situation became entrenched for more than a century, and it was not until the 1070s that a move towards unification began in earnest. This happened gradually, with some of the smaller alliances and free city-states slowly flowing together until they had sufficient collective power to start bargaining with the larger polities.

A World Republic was declared in 1089, creating the first true world government on Colony Five in two centuries. However, after less than a decade the cracks began to show. Perhaps political dissolution had simply become a habit, but for a range of fairly trivial reasons, a number of small and large power blocs began threatening to secede from the republic.

A solution appeared out of nowhere, in the form of a middle-aged civil servant, who had been running a political forum on the

planetary data-net for some time. A massive data-net campaign, run on a shoestring by enthusiastic amateurs, quickly emerged, with the civil servant becoming an overnight 'net sensation as 'the woman who thinks she has the answers'.

Apparently, she did. Or at least, she had good enough ideas that she developed a huge following worldwide. At the core of her ideas was the concept that states and cities are made up of people who live there. If it were possible to ask everyone what was really going on around them, then it might be possible to determine just why Colony Five's world governments kept fragmenting. If they could figure out what was going wrong, maybe the political leaders might be able to create a workable solution.

What amounted to a giant viral campaign began, encouraging citizens worldwide to put forward their ideas, likes, dislikes and the things that they just could not live with. Much of this data was self-serving or short sighted; some was downright idiotic. There was enough useful content, however, to build a very detailed picture of the political, social and economic conditions prevailing in most regions of the world.

A group of political scientists and other academics, many of them undergraduates enthused by the project, collated and distilled the data, then fed it back into the data net, with recommendations. Of course, nothing happened. Political leaders showed polite (and often genuine) interest in the data but were unable to make anything of it.

In 1091, that changed with the emergence of the Alliance for Unity, a political group whose members were not divided between different states. The AfU asked the question, "what if we actually did these things?" and listed a set of policies it would implement when (not if) it became the world government. Although not 100% workable, the AfU manifesto was sufficiently appealing to gain massive worldwide support. Demonstrations, marches and even riots broke out (or were perhaps orchestrated) across the globe, creating a state of emergency.

The shaky world government responded by placing emergency powers in the hands of the president and suspending many laws and customs that prevented decisive action. A frantic round of bargaining resulted in many political blocs or regional factions agreeing to stop blocking one another's favoured policies in return for help with local problems or a reciprocal favour.

The crisis did not produce a new government, but it forced the existing one to put its house in order and make deals that allowed a number of key policies to be pushed through. Among these were several that echoed the AfU manifesto, guaranteeing their popularity among much of the populace.

By 1092, the crisis was largely over. The government had addressed many problems and created workable compromises,



and the populace were generally appeased by seeing 'their' policies put into action. The government now enjoyed strong but not overwhelming popular support. However, there was one big change. The greatest act of democracy in the world's history had created a dictatorship.

Colony Five's government placed emergency powers in the hands of the president, who used this ability to crash new legislation through and to force compromise deals that either reduced tensions or the influence wielded by the more 'difficult' elements of Colony Five's political structure. He also made his powers permanent.

Today, the presidency seems to have become a lifetime office, and what resistance remains has been marginalized. Most of the population are strongly behind the president and his government, and great strides towards true unification are being made. It remains to be seen, however, whether the situation can be made permanent. Much depends on the ability of the government to maintain popular support. That in turn requires tangible results – which so far have been delivered. Time will tell if this can be continued.

MACON SUBSECTOR

Macon subsector lies on the fringe of the Great Rift. It contains only seven star systems, and as such is too small to have its own administrative apparatus. Bureaucratic functions are handled from Lintl, in Vestus subsector.

Macon subsector faces little in the way of external threats. A serious problem, such as a world government rebelling against the Imperium, would be handled by major assets sent from Deneb sector. In the meantime the subsector fleet, consisting of a couple of old escort destroyers and a handful of patrol ships, shows the flag and deals with the occasional minor incident.

Oleiros B000457-D

Although there are planets in the Oleiros system, it is the asteroid belt that was settled and became the mainworld. Outposts are maintained on some other bodies in the system, but the Oleiros

belt is home to the vast majority of the population as well as all major industries. This was at first from necessity and later by choice.

Oleiros was settled in the earliest waves of Imperial expansion into the region, by a colony mission that went off course and became stranded. Expansion during that period was patchy and many early colony missions were badly planned. The best planned, supplied or luckiest missions found good worlds and set up camp, claiming territory before sending messengers back to the Imperium. Follow-up missions brought in extra personnel and equipment, allowing a small but sustainable technological and industrial base to be established.

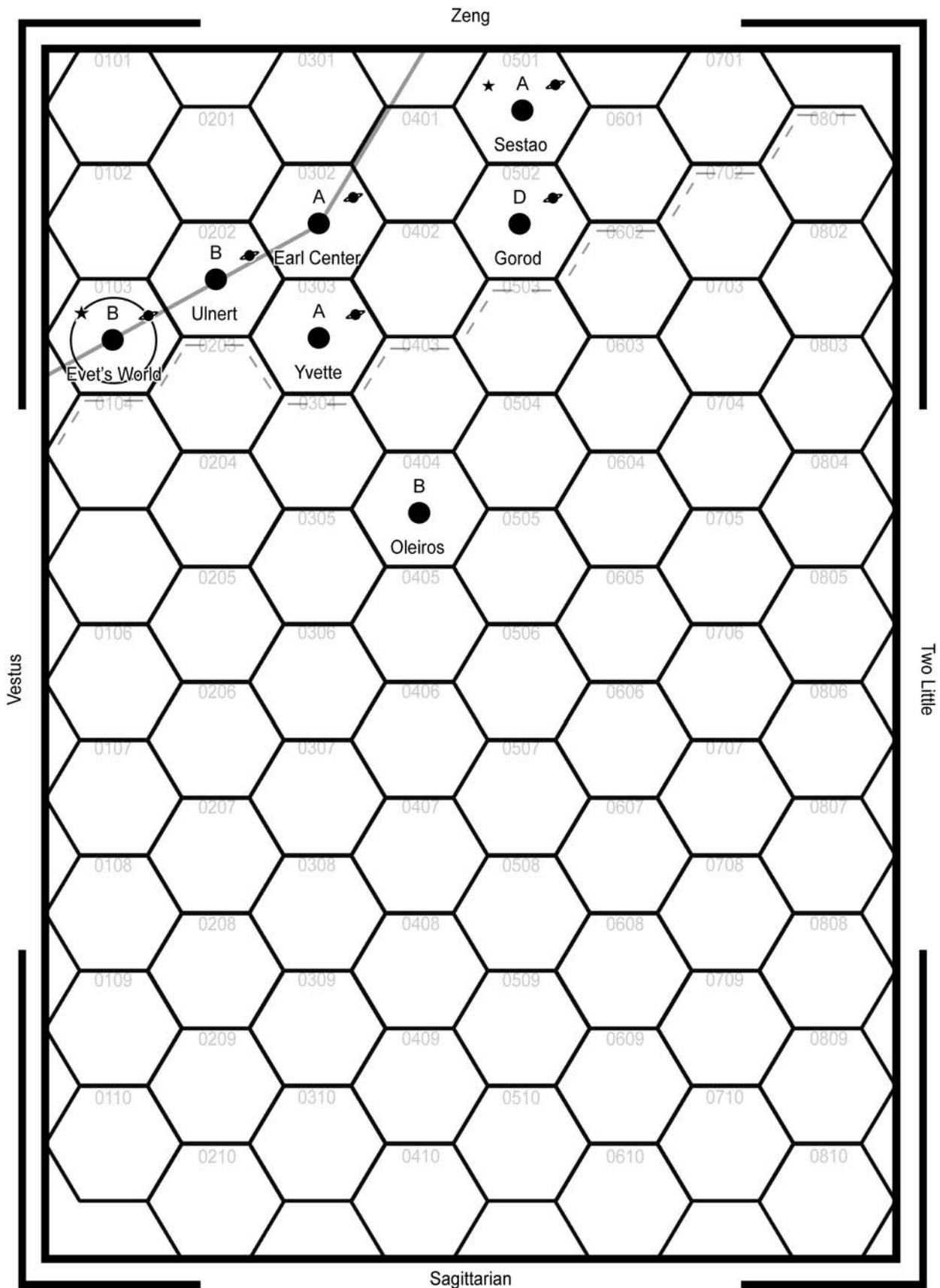
Other missions, through poor planning or just ill luck, ended up on marginal worlds with inadequate equipment, or collapsed through internal disputes. Some of these failed missions were absorbed by later, more organised groups. Others continued to eke out an existence as best they could. Eventually, a more organised and coordinated system was put in place, overseen by the Colonial Office.

By the time this happened, some of the first-wave colonies were already well established, which allowed the Imperials to push a corridor through to these worlds and use them as forward staging posts for further expansion. Not all of them wanted to be reabsorbed into the Imperium, though in most cases they were brought in by various means.

Not so Oleiros. By the time solid contact was re-established with the Imperium, the colony was doing well enough to stand on its own. Its location on the edge of the Great Rift caused Imperial attention to pass by long enough that re-integration never got beyond the proposal and negotiations phase. Thus Oleiros, though friendly to the Imperium and very happy to trade with it, never became a member world.

The first years, in particular, were hard. Forced to survive in the difficult conditions of an asteroid belt located in a system with no gas giants to skim gases from, the colonists entered into a race to develop sufficient technology to enable their survival before their existing supplies ran out and their equipment began to fail.

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Evet's World	0103	N	B201656-D	Ht IC Na Ni	A	Im	G
Ulnert	0202		B53769D-7	Ni		Im	G
Earl Center	0302		A998111-9	Ga Lo		Im	G
Yvette	0303		A79A633-D	Ht Ni		Im	G
Oleiros	0404		B000457-D	As Ht Ni		Na	
Sestao	0501	N	A420675-C	De Ht Na Ni Po		Im	G
Gorod	0502		D6689CG-7	Ga Hi		Im	G





They not only won this race but created a number of innovative solutions which were later patented and sold to Imperial business concerns when contact was re-established. Even today, some standard life-support equipment is based on concepts pioneered by desperate colonists in the Oleiros belt.

Having managed to cover their immediate needs, to the colonists found that their belt was fairly rich in minerals, and set about developing an industrial base. This led to the creation of a small fleet of sublight vessels for use in the belt, and eventually Jump capable ships were built. The first ones used components salvaged from the original colony ship, but later vessels were new-built.

The original plan was to use the Jump-capable vessels to try to re-contact the Imperium and obtain support or even rescue, but by the time the first missions were sent out, the Oleirans had become used to their new home. When the first contacts were made, they were with fledgling colonies or, in at least half the cases, failed missions that were collapsing into chaos. As the technological equipment brought aboard the colony ships began to fail, many of the colonists were reverting to a very basic lifestyle as farmers, dwelling in log cabins and making do with whatever tools they could manufacture for themselves. Some colonies were dying out or on their way to barbarism.

The Oleirans' own histories refer to a series of 'trade missions and rescues' that took place around this time, though there is evidence that at least some of these 'trade missions' were little more than armed raids. In most cases, the Oleirans offered a trade to the colonists they encountered. In return for rights to salvage whatever they could from the colony ships or among broken technology, the Oleirans offered robust mid tech equipment that the colonists could maintain themselves, plus some higher-tech gear. Individuals and families were offered the chance to join the community at Oleiros as citizens.

Those colonies that were doing well were not interested in such a deal, of course, and on those worlds the Oleiros ships merely traded. It was through these first-wave colonies that contact with the Imperium was re-established, at least vaguely. The less successful colonies were, in the words of one Imperial historian, scavenged for personnel and equipment, and in this manner the settlement at Oleiros grew.

The scavenging phase eventually came to an end, as more settlers arrived and support for their colonies became more organised. Oleiran ships traded among the new colonies, often for basic goods such as fresh meat and grain in return for their technological items. Weapons were a popular export item, especially as the frontier became more crowded and colonies began to compete for space on the same world.

The move towards becoming arms dealers may have been a subtle piece of defensive psychology on the part of the Oleirans. Their origins were not known for many years; indeed all that was known of them was that they traded along the Rift fringes in well-armed merchant starships. They were not aggressive, but their main products were high-technology items and armament, suggesting that they were a hard target. This reputation perhaps helped Oleiros avoid pressure to join the Imperium in the early days.

Apart from some early raids, the only real act of aggression committed by the Oleirans was the annexation of Lemente. Located in Two Little subsector, Lemente is a habitable world isolated by seven parsecs of Rift space. The Oleirans knew of a colony mission that had Misjumped to Lemente. According to a distress signal – which was at that time about 23 years old – picked up by the Oleirans, a fairly large colony mission had Misjumped to this isolated system and crash-landed on its habitable world. A shuttle was left in orbit as a transmitter station, and repeated a powerful distress beacon for some 11 years before finally going off the air.

It was not until about 30 years after receiving the first distress call – half a century after it was sent – that the Oleirans were in a position to investigate. A relay of vessels carried fuel and supplies to points in the Great Rift, until eventually a bridge was built across to the Lemente system. A reconnaissance mission, followed by a much larger-scale operation, made its way into the system and made contact with the stranded colonists.

By this time, the colonists had established a workable tech level 6 society, and had managed to keep some of their technology running. They welcomed Oleiran aid at first, though soon relations soured. Having invested enormous resources in reaching Lemente, the Oleirans wanted more in return than the colonists were willing or perhaps able to give. Eventually armed conflict broke out and despite the fact that they could deploy only very small forces at such a distance, the Oleirans put down resistance thoroughly.

The settlement that was imposed was a variant on the one originally proposed by the Oleirans. They would provide technological support in return for political control over Lemente, which was to function as an agricultural colony for Oleiros. This arrangement is still in place, though it has long since developed into a more even partnership. Lemente is still a primarily agricultural world, and Oleiros is very much the dominant partner, but standards of living on both worlds are quite high and Lemente now has a very respectable industrial capability.

Oleiros remains independent of the Imperium, though friendly to it. Occasional diplomatic overtures from Imperial officials tend to politely go nowhere, and there is little interest in pushing the matter. The world's ruling council maintain tight control over



technological functions on both worlds, with the heads of the Oleiros University and the Shipmakers' Guild wielding the most power.

The university is the only route into the ruling class; technology is still the most important facet of Oleiran life. The Shipmakers build the trade ships that ply the edges of the Rift and connect the two worlds together. Theirs is essentially a cottage industry; Oleiran ships are virtually hand-built and are beautifully made, if very slow to produce. Occasional outside contracts come in, mainly from rich nobles and corporate officials wanting a prestigious craft to underline their status.

However, the most important products of the Shipmakers' berths are the agricultural-transfer vessels that cross the rift between Lemente and Oleiros, and the support craft that refuel the deep-space depots. The latter are functional vessels, not much different to tankers and transports used elsewhere, but the former are quite special. These large vessels transport bulk agricultural produce like other grain ships, but also carry small herds of live farm animals to Oleiros, ensuring a supply of truly fresh meat for the well-off citizens of the asteroid habitats.

At least one agri-transport has been bought up as a novelty liner by an Imperial entrepreneur, allowing rich passengers to take rides on animal-back through a little section of grassy countryside, whilst the glazed ceiling above allows them to admire the stars above. Even while in Jump, with the gazed sections sealed, the experience is considered well worth the huge ticket price.

Gorod D6689CG-7

Located right on the fringe of the Great Rift, Gorod was settled several times during the early Imperial expansions. As a medium-sized world with a standard atmosphere and plenty of water, it was an excellent prospect for colonisation and, not surprisingly, targeted by several groups.

The first arrivals were during the early free-for-all, and consisted largely of opportunistic land-grabbers who brought more weaponry than machinery. Their aim, in most cases, was to get there first and stake a claim. This could be enforced with legal writs and guns, hopefully forcing other groups to buy out the land-grabbers or offer them a stake in the new colony.

These groups often died out or moved on, though some remained entrenched on their chosen spot, waiting for other colonists to arrive with open purses. Sometimes new colony missions did arrive, and conflict resulted or a deal was made. Alternatively, the new colonists simply picked a different spot and set up camp there. As Gorod was mostly covered in water, these alternate sites were often on islands or separated from

existing colonies by sea. Even where several groups tried to colonise the same landmass, there was sufficient space that most groups did not come into contact.

Some of the early colony missions were quite large, though few contained more than a few thousand people. The balance of equipment to personnel varied considerably from group to group, as did the amount of follow-up support. One common pattern was for a large group with relatively little equipment to launch a one-shot attempt to make a new life on the frontier. The other, equally common, approach was for a small group with good technological support to arrive and set up a small town, which would then receive additional personnel in follow-up missions. These did not always arrive, however. Lack of funds or disasters along the way derailed some of these long-term plans.

Over the course of a century or so, a vast number of settlements sprang up all over the globe. Some were large, some small, some were high-tech and some little more than nomad camps. Some were visited, raided or scavenged from by ships out of Oleiros. Some vanished completely. Local conditions, unusual weather, and random disasters shaped the fate of many groups.

From this cauldron, several distinct proto-nations developed as groups flowed together, conquered one another or were taken over by better equipped newcomers. Those that achieved the right balance of population, territory and resources prospered and gradually became dominant, though large areas of the world had no such states. There, a gradual slide into what amounted to barbarism took place as large populations competed for limited resources and used up their remaining technological equipment in the process.

What emerged over time was two almost entirely separate cultures on Gorod. The 'barbarian' nations tended to subsist at a tech level of 3-4, while the more advanced societies progressed to the point where they could build their own grav vehicles. However, just as Gorod's more advanced regions reached a stable tech level of 9, large-scale warfare broke out. This started as rivalry between the advanced states and developed into a free-for-all which the 'barbarians' took advantage of. Some states were overrun, or damaged to the point where they ceased to be players in the political arena.

From this period of conflict emerged an alliance, composed mainly of more advanced states but also encompassing several large 'barbarian' groups. Together these forces crushed their opponents and created a stable nation based on their core territories. The cost was high, however, and among the casualties was the ability to support advanced technologies. Most areas fell to a sustainable tech level of 5-6, with more advanced equipment treasured as it could not be replaced.



After centuries of border skirmishing against their less advanced neighbours and gradual rebuilding, the higher-tech states recovered to a stable tech level of 7, which remains the case today. Forces of what had become effectively the world government advanced into 'barbarian'-held lands and either took control or drove the lower-tech peoples off their lands. This expansion continued until about 20% of the planetary land surface was firmly in the hands of the world government. This included most resource-rich areas, the best farmland, and similar areas.

Within this area, about half a billion people dwell under the governance of the Nation of Gorod, which claims dominance over the whole planet and all its peoples. The majority of the land surface is of lesser value, and here something like three billion people dwell in conditions ranging from primitive (TL1-2) to early technological (TL 3-4). Most of these folk do not acknowledge the world government, though some 'barbarian' groups are willing to co-exist or to act as a buffer against their less friendly neighbours.

The Nation of Gorod is recognised as the sovereign government of Gorod by the Imperium, of which it is a member. Problems

between the government and its 'subjects' in the outback are an internal affair, which the Imperium does not wish to get involved in. Such problems are common, with several brushfire wars and uprisings going on in various regions at any given time.

Naturally, the world government prohibits contact with any planetary population other than at designated points, which means that starfarers need special permits (virtually impossible to obtain) to leave the region around the starport. Checkpoints and police posts are common on all roads, with movement severely restricted. Most of the 'civilised' populace accept this as a necessary precaution to protect them from the 'savages' who they are told cannot wait to tear down the gates of civilisation and slaughter everyone.

It is likely that the Nation of Gorod will eventually make its claimed control over the whole planet a reality, though that day is some way off. Pacified regions do not always stay that way, and for some decades now a balance seems to have existed whereby the Nation maintains control of its core regions and the most productive areas, but makes inroads into other regions only at the expense of losses to uprisings elsewhere. Some regions see more or less non-stop low-intensity warfare, with only the most inaccessible regions completely free of government influence.

Several offworld organisations are interested in the situation on Gorod. These range from mercenary units seeking government contracts to sentient rights groups. A number of activists and filmmakers have recently been caught trying to slip on-planet. This caused something of a scandal, since under Imperial law the conflict on Gorod is an internal affair and the Imperium is on the side of the world government.

This does not mean it lends active support, merely that Imperial laws support the local government's right to deal with the problem in its own way – within reason. Whatever the Imperial Ministry of Justice or the crew of naval patrol ships might think, they are required to arrest activists trying to slip on to Gorod to 'help being the plight of the oppressed populace to light'.

This policy on the part of the Imperium makes sense from the point of view of governing thousands of worlds. It cannot afford to be dragged into every local dispute and conflict, where even sorting out who is at fault can take decades. However, there are many that think the Imperium is being morally cowardly for not intervening in their favoured cause, and are prepared to take a stand against what they see as injustice.

TWO LITTLE SUBSECTOR

Two Little subsector lies outside the Imperium. It contains just two star systems; Lemente and Zamoran. These are used as transit points for high-Jump ships headed out into Barker subsector.



Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Lemente	0307		B897563-B	Ag Ga Ni		Na	G
Zamoran	0508	M	B674675-A	Ag Ga Ni		Na	G

Zamoran B674675-A

Zamoran is a fairly Earthlike world, if a little hot and dry. Only its location, far out in the Great Rift, would make it a less than appealing prospect for colonisation. However, had a survey mission been launched or speculative colonists Jumped into the system, a surprise would have awaited them, for there have been humans on Zamoran for millennia.

There are two populations on Zamoran, human and Droyne. It is not clear which, if either of them, is native or arrived first, and current thinking is that perhaps both were transplanted to the world by the Ancients. This ties in with the discovery of mysterious ruins in remote areas and on Zamoran's moon.

The two species live separately for the most part, though without much conflict. Roughly 700,000 humans dwell mostly in the southern hemisphere. The northern hemisphere has less useable land, and is home to an estimated 400,000 Droyne. The world has a number of suspiciously radioactive depressions in the ground – almost certainly nuclear craters – and these are distributed in an interesting manner.

Unconfirmed analysis suggests that there are two sets of craters. The first are very old, perhaps several hundred thousand years or so. These are evenly distributed, more or less, between the northern and southern hemispheres. They also tend to be large and deep, with some extensive enough to be mistaken for geographical features such as lakes or small inland seas. Radioactivity in most of these old craters has fallen back almost to normal levels, though a few remain dangerous to approach for unknown reasons.

The later round of craters is much more recent – perhaps 10,000 years or so – and is unevenly distributed. Those in the southern hemisphere are a minority, but these tend to be either very wide, very deep, or both. They are, on average, 'cleaner' than those in the northern hemisphere. There are also other 'damage sites' that are not nuclear and thus far defy description. These include a couple of completely flat areas that look as if a perfectly circular area of rock and topsoil simply vanished, and a mountain with a perfectly straight tunnel, 2.43m in diameter, drilled through it at a strange angle by some kind of beam weapon.

The damage to the northern hemisphere is more conventional, and seems to have taken the form of saturation bombardment with large, 'dirty' nuclear missiles. Radiation levels are no longer much elevated but it is clear that both hemispheres suffered

extensive damage. Most of the craters and other sites would otherwise be obvious spots to build a city – indeed, some have been reoccupied.

The official history of Zamoran, as far as one exists, is on record in the human cities. It records a previous civilization on the world, some 10,000 or so years previously. The commonly accepted theory is that this civilization perished in a war of mutual destruction with the Droyne of the northern hemisphere. It is not known what started this war or what course it took, but at some point weapons of mass destruction were exchanged.

The humans apparently deployed large numbers of fairly crude nuclear weapons. The Droyne used more precise and 'cleaner' nukes plus a number of weapons of unknown type that dated from 'the ancient and unthinkable past'. The official history recognises that a previous war was fought with weapons of this sort in the very distant past, and that the humans possibly also had access to weaponry from that era.

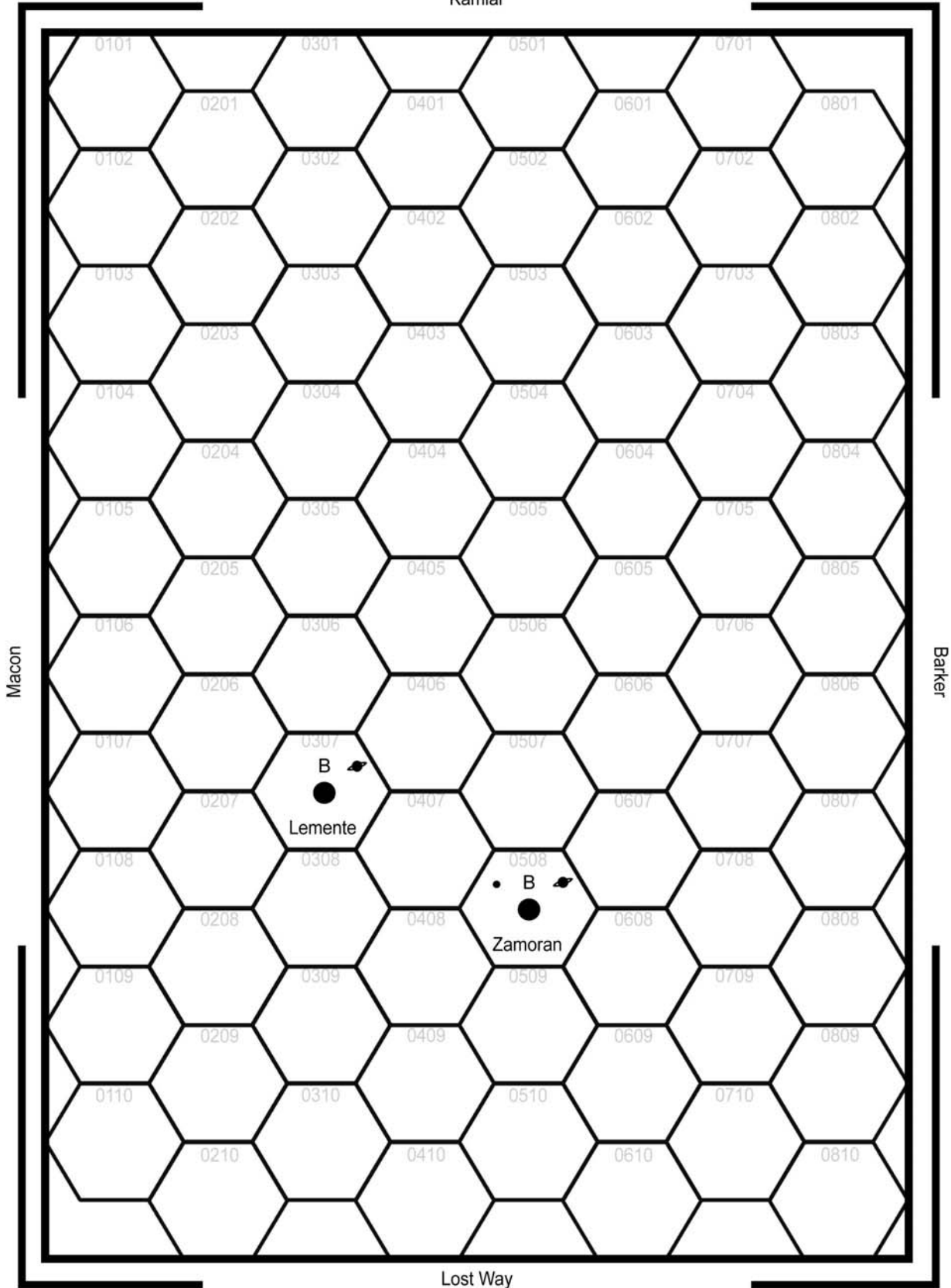
Civilization (Droyne and human) was apparently shattered, and was effectively finished off by an ice age. However, the entire population was not reduced to using stone tools; in warmer climes it was possible for small communities to hang on to some vestiges of a technological civilisation, and from these the recovery began when the ice receded.

The ice age appears to have been fairly short; just a few thousand years, but between it and the war, populations of both humans and Droyne were vastly reduced. The global climate is still warming up, and the ice has not reached its final point of retreat, but the communities of humans and Droyne located close to the equator have made a fairly quick technological recovery, though populations have not expanded very fast. Notably, humans have spread south after the retreating ice, and Droyne north. There are no records of an agreement but the two species seem to have both decided that there is plenty of land and resources to be had without getting into competition that might lead to another war.

The modern human populace is Balkanised, dwelling in a chain of largish city-states near the equator and progressively smaller communities further south. There is also a population of primitive humans in the harsh lands of the far south. Some communities have been re-contacted, with mixed results. Some are delighted to join a more advanced society or at least to trade with it, others are happy as hunter-gatherers and want nothing of civilisation. At present there is no need to push into their lands so they are left alone.



Kamlar



Two Little



A few hundred years ago, exploration of the solar system began, and today Zamoran has a decent orbital port capable of handling interstellar vessels. These do come in, very occasionally, via Lemente. Although the humans of Zamoran have the theoretical science available to build Jump-capable ships, they do not seem to know how to do it in practice and have not attempted the feat.

The city-states are self-governing, though they generally co-operate on local projects. The starport was a joint venture, and the city-states agree on one other thing – war with the Droyne should be avoided. A treaty limiting contact with the Droyne is in place, whereby the city-states have agreed to maintain a joint embassy on an island just north of the equator and to prevent civilians travelling into Droyne lands without special permission.

The Droyne seem happy enough with this arrangement, though most of the time they simply ignore the human population. Their numbers are an estimate at best, as they are secretive and uncommunicative about all aspects of their civilisation. There is no starport as such in the Droyne-held part of the planet, though Droyne ships have been occasionally seen landing both at known city sites and remote locations where no settlement is thought to exist.

The Droyne do not allow non-Droyne ships to land in the northern hemisphere, broadcasting a curt warning and vectoring in attack craft to dissuade the vessel. Ships have been shot down for ignoring these warnings, though vessels on approach to the southern port are generally ignored.

Droyne naval forces operate out of a small installation on Zamoran's moon, which seems to be a naval base of sorts. It lies right on the edge of a huge crater, presumably the site of an earlier base of some kind. Craft based out of the installation are mostly sublight vessels for local defence, but at least a handful of Jump-capable ships are known to exist.

Droyne ground forces, using grav vehicles, have in the past responded to ground incursions by humans coming up from the south. This is the commonest response but it is by no means the only one. Other responses range from completely ignoring the intruders, through a polite request delivered the embassy to remove the incursion, to the total destruction of a survey and mapping party (and the surrounding area) by a large but non-nuclear missile delivered from a craft in low orbit.

The Droyne never discuss their responses to incursions, and there seems to be no pattern to how they might respond to

a given incursion. Size, duration, distance and other factors seem unrelated to the severity of the response. This, coupled with uncertainty about the numbers, location and capabilities of the Droyne, inspires a certain paranoia among the human population, but this is balanced by the observed fact that the Droyne never attempt to encroach on human territory and, so long as they are left alone, seem inclined to simply ignore the human presence.

BARKER SUBSECTOR

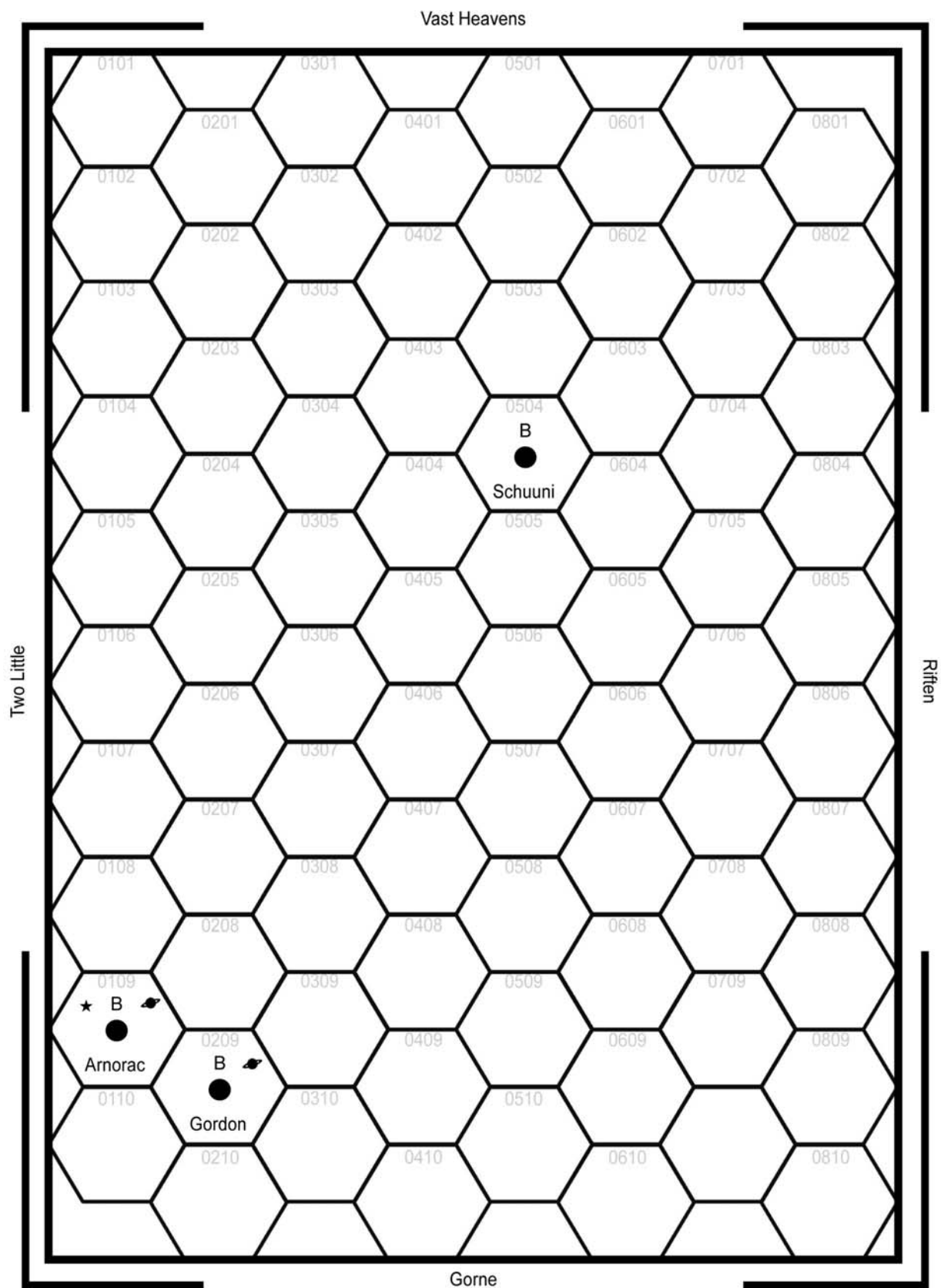
Barker subsector contains three star systems, of which one (Arnorac) is an Imperial client state. Arnorac receives support from the Imperium and the occasional visit from naval ships. Exactly why such a remote world would feel the need for Imperial protection mystifies many casual observers, but in fact the answer is simple – it does not. Arnorac came to be an Imperial client world for entirely different reasons.

Arnorac is a client state of the Imperium for the simple reason that it is owned by the Imperial Navy, more or less. Some decades ago, Arnorac's government collapsed due to a series of economic and political disasters. A period of anarchy ensued, with various factions fighting over governance of an increasingly wrecked civilization.

Help arrived in the form of Naval ships out of Deneb sector, carrying Army engineers and a range of necessary personnel, from diplomats and doctors to technicians and administrators. Order was restored in full Imperial-intervention style, with Marines smashing centres of resistance and Army squads enforcing peace on the streets. Images of the Imperial Marine Corps storming the governmental complex in order to raise the fallen government's own banner over it made excellent propaganda for the Imperium for some years afterwards.

Having rammed a stable government down the throats of the people of Arnorac at gunpoint, the Imperials expected to withdraw, but instead they were requested to stay. The Army was gradually withdrawn but naval personnel remained in key government positions. This apparently suited Imperial intentions; a naval base was constructed and a small force of high-Jump patrol ships deployed along with tanker support.

Today, Arnorac's government is a curious thing, as it contains several personnel seconded from the Navy. The planetary flag is always flown alongside an Imperial Navy sunburst, and the world proclaims its loyalty not to the Imperium but to the Imperial Navy. The locals seem happy with the situation – it is certainly preferable to violent anarchy – and the Imperium has gained a deep-Rift base.





Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Arnorac	0109	N	B581468-A	Ni		Cs	G
Gordon	0209		B310776-A	Na		Na	G
Schuuni	0504		BA9A599-D	Ht Ni		Na	

Gordon B310776-A

Gordon was settled during the Rule of Man by one of several groups that sought to leave the collapsing Second Imperium behind and seek a new home away from the infighting (political and actual), the piracy, and the urban unrest that characterised the last years of the Twilight period before the Long Night set in.

The mission consisted was a complex one, using tankers to shuttle the actual colony ships across the Great Rift from the Trailing-Rimward side. Two promising star systems – today known as Arnorac and Gordon – were the initial targets, with the possibility of pushing onward to seek a habitable world if they turned out to be unsuitable. However, everything went wrong.

One of the colony ships simply disappeared during the transit. It is assumed that this ship broke down in Jump or Misjumped and was destroyed; no trace of it has even been found. The remainder of the mission reached what is now Gordon and waited for the tankers to catch up, but they never came. Their fate, too, remains unknown. The most likely explanation is that the relay system became broken, perhaps due to a vessel Jumping to the wrong coordinates or meeting some kind of disaster.

The other tankers might have become stranded, their crews dying a slow death in deep space, or they might have been able to return to the 'shore' of the rift. Whatever happened, this left the main colony mission stranded without the capability to finish the crossing. The decision was made to settle both available systems, and for a few decades the remaining Jump-capable ships were used to maintain communications and trade between the settlements at Gordon and Arnorac.

Eventually, the ships wore out and it was many generations before Jump drive became more than a theoretical possibility. Arnorac was habitable, and the people there thrived for a time before internal disputes crippled their society. Gordon, on the other hand, was a much more challenging environment.

A small world with only a trace atmosphere, Gordon presented the early colonists with severe problems. Water could be obtained from deep underground basins and ice, but not in great quantities, and useful gases could be compressed from the atmosphere. However, these challenging conditions forced the colonists to spread out, building several communities that could be supported by locally sourced resources.

These colonies gradually went their own ways, finding different solutions to the various problems that faced them. However, they remained a brotherhood in adversity, sharing information and technology even if they acknowledged no central authority. There was no need for conflict once the colonists had dispersed, and most of the new settlements grew at a modest rate.

It was several generations before the colonies became large enough to individually support grand projects such as a return to space. After a range of false starts, satellites were successfully launched and vessels put into orbit. Surveys from space uncovered sites for new settlements atop good resources, which could have resulted in conflict. It is a measure of the friendly relations between the settlements that they instead embarked upon a period of joint expansion, building new colonies and sending personnel to live there without much disagreement about ownership or profits.

These new colonies were also autonomous, like those that set them up, but their creation was good for everyone. New resources became available, and entered the world economy by means of trade, benefiting everyone to a greater or lesser degree. This sparked another joint project; the creation of an orbital trade port.

For many years, transport between the various colonies had been largely accomplished by orbital craft making short hops rather than ground transport. The low gravity of Gordon made this a cheap and easy alternative to trying to drive a railroad across virtually airless, meteor-blasted wastes. The orbital port became a base for cargo and passenger transports, plus a storage area for goods in transit; a sort of orbital rail yard. Its personnel-handling capability took longer to develop, remaining very basic for many years. This was not much of a problem as the only destination for someone arriving at the port was on-planet, just a short hop away.

Eventually, the port became the base for expansion through the rest of the system, with petrochemical-skimming installations set up at the gas giants and mining stations wherever minerals could be found. However, it remained an industrial facility rather than a settlement in its own right. That is, people live at the port, but only because they work there or have family who do. It is unlikely to ever be a settlement in its own right, not least because this might cause conflict with or among the groundside cities.



Once technology reached a sufficient level, Jump-capable ships were built and missions sent to search for the missing colony ship and tankers. These never had any chance of success and were soon abandoned. Voyages to Arnorac were more successful, but could not prevent the collapse of government on that world or the subsequent period of anarchy. Ships out of Gordon were not present when the Imperial Navy arrived on Arnorac, but contact came soon after.

Today, Gordon has a population of some 60,000,000 people divided between several large settlements and many small ones. Most are located underground and have access to water sources but rely mainly on starship-style recycling and life support systems. Society is fairly austere, but not excessively so. Recycling is important and the diet is repetitive, but there are sufficient resources to produce luxury goods.

Contact with the Imperium has not really changed anything. Occasional trade ships bring in Imperial goods, and trade with Arnorac is now well established, but for the most part Gordon remains a self-sufficient society located in the midst of the Great Rift. There are those who say that if all the other stars went out, the folk of Gordon would be able to go on with their lives as if nothing had happened.

Given that the folk of Gordon came to this world to escape the chaos surrounding the fall of the Rule of Man, it is fair to say that the mission was a success – at least, for those that made it. The fate of the others may never be known.

USHER SUBSECTOR

Usher subsector contains nine star systems, of which all but one are Imperial territory. Ironically, that one system, Tonnurad, is the entry point for almost all trans-Rift traffic into Imperial space.

Tonnurad is a mid-tech world whose population are friendly to the Imperium but have no interest in joining. The deals that the government of Tonnurad has negotiated with the Imperial shipping corporation Riftshore Navigation LIC allow for tariffs to be imposed on goods moved through the Highport, something that would not be permitted under Imperial trade laws. Thus

although the world government subsidises some of the port's activities, it makes a decent profit from it.

Although it is in Tonnurad's interest to remain outside the Imperium, the rest of the subsector is firmly under Imperial control. There is no subsector capital; administrative functions are carried out through Lintl in Vestus subsector.

The Imperial Navy and Scout Service maintain small bases at Bastion and Aldaya respectively. These are mainly to support operations along the Rift fringe and out into Trojan Reach sector. The latter contains some Imperial worlds but is the outermost frontier of Imperial territory in the region and can be a little lawless.

Naval assets in Usher subsector are mainly patrol vessels, with a couple of destroyers to deal with more serious threats. This force is entirely adequate for dealing with piracy and smuggling, but could not handle a major threat.

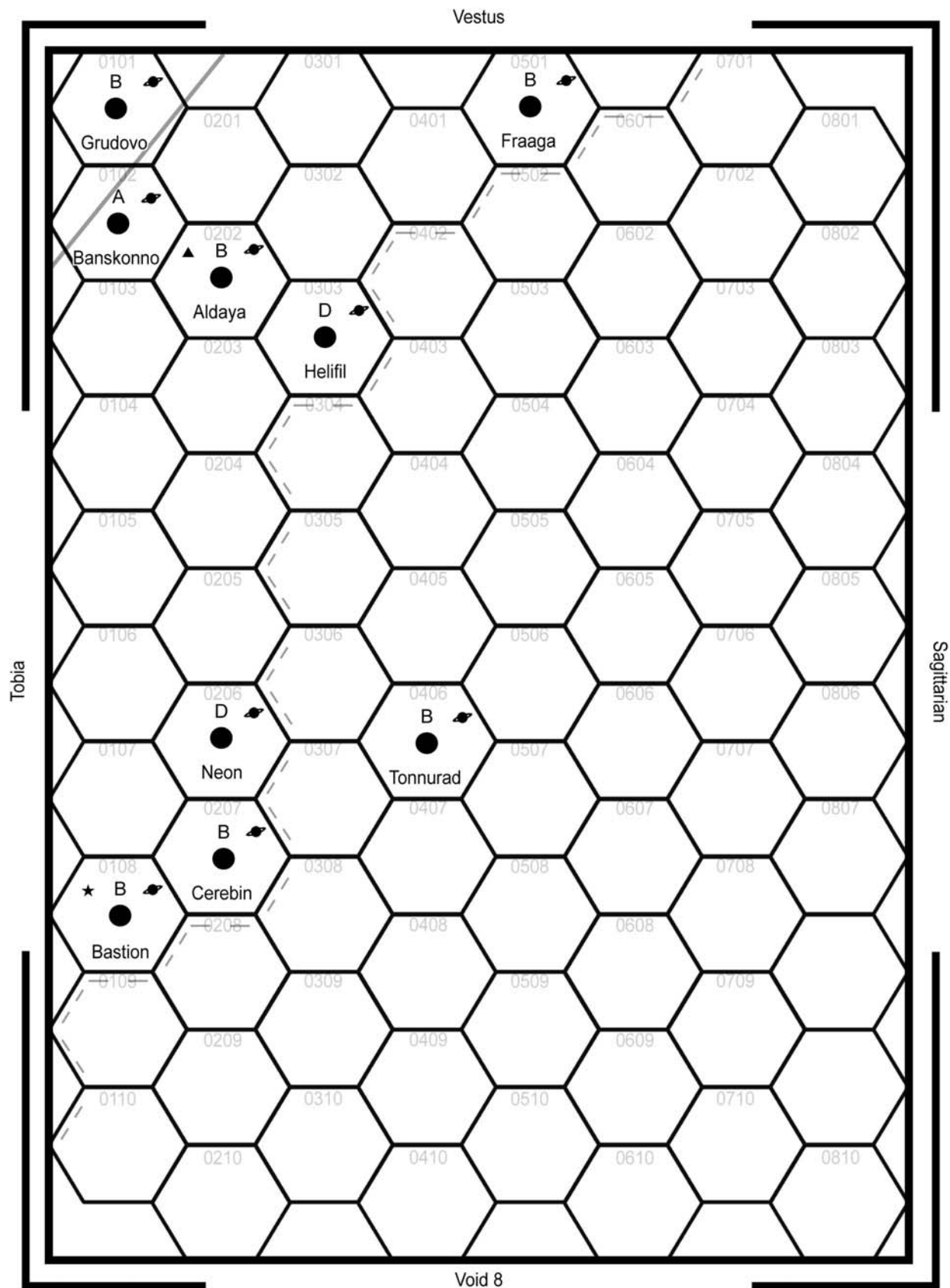
Grudovo B560453-C

Grudovo is a desert world, with virtually no surface water. Many starfarers assume that such a world must be an endless sea of sand dunes baked by an intense sun, but this is not always the case. Grudovo's surface temperature is not especially high, and the majority of its terrain is rocky badlands rather than sand. There are also extensive regions of hills and mountains, and a few small bodies of water. Most of these are seasonal; only about half are reliably present year-round.

Although extremely dry, Grudovo is not impossible to live on. The terrain can be difficult but presents less of a problem to large vehicles such as ATVs than sand would. Nevertheless, when it is necessary to travel outside the settlements, grav transport is favoured.

Grudovo is home to around five thousand people, of whom nearly half live in the main community. This is a comfortable, advanced-technology settlement co-located with the starport. It lies on the shore of the largest reliable body of water and is sheltered by high ground on three sides. To the north is a small region of plains which ends abruptly at a huge volcanic escarpment, effectively sealing the inhabited region into a box surrounded by high lands.

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Grudovo	0101		B560453-C	De Ht Ni		Im	G
Banskonn	0102		A582444-C	Ht Ni		Im	G
Bastion	0108	N	B737532-B	Ni		Im	G
Aldaya	0202	S	B885620-6	Ag Ga Ni		Im	G
Neon	0206		D78227A-7	Lo		Im	G
Cerebin	0207		B423662-C	Ht Na Ni Po		Im	G
Helifil	0303		D310724-8	Na		Im	G
Tonnurad	0406		B563695-7	Ni		Na	G
Fraaga	0501		B691420-B	Ni		Im	G





The plains are dotted with small communities, mainly along the course of seasonal rivers. Most of these are either mining outposts or agricultural sites. The latter use water extracted from the subsoil to ensure a year-round supply even when the rivers have run dry. Farms, like the settlements themselves, are sealed off from the environment by high walls and glazed roofs.

Within the settlements, climate control ensures a shirtsleeves environment. Thus the people of Grudovo are not desert-dwellers at all. Many never go outside and might as well live in an orbital habitat or on a temperate planet. If they do travel it is by air-conditioned grav vehicle, leaving one sealed settlement via an airlock and landing at another. A significant segment of the population do go outside of course, working on the starport landing apron or the mining sites before returning indoors at the end of the shift. Even here, they are not exposed to the full rigour of Grudovo's environment thanks to the sheltering hills.

Grudovo's main source of income is its starport, and what industry exists is primarily of a support nature. The vast majority of the planet remains unexploited and, indeed, largely unexplored other than by orbital survey. This creates a situation where offworld businesses have begun to claim, not without justification, that five thousand people cannot possibly need a whole planet of their own.

The Imperial charter recognises the government of Grudovo as a 'world government' holding sovereignty over the whole planet. The charter provides for enforcement of this sovereignty by legal means and even the intervention of military forces, and specifically prohibits offworld interests simply landing in a remote area and commencing operations. This does not suit Sternmetal Horizons LIC, a Megacorporation that wants to establish a mining settlement atop what it believes is a promising deposit.

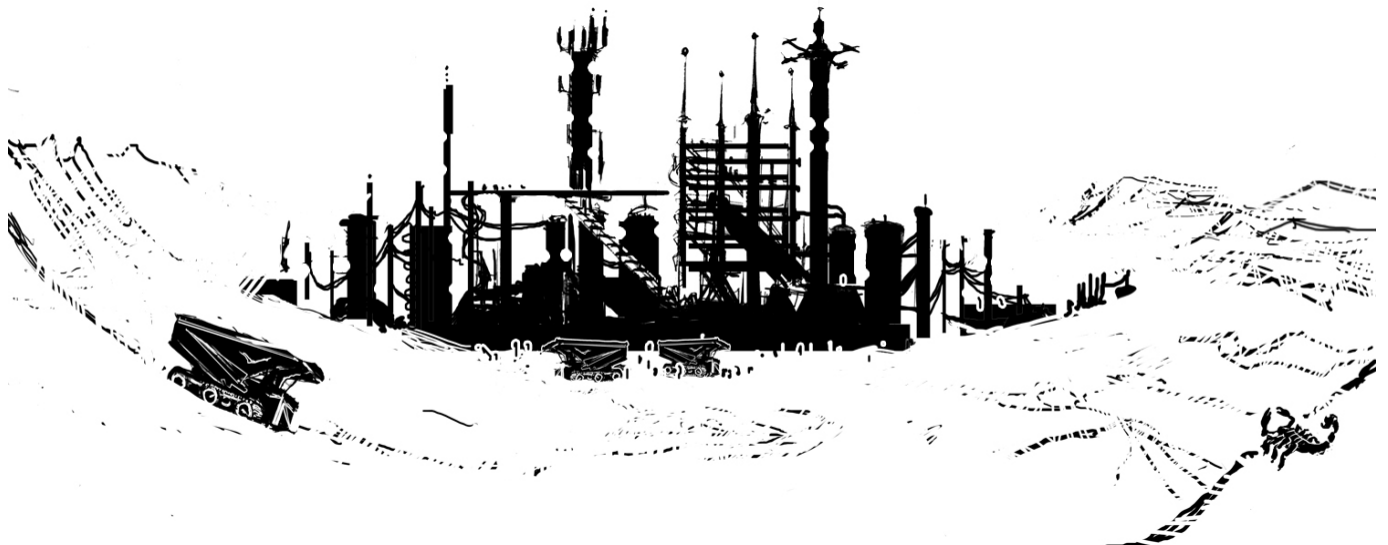
Sternmetal is not known for doing things by halves; a mining operation would probably be supported by a 'corp town' housing workers' families and supporting industries. More importantly, it would be on such a scale that the existing population would be outnumbered. Concerned about the implications of this regarding planetary sovereignty, the government of Grudovo has refused to allow Sternmetal to develop its chosen site.

Sternmetal contends that the 'world government' should not be permitted to dictate who uses territory it has never even mapped, located on the far side of the planet. The Imperial Charter, Sternmetal contends, assumes that a world government has some means to enforce its laws and protect its territory over at least a majority of the useable planetary surface, whereas on this world the government's influence is confined to a single valley.

There are valid arguments on both sides, with neither willing to accept the obvious compromise whereby the world government licenses Sternmetal to develop its territory in return for a fee. In the meantime, while Sternmetal is observing the law and not attempting to set up a major installation, smaller mining outfits have begun to slip prospecting teams onto Grudovo.

These missions are illegal and unlicensed, but the very fact that the world government cannot do anything about them suits Sternmetal's purposes. The Megacorp hopes to present the courts with proof that the world government's position is unenforceable and therefore subject to a court ruling. This has raised the stakes for the world government, to the point where it has attempted to run off illegal prospectors wherever they can be found.

The government personnel tasked with this job are not really up to it. They are a mix of government officers and security guards with no desert training, who are expected to fly halfway around the world and persuade the illegal miners to leave. Several





teams have been fired on or disappeared in the open desert, possibly from hostile action but quite likely because they are simply not prepared for the job.

Meanwhile, the prospectors and miners have also begun to fight among themselves over prime spots. It is not known how many teams there are on Grudovo, nor where they all are, but it does appear that incidents of violence and sabotage between rival groups are on the increase.

The Imperial authorities have offered to deploy a small force of Imperial Army troops to assist; Sternmetal has suggested that its security arm can do the same job, and the world government insists that it can cope, creating a deadlock. The situation appears to be deteriorating and it is only a matter of time before one party or another takes decisive action, which may have serious long-term consequences for the world and its government.

Aldaya B885620-6

Aldaya is a temperate world with a dense atmosphere and sufficient water to make it a good prospect for habitation, and as such it was colonised early in the Imperial expansion into the region. This was something of a hit-and-miss affair, with several small colonies set up in rapid succession, each in a different region. Some were successful and some rather less so.

The resulting mess was bought outright by a development corporation rather grandly named Imperial Colonial Development, LIC. ICD essentially bought out all of the viable colonies and landed assistance teams in the middle of those in the process of collapse. The intent was to coordinate these fledgling colonies and supply assistance that would ensure a steady, controlled development. Eventually the colonies of Aldaya would become a functioning world state, with a branch of ICD as the government.

It was a workable plan; indeed, it had been done successfully elsewhere and has been successful since. However, in the case of Aldaya the funding dried up. ICD had its fingers in too many pies, and did not recognise the need to cut its losses early enough. Striving to keep all its assets, ICD lost everything.

The demise of ICD brought about a sordid affair on Aldaya, in which the corporation's creditors tried to liquidate its assets in a variety of ways. Some sent administrative parties to take over the colonies, attempting to run them as businesses. The idea was that goods made by the colonists, plus agricultural surpluses and any raw materials that were mined, could be taken to offset the colony's debt. This was unworkable as these were small, struggling colonies with no surplus. It was also illegal; ICD

owned the land and the machinery, but the Imperium has laws that prohibit the ownership of people; laws that the creditors came perilously close to breaking.

The alternative approach was more direct. The creditors attempted to run the colonists off their land, or induce them to join a new colony project (usually in the same location) run by the creditors. Machinery and similar assets were taken. The intent in most cases was to move the machinery and those colonists willing to accept a contract to a few sites, which included the best of the existing ones, and to invest in the development of those.

The colonists, for the most part, resisted. The creditors were successful in securing some of the original colony sites, and to these they moved those personnel who were willing to sign up plus what equipment they had managed to seize. This was augmented by an influx of new personnel and a security detachment.

In some cases the original colonists were able to defend their holdings, while others were driven off and forced to scrape an existence in the countryside. These dispossessed colonists raided the new settlements. They were unable to drive off the newcomers but forced them to turn their settlements into fortresses. As the costs of security spiralled and the endless raids crippled the world's tiny economy, the creditors cut their losses and pulled out.

This left the newcomer colonists in a difficult position. Some chose to leave and seek a new start elsewhere, while others clung to what they had. Skirmishing went on for generations, but in the end the newcomers were able to outlast the dispossessed settlers. Those that did not ask for a place in the new settlements faded into the outback and eventually ceased to be much of a factor in world affairs. A few of their descendants still dwell in isolated communities in some areas, but for the most part the dispossessed colonists just faded away.

The fortress-colonies struggled for many years with inadequate resources and manpower, but eventually they were able to begin to expand. Population growth was not rapid, and technological capability had dropped to a steam-power level. However, progress was constant, if painfully slow. Gradually the colonies developed into a civilisation of sorts and clawed their way up to tech level 6.

Since most of the sites chosen for development were fairly close to one another, it was not difficult to link the colonies – which had now become cities – together with rail and road transport and to gradually evolve a world government. This took the form of a full democracy, every adult being eligible to vote.



Thus, when the Imperial Megacorporation Tukera Lines offered a substantial investment package in return for the rights to set up and operate a starport in orbit, the whole population voted on it and a majority agreed to accept the offer. This brought in significant funds, but caused severe disagreements over how these were to be spent.

Since that time, Aldaya's world-democracy has been gradually spiralling into anarchy, unable to reach a consensus on most issues. There has been some violence, but for the most part the problem is one of governmental paralysis rather than fighting in the streets. This is bad enough, but as matters get worse the opinions just become more entrenched. Dozens of tiny voting alliances and interest groups exist, all blocking one another's initiatives and making deals for the votes of other groups, only to be themselves blocked by another group pursuing a different agenda.

While the planetary government is nearing collapse, the starport is doing well. The ground component is small and guarded by Tukera Lines' security troops; it is a little enclave of organisation and effective decision-making amid the general chaos on-planet. However, few visitors land at the Downport. Most simply pass through the Highport, which is large and efficient.

The port was wanted by Tukera for two reasons; to support its own shipping operations and to make money in its own right. It has succeeded in both those aims. Tukera liners and freighters are turned around at the port before heading back up into Deneb sector. Many receive overhauls or routine maintenance in the yards at the port, which are available to non-Tukera vessels for a high fee. The quality of work undertaken is worth the price it seems; non-Tukera ships fill the repair bays whenever there are no liners in for refit.

Although the port is licensed by the world government, which receives a percentage of its revenue, in reality the port operation has nothing to do with the local culture or government. Décor and entertainment are typical interstellar-cosmopolitan rather than local in flavour, and almost all the personnel are recruited elsewhere. The relationship between port and government is a marriage of convenience, with both remaining independent. A governmental collapse on Aldya would not affect the orbital port at all – and nor would any aid be forthcoming.

SAGITTARIAN SUBSECTOR

Sagittarian subsector contains just one star system, R'Bak. Lying far out in the Great Rift, R'Bak is extremely isolated. Its mainworld, though not the star system, is Red Zoned. The official reason for this is to protect the developing cultures of the mainworld.

The R'Bak star system is open to travellers – at least as open as any isolated system can be. It is somewhat hazardous to navigate, with meteor swarms posing a quite serious danger to ships in the inner system.

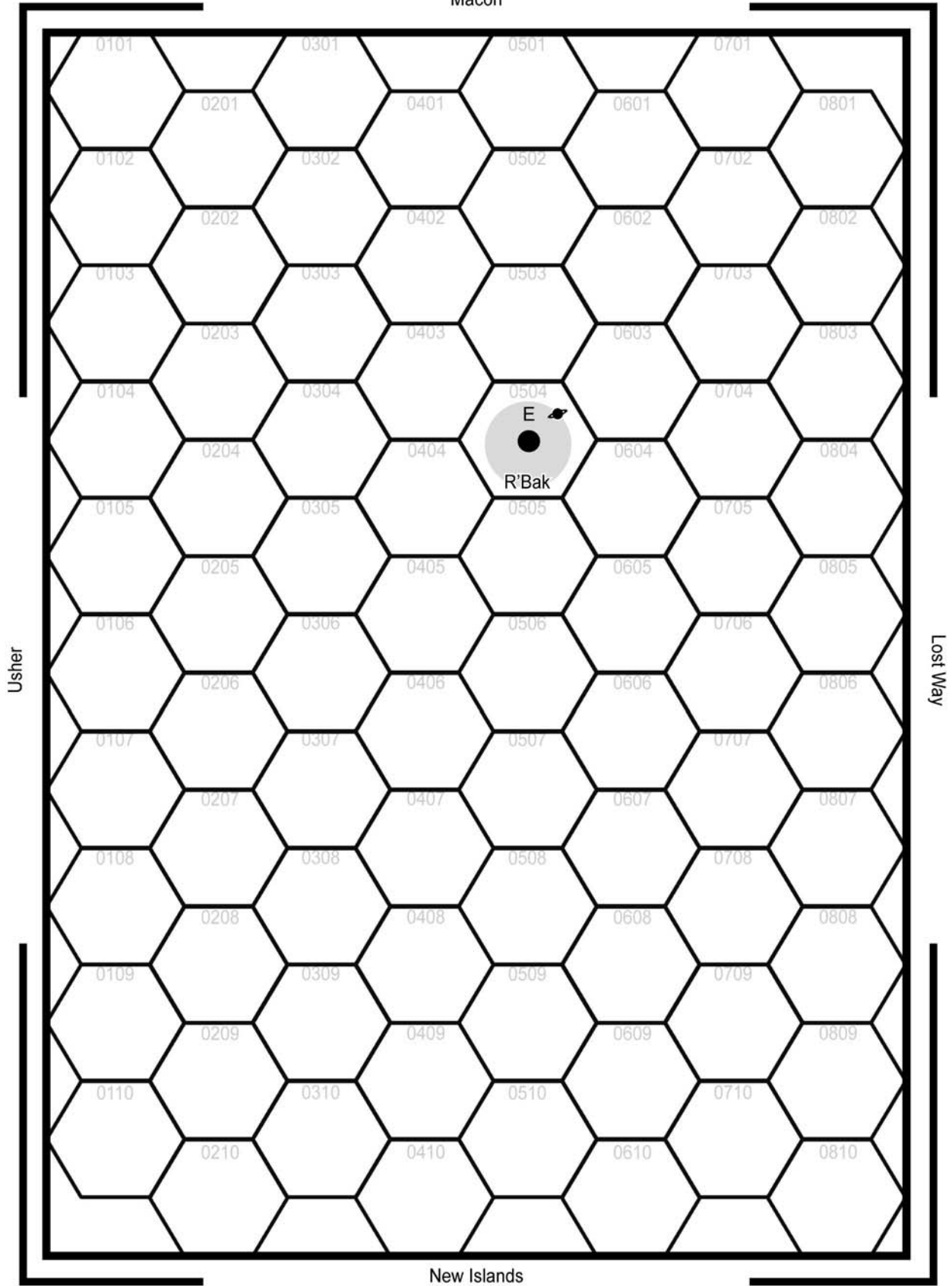
There are two distinct populations in the R'Bak system; the planetary dwellers and the people of the orbital habitats. These became separated during the Long Night, when the system's space travel capability was lost. The ground-dwellers, with access to machinery and resources, gradually fell into barbarism and forgot about their cousins living in orbital habitats. Meanwhile the orbitals, who retained much of their technological base, lacked the materials and machinery to replace or even maintain their spacecraft.

Imperial explorers arrived in time to help the orbital dwellers repair their homes and re-establish space travel. A spacefaring society was quickly built up, supported by asteroid mining and using machinery bought from the Imperials to construct new vessels. The orbital dwellers now have the equivalent of a Class B starport and trade (very intermittently) with long-range vessels out of Imperial space. There is some talk of setting up a chain of deep space refuelling points to link R'Bak to Neubayern in the Islands and to Imperial space to Spinward-Coreward, but thus far this has come to nothing.

R'Bak itself is interdicted (Red Zoned) in order to protect the ground-dwellers as they rebuild their society. This is unusual; normally the Scout Service imposes Red Zones for such social reasons and the Navy uses them for economic, political or military purposes. This has given rise to some speculation that R'Bak is home to a military research station looking into special combat techniques, psionic phenomena or some other highly sensitive area of interest.

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
R'Bak	0504		E587777-5	Ag Ga Lt	R	Na	G

Macon



New Islands

SAGITTARIAN



Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Undrelyn	0202		B551433-6	Ni Po	A	Na	G

LOST WAY SUBSECTOR

Lost Way subsector contains just one star system; Undrelyn. In addition to its human population, the world has a significant Chirper community. Official estimates of the Chirper population range from about six thousand to nearer fifteen thousand, but it is difficult to obtain reliable figures.

The Chirpers of Undrelyn dwell in small villages, mostly in quite remote areas. They have little technology beyond a few crude metal tools. They are forcibly driven away from human communities and shun human contact wherever possible. The human population view them as primitive savages, little more than a nuisance to be brushed aside, and do not welcome enquiries about them.

GORNE SUBSECTOR

Gorne Subsector contains no star systems.

VOID 8

Void 8 Subsector contains no star systems.

NEW ISLANDS SUBSECTOR

New Islands subsector lies entirely outside the Imperium, though there is a small naval base at Zuflucht. There is no single dominant power; four high-population worlds (Esperanza, Serendip Belt, New Colchis and Joyeuse) jockey for position as the pre-eminent power in the region.

The world of Orphee is interdicted to protect its inhabitants, a race of herbivorous sentients who, it is theorised, might achieve a technological society in a few thousand years if left alone. Scientific parties are allowed on-planet to study the Orphee, but access is supposedly controlled by a joint interdiction force. In practice, the interdiction is patchily enforced and at violations are increasingly common.

Zuflucht C545720-8

Zuflucht lies at the far Spinward-Coreward corner of the islands cluster, and was colonised late in the spread of humanity through the Islands. The mission was, in many ways, poorly planned. The intent was to send *Voyageur* out to the Zuflucht system to investigate its potential as a colony site. A small number of colonists were aboard in suspended animation. These were drawn from various worlds and were intended to form a seeder colony if Zuflucht proved to be habitable.

The intent was to set up a small colony, at which point *Voyageur* would turn around and head back into the central region. A powerful transmitter would beam news of a successful colony back, with the signal arriving long before *Voyageur*. At this point, another colony ship would be sent with more personnel. Those already in place would prepare for the arrival of the follow-up group, at which point the colony would be of a size suitable to support itself.

Voyageur stopped off at Topas to resupply and to pick up any personnel who wanted to join the mission. The expectation was that a few hundred people might come aboard; in the event it was tens of thousands.

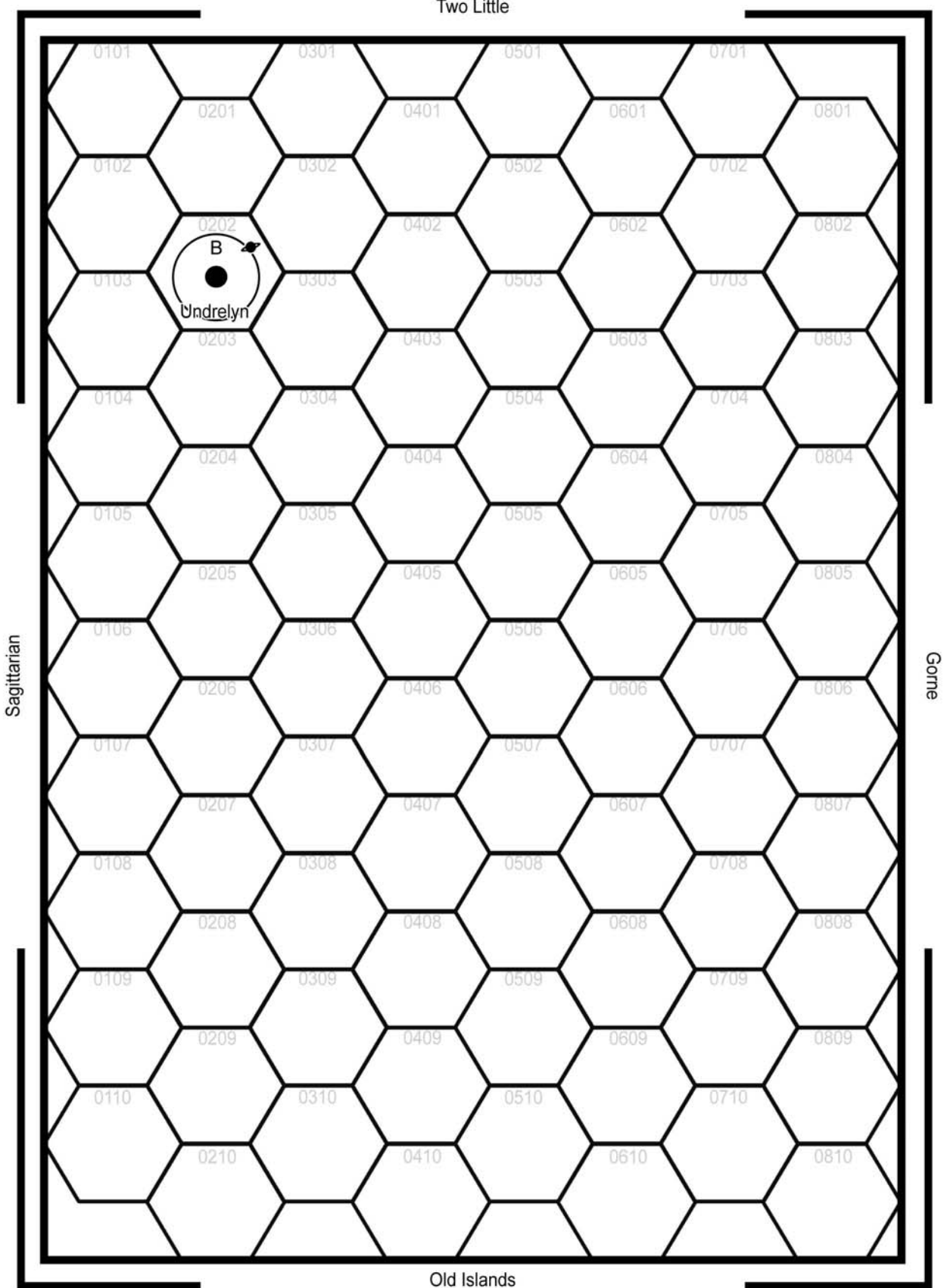
When *Voyageur* arrived, Topas was in the last stages of a civil war. Large numbers of refugees were eking out a fragile existence in camps on the fringes of the war zones. With nothing left to lose, they agreed to set out for a new home far away, and boarded the shuttles from *Voyageur*. The ship packed in as many as it could take, loaded up what equipment its crew could obtain, and departed from Topas.

The refugees had few possessions and no equipment, and what was already aboard *Voyageur* was sufficient only for a seeder colony of a few thousand people. However, when Zuflucht turned out to be habitable it was decided to make a go of it. The seeder colonists were awakened first and set up a basic town. The refugees were then thawed out and sent down in batches as the infrastructure grew to accommodate them.

This was a slow process, requiring years of careful resource management to ensure that the colony was not swamped. The end result was a group of rather oddball settlements, with a core of prefabricated buildings surrounded by log cabins. The seeder colony mission had included six self-contained fusion power units and an additional two were built from spares donated by *Voyageur*'s crew. Each of these became the core of a settlement, separated by a few hundred kilometres to allow for expansion.

There was plenty of power and not much machinery to use it; likewise vehicles were in desperately short supply. *Voyageur* remained in orbit for thirty years, acting as a depot for supplies and spares, a medical and training centre, and a garage for the shuttles that took up the task of providing mobility. Workshops aboard the ship were used to repair items and fabricate new machinery.

Two Little



LOST WAY



Eventually, with much help from **Voyageur**, the colonists were able to begin producing their own technological items. The colony ship gathered up those of its worn-out shuttles, landed all of the spares and machinery its crew thought they could spare, and began its belated return to the central cluster.

Left alone, the colonists faced the future with resolution. Most of the first-generation settlers had escaped the horrors of a civil war and a squalid existence in refugee camps. Now they had real hope of a better future, with a wide-open world to tame. People who had boarded **Voyageur** with nothing more to their name than their ragged clothing saw out their last years as the elders of a growing civilization. True, they were living in log cabins and working in the fields for the most part, but they were far better off than they could have hoped for.

There was no follow-up colony mission, and so Zuflucht was forced to make its own way. With so many people relative to the amount of infrastructure, there was never any hope of maintaining the technological capability of the original mission. This was planned for, and thus there was no huge slump. Instead, Zuflucht dipped down to a steam-powered technological base but retained more advanced knowledge, allowing a recovery to a comfortable TL 8.

Modern Zuflucht is home to some 50,000,000 people spread out across the globe. Society is fairly peaceable despite (or perhaps because of) a lack of formal laws. There is an unspoken code in place governing acceptable behaviour, and a strong sense of community. This makes doing something your neighbours would disapprove of a source of stigma. More serious crimes are often dealt with informally but vigorously by parties of concerned citizens.

Governmental functions are handled by a small corps of professional clerks and bureaucrats, while actual decisions are made by participatory democracy, with everyone having a vote. Curiously, this includes children and even infants. The votes of minors are cast by their parent or guardian until they reach adulthood. A worldwide data transfer net allows citizens to remain up to date with important issues and to cast their votes on important matters.

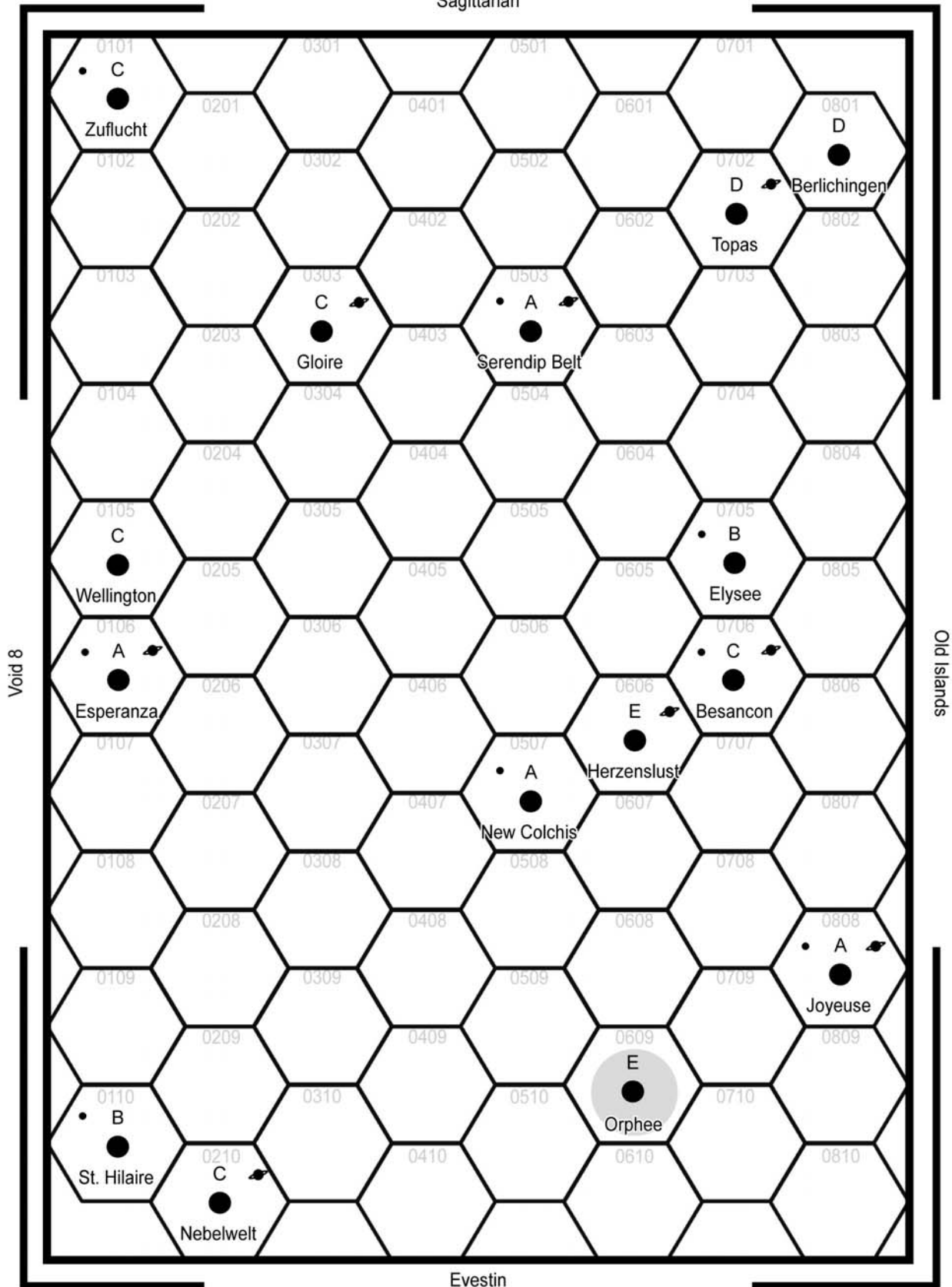
The arrival of Imperial starships in the Islands was beneficial to Zuflucht. The orbital component of the starport is larger than usual for a class C installation to accommodate a small naval base. Here, patrol ships of the Imperial Navy receive maintenance while their crews take leave on the planetary surface.

The Navy is also bound by treaty to defend Zuflucht. Given the small forces available this is on the face of it not much of a benefit. However, since firing on an Imperial warship inevitably results in war with the Imperium, it is a very good deterrent to annexation attempts by other Islands powers. Not coincidentally, the folk of Zuflucht are, on the whole, very friendly to 'The Fleet' as they call the Imperial Navy. Indeed, some try to sign up to join the navy, which does not normally recruit beyond the Imperial borders. The world is sometimes accorded unofficial status as an Imperial Client State to permit this.

Commercial vessels also come through Zuflucht on the trans-Rift run, restocking at the port while their crews enjoy some groundside time. This is a great relief after multiple Jumps in the darkness of the Great Rift, or a good way to prepare for the transit. Crew and passengers from these ships find themselves made welcome in a relaxed and friendly society that shows the cosmopolitan influences of the Imperium far more than is the norm deeper into the Islands.

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Zuflucht	0101	M	C545720-8	Ag Ga		Na	
Wellington	0105		C8B0263-A	De Lo		Na	
Esperanza	0106	M	A674ABC-B	Ga Hi In		Na	G
St. Hilaire	0110	M	B579763-A			Na	
Nebelwelt	0210		C879425-5	Lt Ni		Na	G
Gloire	0303		C764567-9	Ag Ga Ni		Na	G
Serendip Belt	0503	M	A000949-C	As Hi Ht In Na		Na	G
New Colchis	0507	M	A8959AA-C	Ga Hi Ht In		Na	
Herzenslust	0606		E995765-6	Ag Ga		Na	G
Orphee	0609		E885600-0	Ag Ga Lt Ni	R	Na	
Topas	0702		D420899-7	De Na Po		Na	G
Elysee	0705	M	B502532-9	IC Ni		Na	
Besancon	0706	M	C201341-9	IC Lo		Na	G
Berlichingen	0801		D500437-8	Ni		Na	
Joyeuse	0808	M	A7899B9-C	Hi Ht		Na	G

Sagittarian



NEW ISLANDS



Orphee E885600-0

Orphee is interdicted, with the equivalent of a Red Travel Zone. This is supposedly enforced by a joint force maintained by all the major Islands powers. The Convention of Interdiction requires that ships of at least two powers – and more normally three – must be on station to maintain the blockade at any given time. In practice, only Joyeuse maintains the blockade full-time. Other powers send a ship from time to time, usually at increasingly long intervals.

There are big gaps in the blockade and if permission can be obtained from the government of Joyeuse to visit the world then bypassing any other blockading ships is a relatively simple matter. Permission is granted to scientific parties from time to time, but this has to come from a joint commission based on New Home. It is quicker and simpler to bypass the blockade in most cases, raising questions about whether there is any point in maintaining it.

The point of the blockade, of course, is to protect the Orpheides. It is unusual to encounter sentient herbivores, so these primitive people would be of interest anywhere. With non-human intelligent life so very rare in the Islands, they are of particular interest to science. The Convention of Interdiction provided for the protection of the Orpheides from outside exploitation but permitted some scientific observation. This has proceeded in fits and starts, with several teams on-planet at times and no real interest at others.

It is known that the Orpheides are cooperative herd people who have developed rudimentary tool use. This amounts to little more than fashioning weapons from sticks and stones to ward off (non-sentient) predators and to assist in obtaining food. The Orpheides do not seem to make much use of fire, though they may be aware of how to start one.

There are thought to be several million Orpheides on Orphee, generally in herds of 10-30 adults. It has been theorised that herds belong to larger groupings, creating a sort of uber-herd. Individuals transfer from time to time between herds, but very rarely outside their uber-herd even where two or more such groupings are in proximity.

The Orpheides do have a language of sorts, though thus far it has not proven possible to decipher much of it other than general intent. Communication between humans and Orpheides has never been recorded, but since that would constitute interference, something specifically forbidden by the Convention, perhaps this is not surprising.

Rumours persist that one or more of the Islands powers (usually, but not always, it is Joyeuse that is accused) have removed a sizable population of Orpheides to a remote location, possibly offworld, in order to conduct experiments on them. Thus far, no

evidence has emerged. Conspiracy theorists have concocted all manner of plots around this rumour.

The commonest theories suggest that the Orpheides are being trained as shock troops or hazardous-environment slaves, or that they are psionic and are being dissected to learn their secrets. There are many reasons why such an activity would be kept secret, but some proof would normally be available if there were any truth in the rumours.

Whatever the truth of the various rumours surrounding the native people, the fact remains that Orphee is highly suitable for human habitation. Thus far it would appear that the Convention has served its purpose but as Jump capable ships become more common, perhaps it is only a matter of time before someone decides to set up a colony or base in some remote location. Vessels that are thought to be equipped for orbital mineral survey operations have been intercepted and chased out of orbit by the blockading navies. However, the blockade has so many holes that it is only a matter of time before someone obtains a good survey.

If mineral wealth is discovered on Orphee and the larger powers are distracted, say by a large-scale conflict, then it is virtually certain that an attempt to exploit this wealth will be implemented. At best, encroachment on the Orphee is inevitable. At worst, they may be trampled in a free-for-all mineral rush. Scientists predict that the Orphee could achieve a technological society in a few thousand years, but their chances of achieving this vanish almost to nothing if their world becomes the target for unregulated exploitation.

Topas D420899-7

Topas is one of the less inviting worlds of the Islands cluster but nevertheless it was colonised early on. It is the nature of sublight colony missions that they cannot easily move on in the hope of finding somewhere more habitable. After a transit requiring decades, including long periods of acceleration and deceleration, the mission personnel had no choice but to proceed with the landing and colonisation attempt.

Topas' atmosphere is too thin for humans to breathe unaided, though thick enough to allow survival without a pressure suit. Compressor masks or compressors feeding into sealed buildings are necessary, and in addition what atmosphere there is suffers from a taint. This is mildly radioactive volcanic dust from the world's many active volcanoes. The dust itself is an irritant that can cause respiratory complications, and the fact that it is radioactive also poses a slight long-term health risk. The level of radioactivity is not high enough for skin contact to be much of a hazard.

Despite this unhealthy background, the colonisation of Topas went well. Most construction was either underground or semi-



subterranean, and a city was soon carved out. Others followed as the population grew and spread out. For a time, it seemed that Topas could become a major power. The outbreak of civil war put an end to that possibility.

The origins of the Topas Civil War were complex, but among the critical factors was overcrowding in the cities due to the difficulty of building suitably environment-controlled dwellings. Competition over resources and even food were factors, eventually leading to a multi-way fight between the cities. Destruction of living space and food resources caused ever greater overcrowding and made further conflict over resources inevitable.

The situation was somewhat alleviated by the arrival of the colony ship *Voyageur*, which accepted large numbers of refugees into its low berths. These people eventually settled Zuflucht, but after their departure the war went on for some years until exhaustion imposed an unspoken ceasefire.

Despite occasional flare-ups over the next few years, the ceasefire held and eventually became official. Topas has lost its chance for rapid development but its people were able to build themselves a future from the wreckage. A world government did not emerge for several decades, and even when it did, it was not initially recognised as such. Instead, the government had its origins in a multi-faction reconstruction committee.

The rules agreed and imposed by the reconstruction committee eventually became the tenets of government, and eventually the committee was renamed the Topas World Council, taking on officially the role it had played for many years. Once in place, this governmental system became entrenched and had remained so to this day.

Expansion and population growth were carefully controlled to avoid a repeat of the civil war, with the result that the original cluster of cities gradually flowed together into a giant metropolis. Other cities were founded, but even today a full third of the world's 800,000,000 inhabitants dwell in the central metropolis.

Topas was annexed by Serendip Belt not long after the Jump drive was obtained. The annexation was bloodless, but strong-arm tactics were used. Topas was offered a choice between participation in and exclusion from the economic benefits of union with Serendip Belt, backed up by a broad hint in the form of the Islands' first Jump-capable battle squadron.

Annexation lasted a little less than two decades. Once other powers obtained the Jump drive, pressure was brought to bear on the Serendips to give up some of their new territories. The conference that produced this historic agreement was actually held on Topas, and in 5542 the Concordat of Topas was implemented. This returned (and also Besancon and Elysee) to self-governance. It also declared the concept of planetary sovereignty, i.e. the concept that each world had the right to govern itself.

Life on Topas was not greatly affected by annexation or independence. With few Jump-capable ships in those days, the Serendips did not transfer much of their military or bureaucratic system to Topas during the annexation. The Serendip governmental apparatus was partly withdrawn; what remained became an embassy and a trade mission.

Today, Topas has one huge urban mega-sprawl and several smaller cities located in fairly remote areas. In between are large areas of unused land, which is not much use to anyone due to the lack of air or water and the presence of the occasional active volcano. The government is extremely conservative and imposes a range of 'stability measures' dating from the reconstruction period. Cultural memory of the civil war (or at least, of the destruction it caused) remains sufficiently strong that these measures are rarely questioned by the population.

The rather basic starport is used as a refuelling stop for vessels transiting between Serendip Belt and Neubayern. Some trade is carried on in the port, but Topas' tech level 7 economy cannot produce much to export and there is little of natural value on-planet. The exception is a type of volcanic crystal which is prized as the basis of art objects. Harvesting the crystals is somewhat hazardous, but not unduly so.

A growing community of sculptors craft the crystals into decorative objects which find a modest market offworld. Apart from this, Topas is something of an economic backwater. Without the funds to invest in development it is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future.

Besancon C201341-9

Besancon is too small to retain an atmosphere, but it does have water locked up in ice, which made it less of a challenge to settle than a bare rockball world. It was settled by a mission from Amondiage, though the original colony was more of a self-sufficient waypost than an attempt to establish a major economic power.

Besancon's population has always remained very small, only exceeding 10,000 during brief periods when colony missions were being marshalled. The entire world population dwells in a single town, mainly working at the starport or in supporting industries. A liberal representative democracy evolved many years ago and has always been found satisfactory. In practice the government does little but oversee public services, and intrudes very little into the daily lives of citizens.

Besancon was annexed by Serendip Belt soon after the Jump drive was obtained. There was some resistance, which took the form of a protracted small-arms battle between a militia formed from among the populace and an infantry company sent to secure the government complex. After several hours and dozens of casualties the militia were forced to surrender when it



became apparent that the Serendips were landing more troops – they had brought more than the population of Besancon at that time and could obviously not be stopped.

Besancon reverted to independent status as a result of the Concordat of Topas, and became a stopover on the trade route known as the Crescent. Small trade missions are maintained by various powers, with New Home, Joyeuse and New Colchis conducting most of their trade with one another in the neutral port of Besancon.

Other than as a refuelling stop, Besancon has little strategic importance. However, the fact that trade ships come through quite frequently has made it a place of interest for the navies of the Islands. Most maintain a token presence in the form of a sloop or corvette, or put a patrol through to show the flag once in a while. This means that the Besancon system is one of the few places where forces of any power can be encountered, and makes combat between at least minor vessels a certainty in the event of war.

The central location of Besancon has prompted an unusual breed of entrepreneur to set up shop at the port. These are independent couriers, operating small starships capable of carrying a very small cargo in addition to a couple of passengers and, most importantly, messages. These messengers-for-hire are willing to carry despatches or urgent information to almost any destination. They have thus far proven trustworthy and reliable, and make a cheaper alternative to stationing messenger boats at the port. How long they would remain independent, or even active, in a general war situation remains to be seen.

OLD ISLANDS SUBSECTOR

Old Islands subsector lies entirely outside the Third Imperium. The high-population worlds of Neubayern, New Home, Sansterre and Amondiage all vie for pre-eminence. Of these, New Home is in some ways the spiritual capital of the subsector (and indeed of the Islands cluster as a whole). New Home has

a higher tech level than any of its rivals, which helps support this status.

Sturgeon's Law is inimical to humans. Most of its extensive land surface is covered with plants that can metabolise both metal and animal protoplasm – such as that of humans – with equal ease. Sturgeon's Law was settled more or less by accident by colonists aboard the sublight vessel *Infinité*, which was forced down due to serious equipment failures aboard.

Fortunately for the colonists, their vessel landed in Sturgeon's Law's only sea. This not only allowed the ship to maintain integrity and continue to support its inhabitants, it also protected the colonists from the plant-life on land. The wreck of *Infinité* served as a city for some time, until finally the colonists were able to construct a number of more permanent settlements. The modern population is not large, but the inhabitants have come to terms with their world and live fairly comfortably.

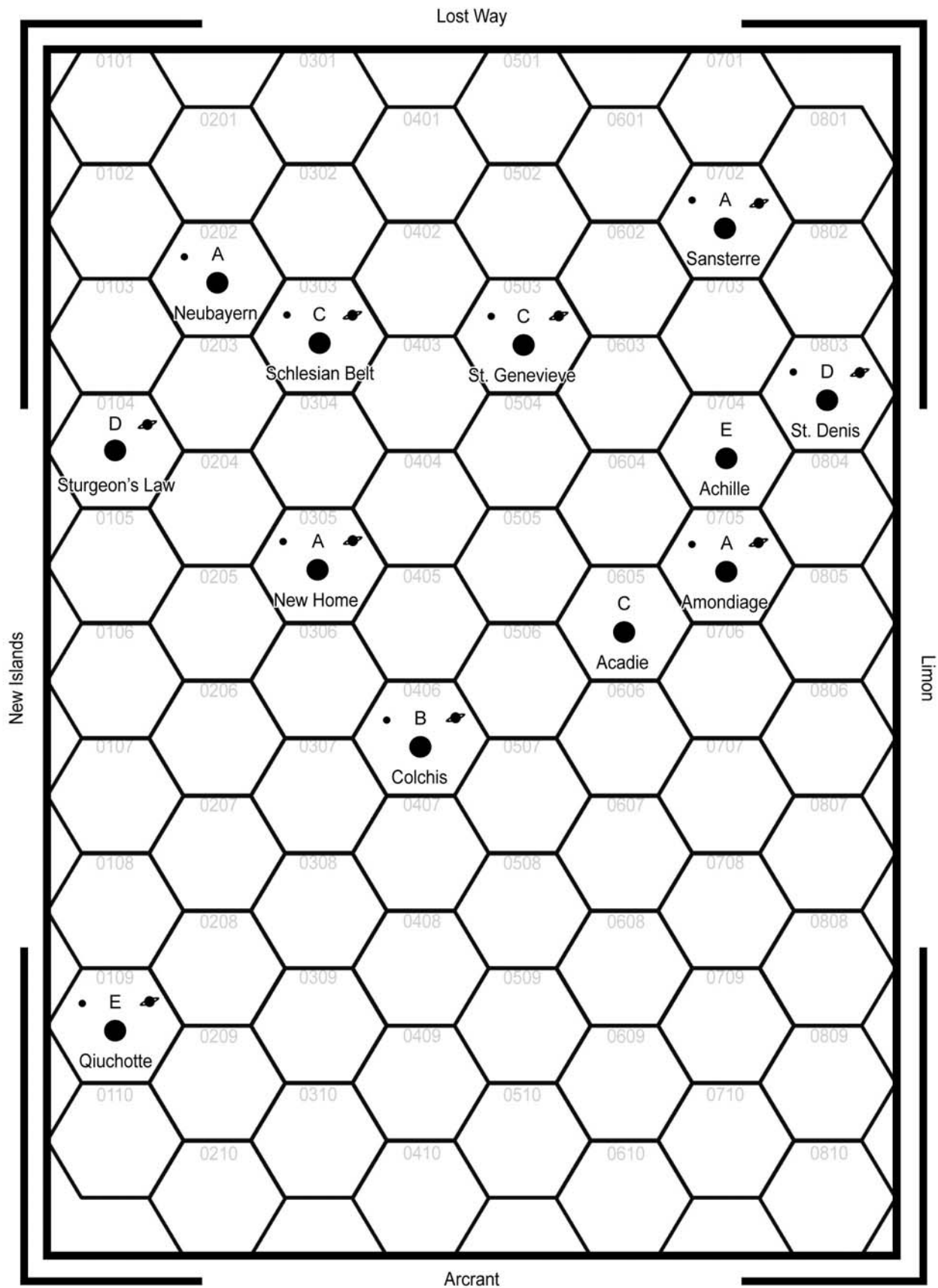
Achille was colonised by a utopian group from Sansterre, who wanted to create a model democracy. Although compromises have been made and the initial fervour has dwindled, Achille remains a workable democratic society, albeit a small one. An even smaller group settled on St Genevieve. These were wealthy individuals and their staff, seeking a retreat from the masses of society. Thus far, they have not been unduly disturbed in their new home.

Sturgeon's Law DAC1451-9

Although obviously large and lacking in surface water, Sturgeon's Law does not, at first approach, seem unduly hostile. Indeed, most of the land surface is covered in greenery, suggesting a habitable world. To the crew of the colony ship *Infinité*, years out of Amondiage, first appearances seemed very promising.

There was little time for a more detailed study. The vessel had been suffering from a range of serious failures during the last months of deceleration, and as it entered orbit the drives began

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Sturgeon's Law	0104		DAC1451-9	FI Ni		Na	G
Quichotte	0109	M	E576667-6	Ag Ga Ni		Na	G
Neubayern	0202	M	A7889C9-C	Ga Hi Ht		Na	
Schlesien Belt	0303	M	C000367-B	As Lo		Na	G
New Home	0305	M	A565857-D	Ga Ht		Na	G
Colchis	0406	M	B676898-9	Ga		Na	G
St. Genevieve	0503	M	C560100-A	De Lo		Na	G
Acadie	0605		C868563-9	Ag Ga Ni		Na	
Sansterre	0702	M	A87A943-C	Hi Ht In		Na	G
Achille	0704		E301335-9	Ic Lo		Na	
Amondiage	0705	M	A5629A9-C	Hi Ht		Na	G
St. Denis	0803	M	D735764-7			Na	G





to give out. *Infinité* was a constructed-hull ship, designed to land directly onto a planetary surface rather than shuttling personnel and equipment down to the surface.

This presented the crew with a stark choice – enter atmosphere immediately or die a slow death in orbit. There might be enough power for a controlled landing, but there was no way *Infinité* would ever return to orbit or accelerate to interstellar speeds. The planet below seemed welcoming enough, and there was no chance of going elsewhere. So the descent began.

It was intended to land in a plateau that seemed relatively free of vegetation, but as the descent continued the pilots could barely keep their ship under control. Coming in too fast and unable to slow down, the captain made a decision that killed him and his bridge crew, but ensured that at least some of the colonists survived. Using the last of her thrust, *Infinité* slowed as much as possible and turned towards Sturgeon's Law's only sea. She hit the surface hard enough to smash the control areas and kill her bridge crew, but the hull remained together as she sank in shallow water.

Infinité finished up more or less level, about 20m below the surface of the sea, in an area of shallows surrounded by small islands. Her powerplants and life support systems still functioned, some of her engineers were alive, and most important of all – though at the time the survivors did not know this – she was not on land.

Had *Infinité* come down on land, even in a perfect landing, there would have been no survivors of the colony mission. The greenery seen from orbit was indeed plant life, but it was hostile to virtually all life. The commonest plant on Sturgeon's Law was (and still is) a moss-like growth capable of rapidly digesting animal protoplasm and even metal.

Stuck underwater, the crew decided to wake the colonists slowly and in batches. Many had not survived, or were so badly hurt in the crash that the only option was to turn off their low berths without activating the waking cycle. The survivors set about ensuring their long-term survival, repairing sections of the ship weakened by the crash and slowly converting their starship into an underwater city.

It was some months before a scouting party was able to get outside and to the surface. There, they discovered that they had come down in the only place that humans could survive. With care, it was possible to explore nearby islands and even the mainland, but contact with the moss was a deadly threat. Even the atmosphere turned out to be hostile. A normally breathable gas mix carried spores of the corrosive moss, which slowly attacked flesh and equipment. The few environment suits the colonists had soon became non-functional, and the colonists withdrew into their vessel to consider their options.

There was no prospect of rescue; even if another ship was sent to Sturgeon's Law it would not arrive for years. So the colonists were in it for the long haul, with only whatever they could find aboard the ship. Fortunately, that was a lot of resources. The mission was well supplied and although some of the gear was not remotely useful in the present situation, the population had been vastly reduced by the crash. So long as the ship remained watertight and the powerplant held up, there was hope.

The water covering the ship kept out the atmosphere and the deadly moss spores, so it was obvious that the colonists' future lay underwater. The ship's workshops were used to build crude submersibles which ventured out in search of resources. Underwater construction robots were built out of machinery intended for use on land. Not everything the colonists tried was a success, but slowly the battle for survival became an attempt to build a place to live.

It was not until after the propagation of Jump drive through the Islands cluster that Sturgeon's Law received offworld visitors. They found an underwater settlement housing about 30,000 people, supported by seabed farming and some minor industry. Perhaps more surprisingly, they also found a beacon in orbit warning of the general hostility of the world, and offering guidance to an island cleared of vegetation, for use as a landing field.

Providing they do not stay more than a few days, it is safe enough for vessels to land on the island. An oft-repaired bunker entrance leads via decontamination facilities to an underwater submarine dock and finally to the settlement. The locals do not receive a lot of visitors, for obvious reasons, but they are friendly enough to those who make the journey. They are strangely reverent of anyone who can claim to be part of a starship's bridge crew and will lionise anyone wearing pilot's insignia.

This reverence for the crew who brought *Infinité* down at the cost of their own lives, and the men and women who found a way to survive on such a harsh world, extends to the governmental system. Modern Sturgeon's Law has a ruling caste derived from the underwater engineering profession. This group elects a president, who is referred to as the Captain, and a vice-president who takes the title of Chief Engineer.

Society is liberal and surprisingly contented, with emigration low even among those who have the chance. Although tech level 9 items are available, resources are scarce, so there is little in the way of consumer goods to be had. The population do not own personal comms, but have never seen the need. They are never more than a few steps from a wall communicator, and in any case if they want to talk to someone, a few minutes' walk down the corridor will allow a face to face meeting.

Likewise, most tools and electronic equipment are communal property, held in workshops or common areas for use by anyone



who needs them. Most citizens possess at least a basic set of technical skills and can assist with routine maintenance. The ability to mobilise the whole population for big jobs has saved lives on many occasions and the citizenry are deeply suspicious of anyone who cannot use a soldering iron or spanner with at least basic competence.

Achille E301335-9

A small world with no atmosphere, Achille is one of the least habitable mainworlds in the Islands cluster. Not surprisingly, it was passed over for colonisation for many years. Eventually however, a group of idealists from Sansterre decided that they would seek a new home, and set out aboard one of the earliest Jump-capable ships. After some difficulties they reached Achille and set up a small colony.

There is just one settlement on Achille, a town of some 2,000 people located in a crater close to the world's north pole. Achille has small ice caps for all it cannot retain an atmosphere, and water is obtained from the ice. The settlement is more or less self-sufficient, using starship-style hydroponics and recycling equipment to support its people.

In the century or so since Achille was settled, the idealism of the first colonists has worn off somewhat, though society remains committed to the basic precepts of the founders. These were based on a somewhat altered form of traditional French nobility. Thus the rulers are heads of pseudo-noble households, with retainers and commoners coming lower in the social order.

Each noble house bases its claim to high status on one of three functions. The 'nobility of the sword' are warriors, though in a small society like Achille this translates to a law enforcement and security role. 'Nobility of the Cloth' are religious leaders, while 'Nobility of the Ancient Regime' hold their position by dint of property ownership and political power.

These families almost certainly cannot trace their roots back to Old Earth's traditional noble houses, but have simply adopted some of the trappings of the ancient system. Theirs is a technological society of course, so while the Nobility of the Sword do train with duelling swords, they enforce the law with body armour and automatic weapons.

Achille receives very few visitors, which suits the locals. Most vessels plying between Amondiage and Sansterre go via St Denis, not least because the port at Achille is so basic. Indeed, it is little more than a flat area of bedrock. Fuel must be obtained by cracking ice, but doing so close to the settlement (and the port) is forbidden. Thus even the basic evolutions of starship operation are problematical at this world.

Visitors who do persevere and enter the sealed town find that they are neither welcome nor otherwise. The locals have little interest in offworld contact and make no effort to either welcome visitors nor to make money off them. It is possible to find somewhere to stay and to buy needed goods, but prices are high and it is obvious that the locals find the whole business inconvenient.

Those that can claim a noble connection, either to the invented-nobility of Achille or the Imperial nobility (which the Achillians have heard of) might be treated differently. So might a perceived kindred spirit. Thus a senior member of the same faith might find hospitality with the nobility of the cloth; a decorated soldier would be able to claim guest rights with the self-styled warriors, and a well-off trader or respected diplomat would be well received by the political nobility.

Achille has virtually no industry and little economic worth, so might be entirely passed over by a general war in the Islands. It is of no strategic value to any faction and does not even have gas giants for refuelling. It is possible that the utopians picked an ideal spot to ride out future troubles, continuing to enjoy their peculiar political system while greater powers smash one another into oblivion.

Colchis B676898-9

Colchis is something of an oddity in the Islands. It might be considered to be a second-tier power, although it cannot build starships of its own. Colchis itself is an extremely habitable world with a high population and a solid technological base, making it in many ways both a potential prize and a battleground for the other powers.

As if this were not enough, the Colchis system contains several other populations and installations that might be of interest to an invader. The Colchis system is something of a microcosmos, within which there is a thriving interplanetary community linked (mostly) by sublight vessels.

The system is named for the mainworld on star charts, but its central star is called Colchis Prime. Colchis Prime is a type F7V, a yellow-white dwarf. This is a fairly common star type, part of the 'main sequence' of stellar classification and somewhat hotter than Sol, Terra's sun. Colchis Prime is orbited by a 'far companion' star, known as Colchis Secondary.

Colchis Secondary (ColSec to local astronavigators) is a type M5 red dwarf star, similar to Proxima Centauri. Red dwarf stars are extremely common, and binary systems of this sort are not unusual. What makes the Colchis system special is that both stars have a planetary system. The ColSec system contains far less bodies than the main Colchis system, but it does have a borderline habitable world.



THE COLCHIS PRIME SYSTEM

Often referred to simply as 'the Colchis system', Colchis Prime contains seven rocky planets, a smallish gas giant and a planetoid belt in addition to the star itself. The innermost two planets are too close to the star to be much use, but the remainder of the system offers a number of possibilities.

Aetes is the innermost planet. Little more than a scorched rock, it is too close to the star even for a research station.

Medea is next out. A small, tidally-locked ball of rock following a somewhat eccentric orbit, it has little to offer. During the periods where Medea is furthest from Colchis Prime, it is sometimes visited by scientific parties who carry out experiments or set up automated laboratories which transmit their findings until they are destroyed as the planet makes its close pass to the star.

Samelegro is another small, tidally locked planet. Too close to the star to have an atmosphere, it is uninhabitable on the 'bright' side, which always faces Colchis Prime. The 'dark' side always faces away, and is exposed to the cold of space. Between the two there is a region of constant twilight, where the world is most habitable. Here, a few thousand people dwell in small communities.

Most of the settlements of Samelegro are mining communities, each located atop a deposit of minerals. Several stripped-out carcasses of settlements also exist, where a region has been played out and the population have moved on. Each settlement has its own landing area – the term 'spaceport' is a little grand – for ore and supply ships, but the main port is at Samelegro Station, a town of about two thousand people that serves as an administrative capital and base for prospecting missions.

Samelegro Station receives few visitors other than scientists, prospectors and the families of miners, but occasionally a trade ship will come through with a cargo of necessities and luxury goods.

Colchis is the mainworld of the system and is detailed below.

Imereti is a 'rockball' world with only a trace atmosphere. It nevertheless supports a population of several million people, dwelling in large city-colonies. The United Colonies of Imereti, as the world-state is known, is run by a complex pseudo-democratic system whereby the population vote on all manner of issues but wield no actual power. Instead the results of each poll are used as an indicator of public opinion by a bureaucratic government that makes its decisions without direct popular input. As a general rule, the mass vote is sufficient to influence governmental decisions somewhat but rarely gets the populace exactly what they want.

The United Colonies maintains a central spaceport equivalent to a small Class B Starport. A small fleet of sublight trading vessels operates out of this port, and there are a few orbital defence craft. However, although Imereti is theoretically independent from Colchis, it is bound by treaty to leave foreign affairs and large-scale defence to the government of Colchis.

Sochi is small and unimpressive as gas giants go, but is still big enough to have a modest ring system and a handful of moons. Most are little more than overgrown planetoids but two, imaginatively named Sochi One and Two, are significant enough to be inhabited. Sochi One is a gas-skimming base, from which automated shuttles skim petrochemical-rich gases from the upper atmosphere of Sochi. These are processed on site and shipped to the mainworld for industrial use.

Sochi Two is the largest of Sochi's moons and is theoretically independent. Settled from the United Colonies of Imereti, the one community on Sochi Two is known as Sochi City. Its population numbers around 35,000, of whom many arrived from elsewhere. Standards of living are fairly low, and crime is rife. However, Sochi City offers a haven to people that cannot find a place elsewhere, and as such receives a steady trickle of immigrants.

There is some industry, but most of its output is used up in subsistence or traded for necessary items to keep the machinery and hydroponic gardens running. The best way to get rich in Sochi City is to find a way to part newcomers or visitors from their possessions. Overpriced liquor, gambling and dubious forms of entertainment are the most reputable, with straight-out robbery and extortion only slightly less common.

The **Colchis Belt** is a term that covers both the system's main planetoid belt but also the small jumbles of planetoids that orbit at Sochi's leading and trailing Trojan points (i.e. 60 degrees ahead or and behind the gas giant in its orbit). The latter are kept more or less stable by gravity, while the belt proper is patchy. Some areas are relatively dense (as planetoid belts go; it would still be highly unlikely for a vessel to collide with a rock, even flying blind through the densest part of the belt) but most of the belt is so sparse that were it not marked on the charts it could be mistaken for an area of open space.

A number of small mining installations exist within the belt. Most are owned by commercial firms out of Colchis or the United Colonies, but some are independent. Colchis has had a 'belter' community almost since the system was settled. This was perhaps inevitable; the colonists had lived aboard a space vessel constructed from a hollowed-out asteroid for many years. Some chose not to descend to an unfamiliar planetary environment but instead set about creating new homes for themselves in space.



Today, the number of belters is not known. Colchis claims sovereignty over the belt and occasionally attempts to impose greater order on the belters, or to conduct a census. This usually flounders in the face of passive resistance or utter indifference from the belters, or because they have a tendency to move around between planetoids and settlements, and are notoriously hard to keep track of.

Guria is an unusually large rocky planet located in the outer system. It has a high surface gravity and is not suitable for human habitation. Its moon, Guria One, is the site of a small scientific outpost investigating the possibility of harvesting frozen gases or perhaps mining minerals from Guria's crust using robotic equipment.

Humans can work on Guria for quite extended periods without coming to harm, but the high gravity is tiring and can lead to accidents. If a robot-assisted mining system could be perfected, or if minerals of sufficient value to outweigh the risks were found, then the world might be opened up to exploitation in a short time. For now, Guria and its moon remain places that only supply ships go.

Atchara is the outermost planet in the Colchis Prime system. It is a rockball with no atmosphere. Such gases as exist are frozen to the rocky surface. Despite this, Atchara is home to a population of several thousand people. These were optimistic settlers who thought that an outsystem rockball offered a good compromise between the life they knew aboard the colony ships and a planetary settlement.

Atchara's only city is carved into the rock of the crust in much the same manner as a planetoid-hulled starship. Society is austere and almost obsessive about recycling and conservation, but for all that the Atcharans have made a reasonable life for themselves. Social activities that require little in the way of resources, such as singing, poetry and drama, are popular pursuits. Outsiders are sometimes astounded by the amount of joyful laughter emanating from the drab, austere homes of the populace.

Atchara, perhaps unsurprisingly, operates a number of salvage vessels. These usually offer assistance and rescue to shipping within the system, but illegal salvage operations have been recorded. Atcharans have lost their lives on several occasions, trying to 'salvage' (the owners would say 'loot' or 'steal') remote mining or scientific equipment. Any abandoned installation will be stripped down to the foundations as soon as the Atcharans find out about it.

Atchara operates a couple of Jump-capable salvage ships. This is in defiance of rules imposed from Colchis about ownership of Jump-capable vessels, but so far nothing has been done about it. These vessels generally use their drives to get about the system quickly, but occasionally they will voyage to another

system to seek salvage – or unattended objects they can steal, depending on your viewpoint.

THE COLCHIS SECONDARY SYSTEM

The ColSec system contains only one rocky planet plus a gas giant and a scattering of planetoids. The star is a fairly dim red dwarf orbiting far enough out from Colchis Prime that it exerts relatively little effect on the main system either with gravity or heat.

Svaneti is the only rock planet orbiting ColSec, just close enough to be a borderline-habitable world. Svaneti has a breathable atmosphere and a fair amount of surface water, though this is largely frozen. It is possible that Svaneti was at one time warmer than it is now, since the world has a fairly advanced ecosystem.

The half-frozen oceans are home to a great variety of fishes and other sea-dwelling creatures and land vegetation, though sparse, is sufficient to support a number of species. Some of these creatures are fairly large, up to the size of a Terran dog.

The population of Svaneti numbers about a million, mainly dwelling around the more habitable equatorial regions. Settlements are fairly large, and well supported by a mature TL 9 industrial base. This can do little more than support the present population however; there is no surplus for grand projects or the construction of space vessels.

Svaneti's towns are linked by an efficient rail system, which runs through tunnels as much as it does aboveground. It still requires frequent maintenance to prevent cold-induced failures however. The world's main industrial activities are fishing and seabed farming, which supply the populace with most of their diet as well as a surplus to be traded offworld.

Each town has a governor, who is elected from an eligible group for a 10-year term of office. Eligibility requires certain standards of education and time served in a relevant post which might be technical, social or bureaucratic. The town governors send a representative to a central body which grandly calls itself the 'world parliament'. This body votes on important matters and passes its decisions on either to the affected town governors or its own small executive branch. Thus the world has a sort of representative democracy, though in practice most towns are autonomous in the majority of matters.

Svaneti maintains a spaceport equivalent to a Class C starport, which is used mainly by sublight freighters out of Colchis. The time taken to transit between the Secondary and primary systems is considerable for non-Jump ships, but to the Islanders such a voyage is a mere stroll down the street compared to the vast distances travelled by the first colonists and the secondary missions that settled the Colchis system.



Racha is a small gas giant orbited by a collection of small planetoids its gravity has captured over the millennia. None of these moons is large enough to support a colony, but some are big enough to be worth mining. So thought the crew of the asteroid-hulled sublight colony ship ColSec Mariner when they arrived several centuries ago. ColSec Mariner was placed in a parking orbit around the gas giant, and gradually changed its name to Mariner Colony. From this artificial moon, the colonists began to exploit the mineral deposits of the secondary system's scattered planetoids, obtaining hydrocarbons and petrochemicals from Racha's atmosphere.

Mariner Colony did well, reaching a population of about 100,000 at its peak. This has declined somewhat but the colony remains entirely viable. Although there are no moons suitable for habitation orbiting Racha, the scattered planetoids of the secondary system include a number that could be, and indeed have been, settled. Thus Mariner Colony has fathered a brood of small belter settlements. These are self-governing, using the same system of semi-hereditary officers as the main colony.

Mariner's engines remain functional, and are occasionally used to change orbit or to visit a planetoid chosen for seeding with a colony. There is even some talk of transferring most of the population to the planetoid colonies and loading up with minerals for a trading voyage back to the main system. This is doable in terms of technology and practicalities, but it would cause considerable disruption to the populace whilst probably not being economically viable.

Thus for the time being Mariner Colony remains a mobile planetoid habitat which is usually a temporary moon of the gas giant Racha. The planetoid population (including Mariner) trade with Svaneti. This mainly takes the form of raw materials for food, but skills and experience are often traded, and personnel will sometimes marry into another society. Relations are friendly, though there is nothing even resembling a formal government-to-government embassy.

COLCHIS

Colchis is the mainworld of the Colchis system, and in theory at least holds sovereignty over the entire star system. Some regions, such as the United Colonies of Imereti, are independent to a large degree but only at the sufferance of Colchis itself. They do not possess the military capability to prevent a blockage or takeover. However, this does not suit the interests of Colchis, which finds it more effective to allow distant settlements to govern themselves so long as they remain within the bounds of acceptable behaviour.

Colchis itself is a mid-sized world with a surface gravity a little lower than that of Terra. This is entirely within the comfortable range for humans. The atmosphere has a slightly unusual gas

mix which causes the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service to label it as 'standard, tainted' and recommend a filter mask. In practice, acclimatisation is possible and can be carried out over the course of a week with considerable discomfort or a couple of months without really noticing.

The planetary surface is about 62% covered in water, which is fairly shallow in most regions. Erosive forces are less prevalent than on Earth, so Colchis boasts some impressive, steep-sided mountain ranges. There is little evidence of extensive glaciation at any time in the world's past, so glacial landscapes are found only in a handful of mountainous regions.

Much of the land surface is composed of rocky plains, semi-desert and scrubby forest, none of which is conducive to extensive agriculture. However, the coastal regions are more habitable. As a result, habitation patterns tend to follow major watercourses, and of course the coastal plains are good sites for cities. This gave rise to a reliance on water transport in the early history of the colony, and this has continued to the present day.

Colchis has a unified world government which is descended from the original colonial apparatus set up when the world was settled. Towns, cities and important functions have appointed officers to oversee them, and these officers report to regional and finally planetary governors.

Functions that require a governor include the local transportation net, power generation for a region, a major agricultural project and so forth. As the centuries passed, the number of governors and officers, and the layers of authority required to accommodate them, has gradually grown until Colchis has all but stagnated under a mountain of red tape.

It was not always so. Colchis was colonised very early in the second wave, as the settlers at New Home sought additional star systems to colonise. From Colchis, additional missions were sent throughout the star system and even to a distant world that became New Colchis. The latter developed into a major power in the region, while Colchis itself slipped into obscurity.

This may have resulted from the migration of the best and brightest – or at least the most driven – offworld to set up new colonies. This theory suggests that those left behind on Colchis were the laziest, complacent and generally mediocre of the settlers, and as such it is not popular on Colchis itself.

Whatever the cause, Colchis never attained the status that other colonies achieved. Some had environmental difficulties to contend with, such as Serendip Belt or Sansterre, yet managed to emerge as first-rate powers within the Islands. Colchis was a welcoming, habitable world with the resources, effectively, of two star systems to hand, and yet never quite attained the status one might have expected.



Colchis today is home to some seven hundred million inhabitants, who enjoy a fairly uniform tech level of 9. Standards of living are good, and there are well-defined career paths for anyone seeking advancement through conventional means. Here, the image of Colchis as a world-nation of mediocrities is challenged; the upper echelons of society are filled with individuals who clawed their way to success through a combination of talent and hard work.

Colchis lies on one of the main trade routes of the Old Islands, and as such is a major trade port. Vessels from New Home and Amondia are commonest, but ships from almost anywhere in the Islands – plus occasional Imperial vessels – can be encountered in port. Indeed, Colchis Starport is one of the most cosmopolitan places in the Islands, and most powers maintain trade missions there. Not coincidentally, it is also a hotbed of politics and espionage.

Various powers would like to control Colchis, or at least its starport, and all manner of political and economic influence is being brought to bear on the government. Thus far Colchis has remained neutral and frequently offers to host conferences or mediate in disputes. Its status as the only second-rate power in the Islands works in its favour to some extent – Colchis has sufficient status to be taken seriously but is not a threat to any major power.

Colchis does maintain a trade fleet of its own. This is made up of ships capable of consecutive Jump-1s, which is the industry-standard for shipping in the Islands. Colchis ships can thus compete on an equal footing with those of other powers in the mainstream shipping marketplace, but the world's lower than average tech level makes its goods less attractive to first-rank powers. Colchis-made items do find a ready market on lower-tech worlds, but this does not bring in as much revenue as trade with the big players.

There are also a significant number of commercial ships serving the in-system trade lanes. Most are non Jump-capable and undertake long voyages around the system, though a handful of Jump-1 craft are used for VIP passenger transport and urgent small-cargo runs.

Colchis' navy is almost entirely non-Jump capable and is dedicated to the defence of the home system. Although Colchis

claims sovereignty over the entire Colchis Prime/Secondary system, warships are mainly kept close to the homeworld. It is likely that everything but Colchis itself would be abandoned in the event of invasion. Even then, it is not likely that the TL9 warships of Colchis could prevent an invasion by one of the more advanced major powers. What they could do is to make the price tag very high, and this seems to be an effective deterrent.

As the possibility of war in the Islands increases, Colchis seeks to remain independent by a policy of armed neutrality on one hand, and playing the big powers off against one another on the other. This is risky but there seems to be no other way. The best policy seems to be to see who is in a dominant position and then ally with them, but until matters become clearer Colchis is forced to tread a thin and occasionally convoluted line.

LIMON SUBSECTOR

Limon subsector contains seven star systems, all of which are within the Third Imperium and lie 'beneath the claw'. Thus although Limon subsector is located on the very edge of the Great Rift it is in tune with the mainstream Imperial territories and culturally well integrated.

Facing little in the way of external threats, Limon subsector has only a token Navy presence. This is based out of Rampart and deals mainly with customs and internal security operations. Vessels do sometimes assist with inspections of ships coming in from or via the Islands, but the volume of traffic is sufficiently low that this is not a major drain on resources.

Eskandor C551499-9

Eskandor is in many ways a typical Rift-fringe system, with a lowish population and fairly basic starport. The port just barely qualifies as a Class C installation, with minimal ground facilities including a control building, storage areas, a small workshop, underground fuel tanks and a support complex that contains little more than a couple of small hostel/hotels and some shops. These are used more by the local population than offworlders, as the port backs on to the only major settlement on the entire planet.

The port's orbital component is little more than a mooring station for ships that cannot enter atmosphere, a small living

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Cyclone	0510		B599347-9	Lo		Im	G
Eskandor	0608		C551499-9	Ni Po		Im	G
Sakaliin	0609		B857222-B	Ga Lo		Im	G
Rampart	0610	N	A434200-F	Ht Lo		Im	G
Jokelyn	0708		B201469-B	IC Ni		Im	G
Hoilhapuli	0809		B76565A-8	Ag Ga Ni		Im	G
Bonn	0810		A8C578C-B	FI		Im	G

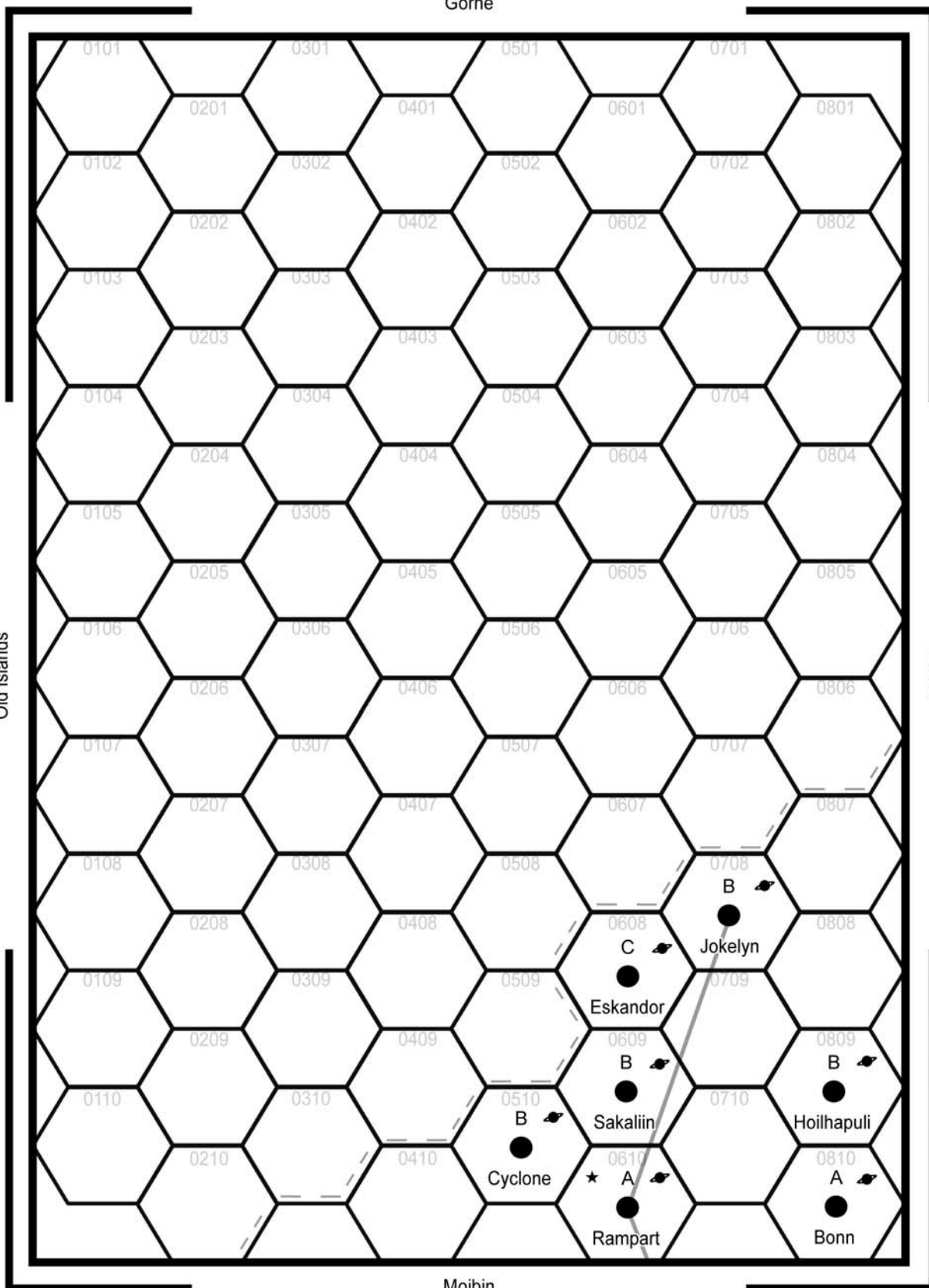
Gorne

Old Islands

Balech

Moibin

LIMON





temperatures are, on average, on the low side of tolerable, with nights in particular being very cold due to the thin atmosphere.

A world like Eskandor might still be heavily settled if there were good reasons for living there. Even airless rockballs sometimes have a population in the billions, but there has to be an incentive for large-scale colonisation or later immigration. Eskandor does not really have anything to make it attractive. There is no vast mineral wealth, and the world is most definitely never going to be on a major trade route.

Without the likelihood of prosperity to attract settlers, the only common reason for large numbers of inhabitants is natural population growth. This tends to happen on welcoming worlds, with an abundance of food crops and herds. Eskandor is not an easy world to farm, so the population always remained very small.

Backwater worlds of this sort are fairly common in Imperial space, and to some extent represent a drain on the Imperial economy. Local resources are sufficient to support the population, but little wealth is generated either through trade or industry. There is no luxury or unique item to make the world special; it is simply a place where a few people live.

The tax contribution of such minor worlds is negligible, and is outweighed by the cost of sending naval patrol ships through the system from time to time. However, this is a necessity, as is keeping such worlds within the Imperium. By doing so the Imperial authorities (to some extent) can prevent them from becoming a problem. Non-Imperial worlds might become a haven for criminals or pirates, or might forge links with foreign powers.

area for staff and berths for the world's two transfer shuttles. There is nowhere for visitors to stay or to handle cargo; all business has to be conducted groundside. This does mean that non-atmosphere-capable ships must send their cargo to the Downport using their own shuttles or pay for a transfer using those of the port.

This kind of set-up is not uncommon on backwater worlds. It makes commercial activity somewhat fiddly for visitors, which in turn discourages trade. However, traffic volumes along the edge of the Rift tend to be fairly low, and Eskandor's population is not large enough to make it a useful trade destination in its own right. Thus, streamlining the cargo handling process would not only cost credits that the locals do not have, it would also be more or less pointless.

Eskandor itself is a fairly marginal world, with a thin but breathable atmosphere. There is little surface water, and much of what there is remains frozen for most of the year. Surface

These things can happen anyway, but it is much simpler to deal with a developing problem if the world is an Imperial member than to intervene 'outside' the Imperial borders. Besides, it is not desirable to have non-Imperial systems scattered across the trade lanes where they might impose tariffs or otherwise interfere with Imperial trade and commerce. That is unlikely in the case of Eskandor, but the blanket policy applies everywhere.

The entire planetary population, some 20,000 people, dwell within a 200km radius of the starport, most of them in the main settlement or close to it. The rest of the planet is unused apart from very scattered meteorological monitoring stations and the occasional party of prospectors. At least, that is the official situation. A planet is a very big place, and it is entirely possible that other groups are present on Eskandor.

In the past, prospectors have found mineral veins that could not be exploited by local industry, so the world government



grated licenses to small mining companies to develop them, in return for a percentage of the proceeds. Such operations tend to take what they can get easily, using fairly basic equipment, then move on. However, it is possible that unlicensed mining operations might be present.

There are other possibilities too. An entire planet offers plenty of hiding places for a pirate or corsair band to use as a base, or for a group of illegal colonists to set up a home. Thus it is not unlikely that Eskandor has residents who are not included in the official world population figures, or even known to the government.

This is another reason for ensuring that minor worlds remain Imperial members. The planetary government is answerable to the Imperium and must obey the body of Imperial High Laws that apply everywhere. In theory, a large enough band of colonists could land on an empty world and claim it, becoming the planetary government. While this might not be a bad thing – many loyal worlds were settled this way in the past – it can cause unpredictable results, and the Imperium needs stability to thrive.

Thus, although Eskandor and worlds like it contribute little to the Imperium as a whole they are valued simply for the fact that an organised planetary government, which is willing to obey Imperial laws, is a more stable situation than an empty, unregulated planet. Such worlds also have to be patrolled and monitored by the navy, so there is no possible budget saving to be made from cutting them loose.

Thus the people of Eskandor live quietly in the interstellar equivalent of a small town on the prairie, far from anywhere. Events in the wider universe rarely trouble them, but there is no guarantee that there is not something unusual going on in the outback without their knowledge.

Bonn A8C578C-B

Bonn is primarily a trade port. Indeed, many spacefarers think of Bonn as an orbital port rather than a planet; few venture down to the hostile surface. The port itself is a large, advanced and highly capable installation which more than justifies its 'A' rating. It is owned and operated by the world government, and represents the main source of income for the world.

Around 12,000 people live and work at the orbital component of the port. Of these, most are recruited offworld although the management staff and many long-service personnel are locals. Staff dwelling at the port are not counted in the planetary census, unless they are also citizens of and resident on-planet for at least some of the time.

After passing through customs checks, visitors emerge onto the port concourse, with its vast array of retail outlets, restaurants

and entertainment establishments. The port is busy and lively, decorated in a style that many find somewhat in-your-face but is certainly vibrant. Helpful and polite staff are everywhere, and smartly uniformed security are rarely far away. The deliberate intent is to create a place where visitors feel welcome, safe and relaxed. This makes them more likely to spend money, which is what the port is all about.

In addition to private purses, Bonn Orbital caters to the interstellar trading community. There are several brokerages and Megacorporate offices, with a lively freighting and cargo business. Free Traders and similar single-ship operators are just as common as members of organised shipping lines; there is usually a fair amount of small cargo to be picked up by smaller operators.

Bonn Orbital is a major mail nexus, and so is home to a number of private mail ships and couriers. Some are on contract for a particular route; others take whatever is left over. As a result, Bonn is known as a good place to charter a starship. Specialist vessels such as laboratory and safari ships, survey vessels and starmerc escorts-for-hire are also much in evidence.

Bonn Orbital also has extensive starship maintenance, repair and construction yards. These are privately owned and cannot handle very large vessels, i.e. those over 5,000 tons. Instead they specialise in private construction, often to unusual one-off designs. Sometimes the original client runs out of money, which can lead to a partially built vessel becoming available at a discount. Completion may be to the original designs, but conversion on the ways is not uncommon.

The yards do not build military ships, though they will overhaul privately owned combat vessels such as escort corvettes operated by shipping lines or noble houses. About half of the yards' capacity is at any given time dedicated to building or maintaining vessels for local small to medium merchant lines; the rest is available to anyone with the money.

Bonn Downport is rather less impressive, and sees few visiting ships. It is primarily a groundside port for the planetary population, though it has a number of impressive features that are clearly never used. For example, to qualify for A Class status a port must be able to handle large starships such as bulk transports at both orbital and ground installations. So Bonn Downport has two landing areas capable of taking a 15,000 ton freighter, even though one will never land there.

The smaller pads are more often used, especially those serving the ground-to-orbit shuttle fleet. These pads are located underground, with the vessel taking off and landing via large doors. This allows the atmosphere in the docking bay to be purged and prevents excessive damage to the vessel.



Bonn's atmosphere is insidious, and weakly corrosive. Personnel venturing outside need hostile environment suits, so it makes sense to conduct maintenance and servicing of the shuttle fleet in environment-controlled bays. These lead into the rather modest Downport concourse and thence to the planet's only city.

Apart from specialist outposts, Bonn's entire 60 million population live and work in a single underground city. This grew up as a result of the wealth to be had on Bonn. Initially this was industrial; Bonn is a very mineral-rich world and heavy investment resulted in an economic powerhouse that exported its goods throughout the rest of the subsector and beyond. The port was built initially to support this trade, but became a secondary source of wealth in a fairly short time.

Although major industries are all located in the city, a number of commercial outposts exist. These are mainly involved in resource extraction, which ranges from conventional mining to the extraction of rare compounds from the atmosphere and water. A number of small experimental stations conduct research into further uses of these compounds.

Within Bonn City, laws are strict and enforcement harsh. This is in some ways necessary, given the hostility of the planet in general. Failure to observe the correct procedures could allow toxic gases or substances into the city and cause widespread casualties. However, the same attitude applies to all regulations and laws, from littering to civil disputes.

The population are fairly well off despite their rigidly controlled lives, with a high standard of living and plenty of luxury items. However, the ordinary folk do not live anything like as well as the elite. Those holding high office in the trade, industry or governmental sectors are fabulously wealthy by anyone's standards, and guard their status carefully. There is a 'glass ceiling' that limits how high anyone not born among the elite can climb, though occasional exceptions do appear.

Bonn is very much a place that even people who pass through Bonn Orbital forget about, but nevertheless its leaders are highly influential in local affairs. The elite of Bonn are so wealthy that on occasion they literally bought a planet. Actually, the situation was more complex than this, but essentially the starport at Jokelyn went bust and was bailed out by funding from Bonn. The port was owned and operated by, and also virtually the only source of income for, the world government of Jokelyn. As a result, Bonn acquired a dominant stake in the affairs of another world.

The legality of this under Imperial High Law is somewhat vague, but the fact is that Jokelyn's extensive starport remained open and continued to serve the needs of interstellar trade. This was seen as beneficial and since Bonn interferes relatively little in day-to-day affairs on Jokelyn, the situation is accepted. Thus far the investment seems to have been a good one for everyone concerned; a modest additional revenue comes in to Bonn, while Jokelyn's government receives more than it was getting from the port during the period of decline.

ALONE SUBSECTOR

Alone subsector contains one star system. The mainworld is now named Garden by the inhabitants. It presumably once had a different name, but little is known of the original inhabitants.

When colonists began to arrive on Garden in 1079, they were seeking a habitable world far from outside interference, where they could live a peaceful existence as farmers and ply similar subsistence trades. They found evidence of a previous civilisation, which ended abruptly around 1000. Evidence pointed to a mass migration offworld, though where the original inhabitants went, or how, remains a total mystery. All that is known is that they were non-human and probably did not have access to the Jump drive.

The previous inhabitants may have left Garden to escape from an environmental disaster. The new colonists found the environment in a vulnerable and unstable condition. Pollution in the atmosphere was at the point of becoming disastrous, while Garden's star was contributing to the problem. A long-period variable star, it was entering a bright phase and causing temperature increases.

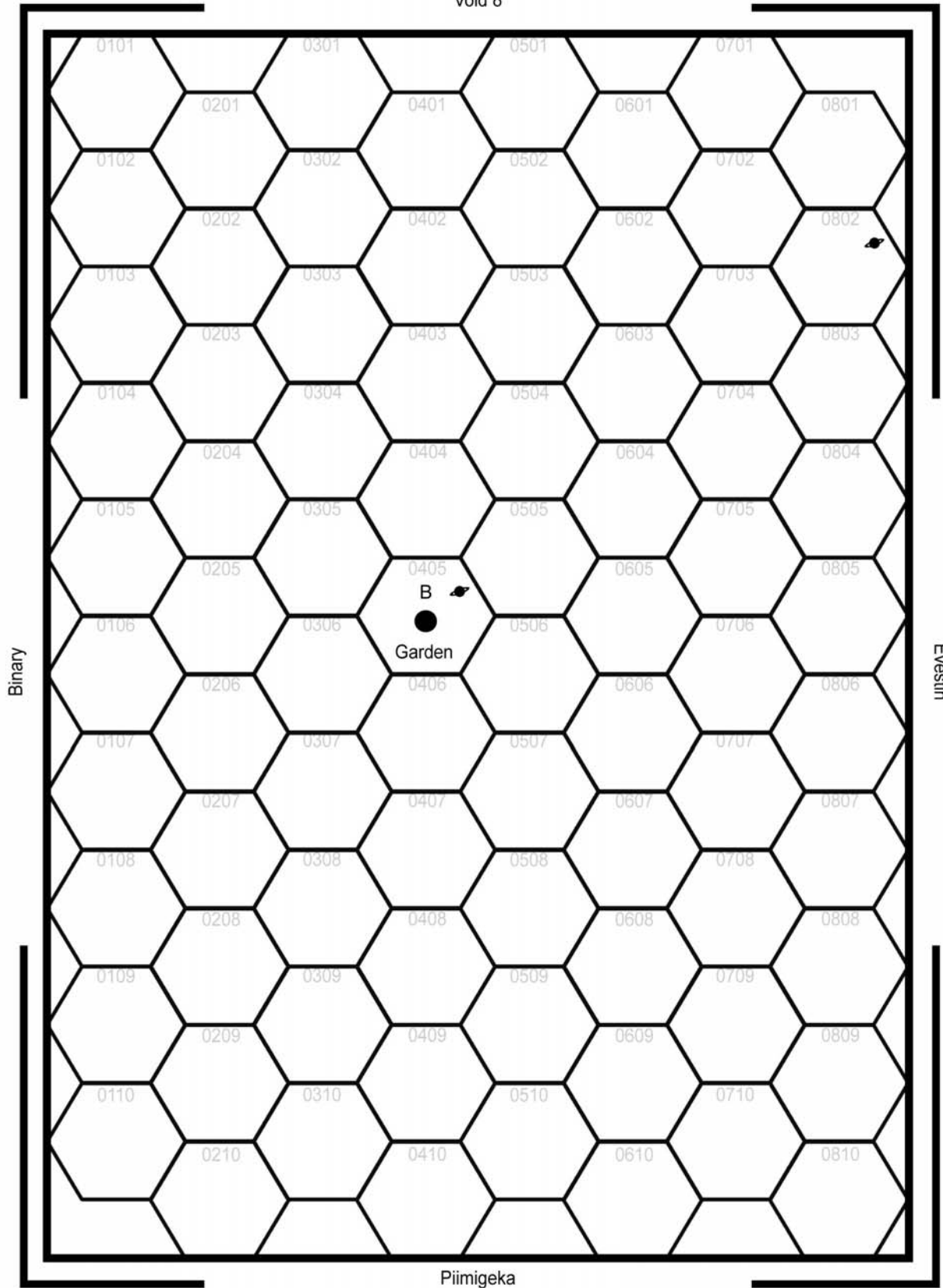
With assistance from the Imperial Ministry of Colonisation, the Gardeners, as the new inhabitants styled themselves, were able to stabilise the situation. Atmospheric terraforming and strict conservation measures have reduced the temperature somewhat and allowed the colonists to begin living the lifestyle they sought. Use of technology outside the starport is kept to a minimum, and environmental impact is carefully monitored.

That is not to say that the Gardeners are technophobes or barbarians, but most technology is used for environmental control, power generation or communications and with careful regard for the environment. Thus far, it seems to be working; Garden is not an idyllic paradise but it is entirely liveable.

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Garden	0405		B755578-A	Ag Ga Ni		Na	G



Void 8



ALONE



EVESTIN SUBSECTOR

Evestin subsector contains no star systems.

ARCRANT SUBSECTOR

Arccrant subsector contains six star systems, all of which are Imperial territory. These systems all have good starports and see a lot of trade ships coming through, though there is no trans-Rift traffic. The Imperial Navy maintains patrols from bases in other subsectors, while the Scout Base at Pit Stop is primarily concerned with supporting survey missions along the Rift fringe.

Arraste B59368B-6

Lying on the very fringe of the Great Rift, Arraste is an unpleasant world in several ways. The atmosphere is very dense, making breathing tiring for those not properly acclimatised. It is also heavily polluted with industrial waste, requiring a filter mask to avoid long-term health problems. As if this was not enough, Arraste has a somewhat eccentric orbit, resulting in significant climate changes over a 130-year cycle.

Socially, Arraste is also a fairly unpleasant place. The 4,000,000 or so inhabitants dwell in several large cities, surrounded by agricultural districts. The cities are overcrowded, polluted and heavily policed to keep the increasingly disaffected populace under control. The social elite enjoy a rather better lifestyle, and it is the chance of elevation into this group – or at least its lower echelons – that motivates a segment of the population to support the present regime.

There is a low-level insurgency ongoing in the cities, with rebel encampments beginning to appear in the outback. At present it is well within the capabilities of the police and military to maintain order, and the rebels are little more than a nuisance. However, there are indications that they have obtained better equipment recently. Their operations have also become more effective, suggesting that offworld advisors have been brought in.

As with many such worlds, Arraste has a large area of outback which is totally uninhabited and rarely even visited. Despite the atmospheric and climate conditions, it would not be very difficult

for a guerrilla force to hide in the countryside. However, there is no rural population to support such an insurgency, except very close to the cities. Thus the insurgency is confined to a fairly limited area.

The operation of the orbital port is not greatly affected by conditions on the ground. Built with investment from the Colonial Office, the port was intended to facilitate greater Rift-edge trade. In this it was only marginally successful, and the increased revenue did not justify the expense of building it, nor does it meet the running costs.

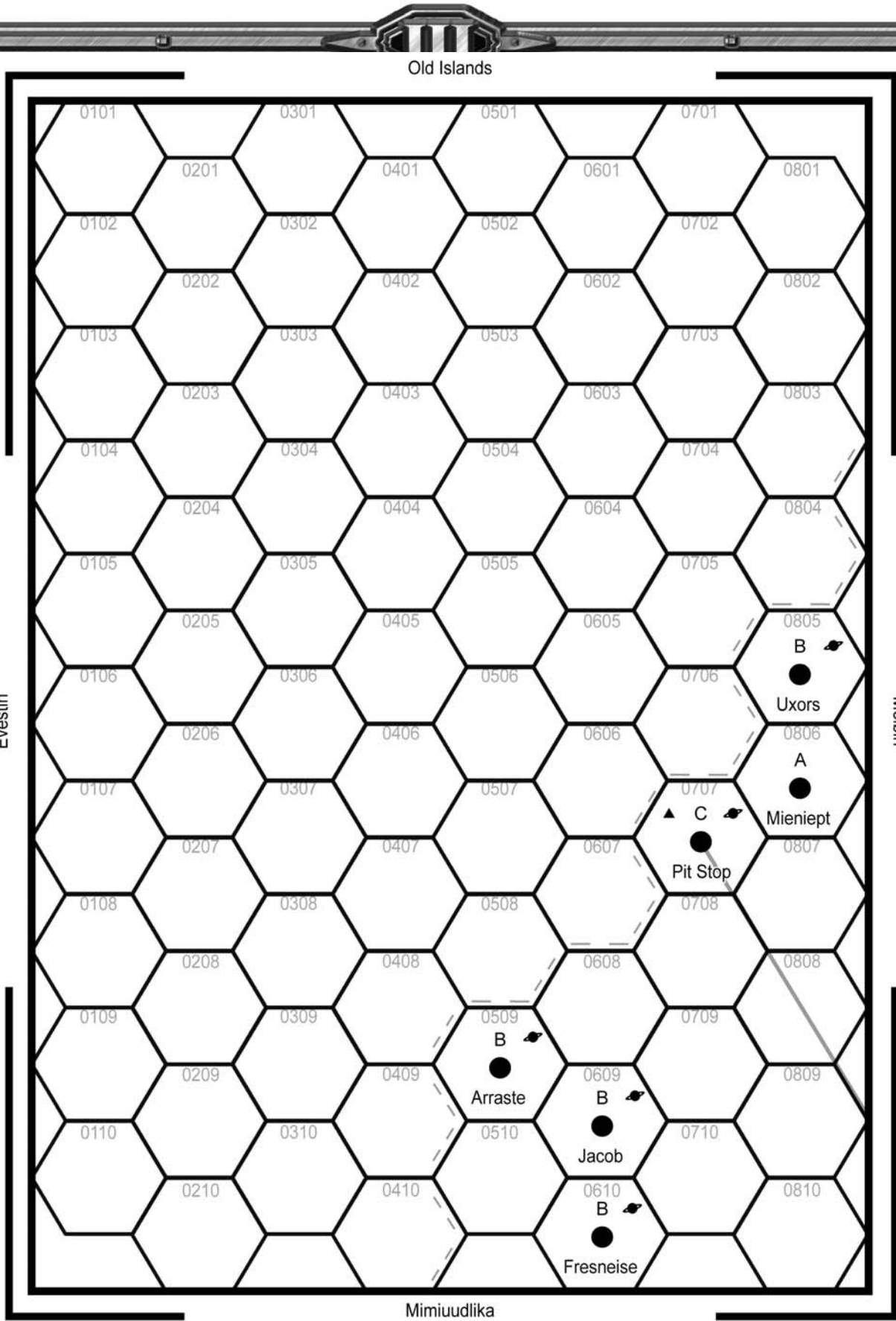
Although the port is large, it not in very good repair. Segments are disused and have been closed off. An illegal scavenger community has developed, slipping into these areas to remove items for sale. These are available on an ever-increasing black market, which the authorities have thus far failed to do much about. There are concerns that the port's vital systems might be harmed by the scavenging, and at times security patrols have been sent into the disused segments. Sometimes arrests are made, more often nothing is found, and very occasionally the security detachments become involved in gunfights with armed scavenger bands.

Meanwhile, the rest of the station continues to decline. This is obvious despite attempts to keep at least the main concourse presentable. A 'secure zone' exists around the main terminal, with the further reaches of the station becoming increasingly hazardous for visitors. Starships can still receive maintenance and repairs, but spares are in short supply and the work is often shoddy.

This situation is intolerable to major shipping operators, who have mostly re-routed their vessels through less seedy ports. Smaller operators have less choice in the matter, and there is a certain class of starship owner who prefers to operate out of a port whose owners are desperate for cash and where regulations are rarely enforced. This has contributed to the generally bad reputation of Arraste Highport, though so far the 'B' rating assigned years ago by the Scout Service has not been changed.

The Imperial Navy, with Marine support, has more than once conducted a sweep of Arraste Highport. A flurry of served legal

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Arraste	0509		B59368B-6	Ni		Im	G
Jacob	0609		B100400-E	Ht Ni		Im	G
Fresneise	0610		B728512-A	Ni		Im	G
Pit Stop	0707	S	B593326-A	Lo		Im	G
Uxors	0805		BA97377-9	Ga Lo		Im	G
Mieniept	0806		B794454-B	Ga Ni		Im	





notices, impounded starships and arrested gang members followed each time. This has perhaps prevented the port from becoming overtly lawless, serves to keep overt pirates from using it as a base, but it cannot do anything about the lack of funds.

The simple fact is that Arraste should never have had such a large or expensive installation. It cannot be supported by interstellar trade or by the planetside government, and became a money pit when this was attempted. A plan is in place to try to sell off segments of the station – literally bringing in salvage crews to cut away parts of the station and break them for scrap and salvage. This, it is hoped, will enable a small orbital station to be constructed from the remains, with enough salvage left over to sell and pay for the work.

The plan is a rather extreme one, but the only alternatives are to watch the decline go out of control or to hope for a grant of funding from the Imperial authorities, which amounts to the same thing. The main problem is that the salvage-and-rebuild operation will of course cost money, and it will require cutting up a station that is not yet paid off. That would require permission from the port's creditors, and this is unlikely to be granted unless they are paid off.

Since there is no money to reverse the decline, and more extreme measures are blocked for the same reason, it seems certain that the downward spiral will continue. Conditions on Arraste itself are becoming increasingly unpleasant, and it would appear that things are no better in orbit.

Pit Stop B593326-A

Pit Stop is one of those worlds that can be considered to be Imperial territory rather than being an Imperial member world. The vast majority of mainworlds are self-governing political entities that are also members of the Imperium. This is subtly different to being the sovereign territory of the Imperium in the way that a military base might be.

The Imperium claims various areas as its territory, notably Starports but also training and basing faculties leased from a mainworld. Many Imperial installations are located on bodies in a system that are not owned by a mainworld, such as laboratories in the remote outsystem. However, a few mainworlds are Imperial territory. The obvious example is the naval depots maintained in most sectors. There, an entire star system is under Naval jurisdiction and there is no distinction between Imperial and world-government territory since the two are the same thing.

Pit Stop is an otherwise empty world which was annexed by the Imperium for use as a Scout Service base. In its history the base has acted as a terminus and maintenance depot for express boats and courier ships, a holding area for surplus

Scout vessels, a training facility and a support base for missions along the Rift fringe and out into it. Today Pit Stop fulfils all of these missions as necessary.

Whimsically named by the Scout Service personnel first stationed there, Pit Stop is a medium-sized world with a dense, tainted atmosphere and a relatively area of seas and oceans. Despite this, Pit Stop is not really a dry world. The seas are small and fairly shallow, but not very far apart. Between them are regions of not-quite-dry land, swamps, marshes and the occasional rainforest. There are very dry areas, but a surprisingly large amount of the planetary surface is covered by these various forms of wetlands.

Pit Stop is a fairly warm world, making any venture out into the wetlands an unpleasant experience normally referred to as the 'Pit Stop Steam Bath'. This is not necessary for day-to-day life, but the Scout Service routinely sends personnel out on survival courses or to gain experience in operating in a difficult environment of this sort. Training is one of the functions of the Scout base, so new drafts of trainees get to experience the joys of slogging through steaming mud at various times of the year.





There is just one town on the surface of Pit Stop, surrounding the Downport and the Scout base itself. The population of this town is actually somewhat higher than the UWP indicates. This is because the Scout Service Survey Branch, which deals with census information of this sort, uses only the permanent population of the planet as a basis.

The permanent population of a world like this one is quite difficult to assess, since it does not include personnel assigned to bases or staffing starports. Thus Survey Branch pegs the planetary population as 6,000 residents. Even this figure varies from time to time, but overall it is a reasonable estimate of the number of people who would call the world home. To come up with this figure, Survey Branch counted personnel assigned to the base on long-term assignment plus any dependents they had. Any personnel who had gone into retirement here, plus non-Scout personnel who had come to the base to live, were also counted. The latter include a range of scientific experts, hired workers on long-term contracts, shopkeepers and the like.

In addition, there are typically around another 4,000 Scouts at Pit Stop. These include recruits in training, personnel undertaking refresher courses, and technical personnel assigned temporarily to the base to look after the vessels or the installation itself. Some of these personnel live at the Highport, but most are resident on the surface.

The planetary government is listed as a Participatory Democracy. This is a nod to the Scouts' traditionally loose command structure, whereby teams are formed and someone is put in charge for the duration of a mission, then dissolved again. There is no permanent rank in the Scout Service, and none in the government of Pit Stop. All residents have a say in decisions affecting their home, except where orders from the Scout Service are concerned. These (obviously) override the democratic discussion process where necessary.

Pit Stop has virtually no industry of its own. It is supplied with components and raw materials by freighter, and uses small workshops to fashion anything that might be needed if it cannot be drawn from stores. Were the installation cut off from external shipping, it could not support its population. The only source of income is the port itself, which functions as a normal starport.

Few ships come down to the surface, but the Highport sees a reasonable amount of shipping. The usual recreation, business and maintenance facilities are available to passing starfarers. The only real difference is the number of Scout Service uniforms on show. Most shops and bars are privately owned, but customs, bureaucracy, maintenance, security and similar functions are carried out by Scout Service personnel.

Most of the Scout Service craft based at Pit Stop are small vessels such as Survey Scouts and Scout/Couriers. Those that can

enter atmosphere are based on-planet, with the rest occupying berths in a secure area of the Highport that is not accessible to non-Scouts. A number of high-Jump 'scout cruisers' of varying sizes (starting at 800t and including 10,000t+ vessels) are also based out of Pit Stop, though few are permanently assigned. Instead they are rotated through as their mission requires.

A sizable support flotilla is also based out of Pit Stop. Crewed by Scouts, these vessels carry out unglamorous but important jobs such as picking up Xboats (Express Boats) at their arrival points. A mix of Xboat tenders, Xboats themselves, tankers and supply vessels are assigned, again temporarily as their mission requires to the base.

A number of high-capacity, high-Jump tankers and supply ships are maintained at Pit Stop and refer to it as their home port. These vessels are used to support operations in the Rift, including the Trans-Islands run. The base has extremely good drive calibration facilities, which is an absolute necessity when attempting to rendezvous with another vessel or a deep-space refuelling point in the utter emptiness of the Rift.

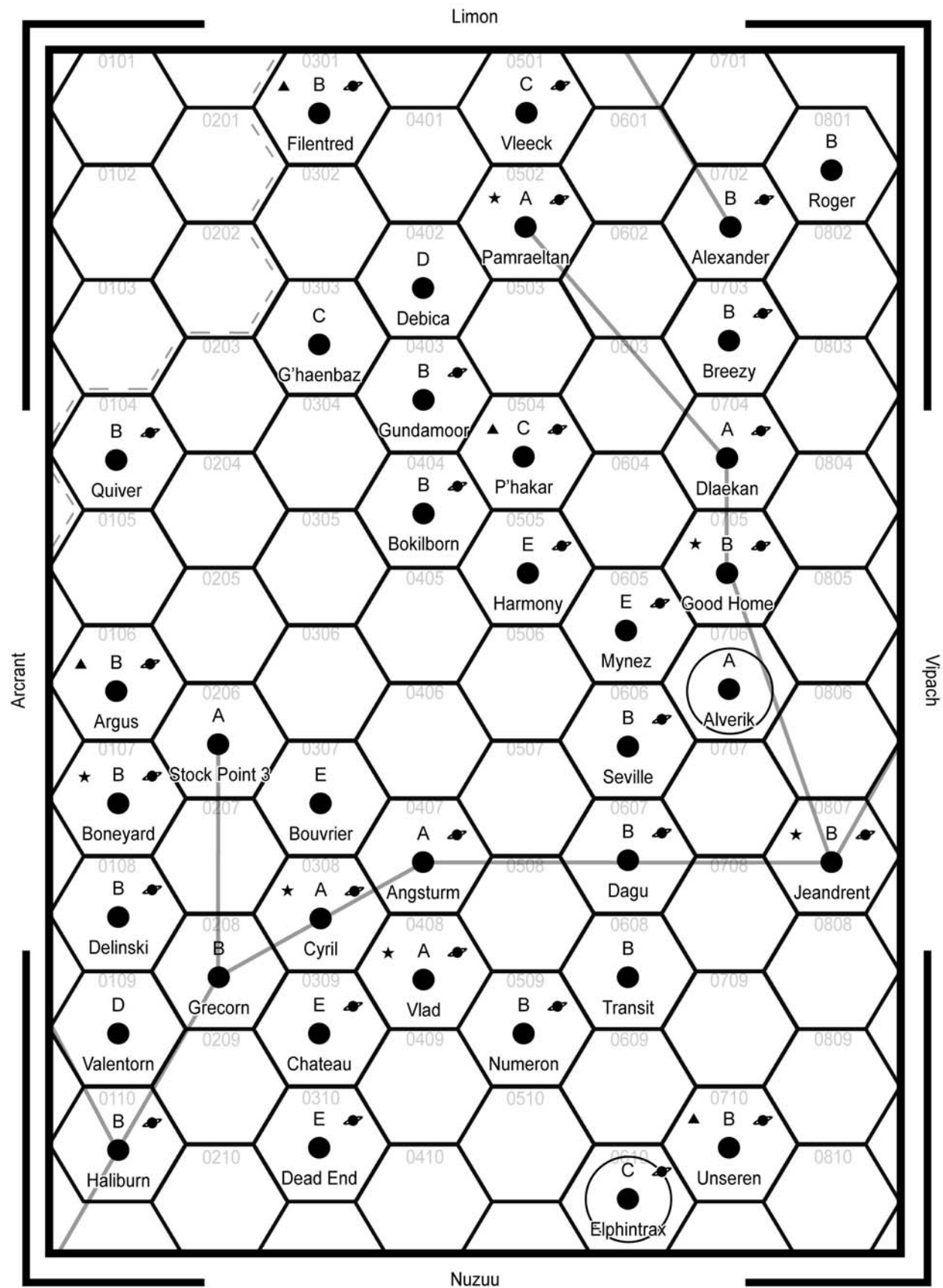
MOIBIN SUBSECTOR

Moibin subsector is in many ways an 'internal' subsector of the Imperium. All of its worlds are Imperial members, and have been (in most cases) for centuries. The Great Rift is at times referred to as 'the back fence' by Imperial citizens and starfarers, which says a lot about attitudes towards it.

In the mind of the average Imperial citizen, the Imperium just stops at the edge of the Rift and there is nothing much of consequence beyond it. It is certainly not seen as a frontier – these people feel that they live in the Imperial heartlands rather than some half-civilised colonial region. Those worlds lying close to the Trans-Rift routes have a more cosmopolitan view, but elsewhere the general feeling is that what is 'out there' is of little consequence compared to events within the Imperium.

The Imperial Navy seems to agree, at least to some extent. Rather than battleships and large cruisers, the emphasis is on smaller cruisers and destroyers; vessels more suited to keeping the peace and enforcing Imperial law than fighting off invaders.

Economically, trade with regions deeper into the Imperium is far more important than external commerce. Moibin subsector is at something of an economic disadvantage compared to subsectors surrounded on all sides by potential markets. Not only does this affect direct trade but it also reduces the revenue that can be earned from through-trade. Passenger and cargo volumes thus tend to be somewhat lower in the subsector's ports than in regions deeper in the Imperium.





Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Quiver	0104		B310405-D	Ht Ni		Im	G
Argus	0106	S	C755A96-8	Ga Hi		Im	G
Boneyard	0107	N	B420310-A	De Lo Po		Im	G
Delinski	0108		B55367A-8	Ni Po		Im	G
Valentorn	0109		D556512-4	Ag Ga Lt Ni		Im	
Haliburn	0110		B565777-7	Ag Ga		Im	G
Stock Point 3	0206		A436110-F	Ht Lo		Im	
Grecorn	0208		B79858C-B	Ag Ga Ni		Im	
Filentred	0301	S	B548534-8	Ag Ga Ni		Im	G
G'haenbaz	0303		C557558-A	Ag Ga Ni		Im	
Bouvrier	0307		E430668-8	De Na Ni Po		Im	
Cyril	0308	N	A7969B9-E	Ga Hi Ht In		Im	G
Chateau	0309		E450200-5	De Lo Lt Po		Im	G
Dead End	0310		E576000-0	Ba Ga Lt		Im	G
Debica	0402		D645688-6	Ag Ga Ni		Im	
Gundamoor	0403		B311637-C	Ht IC Na Ni		Im	G
Bokilborn	0404		B573552-C	Ht Ni		Im	G
Angsturm	0407		A545788-B	Ag Ga		Im	G
Vlad	0408	N	A554844-C	Ga Ht		Im	G
Vleeck	0501		C762475-6	Ni		Im	G
Pamraeltan	0502	N	A537651-E	Ht Ni		Im	G
P'hakar	0504	S	C420456-B	De Ni Po		Im	G
Harmony	0505		E6538AF-4	Lt Po		Im	G
Numeron	0509		B432769-9	Na Po		Im	G
Mynez	0605		E627989-8	Hi In		Im	G
Seville	0606		B657445-7	Ga Ni		Im	G
Dagu	0607		B100362-C	Ht Lo		Im	G
Transit	0608		B987000-0	Ba Ga Lt		Im	
Elphintrax	0610		C574476-7	Ga Ni	A	Im	G
Alexander	0702		B42369A-B	Na Ni Po		Im	G
Breezy	0703		B100544-C	Ht Ni		Im	G
Dlaekan	0704		A583657-D	Ht Ni		Im	G
Good Home	0705	N	B745789-9	Ag Ga		Im	G
Alverik	0706		A550698-A	De Ni Po	A	Im	
Unseren	0710	S	B552549-9	Ni Po		Im	G
Roger	0801		B424200-B	Lo		Im	
Jeandrent	0807	N	BA7A666-8	Ni		Im	G

The world of Dlaekan is home to the Tapazmal, a human minor race. It is an extremely hot world, with most settlements located high in the mountains where temperatures are more bearable. Dlaekan has a high level of tectonic activity. This at times causes population relocation to a region becoming unsafe either temporarily or more or less permanently.

Argus C755A96-A

Argus is a fairly typical habitable world, of medium size with a thin atmosphere and a reasonable amount of surface water. It can happily support a large population with its own resources, and unsurprisingly the population has grown accordingly.

Argus is home to about 38 billion people, most of whom dwell in huge self-contained cities with layers deep underground and high towers rising above. Most cities do not have a 'ground level' as such. The underground section tends to be built in layers, often in blocks which have areas of bedrock between them for stability or support. This trend is continued above ground, with vast blocky constructions rising tens of even hundreds of metres and linked by tubeways. From the tops of these structures (and sometimes between them) are high, slender towers which house government offices, major business groups and the social elite.



Thus the cities of Argus are essentially artificial caves, dug below ground and built above, within which are all the usual homes, shops, restaurants, businesses and industrial areas of a typical city. Some blocks have a specific function, such as heavy industry, but most are fairly self-contained with their own shopping areas, places of work and so forth.

Transport within a block tends to be pedestrian-oriented, with moving pathways and tram-like public vehicles on rails. Personal transport mainly takes the form of small electric cart-like vehicles; there is little need for more powerful vehicles as no part of a block is all that far from any other. Besides, the blocks are built in three dimensions making wheeled transport impractical when changing levels. Transit between blocks is normally via fast monorail trains, which are geared up to moving pedestrians around quickly and efficiently.

All citizens have a travel pass that allows free access to the trains and street transport in most areas, and subtly controls the movements of individuals by imposing a charge to enter some areas. This is justified as being necessary to pay for aspects of the transport system (usually 'essential maintenance' that never seems to be finished) in that area. Some areas are restricted and cannot be accessed using the normal civilian pass.

Of course, movements using the pass can be monitored by law enforcement agencies, and without one it is difficult to use the system. Starfarers can buy a short-duration pass for a few credits; it comes with a free leaflet describing how excellent the public transport system is and how lucky the citizenry are to be able to use it for free.

Vehicles for use outside the cities or capable of flying between them are heavily restricted and difficult to obtain even with vast amounts of cash. In truth there is little need, at least not for the ordinary citizen. Most cities are very much like one another, so there are few reasons to visit a different one. If someone does need to travel there is a highly efficient monorail system available to take him straight to his destination and home again. This, too, is available to the citizenry for a very small fee.

Control of movement is one of the tools used by the government of Argus to try to keep the populace in order. With so many people on the planet, most of them jammed into huge cities, population control is essential. Unfortunately, the government is losing control.

There has always been disaffection on Argus of course, but in recent years this has grown beyond what can be handled by normal means. Previously a system of cheap entertainment, mild propaganda, and strong law enforcement was sufficient to keep crime and disorder within reasonable limits. However, social unrest has increased massively in the past few years. Both politically motivated violence and simple crime have become serious problems.

In most areas of the majority of cities, an increased presence of increasingly intolerant police has kept a lid on things, but there are no-go areas in some cities. Many more places have become distinctly unsafe and require ever more heavy-handed measures to bring them back under control.

On top of a general increase in lawlessness, there is an organised insurrection going on in some of the cities. Control has been lost in some areas, and even if there is no direct connection between rebels and the general rise in criminality, the insurgents are creating ideal conditions for crime to flourish, which in turn diverts government resources away from dealing with the political threat.

As yet, the Imperial authorities have not imposed an Amber travel zone on Argus, but it seems likely that this will happen in the near future. An intervention cannot be ruled out, though the Imperium tries to stay out of internal affairs whenever possible. On a world like Argus, an intervention would have to be on a massive scale to have any chance of success, and this would be a multi-year effort. The Imperial authorities have thus far limited themselves to offering the government advice and support.

The facilities to support an intervention are already in place, in the form of an Imperial Interstellar Scout Service base on Argus' moon. This is not a large installation, though it is actually more capable than Argus' own small starport. The facility is off-limits to non-official vessels and receives relatively little traffic. Its primary function is to support the Xboat network in the subsector, though it is large enough to handle scout cruisers – or army troop transports.

There have been suggestions that the Scout Service has agents on Argus, monitoring the situation. This is almost certainly likely to be true, as the IISS has a contact and liaison branch that deals, among other things, with problems like those on Argus. Less likely is the rumour that IISS security forces are operating in the cities of Argus, eliminating the most dangerous criminal and political groups.

There are even those that blame the whole problem on the Scouts, suggesting that they are conducting a massive social experiment or perhaps just honing their rabble-raising skills for use against the enemies of the Imperium. Rational people find this rather unlikely but the conspiracy theorists have taken the idea to heart.

The Scout base is unlikely to be affected by the troubles on-planet, and the government expends considerable effort to ensure that the region around the starport is secure. This is where offworlders are likely to remain, especially with movement restrictions in place, and so the extent of the problem remains concealed for the time being. How long the lid can be kept on is an open question.



Boneyard B420310-A

Boneyard is about as cheerful as its name suggests. A world of cold deserts whose dust is stirred by the winds of a thin, tainted atmosphere. According to local sources, the world is named thus because Imperial colonists found the desiccated bones of the previous inhabitants when they arrived.

It seems that Boneyard was inhabited, possibly by several million people during the First and Second Imperium period. At some point during the Long Night, the population died out. It has been suggested that waters sources may well have literally dried up, but other theories include a plague or possibly biological warfare. The very lack of evidence is puzzling.

The inhabitants were human, and they left behind cities half-buried under the desert dust. Their writings were in standard Vilani script, and are entirely intelligible to modern scholars. However, they make no mention of whatever disaster overcame the world. This suggests that whatever happened, it was sudden.

Today, the entire populace numbers 9,500 people who live and work at the Downport. All are employees of the Boneyard branch of Interstellar Transit LIC, a mid-sized corporation that builds and runs starports on behalf of world governments that cannot afford the investment required to set one up. In this case, the firm was given a franchise to open and run a port by the Imperial authorities, effectively permitting the corporation to colonise an empty world.

A small 'corp town' surrounds the landing area, with its own agricultural system in glazed-roof sheds. Apart from being able to feed themselves, the people of Boneyard are not in any way self-sufficient. Most would call the world their home, but in truth they are corporate employees. Even the world government is simply a group of company executives and the body of law is essentially the corporate rulebook.

The rest of the planet is barren wasteland, visited by the occasional scientific party or band of ghoulish scavengers. The difference between the two lies in their intent, and in the possession of a permit from the world government to conduct research and excavation in the 'lost cities' of the outback. These still have considerable archaeological significance as well as a fair amount of equipment that could be scavenged by people willing to desecrate the graves of an entire planetary civilisation.

There is, realistically, no law anywhere outside the port and its associated town. Parties of corporation security personnel occasionally venture out to run off scavengers, but for the most part the world is left as it was when the first Imperial settlers arrived. There has been little attempt to discover mineral wealth

or set up industry; these matters lie outside the field of interest of a starport-operations company.

The orbital component of the port, as is not uncommon with worlds of this type, sees much more traffic than the Downport. It is a large and efficient establishment, with construction yards for small craft and repair and maintenance facilities for larger craft. The Highport is the home base for a small shipping line, Moibin Shipping LIC, which operates two medium sized freight ships and a flotilla of smaller vessels; mainly Subsidised Merchants.

Moibin Shipping has a deal with Interstellar Transit, which provides cut-price maintenance in return for using the port as a home base and therefore providing a regular source of income. Moibin Shipping vessels generally operate within 4-6 Jumps of their home port, mostly on well-defined circular or there-and-back trade routes. The firm receives an Imperial subsidy to provide a mail and passenger service to systems that would otherwise not see a starship for weeks on end.

There is also a small naval base in the system. This is located on moon of one of the gas giants and primarily supports small patrol ships of the subsector fleet. The base can handle vessels up to destroyer size but its complement of vessels are mostly patrol cruisers and close escorts. A communications squadron of naval couriers also operates out of the base, and it is possible to determine if something unusual is going on in the region from their behaviour. Every now and then the couriers start haring off in different directions with news. Of course, civilian organisations such as the port authority rarely receive any information about what has caused the activity.

Haliburn B565777-7

Haliburn is a Balkanised world. Its 40,000,000 or so inhabitants are divided up among several powers of various sizes, plus a scattering of independent towns and regions. This situation has existed since the end of the Long Night, although at times the world has approached unity before the power blocs began to fall apart.

At present, there is a new move towards unification on the part of an alliance of medium-sized powers. Some smaller nations have been absorbed or have joined the alliance as autonomous partners, but now the alliance has run up against resistance.

The intent was to use economic and diplomatic means to gradually draw together the various nations of Haliburn into an alliance that would then be firmed up into a world-state. However, while small countries and independent towns proved susceptible to influence the more established powers were harder to convince. Most of the larger nations were entirely willing to consider unification, but only on terms that more or less put them in charge.



This created a dispute that has gradually escalated into military skirmishing. As yet, there has been no widespread or large-scale combat but accusations of sabotage and rabble-rousing are being thrown around by all parties. In at least some cases these are justified. Border clashes are also becoming more common as the various powers demonstrate their capabilities in the hope of influencing the diplomatic situation.

This conflict is not by any means universal. Several regions are entirely untouched by it. However, travel from one state to another can be problematical due to tightened border controls and a general suspicion of strangers wanting to enter the country. This is not too much of a problem for starfarers however, as it is usually possible to go direct to a regional capital from the Highport.

Haliburn has no central Downport. Instead, each major and most of the minor powers have a spaceport which is linked to the Highport by shuttles. Vessels rarely land on-planet but instead berth at the Highport and transfer their cargo or passengers by shuttle. This practice has been routine for many years but recently has been insisted upon, on the grounds that it allows the various powers to monitor what the others are importing.

The highport itself is a fairly typical orbital facility. It is showing its age somewhat, but has been maintained within acceptable limits and will continue to function for many more decades before requiring a major overhaul. However, while the facility is in good shape, the operators are becoming increasingly factionalised. Local merchants have always competed to buy goods from passing ships, but the competition is cutthroat nowadays. It is not unknown for crews of ships dealing with one power to be harassed or intimidated by personnel working for another.

The Imperium has laws against interfering with free trade, and the situation at Haliburn Highport comes very close to violating them. There is an Imperial embassy at the port (as at most ports) and the ambassador's office has issued warnings to several nations. Each time, the situation cools down for a while, but the period of calm grows shorter each time.

The only overt Imperial response to the situation has been to increase the force of Marine Corps guards at the embassy and to increase the frequency of visits of patrol ships to the port. This obvious hint does not seem to have worked, although it did cause a shift in policy on the part of the alliance for unity. The alliance members are now blatantly currying favour with the Imperial authorities

The alliance is currently producing a great deal of propaganda which attempts to pin every skirmish or border incident on the larger powers. It is obvious that the alliance leaders hope to convince the Imperial authorities to support their bid for unity or at least not to censure them for their methods. Whether or

not this will work remains to be seen, but it has created an increasingly polarised situation, with certain nations portrayed as 'the bad guys'. This in turn makes escalation more likely.

Even the larger powers of Haliburn are relatively small; just a few million people at most. As a result, mass armies are not possible even if the funds to equip them existed. Instead the usual pattern is a defensive force composed mainly of reservists and militia, equipped with fairly basic weapons, and a striking force. This is much smaller in terms of manpower but is equipped with the best weaponry local industry can produce. Advanced weapon systems are obtained offworld to augment this force's capabilities wherever possible.

The nations of Haliburn have, in some cases, begun hiring mercenaries. These are mostly cadre forces who are training up the locals rather than units intended for direct action. There are various reasons for this approach. One is cost; a training cadre is cheaper than a commando formation. More importantly, this flurry of merc hiring is more a form of political sabre-rattling than anything else.

The states that are using mercs hope to send a message to their rivals that they are ready to play hardball. Ideally this will strengthen their bargaining position without the need for either mercs or the troops they train to be put to use. Success has been mixed so far, and it is thought that some of the 'cadre' units that have been hired are actually commandos. Rather than training a local defensive force to higher capabilities, these mercs may be engaged in sabotage and reconnaissance operations against potential foes.

It would be very difficult to prove this if it were the case, and in theory mercenary forces are deniable assets which can be cut loose if they get caught. Indeed, their actions can be blamed on another power, perhaps triggering Imperial sanctions or even an intervention. Dirty tricks of this sort have been used before on other worlds, and the situation on Haliburn is rapidly reaching the point where the various factions are too entrenched and have invested too much to simply go back to business as usual. Analysts predict that unless something changes, and soon, there will be open conflict on Haliburn in the near future.

Filentred B548534-8

Filentred is a wet world with a thin atmosphere whose taint makes it unbreatheable to unprotected humans. It is a relatively simple matter to filter out the dangerous compounds, which are biological in origin. Much of the land surface is home to several species of plant whose pollen is a severe irritant to humans. For this reason, the majority of the population dwell at sea. This does not remove the taint completely of course, but distance and moist air cause much of the pollen to drop to the surface, reducing the burden on filtration systems.



More than 80% of Filentred's surface is covered by oceans, with frequent small island chains. The 700,000 or so inhabitants mostly live in cities of about 50,000-100,000 people located in shallow waters off the coasts of islands that have been cleared of the offending vegetation. The land is used for agriculture, though most of Filentred's food comes from the sea.

The cities each have a governor who wields considerable power but answers to the world's ruling class. This is a group of wealthy individuals including industrialists, merchants and members of 'old money' families. Entry into the ruling class is on merit, which in a plutocracy like Filentred means having enough assets to merit a place. Offworlders are welcome providing they buy in with a suitably large investment into the world's economy and make Filentred their home.

The world's sustainable tech level is 8, but this applies only to the cities. The rulers live apart from their subjects, in a floating habitat that makes its stately way around the globe. The capital-habitat was built offworld using high-tech engineering, and is outfitted at TL 12, including its defence systems. It has workshops and factories capable of maintaining TL 12 equipment, but only on a very small scale. These items are not available to the populace, though imports can be bought on the open market.

The rulers are supported by a large body of people, numbering over 8,000, who are not part of the ruling caste but enjoy some of its privileges. Competition is fierce for jobs on the capital-habitat, as salaries are generous and living conditions excellent. The rulers employ a full range of workers, everything from guards and pilots through engineers and technicians to janitors and waiters.

In addition to status and good pay, workers get to bring their families to the capital, where they benefit from excellent medical care and education. Workers are also encouraged to invest part of their pay or speculate it on either the world stock exchange or the subsector markets. Favoured staff often receive advice or even share-handling services from their employer which not only breeds loyalty but can – occasionally – result in someone who came aboard as a worker joining the ranks of the plutocrats.

The capital-habitat has its own spaceport which is reserved for the use of the rulers, their guests, and supply ships bringing in essentials and luxuries. Starfarers are sometimes invited to land as guests at the port, but this is usually only done when the visiting ship is a noble's yacht or a liner from a well-respected shipping corporation. One curious feature of the port is that all landing areas have retractable floors, allowing vessels to be lowered into sealed berths. This is partly for security and partly for weather protection. In truly severe weather the habitat can 'button up' and submerge to ride out a storm in calmer waters a few dozen metres down. Its maximum depth is not advertised, but is not likely to be more than 100-150m at the most.

The cities are rather more modest in terms of technology and opulence than the capital, but in general they are clean, spacious and pleasant to live in. The atmospheric taint (and also wind and rain) is kept out by polymer domes that cover sections of the city, making each one look like a collection of bubbles from the air. Buildings have secondary filtration systems in case of a dome rupture, which occasionally happens in very bad weather.

The city-folk are hard working and have a strong entrepreneurial spirit. A surprisingly large number go offworld to join merchant shipping lines as brokers or pursers, or take jobs in starport brokerages. This is not unconnected with the amount of business education available in schools, and the existence of a College of Commerce at the Highport, which offers scholarships to promising students in return for a period of employment at the port and a small cut of their salary for the first ten years after graduation.

Each city has a slightly different flavour, but there are distinct similarities all the same. Each has a small spaceport and a sea dock from which a fleet of trawlers and underwater farming vessels operate. Ground transport is fairly limited, as the cities are not very large and are surrounded by sea. Defence is handled by a small professional force who man missile batteries around the periphery of the city; military vehicles are few and mostly of a utility/transport rather than combat sort.

Society is fairly harmonious, though a spirit of competition pervades most activities. Status is conferred by wealth, so symbols such as clothing, electronic gadgets, size of dwelling and so forth are greatly valued. Filentred is one of the few places where a ship's purser is of more interest to the locals than a mere pilot or spacefaring mercenary. Tales of commercial success, offering insights into some aspect of the merchant business, are as likely to impress the locals as sporting success, military decorations or possession of a doctorate from the University of Sylea.

Filentred's orbital port is large, even by class B port standards. It is home to a small Scout Service base, whose personnel are mainly concerned with operations in the Rift and, particularly, into the Islands subsectors. The base supports several long-range Scout cruisers and the tankers that enable them to extend their missions right out into the depths of the Rift. These vessels are away from home for long periods, and the crews almost always have leave owing when they return.

Even if a crew does not take leave, a period of liberty will be granted while the ship refits and re-supplies. Scouts blowing off steam after a long voyage are a common sight in the port and while serious excesses are frowned upon, their antics are generally viewed with fond amusement by the people who live and work at the port.



Filentred is also the main jumping-off station for trans-Rift voyages and the point of arrival for those coming the other way. It is most economical to keep trans-Rift ships on the Rift run, and to transfer cargo and passengers to other vessels for more mundane voyages to their final destination. Trans-Rift ships require meticulous safety checks, recalibration of drives and general maintenance before their next trip, and Filentred highport is well equipped to perform these functions. Indeed, supporting the trans-Rift route is a major source of income for the port.

The Highport is also an important link on the Rift-edge trade routes, and is home to a major commercial exchange. This handles both stock-market transactions and speculative investment in cargoes or missions. In the former case, private investors purchase a share of the value of a cargo being shipped through the port, receiving a proportionate cut of the profit, if any. Missions, both commercial and exploratory, are also funded in this way. The investors buy into the mission in return for either a straight cut of the profits or a percentage of the long-term benefits.

Investing in an exploration mission is a big risk; most find nothing of direct value. However, there is always the chance that a scientific vessel will locate something that results in a cash payout from the Imperial authorities or a proportion of a science prize. A very lucky investor could be made for life if a new commercial market were opened up or a new product brought into Imperial markets as a result of a mission he invested in.

The commercial college, located at the Highport, is another good source of revenue for the host planet. Some of the students are locals, but many come from other systems to study at an increasingly prestigious institution. Fees are high for those that cannot obtain a scholarship, but employment prospects are good. The Megacorporation Tukera Lines has begun sponsoring some aspects of the course, and offering fast-track promotion to graduates. Although there have been accusations that the course is becoming biased, Tukera's involvement has been good for recruitment and for the prestige of the institution.

Harmony E6538AF-4

Harmony may be one of the least harmonious places in Charted Space. This somewhat dry but otherwise habitable world is home to about 950,000,000 people, of whom about half are ruled by a singularly unpleasant low-tech military dictatorship. The remainder of the population have – thus far – successfully rejected the rulership of the dictator.

Within the regions controlled by the government, there is massive support for the dictator. This is mainly due to his successful restoration of order after the previous government collapsed. Faced with economic disaster and literal starvation in many

areas, the populace rallied behind the man who offered them a solution and so far have not been disappointed. However, the recovery was not uniform.

Unsurprisingly, those regions that showed the most support were rewarded with the greatest efforts to aid their recovery. Attempts were made to assist other areas, but without firm control over the situation the results were patchy at best. This served to further divide the population into pro- and anti-government factions.

Most of the functioning industry and infrastructure is concentrated in government-controlled areas. These are under martial law, with large numbers of troops in the streets. Most locals actually find this reassuring, as memories of anarchy are still fresh. Besides, the citizenry are fed a constant diet of propaganda that depicts those who rejected the dictatorship as evil wreckers of civilisation who are just waiting to tear down what remains and complete their work.

There is no shortage of volunteers for the armed forces, who swear a personal oath of loyalty to the dictator. Their mission, they are told, is to someday reunify Harmony and take back the wrecked cities from the 'rebels and anarchists'. Although





these troops enforce extremely harsh laws and often receive shoot-on-sight orders for anyone violating curfew, they are popular with the citizens. It is not uncommon to see uniformed troops chatting with civilians and even sitting together outside a pavement café.

The situation is rather different in the 'rebel' areas. Here, all is not desolation and anarchy as the dictator's propagandists like to claim. In many areas times are very hard, with even food in short supply, but there are several emergent factions and proto-nations that are earnestly trying to make things better. However, skirmishes with brigands and criminal gangs weaken these groups. The dictator's troops are gradually re-integrating these areas, a process that may take decades but will eventually succeed unless the general populace loses faith in its jackbooted, militarised new government.

Officially, the Imperium is not concerned with the internal affairs of member states. However, there are always concerns raised when a high-law state emerges from a chaotic situation. The Imperium recognises the current government as legitimate but has sent observers to Harmony to obtain a first-hand account of the situation. Their initial conclusion was that the extremely repressive government was actually quite popular and was remaining within the bounds of High Law. The commission decided that the measures taken were necessary and effective, although it did make a number of strongly worded 'recommendations' to the government which were largely ignored.

The possibility exists that the Imperium might recognise some of the independent regions as states in their own right. This is really their only hope to avoid forcible reintegration in the long run. However, a petition for statehood (which would change the world government status to 'balkanised') is a major undertaking and requires a degree of diplomatic finesse that is not really available to the rebel proto-states.

Thus, offworld help is being sought. This is of course illegal in the eyes of the government, and offworlders face harsh penalties for assisting the rebels. The Imperium cannot protect anyone who decides to throw in their lot with the rebels, other than trying to ensure that the dictatorship does not violate their sentients' rights. That more or less amounts to ensuring that they are held in humane confinement before their show trial and execution.

Despite this, the rebel groups are receiving support from various sources. Some is well meant but useless, such as the 'conscience groups' that occasionally turn up on-planet. These have tried all manner of gambits ranging from picketing government buildings to trying to secretly film government troops engaged in repressive actions. If they are lucky, these people are rounded up and deported. Many are shot as enemies of the state, and their offworld origins offers no protection from this treatment.

Others, who come to Harmony to try to reveal the fate of the conscience groups to the wider universe, fare no better. In any case, none of this is secret. It does not need to be – the government is acting within its own laws and is entitled to do so by the Imperial charter.

More direct action has generally been more successful. Groups of volunteers have at times managed to slip onto Harmony and join the fight to keep the independent areas free from government control. The motivations of these 'Interstellar Brigades' vary considerably, but the locals will take whatever help they can get. Mercenaries have also been hired at times, but these tend to be low-quality units or forces of dubious background.

Reputable mercenary units are very reluctant to take contracts on Harmony. The rebels cannot pay them much, and the government does not need them. Ironically, mercenary forces openly fighting against the government have the best chance of survival of captured. There are laws governing their status, which makes it difficult for the government to simply shoot them as criminals. Deportation is not guaranteed however; many mercs have disappeared or been 'mistaken for terrorists' by the forces of the dictatorship.

The rebels do have some political support offworld, which ranges from fundraising to buy weapons and hire mercs to political pressure towards recognition. Their main problem is that they are not at all unified. While the dictatorship is a monolithic organisation that can bring huge resources to bear on a problem then transfer them elsewhere, the rebels are simply a collection of large and small independent regions. Some are nothing more than refugee groups or the population of a city, trying to get enough to eat. Even the best organised and equipped cannot compete with the armies of the government.

At present the dictatorship's control over its territory is firm, and additional areas are gradually being pacified. Forces are spread fairly thin, but as the smaller pockets of resistance (or simply independent areas) are reintegrated, ever greater resources can be allocated against the major rebel groups. It is likely that within a few years the last of these proto-nations will have been crushed.

Alverik A550698-A

Alverik orbits at the outer edge of its star's life zone. Coupled with the thick atmosphere, this makes Alverik a very cold world. Much of the surface is rocky desert; the rest is dusty desert or mountains. Despite this, the world was settled in the days of the Vilani Imperium.

The Long Night was hard on Alverik. Without offworld trade, even survival was in doubt. The population size crashed down to almost zero, and technology was forgotten by the small bands of nomads or mountain villagers who struggled to make a life on their harsh and unforgiving world.



The Third Imperium annexed Alverik more or less in passing, during the Pacification Campaigns. This meant nothing more than setting up a rudimentary landing area and stationing a few personnel on-planet to support the land grab. The Imperials were somewhat surprised to find that the world was inhabited. This occurred when bands of nomads began to arrive at the Imperial outpost to trade. Relations were friendly enough as there was no need for conflict.

Over time, the tiny Imperial outpost grew into a small town. Settlers came for various reasons, and never in large numbers, but they were joined by locals seeking a more settled existence, and the general trend was one of slow expansion. A government of sorts grew out of the very basic colonial administration that had been in place, and was modelled on it. Even today, the planetary president is referred to as the Colonial Governor and wields all the powers of the commander of a new colony.

The governor/president is assisted by an appointed body of bureaucrats and executives, with little input from the general population. The general growth trend was massively accelerated by a large influx of colonists in the 800s. These arrived as part of a training programme intended to prepare them to settle on desert worlds as part of an aborted expansion project. Having prepared themselves to settle on a frontier desert world, many decided that they could make a perfectly good home here on Alverik. They were offered land grants and a limited amount of equipment, and set up several new communities.

The construction of the starport brought new prosperity to Alverik. The landing field had long since developed into a basic class C port, but investment money became available to enormously expand the port. By the time work finished, the Downport had become a sprawling complex, and the Highport was little smaller.

The Downport is home to a number of starship-related businesses. There are extensive repair and construction yards, specialising in small military and civilian vessels of a utilitarian nature. General Products owns some of the yards, at which it builds an endless stream of Patrol Cruisers and Mercenary Cruisers for the Imperial Navy and private clients. A number of component factories are also present, including a very successful business that fabricates replacement parts for older vessels that have been out of production for many years. These parts are not cheap, and often have to be fabricated not only to fit an archaic ship design but a specific vessel that may have been heavily modified.

Starship modifications are also an important part of the port's business. 'Modding' can be fairly trivial, such as installing a different weapon fit in a turret or remodelling the interior of a ship's galley. However, the port also undertakes more radical

work. Sometimes this involves cutting away damaged parts of a wreck and rebuilding what remains into a useful ship, or adding a 'hull plug' to the middle of a vessel to increase its displacement and capabilities. Drive and control system upgrades are also popular with the port's clients.

The Highport is a large installation, but many visitors feel that it lacks character. Everything is middle-of-the-road and inoffensive, or as one astrogator's guide puts it 'bland, bland, bland, with a sprinkling of bland to not add any variety'. This is mainly a result of the endless wrangling between investors over various aspects of the port's design. The end result was a series of compromises that pleased none of the investors and will never inspire anyone.

However, the port does its job well enough, receiving and servicing a stream of traffic bound for the Rift fringe or heading either Trailing to Gushemege sector or Rimward into Verge and Illeish. Revenue from the port and the ground-based construction yards has enriched the planetary population, causing Alverik to become more attractive to immigrants.

Today, small numbers of desert and mountain people still remain, following their traditional way of life. Some actually dwell among the ruins of cities built before the Long Night, and there are those who draw parallels with the situation that existed in those days. Then, too, Alverik had a population too large for its natural resources to support and dependent on interstellar trade. Were today's trade to be disrupted, a repeat of the collapse would be inevitable. The desert and mountain folk would probably survive however, to greet whoever came to settle their world when the lights of civilisation came on again.

OTHER LOCATIONS

The following are rumoured to exist, or perhaps do exist but are not widely known about. They are located wherever the Referee decides that they should be, assuming they are present at all.

Roguestar

Starmaps, astronavigation charts, call them what you will. These maps are used by starfarers to get from one place to another. However, the places they mark are not stars but mainworlds. All mainworlds orbit a star, so obviously one will be present in any system marked on a map, but the reasons for visiting a system tend to revolve around the mainworld and the people there.

There is little economic, social or political reason for visiting a system that has no mainworld, no people, no industry, no trade and so forth, and for this reason Roguestar is not marked on the starcharts. It is useful as a navigational reference point; like all stars it can be seen for many parsecs. However there is simply no reason for the average starship crew to go there.



Roguestar is a lone red dwarf star located in the Great Rift. It has no planetary system, therefore no mainworld. The only objects orbiting Roguestar are a collection of comets and the occasional planetoid. This makes obtaining fuel problematical. In such an empty system, the only way to refuel would be to find a comet, chase it down and then crack its frozen gases for hydrogen. That is a slow process at the best of times, and it is quite likely that a ship's supplies would run out before a suitable comet could be found or reached.

If the location of a suitable comet were known, it would of course be possible to Jump directly to it. An automated gas-cracking plant could be left running constantly, or a small base might even be set up. This would make Roguestar an excellent base for covert activities or perhaps piracy. In fact, there is a rumour, which evolves constantly, that a pirate alliance operates out of Roguestar.

Not only does this rumour include a delightful pun on the star name, but it contains elements of the most far-fetched adventure vids. The common version is that somewhere in the space surrounding Roguestar (it is not really accurate to refer to this area as a star system) there is a pirate base built from the hulls of captured vessels. The pirates sell off what they can of the prizes they take and use the remaining hull and components to improve their base.

Fuel is obtained by harvesting comets for gases which are slowly cracked and condensed into liquid hydrogen for fuel plus whatever other gases are deemed useful. This is done by automated installations, with the fuel picked up from time to time and taken to the station. There, it is stored in fuel tanks ripped from the guts of captured ships.

This is all very fanciful of course, and highly unlikely, but many rumours have a kernel of truth so perhaps some version of this setup exists somewhere; perhaps there are pirates at Roguestar. Perhaps the rumour is even true.

The Gas Cloud

Space is not entirely empty. Even between star systems there are always comets, chunks of ice and rock, and drifting clouds of interstellar gas. These are never very thick; many are scarcely more dense than vacuum. Out in the Great Rift, there is even less interstellar debris than elsewhere.

However, a relatively dense gas cloud has been observed within the Great Rift. The key term is 'relatively' dense – an unprotected human would die in the cloud in exactly the same way as if he were exposed to hard vacuum – but even this is very unusual and merits some investigation.

The gas cloud takes the form of a curved stream nearly two light-years long and about half a light-year thick and wide. It is faintly reflective and also slightly radioactive, making it difficult

for remote sensors to penetrate and find out what is inside. It seems likely that there is something in there, as the cloud seems to keep changing shape slightly and exhibits areas of greater and lesser density which also move around. These phenomena are not 100% confirmed; the internal movement of the cloud might be an illusion caused by the reflective gas particles.

According to official records, the gas cloud has never been directly investigated. Remote instruments are constantly trained on it from observatories and lab ships stationed on the edge of the Rift, but thus far no one has undertaken the vast expense of sending a mission out into the depths of the Rift just to examine some gas particles.

Hedley's Comet

Hedley's comet is another anomaly located out in the Great Rift. There are probably dozens, hundreds, maybe even thousands of comets drifting through the vast void. Most will never be located. They are relatively tiny, cold dark objects in a huge expanse of cold dark space. Those that are located are logged into the Scout Service database and forgotten about. Once their location at a given time plus course and speed are known, it is a simple matter to find them again.

Not so Hedley's Comet. This body, which is assumed to be a comet as it displays the characteristics of one most of the time, advertises its presence by occasionally emitting in the visible, infrared and/or X-ray wavelengths. Having caught the attention of scientists and astronomers by 'flashing' in this manner, Hedley's Comet behaves normally for an extended period before its next episode of exhibitionism.

Even more strangely, the comet, if comet it is, seems to change course from time to time. Missions sent to investigate it have never found it. Whenever a vessel emerges from Jump in the location predicted for Hedley's Comet, it cannot be found. Jump variance could explain this to some extent, but advanced scientific sensors should be able to find even a cold body within the limits of normal Jump-emergence variations.

Even more strangely, the 'course changes' may be more than simple alterations in vector. A small course change would place the comet within a predictable volume of space, but this does not seem to be the case. In fact, according to some reports, the comet has been relocated in places it could not have reached in the elapsed time after being lost. The oddest claims suggest that the comet sometimes skips back on its vector, and is relocated by sensors either in a position it should have passed through years ago, or somewhere it would have been had it made a course change several decades before.

This behaviour seems unconnected with the 'flashes', and could be explained by the existence of multiple bodies except for the



fact that missions to predicted locations have never found any trace of the object itself... or any object. At present Hedley's Comet remains a mystery, which attracts attention by 'flashing' then vanishes to turn up in an unexpected place. Scientists are equal parts fascinated, puzzled and frustrated by this mysterious object, phenomenon or whatever it is.

Rogue Dwarf

The dividing line between a large planetoid and a true planet is something that scientists have been arguing about for centuries. Various definitions exist but none has ever remained in force for more than a couple of hundred years before a revision was put forward. The average spacefarer need not worry about precise scientific definitions, and generally accepts the concept that a dwarf planet is simply a very small planet or a planetoid large enough to hold a faint trace of atmosphere.

Dwarf planets can be found in many star systems, either in planetoid belts or orbiting solo like any other planet. In the former case the dwarf planet's gravity will have cleared its immediate area of smaller objects, creating a sort of empty bubble within the belt, with the dwarf planet at the centre.

The object specifically referred to as 'Rogue Dwarf' is actually located in the Rift. It was apparently ejected by gravitational interactions from a star system somewhere along the edge of the rift, many millennia ago. This happens from time to time; there are other rogue planets voyaging through interstellar space between systems or across the Rift. This one is special simply because it is a deathtrap.

Several Imperial and independent vessels have approached what has now simply become known as Rogue Dwarf. They ranged from scientific and scout vessels through warships to opportunistic scavengers. In every case the vessel's transmissions ceased abruptly. Relay ships standing off from the planet remained unharmed unless they closed in to investigate or attempt a rescue.

The fate of the ships approaching Rogue Dwarf remains unknown, though transmissions from some indicated that the crew had observed objects on the surface that might be downed starships or settlements of some kind. Those that got close before going off the air indicated an intention to land. Others were lost before even reaching visual range, or during a flyby. Automated reconnaissance drones similarly ceased transmitting.

It will be millennia more before Rogue Dwarf crosses the Rift and enters inhabited space, so there is no immediate threat. However, scientists are eager to discover its secrets. Not only why ships lose contact when they approach, but also deeper mysteries. What system was this world ejected from? Was it really a natural phenomenon that caused its voyage? When did

this happen? Does Rogue Dwarf carry with it some secret of the Ancients, or could it even predate them?

And what will happen when it does enter inhabited space? Is this enigmatic object a curiosity, a fragment of an ancient civilization, or some kind of interstellar time bomb? It would appear that the only way to find out would be to land on the surface and investigate... something that has proven fatal for everyone who tried. Or has it? All that is really known is that the ships stopped transmitting and never returned. The demise of the crews has simply been inferred from the fact that they were never heard from again.

Wrecks of the Great Rift

Any ship that Misjumps into the Great Rift is almost certainly doomed. It is conceivable that by an incredible stroke of luck the ship might come out close to a comet that can be used to obtain fuel, or in one of the deep-Rift systems. This is what happened to the strike cruiser *Eldorado*, and in truth it is so unlikely that it will probably never happen again. Even a slight Misjump, bringing out a vessel just a half light-year from an inhabited system, is a death sentence unless the ship has enough fuel to Jump to safety.

Thus there are wrecked ships drifting out there in the Rift. Their passengers and crew died long ago, their systems gradually failed as the power ran down, and they became artificial comets. Some used the last of their fuel to accelerate in the direction of inhabited space, perhaps as a final gesture of defiance in the face of fate. Perhaps the crew preferred to believe that someday their lifeless ship would be detected as it entered more dense space; at least that way their fate would be known.

Whatever events may have transpired, those ships are out there. The positions of some are known, though they are not in any publicly available database. Some of them have been salvaged or their cargoes removed, but others have been left undisturbed as a monument to lost starfarers.

In theory, it might be possible to survive being stranded in deep space for a considerable time. A risky combination of Fast drug and low berth use could perhaps prolong survival time to years or even decades. There is even a (very faint) possibility of survival even after the power to the low berth runs out. According to popular vid entertainment, it is possible that a low-berth user can be further cooled, say by the cold of space, to a temperature where they will be preserved forever. A surprising number of fictional characters have survived shipwreck and betrayal in this manner.

Sadly, it does not work in real life. A person in suspended animation is not entirely frozen. The low berth needs power to maintain conditions suitable to sustain life at a minimal level. Without power, the low berth user will die. Or more accurately,



no one has ever been successfully revived in this manner. However, the sample is small; it has only been attempted in a handful of cases so perhaps there is a chance. There is also the possibility that psionic suspended animation might work differently. Thus there is an outside chance that even if a wrecked ship is not discovered in time to revive the crew before the powerplant runs down, someone might just be in a condition to be awoken. What the effects on an individual frozen in this manner might be are a matter for speculation.

Salvaging monument-wrecks, if they can be found, is illegal, but that has not stopped scavengers from trying. Unlisted wrecks are covered by interstellar salvage laws – salvage rights are granted in the event that there is no one alive aboard. There is a special case where crew or passengers are discovered alive but in a condition where they would not survive without the assistance of the salvagers. In that case, for example where a crew are in low berths with no one awake to man the ship, salvage rights are still given to the rescuers. This is mainly to remove the incentive to turn off the low berths and then claim the ship was deserted.

Salvaging Rift-wrecks is not a viable full-time business, but if one were located then it might be successfully attempted. However, not all of the wrecks out there are human. Droyne and Aslan ships have been recovered, along with a couple of very old vessels that either defied identification or – according to starport rumours at least – turned out to be less derelict than they appeared.

Proto-System

Stars and star systems do not last forever. They form from a collection of interstellar gas, some of it ejected from dying stars, gradually coalescing over millions of years into a central star (and possibly companion stars) plus rocky and gas giant planets, planetoids, comets and other bodies.

This process is ongoing constantly, with new systems forming to replace those that die of what amounts to old age. One such system is forming near the fringe of the Great Rift, and is of great interest to the scientific community.

It is not especially hazardous to enter the coalescing gas cloud, except near the centre. In that region there is a fair amount of radiation, which might pose a threat to a vessel's electronics and crew. Elsewhere it is less dangerous, though Jumping back out again can be a problem due to the density of the gas cloud. As a result, most ships studying the proto-system remain either above or below the gas cloud, which takes the form of a thick rotating disc. Above and below, the gas is much less dense and there is little threat.

Most of the ships studying the proto-system are Imperial, but for several years now the Darrian Confederation, based in

Spinward Marches sector, has maintained a scientific vessel in the system. It is occasionally withdrawn and replaced, and more often re-supplied and re-crewed in position. The Darrians have traditionally been interested in stellar physics, so their curiosity is natural. All the same, it does concern some Imperial observers – the Darrians did, after all, manage to cause their own star to go nova.

Ancients Site(s)

It is known that the Ancients were active in Reft sector. They are thought to be responsible for transplanting humans and other species (possibly including the Droyne and Chirpers) to the worlds of the region, along with flora and fauna from Earth and other planets. This is the usual explanation of why humans can find edible plant and animal life on so many worlds.

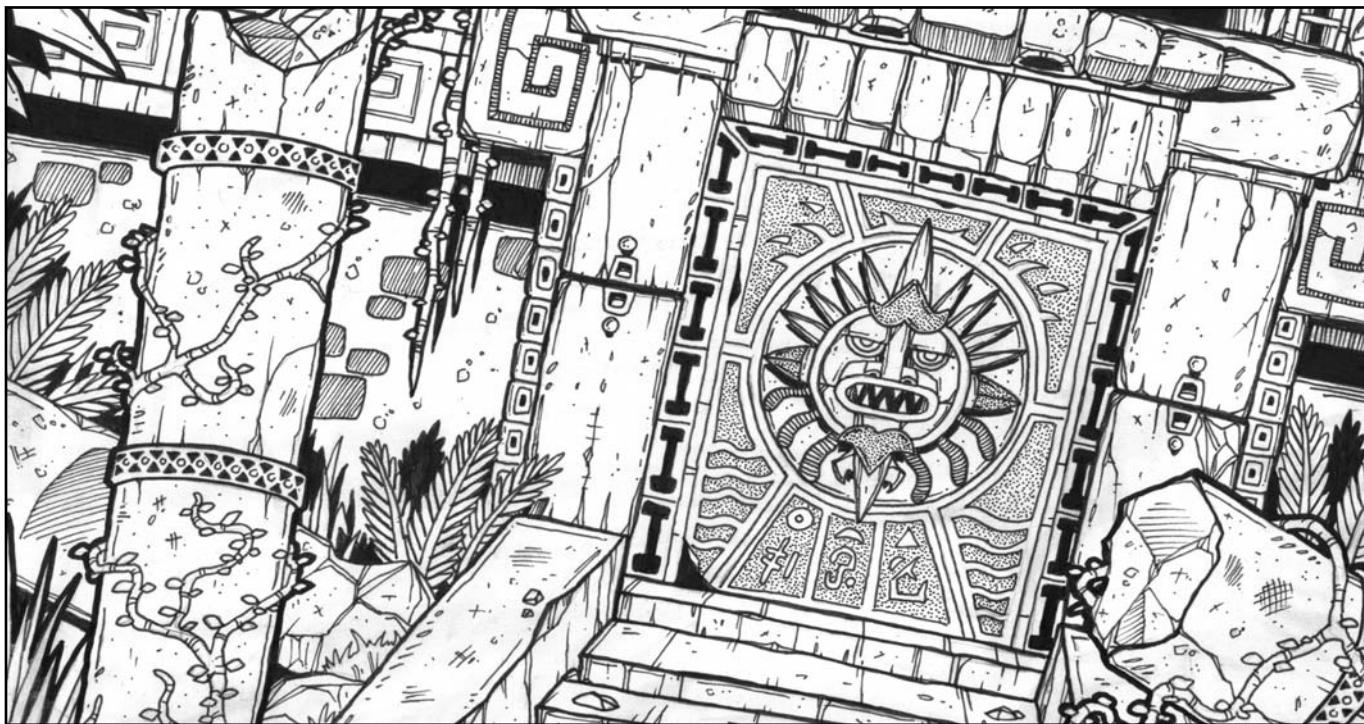
The Ancients are thought to have destroyed themselves in a cataclysmic war hundreds of thousands of years ago. Other theories suggest that perhaps they fought someone else, but there is little evidence of this. Whatever the truth may be, the Ancients left bits and pieces of their civilisation lying around for future sentients to find. Many artefacts are incomprehensible, broken, or both, but now and again something functional is found.

While vid shows are full of heroes armed with Ancient disintegrators, invisibility suits and teleport units, most artefacts are rather more mundane or only function as part of a larger unit, which may not always be present. Thus most artefacts are valuable only to collectors or the scientific community. It is illegal to traffic in Ancients artefacts without a license, at least in the Imperium. Most of what is sold is fake anyway.

However, now and then a site, rather than isolated artefacts, is found. Again, while these sites always contain powerful starships or weaponry in vid shows, in reality when their purpose is deciphered it is often fairly mundane. Any civilisation, no matter how advanced, has more private dwellings, farms, factories and offices than planet-busting weapons. Thus sites are often 'of interest to scholars' than something world changing.

The Imperium has a policy of paying a finder's fee to anyone locating a proven Ancients site, and then assigning a percentage of anything valuable located there to the finder. Often a site will provide an occasional payment for years as scholars discover something interesting. Notably, the fee comes with an extensive legal contract requiring the finder to stay away from the site and not tell others about it. There are numerous reasons why the Imperium does not want private citizens clambering all over ancients sites or conducting their own excavations. There is a stiff penalty for not reporting an Ancients find.

Thus the typical Ancients find (if any can be considered 'typical') is lucrative but not life-changing. However, sometimes



adventurers will stumble over something special, and there is a small community of 'Ancients Hunters' who have made it their life's work to try to do this. Ancients Hunters come from all kinds of background. Some are scientists, some cranks, some both. Some are individuals who had a previous brush with Ancients technology and want to find out more. Most work alone or in small groups, and there is often fierce competition between them.

Reft sector has the same rumours about Ancients sites as anywhere else. According to starport scuttlebutt, virtually every odd coincidence or strange happening is the work of the Ancients. Some even claim that the Great Rift is the result of some kind of super-weapon. There are claims of derelict Ancient spacecraft lying out in the Rift and a teleporter device that will take a ship right across the Rift or into a pocket universe, or even down a black hole. Conspiracy theorists seem to like the idea that the Imperial government is covering up some kind of giant Ancients site out in the Rift, perhaps in the Islands subsectors.

What all of these rumours have in common is a lack of proof, but there is a chance, perhaps, that there is some basis for at least some of them. Perhaps an Ancient settlement or wrecked starship really does await discovery somewhere. Perhaps there truly is a teleporter on an airless comet that will take intrepid adventurers... somewhere. Perhaps the claims that something older than the Ancients has been found are true. The only real way to find out is to go and look.

Hope Freeport

In the dark days of the Interstellar Wars, the Terrans sent out a number of hurried colony missions. Most went Rimward, away from the Vilani Imperium. However, one followed in the footsteps of the ESA missions that eventually colonised the Islands subsectors. This mission was aboard what was to have been the fourth ESA colony ship, now renamed *Shining Hope*.

Shining Hope carried a number of early Jump-capable ships in addition to tens of thousands of colonists. Its departure was rushed as a result of fears that Terra was about to be overrun by the Vilani, and the ship went to silent running as soon as possible in the hope of evading detection. It followed the path of the original mission, more or less, but drifted a little off course as the centuries passed.

Unlike the early missions, *Shining Hope* was guided by computer, with no flight crew awake other than to conduct maintenance at 20-year intervals. The shipboard computers were to waken the crew when a potentially habitable world was located after a suitably long voyage to carry the ship clear of the Vilani threat. This was in terms of both distance and elapsed time – the Vilani Imperium surely could not exist forever.

Shining Hope travelled at a lower velocity than its predecessors, and took a much longer time to cover the same distance. Thus it was not until 32 years ago that the crew were awoken by their automated systems. Something was clearly wrong; the ship was in the middle of a huge void rather than approaching a habitable world. Maintenance cycles had been missed for the



past 1,200 years, and the ship's velocity was much lower than it should have been.

It transpired that Shining Hope had suffered a chain of linked malfunctions. The wakeup cycle for maintenance crews had been suspended, allowing systems to degrade. This in turn caused computer problems that resulted in the ship beginning its deceleration for approach to a star system when none lay ahead for literally centuries more transit time. Many of the low berths had also failed, killing a significant proportion of the colonists.

A period of frantic work enabled the crew to stabilise their situation and prevent further failures, but this was just the beginning. They desperately needed supplies and spares, and of course to find out where (and when) they were. With no idea about conditions in the wider universe, it was wise to tread cautiously where possible, but time was not on the side of the crew.

The Jump-capable vessels were broken out and those that still worked were prepared for flight. After cursory tests the vessels set out for the nearest star systems. Most returned, and gradually a picture of local conditions was built up. The Vilani Imperium was long gone, but that did not mean that there was no danger. Crews were advised not to reveal the coordinates of their parent vessel.

As time passed, it became apparent that this was not a viable option. The colonists had set out with equipment designed to let them settle a new world, but most of this was quickly traded away for essential spares. There was little else of value to trade, and the list of needs was scarcely any shorter.

After due consideration the colonists realised that they did indeed have something valuable to trade; trade itself. They had a ready-made independent starport in a secure location. Word went out on the grapevine; Shining Hope – now reinvented as Hope Freeport – was open for business.

At first there was little response, but gradually the ships began to arrive. With them came increasing prosperity, though at a price in terms of moral integrity. A few items were placed off-limits, such as slaves and obvious pirate booty, but for the most part Hope Freeport was willing to trade in whatever visitors wanted, no questions asked.

Today, most visitors do not realise that Hope Freeport is a starship. The assumption among those that care to think about it at all is that it is some kind of deep-space asteroid habitat. Not that it matters; it is what goes on there that is important. As well as trading in all kinds of commodity, it is possible to obtain maintenance and repairs at the port. The technicians are now up to speed with modern technology and can service most kinds of ship. They do not ask how combat damage was

incurred, nor are they too nosy about where owner-supplied spares come from.

The markets of Hope Freeport are bustling places, with all manner of goods on sale. In the quieter portside bars, it is possible to find a person who knows where almost any item can be found. There are rumours that nuclear weapons and Ancients artefacts can be bought and sold in the port. Certainly the vessel had nuclear weapons aboard when it was launched during the Interstellar Wars, but after all these centuries it is not likely that they would be operational. However, it is possible that there were nuclear weaponeers among the original crew. If so, then with the right materials it would be possible to put together effective nukes.

Rumours of this sort have piqued Imperial interest. Navy and Scout Service ships visit from time to time, and spies have been infiltrated among the growing population of the port district. Although Hope Freeport is technically beyond Imperial law, its leaders know that this would not prevent the Imperial Marine Corps from storming their port if the need arose. So far they have managed to remain below the threshold for intervention, though incidents are not uncommon.

The general population dwell in the interior of the asteroid habitat, away from the port area, and remain culturally somewhat isolated. However, some influence from the more cosmopolitan port-town population does leak through; the people of Shining Hope are gradually moving into the 57th Century.

The asteroid itself is well defended with weaponry fitted during the preparations for flight from Terra. There is more than enough firepower to see off a raider or even a small naval ship. The Jump-capable fleet is also lightly armed, and its crews have developed a reputation for being a little trigger-happy. Word has got around that ships out of Hope Freeport, and their crews, are not good targets for a raid or even a scam. Their heavy-handed response may eventually lead to trouble with the Imperial authorities, but in the meantime it keeps opportunistic lowlifes at bay.

Long-term, Hope Freeport faces a difficult future. Its prosperity is based on its seedy reputation and willingness to trade in dubious or outright illegal items. However, by definition this means dealing with criminals or at least borderline-crooked merchants. The port is currently on a long slide into total lawlessness, and it is hard to see how this could be reversed.

At present, portside security can deal with the problems that arise and the general population can be kept insulated from what happens near the docking areas, but this surely cannot go on forever. It would appear that the Shining Hope has become tarnished, and may in time be entirely extinguished.



ADVENTURES IN REFT SECTOR

Reft Sector is a unique gaming environment, offering distinctly different flavours depending on which region the players decide to visit. 'Beneath the claw' lies a region that is well integrated into Imperial society, while 'behind the claw' is a frontier area. Between them lie the worlds of the Islands subsectors and the isolated worlds of the Great Rift. This region is (mostly) outside the Imperium and contains many powers vying for supremacy. There might also be all manner of strange phenomena within the Rift itself.

The distances involved could make adventuring problematical, but once within the Islands a Jump-2 ship can reach most destinations. A merchant craft with a large enough cargo hold can carry demountable fuel tanks in place of cargo, permitting an extra Jump. This would allow a Jump-2 ship to reach the Islands via the refuelling stations. Alternatively, a Misjump might land a vessel in the Islands, forcing the crew to make the best of things until they can find a way home. Or the characters might be Islanders themselves.

THE ISLANDS WAR

The Islands subsectors were first published in 1981, in *Traveller Adventure 5: Trillion Credit Squadron*. This was essentially a wargame scenario revolving around conflict between the various Islands powers. The war was assumed to break out sometime after 1106, but no timeline was published for the war. In any case, the future is not carved in stone; the Islands War may or may not happen. Even if it does, it can take any course that the Referee sees fit.

What follows is a suggestion for how the Islands War might play out. Such a conflict could create innumerable adventuring opportunities including from secret missions for one power or another, gunrunning, espionage, rescue of refugees or prisoners, salvage of damaged warships, or just trying to make a living against the backdrop of a major war.

The Islands War is not likely to be a war of total conquest or extermination. While some powers may come to hate one another, deliberate genocide or planetary destruction is unlikely. Even if it were considered acceptable to attempt something of this scale, it is possible that other powers would unite against any world that carried out such an atrocity.

The Islands powers each have their own agenda, making permanent alliances unlikely. Indeed, the shifting web of alliances and agreements has both altered the balance of power in the region and helped keep an uneasy peace for some time. Two or more powers may well decide to gang up on another,

but the formation of a powerful alliance may well prompt other worlds to band together, if only to avoid being steamrolled.

Conquest of a high-population world is a very difficult business, requiring large numbers of troops even once the orbital defences are suppressed. This would be beyond the means of most Islands powers or even an alliance of two or more. So, if worlds cannot be bombed into extinction nor invaded and conquered, how can the war be won?

It is likely that any war in the Islands, whether between two powers or a general free-for-all, would in some ways resemble the limited wars of Europe in the early Gunpowder age. There, the general concept was 'grab what you can and sue for peace'. Thus conflict is likely to be punctuated by periods of peace or at least ceasefire. Two powers might fight, then agree concessions in return for a ceasefire. This does not mean that the war could not go on elsewhere; indeed these two powers might be at war with others even while their shaky ceasefire holds.

Battles are unlikely to be fought to annihilate enemy forces, for the simple reason that this is beyond the means of most powers. Instead, a world might try to capture an outsystem installation or a colony, hoping to gain a favourable treaty. Alternatively, the aim might be to draw out some of the enemy's ships and disable or destroy a major vessel or two. This would of course weaken the enemy in the long run, but might also force the opposition to the negotiating table.

A power that lost a prestigious capital ship might sue for peace or offer a ceasefire, allowing the victor to repair vessels damaged in the battle or to gain concessions. Loss of part of a world's fleet might even force it to change sides, accepting the protection of the victor in return for subordinate position in an alliance. Of course, if the victor suffered a major setback, his ally might decide to reconsider the position.

Thus battles and military operations in the Islands are likely to be fought with a political aim in mind, or to weaken an opponent. Commerce raiding (attacks on merchant ships and perhaps starports) is a likely tool, as is infiltration and sabotage by special forces units. It is possible that a desperate power might try to bombard the industrial centres of an enemy to weaken them, but large-scale loss of civilian life might trigger a backlash among the other worlds of the Islands and similar bombardment of the homeworld's cities.

Into this mix must be added the agendas of other powers. Imperial Megacorporations may support the powers that have given them favourable deals, while the Imperial Navy might be



deployed to keep the trans-Islands run open. Colonies might seek independence, or neutral worlds may be courted for their industrial capabilities and resources. To a party of adventurers stuck in the middle of all this, the opportunities for getting into trouble (and maybe making a profit) are enormous.

A Possible Islands War Timeline

As already noted, any war is likely to be a number of smaller conflicts between rival powers or perhaps small alliances rather than an all-out slugfest. The action in any given area is likely to be a series of combats punctuated by diplomacy and special missions, made more complicated by the fact that information and orders can only travel as fast as a courier ship. A given fleet or squadron might not be aware that war had broken out, or that peace has been made. A treaty could be derailed by the actions of a raiding ship which has been out of contact for weeks or even months.

Note that the 'war' might change character several times, dropping down to a tense political situation after a period of open conflict before more fighting breaks out. It may be that one theatre of war might be fairly quiet, even normal, for a time while heavy fighting goes on elsewhere. Any power that can stay out of general conflict, going on with normal economic activity, has a long-term advantage over those that must expend money and resources – unless that expenditure can be converted into significant gain by a good treaty or acquisition of new assets.

It is possible, for example, for Serendip Belt and New Colchis to be in a state of open war, while Serendip Belt is also at war with New Home, even though New Home is at war with New Colchis. Meanwhile Serendip Belt is allied to Neubayern which is allied with New Home against Amondiage. Thus the Serendips are at war with the ally of their ally and also with the enemy of their enemy. This creates a complex situation in which it is difficult to gain a lasting advantage.

COLD WAR PHASE

A state of tension not much worse than the present, in which the various powers make alliances and jockey for position. Political brinkmanship, combining threats of force with deployments of ships, is a common tactic. Each power hopes to gain advantages without committing itself to military action. Compromises are made, and deals are broken from time to time.

Military action tends to be low-key, such as sabotage and raiding by 'deniable assets' such as special forces units, foreign guerrillas sponsored by an offworld power, mercenaries and vessels pretending to be pirates. Actual pirates might be bribed to attack foreign shipping, and justifications are sought to allow a power to legally harass or attack the assets of another.

No advantage can be gained without taking risks, so the powers try to get what they can out of a given situation whilst judging how far they can push others. Underestimating the resolve of a hostile power could lead to escalation, but overplaying a willingness to fight might convince them that they need to strike first.

This is a very tense situation characterised by 'incidents' and occasional small-scale combat, with the conduct of the various powers limited by, among other things, a need to maintain the pretence of normal relations with other worlds.

SKIRMISH PHASE

Open conflict is ongoing, but strikes are limited to attacks on commercial shipping, minor assets, colonies and skirmishes between relatively small combat vessels and squadrons. The involved powers do not want to commit themselves, and may well continue to act as if nothing unusual is happening. Normal economic activity, and normal shipping movements, are ongoing.

Each strike, skirmish or attack is followed by a period of diplomatic protests, accusations, and demands. The involved powers attempt to gain as much advantage from the situation as possible without starting a war in the true sense. If one participant feels it has accrued enough advantages that it can win, then it may well choose to escalate to open warfare. Alternatively, a favourable treaty might be demanded from a position of obviously superior strength.

A conflict might escalate from the skirmish phase deliberately, but unintentional escalation is also possible. A cycle of raid and counter-raid, with public opinion outraged by the acts of the enemy, might draw a power into a war its leaders suspect they cannot win.

LIMITED WAR PHASE

Strikes against targets closer to home (both physically and spiritually) are likely, and attacks on the homeworld itself are possible. In the skirmish phase, powers might be unwilling to do anything that hurts the enemy too deeply, as this might make a diplomatic solution impossible.

Once the limited war phase is reached, the involved powers are no longer having a heated exchange intermixed with military action, but are fighting an actual war. The difference may be quite subtle, but it is profound. The war will no longer be referred to as a 'dispute' or 'conflict'; it is a war and the powers will be fighting for a military solution rather than making strikes to gain diplomatic advantage.



The actions of the combatants will still be limited in many ways. Strikes will mainly be aimed at military targets and supporting industries, but efforts will be made to avoid large-scale collateral damage. Thus a major shipyard that is co-located with a high-population city may be left untouched for humanitarian reasons.

Up to this point, the combatants will refrain from attacking targets whose destruction the opposition would find it hard to forgive. The destruction of a prized capital ship or an industrial asset that might take years to rebuild would probably be avoided at the skirmish stage, as it would likely lead to escalation. Once open warfare, even of a limited sort, begins, this is no longer a factor. Indeed, destruction of these targets will become a sought-after goal as it will translate to military advantage.

TOTAL WAR PHASE

A limited war might be cooled down into a period of skirmishing, and finally to a mutually acceptable treaty, or one combatant might gain sufficient advantage that a rather less favourable

settlement could be demanded. If this is not accepted, or if the war escalates out of control, then total war is the only option.

Total war mobilises the entire resources of the combatants, and more importantly considers those resources to be fair targets. Concerns about civilian casualties become largely irrelevant, and attacks on industrial centres become likely. Such attacks will normally be fairly precise. A power that uses orbital bombardment or nuclear weapons against a manufacturing centre in the middle of a city might be able to justify this as an attack on the industrial support structure, intended to weaken the enemy's military capability.

Such a justification might be accepted by other powers once or twice, but each time something like this is done there is a risk that otherwise uninvolved powers might decide that such actions are totally unacceptable. The response could be anything from a strongly worded diplomatic note through cancellation of an alliance or a declaration of (limited) war, to a tit-for-tat nuking of an industrial target. It is certain that any power that attacked





high-population regions like this would face at least an attempt to do the same by its enemy. That is a given; the question is whether it would create additional problems.

Even in a total war situation, attacks that caused mass civilian casualties would need justification. The elimination of a military or industrial target might be accepted in this case. However, deliberate attacks on the population would be considered atrocities by most powers in the Islands. Claims that such attacks were intended to frighten the enemy into submission or to eliminate a segment of the working population to weaken the enemy would be insufficient justification.

Such atrocities would almost certainly cause a backlash among other powers, and would escalate the conflict to its most savage phase.

DESPERATION PHASE

A power that faced annihilation and could not obtain acceptable surrender terms might choose to take desperate measures. Alternatively, these measures might be used against an enemy that committed atrocities, or an attempt to win a total war might escalate beyond the bounds of 'civilised' conflict.

A desperate power will take any measures it feels offer a chance of victory. Nuclear bombardment of civilian areas, use of biological or nuclear weapons, and any other tactics would be considered acceptable.

Once a war has reached the desperation phase, it will end with one or both sides incapable of continuing. If devastation is mutual (or both sides are somehow shocked into realising what they are doing) then a ceasefire is possible. If this happens it will usually become permanent without any real negotiations or terms; both sides will simply stop fighting. However, it is more likely that a war of desperation will continue until one side surrenders unconditionally. Surrender may well be dictated from the wreckage of the capital. The 'winner' of such a war might well not be in much better state than the loser.

It is the realisation that conflicts tend to escalate and that a clear, quick victory is unlikely that keeps the Islands powers from going to war – or at least makes them want to limit their conflicts. Escalation is a constant danger, and it is hard to say exactly what actions will lead to it. Thus, unless a power thinks that it can win a war decisively and quickly, it will try to stop short of open warfare.

NOTES

Note that it is possible for a power to be in a state of, say, skirmishing with one of its enemies whilst fighting a total war with another. These 'phases' are not clear-cut and distinct, and it is possible for one side to think it is fighting a limited war even

after the other has ripped up the rulebook and is preparing a total war strategy. All the leaders of the Islands powers can do is to try to limit the intensity of the conflict unless they are sure that escalation is a good (or the only) option and to look at the actions of their enemies.

Misunderstandings and accidents can lead to escalation. A stray warhead that strikes an orbital habitat instead of one of the defending vessels might cause the victim to go straight to total warfare or even desperation-phase strikes, thinking that the enemy is already conducting such a strategy.

Thus, as a rule, most conflicts will be low-key most of the time, becoming limited wars for a time and then fading back to skirmishing. Any conflict that reaches the total war phase will most likely either proceed to desperation sooner or later, or will spread as more powers join one side or the other to prevent the defeat of allies or the ascendance of potential enemies.

It is possible that the Islands War could gradually become an all-out total or even desperation war, but this is not likely to happen quickly. A protracted period of tensions, skirmishes and occasional limited wars is probable before any major conflagration. The Islands War, if it happens at all, is likely to go on for years.

ADVENTURING IN REFT SECTOR

Traveller campaigns tend to fall into one of a number of general categories, though many incorporate elements of two or more. Reft Sector offers a wealth of adventuring opportunities in many different fields.

Free Trader/Freelance

Perhaps the archetypical Traveller game, the 'free trader' campaign revolves around a small commercial starship and its crew. Small ships of this sort are marginally profitable most of the time, and tend to suffer (or benefit) more from upturns or slowdowns in the economy. A ship with a lot of debts, or one whose crew want to make more money than they can get simply by carrying freight, may end up doing a range of odd jobs. Not all of them will be strictly legal, and clients may not be entirely candid about the nature of the job.

Speculative or exploratory trade is always an option for a commercial ship, i.e. buying goods and seeking out a market for them. Exploratory trade can be highly risky, but it is possible to make a huge profit by heading off the main shipping lanes and into little-known areas. The Islands subsectors offer a number of possibilities of this sort, allowing a small merchant ship to perhaps make a big score once or twice before other shipping concerns catch on. Once this happens, the price of goods tends to even out as the new market becomes flooded or the new source realises that it is underselling.



Phase	Likely Events
Cold War	Sabotage, espionage, deniable small-scale military operations, occasional small-ship actions
Skirmish	Frequent small-ship actions, seizure of commercial starships and minor assets, commando raids against outposts and colonies
Limited War	Attacks on commercial shipping, ground combat on colonies, occasional fleet actions and attacks on major warships, possible strikes against important industrial assets
Total War	Fleet actions, strikes against industrial assets, attacks on homeworld
Desperation	Large-scale orbital bombardment, biochemical warfare, terror raids, virtually anything else that might lead to victory.

A free trader type campaign offers the characters mobility and a reason to go places, which enables them to get into all kinds of trouble. A free trader crew might become involved in smuggling or be hired to spy on a rival while they are in port. A need to alleviate debts (or simple greed) might lead to all manner of hare-brained schemes. Rumours of derelict starships or abandoned installations might prompt a salvage operation, while even a simple charter to deliver mail can lead to all manner of complications.

Charters are a common way for small starships to make extra money. Usually the ship and crew are hired for a fee, to go wherever the patron wants. This might be a simple cargo or passenger run, but could also be something more interesting such as a charter by a group of scientists to transport themselves and their equipment to a remote (and possibly hazardous) region.

Some charter patrons hire the ship in its entirety, but it is also common for a patron to strike a deal with the ship owner. For example, the patron might agree to cover crew salaries, fuel and life support costs while the ship visits certain locations with the patron aboard (for whatever purpose) but leave the owner free to make whatever profit he can on the ship's cargo and passenger space.

An alternate take on this kind of campaign is for the characters to be a band of 'freelance experts' who do not have a starship of their own. This can limit the characters' mobility, which can be a useful plot device for the Referee. It also removes the necessity for characters to have a full set of ship-operating skills between them.

A band of 'freelance experts' will often hire out to local employers to solve problems or bring unique skills to bear. This might be anything from negotiating an end to a labour dispute on a remote mining outpost to stealing information or items from a rival. An adventuring group with a diverse set of skills can undertake almost any task and might find themselves acting as trouble-shooters for a local business or political figure.

Military/Naval

A military or naval game tends to involve a hierarchical command structure, which is not always acceptable to the players. If it is, then there are many possible adventures. The players might be members of one of the Islands powers armed forces, or the Imperial military. They might also be military personnel.

A military or naval game need not revolve around constant combat. Indeed, it may be far more challenging to have to deal with problems without resorting to force. For example, a small Imperial patrol ship on a tour of the Islands subsectors might become embroiled in local conflicts bordering upon open war. The actions of the crew of this vessel could drag the Imperium into a conflict that it does not want and may not have available resources to deal with.

This becomes even more difficult if the characters have orders that they must obey. For example, a patrol ship might be under strict orders not to become involved in local politics, but must somehow deal with a crisis in a manner that does not make the Imperial Navy look ineffectual.

Much the same comments apply to mercenary forces. They may be subject to orders not to be drawn into conflict but have



to deal with threatening events and provocation. Or they might have been deliberately placed in a vulnerable position as an expendable 'tripwire', providing warning of enemy intentions at the expense of their destruction. The mercs would then be caught between their contractual obligations and a need to save their skins.

Military games can be made more than simple shooting matches by the introduction of complicating factors. These might include political or corporate agendas, or secret orders that create a conflict with the main mission. Lumbering a military unit with a group of civilian refugees or giving them stubborn scientists or diplomats to protect can also make a military game much more interesting.

Diplomatic/Espionage/Criminal

The Islands subsectors in particular offer a wealth of opportunities for diplomatic style gaming. Here, much of the action is subtle, with stealth and guile used to obtain information. The characters may find themselves attending receptions and balls, either as dignitaries or pretending to be important people. In such an environment, appearances are all-important and subtlety is vital. Using a fusion gun might solve the immediate problem, but only at the cost of starting a war... so some other means must be found.

Assassination is always a possibility, and of course a diplomatic situation can explode into large-scale violence if things go badly wrong. For the most part, though, a diplomatic/espionage game will be a mix of personal interactions and narrow escapes as the characters try to bribe, coerce, sneak and infiltrate their way to the goal.

There is also plenty of room for criminal activity in the same sort of environment, and for crossover between politics and crime. A diplomat might need to take direct action, and a criminal group might be induced to steal political secrets. In a 'cold war' or 'skirmish phase' scenario, the Islands War is a perfect backdrop to this kind of adventure. Spies might have to team up with criminals to get what they want, and thieves might find that they have stolen the wrong item from some very dangerous people.

Not only are the Islands powers involved in espionage among themselves, but Imperial corporations and the Imperial intelligence services are also embroiled in the same situation. Information is a precious commodity, and anyone who can obtain items or secrets is worth hiring... or eliminating.

Exploration/Scientific

The Imperial Interstellar Scout Service has only patchy files on the Islands and the areas along the edges of the Great Rift. Even less is known about the Rift itself. True, much of it is empty space, but there are anomalies and uncharted objects out there that need exploration and investigation.

The Scout Service often uses freelance scientists and explorers, as do corporations and the islands powers. Thus there are plenty of opportunities for a band of adventurers to become involved in scientific or exploration missions. Even within fairly well travelled areas there is still a need to update the star charts and to conduct demographic surveys. Such work is mundane most of the time, but occasionally a scout or scientific team can find themselves in the middle of a disaster or with great events unfolding around them.

Scientific missions can be hazardous in and of themselves. Close-up study of a volcano or other natural phenomenon can be a dangerous business. Other scientific missions might take the characters into uncharted areas inhabited by potentially hostile people (humans and others), and there is always the possibility that a mission may discover something better left alone.

The Ancients were active in the Rift region, and may have left behind hidden installations or sites with active artefacts. Previously unknown aliens may have lived in the region before or after the Ancients. Who can say what might be found aboard a derelict spacecraft or embedded in the frozen gases of a comet?

Reft Sector is, in many ways, still an unknown. Elsewhere in Charted Space, explorers have been wandering around using Jump drive for ten thousand years; ever since the Vilani founded their First Imperium. But Reft Sector has only seen Jump-capable traffic for the past 130 years or so, and the resources of the Islands powers are limited. Thus there may be some surprises awaiting explorers at the fringes of known territory.

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THE THIRD IMPERIUM.

Reft Sector

Reft Sector is an astrographical oddity. It contains two groups of stars, of relatively standard density, separated by a wide rift. Much of this rift is entirely empty, as the name suggests, but deep within it lie two relatively dense subsectors. These were settled by sublight expeditions from Earth and remained isolated from the rest of Charted Space for most of their history.

The history of the region since that time has been troubled, with periods of war interspersed with relative peace. The existence of many small powers, each with distinct cultures and political systems, led to the creation of a shifting web of alliances and rivalries. As a result, it is likely that at least one dispute or conflict is ongoing in the Islands at any given time, and other powers are on the verge of being drawn in or are offering assistance of one form or another.

There is money to be made in the Islands and via them, but the hazards are considerable.

To use this supplement, a Referee will require the *Traveller Core Rulebook*

MONGOOSE
PUBLISHING



ISBN 978-1-907218-31-6

9 781907 218316

US\$ 24.99