

BLACK STAR RISING

humanity grapples with alien politics, the self-interest of its nations, and the threat of a thousand terrorist factions, armed with technologies beyond comprehension.

a One-Sheet Setting For the Gateway roleplaying game

NINETY YEARS ON

January 15th, 2016. The day the world changed. It was the day of First Contact.

At the end of 2015, having picked up some unusual activity, The scientific community turned its most powerful telescopes on Mars to investigate an found extraterrestrial activity. Messages were sent, and on the 15th of January Earth received a reply.

The extraterrestrials called themselves the Chahun and their message was one of peace and commerce. They had come to trade.

A meeting was hastily arranged and, on the 21st January, in front of millions, and even more watching on TV, the Chahun landed in the UN building Plaza, New York City. From the assembly chambers the Chahun delivered their message, simultaneously translating it into every language they had received the welcome message in.

They claimed to be interstellar prospectors. They had found vast deposits of the mineral resource that has become known in English as "Gatestone" on Mars. They also recognised Earth's sovereignty over the resources of Mars, given the presence of Earth artefacts on the planet's surface. They had come to negotiate mining rights for Mars and offered us great new technologies in exchange.

Negotiations lasted weeks. Following debate over who would lead the negotiations, an Interstellar Relations Council was set up, the UNIRC. The council had six seats, one each for the nations that had sent missions to Mars: the US, China and Japan. Russia was also given a permanent seat, partially politically, and partially as acknowledgement of Russia's pioneering of humanity's space endeavours in the previous century. The final two seats were non-permanent seats, one occupied by a European Union country and another to rotate between other UN member states.

Eventually the UNIRC signed a deal that would see the Chahun offering jobs to human labour on Mars and providing both advanced technologies and starships, to enable the UN to both pro-

tect earth and begin to explore the rest of the galaxy.

Further Chahun came to our solar system and began to build a great interstellar gate at Jupiter's L3 lagrange point. Within two Earth years the gate was built and UNIRC was given its ships and Chahun teachers came to Earth to work in our universities and research facilities.

The years that followed was thought, at the time, to be the dawning of a new era of prosperity. Different nations built their own interplanetary vessels and established bases on Mars. Workers and colonists travelled to Mars to live new lives working in the Gatestone mines. It was a ticket to prosperity for many of Earth's poorest. With the Chahun starships, earth began to explore the galaxy, making first contact with a large community of alien species from many different planets. Here they discovered the Juo-Tae, a forum for planets, governments and other factions to air their grievances and disputes and negotiate pacts and treaties in a peaceful manner.

However, it was Earth's introduction to the interstellar community that eventually led to the Martian Emancipation War. As reports came back it became obvious that the Chahun had bought their Gatestone rights at a greatly knocked down price. The UNIRC and Security Council met in behind closed doors and began to plot the reclamation of Mars.

Needing to act swiftly and with purpose, the UNIRC armed its starships and fastest interplanetary vessels with nuclear warheads and, on November 17th 2047, hit the Chahun holdings on Mars with the full force of their combined military might. In the chaos that followed they established a tough defensive perimeter.

However, this was not an act that the Earth governments had taken without allies in the wider community. Many other factions in the interstellar community were unhappy with the Chahun's exclusive mining rights. Earth opened up the mining rights and started to become a fully fledged member of the Juo-Tae.

Today, more than fifty years on from the Emancipation, Mars has become a hotbed of interstellar politics and trade, with its vast resources supporting many industries. With many different alien species and factions represented here it has become a bizarrely cosmopolitan place, tightly packed into the complexes. The main administrative centre is a military-run affair, managed by a UNIRC coalition force. The current commanding officer is a British Brigadier, Imran Shah. The Brigadier has probably more experience in Xenorelations than any other human, even before taking the post. He handles the different factions with skilful diplomacy, carefully ensuring the Terran, and British, agendas are carried through without ruffling any feathers.

However, Earth is not without its own internal troubles. Whilst the nations with permanent seats on the UNIRC have become rich and powerful on the proceeds of extrasolar developments, others resent the size of their slice of the metaphorical cake. Many religious groups have also found the

bombshell revelation of extraterrestrial intelligence difficult to contend with, and have become more isolated and dogmatic. Furthermore, many Martian and Jovian Gate workers, feeling disenfranchised and are licking deep wounds from the Emancipation War, are forming their own community identities independent from their Terran heritage.

THE GALACTIC ORDER

The interstellar community exists, currently, in a state of relative peace. Just over thirty years before the Chahun made contact with Earth, a great war had raged across the stars.

Before the war two superpowers dominated the Galaxy: the warlike Kajthrax Empire and the Tehwan Commerce League. These two powers had risen to prominence following the decline of a number of older imperial powers that grew up with the early development of Gate technologies. The war began when the Kajthrax began to invade and occupy some of these declining imperial powers. Alliances were formed amongst these powers, most siding against the Kajthrax.

Even with a large alliance working against them, however, the Kajthrax were slowly developing control over one of the most commercially important sectors of the galaxy. Hence the Tehwan League, seeing their lucrative markets slipping under the control of the self-sufficient Kajthrax, entered the war. Slowly the momentum slipped away from the Kajthrax and they began to suffer heavy losses.

Eventually the Kajthrax signalled their desire for a truce and a ceasefire and conditional surrender terms were agreed. The agreement left the Kajthrax Empire largely intact, but forced open their systems to trade. It is unlikely that any other sanction could have more surely or irrevocably changed the balance of power within the Empire and led to its break up.

Although generally peaceful, interstellar politics today are tense. The Kajthrax empire is breaking up, splitting into a number of often violent factions, some focused on revenge against the Tehwan League and their allies, others seeking freedom from the Empire's oppression. The Tehwan League has become the galaxy's single superpower, and is being stretched as it seeks to ensure its agenda across the galaxy. The seemingly unassailable power of the Tehwan leaves smaller factions without means to express their grievances against the League and their closest allies, leaving terrorist tactics as the only avenue to vent their anger.

THE GALAXY

The following section covers the different parts in the galaxy and the alien life characters are likely to meet exploring them.

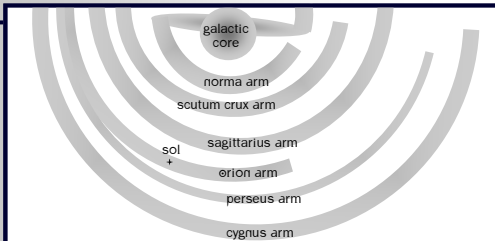
Orion Arm: This is a mineral-rich yet disperse region which has only recently been explored by the different alien factions. Sol was one of the first in this region to be contacted, some other primitive worlds exist, many without spacefaring technology.



Written by Ben Redmond, Designed by Ben Redmond and Nigel McClelland, Layout by Ben Redmond

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Sagittarius Arm: This spiral arm of the milky way, the next arm in from the Orion Arm, is the new hub of galactic influence. Here you find the Tehwan League's home worlds and the Juo-Tae. It is home to many well-developed yet young colonies, providing an excellent region for trading between worlds.

Scutum-Crux Arm: This region of space, sometimes called the Old Imperial Core, belongs to the small number of ancient imperial powers, now in decline. The planets and systems of this section are well developed and packed in close proximity. Whilst the systems remain wealthy, their access to trade is limited to their own mature markets and they are still recovering from the Kajthrax invasions.

Norma Arm: The systems of this region belong to an ancient civilisation, the Zan-Gho who have travelled the galaxy for eons, but their understanding of their technology has been lost to them for millennia. However, with the rise of the Tehwan League, the peace and emphasis on trade has enabled a reawakening of the Zan-Gho's power.

FACTIONS

This following Section looks at some of the major factions in the setting

THE JUO-TAE

The Juo-Tae is perhaps the only interstellar forum for different factions and governments to air their grievances and resolve disputes. Whilst many humans think of the Juo-Tae as an interstellar United Nations, the true nature of the Juo-Tae is very different, and very alien.

Juo is actually the dominant religious organisation of Tehwan's League. The Juo religion is primarily a religion emphasising the importance of trade and commerce, so divergent from the ethics of earth religions that it is hard for humans to identify it as a religion. The Juo-Tae can be seen as the high temple of the religion, where anyone can come to strike deals, seal pacts or ask for guidance or judgement. In reality it is only open to those of significant wealth, power or influence.

BLACK STAR

The Black Star is an unofficial covert operations division of the UNIRC. Initially, Black Star was established as a means of sharing intelligence on interstellar factions and politics between UNIRC member states. However, it soon became apparent that there was a need for unified, and plausibly deniable, action to be taken in the interests of all earth.

When Black Star began, it recruited its staff from existing earth nations' intelligence services. However, this led to hidden agendas and disputes between agents and the nations they represented. Now Black Star, although led by an experienced agent chosen by the council members, recruits fresh agents who have no history of working for any government, and preferably with multiple nationalities or a history of travelling and working through many of earth's nations and even beyond.

Black Star operates more like a terrorist organisation than a legitimate intelligence service,

operating through secret cells with limited communication between their different levels of command. Whilst they do some intelligence gathering, they are more often actively striking out at earth's enemies: from taking out spies and thwarting plots that threaten earth's interests and sabotaging enemy weapons projects to secret propaganda wars against enemy factions.

NATIONS OF EARTH

Of all the nations of earth, two stand out as being the major players in the new interstellar world: The US and China.

The USA remains a powerful economic and military force and, in alliance with Japan, has developed a great understanding of the new technologies. Its internal politics remain in regular flux between the conservative right, liberal left and moderate centrists from both parties. However, in light of the greater galaxy the US finds itself a part of, a greater federal unity has emerged, with politicians of every colour looking to strengthen the nations borders against extra-solar threats. As a result, the intelligence services have become more powerful and influential on federal politics, feeding on a common fear of alien threat.

China, in contrast, has become much more open and active outside Terran spheres of influence. As the US seeks to protect its interests and secure its borders, China seeks to become the spokesperson for the Earth, leading in many negotiations and having the most prominent and active diplomatic group at the Juo-Tae. Whilst the US has specialised in weapons technology, China has become an exploring nation, developing new and improved starships to seek out new planets. China has even begun to build the first Terran extra-solar colony: an agricultural colony on a newly discovered planet they have named Jiang Hu.

TERRA FIRMA

To call Terra Firma a unified faction is perhaps a little inaccurate. Under the figurehead of George Kyle, a self-styled redneck survivalist militiaman, wanted in a number of Terran nations for his terrorist attacks on extra-solar interests, a number of independent cells have sprung up, working to remove earth from alien interests. Currently residing in a Mississippi gaol, awaiting extradition to Italy, as his lawyers fight the order in appeal after appeal, Kyle has become an important figure in American politics, with many supporting his goals if not necessarily condoning his methods.

SUPER-TERRAN WORKERS' ALLIANCE

This labour union represents workers from both the Martian mines and factories and the Jovian Gate. Deemed illegal by many countries, it operates almost as a secret organisation, and, although officially denied, does have its own paramilitary wing. In recent years the Alliance has become a focal point for airing anti-Terran grievances and talk of independent states for Mars and the Jovian stations. As yet its paramilitaries have only involved themselves in small operations to secure evidence from corporations and governments to secure the rights of its members, but rumblings within the Alliance are calling for more definite action to be taken towards independence.

ALIEN SPECIES

This section describes the physical appearances of the different alien species most commonly encountered by humans:

Chahun: broad, tripod-bodied scaly creatures with three arms and legs, and a large head.

Kan-Juo: Dominant Tehwan League species, blue-skinned roughly humanoid creatures with vertical mouths and tentacle-like limbs.

Kajthrax: eight-foot tall arthropod species with two arms and legs.

GAME SYSTEMS

This section covers character creation, equipment, and some hints and tips for GMs to enable you to play a Black Star Rising campaign.

PITCHING THE GAME

It is the GM's Job to decide how you will play the game. The PCs will play a team of characters involved in espionage, counter-terrorism, or even freedom-fighters resorting to terrorist actions themselves. The GM should choose which faction the game is going to be based around and ask the players to build their characters with that in mind. It is recommended that you use the Black Star faction, as this will allow players to explore a more diverse range of character concepts and come up against a greater variety of enemies.

CHARACTER CREATION

Black Star Rising characters are best built as fairly competent, but not heroic, characters, starting with 60 points.

The backgrounds available are as follows:

Academia: Covering research, schooling and academic knowledge.

Computers: Skill at programming and using computer systems.

Crystalscience: Covering more advanced technologies and industries.

Industry: Covering industrial and commercial links, understanding of markets and business and trade practices.

Military: From fighting and using military equipment to protocols and an ability to requisition equipment.

Politics: How knowledgeable and well connected with the various different political factions your character is.

Police: Covering investigative, driving and surveillance skills, alongside police connections.

Spacefaring: Familiarity with ships and

Undercover: Skill and knowledge of undercover techniques,

Underground: Connections and knowledge of underground freedom movements and terrorist techniques.

Underworld: Covering your skill at criminal activities and knowledge of criminals and their activities.

EQUIPMENT

GMs can use the following equipment traits to define new advanced technology equipment.

Defracting: disperses energy beam weapons. Prevents the Energy Beam trait being used.

Disruption: A weapon trait, creating a gravity disruption that pulls matter in different directions. Common in grenades.

Energy Beam: Crystals can be used to create powerful beams of E-M energy.

Gate-Comm: Allows communication over interstellar distances.

Gravity Controlling: Some devices allow individuals or even vehicles to manipulate the gravitational plane that affects them.

