# STAR·DRIVE

## THE EXTERNALS

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# 2

## CONTENTS

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# PROLOGUE

In a recent high-level security session among the Regency and Concord commands on Aegis, Christopher Hale summed up the available intelligence concerning the Externals: "What we positively know about the Externals we can delineate in under a minute. This is an unacceptable position, ladies and gentlemen, and we must do better, or we may lose a war before most of us in the Verge realize we've been invaded."

Indeed, revelations about the Externals during the past years of the STAR*DRIVE® campaign have been slim. All we know for certain is they are a mystery and a danger just beyond the Hammer's Star system. With this product, the veil of secrecy around the Externals is lifted. Gamemasters can move their campaigns in many directions as we put the Externals at center stage and show the face of the enemy. Complete details on the species that make up "the External threat" can be found in *Alien Compendium: Creatures of the Verge* and this book. Additional notable materials on External activities are available in the *STAR*DRIVE Campaign Setting*; *Star Compendium: Systems of the Verge*; and *Klick Klack*. This supplement seeks not to repeat what we already know but to expand the knowledge of the entire External threat and drive its

secrets out into the light, for good or ill.

Starting with this supplement, war engulfs the Verge with a seemingly unstoppable and innumerable enemy. Leaving all the major details on troop movements and fleet actions aside, uncovering the External secrets can easily be a campaign in itself. There are many chances for heroes and others to encounter and learn of the Externals, whether they're on the front lines or behind them. Unless your heroes own a combat-ready ship or are part of the military, much of the fleet action and major encounters of the early war occurs as news for the heroes to learn about from the sidelines.

With this section, we'll define what we know and when we learn more about the aliens from beyond. In Part One, we examine the whole of the External threat, exposing their structure and their member species. We learn its more proper name—the I'krl Exeat, an element of the greater I'krl Theocracy—and some of their plans for the Verge (and their own regions of space beyond the Lightning Nebula). Part Two puts all that into action as the war begins. Opening with a section on External technology and followed by a review of External military forces and tactics, these sections describe the External
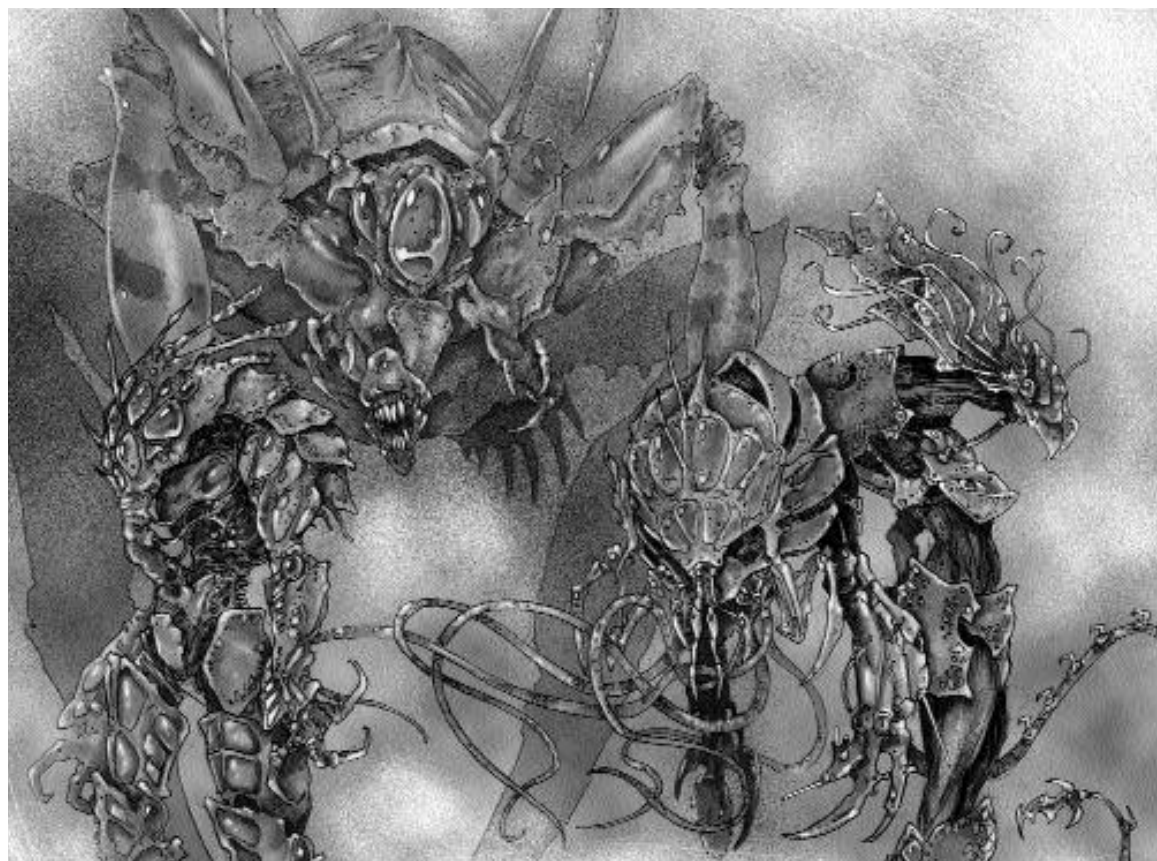
menace in concrete terms. A timeline detailing some of the major strategic elements of the war serves as a framework that Gamemasters can use to create adventures for their players. Part Two wraps up with a section describing how the war affects various locations in the Verge, as well as some ideas delineating how Gamemasters can incorporate the war into their campaigns.

## WHAT WE KNOW

Much of the timeline and what we know about the Externals comes either from hard experience—the assault on Hammer's Star by the klicks, the massacre at Nova Station by the magus, the fall of Jaen to the kroath, and hints of External involvement at Eldala—or from a rogue Galactic News Agency reporter known only as Avatar. These events are more thoroughly covered in numerous other products, and references to them appear both in the timeline below and within each individual species entry in "The Externals" section. This section covers information already gathered before the start of the war in 2503 as well as information still awaiting discovery (such as the status of the teln infestations in Algemron).

### Preliminary Intelligence

Heroes and others can begin their investigations of the Externals by searching pre-existing records, files, and historical data and uncover far more than one might expect. It's all a matter in knowing what to look for and asking the right questions of the right people or machines. Aside from the first encounter reports, there are many layers of intelligence to sort through.

Of all the Externals active in the Verge and Old Space, the gardhyi have been the most prevalent and among the more enigmatic in terms of their motives. Given their slight similarities to humans, gardhyi have hidden among men for centuries in many guises. They often appeared in myths and legends as trickster figures, gods in some more primitive cultures, or as the Men in Black that haunted man's early attempts at extraterrestrial investigations. Human history hints of links to the gardhyi, but none of those links reveal much about their role now in the Verge due to one simple fact: Very few gardhyi act toward the same goals.

Information on the n'sss, aside from the technological schematics and data gained from wreckage at the Zin Point outposts, comes primarily from the t'sa. Upon first hearing of the outpost attacks and later encountering n'sss themselves at the Dusk colony in Oberon, the t'sa loudly proclaimed the n'sss to be demons come alive! Some folks, such as Avatar (the reporter whose stories make up *Threats from Beyond*) and a growing number of others, note that wherever folk report n'sss activity, the involvement of VoidCorp rarely lags behind. Rumormongers insist that the corporation has ties to the n'sss.

The teln, klicks, and kroath maddeningly defy military or other intelligence in one crucial manner: They do not appear to leave physical evidence or written records among those they encounter. The kroath say nothing and the only records one finds on them relate to their immunity to pain, juggernautlike tactics in combat, and their dissolution upon death. The teln remain carefully hidden among the upper echelons at Algemron, or at least that is where most in the know guess them to be. Few reports give that much information on them, unless heroes can gain access to the secret labs and files at Section 21-C at Corrivale or Colonel Davis's camp on Algemron. Heroes can meet, examine, and expose these Externals, but their status among the Externals may be impossible

### The Medurr

The medurr, a warlike reptilian species first encountered outside the Lucullus system in June 2502, are fully detailed in the Alien Compendium II. Their culture is aggressive and expansionistic; the arrogance and temper of individual medurr lead humans who encounter them to consider them a threat. Their presence just outside the Lucullus system has caused much concern among the Barons of the Lucullan League.

As detailed in the Alien Compendium II and in this product, the medurr are at war with the Externals of the I'krl Theocracy, particularly those of the Exeat. They have solidified ties with the Verge Alliance for three simple reasons. First, the medurr hate the species of the Exeat—particularly the kroath and the gardhyi—with an unending passion. Second, they stand to gain greater weapons and ship technology from the people of the Verge as part of their alliance; they are especially interested in stardrive technology. Third, the Alliance won their respect when three Concord Administrators bested the medurr diplomat's honor guard in honorable combat.

Few of the intelligent species that make up the known species of the Concord trust the medurr. A notable exception to this is the weren, who profess at least to understand them. The medurr remain close-lipped during negotiations about their technology and their knowledge of the Externals, bargaining for every scrap of information they give to the Verge Alliance and gaining arsenals of old outmoded weapons that still represent a windfall for them. The medurr are quite aware that the Concord is most interested in their starrift technology—the ability to create artificial wormholes for instantaneous travel—and they plan to make the Verge (and the Externals, peripherally) pay dearly for the information.

to determine until seen in context with any of the other External species.

## First Contacts and First Answers

The entries in "The Exeat" section make numerous allusions to the events and data revelations noted below. Rather than repeat all the preexisting references for all External species to date, below is a table that provides the first encounters and previous reference for more details. Once GMs know when the External species first encountered humanity (and how the encounters went), it's easier to manage additional gathering of information.

## A Need-to-Know Basis

While Gamemasters may adjust this for their own campaigns, we recommend introducing heroes to the upper-echelon species of the Externals methodically. Gamemasters can reveal information about the Externals in a number of different ways. Gossip in free trader bars or other gathering places could provide rumors of bizarre events or encounters out in the depths of the Verge. News reports, such as those put together by Avatar in *Threats from Beyond*, can add substantiation to some of those rumors (or doubt, as the need arises) or introduce new information. The heroes could discover something on their own, something that may threaten their lives. Finally, officials of the Verge Alliance could provide data concerning elements of the Exeat in a region they want the heroes to scout. Remember also that the Alliance wants to collect information more than they want to give it away, so the heroes may end up providing information to the Alliance in exchange for getting answers from them. These and other methods are fine for expanding heroes' knowledge of the External threat. Players beware: The Externals and their spies are quite methodical and careful in their invasion, including controlling information about their activities. They're not just going to show up on Alaundril for interrogation.

The Concord is not the only agency putting together a picture of the Externals. Nearly every stellar nation that has any presence in the Verge seeks to protect itself from this potential danger. Some of these nations undoubtedly see the Externals as a weapon to be used against their enemies. In addition, Verge governments remember well the tragedy of Silver Bell and seek to prevent a repeat of that disaster.

## Against the Clock

The timeline on pages 6 and 7 provides Gamemasters a blueprint of what heroes may or may not know at any given time during their campaigns. Much of the information relates to secret meetings and events, so Gamemasters can make adventures out of seeking such secrets from those involved. This timeline refers to events detailed later in this manuscript, from the initial origins of

## First Encounters with the Externals

| Date | SPECIES—First Encounter Events and Intelligence Gathering |
|---|---|
| Unknown | GARDHYI—Random gardhyi incidents pepper human history. *(Alien Compendium*, p. 119-121) |
| 2436 | N'SSS—Attacks on the outposts near Zin Point reveal the existence of the creatures soon called the n'sss, after the "demons" of t'sa mythology they appear to resemble. (*AC*, p. 125) |
| 2485 | KROATH—Colonies at the Armstrong Cluster decimated by green-armored humanoid forces. Five years later, the attackers are positively identified as the kroath. (*AC*, p. 122) |
| 2486 | BLIX—Blix abandon a destroyed ship and are marooned initially on Bluefall. They are later revealed as benevolent "fixers." *(AC*, p. 116) |
| May 3, 2489 | KLICKS—Assault upon and destruction of Silver Bell colony on Spes in the Hammer's Star system. A mystery for years, it became clear as time went by that it was the klicks that launched this attack. (*STAR\*DRIVE Campaign Setting*, p. 204–206, 219–220) |
| 2496 | TELN—Major Garth Norrik of the Federal State of Algemron's Intelligence Directorate unknowingly infected by a teln. Others in his government have long been under the subtle influences of the teln. (*S\*D* p. 177, 186, 187) |
| 2498 | EVREM—Peaceful encounters with a massive crystalline ship in the Lucullus system reveal the evrem, a psionic species seemingly interested only in peaceful diplomacy and trade. *(AC*, p. 117) |
| December 2500 | MAGUS—Nova Station at the Alaundril shipyards is the site of a massacre at the hands of a creature later identified as a magus. The Center for Xenological Studies on Bluefall gains theories and information about the magus from the evrem "Raphael." *(Threats from Beyond*, p. 10–13; *AC* p. 124) |
| June 2502 | MEDURR—Ship believed a derelict discovered and fought over by numerous factions. Ship reactivates and gates in new species of "dragons," later revealed as the medurr. *(Zero Point; Alien Compendium II)* |

the threat to the stunning secrets unveiled at the battle for Aegis; this brief timeline simply shows which species humanity knows of and can investigate at what times.

## WHAT WE MUST LEARN

Even with the major events noted above, there are many questions that are left after the dust settles on 2503. This product can provide you (and the supporting cast and heroes of the Verge) many answers about the invaders.

## Where Do They Come From?

We can learn that they come from beyond the Lightning Nebula and that they control hundreds if not thousands of systems in the Perseus Arm of the Milky Way galaxy. Not so easily uncovered are External bases hidden throughout the Verge. Many Vergers fear that the Externals lurk within a single jump from their homes, and if they don't drive them out, the war against them will never end. Others believe that the Externals are from much further away; they agree with other Vergers that the fight against the Externals is a fight for the Verge itself.

## Information Timeline

| Date | SPECIES—Additional External Data Gained or Hidden External Activities to Uncover |
|------|------|
| 2364 | GARDHYI—Stage One of the Exeat begins with the arrival of Vurhyr Barok Lhor and his gardhyi agents. Initial incursions by I'krl-aligned gardhyi, teln, and n'sss agents occur all across the Verge and in Old Space, as they begin their research and analysis of human space. None of their actions draw any attention until the 2430s at Zin Point and 2480s at Armstrong, nor do any of these agents and events seem linked to anything greater. |
| 2370 | GARDHYI/N'SSS/TELN—Establishment of hidden bases on planets and moons within the Hathorn system. From these bases, Externals explore human settlements elsewhere in the Verge. |
| 2381 | KADARAN/KLICK—A destroyer-class ship arrives from the Lightning Nebula at Hathorn carrying the Parak Martis and his scientists and an escort of klick ships and crew. The kadarans begin their work transforming Hathorn's moons and planetoids into communications arrays, massive computers, and added habitats for the Exeat forces. |
| 2448 | I'KRL—Fleet movements and fleet building begin within the Lightning Nebula and the Perseus Arm as the preliminary plans of attack begin to form within the I'krl Exeat command. |
| 2451 | TELN—The teln are brought to Algemron. |
| 2452 | I'KRL—Osar of all species are struck by religious fervor as the I'krl gods speak to them, performing miracles throughout Theocracy Space around their holy sites. The upper echelons of the church become far more powerful (due to I'krl partial possession). |
| 2457 | THAAL—Thaal arrive in the Verge for the first time. They soon scuttle an antiquated generation ship, removing its propulsion systems and launching the battered hulk into space using their newly granted powers. Humans find the hulk in the Oberon system (*Threats,* p. 63) forty-five years later. |
| 2459 | SIFARV—After numerous close calls with human scout ships investigating the outer systems, the Exeat receives three dreadnoughts and full crews from the sifarv. Their purpose is to help maintain the secrets of Hathorn. Although the sifarv have supported in principle the goals of the Exeat, the sifarv military does not commit resources to it until now. |
| 2462 | GARDHYI—VoidCorp executives secretly open talks with gardhyi within their territory, and bring the I'krl to the notice of VC upper executives, including its AI CEO. With the promise of more control and a wider base of power (not to mention a sharing of technology that could assure the corporate nation's dominance in a number of fields), VoidCorp and the I'krl form a close, highly secret alliance. |
| 2470 | I'KRL—VoidCorp secretly builds a small colony and communications grid in the Hathorn system. |
| August 2498 | N'SSS—VoidCorp executive Wayne Bailey (Hm/VoidCorp/DFA-7) secretly concludes an agreement with the n'sss via gardhyi agents whereby VoidCorp undertakes to hide a small n'sss base within the gas giant Redcrown in the Aegis system. The intelligence information both VoidCorp and the I'krl receive from this base proves invaluable in their future operations in the Verge. |
| Late 2499 | I'KRL—With the mustering of the Exeat fleet of five capital/fortress ships and their support craft to the Verge and Hathorn, Stage Two of the war truly begins for the Exeat. From this point on, all of the defined I'krl-allied species can be encountered in the Verge, although they remain extremely rare, limited as they are to a few secret staging bases. |
| Early 2501 | EXEAT—The world computer/communications array in the Hathorn system becomes operational. |

## Why Are They Here?

This is the greatest secret held by the invaders, and only one being has the answer: Ython Kadar. He directs his forces passively, making analysis of his plans difficult. Secondary goals among the Exeat forces include providing planets for the klicks, teln, and n'sss to occupy. Other goals are open to wild speculations. If the Vergers can't begin to guess the Externals' motivations, they cannot find a common ground to sue for peace. For now, most Vergers believe they're after the resources the Verge has to offer, and that's as good a reason as any.

## Is There Any Chance for Peace?

The Verge Alliance has not made any headway in attempts at diplomacy with the Externals, as the bulk of the early actions begin and end with noncommunicative species such as the kroath and klicks. Still, having seen the ruthlessness of their fleets at Lucullus and elsewhere, the Alliance doubts that even the upper echelons of the External forces would negotiate unless forced to do so.

## Information Timeline (cont.)

June 26, 2501    I"KRL—The t'sa ship *Twelve Clutch* disappears from normal space but reemerges briefly to transmit one word: "I'krl." This is the first clue about the true name of the External Threat. (*Threats,* p. 13)

May 2502    TELN—Public Knowledge: Avatar reveals the existence of the teln parasites on Algemron via the Galactic News Agency, though many dismiss the report as an urban legend and conspiracy theory. (*Threats*, p. 86)

Late 2502    GARDHYI—Encounters with I'krl-aligned gardhyi occur on Penates and elsewhere, as Helixtech and some of the Barons worry about the medurr/Concord presence outside the system.

September 2502    MEDURR—Informal negotiations with Concord occur near Lucullus. (*Alien Compendium II*)

March 2503    MEDURR—Stykor of Clan Vys arrives at Aegis for initial secret negotiations between the Medurr Imperium and the Verge powers. (*Alien Compendium II*)

April 2503    SIFARV—First encounter. (Encounters could occur earlier, if so desired by the Gamemaster, lone scout ships and sifarv joyriders encountering heroes in various places.) The birdlike sifarv revealed among wreckage and captured as prisoners during and after the battle at Tendril.

June 2503    I'KRL—At Lucullus, the Barons' betrayal of the Concord is revealed as the ULDF sides with the Externals against the Verge Alliance battle groups.

July 2503    BAREEM—First encounter. Occupation of Penates begins. Betrayed in turn by the Externals, the turncoat Barons seek to extricate themselves from a brutal conquest. The hulking bareem quickly overwhelm Lucullus, establishing Port Royal as their primary base within hours and quickly betraying the Jamaican baron and his people.

July 2503    KADARAN—First encounter. Occupation of Penates continues. Other ships arrive after the orbital battle ends, bringing the kadarans. These aliens begin experiments upon the human population shortly after planetfall.

August 2503    BAREEM—Land forces on Penates decimate Santiago in a show of force, wiping out the Picts (and uniting the Supervisors with the Technospiders in a rebel opposition).

September 2503    I'KRL—The cathedral ship of Ython Kadar arrives in the Verge at Hathorn.

September 2503    EVREM—The last evrem crystalship arrives at Bluefall. The evrem reveal all they know about the I'krl and their tactics, their history, and so on. This information constitutes an early windfall for the Verge Alliance, but by itself is insufficient to do more than fight a delaying action against the Externals.

October 2503    MEDURR—Stykor and Administrator Sela Taris seal the Aegis Imperium Accords and forge a tentative alliance against the Externals. The medurr add tactical intelligence to the information provided by the evrem.

November 2503    KROATH—Various agents from Lucullus escape and reveal the bareem and kadaran plans for Lucullus as a staging area and recruitment area for kroath troops. All captured or slain humans, mechalus, and fraal have been turned into kroath!

December 2503    THAAL—First encounter. Like the sifarv, their existence can be uncovered earlier, though the first major encounter with them comes during the Battle of Aegis, as Ython Kadar and three aides first communicate with the Verge Alliance high command. They leave behind the sifarv Tareel, "to teach the heretics of their coming masters and their proper worship."

# SECTION ONE: THE EXEAT

The Prologue recapped what we already know about the External threat and the species we knew were involved. Now we'll take an in-depth look at the I'krl Exeat and its composition.

The "Rank and File" text below takes the broad view and lays out the rough power structure and chain of command among the Exeat. It provides a history of the threat in the Verge (while the rest of the Externals' history lies in Section Three). In addition, "Rank and File" scrutinizes each species' motivations for participating in the invasion of the Verge. While we mention numerous major supporting cast members among the Exeat commanders as we go, we set their write-ups as a sidebar entitled "Important Exeat Leaders."

Six of the next seven sections cover each of the External species in turn with a look at the species in the broadest view possible, giving as much information about the species as the known alien species in the core ALTERNITY® campaign and the additional material in the *Alien Compendium*. This supplement does not reproduce every scrap of material we have on some previously encountered External species—the klicks alone have generated more than thirty pages of hard data!—but this section adds information about their status within the I'krl Theocracy as well as references to all previously printed material.

After the racial sections, we provide the secrets of the krl'osar, the mindwalking priesthood of the I'krl Church. We'll peel back the veil from the church hierarchy and ranks of the priesthood (and thus gain hints of the whole Theocracy rulership). The Church's orthodox regimen of training for all Mindwalkers and psionic talents has created some new mindwalking powers unique to the krl'osar.

The few sidebars among this section's topics flesh out hints from this and other sections of the supplement (or previously noted mysteries from other products). We'll get more details on the human traitors of the Verge (and Old Space) siding with the Externals against the known species as well as the true power players among the I'krl Exeat.. As well, there are more hints and rumors about the mysterious powers behind the Exeat and the dark abilities that they grant their truest servants!

## RANK AND FILE

This is where we'll examine the past and present of the External threat to the Verge. From there, the chain of command and how the power structures work among the Externals become the focus. Next, read through the brief examinations of why each of these species, in the words of Administrator Hank Ward, "has decided to come play king of the hill, and no one told them they couldn't bring nukes." Finally, given the vast differences in species and communications, we'll look at how the Externals communicate well enough to work together toward the domination or extinction of the Verge species.

## History

The events and history that led the Exeat to the Verge and to conflict with humanity cover more than a dozen millennia. However, we've isolated the most immediate events that concern the forces and faces of the I'krl Exeat.

More than three thousand years ago, a fearsome species, long imprisoned among unknown dimensions, awoke as a result of some unknown psionic or interstellar event. At first only aware of the universe around them and the lesser species that worshiped them as long-vanished gods, these I'krl began communicating cryptically through kadaran world-computers and sending dream visions to followers trained in datalinking. For more than five thousand years, the I'krl Church had held fast to the secret that their gods touched them through their living computers. During this time, the I'krl urged their priests to take power out of the hands of secular rulers, moving the Church from its secondary role as the power behind many sifarv thrones to the role of ruler, making the sifarv arnak a puppet emperor. They also urged many agents into the Void to seek out the technology that kept them imprisoned and out of their original dimension.

These agents came to the Verge and Earth over the centuries for many purposes. One such mission sent Vurhyr Barok Lhor toward the Verge in 2364 in order to establish an information-gathering base long before the Exeat was planned. The base grew over the next decades as the I'krl cast their senses out into the Verge and the Stellar Ring, looking for some way to free themselves and urging their followers to aid their search. Among the earliest projects was the kadaran growth of a world-computer on one of Hathorn's moons. Thaal and gardhyi explorers canvased the Verge searching for Precursor ruins, finding only those on Eldala (explaining the edanwe's aversion to fraal today).

In 2452, the I'krl and some of their priests suddenly registered a massive wave of psionic energy coming from the Verge, and they found that it opened rifts in subdimensions adjacent to their own. The I'krl, while unprepared for the wave (caused by the Vanishing of Bluefall), used it to partially escape their dimensional prisons by extending parts of their collective consciousness into

the minds of certain senior priests. Such krl'osar became the powerful *krl'yth*, their eyes now tinged purple with the "magic" gained in I'krl service. Still quite rare and secret except through rumor, these powers boosted the priests' natural psionics but also allowed them to perform "miracles" to signal the rise of the Exeat after nearly a century of preparations and minor incursions into human-claimed space.

Within a year of what the faithful called the Sanaremn ("The Miracle Wave"), the I'krl sent visions of the Verge and its riches to the thaal Ython Kadar, the gardhyi Vurhyr Barok Lhor, and the sifarv Paratak Trewys. These leaders began planning a full military invasion of the Verge. Ython Kadar and Paratak Trewys secretly began assembling a fleet as Vurhyr Barok Lhor and his cadre of agents out beyond the Theocracy began the final intelligence preparations for the Exeat. The early attacks at Armstrong, Zin Point, and Hammer's Star tested humanity's mettle and prevented their stumbling upon Exeat installations and ships. Within ten years of those initial incidents, the gardhyi (or their teln allies) had contacted or infiltrated numerous powerful human groups, including the upper executive ranks of VoidCorp and Helixtech in the Lucullus system.

Hearing of increased activity in the Verge by the Theocracy, the evrem sent three ships into the Verge to keep a watchful eye on the Exeat; they were to intervene only if absolutely necessary. When kroath serving the I'krl destroyed one of the ships in transit, the evrem responded by teleporting blix onto three kroath battleships, which caused one of them to crash and incidentally brought the blix to Bluefall (the fate of the other two kroath ships is unknown). They also nudged an automated riftship of the medurr off course during its flight to ensure its arrival in the Lucullus system in time to possibly help disrupt the I'krl invasion.

The Exeat had mustered the majority of its fleet and its forces at Hathorn by the end of the 25th century; its world-computer there became operational in 2501. In December 2500, the n'sss unleashed a magus at Nova Station in the Tendril system, assigning it the mission of assassinating four stellar nation ambassadors and their party. The magus was able to kill three of them, along with several other people, before security forces brought it down. The n'sss targeted the four ambassadors because they had come out to seek exploration and mining rights to the gas giant Sperous. Such exploration threatened a small n'sss base hidden within its upper atmosphere. Similar tactics had been planned years before during their settlement of Redcrown in the Aegis system, but VoidCorp's protection of their base has made such a move unnecessary.

The disappearance of the t'sa ship *Twelve Clutch* six months later during a stardrive experiment did far more than the Verge (or the Exeat) realized. The experimental stardrive dropped the ship through drivespace and close enough to the dimensions in which the I'krl lay imprisoned that they grabbed hold of the ship's computers and systems. The reappearances of the ship represented the brief moments where the t'sa regained control and exited the subdimensional space before the I'krl or the malfunctioning stardrive pulled them back out of normal space. Whether this experiment has given the I'krl the chance to break free or not is unknown, though finding the t'sa and their ship might be the first step for humanity to understand and defeat these ancient evils now invading the Verge. (Later military proposals suggest detonating the ship while in drivespace, possibly injuring or even destroying the I'krl, but no one has yet found a reliable means of contacting the *Twelve Clutch*.)

The following year (2502) saw the Exeat in a state of readiness and preparation, their klick and kroath shock troops sowing chaos around the Verge. The Exeat mounted continual attacks against Concord assets in the Hammer's Star system to keep everyone's eyes out of Hathorn, and they placed troops for the coming conflict in Dewi (hidden "ghost ships" of the n'sss) and Vieron (kroath invaders paving the way for kadaran science teams). The Exeat allied with the Ptolemy pirates out of expediency: It allowed them to establish a kadaran shipyard well away from the main battle zones as a contingency by promising the pirates some of their tech. The long-hidden and highly effective teln spies finally became active partners of the Exeat. They urged some of their hosts—specifically senior Vice President Faith Terragis of HelixTech and Farr Histwin of Union Penates—to create a panic about the recent incursion of medurr near their space and to ally with gardhyi agents of the Exeat. The plans of more than a century were coming together, and soon the Verge would tremble at the coming of the Exeat and the I'krl gods who drove them forward.

## Power among the Exeat

There are three power structures among the I'krl Theocracy, and they are fully represented among the Exeat of Ython Kadar. In short, the psionic priesthood holds power over the nobility, which in turn holds power over the military, all three sharing dominance over their general public.

The religious power structure comes from the I'krl Church (represented by the krl'osar, "the holy servants of mystery.") A krl'osar is a combination of Mindwalker, Concord Administrator (in a trouble-shooting and leadership capacity), and religious priest.

The noble power structure comes originally from the Sifarv Demesne (which has been wholly absorbed and

subsumed by the I'krl Theocracy) and its extant leadership. Now rendered largely ceremonial, nobles still hold their titles and much social power, though they rule only as dictated by their religious equal or superior. Many among the nobility are also part of the church or military, their roles and social influence improved even though their earned ranks are often far beneath their noble titles. While still answering to the chains of command, nobles can sidestep certain rules and obligations unless in direct conflict with orders.

The military power structure is very similar to that of the human military, though the latter lacks the sentient

## Table 1: External Ranks and Titles

This table shows the power ranks among the religious (the krl'osar) and the military (the damarithan) power structures (as per joint commands and ships' crews). There is always at least a kihl krl'osar and four lesser priests (if not krl'osar of greater ranks) on any ship above a fighter as "loyalty officers" to relay news back to the Theocracy or Exeat Command at Hathorn. Such offices remain rare among the ground troops.

### Ranks and Species

| Religious | Noble | Naval | Military | Thaal | Sifarv | Gardhyi | Kadaran | Bareem | Teln | N'sss | Klick | Kroath |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Krl'xenhon | | | | X* | | | | | | | | |
| | Arnak | | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Krl'vurhon | | | | X* | | | | | | | | |
| | Arak | | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Krl'ython | | | | X* | | | | | | | | |
| | Patnak | | | | X | | | | | | | |
| Krl'vurhyr | | | | X* | | X* | | | | | | |
| | Paratak | | | X | X | X | | | | | | |
| | | Xenarksol | | X | X | X | | | | | | |
| | | | Tr'komro | X | X | X | | | | | | |
| Krl'oharel | | | | X* | X* | X* | | X* | | | | |
| | Parak | | | X | X | X | X | X | X# | | | |
| | | Ytharksol | | X | X | X | X | | X# | | | |
| | | | Xenkomro | X | X | X | X | X | X# | | | |
| Krl'vuryth | | | | X* | X* | X* | | X* | | | | |
| | Mirnak | | | X | X | X | X | X | X# | | | |
| | | Arksol | | X | X | X | X | | X# | X# | | |
| | | | Ythkomro | X | X | X | X | X | X# | X# | | |
| | Mitarak | | | X | X | X | X | X | X# | X# | | |
| | | Ythapsol | | X | X | X | X | | X# | X# | X# | |
| | | | Komro | X | X | X | X | X | X# | X# | X# | |
| Krl'xenoth | | | | X* | X* | X* | | X* | | | | |
| | Mitak | | | X | X | X | X | X | X# | X# | | |
| | | Apsol | | X | X | X | X | | X# | X# | X# | |
| | | | Komyth | X | X | X | X | X | X# | X# | X# | |
| Krl'noth | | | | X* | X* | X* | | X* | | | | |
| | | Ytharsol | | X | X | X | X | | X# | X# | X# | |
| | | | Komith | X | X | X | X | X | X# | X# | X# | |
| Krl'kihl | | | | X* | X* | X* | | X* | | | | |
| | | Tarlsol | | X | X | X | X | X | X# | X# | X# | |
| | | | Komosar | X | X | X | X | X | X# | X# | X# | |
| | | Arlsol | | X | X | X | X | X | X# | X# | X# | |
| | | Orlsol | | X | X | X | X | X | X# | X# | X# | |
| | | Urlsol | | X | X | X | X | X | X# | X# | X# | |
| | | | Ythkometh | X | X | X | X | X | X# | X# | X# | |
| | | Soleth | | X | X | X | X | X | X# | X# | X# | X# |
| | | | Kometh | X | X | X | X | X | X# | X# | X# | X# |
| Krl'ojekh | | | | X* | X* | X* | | X* | | | | |
| | | Sol'oth | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| | | | Kom'oth | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |

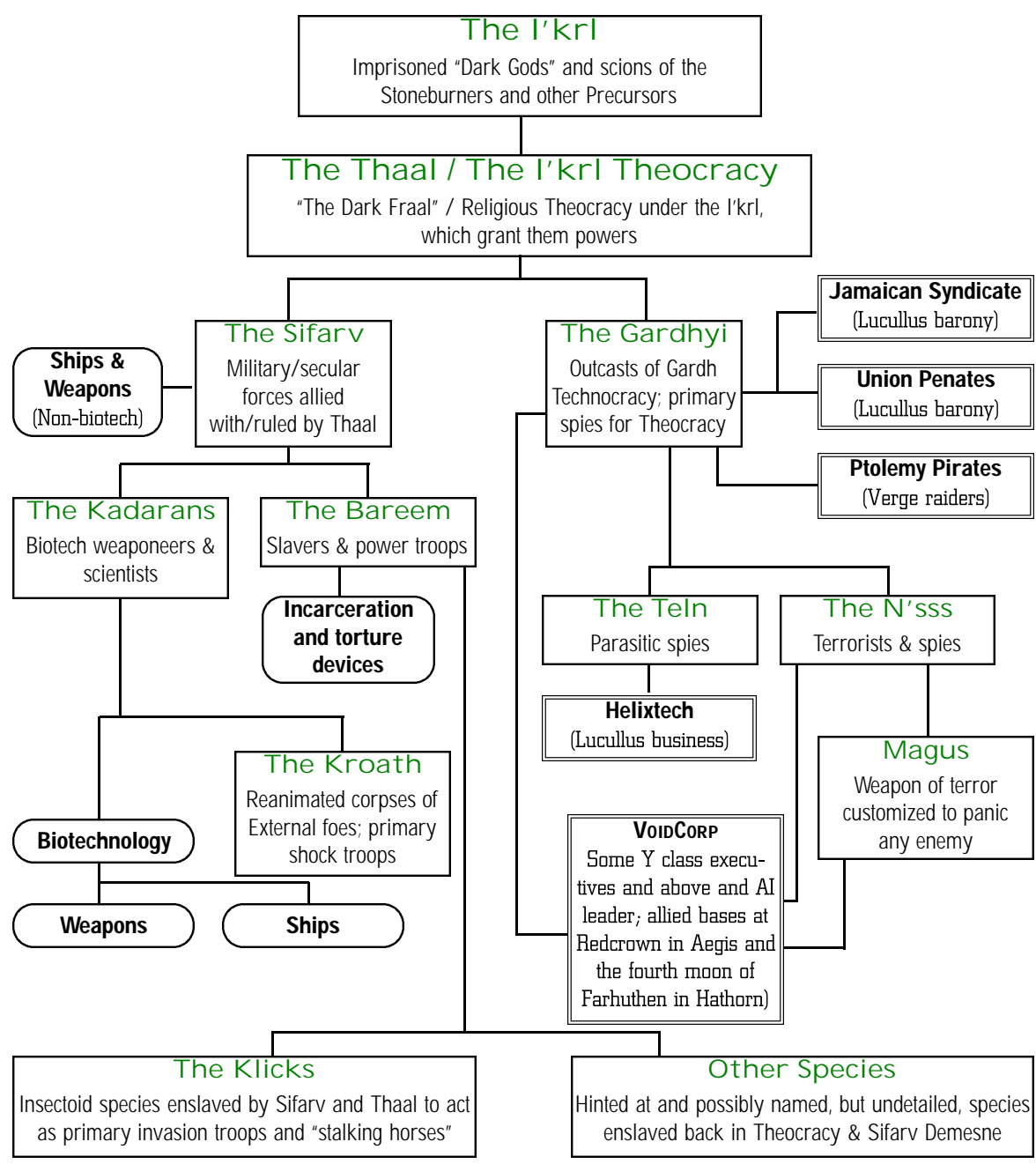\* Only if possessed of psionic talent or mindwalking ability.

\# Ceremonial titles for client/slave species (socially beneath other species with similar titles).

Shaded titles do not have representatives of this rank among the I'krl Exeat (only back in I'krl space).

Note that magus never possess rank of any sort; they are treated as little more than biological machines.

## Species Hierarchy among the Exeat

Rounded boxes are technologies or weapons, not allies.
Double-bordered boxes are human traitors allied with the Exeat.

**The I'krl**
Imprisoned "Dark Gods" and scions of the Stoneburners and other Precursors

**The Thaal / The I'krl Theocracy**
"The Dark Fraal" / Religious Theocracy under the I'krl, which grant them powers

**The Sifarv**
Military/secular forces allied with/ruled by Thaal

**Ships & Weapons**
(Non-biotech)

**The Gardhyi**
Outcasts of Gardh Technocracy; primary spies for Theocracy

**Jamaican Syndicate**
(Lucullus barony)

**Union Penates**
(Lucullus barony)

**Ptolemy Pirates**
(Verge raiders)

**The Kadarans**
Biotech weaponeers & scientists

**The Bareem**
Slavers & power troops

**Incarceration and torture devices**

**The Teln**
Parasitic spies

**The N'sss**
Terrorists & spies

**Helixtech**
(Lucullus business)

**Magus**
Weapon of terror customized to panic any enemy

**The Kroath**
Reanimated corpses of External foes; primary shock troops

**Biotechnology**

**Weapons**

**Ships**

**VOIDCORP**
Some Y class executives and above and AI leader; allied bases at Redcrown in Aegis and the fourth moon of Farhuthen in Hathorn)

**The Klicks**
Insectoid species enslaved by Sifarv and Thaal to act as primary invasion troops and "stalking horses"

**Other Species**
Hinted at and possibly named, but undetailed, species enslaved back in Theocracy & Sifarv Demesne

weapons the kroath and magus have at their disposal. A hierarchical chain-of-command governs the Exeat military much as it does the human one. The officers of the Exeat stellar navy and the officers of the army troops remain distinct and separate, however. Neither can issue orders to the other, though each can make official requests for cooperation.

Military officers, nobles, or krl'osar make and deliver the orders and decisions to the troops. These orders can be countermanded by other leaders of the appropriate ranks and titles, though this often causes strife among the power structures. Look at TABLE 1: EXTERNAL RANKS AND TITLES to see how the ranks of krl'osar, nobles, and naval/military officers stack in terms of influence. The most powerful titles sit at the top of the table, and any rank stacked above another can overrule or change orders given by a lesser. Thus, Ython Kadar rules the Exeat, and an apsol (ship captain) must obey the orders of a xenoth krl'osar or a mitarak.

While the religious role is far less heavy-handed back among the Theocracy worlds due to familiarity and control, the Exeat is a religious crusade directly mandated to its commanders from the I'krl themselves. Thus, while the power of the nobility is still recognized, it is less significant to the Exeat than are the religious and military contributions and efforts. While krl'osar can put orders to the other two powers, nobles can normally control the military and their own. The military is more important to Kadar, and thus there is slightly more power placed in military hands (at least enough to ignore noble orders of up to two ranks above military). Thus, among the Exeat, a ship captain can have his orders changed only by a noble that holds a rank of mirnak or above.

## Racial Prejudices among the Externals

While the social structure dictates most of the power strata among the Exeat species, there are other generally held prejudices and attitudes along racial lines. While the rank and file follow the dictates of their superiors, their cultural and personal biases follow different lines. As seen on the Racial/Political Groups of the Exeat graphic, certain species answer to certain others in the hidden social pecking orders. While a barem could attain a higher rank than a sifarv or a gardhyi, both of the latter consider their superior officer beneath them and resent taking orders "from a lesser being."

The graphic shows that all the human traitors except those from Helixtech hold ties to the gardhyi. Most of the contacts have been made via gardhyi agents simply due to humanity's discomfort with the unknown alien natures of most other Exeat species. Helixtech lies under the control of some teln tangles, and they have independent

plans of an unknown nature for this company and their hosts, which do not yet interfere with the Exeat plans. Given the normal social strata, the humans should be accorded social importance at least equivalent to the kadarans or bareem. However, they are as removed from social significance in the eyes of the Exeat as are mere kroath. Of course, until the humans outlive their usefulness, the crafty gardhyi play up their roles among the goings-on in the Verge.

## Motivations among the Exeat

Why did all of these species come together and launch a massive offensive against near-helpless humanity? While the history and the details on the species should more clearly describe their reasons and links to one another, here are brief notes as to the level of investment each has toward the Exeat.

**The Church:** The thaal and all krl'osar and zealous I'krl worshipers follow the dictates of Ython Kadar, the Prophet of the I'krl Rising. He promises that their actions shall lead to a new wave of unparalleled power for all krl'osar and faithful. That is enough to motivate thousands of zealous Mindwalkers and thaal to the cause, though even Kadar does not know what happens after they free the I'krl from their dimensional prison—and he does not particularly care. The happenstance discovery of the thaal's ancient enemies—the fraal—in the Verge has only increased the zealotry into a holy war against the heretics who long ago sinned against their gods.

**The Gardhyi:** The gardhyi, if not exactly tied to the krl'osar cause, have long been interested in the Verge as a possible way home. Some believe the key to ending the exile imposed by their starwebs lies among the Precursor ruins in and around the Verge. Many of them have spent centuries either trying to find those keys or at least keep others from doing so. Other gardhyi have joined the Exeat simply to foment chaos among the human nations and their allies. Whether such a strategy serves their own goals or those of others is not certain. Finally, a few of the gardhyi simply want to go home, and the best way for them to achieve this is to assure the ascendancy of the Gardh Technarchy by bringing to their knees through warfare its potential opponents—namely the I'krl Theocracy and their sifarv allies.

**The Sifarv:** The sifarv see this Exeat from numerous sides. Many simply follow the lead of the religious and bring their resources and military might to bear for the Exeat. Other individual ship commanders and nobles see the Verge as an opportunity to colonize new worlds (hopefully far from the reach and control of the I'krl Church) and may go AWOL to do so. Still others have carefully watched humanity and its allies resist the forces

that have pulled so many species under the sifarv and I'krl wings. They see potential new allies to help them throw off I'krl domination, though these rebels are few among the military.

**The Teln and N'sss:** The teln and the n'sss have no real allegiance to the Theocracy or the Exeat. They merely see this as an opportunity to expand into new colonies and exploit the riches of the Verge. The teln remain in constant need of new hosts, and humans seem genuinely suited to their needs, while the n'sss enjoy the freedoms of colonizing gas giants where few other starfaring species bother them. Much of their initial involvement has since ended, their intelligence having served the Exeat well

**The Kadarans:** The kadarans always enjoy new opportunities to test their latest experiments, and their fast-growing biotech weapons generators (first used with the klick advance troops) are an unparalleled success. The kadaran scientists really see the Exeat merely as a chance to push forward the boundaries of their biotechnology, as well as a way to gather and examine new human technologies to adapt to their own uses (like stardrives, mass reactors, and cybernetics).

**The Bareem:** The bareem have simple motivations: The more species they help the sifarv and the Church conquer and subjugate, the more important they are to the whole of the Theocracy. Their loyalty to both command structures is blind and nearly unthinking, though brief encounters with weren and humans have shaken their resolve. Of all the species they have enslaved, they have never encountered anything remotely resembling themselves. While most bareem continue in their roles as slavers, some individual barem have begun to wonder whether or not they should work to enslave those similar to themselves…

**The Klicks:** The klicks have long been enslaved by the bareem and the kadarans, who view them as their greatest success at genetic manipulation since themselves. Their original planet (called Hivehome by klicks) remains under martial law and occupied by bareem, and the klicks will not rebel as long as the bareem can threaten the klick hivemothers. Klicks on Hivehome remain unaltered, though 90% of all klick eggs get shipped offworld and altered to what we see as klick norms. Many klick leaders seek the chance to break free of kadaran domination, but innate conservatism and fear keep them from rebellion.

**The Magus:** The magi have no other drives beyond those given to them. For all intents and purposes, they are living weapons that destroy any foes at which their masters point them. The Exeat has numerous magi under development at Redcrown (within the VoidCorp "gas mine"), their forms custom-designed to terrorize the varied Verge species. Until they are needed as distractions or demoralizing agents, the magi remain inert.

**The Kroath:** Kroath, as the primary occupation forces and shock troops, exhibit few motivations other than following the orders of their kadaran "creators," which they follow without exception.

## Language among the Externals

I'krl Common is a complex spoken language, though it is far simpler than having to learn fourteen or more separate racial tongues, and thus its existence proves necessary for the continued existence of the multiracial Theocracy. The common written language is pictographic and incorporates graphic or alphabetic elements of all the subject species' native tongues. This make it easier for psionic communication among the krl'osar (flashing images and words) as well as training many different species their ship and weapons controls, all rigged with pictographic button panels.

I'krl grammar and language (see below) reveals how stratified and structured life among the Theocracy systems can be. Each social group has a social, political, and military title and there are multiple meanings and subtle distinctions among them. In a society whose common tongue must address old noble titles, multiracial military and religious titles, and additional secular titles, social stratification still holds as present in this glossary of titles, listed in order of sociopolitical influence and power in the Theocracy.

Many words, especially those directly related to the church and its priests and officers, begin with the prefix Krl'. In practice (and in much of the text of this book), that prefix is dropped due to the overriding assumption and knowledge that it is omnipresent in the language and context. Only when said prefixes are altered by some grammar does it become necessary to write or speak the whole words.

Here are some universal rules for this language which are used as examples throughout this book:
► Plurals are formed by adding N after any vowels, AN after any two consonant construction, or an A after the letters L, N, R, or W. Collective group words (I'krl, krl'han, etc.) use no plural forms.
► All adjectives are prefixes added to words with an apostrophe (or a verbal rest).
► I'krl Common does not recognize gender, so references only go to I/we, you (singular)/you (plural), and it/they.

## THE SHOCK TROOPS

As with all wars, they start with the guys in the trenches, and they're often the first and last things many see of a war. This section recaps information on the "grunts" of the Externals, the klicks, the kroath, and the magus, and reveals their roles in the grand scheme of the I'krl.

## The Klicks

Of all the Externals, humanity remains most familiar with the klicks as they have been a recognized enemy for more than a decade (and they're the principal alien enemies in most STAR*DRIVE products). Like in so many early Earth science fiction tales, the klicks are "alien bugs," insectoid creatures that rarely take any time to communi-

## Social Terms

| I'krl Common | Pronunciation | Definition/Notes |
|---|---|---|
| Uth | OOTH | Nonjudgmental term for a person, corporeal being, mortal. In plural form, this means any or all of these potential translations: all, whole, empire, state, whole of people, masses. |
| Ath | ATH | Term connotes a being lower than a slave, an "expendable;" it often refers to an unbeliever, a heretic, or a blasphemer vs. the I'krl. This term does not even suggest the applicable creature is a person, as animals are of higher social or religious significance. All Vergers = Athan ("heretic subcreatures"). |
| Oth | OTH | Term connotes least beings (slaves, "expendables") in social or other power structures or contexts, though it still means "person, being, mortal" (plural = generic masses, the people). They are seen more as assets, property, or goods than as beings of consequence. |
| Eth | ETH | Person, being, mortal (plural = generic masses, the people) Term connotes lesser beings in social or other power structures or contexts. This connotes the bulk of society. |
| Ith | ITH | Generic term for a mortal being as part of a greater collective (the singular) or a group or collective of whom the speaker is a part (modified as species name or as a member of a power group). These are rising members of society but not yet leaders of standing (junior officers and ranks). |
| Yth | EETH | Greater corporeal being, superior being (in all ways), person of high standing or power. Ythan are the leaders in generic terms. |
| Krl | KURL | An unknown, a mystery, an enigma (as noun); something of mysteries, something hidden, inscrutable, enigmatic, mysterious without negative connotations (as an adjective or prefix). |
| E'krl | eh-KURL | A conundrum (as a descriptor of a series of events), a mystery or confusing series of events with no apparent connections or meanings with one another. |
| O'krl | oh-KURL | A personal, singular unknown; an anomaly; (popular meaning) The Mystery. |
| U'krl (u'krla) | uh-KURL | An unknown person, a stranger, a "wild card." |
| U'pom'krl | uh-POM-kurl | Mercenary (literally, "an unknown stranger subordinate to money"). |

## Religious Terms

| I'krl Common | Pronunciation | Definition/Notes |
|---|---|---|
| I'krl | ih-KURL | An embodiment of all collective mysteries; (popular meaning) The Gods of the I'krl Theocracy, the Mysteries, the Holy Unknown, the Dark Veil, the Dark Cloud (by outsiders). |
| Krl'uth | KURL-ooth | A citizen of the Theocracy; a follower or person subordinate to the Mystery (plural = generic for all those ruled by the I'krl Theocracy and/or all followers of the I'krl). |
| Krl'ath | KURL-ath | Branded as "unworthy" yet still part of the collective by alliances and deals: the enslaved klick troops, client n'sss and teln (the "u'pom'krl" mercenaries), any prisoners, and human Verge traitors. The Unworthy/Nonbelievers/Expendables. If they do not recognize the I'krl as gods yet work with them, they are krl'ath. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Krl'oth | KURL-oth | A slave of the I'krl Theocracy, an expendable, a piece of meat. The kroath fall here (as intelligent tools), as do numerous species left undefined and unnoted under the rule/enslavement of the bareem. |
| Krl'eth | KURL-eth | This most often means "one (pl: those) ruled by the I'krl Theocracy" but it specifically leaves out the leaders and the slaves, referring to the general public, not those above or below. The bulk of this rank are individual bareem or kadarans, as well as traitor sifarv (if not krl'ath). |
| Krl'ith | KURL-ith | This refers to any one being (or beings) in power within the Theocracy, any-where from city councilors to the xenhon and the arnak. Generically, it can refer to individual sifarv, thaal, and gardhyi, though it accommodates other species of mirnak rank or better (individual bareem, etc.) or any one of the faith (any acolyte or above in the Church). |
| Krl'yth | KURL-eeth | A person of the highest power in the Theocracy. These refer usually to those in-dividuals who have received the touch of the I'krl and carry their essence with them. There are rarely more than two dozen krl'yth at any time, and they tend to be of these ranks (and limited to gardhyi, sifarv, and thaal species): the xen-hon, the vurhona, the ythona, the vurhyra, the arnak, and the arakan. |
| Krl'osar | KURL-oss-arr | "The Bodies of the Mysteries:" The Holy Servants (as a whole organization). This is one of the few words that doesn't follow the plural forms and is used as a collective and singular: Any Mindwalker is a krl'osar, and all priests are kr-l'osar. Krl'osar also gets used where humans use "ecclesiastic," "cleric," or "reli-gious" as appositives or adjectives. |
| Krl'han | Kurl-HONN | "Mouths of the Mysteries:" Prelata (senior ecclesiastic offices); Mindwalkers of levels 19 and beyond. |
| Krl'san | Kurl-SONN | "Eyes of the Mysteries:" Tribuna (junior ecclesiastic offices); Mindwalkers of lev-els 10-18. |
| Krl'rin | Kurl-REEN | "Ears of the Mysteries:" Prosela (lesser ecclesiastics); Mindwalkers of levels 1-9. |
| Krl'xenhon | Kurl-ZEEN-hone | (No plural.) Head of church hierarchy; "Highest Father of the Mystery"; rules Theocracy; Mindwalker level 28 (minimum). |
| Krl'vurhona | Kurl-VURR-hon-ah | "Holy Fathers of the Mystery;" rule the Greater Holy Sees; Mindwalker level 26+. |
| Krl'ythona | Kurl-EETH-own-uh | "Great Fathers;" rule the Lesser Holy Sees; Mindwalker level 22-25. |
| Krl'vurhyra | Kurl-VURR-heer-ah | "Holy Voices;" rule a Seat (single system) or patrol Theocracy; Mindwalker level 19-21. |
| Krl'ohareln | Kurl-oh-HARR-eln | "High Speakers of Mystery;" rule the Curia (singular planets) or patrol as an itinerant; Mindwalker level 16-18. |
| Krl'vurythan | Kurl-VURR-eeth-an | "Holy Masters of Mystery;" rule a Congregate (continent or orbital holding) or patrol a Greater Holy See or a fleet; Mindwalker level 13-15. |
| Krl'xenothan | Kurl-zeen-OTH-ann | "Great Servants of Mystery" (Deacons); rule a city or patrol a Lesser Holy See or a wing of capital ships; Mindwalker level 10-12. |
| Krl'nothan | Kurl-NOTH-ann | "Those who Serve Mystery" (Priests); patrol a system or a capital ship; Mind-walker level 7-9. |
| Krl'kihlan | Kurl-KEEL-ann | "Those who Hear the Mystery;" patrol a planet or wing of support ships; Mind-walker level 4-6. |
| Krl'ojekhan | Kurl-ODJ-ekh-ann | "Those who Listen to the Mystery;" an acolyte or apprentice level krl'osar limit-ed to training at one cathedral or church; Mindwalker level 1-3. |
| Fhar | FAR | Sacred, holy (used for things and places—objects and nonliving things). |
| Vur | VURR | Sacred, holy (used for people, ideas and concepts—living things). |

## Military/Noble Terms

| I'krl Common | Pronunciation | Human Analogues | I'krl Common | Pronunciation | Human Analogues |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Arnak | ARR-nak | Emperor | Urlsol | URL-sole | Ensign |
| Arak | ARR-ak | King | Solith | SOLE-ith | Chief Petty Officer |
| Patnak | PAT-nak | Prince | Soleth | SOLE-eth | Petty Officer |
| Paratak | pa-RAT-tak | Duke | Solothan | SOLE-oth-ahn | stellar fleet |
| Parak | PAYR-ak | Count | | | |
| Mirnak | MEER-nak | Baron | Tr'komro | turr-KOME-ro | Five-star general/ Commander of all infantry forces |
| Mitarak | mitt-ARR-ak | Seneschal | | | |
| Mitak | MEET-ak | Mayor | | | |
| | | | Xenkomro | zhen-KOME-ro | General |
| Xenarksol | zhen-ARK-sole | Fleet Admiral/ Commander of all naval forces | Ythkomro | eeth-KOME-ro | Major General |
| | | | Komro | KOME-ro | Brigadier General |
| | | | Komyth | KOME-eeth | Colonel |
| Ytharksol | ee-THARK-sole | Admiral | Komith | KOME-ith | Lieutenant Colonel |
| Arksol | ARK-sole | Rear Admiral | Komosar | KOME-oh-sahr | Major |
| Ythapsol | ee-THAP-sole | Commodore | Ythkometh | eeth-KOME-eth | Lieutenant |
| Apsol | APP-sole | Captain | Kometh | KOME-eth | Sergeant |
| Ytharlsol | ee-THARL-sole | Commander | Kom'oth | KOME-oth | stellar army (i. e. troops and/or national army carried by fleet) |
| Tarlsol | TARL-sole | Lieutenant Commander | | | |
| Arlsol | ARL-sole | Lieutenant | | | |
| Orlsol | ORL-sole | Lieutenant, Junior Grade | | | |

cate rather than attack any human they encounter. While devastatingly effective, klicks are often the troops deployed earliest as they have the least value to their masters among the species of the Exeat.

### Secrets among the Exeat

The klicks encountered by humanity hardly resemble their original bioforms any more after millennia of subjugated genetic manipulation. Klicks can no longer survive without scientific alteration and life support to sustain their eggs (and their previously manipulated cell structures) to hatching and maturity. The original klick species survives a meager existence among the Theocracy, their eggs providing stabilizing DNA for kadaran manipulation into the engineered klick gene pool. If possible to free Hivehome from the bareem, the klicks might turn on their long-time torturers and masters….

## The Kroath

The rogue TVN reporter Avatar opened peoples' eyes to the true horror behind the opaque green armor of the kroath: They are transformed or dead human beings reanimated to serve the Externals! While many still dismiss this as too fantastic a theory, many more sensible heads focus on how best to fight these far too numerous foes. Like the magus and the klicks, kroath are expendables in

the eyes of the Exeat Command, and none of them have any qualms about such a fate.

### Secrets among the Exeat

Despite peoples' doubts, kroath truly seem to be transformed and animate corpses, though of more species than humanity has ever met (thus different forms of kroath are possible with mildly different statistics). The hard armor of the kroath is calcified and radically strengthened skin, while the gel within the suit is a byproduct of liquefying internal organs during transformation as well as a suspension medium for the true kroath species—tiny techno-organic AI nanite-computers created by accident long ago by the kadarans. Kroath actually think of each individual body as a large ship to them, while a kroath ship to them is a whole community of kroath merged together for the purpose of space travel. The bioforms are penned close together and the nanites alter their growing carapaces over skeletonized superstructures and engines so they can carry cargo, weapons, slaves, and more as ships.

Kroath commanders are about 20% larger than the average kroath and have a greater presence of the collective kroath consciousness within it. Leaders come from either merging two regular kroath at generation or transforming larger beings such as weren or medurr into a kroath. Commanders average one per twenty-four

kroath.

Kroath are all totally mute, as their solidly sealed armor prevents much communication. They all understand I'krl Common perfectly well, and some even understand the Galactic Standard used by Vergers. Their only way of communicating to others is to press a palm to another kroath and exchange a few kroath nanites into each other, their messages relayed almost instantly to the entire system via electrical impulses and programs carried through the suspension gel.

While not revealed until late in 2503 or early in 2504, the kadarans almost immediately set up camps on Penates in the Lucullus system and began the wholesale transformation of the human population into kroath. The Picts were among the first victims, as the Jamaicans, Union Penates, and others who allied with the Externals captured their enemies and delivered them to the Externals for conversion (which happens eventually to them as well, once there are enough kroath on Penates to prevent any resistance).

## The Magus

Encountered only once in the Verge at Nova Station on Alaundril, the magus presented humanity with an unstoppable killing machine in the most literal sense. Its utter ruthlessness and cunning far exceed that of any living creature. There are many theories about the magus, as well as a few answers, but few suspect the truth.

### Secrets among the Exeat

Originally created in response to the kadaran kroath soldiers and unleashed only on worlds declared heretic or excommunicate, these custom-built juggernauts are the pride and joy of the n'sss (and their new facilities and allies at Redcrown). The magus forms from a combined suspension of an invasive bio-organic virus with preprogrammed nanites (courtesy of VoidCorp) which invades a living bioform of any kind. The virus breaks down certain neural pathways, DNA strands, and protein groups, which are then invaded by technological nanites to replace those areas with self-replicating cybernetic circuitry. This viral nanite converts a kilogram of biological matter to technological matter in 24 hours, beginning with the brain and central nervous system and working outward through the muscle tissues and internal organs later. Unlike the kroath conversion process, a magus must be grown in a laboratory environment in vats of the viral nanite suspension, but they can be programmed and modified during the process, creating any variety of forms or weapons or features on them and not necessarily of the same form as the host.

Given all this information, the information provided by

the evrem "Raphael" seems false (*Threats)* but remains absolutely true. The n'sss unleashed the earliest forms of the magus on the evrem and the League of Nine worlds over two centuries ago. An early magus simply grew from the introduction of the virus via technologically altered teln larvae. The teln infested a host, grew to a tangle, and thus introduced the magus conversion virus more slowly and painfully for both teln and host alike.

In the end, both methods produce a techno-organic killing machine without any sense of pain or morality. However, the benefits the n'sss find in working with VoidCorp and its methods are a more easily programmed magus with more adaptability in weaponry, defenses, and added technology. There is still a number of the older style of magus, and these conform to the standards set in the *Alien Compendium.* However, nearly any personal weapons or defenses available to upper echelons of VoidCorp could be incorporated into a magus bioform, replacing the dark energy weapon with another or increasing its armor or other skills.

## THE INFILTRATORS

While not the most obvious or open of invaders, the three species of this section have actually been among humans the longest. The gardhyi, teln, and n'sss have been spies for the I'krl and the Theocracy for more than a century before humans ever heard of the External Threat. Whether acting for the I'krl or for themselves, these infiltrators have learned far more of humanity than we have of them…

### The Gardhyi

Gardhyi—the tricksters and Men in Black of Old Earth—mystified many starfarers over the centuries, and no one has ever pierced the veil of enigmas in which they wrap themselves. They simply appear unbidden, bringing chaos where they go. In truth, they are proud outcasts of the gardh people, severed from their community, determined to return to it triumphant.

### Secrets among the Exeat

The original stats given the gardhyi in the *Alien Compendium* originally planned on whole parties of heroes battling a lone gardhyi, and its powers reflect that. However, with the secrets revealed during the Exeat, we can find four distinct types of gardhyi (suitable for low, medium, and high levels of play against individuals and groups, as well as the original gardhyi, now revealed as a powerhouse in the service of the I'krl).

Fully revealed in Section Three, gardhyi are "outcast gardh" exiled from their home worlds and the Technarchy in the Perseus Arm for egregious and blasphemous crimes, from genocide to merely having psionic potential. All have the starweb technology implanted in them to ensure their exile, but their powers are broad and varied, as are their interests. Outcasts cannot activate or control their starwebs until they learn the ESP–*navcognition* skill, and then the outcast becomes a rogue. Rogues psionically control their starwebs and can either use Telepathy–*datalink* to reprogram its jumps or use surgery and nanites or other invasive methods to reprogram the web to certain sites and distances. Shades (see below) and krl'yth can use undetailed F/X in minor ways to readjust the starwebs, though the latter can also psionically manipulate them. Regardless of how any gardhyi may tinker with them, removal of starwebs results in death, and attempts to return to the Technarchy also cause the self-destruct sequence on the starweb to activate.

One thing often overlooked is the gardhyi's longevity: While there are some gardhyi smaller and younger than others, most appear as healthy adults of indeterminate age, and they remain in that state for centuries. Some theorize that the starwebs keep them rejuvenated and alive (all the better way to prolong their punishment and exile outside of their home space), though no one knows for certain. The gardhyi seem immortal, although they can die of wounds and disease.

**The Outcasts:** Whether just a recent outcast or reduced to this level of power due to injuries, a gardhyi outcast has no conscious control over its starweb, and thus has no ability to teleport at will (though another gardhyi with an active starweb can key an outcast's starweb to the same destination as his own). With just the physical abilities and some of the technology attributed to the Externals, the outcast is still a formidable individual foe suitable for lower level hero encounters. Outcasts often pair up with more powerful gardhyi and eventually learn the skills to advance to one of the other types of gardhyi after a few decades of dedication and training. Their most common roles within the Exeat are as agents and information gatherers of other gardhyi, paired up with a rogue to ensure they do not get captured. While the other types often avoid physical entanglements, the outcast seems to revel in combat and seem almost sharklike in their cold, remote fascination with a battle. Those few outcasts among the Exeat either serve as spies and go-betweens with VoidCorp and other human quislings or they hold military posts.

**The Rogues:** Gardhyi rogues make up the bulk of the gardhyi humanity has met: the psionically active gray man with the ability to blink away in a heartbeat. While fraal and human psionic talents and Mindwalkers are more numerous, gardhyi rogues become far more dangerous as they seem to have few qualms about using

every psionic ability they know to its most ruthless or insidious extents. Like most of the other gardhyi, rogues often act as exemplary spies and assassins, their mind powers taking precedence over physical weapons or those F/X powers with a price too high for their tastes. While many rogues in Old Space and the Verge operate on their own mysterious agendas, many more arrive as I'krl priests and krl'osar. While "rogue" in a broad sense, most if not all gardhyi rogues enjoy the power and prestige being part of the krl'osar grants them. While limited to the vurhyra in rank, gardhyi krl'osar are among the most powerful members of the Church in political, psionic, and religious terms, and many treat them with a fair amount of caution. After all, no one can best the gardhyi at dredging up secrets.

**The Shades:** Regardless of the origins or sources of these powers, gardhyi shades tap into F/X abilities and conjure shadows and darkness and other effects normally outside the psionic abilities innate in some other gardhyi. Over the past millennia, gardhyi have been to Earth and to thousands of other systems. If some rumors are to be believed, numerous dark cults on Earth came out of gardhyi shades revealing their powers to select believers. Whether tapping the power as Arcanists ("wizards" tapping some internal energy source) or Faithful ("priests" of this or that dark god), the abilities still congregate around shadow and darkness and spatial manipulation. Shades are relatively unknown among the Exeat, as any heretics who tap such powers yet wield no psionics are immediately killed or excommunicated for their affronts against the I'krl. Thus, any gardhyi shades in the Verge or elsewhere operate independently from the I'krl and the krl'yth despite similarities between some of their powers.

**The Krl'yth:** More detailed later in this section, krl'yth gardhyi (of whom there are approximately twenty-six in existence) exhibit the full range of powers first attributed to all gardhyi. Full Mindwalkers or powerful psionic talents as well as F/X manipulators, the only beings not terrified of these gardhyi are their fellow krl'yth and the I'krl themselves. The normally blank white eyes of the gardhyi constantly swim with undulating purple and black energy, making the normally intimidating creatures even more unnerving to view. Gardhyi krl'yth are as powerful as any member of this species gets outside of the Technarchy. Vurhyr Barok Lhor and many of his associates hope to glean new powers from the Exeat and the I'krl so they may return to lay waste to the Technarchy in the I'krl's name.

## The N'sss

Long a client and lesser species among the Theocracy worlds, the aliens humanity calls the n'sss have spent the last two millennia in a technological race with the kadarans in efforts to garner favor with the Sifarv Demesne nobility or the I'krl Church. Both groups prefer to keep this weapons and technology race going, as they benefit from the greater biotechnology. Socially, these aliens from Ravas V in the Chavol Expanse lose favor simply because their home planets and atmospheres make them difficult for other species to visit.

The n'sss who entered the Verge as spies with the gardhyi and the Exeat have found this new territory much to their liking. Here, they serve the Theocracy on equal footing with the kadarans, and with their loose alliance with VoidCorp providing them with previously unknown technology to work with, they find it tempting to remain in the Verge.

### Secrets among the Exeat

The n'sss actually call themselves the Ravans, as the humans adopted the t'sa name given them. Back amid the Theocracy and in a limited number in the Redcrown facilities, Ravans use more crablike and mantalike pods with some form of hover or flight technologies. The pods in use throughout the Verge were developed specifically to correspond to t'sa mythology: Gardhyi allies studied the Verge and Old Space species and suggested these workable pod-forms as a particular form of psychological warfare.

N'sss biotechnology is both based on the achievements of the species they conquered and those same species themselves. The biotech used by the n'sss (more cartilaginous, similar to arachnid carapaces) is grown in cultures and beds, like pearls or hatcheries. Some small formerly sentient arachnid species grow the stuff naturally,and the n'sss use it for their tech. These starfaring arachnids only traveled to the n'sss homeworld and never made it farther, falling to the ghosts in the gas giant planet next to them in their own star system after years of sharing tech and helping the n'sss overcome their physical limitations in the interests of seeing the stars. Originally developing their biotechnology by scavenging the ships they arrived on and enslaving the invaders, the n'sss eventually escaped their world, conquered the invader's nearby world, and bred the arachnid species into the subsentient species it remains to this day.

### The Teln

The parasitic worm collectives known as the teln seem to serve a very limited purpose among the Exeat species, though they are in fact their most capable spies. Their ability to hide in plain sight and effectively control human populations helped them uncover extensive intelligence and deliver human quislings into External hands. Their

most blatant moves before and during the war involved the control and manipulation of Helixtech senior Vice President Faith Terragis and Farr Histwin of Union Penates, though their reactions hardly strayed from the human norm, so none suspect anything untoward yet.

### Secrets among the Exeat

While they currently share equal "client" racial status among the Exeat, teln and n'sss cannot abide each other for one simple reason: The teln once lived as a slave species beneath the rule of the n'sss, who attempted to genetically manipulate their species into subsentience and thus become another piece of exploitable biotech for the n'sss to control. In fact, the n'sss continue to use a deviant bioform bred while the teln were their slaves, and this creature used to be integral to the magus creation process.

The gardhyi, n'sss, and the thaal realize that the teln desire to remain in the Verge regardless of the Exeat's success or failure, as humanity has proven to be great hosts for them. In fact, religious teln regard the Verge and humanity as their version of paradise delivered to them by the I'krl for their services there. While still obedient, the teln pursue their own agendas here in the Verge, and Algemron may become a new teln home if the humans or the Externals don't stop them. If the teln begin to stray off whatever path Kadar wishes them on, humanity may find there are many weapons that can expose and destroy teln without damaging their hosts. Of course, the costs of using those weapons may be higher than enduring teln infestation of a planet or system. . . . The teln realize this, as they have eyes and ears among the Exeat command apparently unknown to Kadar, and prepare contingency plans: Bluefall and its huge population of easily dominated dolphins and whales could serve a fallback position as a new teln home.

One of the best-kept secrets among any teln clusters is the plan for Lucullus. While the war rages around them and many Lucullans go to the conversion camps and unwillingly become kroath under the watchful eyes of the kadarans, the clusters inhabiting Helixtech executives have slowly and carefully funneled corporate assets and monies into transportable goods and ships. This plan is common knowledge among the Externals, as a few teln-infested executives leave Helixtech and its holdings wide open for kadaran and bareem forces and "escape" to Bluefall with all sorts of assets to give the Externals a hidden mercantile and financial hold within the Verge. What the rest of the Externals don't know are the plans by the teln to provide the Technospiders with ways into Helixtech and supporting computer systems to "accidentally" reveal the full schematics and plans of the n'sss bases in Redcrown and some technological weaknesses to exploit in n'sss pods and ships. Of course, as with all

teln contingency plans, a few teln await anyone led to these information caches. Propagation and infestation remain primary teln motives.

## THE WEAPONEERS

The major distinction, other than the racial and species differences, between the Externals and the Verge species is simple: technology. Many of the External species seem to be armed with oddly shaped and constructed weapons grown or built out of organic materials rather than what we normally recognize as weapons technology. The folk responsible for more than 65% of all weapons and ships among the External fleet and forces are a smallish, decidedly alien species called the kadarans.

### The Kadarans

Originally hailing from Kadar III in the Great Pyaar Territories, the kadarans were once a far more natural looking species. Ancient experiments in genetic manipulation mutated the original kadaran species into a durable and functional yet deviant subspecies of themselves. Thus, xenobiologists cannot find any analogue or archetype to explain the kadaran bioform. Kadarans themselves, if they even remember their original forms or purposes, choose not to share such information with anyone. This species evolved on a dune-filled desert planet with the life centered underground or on oasis plateaus, though once they gained technology, the isolated city-state oases warred on one another for meager resources. The wars escalated over time until very few oasis cities remained on Kadar III. Indeed, very few places remained unscarred from nuclear radiation and other wartime abuses, rendering the planet even more inhospitable.

About this time, nearly four millennia ago, Kadar III fell under the roving eyes of the sifarv military. The kadarans, whose biology altered more during their radioactive wars, had begun working with biotechnology as opposed to the technology that ruined their world and mutated them all. They now embraced the chance to expand beyond their world and solve problems other than the nearly shattered biosphere of their homeworld. Over time, the kadarans became the primary scientists among the Demesne species, a standing they have retained during the past seven centuries of Theocracy rule. Some wonder if the kadarans noted any shifts at all in the political structures, for their methods and efficiency never change. Regardless of their political ignorance, kadarans have spent much of the past six centuries trying to maintain their favored status as biotech engineers, which has been challenged by the absorption of the n'sss into the Demesne and the Theocracy.

## Kadarans as Supporting Cast/Aliens

The "six-limbed sadists" (as described by a Pict escapee from Penates) live in a constant state of scientific activity without any sense of emotional attachment or morality. Tales from Lucullan escapees paint these aliens in lights usually attributed to Thuldan bioengineers and Nazi scientists of centuries past, describing scenes where two kadarans laughed at a joke one told the other as both hunched over an immobilized weren and slowly peeled its hide and fur away in sheets. Obviously, it is hard to gain an objective view point about beings who have little problem vivisecting sentient species, but even such as the kadarans deserve an impartial view of their nature and biology (if only to learn how to defeat or kill them).

Obviously, kadarans primarily focus on Tech Op careers, though a few dabble as Diplomats or Free Agents. Hardly any deign to sully themselves by becoming Combat Specs. The closest most kadarans come to combat is either in an out-of-control lab experiment with a protesting subject or now, among the Exeat: Many kadarans resent the primitive conditions under which they must operate on Penates and actually have to carry pistols for defense during the occupations and the wars.

**Description:** Kadarans may have once been a more aesthetic species before they adapted themselves "to become more efficient and capable of working on numerous problems at once." Whatever the reasons or true origins, kadarans utilize their mutated trilateral forms well. A smallish species whose tallest specimens reach 1.2 meters, kadarans shuffle quickly along on their tripodlike legs spaced equidistantly around their teardrop-shaped trunks, and their three moderately powerful arms are spaced likewise. Limbs always appear directly between a pair of opposing limbs: One arm centers directly between two legs, while one leg always protrudes beneath a pair of opposed arms. Their skin appears an odd mixture of vestigial chitinous plates and reptiloid scales, which provide no protection. Skin color ranges in tones from an ash gray to almost a bluish-steel tinge. Common dress among kadarans consists of a tabardlike laboratory coat with numerous pockets, all bulging with disgusting looking shreds of biotech.

Three black multifaceted eyes sit broadly along the flattened head, spaced widely to allow for 300 degrees of vision and relatively good distance judgement. The shovellike head rests atop a thick neck with only the slightest muscle groupings suggesting shoulders, its wide mouth and jaw revealing masticating plates suitable for a vegetarian diet rather than carnivore teeth.

Their prehensile hands and feet are identical with three digits, an opposable thumb, and a wide flat palm each. kadaran laboratories take advantage of their ambidexterity and provide many hammocklike seats and handholds on all surfaces to allow them to clamber around all sides of large apparati and experiments in progress.

**Encounter:** Reminding some of the t'sa, their bodies constantly in motion, kadarans rarely inspire the sense of amusement or childlike innocence of the aforementioned known species. This species appears almost con-

## Kadaran Ecological Data

**Biochemistry:** Series Ic
**Environment:** Class 1
**GRAPH:** G2/R3/A3/P3/H2
**Biome:** Any
**Encounter Chance:** Unlikely
**Group Size:** 1-4 (d4)
**Organization:** Advanced urbanized society
**Niche:** Highly advanced biotechnological civilization
**Intelligence:** Advanced starfaring sentient

## Kadaran Game Data

These statistics represent a typical kadaran scientist among the occupying forces on Penates in the Lucullus system (7th level Tech Op).

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| STR 9 | (d8+4) | INT 12 | (Animal d6+8) |
| DEX 12 | (d6+8) | WIL 10 | (2d8+2) |
| CON 10 | (2d6+3) | PER 6 | (d8+1) |

Durability: 10/10/5/2    Action check: 13+/12/6/3
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4, roll 30    #Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2    Last Resorts: 0

**Attacks**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Unarmed | 11/5/2– | d4s/d6s/d4w | En/0 |
| Ranged weapon | 14/7/3 | Varies | Varies |

**Defenses**
+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
+1 (INT) resistance modifier vs. encounter skills
+2 step resistance modifier vs. psionics

**Skills**
Unarmed Attack [9]–*brawl [11]*; Modern [12]–*pistol [14]*; Acrobatics [12]–*dodge [14]*; Vehicle Operation [12]; Movement [10]; Stamina [10]–*endurance [11]*; Computer Science [12]*; Knowledge [12]–*biotechnology [15], first aid [13], kroath creation [13], weapons tech [13]*; Life Science [12]–*genetics [13], xenology [13]*; Medical Science [12]–*surgery [14]*; System Operation [12]*–*weapons [13]*; Techno-organic Science [12]*–*repair [13], technical knowledge [14]*; Awareness [10]; Resolve [10]–*physical [11]*; Interaction [6]–*intimidate [10]*.

* These skills apply toward the knowledge, use, and manipulation of kadaran and External biotechnology. They must be purchased separately if a character knows of human or other technologies.

stantly distracted, its mind elsewhere at all times. Combat encounters with kadarans almost never occur, as more than 75% of all kadarans met in the Verge are scientists who prefer anyone they encounter to be strapped to a table or held in place by strong bareem servants. However, some lesser intellectuals do train as Combat Specs, Diplomats, or Free Agents. Kadarans are psionically incapable; thus they do not aspire to the priesthood.

Kadarans, as the primary scientific caste among the Exeat species, receive a −1 step bonus when using Techno-organic Science (same as Technical Science but applicable to biotech of kadaran or n'sss manufacture) or any of its associated specialty skills (the same as those associated with Technical Science). This bonus works only when a kadaran applies more than three limbs and at least two eyes to the task at hand.

When necessary in fleeing or racing to another experiment, kadarans flip themselves over and half-run and half-vault in a rolling motion, covering twice as much distance in shorter times than a bipedal person of their strength and greater sizes. While it appears semicomical, a kadaran has enough limbs to maintain this all-out movement speed and still use ranged weapons with only a +2 step penalty.

The kadaran dual-track mind (see below) wreaks havoc with normal psionic perceptions, the secondary thought patterns creating "white noise" and hampering psionic perceptions. The use of any psionic abilities on kadaran minds (not bodies) suffer a +2 step penalty

Their greatest weakness appears to be the result of their own weapons and folly. Due to the kadaran species' mutability under prolonged radiation, the entire species is

## Biotechnology

Most, if not all, Exeat and Theocracy support technology comes from the kadarans, whose biotechnology far outstrips the amount of more recognizable technology used by many traditional sifarv. While some n'sss biotech fills some small and crucial niches within the war effort, the kadarans grew or developed more than 65% of all technology, weapons, ships, and support equipment.

*Klick Klack* provided our first full look at kadaran biotech, though most any heroes who boarded the klick base would not have identified the tech as anything other than for klick use. The kadaran central processing units have been described as "living tech-trees" that grow and draw energy via solar and geothermal taps and other ambient energies where they are planted. These trees know what to produce (and emit in tough, nutlike shells or vegetablelike pods) as specifications are entered into its brain through the manipulation of fluids, chemical levels, and pheromones. A tree can be programmed to grow small chitinous weapons (and weapons components for larger weapons) of various shapes and sizes, thus allowing one method to create weapons for klick hands as well as those more suited for kroath or gardhyi hands. There can be some programmed to grow grenades, ship parts for damage repair, specific trees with massive energy collectors to produce energy batteries and cells for shipboard use, and so on. Thus, kadaran technological enclaves always have orchards or forests of these biotech trees somewhere around them. Items grow at least as quickly as they might be manufactured technologically. As of the end of 2503, an entire dome (and another being primed for expansion) at Port Royal has been turned over to kadaran tech-trees. Some of these produce blacklaser pistols for the Externals' human allies; these work as well as standard weapons and do not dissolve upon separation from their wielders (see next paragraph).

All External tech dissolves and decays soon after separation from its wielders. This happens for two reasons: Their organic composition melts if deprived of energy, and while although they contain some internal energy source, many weapons draw power from bioelectric fields. The guns tap into the energy generated by any organic sentient's brain, since very few creatures utilize

all of their brain's potential. Kadaran tech can and does create separate materials, weapons, and such for thaal, Mindwalkers, and krl'osar, since they tap more brainpower and cannot afford to lose the energy to their weapons. Another theory points out that their weapons decay rapidly depending on how much heat they're exposed to. Kadarans refrigerate all storage units, so kadaran biotech can remain intact if captured in the vacuum of space or on an ice planet. At human-comfortable temperatures, biotech weapons dissolve if not constantly energized by their wielders' touch or by special powered holsters and armories built for them.

Kadaran scientists developed cybertech, though their biotech focus makes it appear more like parasitic lifeforms than invasive technology. Cy-biotech often grows under careful supervision in a tech-tree or in vats, and these semiliving things actually are programmed and constructed bioweapons. The simplest forms of cy-biotech are armor or melee weapons like blades suddenly jutting out the forearm. The Verge Alliance sustained numerous defeats when they didn't recognize (and thus confiscate or destroy) many things as cybernetic implants: If you see a slimy octopoidal parasite with tentacles along someone's face and throat, rip it off before your enemy uses that communication device to activate defensive weapons. Others are more obvious, if equally disgusting, such as shoulder-mounted biocannons with scaly tendrils snaking up the wearer's arm and across the chest with a hunchback growth that powers the weapon.

Finally, the greatest kadaran weapons are the kroath themselves. Every initial occupation and beachhead of the Exeat sees a transport of kadarans dispatched to begin growing habitat and laboratory domes. Once these grow to their final sizes after about five days, the bareem herd any prisoners and guests to kadaran labs. Over the centuries, all the kadarans need do is inject a viscous genetic suspension fluid into any muscle tissue on the target, and then the only problem is ignoring the screaming as the target being's organs and brain slowly dissolve and its skin calcifies to become kroath.

susceptible to energy damage and they suffer an additional two points over the amount rolled.

**Habitat/Society:** What little is known of kadaran society comes from the evrem, who express severe distaste at having even to utter a word about them. After some pressing, the evrem broke their veneer of philosophical passivity and vented angrily that "no species that cannot understand the sanctity of life deserves that same gift. To torture life, sentient or not, and treat it as a plaything or curiosity is abhorrent, as are the kadarans."

As kadarans almost maddeningly keep their own counsel and speak very little, first impressions suggest a highly focused scientific species with a passion for genetic manipulation and biotechnology. When kadarans began sharing their knowledge with others, their utter lack of morality about their work struck even the most ruthless of bareem as disturbing. Kadarans view all things as puzzles, conundrums, and problems to be solved, and they place little importance in emotions, philosophies, or any modes of thought beyond scientific curiosity, discovery, and victory. There is no room for small talk among kadarans: There are always more problems and mysteries to solve, especially now among all these new species they have yet to examine.

The oddest aspect of speaking or interacting with kadarans that drives even the most patient of gardhyi to distraction is their ability to maintain two or more independent trains of thought at once, unlike nearly any other sentient species. Kadarans often turn their heads and place two eyes on anyone they speak to, but the third eye and one or more limbs continues on with other activities. Some carry on conversations with two groups at once, pantomiming or writing words while speaking to the other group. While kadarans think it perfectly natural to be literally doing two things at once, others among the Externals simply find this trait useful in making them ever-watchful guards, constantly working scientists, or simply the best multitaskers for any position. Kadarans can sleep provided no more than one eye and two limbs are active and they are relatively immobile.

While these broad views paint the kadarans as workhorses and unfeeling sadistic butchers, they do fall prey to all the usual ranges of life's emotions and pitfalls. Kadarans merely continue to work with one thought while one or two eyes and some arms act out any emotions. Kadarans are an asexual species and can each individually replicate three times during their lives, laying two to five rubbery eggs, which hatch within three months. It takes fifteen years for a kadaran to reach full maturity, and they can reproduce at ages fifteen, twenty-one, and thirty. No Exeat kadarans are fewer than twenty-two years old and most are older.

They are susceptible to greed and manipulation—all one has to promise them is a tempting problem or puzzle or give them a chance to examine new pieces of technology (or biology). The main reason quite a few kadarans became involved with the Exeat was the chance to explore new worlds, seek out new life, and rip it apart to see how it all works (and how they can exploit or change it).

## THE SLAVERS

Imagine weren with the ruthlessness of VoidCorp executives and the discipline and arrogance of the Thuldans, and you've got a rough image of the bareem—the slave keepers of the Sifarv Demesne and the I'krl Theocracy.

### The Bareem

Nearly twelve thousand years ago, the bird-folk known as the sifarv left their moon home and ventured down to the third planet of the Toal system around which it orbited. Despite the fact that the bareem were far more physically formidable, the sifarv had greater weapons and the advantages of flight. Swiftly conquered, the bareem have served the Sifarv Demesne loyally ever since, as these avians gave them new technologies and the means to move beyond their world and their PL3 society. Thus, while there are some remnants of bareem cultural history and mythologies, most of their behavior follows Demesne standards.

Bareem tend toward Combat Spec and Tech Op careers, excelling in their sociocultural niche as the heavies among the Theocracy species or in their notoriety as the greatest jailers in the known galaxy. Though exceedingly rare, there are bareem Free Agents, though all tend toward the Bounty Hunter template, and bareem Diplomats only exist within the Aerie of the Sifarv Demesne representing their people's interests. The few bareem with mindwalking ability have joined the I'krl Church and the krl'osar, and their physical natures make them the most forceful and intimidating of proselytizers.

### Bareem as Supporting Cast/Aliens

While most assume the martial attitudes of bareem comes from their physical brawn, bareem dogmatically adhere to what they see as their roles long established by their native mythologies: The First Barem—Warrior—lived by his Strength and Sinew. The Second Barem—Hunter—lived by her Stealth and Stalking, The Third Barem—Keeper—lived to protect his family and clan by Building and Binding. The Fourth Barem—Protector—lived to protect the families by combining what she learned from the Three and use all skills equally. The bareem

see themselves as children of the First Four, though the Fourth gains a special place as the mother of all bareem and thus they have aspects of all four in each of them. The Four taught them to remain strong to kill, consume, or control one's enemies, thus leading to the present day and their service as the Theocracy's armies, bounty hunters, wardens, and police.

**Description:** Bareem are large, hulking hominids almost as hard to miss as a weren or medurr. An individual barem stands 2.2 meters tall, but their habit of hunching forward and resting their weight on their massive arms and knuckles slopes the shoulders and head down to just under 2 meters. These living walls of bristling fur and solid muscle are almost 1.5 meters wide at the shoulder, making them intimidating creatures indeed. Its three-digited hands and feet are prehensile (two massive fingers and an equally massive thumb); a barem can easily choke three or four slaves into submission with its feet and hands around different necks at once.

Bareem have luminescent eyes similar to Earth cats, which reflect and magnify light within them (though their eyes aren't good enough to negate penalties for darkness). The sight of these large piercing eyes reflecting light back at their prey freezes more than a few creatures in their tracks. Thick coarse hair grows heavy and almost furlike on a barem's forearms, head, chest, back, and below the knees on the legs. The hair tends toward black and browns, while corresponding barem skin tones range from pale tan to mahogany brown or jet black. Female bareem have only slightly less hair along their backs and arms, though they grow their hair longer to cover their breasts (if left exposed by choice of clothing).

While capable of wearing any clothes tailored or sized to fit them, bareem most commonly wear little more than loose-fitting pants with tight cuffs and no shoes unless demanded by social niceties. They also wear harnesses or crossed bandoleers over their chests to hold any awards or medals, which bareem show off at any chance. What many slaves learn to their regret are these harnesses can be removed and unbuckled to become a flexible flaillike bludgeon in the hands of nearly any barem. To a barem, modesty should always take a secondary place to maintaining order among the servants and slaves.

**Encounter:** Bareem remain ever prepared for battle, though they (like the weren) do not seek them out. If ordered to attack by a superior of any species, they do so without hesitation or thought, unless ordered to attack one of their own or someone of superior station than them. In all things, bareem rationalize their actions in terms of how it helps them and how it adheres to the

teachings of the Four Bareem (whom they now believe, thanks to thaal teachings and one persuasive barem kr-l'osar, to have been made part of the I'krl).

Bareem commonly attack via brawling first, launching themselves feet first and landing on foes, often crushing or pinning them before even drawing a weapon. Bareem choose rarely to kill opponents unless so ordered or during war. They often look to wound or maim for immobilization, as kills rob them of their prey and their masters of another serviceable slave.

Bareem have retractable claws within their hand or foot palms as evolutionary remnants from their days as tree-climbers. The claws are rudimentary and incapable of causing any more of a scratch than a human fingernail. However, when desired, poison ducts within that claw still inject touched or held targets with a poison that knocks out or paralyzes living tissues but otherwise does little harm. The bareem can paralyze any biological life-

## Bareem Game Data

These statistics represent a typical bareem warden or military officer (roughly 4th level Combat Spec).

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| STR 13 | (2d4+8) | INT 7 | (d12) |
| DEX 9 | (d8+4) | WIL 10 | (d6+6) |
| CON 13 | (2d4+8) | PER 7 | (2d6) |

Durability: 13/13/6/6        Action check: 11+/10/5/2
Move: sprint 22, run 14, walk 4        #Actions: 2
Reaction score: Marginal/1        Last Resorts: 0

**Attacks**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Unarmed | 16/8/4– | d4+4s/d4+6s/d4w | LI/0 |
| Melee | 15/7/3 | Varies | Varies |
| Ranged weapon | 10/5/2 | Varies | Varies |

**Defenses**
+2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks

**Skills**
Athletics [13]; Unarmed Attack [13]–*brawl [16]*; Melee [13]–*bludgeon [15], powered [15]*; Manipulation [9]; Modern [9]–*pistol [10]*; Vehicle Operation [9]; Movement [13]; Stamina [13]–*endurance [14]*; Security* [7]–*protection protocols [9], devices [10]*; Animal Handling [10]; Awareness [10]; Resolve [10]
*–1 step bonus

## Bareem Ecological Data

**Biochemistry:** Series Ia
**Environment:** Class 1
**GRAPH:** G2/R2/A2/P3/H3
**Biome:** Any
**Encounter** Chance: Possible
**Group Size:** 2-24 (2d12)
**Organization:** Militaristic slaver society
**Niche:** Advanced seminomadic clan hunters
**Intelligence:** Human-equivalent sentient

forms of less than 50 kilograms twice a day if in contact with skin or nonprotective clothing and if they can hold a target for more than one phase to inject their poison.

Very few bareem hold the potential for full Mindwalker abilities, though roughly one in fifty thousand have wild talents and one in fifty million have the psionic ability to become one of the krl'osar Mindwalkers.

Though not especially brilliant at such tasks, bareem have developed considerable skill with security systems and the like. As such, they take a –1 step bonus to any attempts to use the Security broad skill or any of its specialty skills.

**Habitat/Society:** If not given a reason to attack by insult or injury or orders, bareem can be quite affable at first meeting. Despite millennia among the stars and advanced technology, bareem still prefer a more oral tradition in communication and can be long-winded if given the chance to go on. In other words, being polite and not interrupting a barem could pin you in place for a seven-hour-long story. They hand down mythology—slightly tailored over the past centuries to account for the sifarv and thaal religions—to their children through storytelling.

While deferent to a fault to the sifarv and thaal species, bareem smugly take on airs of superiority over the kadarans and all the other species of the Theocracy. The kadarans either don't notice or don't care, while the other species already subjugate themselves as slaves beneath the iron grip of the bareem. Among themselves, bareem organize themselves in loose clan structures, their elders directing and overseeing the lives and welfare of their clans. Bareem marriages often only exist to see the birth of children and then both parents go their separate ways, bareem young often raised by one parent and his or her clan. Some rare marriages remain intact, especially if bareem mated pairs have smaller or no clan family around them (on board ships or in isolated postings). There are no gender stereotypes among the bareem (though there often are among the species they serve and subjugate), and in fact the females often make more fierce warriors and wardens over the males whose focus tends more toward hunting or deterrence (police work).

# The Conquerors

Of all the species most responsible for the state of the galaxy today, the sifarv stand proud and tall as the conquering species that initially brought all the Exeat species together and under their wings. Warlike in thought and action, the sifarv culture admires and embraces strategy, tactics, and a militaristic zeal for order. Sifarv culture finds strength in a feudal and oligarchic social structure. Many defeated species mistake the bareem for the much-vaunted sifarv, as bareem ground troops are nu-

merous among Demesne military forces; most are shocked to discover their conquerors are the beautiful, willowy, feathered and winged sifarv.

## The Sifarv

Rising from their home on the moon of Saerie over the bareem planet of Toal III nearly twelve thousand years ago, the sifarv have not stopped hunting and dominating entire species, solar systems, and galactic regions. In all, before the sifarv arnak converted to the I'krl Church and turned all true control over to the krl'osar, the Demesne encompassed and ruled over one hundred worlds. Even reduced to figureheads and puppet rulers, the sifarv and their expansionistic drive to conquer remains strong (and helps explain some enthusiasm over the Exeat). This proud species came to the stars on their own and introduced many other species to the stellar community, so they naturally see nearly all other species (outside of gardh, evrem, and thaal) as upstart children (an attitude reinforced by their society, which places them at the top of the racial ladder).

Sifarv embrace all types of character professions and occupations, though to varying degrees. Their favored professions depend on their social rank, as 80% of sifarv nobles are Diplomats with some other secondary skills, while the sifarv commoners prefer Combat Spec over most other classes or occupations. Like the bareem, sifarv Mindwalkers are rare, numbering only oneout of every ten million sifarv (but easily found by their stark-white plumage and red eyes at birth), though psionic talents (which are enough to gain entry into the church) number one out of every one hundred thousand births.

### Sifarv as Supporting Cast/Aliens

Sifarv deceive nearly every species they encounter, for they, like humanity, do not show their strengths and weaknesses by their bioform. Outwardly, they seem peacefully graceful with their feathered manes and delicate features, long, lithe limbs, and trilling speech. Like hawks and eagles, their strength and cunning appears when needed, and the peaceful veneer shatters with a sharp war cry! Like humans, they adapt to and conquer nearly every situation they seek out, their strength in their wills rather than their bodies.

**Description:** Sifarv are an avian species, and the only other such sentient avians encountered by humanity since the sesheyans. While their folded wings make them seem taller, all sifarv range in height between 1.4 and 1.7 meters, their wingspans measuring 50% again as broad as the person is tall. Sifarv are also quite thin and light, their hollow bones and body structures engineered

for flight. Sifarv hands and feet have only three digits each, two fingers or toes and opposed third digits (toes or thumbs). Sifarv legs also bend backward at the knees, just like birds' do.

Like their bodies, sifarv faces are long and thin, almost teardrop-shaped and coming to a point. They have small, high nostrils and no upper lips as the slight cartilaginous vestiges of beaks run down the lower half of their faces to form chins (which can be pointed, hooked, or smooth). Almost underneath the chin is the mouth. Eyes rest on either side of the head and are large enough for spectacular distance vision and a wider angle of sight than other humanoids their size; the eyes have large black pupils surrounding by thin irises of varying color

While bipedal and approximating a humanoid shape, vestigial feathers replace hair on the scalp, forearms, and legs. Tiny feathers cover the breast from collarbones to the lower ribcage, spreading up the neck, the larger neck and head feathers flanging out into a plume between the nape and the crown of the skull. Colors vary in both feathers and skin tone, though skin tends toward a duller or darker shade of the plumage color.

**Encounter:** Most likely, first encounters with sifarv leave humans and other species irritated for at least one reason: Sifarv are among the most conceited and arrogant of species. So enrapt in their own "self-evident superiority," they tend to speak down to all other species except their thaal allies. When they encounter new species, sifarv always refer to them as "shreel" or prey. The sifarv rarely use their racial names or given names until the subject species gains some their respect (by defeat in battle or at least valiant shows of resistance). Among the Theocracy worlds, to rise above being shreel often prevents the species from enslavement (or at least until that species can be beaten into submission and slavery).

Despite the apparent frailty of their small forms, sifarv prove surprisingly tough, resilient, and merciless in battle. While often leaving the vanguard to bareem soldiers, numerous sifarv reportedly fly and dive with reckless abandon toward their foes, dropping nearly silently out of the sun with little warning. Capable of only carrying small weapons while in flight, sifarv (other than those encountered in full regalia on board ships) do not wear armor or heavy clothing that weighs them down. Also, while many sifarv hover over battles directing their troops, few enter battle directly unless it proves necessary for troop morale or victory.

Sifarv move with a grace and speed in keeping with their forms. Wings often subtly mimic arm and hand movements when not in flight, and thus sifarv often speak bluntly and rarely lie. After all, they provide clear

## Sifarv Ecological Data

**Biochemistry:** Series Ic
**Environment:** Class 1
**GRAPH:** G1/R1/A2/P2/H2
**Biome:** Any; mountains and highlands preferred
**Encounter Chance:** Slim
**Group Size:** 3-8 (d6+2)
**Organization:** Feudal imperialists ruled by Theocracy
**Niche:** Advanced technological civilization
**Intelligence:** Starfaring sentient

signals when they lie, as wings often twitch or the lighter feathers on their neck rustle due to some psychosomatic signals of suppressed emotions. However, psionic sifarv—all of which are marked by red irises and white plumage and are all trained krl'osar priests—can prevent these signals or at least cloak them by mental illusions.

The primary martial encounters humans have with sifarv are during hunts, as the sifarv nobles took to toying with human prisoners by setting them loose and hunting them like owls and hawks hunt mice… During the war, this only occurred inside some domes on Penates and Vieron, though it could occur after the war if the sifarv cement a presence in the Verge. One tactic noted by those escaping the hunts unleashed on Penates mentioned two sifarv flying close to ground level, slim metal filament chains held between them that decapitated any foolish enough to intercept them.

## Sifarv Game Data

These statistics represent a typical nonprofessional sifarv of the idle nobility.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| STR 8 | (d6+4) | INT 10 | (d8+5) |
| DEX 12 | (d12+5) | WIL 10 | (2d6+3) |
| CON 8 | (2d4+3) | PER 10 | (2d6+3) |

Durability: 8/8/4/4          Action check: 13+/12/6/3
Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4, fly 40      #Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/1          Last Resorts: 1

**Attacks**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Unarmed | 10/5/2– | d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s | LI/O |
| Wing buffet | 12/6/3 | d6s/d6+2s/d4w | LI/O |
| Melee | 11/5/2 | Varies | Varies |
| Ranged weapon | 13/6/3 | Varies | Varies |

**Defenses**

+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks

**Skills**

Melee [8]–*blade [11]*; Unarmed Attack [8]–*brawl [10], wing [12]*; Acrobatics [12]–*flight [14], zero-g [13]*; Modern [12]–*pistol [13]*; Stealth [12]; Vehicle Operation [12]–*space\* [14]*; Movement [8]; Stamina [8]–*endurance [10]*; System Operations [10]–*weapons [11]*; Culture [10]–*diplomacy [11], etiquette (sifarv) [11]*.
\*Apply a –1 step bonus if the type of space vehicle flown is a sifarv fighter.

Sifarv fighter pilots are especially noted for their skill; they comprise the bulk of the Theocracy's fighter forces. Any sifarv who learns Vehicle Operation–*space vehicles (fighters)* may take a –1 step bonus to their skill checks.

**Habitat/Society: Sifarv** society resembles numerous oligarchic human societies past and present, most notably the feudal courts of Europe or the current Thuldan Empire. All these societies hold themselves above their fellows by an attitude of genetic, social, and technological superiority, and the sifarv see little that disproves their attitudes, as few species have ever been able to resist their domination or enforced alliances.

Sifarv language is lyrical and soft, most often described as beautiful (even when one hears a death whistle from a diving warrior). While sifarv have a greater range of sounds and speech available due to a flexible lower mouth, making S sounds and other sibilants produces whistling trills from all sifarv, whose throat and vocal structures retain many similarities to those of birds.

Sifarv design their clothes and architecture and ships all with a need for freedom of movement for their wings. Thus, much of their clothing and building provides wide-open spaces for them to stretch their wings. While pants are snug and form fitting, jackets and shirts often either are loose tabards and tunics, or they have holes for the wings and are equally snug. As they are exacting about grooming and appearance, no sifarv willingly wears colors that clash with their plumage or eye colors

### The Trillaari

The Trillaari represent breakaway sifarv and bareem separatists who rejected the rule of the I'krl Theocrats forty years ago. They chose to emulate the sifarv Arnak Trillaar, the last warrior emperor to rule before sifarv rule became subordinate (and in their view woefully corrupted) to thaal influence and the I'krl Church over two thousand years ago. They exist as pirates in a small fleet whose main base has never been located by any species, External or otherwise. Notes on the leader of these pirates—the Trillyth Kaarsar—can be found among the "Major Figures of the Theocracy" in the External Space section. The Trillaari Fleet, at last reckoning by the Theocracy, consists of four battleships, seven light carriers, nearly twenty light cruisers, and the minimum attendant fighters (under two hundred), scouts (under one hundred), and destroyers (under forty).

All trillaari (even the bareem members) still embrace the idea of sifarv supremacy over all other species, and they do everything possible to break the hold of the I'krl Church over their leaders and the Demesne. There is the slim possibility, at the Gamemaster's discretion, that heroes (or other Vergers) could come into contact with some of the Trillaari fleet, which might follow the Exeat to the Verge. Then, it's a matter of roleplaying a first contact and convincing them that the enemy of their enemy can be friends, at least temporarily. . . .

For more than a millennium, sifarv scholars and kr-l'osar priests have studied and sought after a power of their species long lost but possibly attainable through kr-l'osar powers—the sifarv battlecry. Now a legendary power unseen in more than 1400 years, this psionic power once manifested in great numbers among the nobility. (Some, like the Trillaari, take this lost power to suggest that subjugation beneath the I'krl and the thaal angered the sifarv gods and they stole this noble power from them.) A biokinetic power, a sifarv could screech and stun whole groups of enemies or sing and charm them as well. Despite close duplications by psionic powers, sifarv krl'osar still seek to restore this innate power to their species and they seek the answers everywhere.

## THE HOLY ONES

The most shocking of the Externals, at least to humanity and its allied species, are those who brought the word of the I'krl to a thousand systems and act in their grace now to free them. They are the ruthless, insidious, and all-too-familiar thaal—the sibling or parent species that spawned the fraal Wanderers and Builders.

### The Thaal

As detailed in the history of the I'krl Theocracy in the next section, the thaal are of the same species as the fraal, one of the primary aliens of the STAR*DRIVE campaign, and they serve to illustrate one of humanity's greatest fears: What if the fraal used all their psionic might against us? That nightmare comes alive with the arrival of the thaal and the krl'osar into the Verge during the Externals War.

Rumors rampaged across the Verge as the first thaal encountered were mistaken as fraal until they began their religious conversion campaigns of psychically enslaving people. Tales passed from system to system as folk talked about these "dark fraal" working with the Externals, fanning xenophobic paranoia among the Verge species (as intended). Once the Alliance commanders realized they dealt with another offshoot of the fraal, tempers cooled and intelligence began to collect. Luckily, fewer riots and whisper campaigns erupted against the fraal as expected, though some small-minded people used the opportunity to enhance their anti-psionic campaigns. Most realized the best way to fight some of these psionic priests was with psionics and fraal of their own. The Aegis Rangers (the nickname that has developed for the Regency of Bluefall's 118th Psychological Operations Battalion) took heavy casualties early in the war's intelligence gathering phase when thaal impersonators snaked their way into their ranks from Hathorn. However, the thaal provided the Rangers with much information on the

I'krl religion and themselves with some agents. Much to the chagrin of the fraal, however, the thaal revealed very little about their racial history until the evrem provided information (noted in Section Three). The paranoia engendered by the revelation were tough on fraal relations with other species, but many of the Verge Alliance powers and the fraal themselves simply used the chance to learn more about their own psionic potentials.

The thaal activated a slash-and-burn campaign where possible with scout ships and small transports, moving many thaal krl'osar across the Verge to supplant and impersonate fraal, discredit them, or attack them as heretics. A notable fact surfaced later in the war that most skirmishes and attacked fraal were Builders, not Wanderers, though one Wanderer city-ship came under attack briefly when it ventured into External-controlled Lucullan space. In any case, once their basic nature came to light—psionic zealots on a religious crusade apparently leading the other External species—the thaal became the most hated enemy of the Verge Alliance. By the end of the year, most knew that the most dangerous species among the Externals were the thaal who ruled them.

### Thaal as Supporting Cast/Aliens

While the Externals War raged, great mysteries became unveiled as the secret masters of klick, kroath, and others proved to be familiar faces: The thaal are the species from which the fraal originated. After more than ten millennia, the fraal finally have the chance to learn of their species' past, but their brethren from beyond Hammer's Star seem less than willing to share such information.

First impressions of the thaal mimic the earliest reactions to fraal visitations to Earth before 2124—a mixture of apprehension, curiosity, and a healthy dose of fear. While fraal have always struck many as enigmatic and inscrutable, most humans view the thaal as more ruthless and aggressive with their psionics, as if they carried some given rights to invade one's thoughts at any time. The other immediate difference by which humans identify the thaal from their allies is their range of emotions: While often harsh and aloof, thaal have just as wide and volatile an emotional range as any human or aleerin.

Thaal, like their wayward fraal brothers, tend toward less physically inclined classes and professions, embracing the Mindwalker and Diplomat-Mindwalker classes almost exclusively. There are thaal Tech Ops, though these are all thaal with psi talents rather than the capability for full mindwalking. While fraal view their psionics with religious reverence, all thaal (at least all those met in the Verge via the Exeat) embrace a dogmatic and orthodox religious structure. Their krl'osar training teaches them that psionics are gifts from the I'krl, and they are to be used in their reverent service zealously.

**Description:** Aside from a few notable cultural distinctions, the thaal appear identical to the fraal with which humanity is already well acquainted. They are, after all, of the same species; only a religio-political and sociocultural rift separates them. However, while they show no gross physical differences from the fraal, this species shows a greater propensity toward psionic power and less physical acuity. Thus, their musculature is not even as strong as a fraal's though their minds generate more than the norm of psionic potential.

Thaal, like fraal, stand roughly 1.5 meters tall in a bipedal humanoid form. Their garb almost exclusively consists of the krl'osar colors of white, purple, and gray, though the range of styles is as broad as those among the stellar nations. At the absolute least, thaal wear the badge of the krl'osar and prefer clothes that wrap snugly and cover most of the body, unlike their sifarv coconspirators.

As do the fraal, thaal naturally communicate psionically among themselves. They also have a wide understanding of other racial tongues from all the species of the Externals. They also seem to know most of the languages of the Verge, thanks to their long-term intelligence gathering, though they seem to lack a complete grasp of the t'sa and sesheyan tongues.

**Encounter:** Thaal can be encountered nearly anywhere there is reported External activity, especially after the war gets underway and Lucullus falls. There seems to be no split in thaal society as there is among the fraal, and in truth, many similarities crop up between the thaal and the Wanderers (though there remain enough distinctions that both vehemently point out as heresies against the norm). In fact, while the sifarv constantly denigrate other species for their inferiority, thaal take an intellectual curiosity about new species, always looking for new acolytes and species to "unite under the tri-spheres of the I'krl." Of course, this rarely prevents them from exploiting any species and its weaknesses if it fails to embrace the holy word they bring.

Thaal always carry a weapon, though they most often use them as a sign of strength rather than actually wield them. Krl'osar crystaffs notwithstanding, the weapon unsheathed first by all thaal is the mind. Thaal tactics often suggest capture and subdual over killing, as examples must always be made and slaves are in constant demand. Thaal forced into combat act in every way possible to remove themselves from harm, preferring to direct underlings or at least deal with foes from a distance, unless they know their foe cannot match them. It is rare to encounter thaal in groups of fewer than four, and lone thaal often have bareem or sifarv bodyguards to do their fighting.

**Habitat/Society:** The thaal live and work among numerous species, just like the Builder fraal, though they retain a sense of superiority over all of them, including their allied sifarv oligarchs. Like the Wanderer fraal, psionics form the cornerstone of the thaal universe, though the I'krl and the religion built around them exists at center for them. Unlike fraal, the ultra-religious thaal perceive of psionics as gifts only bestowed upon the faithful. They view the use of psionics in very orthodox patterns and any deviation from those patterns brings up cries of heresy and often leads to violence. While rarely discussed openly, those who look easily notice the divisions among the species: The thaal embrace religion and domination; the Wanderers embrace psionics and isolationism; the Builders embrace science and assimilation. These focal points are the cause of the schisms among their original forebears so long ago. Even before the revelations of the I'krl, the thaal followed religious precepts that differ little from those espoused today.

While fraal emotions exist at subtle levels and they bond with friends for life, thaal make the same sorts of bonds with others in both directions: Friendships are for life, as are hatreds. Wanderer fraal look upon these emotional kin with some disdain both for their methods and the "errors" between what they believed was their culture and what attitudes the thaal brought with them to the Verge.

With lifespans measuring in multiple centuries, thaal rarely mate simply to prevent overpopulation unless they seek to dominate a planet they colonize. In either case, thaal births (like those of the fraal) are often singular births after an unusually long gestation period of fifteen months. Any thaal born without psionic potential die from exposure soon after birth, a long-standing practice in the Theocracy. Thaal grow to their adult proportions by the age of twenty, their psionic potentials growing with their bodies. There are no thaal children with the Exeat, though the younger thaal adults are marked by their almost glowing skin and eyes (which dull and mute themselves beneath wrinkles and age later on).

While they are no less mortal than any other species of Externals or Vergers, many among the Exeat bring

### Thaal Ecological Data

**Biochemistry:** Series I
**Environment:** Class 1
**GRAPH:** G1/R1/A2/P3/H2
**Biome:** Any
**Encounter Chance:** Unlikely
**Group Size:** 2–12 (2d6)
**Organization:** Theocratic oligarchy
**Niche:** Advanced technological civilization
**Intelligence:** Telepathic sentient

### Thaal Game Data

These statistics represent a typical thaal acolyte of the I'krl church (a 1st-level Mindwalker).

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| STR 6 | (d6+3) | INT 12 | (2d4+8) |
| DEX 8 | (d8+3) | WIL 13 | (d8+9) |
| CON 9 | (2d4+2) | PER 12 | (d12+3) |

Durability: 9/9/5/5      Action check: 12+/11/5/2
Move: sprint 14, run 10, walk 4      #Actions: 2
Reaction score: Ordinary/2      Last Resorts: 2
Psionic Strength Points: 19

**Attacks**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Unarmed | 3/2/1– | d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s | LI/O |
| Ranged weapon | 9/4/2 | Varies | Varies |

**Defenses**
+2 (WIL) resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

**Skills**
Modern [8]–*pistol [9]*; Vehicle Operation [8]–*space [9]*; Knowledge [12]–*language (human) [13]*; System Operations [12]; Awareness [13]–*intuition [14]*; Resolve [13]–*mental [14]*; ESP [12]–*empathy [13]*, *osar battle calm [13]*; Telekinesis [13]–*kinetic shield [14]*, *psychokinetics [14]*; Telepathy [12]–*contact [13]*.

with them long ingrained superstitions from the Theocracy which mythologize the thaal slightly. They believe (as do some demented thaal) that they are the direct children of the I'krl and to harm one or kill one is to blaspheme and risk eternal torment. One cannot cross their paths unless he bows his eyes beneath the notice of the thaal (often becoming full bows, not just averted eyes). To speak unbidden to a thaal is to presume they wish to be noticed: Many among the Theocracy are trained to assume a thaal krl'osar is not there unless he announces himself and thus is "invisible" until he draws attention to himself. Of all the superstitions, that last one causes many problems, as humans and other species do not play along with them in willful ignorance and thus anger thaal by interacting with them without their leave.

## THE KRL'OSAR

An omnipresent force among the External command structures are the krl'osar, the "holy servants of the mysteries." They are the priests of the mysterious gods they call the I'krl, and Mindwalkers all. Unlike the Mindwalkers of the Verge and Old Space, all psionically-active beings from the Theocracy (and thus the Exeat) gain their training as Mindwalkers from the I'krl Church and primarily from the thaal. The krl'osar test all children on Theocracy worlds for psionic gifts before the age of five, and any found with "the gift of the gods" become wards of the church, taken from their homes to be raised in the ecclesiastical world of the krl'osar. Psionics form the foundations of the I'krl religion and acolytes learn psion-

ics more as prayers and codas than as skills, relying on faith and will more than intellectual understanding of the powers.

Ultimately, the only true differences between standard Mindwalkers as presented in the *Player's Handbook* or the *Mindwalking* psionics guide and the krl'osar psionic priests is this: The powers have strong ties to thaal and I'krl mythologies and dogma; rising in power as a krl'osar Mindwalker raises a person's rank within the church hierarchies; and they gain a few powers that seem almost magical in nature, as they have only been seen cloaked in the mysticism of the church. In all other ways, krl'osar should be treated and written up as normal Mindwalkers.

Every krl'osar, and even every acolyte or slave with some ties to the church, wears the symbol of the I'krl in some manner. The symbol itself is a simple triangular overlay of three circles: a gray circle atop a purple circle on the left and a white circle on the right. The most common manners of wearing these are as an armband or around the neck as an amulet. Some zealots tattoo the symbol somewhere easily noticed, though any slaves of the church have the mark branded just behind the left shoulder. Krl'osar clothing colors tend to use white, gray, and purple quite often, though variations to lavender and black appear quite often as well in ecclesiastical garb. None in the Verge have seen full formal ecclesiastic garb for the krl'osar beyond some standardized jewelry (bracers, headbands, armbands, and amulets) and purple or black tabards and sashes bearing the I'krl symbol.

## The Power of Faith

The teachings of the I'krl priests follow very strict, orthodox lines that have deviated little over the course of one thousand years or more. Many humans expressed surprise that the thaal and the krl'osar didn't exhibit too many more varied powers than Mindwalkers in the Verge already had. While they may have been restricted by orthodox teachings or the limits of mortal minds, the krl'osar could also simply have hidden its powers. Look to the "Rumors" below for hints of other powers to grant the krl'osar; the two powers below are the only confirmed new psionic abilities wielded openly against humanity during the war.

### Osar Battle Calm

*ESP Skill; cost 3 points. This skill cannot be used untrained.*

After one phase of concentration, a krl'osar becomes hyper-aware of her immediate surroundings and all physical movement within a radius of 1 meter plus an additional meter per rank achieved in the skill. Depending on the success roll, she has +1/2/3 steps to allocate as a defensive penalty against all melee attacks directed at her.

At rank 4, add onestep to the effects. At rank 8, the krl'osar can apply the penalty to ranged attacks as well. At rank 12, add another +1 step penalty to both melee and ranged attacks directed against her.

### Osar Crystaff Meditation

*Biokinesis Skill; cost 5 points. This skill cannot be used untrained or without an osar crystaff.*

Using an osar crystaff (see below), an krl'osar priest can effectively absorb and negate damage from many types of attacks with his melee weapon. This battle meditation takes one full phase of concentration to set in place. Once active, the meditation remains active for the rest of the round and all of the next one. The Mindwalker can increase this duration by one additional round per psionic energy point spent to maintain it. While active, the meditation causes the staff's crystals to glow slightly and stream small sparkles of energy when in motion. If using the meditation to block incoming attacks, the krl'osar cannot attack during that phase. Attacking with a crystaff does not end the power of the meditation, though the krl'osar cannot block or negate attacks in that phase. Removing one or both hands from the crystaff ends any meditation, so switching weapons can disrupt it.

Crystaff meditation sets up a psionic energy pattern in and around the krl'osar and his crystaff, allowing them to absorb and negate the force of attacks. Knowing how to use the crystaff as a weapon is not necessary for performing the meditation. When using a crystaff to block or absorb damage, the krl'osar can, by choice, decide which damage to block if confronted with more than one type of attack in a round (i.e. block all LI or HI attacks).

If successful, they can willingly negate types of damage from the chosen attacks intercepted (i.e. stuns, wounds, or mortals). Each damage type can be read as 2 points of a lesser type of damage. Thus, a krl'osar that can negate two wounds can alternately negate 4 stuns; and the ability to block three mortals can stop 6 wounds or 12 stuns. This block applies to all damage of stated type applied against the krl'osar in the phase.

As the krl'osar advances in crystaff meditation, he can perceive and intercept greater types of damage or energy. At rank 1, the krl'osar may use this ability to block LI damage. At rank 4, the krl'osar gains the ability to block HI damage (as noted on the table below). At rank 8, this ability extends to include En damage. At rank 12, the krl'osar gains the ability to use half the damage amount absorbed during the previous phase as added LI damage to an attack with his crystaff.

*Crystaff meditation cannot be used in conjunction with*

*any other Constitution- or Will-based psionic abilities. It also cannot be used while in Osar Battle Calm, though it does combine with Battle Mind.*

| Rank | LI | HI | En |
|------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | 1s/2s/3s | | |
| 2 | | | |
| 3 | 2s/3s/4s | | |
| 4 | | 1s/2s/3s | |
| 5 | 1w/2w/3w | | |
| 6 | | 2s/3s/4s | |
| 7 | 2w/3w/4w | | |
| 8 | | 1w/2w/4w | 1s/2s/3s |
| 9 | 1m/2m/3m | | 2s/3s/4s |
| 10 | | 2w/3w/4w | 1w/2w/3w |
| 11 | 2m/3m/4m | | 2w/3w/4w |
| 12 | | 1m/2m/3m | 1m/2m/3m |

**Krl'Osar Crystaff:** The krl'osar crystaff is a metal quarterstaff averaging just under 2 meters in length and shod on both ends with large crystals of variable colors. The length of the staff remains smooth unless the wielder chooses to carve holy marks or personal sigils on it (or the tallies of foes defeated with it). In all ways, it corresponds to the weapon statistics of a normal quarterstaff (Melee Weapons), though their availability is Restricted only to krl'osar of the I'krl Theocracy.

## I'krl Orthodox Names for Psionics

While noted by their standard names in character statistics and use, the I'krl Church has its dogmatic names and titles for every psionic power. Each skill is considered a prayer or mantra to the krl'osar while it is just a mental exercise or skill to other Mindwalkers. Referring to skills by their common names (and not the church-mandated titles) always inflames the tempers of krl'osar.

Some adjustments made to the psionic powers as well as some of the newer powers come from *Mindwalking: A Guide to Psionics*. The *dimension walk* skill, originally in the *Tangents* sourcebook, changed from a Telekinesis skill to a Psychoportation skill.

### CONSTITUTION SKILLS

| BIOKINESIS | THE KAPAR PRAYERS |
|------------|-------------------|
| Bio-armor | Kapar's Fourth Lesson |
| Bioweapon | Kapar's Third Lesson |
| Control metabolism | Kapar's First Lesson |
| *Heal* | *Kapar's Fifth Lesson* |
| *Intangibility* | *Kapar's Eighth Lesson* |
| *Morph* | *Kapar's Seventh Lesson* |
| Rejuvenate | Kapar's Second Lesson |
| Transfer damage | Kapar's Sixth Lesson |

### INTELLIGENCE SKILLS

| ESP | THE SOL PRAYERS |
|-----|-----------------|
| *Battle mind* | *War of Sol* |
| Clairaudience | Ear of Sol |
| Clairvoyance | Eye of Sol |
| *Crystaff meditation* | *Crystaff meditation* |
| Empathy | Heart of Sol |
| Mind reading | Sol's Veil |
| *Navcognition* | *The Traveling Eye* |
| *Osar battle calm* | *Osar battle calm* |
| Postcognition | Sol's Reminiscence |
| *Precognition* | *Sol's Prophecy* |
| Psychometry | Touch of Sol |
| Sensitivity | I'krl Waiting or Sol's Sensing |

### WILL SKILLS

| PSYCHOPORTATION | THE VUR PRAYERS |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Alter speed | Psalm of Fleeting |
| *Apportation* | *Psalm of Collection* |
| *Dimension walk\** | *Psalm of Vur's Great Journey* |
| *Duplicate* | *Psalm of Mirrors* |
| *Teleportation* | *Psalm of Journey* |
| *Timeslip* | *Psalm of Moments* |

| TELEKINESIS | THE NOTH PRAYERS |
|-------------|------------------|
| *Cryokinetics* | *Kiss of Winter* |
| *Electrokinetics* | *Skywrath* |
| *Kinetic blow* | *Arm of Retribution* |
| *Kinetic shield* | *Guard of Noth's Wisdom* |
| Levitation | The Raedwalk |
| Photokinetics | Light of Purity |
| Psychokinetics | Touch of the Prophets |
| *Pyrokinetics* | *The Sualtar Rings* |

### PERSONALITY SKILLS

| TELEPATHY | THE OHARN PRAYERS |
|-----------|-------------------|
| Contact | To Understand Lifeminds |
| *Datalink* | *To Understand Techminds* |
| *Drain* | *To Claim by Faith* |
| Empathic projection | To Feel as One |
| Illusion | To Show the Glories |
| *Mind blast* | *To Punish Doubt* |
| Mind shield | To Protect by Faith |
| *Mind wipe* | *To Cleanse the Heresy* |
| Psychic armor | To Guard by Faith |
| Psychic projection | To Venture by Faith |
| Suggest | To Teach by Faith |
| Tire | To Slow by Faith |

Note: Skills printed in *italic* can't be used untrained.

## Krl'osar Rumors

During the war, attacks by some cadres of krl'osar priests caused flurries of rumors and speculation. Witnesses saw many phenomena beyond their comprehension. As very few Vergers are full Mindwalkers, reports of psionics used by the krl'osar priests are sketchy. As none of these powers could be corroborated by someone with the proper knowledge of what had occurred, these new powers could be anything from illusion-cloaked telekinetics to hidden weapons slyly used by the priests. While more than fifty reports to the Verge Alliance command registered these abilities in use in space or in ground movements, very few ever saw use against other Mindwalkers or those versed in psionics (or at least those who survived to report back).

► Until krl'osar prisoners can be fully scanned and their powers learned, these rumored powers remain just that—rumors.

► Among the most common rumors was some ability they seemed to project that made their hand-to-hand weapons hurt more. Fraal Mindwalkers hint that such an ability is possible, but is normally used in reverse in medical circumstances to reduce pain of needles and tests, not enhance the pain of a club.

► Mass/weight manipulation: One report noted thaal hefting huge boulders and throwing them at low-flying fighters, while others noted hovertanks crashing as if their weight overloaded their grav units.

► Group levitation/flight: Numerous reports saw the krl'osar surround themselves in glowing energy and fly groups of priests and equipment en masse, defying the weight available to normal levitation techniques.

► Molecular bond manipulation: Boarding actions on some ships noted krl'osar being able to walk through walls or suddenly turn a plastic window into something to resist blaster fire. The leading theory suggests they might be able to strengthen or weaken molecular bonds of things touched.

► Life swapping: Some wounded reported that they'd nearly captured some wounded krl'osar, but when they approached to collect them, the thaal touched them and inflicted the wounds on them while healing themselves.

► Psi-block: Third-hand reports suggest that krl'osar and Aegis Rangers clashed in some small skirmishes, and the krl'osar managed to block or rob their foes of their psionic abilities, making them easy prey.

► Psi-pool: The rumor that scares the Verge the most is the suggestion that a senior krl'osar priest could absorb or pool power from a group of lesser priests in a ritual to perform incredible feats of psionics unheard of by humanity. Rumors include powering

whole ships by psionic energy or at least protecting them with telekinetic shielding generated by twelve priests; grouping power from numerous krl'osar to empathically affect entire groups instead of individual minds; or simply combining power from a score or more priests to power abilities known only to a major priest.

# THE I'KRL

*Designer's Note: Bear in mind that everything revealed here about the i'krl and the krl'yth remains secret and known only to fewer than a dozen people in the Theocracy and only four people in the Verge—Ython Kadar, Vurhyr Barok Lhor, Paratak Trewys, and Vurhyr Joran.*

The ancient species long fettered by their Glassmaker-inspired prison, the i'krl exist as a homogenous collective beyond the physical and astral planes that humanity and Mindwalkers recognize as reality. Once a psionically powerful mortal species like the thaal or the evrem, the i'krl sought dominance over all, and paid for their folly by being fused together in an amalgamated form and banished into some alien dimension not adjacent to our own. Over the many tens of thousands of years since their banishment, the i'krl regained consciousness and control, though they remained a psionic collective instead of a physical species. They found that great expenditures of power allowed them to communicate via certain powerful computers and minds that connected to them. Only upon sensing the massive wave of psionic energy from the Vanishing at Bluefall did the i'krl dream of escape. Not being prepared for the rift torn among the dimensions, the i'krl only managed to partially touch some of their pious worshipers and nestle inside of their brains.

Thus, the i'krl now seek to manipulate their krl'yth agents and the Verge into triggering another psionic wave like the Vanishing to free them entirely or to find a way to shatter their prison by manipulating the Glassmaker ruins and technology therein. Until that happens, the i'krl continue to push their agents and possess very powerful krl'osar in order to gain more power and ready the Verge for their ascension and invasion.

## Krl'yth

Currently almost exclusive to the krl'han group of senior krl'osar officials, the krl'yth hold the new power among the clergy of the I'krl. Whether chosen by fate and luck (like Kadar and Barok Lhor) or by enduring long and painful rituals in secret, a faithful psionically active person can become krl'yth ("those of the Great Mystery"). The yet-unknown power of the ritual fuses some of the I'krl's power and substance into the body of the suppli-

cant, though the only external cue of this infestation are a shift in eye color and fingernails—they turn a rich, nearly black purple, and any powers manifesting energy likewise become purple.

Once becoming a krl'yth, the person becomes a host for the collective presence of the I'krl, though they do not manifest fully into these new bodies as the mortal frame explodes when that much power courses through it (as was the fate of a thaal vurhon). The I'krl content themselves in passively watching and hearing and experiencing everything the krl'yth does, granting them power when necessary, but rarely if ever actually forcing enough presence through their connection to speak directly via possession.

While some blanch at the thought of allowing an alien presence—gods or not—permanent ties to one's mind and soul, the krl'yth understand and accept the burden. For this, they gain F/X powers of unparalleled dimensions for boosting their own psionic powers and the ability to perform miracles to show the worlds the true powers of the I'krl. Krl'yth gain the unique broad skill of "I'krl Powers," the specialty skills (spells and rituals) of this broad skill all needing training. (Of course, when the god manifests inside one's head, training can easily be sidestepped as the I'krl points the way to where such knowledge is hidden.)

## Powers of the Krl'yth

Most of the powers of the krl'yth remain hidden and unknown, since the quartet of them involved in the Exeat remain relatively untouchable by humans until the Battle for Aegis. Shadowy powers generally attributed to gardhyi actually belong to Vurhyr Barok Lhor and two of his krl'yth gardhyi associates back in Theocracy space. The few powers exhibited by Vurhyr Joran during his visit on Bluefall or revealed by spies watching Ython Kadar or Paratak Trewys are noted below. In terms of F/X designations, krl'yth could be considered alienists (worshipers of aliens acting as gods). Some of these powers are adaptations or renamed from their former appearances in *Beyond Science: The Guide to FX* and other sources.

If the Gamemaster or players use *Beyond Science*, krl'yth use the starting power levels for superheroic level campaigns, regardless of their previous classes or abilities. Since the power comes from the I'krl within them, the F/X point pool does not grow or change with added ability. On the positive side, points restore themselves at two per hour minimum, regardless of Will feat checks, and any powers Gamemasters wish to link to the mysterious I'krl can be transmitted to the krl'yth for use in limited fashions. In other words, Gamemasters can use any and all F/X powers desired and add them to the repertoire of the krl'yth, though all should be renamed and put into an orthodox religious and pseudo-psionic context. We recommend limiting accessible powers to Faith F/X or those relating directly to psionics. Superpowers could be adapted and used as needed, though such powers should begin to burn out the krl'yth as she taps too much power from the I'krl (or they force her to use too much). While Gamemasters can certainly have an I'krl-possessed supporting cast character take on the heroes, possession for more than six rounds (minus one round per use of major F/X powers or psionics) causes the mortal supporting cast character to explode violently. Thus, climactic battles can bring in great F/X powers but do not unbalance the campaign as that power corrupts resolutely and finally.

### Coda of Krl'saran Wrath (WIL 4)

*Summon miracle; 2 FX energy points*
*This skill can't be used untrained.*
This miracle summons and creates a weapon and any ammunition out of the will and faith of the worshiper (as well as any surrounding shadows and the power of the I'krl). While the worshiper need not know how the weapon is constructed, he must be familiar with its use and operation to properly visualize it. At the end of the phase when the miracle is cast, the weapon appears in the worshiper's hand, and remains in existence for d8+2 rounds or until dismissed by its creator. The weapon summoned is either a melee weapon of any size or a ranged weapon of pistol size (due to the greater complexities of these weapons). Whatever charges or rounds needed for the weapon exist while it exists (no running out of ammunition).

At ranks 3 and 9, the duration of the weapon extends by a cumulative +2 rounds (i.e. d8+6 rounds at rank 9) At rank 6, a worshiper can summon larger ranged weapons of up to rifle or SMG sizes. At rank 12, the worshiper can summon a weapon she has never wielded but seen used (often duplicating the weapons of an enemy) and wield it for the duration as if trained in its use.

### The Darts of Vhusak (AKA Shadow Bolts; WIL 3)

*Summon miracle; 1 FX energy point*
*This skill can't be used untrained.*
A dark pulse of purple energy fires from the worshiper's hand (10/20/30-meter range) to stun a target on a successful hit. The dart inflicts d4s/d4+2s/d4+4s damage (En/O). While they can be cast with no light or sound to strike from positions of concealment, most krl'yth consider this cowardly and do not do so unless ordered so by superiors or by the I'krl itself.

At ranks 3 and 9, the miracle creates an additional bolt of energy, allowing up to two targets to be attacked

per casting. At rank 6, the damage increases to d4+2s/d4+4s/d6+4s (En/0). At rank 12, it increases to d4+4s/d6+4s/d6+6s (En/0).

### Prayer of Deliverance (WIL 6)

*Summon miracle; 10 FX energy points*
*This skill can't be used untrained or without the ESP–navcognition skill.*
This most powerful of miracles is an advanced version of bend space (found in *Beyond Science*)and is actually a crucial power for the Exeat and its future plans. It can be cast by multiple worshipers to either share the energy cost of the casting or to simply increase the effects of the prayer in numerous ways. This miracle warps space and time around the worshiper(s), allowing instantaneous travel across unbelievable distances for the krl'yth and whatever or whomever it chooses to bring along. It actually opens an interstellar wormhole, but to all nonpsionic perceptions, it appears as a great glowing bubble in space around the caster that grows out to its desired radius and then contracts, pulling all chosen matter with the worshiper(s) to their destination.

One of the risks of the prayer is its easy disruption. If any matter pierces or interrupts the bubble at its maximum extent, the energy flow is disrupted and the prayer fails, though the F/X energy is still lost. Thus, this prayer is rarely conducted on a planet with too many variables to disrupt the bubble. Most often, the chapels within every ship in the Theocracy fleet are at the heart of a ship and this allows krl'yth to transport whole ships and crews of the faithful along with them in swift, undetectable ways.

Alone, a single krl'yth can create a prayer bubble that radiates out to a radius of 15 meters and then move all desired matter and energy (determined by the worshiper) within this radius up to 60 light years away, depending on the success of the roll (20/40/60). The usual method of using this miracle is to surround a fighter or transport and take it with the worshiper. The costs, beyond the F/X point cost, occur upon the conclusion of the prayer and arrival at the destination. The worshiper immediately suffers 2d4+2s/3d4+3s/3d6+3s (stuns becoming wounds if necessary) and loses the ability to use either F/X or psionic powers for d4 days due to the drain on the worshiper's system in tapping such powers. Additional casters within this miracle can simply share the F/X cost, dividing it evenly among them while all performing the same prayer. They can also cumulatively increase the size of the warp radius by 10 meters with each additional worshiper if paying the full costs of the prayer.

Traveling via the *deliverance prayer* seems instantaneous to those inside the bubble, nor are there any seeming alterations in space once the bubble reaches its maximum radius (travelers do not notice the compression or expansion of the bubble due to its opaque purple energy). In reality it takes an hour to travel each light year, and the bubble's expansion at its destination point goes to the maximum radius and then shimmers into nothingness.

At ranks 3 and 9, the krl'yth can increase the bubble's radius by 5 meters. Ranks 6 and 12 add five light years to each success rank (25/45/65 and 30/50/70).

### Prayer of Sufferance (WIL 3)

*Summon miracle; 1 FX energy point*
*This skill can't be used untrained.*
The miracle, delivered by physical touch or by psionic contact, increases a target's sensitivity to psionics drastically, "allowing them to suffer in their zeal and duty to the I'krl." While this miracle remains in effect for d4 hours, all psionics used by (for defense or offense) or upon the target automatically incur an equal number of stun points as psionic energy points spent.

At ranks 3, 6, and 9, the duration increases by 20 minutes. At rank 12, the prayer of sufferance can be reduced to activating only when the target is touched or uses one particular psionic broad skill, but the duration of the miracle now increases to d8+1 hours.

### The Prophet's Eye (AKA Darksight; WIL 3)

*Transform miracle; 1 FX energy point*
*This skill can't be used untrained.*
This miracle increases the worshiper's ability to see in darkness. The miracle lasts 10 minutes and reduces the penalty from low light or darkness by 1, 2, or 3 steps.

At ranks 3, 6, 9, and 12, the duration increases by 10 minutes.

### Ritual of Excoratt (WIL 4)

*Summon miracle; 2 FX energy points*
*This skill can't be used untrained.*
This miracle—the most dreaded of punishments among the krl'osar or the Theocracy's faithful visited upon those under watch of heresy against the I'krl teachings—reaches out to the mind of a target psionic within 20 meters and unleashes a brief pyrokinetic flash within and on the offending being. It immediately deals d4+2w/d6+2w/d8+2w to the target and half as much damage to anyone within a meter radius. Once the purplish flames die down at the end of the phase, a surviving target remains surrounded by a purplish corona of harmless flames, signaling their status as a heretic turned penitent in the eyes of the Church. The corona remains around the target for twice as many days as the attacker's rank, and during that time, all psionics used by the target being costs twice as many points to operate normally.

At ranks 5 and 9, the initial damage dealt by this miracle increases just as per the pyrokinetics skill. At ranks 6 and 12, the range of the miracle increases by 10 meters.

**Thenark's Requiem (AKA Call Shadows; WIL 3)**
*Conjure miracle; 1 FX energy point*
*This skill can't be used untrained.*
This miracle draws shadows in a 1 meter radius surrounding a worshiper together and darkens them, concealing the worshiper from observers for up to an hour. Those searching for the target worshiper suffer a +1 step penalty to all Awareness checks for every degree of success of the skill check. This area of effect remains in place for an hour even if the worshiper leaves its confines.

The area of effect can increase to 4 meters across at rank 4. At rank 8, the collected shadows increase Awareness penalties to +2 steps/+3 steps/+4 steps. At rank 12, the effect becomes mobile and moves with the worshiper at a movement rate of 2. If the worshiper moves faster, the shadowed area stops wherever the worshiper exceeded that movement rate.

## Original and Additional Sources

▶ ALTERNITY *Gamemaster Guide*, pages 223–229
▶ *Threats from Beyond*, page 13
▶ *Beyond Science: A Guide to F/X*

# IMPORTANT EXEAT LEADERS

Below are details on the major figures among the I'krl Exeat within the Verge, listed in abbreviated statistics and pertinent information following each character's name as per the standard ALTERNITY shorthand format. However, given the new species and allegiances, here are abbreviations and notes to define the hidden details of these characters and others with whom they interact:

**Ython Kadar:** (Thm/Exeat/D-MW27/krl'yth) This quietly power-mad thaal could redefine zealotry as an art form. Beginning his career in the Church as a diplomat 270 years ago, Kadar always had a knack for ironing out racial and cultural differences when these clashed in the multiracial church. Over fifteen decades ago, Kadar received his first vision while visiting a cathedral on a worldcomm in the Khiir Cluster: The I'krl spoke to him and to the gardhyi Vurhyr Barok Lhor during a massive solar storm, and put them on this path leading to the Verge. Kadar and Lhor both rose as quickly and decisively as possible through the ranks of the church, all the while keeping the I'krl's message in mind: "Go forth and destroy those who oppose us. Go forth and

## Species Codes

| Code | Species | Code | Species |
|------|---------|------|---------|
| B | Bareem | N | N'sss |
| F | Fraal | S | Sesheyan |
| G | Gardhyi | Sv | Sifarv |
| H | Human | T | T'sa |
| K | Kadaran | Tn | Teln |
| Kl | Klick | Th | Thaal |
| Kr | Kroath | W | Weren |
| M | Mechalus | X | Mutant |
| Mr | Medurr | | |

find the keys. Do so and you both shall earn our gratitude. In that alone is power beyond your reckoning." At the time of the Vanishing, Kadar received more power from the I'krl and became krl'yth. Now, Kadar's Exeat has built up momentum and power of its own, and the new miracles he and Joran and Lhor showed the people only increases Kadar's influence. This thaal priest works to fulfill his gods' demands, though he does not wish to take the xenhon's throne. His master back in Theocracy space awaits it upon Kadar's completion of this crusade, as their cumulative connections and power could easily unseat the current xenhon. Kadar is content to establish the Kadar Hanuthen, the Lesser Holy See that would encompass the entire Verge.

**Vurhyr Barok Lhor:** (Gm/Exeat/MW24/krl'yth) The primary aide to Kadar and his chief of intelligence, Vurhyr Barok Lhor has prepared the way for the Exeat from the Hathorn system and has monitored and coordinated all Exeat activities in the Verge since his first direct contact with the I'krl 150 years ago. While Kadar truly leads the Exeat, more agents of many External species personally answer to Vurhyr due to the long-term mission given them. Barok Lhor's cold aloofness makes him far more imposing than Kadar's zeal, as he looms slightly more than 2 meters tall and his eyes glisten blackish-purple quite starkly against his pale gray skin. Lhor's travels to Lucullus and to parts of the Stellar Ring established External ties to Helixtech and VoidCorp, though the primary execution of the alliances with the human con-

## Nationalities/Allegiances

| Code | Allegiance |
|------|-----------|
| Demesne | Loyal to secular leadership of Sifarv Demesne |
| Exeat | Loyal to the goals of the Kadar Exeat (and a new krl'osar and Theocracy) |
| Krl'osar | Loyal to religious hierarchy within I'krl Church (religious/nonpolitical power) |
| Lhor | Loyal to gardhyi agents and/or gardhyi Vurhyr Barok Lhor (not the Exeat as a whole) |
| Theocracy | Loyal to religious leadership of I'krl Theocracy (political power) |

glomerates fell to subordinates among the teln and other gardhyi (aside from secret meetings between Lhor and the leader of VoidCorp). Barok Lhor's greatest achievements before and during the war include the complete domination of Hathorn, the building and launching of the Exeat cathedral ship, and the establishment of secret bases in gas giants in the Aegis and Dewi systems.

**Vurhyr Joran:** (Thm/Exeat/MW23/krl'yth) The recently promoted protégé of Kadar, Joran underwent the ritual with his mentor and gained krl'yth status. After the Battle for Aegis and the first primary contact between the Verge Alliance and the Exeat command, Joran becomes a willing "guest" on Bluefall "to bring the holy word of the I'krl to the heathens and heretics so they may be saved upon their deliverance." With this, he becomes the touchstone by which the Verge Alliance learns of the I'krl Theocracy, the Exeat, and the ways of the thaal. Unknown to all but himself and the other krl'yth, Joran also acts as the I'krl's main spy inside, all he sees and knows becoming instantly known to Kadar and others through their link to the I'krl collective. Joran himself actually comports himself well and is more open and affable than humans expect from fraal, his guards kept distracted by his easygoing personality (behind which lurks a strategic mind seeking to better understand the Exeat's enemies).

**Paratak Trewys:** (Svm/Exeat/MW8/krl'yth) His noble title and his krl'yth status gaining him a higher position among the Exeat Command, Trewys once was merely a puppet for Barok Lhor's control (as were quite a few of his relatives). Trewys only held a weak telekinetic talent, but it and his political connections among the nobility and the church moved him up. Now, as part of the Exeat and the krl'yth, the young paratak sits at the left hand of Kadar as the secular commander of the military forces. Of course, either Kadar or Lhor chose their ally well, for this minor grandson of Arnak Chela of the Jhirpa Nebula brought much financial and political power to the Exeat and upon the Sanaremn (what humans call the Vanishing of Bluefall) he became krl'yth and gained the gift of prophecy from the I'krl. Since that time, Trewys became a partner, not a pawn, though the I'krl subsume much of Trewys's original personality, giving him a darker reputation with a penchant for referring to himself as a collective or plural lifeform.

**Kyanda:** (Svf/Exeat/FA11/krl'yth?) Despite her lack of a noble or ecclesiastical rank, Kyanda is a highly placed member of the Exeat as the primary bodyguard (and much-rumored consort) of Ython Kadar. This cobalt-blue feathered woman wears a number of kadaran cy-biotech implants including a dark plasma cannon on her left arm. Some other unknown enhancements make her wing flight feathers razor sharp, and she has been known to lash out, beheading anyone insolent enough to interrupt her or the ython. She rarely speaks, but her soft voice belies her battle-hardened exterior and ruthless demeanor. While those who have known her for years know her eyes have always been a deep purple, many whisper that she has been touched by the I'krl and that grants her the power to operate so effectively outside the chain of command.

**Parak Martis:** (Km/Exeat/TO16) By far the most sought after External for the heinous nature of his war crimes, Parak Martis is the sadistic senior scientist of the Exeat, answering directly to Kadar and Barok Lhor despite a low military rank of komro (Brigadier General). With his ideas on rapid-growth weapons depots and kroath production, Martis's religious connections gained him a social/political level equal to Atreel (see below). His understanding of human technology (via Barok Lhor's spies) makes him far more dangerous as he adapts kadaran biotech to mimic various human weapons and cybertechnologies. The most exasperating thing about Martis is his incessant chatter, which continues even while he sleeps. Lhor has made this an advantage, since recording all the musings of Martis provide far more scientific knowledge and understanding than Martis himself provides.

**Ytharksol Atreel:** (Svf/Demesne/D-CS13) One of Trewys's oldest friends, Atreel's brilliance as a fleet commander saved him from obscurity within the Grattan Wastes. Rising swiftly through the military ranks and making many friends along the way, the sifarv carefully hides his distaste for Theocracy rule beneath a stoic demeanor and a strategy of picking his battles. Atreel has the trust of the Exeat leaders and the command of the entire Exeat fleet (which can only be countermanded by Kadar or Lhor) except the Cathedral ship of Ython Kadar. His weakness comes to the fore only when his orders are not followed to the letter: He flies into blind rages when his strategies get implemented poorly or fail due to poor execution or lax discipline. He also remains fixated on winning any battle where he engages his fleet. Atreel, with his understanding of the politics and powers involved, hopes to help the Exeat conquer the Verge, and when that destabilizes the xenhon's power back in the Theocracy, Atreel may test the loyalty of his officers by abandoning the Verge in favor of overthrowing the religious rule of the sifarv.

**Arksol Czynn-tal:** (Thf/Theocracy/D-CS16) Commander of the *Phlegethon* (the External fortress ship so named by the humans) and leader of the Fourth Armada, Czynn-tal ranks among the highest placed females in the entire Exeat military. Czynn-tal's tactical knowledge and the firepower provided by the adaptations of Glassmaker technology have made her flagship the best ship in the Exeat fleet outside of the cathedral ship. Czynn-tal's abili-

ty to keep track of huge numbers of variables allowing her to manipulate dozens of capital ships in a battle without looking at a computer screen is outdone only by Atreel's strategic sense. She does not like the adaptations made to the ship, though she enjoys the added punch delivered by the new weapons; she simply hates kadarans with a passion and avoids them as much as she can.

## Other Exeat Characters

**Mitarak Hagan Lex:** (Bm/Krl'osar/D-CS14) Leader of Lucullus/Penates occupation forces; HQ in Port Royal's Capital Dome; also a xenoth of the krl'osar.

**Ythapsol Shier Maree:** (Thf/Theocracy/CS9) Commands Eagle capital ship or Falcon flight under Czynn-tal in 2nd Fleet. Commands 2nd Battleship Wing from *The Shanath*

**Mitak Pama Lex:** (Bf/Exeat/CS9) "Butcher of Santiago" and head slaver/commander of the kroath creation camps as well as eldest daughter of Hagan Lex.

**Apsol Anla Ptarue:** (Kf/Exeat/FA10) Mitarak by birth of one of few titled kadaran families, but determined to win her own notoriety in military service. Commands the battleship *Tranda* in Vieron system to reinforce Jaen and to expand kroath forces into rest of Vieron colonies; medium level hero foe or nemesis of Commodore Pfender of Thuldans.

**Tarlsol Rael Graam:** (Gf/Exeat/CS11) Commander of a Falcon transport or captured human ship under command of Martis; on broad assignment to capture Verge tech and species. Works with Vardye Hellis of the Ptolemy pirates. An accessible enemy for heroes to start with; has connections with Lucullus and Erek Joss.

**Komosar Erek Joss:** (Bm/Theocracy/CS14) The Externals' "Sgt. Fury"; dangerous infantry leader. Leads the "Manyteeth" Ahmk (77th Infantry unit of thirty-two bareem, sifarv, klick, and kroath troops); at forefront of the battle at Caracas (or anywhere a colorful biotech enhanced warrior with a blacklaser cannon grafted to shoulder would come in handy). Fighting for the Theocracy as a patriot, not realizing that what's going on here could overthrow the current regime.

**Faith Terragis:** (Hf (Tn)/Lhor/D-FA12) (Mitak as relative rank as operative for Barok Lhor; not official title or rank.) Highest placed Verge spy; senior Helixtech VP in Lucullus; helped set up Jamaicans and Union Penates by fanning paranoia about Galactic Concord negotiations with medurr outside of Lucullus. "Escaped" the system and works to worm way into Verge Alliance councils early on. Another excellent low- to mid-level hero foe.

**M'nr:** (Nm/Lhor/FA9) Komith (relative rank as spy for Lhor). Head of n'sss contingent at Redcrown; main VoidCorp contact and head of magus building project; reports to Vurhyr Barok Lhor outside military structure.

# SECTION TWO: EXTERNAL SPACE

As humanity learns more about the I'krl and their External forces, there is a corresponding need for intelligence about the worlds and space beyond the Lightning Nebula and beyond the Orion Arm of the galaxy. "The Verge's Edge and Beyond" takes a prescient look at information that can come from the evrem, medurr, or other sources during the war, but most likely these areas and experiences can unfold normally as part of an ongoing STAR*DRIVE campaign as heroes explore space during and long after the Externals War has quieted down. While far from complete, the information provided by the evrem diplomats on Aegis proved far more than anyone from the Verge could ever safely collect in a century, and we present this in the "I'krl Theocracy" and "Beyond Orion's Arm" sections. This section expands the boundaries on where and how you can use the Externals both during and after the war. If nothing else, there are now more mysteries and more adventures beyond the Lightning Nebula for heroes ready and willing to brave them and meet new stellar powers and continue the fight against the I'krl… Ideally, long after the Exeat has played out in your campaigns, this material provides you with new material upon which to expand your STAR*DRIVE campaigns.

## THE VERGE'S EDGE AND BEYOND

Due to the inherent dangers and the apparent lack of exploitable resources out by Hammer's Star and the outer reaches of the Verge, these areas are not as well mapped or analyzed as the inner systems. From the first moment the I'krl Exeat exited the Lightning Nebula, the External species have extensively analyzed and investigated the outer systems and turned some of them to their advantage. The earliest encounters with the Externals happened at Armstrong, Zin Point, and Hammer's Star, and there may be more areas which they've infiltrated and settled in for long occupations. Similarly, there are many smaller systems on the Verge's edge yet uncharted which may have become I'krl holdings and thus lurking menaces for humanity.

### Hathorn

The Class M red star system holds four planets and an asteroid belt within its gravitic hold, and this has been an I'krl stronghold for more than a century as the "Sacred See of Kadar." While the first planet is viable only as a source of metals and minerals, the third planet—a gas giant named Ssiihr by its inhabitants—is home to a large population of n'sss. The asteroid belt also provides a wide range of resources for normal sifarv ship building, which takes place either on major planetoid bodies within the belt or in their orbital shipyards around Fhare (see below). The fourth planet occupies a wide elliptical orbit and is in effect an icebound rock with little of interest to human or External alike.
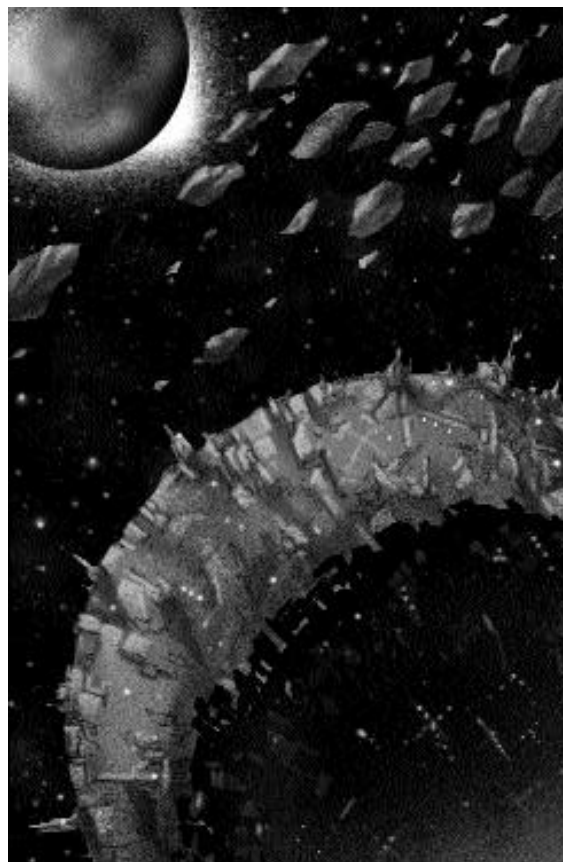
Surrounding the second planet in the system—named Fharuthen or "Sacred State"—are seven moons and three accretive rings of dust and stones from previously destroyed moons. One of the moons and the planet itself are both Class 1 bodies, though Fharuthen's atmosphere and proximity to the sun render it a jungle planet. The Class 1 moon has been named Fhare ("Sacred Place") and houses nine separate colonies, including one each for gardhyi, thaal, sifarv, and kadaran officers and their respective slaves' quarters. The ninth is the largest as the cathedral complex and home of the loyal krl'osar, the holy servants of the church (and Mindwalkers all). It has also served as the primary base for Vurhyr Barok Lhor for the past five decades and more recently for the Ython Kadar. Down on Fharuthen live bareem who manage the slaves, and who provide for the system's food needs through hunting of native fauna or agriculture on this harsh planet.

Fharuthen's largest moon appears odd under sensor arrays and to the naked eye—Kadaran biotech and other sifarv adaptations have transformed this moon into a lattice of computer circuits and comm relays. This "comm-world" maintains communication lines among the Externals in the Verge as well as their fellows far behind in the Lightning Nebula or beyond.

VoidCorp has a secret comm relay point in orbit on the fourth moon, which it established secretly in 2470. It has been through this relay that communications between the I'krl Exeat and VoidCorp executives of Y and greater rank have remained open for more than three decades. This relay, enhanced by the I'krl using their fold-space communications arrays, is one of four in VoidCorp's possession (two others are at Catalog in the Stellar Ring and Redcrown in the Verge; the remaining one is hidden at a location of the Gamemaster's choosing). Data between the arrays passes far more quickly than through drivespace relays, but it is limited to those who have access to the information at the four communication nodes.

## In Their Wake . . .

The I'krl Exeat wants the Verge for its own mysterious reasons, and its forces certainly leave their marks on any worlds visited. Gamemasters are encouraged both

by seeding large numbers of troop transports across the Verge, depositing bareem troops into many inhabited systems to cause problems for decades to come.

The kadarans can be among the more deadly of the I'krl species given what they can do with their biotech. Responsible for the creation of the kroath and the radical biomodification of the klick species, kadarans can provide nearly as many surprises as krl'osar psionics and F/X. Even long after they have been removed, kadaran biotech resists removal once it infiltrates and sets itself in place. The "weapon-trees" and "kroath conversion pens" installed on Lucullus may remain for years to come until they can safely be removed without additional damage or injury. Even so, many among the Austrins, Thuldans, Nariac, and Insight are intensely curious about kadaran biotech, and some might even be so moved to shelter a kadaran and its technology secrets for advancing their positions after the war.

As for the leading species of the Exeat, the thaal, gardhyi, and sifarv may leave minor or major traces of their existence across the Verge as isolated prisoners or dictatorial warlords over native lesser species. The bulk of these species' impact on the Verge come from any indoctrination they do of folk to the I'krl religion or from the reactions to the secrets that unfold during 2503. The initial damage—which can be as long-lasting as Gamemasters desire for their campaigns—creates a schism of trust between the fraal and all other species, as their origins and intentions now become suspect as their racial brethren lead the External threat. Anti-fraal prejudice can easily flare up during the war years, and it only adds fuel to the fires of human extremists among the Thuldans in wanting to subjugate all nonhumans.

Over the course of the war (or in the decades preceding it), many ships of the Exeat fleet become damaged in skirmishes with humanity or as a result of simple mishaps in interstellar space. Adventures can easily rise from the wreckage of crashed I'krl ships as they either provide hostile native species with advanced tech or simply unleash the dangers of the Externals upon another battlefield. While incredibly rare due to the zealous religion that binds them together, some Exeat forces may choose to desert during the war, and they might be found later, holed up in minor holdings of their own in the outer systems, in the Lightning Nebula, or nearly anywhere along vectors involved with the war.

Peripheral sites that did not decide the war but were early incursion points could also remain problems for years. The systems of Dewi and Tarsis, while not so remote as some, are of minor importance to Verge politics, but might have been of note for the Externals. Considering the deep enmity between VoidCorp and the remnants of the Dreth Commonwealth now living in the Dewi sys-

before and during (and after) the war to hide discrete pockets of Externals throughout the Verge as remnants of the greater threat but also as a lasting enemy to remind the heroes that wars rarely solve problems nor do enemies ever fully go away.

Even their most common forces leave legacies that take decades to overcome. Kroath forces often decimate civilian and military populations, especially if supplemented by kadaran conversion forces. By all rights, Penates and Vieron and other sites could suffer nearly total depopulation as a result of the kroath invasions, and this could easily happen on other worlds explored later. Klicks left unchecked on a planet with the means to reproduce their warrior and leader castes could easily come to dominate entire biomes on a planet within months, provided they have sufficient food sources.

The bareem could be the longest-lurking menace for any systems of the Verge. As has been their tactic and purpose for centuries, bareem can be dropped as infantry onto a planet, and they all single-mindedly stalk and enslave the major bioforms on any planet to which they are introduced. They also have a tenacity rivaled only by weren and fight zealously to uphold whatever orders they were given. Gamemasters with a particularly sadistic streak could leave a parting blow by the Exeat

tem, it may be part of the External strategy to pressure Dewi in exchange for VoidCorp assistance elsewhere. Fraal Administrator Lodiri ba Tiras foresaw a great menace coming to the Dewi system, and the rampant rumors of phantom ships suggest to some that there may have been more fronts in this war than the major battle sites at Lucullus, Aegis, and Ignatius. Points of little military importance (but of seemingly great interest to the Exeat) are any Precursor ruins. There are hints that the I'krl Exeat knows far more about the ruins and their technologies than humanity does, and just that mere thought sends chills of dread down Alliance Command's collective backs.

Last but not least, the human traitors who side with the Exeat become exposed in the latter half of the war. While VoidCorp's secrets remain so at the end of 2503, the betrayals at Lucullus and the Ptolemy Pirates' alliances can have long reaching repercussions for folk from those systems or affiliates. How leaders and societies deal with the quislings (and the suspicions about those who hail from the same system) is up to the Gamemaster. These, by far, may be the hardest scars of all to heal even long after the war is over.

### Other Rumors

Throughout the war, rumors fly about almost with life of their own, as everyone desperately seeks information on the nature of the threat they face. While Gamemasters are encouraged to read the full events of the war and turn some of them into official rumors for hero involvement, additional rumors can put other special events solely in the hands of the heroes beyond the official version of events. Rumors should either build or dash hopes of those hearing and repeating them, and they build a chain of logic from conjecture to truth. Below are several possibilities that could be formed from rumors:

► A friend of a friend said that a fraal generation ship appeared in the Karnath system. However, none of the fraal lay claim to it, and claim it's as ancient as one of their own. Are these new fraal allies or enemies, and do they possess any information or technology that could help win the war?
► With the number of External ships near Precursor sites, some folk say the Externals are out to raid the ruins and use the supertech against us.
► Lucullus didn't just roll over and throw in with the Externals: The barons were controlled by those mind-control worms I heard about!
► I talked with an evrem once and he mentioned that not all the sifarv bird-folk toe the line of the dark fraal. They're supposedly pirates in their own space. Maybe if we could get some of their help over here,

we'd be able to fight these External bastards with better forces and better tech.
► The deepfallen of Bluefall are all secretly working for the Externals! They caused the Vanishing by turning everyone in Aegis into a kroath and sending them to Armstrong years ago!
► I've heard some legends from folks who've traveled past Hammer's Star, and they say there are living ships and robots that fight the Externals and win! We've got to get some expeditions into the Lightning Nebula to find these "Metar" and ally with them!
► I've heard some news from Lucullus that if you're shot by certain guns wielded by the Externals, you'll mutate into a klick!

While none or all of these hints could become true, their true purpose for Gamemasters serves to generate new ideas and possibilities for adventures using the Externals and the Verge. Just because the main part of the action takes place off in space doesn't mean that the only dangers are among the stars . . . and that's where the heroes come in.

## THE I'KRL THEOCRACY

While it is of little comfort to those of the Verge, the "External Threat" is only a fraction of the power that could be unleashed by the powerful I'krl Theocracy. The Kadar Exeat is, for lack of a better term, an expeditionary force and a movement of proselytes dedicated to "delivering the holy words of the I'krl to the ignorant species." While we briefly touch on the Exeat below, this section provides information on their government and home states and their true natures. Some of this information can be useful if the heroes take the fight to the I'krl via medurr starrifts or other means of closing the vast distance between "the Holy See of Kadar" (the Verge) and Theocracy space.

### The Exeat of Ython Kadar

Due to various political and religious influences in their own space, certain factions pushed for an exploration of space beyond the Perseus Arm (or what they call the Tese Region). While beginning fourteen decades ago, the Exeat had little encouragement or force behind it until fifty years ago with the sudden spate of miracles attributed to the rising of the I'krl. What had up until then been a reconnaissance and exploratory mission by gardhyi krl'osar now became the holy crusade of a lone thaal ython—Kadar of Viroan became the central figure in calling for an Exeat, a holy mission, to convert the Verge to I'krl worship and control. To the surprise of many, the krl'han (the senior church officials) approved of this move.

More details exist elsewhere on the Exeat and its structure. In its context with the Theocracy, the Exeat may either prove the greatest folly or the greatest boon to all faithful of the I'krl. For reasons yet unknown, the Verge appears important in some way to the Externals or their gods, and only Ython Kadar and a handful of folks among the Theocracy's upper echelons know why. All most folks (including Vergers) know is that the church has put a large fleet and thousands of troops into action, and their call to arms is "Conversion or Death." In secret, the commanders of the Exeat move ever closer to freeing the I'krl on an unsuspecting Verge. . . .

## History

Fourteen thousand years ago and more than 13,000 light years from Earth, "the heretics" of the fraal species embraced technology and used it to rule their world. Upon their exodus to the stars, these technologists created a wormhole using the gravitic forces of two planets within their solar system of Dbaal, launching their fleet of generation ships into the stars and to new worlds. However, their zeal for science overlooked some factors, and their wormhole's backlash and collapse shattered one of the outer planets and its moon. While the gravitic stresses affected the planets for a time, the shattered moon was a site considered holy among the religious caste. Four centuries of wars between religion and science ended with the religious castes victorious. They separated themselves in both spirit and identity from their scientific castes by renaming themselves thaal, and remained planetbound for the next centuries, building their religion around mysterious white crystal ziggurats on their planet and one of their moons.

About 11,500 years ago, the avian sifarv attained space flight, leaving their moon home of Saeril to conquer the planet below (Toal III of the Toal system) and its dominant species of primates called the bareem. The sifarv soon began sending sleeper ships off into nearby systems and within 1,400 years had encountered and conquered more than three dozen intelligent species while colonizing over forty living worlds. The sifarv entered the Dbaal system and landed on Ahjaarl, the home world of the thaal. While the sifarv (and bareem and kadarans) had greater technologies and space flight, they could not easily fight the overwhelming psionic powers of the thaal or the religious fervor of the Ahjaarl natives. However, at this time, all the thaal wished was alliance, and the sifarv and their subordinate species were now joined in their expansion by the krl'osar, the religious army of the I'krl Word.

For millennia, the Sifarv Demesne grew to unbelievable proportions, and they grew generous to their allies. Subject species like the kadarans and bareem gained proxy rule over some systems, while the power of the krl'osar (which humbled or defeated many species without a shot fired) earned them more than a dozen systems. Over the course of these expansions, I'krl priests became more and more influential among the ruling class of the sifarv, soon becoming mandatory viziers beside every throne and often the true powers behind those thrones. Over four centuries ago, a sifarv krl'osar named Kolluss rose to the throne of the arnak and placed much of the arnak's power over the 121 systems of the Demesne in the hands of the church. While the Sifarv Demesne still exists today as a secular construct and title, all became the I'krl Theocracy at that point (after the inevitable civil wars died down), and the krl'osar priesthoods joined the sifarv nobility and the military among the ruling powers of the Vuruthen (Theocracy states and the Sifarv Demesne).

## The Holy Hierarchy

As the dominant power among the ruling classes, the krl'osar psionic priests administrate to their faithful in a highly structured command hierarchy. The *Xenhon* rules all the I'krl *Vuruthen* (Theocracy) through his twenty *Vurhonan* (*vurhon* singular), four of whom directly report to the xenhon and the rest who oversee the sixteen Greater Holy Sees (religious control of around ten systems). Vurhon orders filter down through the forty *ythonan* (*ython* singular) who control the Lesser Holy Sees (two to five systems beneath a vurhon) or have other direct duties for the church (such as commanding an Exeat into unknown territories). Each ython has two to four *vurhyran* (*vurhyr* singular) who command their cathedral ships, control individual systems or areas, or simply aid other floating duties among the high hierarchy. All krl'osar refer to these top four ranks collectively as the *krl'han*, "the Mouths of the Mysteries." Thaal dominate the krl'han though there are a few select gardhyi among these august ranks.

The second collective among the krl'osar are the *krl'san*, "the Eyes of the Mysteries," and these account for the three ranks of junior officers among the priesthood. An *oharel* reports to a vurhyr, often commanding a priory ship, planet, or starbase, and there are two to five of them for each vurhyr. Beneath each oharel are exactly two *vurythan* (*vuryth* singular). A vuryth can command a fortress ship, a whole planetary continent, or a lesser starbase. Individual major cities or dreadnought capital ships fall to the *xenoth*, of whom each vuryth commands two or three depending on need. Most krl'san are again thaal, though they are followed in prominence and numbers by the sifarv, the bareem, and the gardhyi.

The final krl'osar collective encompasses the ecclesiastical rank-and-file as "the Ears of the Mysteries," the

*krl'rin.* These soldiers of the I'krl tend to be wanderers sent on any number of missions throughout the Theocracy or beyond, and these ranks are the most commonly encountered krl'osar onboard ships or out in space. The older members settle on planets and provide support for their local superiors. A *noth* can rule a landbound cathedral or command carriers and lesser ships, and at least one noth and as many as four answer to each xenoth. Two or three *kihla* (*kihl* singular) serve under each noth, and these are the lowest level of active priests who have any political influence beyond individual contacts. They do have the rank to take command of a cruiser or lesser ships. A kihl always has at least one (and as many as five) acolyte with her for training, and these least of the krl'osar are the *ojekhan* (*ojekh* singular).

While it seems redundant to have two overarching power structures ruling all the people of the Theocracy, the church rarely bothers much with direct government or the secular infrastructures of the peoples. It merely polices, tithes, and dictates to the secular leaderships (military and noble alike). The church reinforces its control by mandating the presence of various ranks of krl'osar in every system, every ship, and every place of import in their known space. The krl'osar are "the holy servants of the I'krl," and like political officers among the former Soviet Union on Earth, their purpose is to maintain certain points of view rather than any direct commands. See the accompanying diagrams for a cleaner representation of the church hierarchy and TABLE 1: EXTERNAL RANKS AND TITLES (see Section One) which relays how much sociopolitical power each title has (and whose order they can overrule without any exercise of their powers).

### The Sifarv Demesne

The sifarv, according to evrem accounts, rank among the five oldest species encountered by humanity and other spacefaring species that are still extant and a major player in interstellar politics. Once encountered, many humans and allied species remark that the sifarv hold many similarities to the political and social structures of the Thuldan Empire, its highly stratified social classes and noble titles far more important than individual ability. The Thuldans, of course, see no similarities whatsoever to this "inferior species of bird-men." The sifarv keep their own counsel, as they do in their own space, for their power is no longer their own.

The sifarv are a proud species, which is evident in their social strata, their secular politics, and the long-burning enmity held against the religious sifarv and their thaal masters. While many sifarv would love to see Theocracy rule end, none in power are so bold as to challenge the decisions made by the Twelve—the *arnak*

(emperor) and his court of *arakan* (kings who oversee eleven systems each). Sifarv nobility follows hereditary lines, so each child of the arakan could rule two to five systems within their parents' domains as a *patnak*. Four or six nobles answer to each patnak, each claiming the title of *paratak*. *Parak* is the next lesser title, and these "counts" (from two to four per paratak) oversee individual planets and colonies for their paratakan. Other lesser ranks include *mirnak* (two per parak), *mitarak* (two or three per mirnak), and *mitak* (five or more per mitarak), the least of the noble titles which equates to a mayor of a large city-state.

The secondary structure of power among the sifarv and their ruled species comprises the military, both landed armies and the stellar and aquatic navies. Like the Thuldans, many hold both noble titles and military ranks, though not necessarily. Refer to TABLE 1: EXTERNAL RANKS AND TITLES in Section One to compare social and military ranks and how much power each holds in the sifarv and Theocracy hierarchies. On page 49 is a diagram highlighting those secular hierarchies among the Sifarv Demesne.

### Major Planets of the Theocracy

The most important planets among the 121 systems of the Theocracy are those from which the primary species sprang. Depending on whom one asks, the religious heart of the Theocracy lies either on Ahjaarl, the homeworld of the thaal (in the Dbaal system), or on Kaarl, the mythical birthplace of the I'krl before their ascension. These lie deep within the borders of Theocracy space and have never been visited by outsiders (at least none who lived to tell of it).

To the sifarv and bareem, Saeril and Toal III are important only as origin worlds and as ceremonial places. Their more important claims lie among the Aerie, a cluster of seven moons and three planets among the adjacent Nyoth system and the Whalon Nebula which count as the most prestigious and important worlds to the sifarv and the bareem both.

Kadarans, strangely enough, no longer count any planet as a homeworld (as their original home is now a blasted radioactive dead world) . They find more importance in those planetoids they can terraform into living computers and comm relays, even though they do have nine "laboratory planets" under their control. The gardhyi, despite their outcast status and sterile nature, live seemingly immortal lives and enough have been banished from the Technarchy to control (if not totally populate) three systems in the Theocracy, the greatest of which they call Chigon.

# Military Hierarchy of the Theocracy Infantry

Ranks are in **bold** type above the group they command (aside from social obligations to the other power structures).
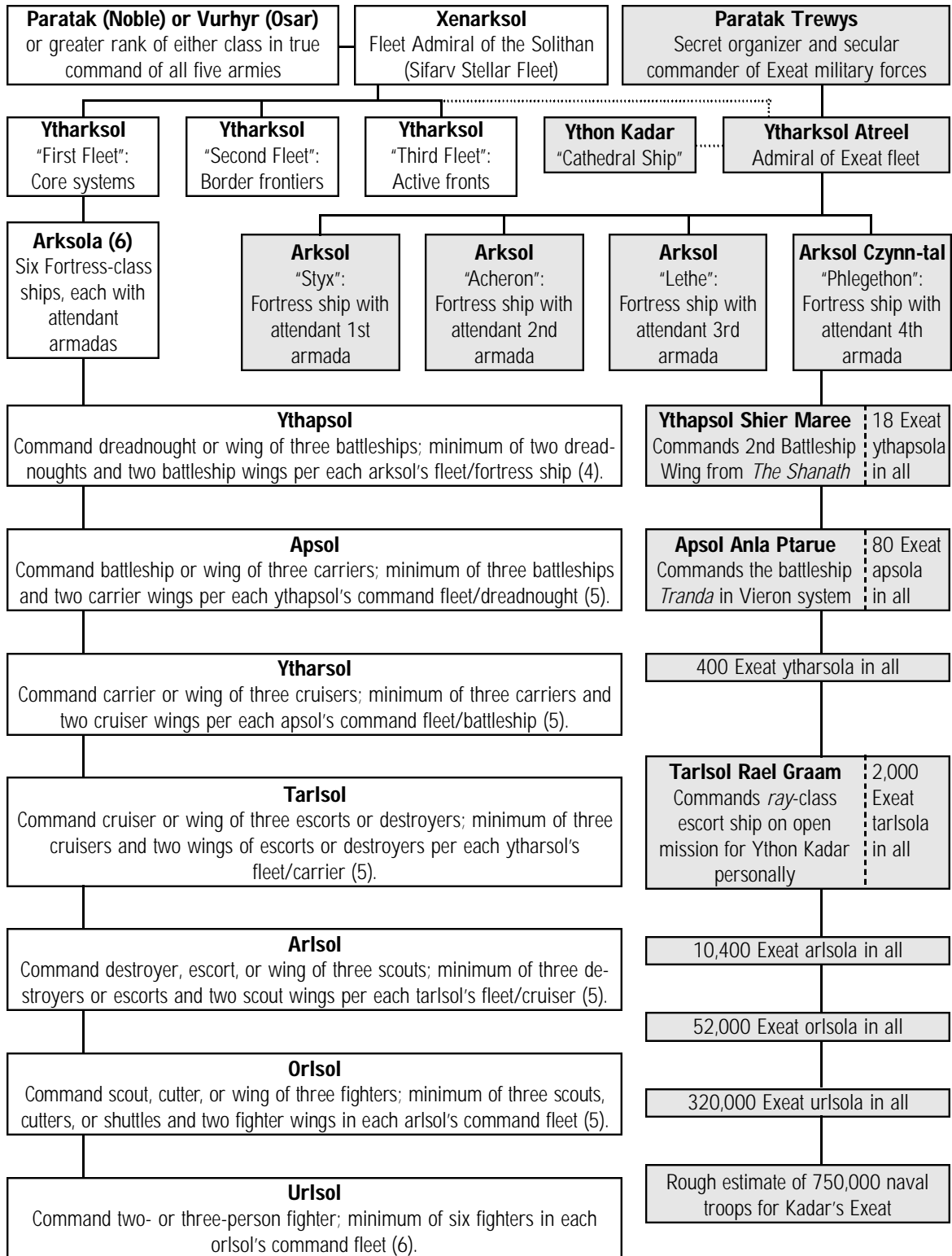Each subordinate subset is repeated under each rank unless noted otherwise. Shaded boxes are Exeat examples.

**Paratak (Noble) or Vurhyr (Osar)**
or greater rank of either class in true command of all five armies

**Tr'Komro**
"First Army":
Core worlds

**Tr'Komro**
"Second Army":
Slave worlds

**Tr'Komro**
"Third Army":
Heretic worlds

**Tr'Komro**
"Fourth Army":
The frontier

**Tr'Komro**
"Fifth Army":
Xenhon's Hand

**Xenkomro**
"Legion One":
Armored troops and
invasion forces

**Xenkomro**
"Legion Two":
Engineering and
Conversion Corps

**Xenkomro**
"Legion Three":
Long-term
occupation forces

**Ythkomro**
"Ru-Arami": Major battle group with armor support. Additional
Ru-Arami and officers as needed (minimum of five per each legion).

**Komro**
"Orj-Arami": Major battle group with armor support. Additional
Orj-Arami and officers as needed (minimum of four per each ru-arami).

**Komyth**
"Ru-Matek": Troops and heavy artillery. Additional
Ru-Matek and officers as needed (minimum of two per each orj-arami).

**Komith**
"Matek": Troop regiment with heavy weaponry. Additional
Matek and officers as needed (minimum of three per each ru-matek).

**Komosar**
"Ahmk": Troop company with support weapons. Additional
Ahmk and officers as needed (minimum of three per each matek).

**Ythkometh**
"Groush": Troop platoon of two Chor plus support personnel. Additional
Groush and officers as needed (minimum of three per each ahmk).

**Komethdar**
"Chor": Section of two Ta-Hro plus support personnel. Additional
Chor and officers as needed (minimum of three per each groush).

**Ythkomro**
"Ta-Hro": Squad of thirteen troops made up of two Hruth (six-member
fire team) and one komoth. Additional Ta-Hro and officers as needed
(minimum of three per each chor).

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**Paratak Trewys**
Secret organizer and secular
commander of Exeat military forces

**Tr'Komro Tamarth ("The Hawk")**
"The Hidden Army": Clandestine troops
for the Exeat organized beyond the nor-
mal five armies. This army follows the
standard structure of the Theocracy
Armies, though its reduced numbers
create a greater reliance on kroath con-
versions than normal in their invasion
of the Verge. Tamarth is the sole
tr'komro commander of the ground
troops among the Exeat.

**Xenkomro Hagan Lex** commands the
2nd Legion at Penates with Parak
Martie. Other **xenkomros** command the
fleet-bound troops and guard Hathorn at
Fhare.

The **15 ythkomro** remain unnamed
until late in the war. Five are known to
be on Penates, three occupy positions at
Vieron, and two more are at Hammer's
Star.

**63 komro** (22 at Penates, 16 at
Vieron, 8 at Hammer's Star, 17 in
unknown locations)

150 **komythan**

480 **komithan**

1,500 **komosara**

4,500 **ythkomethan**

13,500 **komethdaran**

41,000 **komethan**

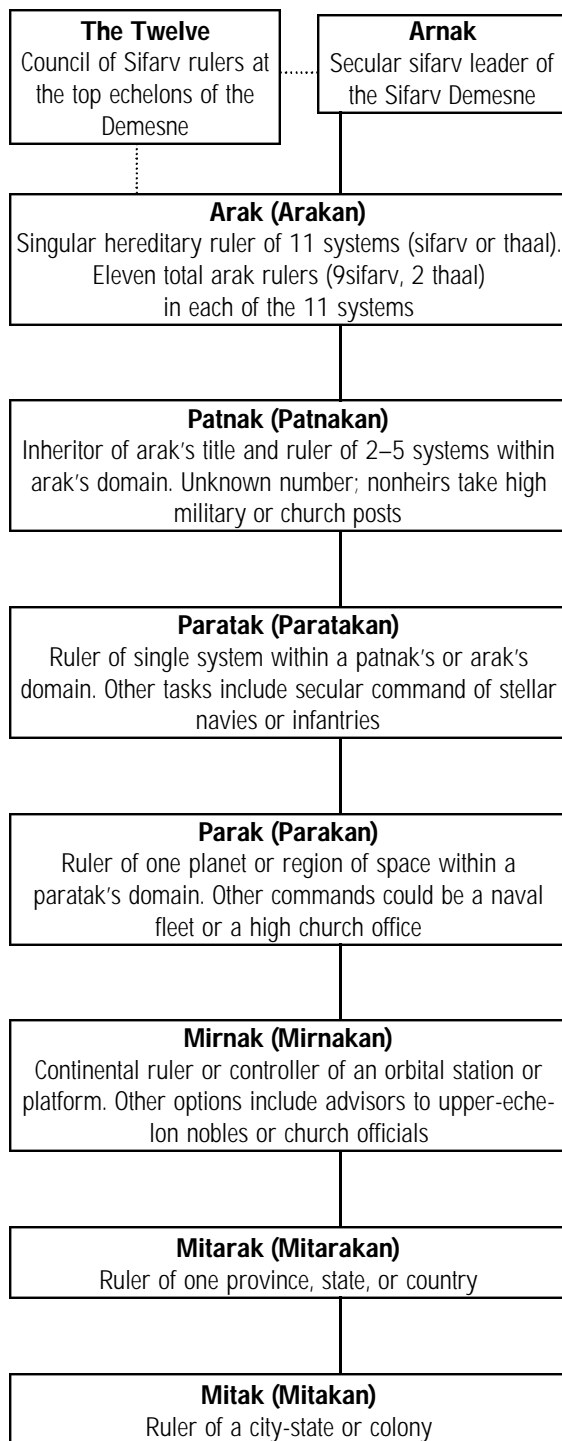Estimate of 400,000 nonkroath landed
troops for Kadar's Exeat

# Military Hierarchy of the Sifarv Stellar Navy

Ranks are in **bold** type above the group they command (aside from social obligations to the other power structures). Each subordinate subset is repeated under each rank unless noted otherwise. Shaded boxes are Exeat examples.

**Paratak (Noble) or Vurhyr (Osar)**
or greater rank of either class in true command of all five armies

**Xenarksol**
Fleet Admiral of the Solithan (Sifarv Stellar Fleet)

**Paratak Trewys**
Secret organizer and secular commander of Exeat military forces

**Ytharksol**
"First Fleet": Core systems

**Ytharksol**
"Second Fleet": Border frontiers

**Ytharksol**
"Third Fleet": Active fronts

**Ython Kadar**
"Cathedral Ship"

**Ytharksol Atreel**
Admiral of Exeat fleet

**Arksola (6)**
Six Fortress-class ships, each with attendant armadas

**Arksol**
"Styx": Fortress ship with attendant 1st armada

**Arksol**
"Acheron": Fortress ship with attendant 2nd armada

**Arksol**
"Lethe": Fortress ship with attendant 3rd armada

**Arksol Czynn-tal**
"Phlegethon": Fortress ship with attendant 4th armada

**Ythapsol**
Command dreadnought or wing of three battleships; minimum of two dreadnoughts and two battleship wings per each arksol's fleet/fortress ship (4).

**Ythapsol Shier Maree**
Commands 2nd Battleship Wing from *The Shanath*

18 Exeat ythapsola in all

**Apsol**
Command battleship or wing of three carriers; minimum of three battleships and two carrier wings per each ythapsol's command fleet/dreadnought (5).

**Apsol Anla Ptarue**
Commands the battleship *Tranda* in Vieron system

80 Exeat apsola in all

**Ytharsol**
Command carrier or wing of three cruisers; minimum of three carriers and two cruiser wings per each apsol's command fleet/battleship (5).

400 Exeat ytharsola in all

**Tarlsol**
Command cruiser or wing of three escorts or destroyers; minimum of three cruisers and two wings of escorts or destroyers per each ytharsol's fleet/carrier (5).

**Tarlsol Rael Graam**
Commands *ray*-class escort ship on open mission for Ython Kadar personally

2,000 Exeat tarlsola in all

**Arlsol**
Command destroyer, escort, or wing of three scouts; minimum of three destroyers or escorts and two scout wings per each tarlsol's fleet/cruiser (5).

10,400 Exeat arlsola in all

**Orlsol**
Command scout, cutter, or wing of three fighters; minimum of three scouts, cutters, or shuttles and two fighter wings in each arlsol's command fleet (5).

52,000 Exeat orlsola in all

320,000 Exeat urlsola in all

**Urlsol**
Command two- or three-person fighter; minimum of six fighters in each orlsol's command fleet (6).

Rough estimate of 750,000 naval troops for Kadar's Exeat

## Noble Hierarchy
## of the Sifarv Demesne

Ranks are in **bold** type above the group they command (aside from social obligations to the other power structures). Each subordinate subset is repeated under each rank unless noted otherwise.

| **The Twelve** Council of Sifarv rulers at the top echelons of the Demesne | **Arnak** Secular sifarv leader of the Sifarv Demesne |
|---|---|

**Arak (Arakan)**
Singular hereditary ruler of 11 systems (sifarv or thaal). Eleven total arak rulers (9sifarv, 2 thaal) in each of the 11 systems

**Patnak (Patnakan)**
Inheritor of arak's title and ruler of 2–5 systems within arak's domain. Unknown number; nonheirs take high military or church posts

**Paratak (Paratakan)**
Ruler of single system within a patnak's or arak's domain. Other tasks include secular command of stellar navies or infantries

**Parak (Parakan)**
Ruler of one planet or region of space within a paratak's domain. Other commands could be a naval fleet or a high church office

**Mirnak (Mirnakan)**
Continental ruler or controller of an orbital station or platform. Other options include advisors to upper-echelon nobles or church officials

**Mitarak (Mitarakan)**
Ruler of one province, state, or country

**Mitak (Mitakan)**
Ruler of a city-state or colony

## Major Figures
## of the Theocracy

Below are details and brief notes on some of the major figures among the I'krl Theocracy. Those figures who loom large among the Exeat have been detailed in Section One: The Exeat. These listings use the abbreviations for species codes and nationalities/allegiances described in Important Exeat Leaders, page 39.

**Xenhon Ahmyt of Ahjaarl:** (Thm/Theocracy/MW31) The current xenhon holds this high seat by political power, not "the will of the I'krl" as touted to the masses. Unlike all others among the krl'yth or krl'han, Ahmyt holds no vestige of I'krl power and has only managed to hold off his enemies among the vurhonan by his connections among the military and nobility. In private and only among trusted companions, he vehemently opposes the Exeat, as his arch-rival Vurhon Kasahl stands to gain the most from the expedition, not the least of which is the coveted xenhon's throne.

**Vurhon Kasahl of Scyll:** (Thm/Exeat/MW29–krl'yth) Vurhon of the Trean Hanuthen (greater holy see) and master of the patriot Kadar, his Holiness Kasahl is the true leader of the Exeat and the Prophet of the I'krl. Once deemed the weakest among the vurhonan, Kasahl's position on the outermost comm-world of Scyll affords him the most contact and infiltration by the I'krl through the planet's bioelectronics and his faith. In fact, very little beyond the physical form remains of Kasahl beyond his ambitions to overthrow the 321-year-old xenhon and take the throne once he and Kadar perform their tasks for the I'krl in the Verge.

**Ython Elnor of Kaarl:** (Thf/Krl'Osar/MW23–krl'yth) A long-time rival of Kadar, Ython Elnor oversees the I'krl homeworld of Kaarl. As she monitors the comm-relays on the moon over the homeworld of Kaarl and meditates near the ziggurat at Sharsen Colony, she gains insight into the plans of the I'krl and has seen the Verge in visions. However, the I'krl don't allow her the full vision, so all she knows is the Exeat will destroy the entire power structure of the krl'osar and the Vuruthen if left unchecked. For now, while she tries to warn the vurhonan and others of the faith, smokescreens, and political plays by Vurhyr Kasahl and Arak Chela negate any real chance she has of derailing the Exeat.

**Arnak Sota IX of the Sifarv Demesne:** (Svm/Demesne/DT018) Titular (if not actual) ruler of all he surveys, the Arnak Sota IX has survived more than two hundred assassination attempts (ninety-four by his own immediate family or advisors) over the course of his ninety-six-year rule. While tired and grown apathetic of his puppet rulership under the I'krl Church, Sota holds onto some pride and hopes that his children have the

drive to temper themselves better against this usurped rule after four centuries. Thus, he continues (via loyal kadaran and bareem agents) influencing his arakan into fighting one another, hoping a crucible of conflict can forge a stronger sifarv leader to take power back from the priests and their insidious gods.

**Arak Chela of the Jhirpa Nebula:** (Svf/Exeat/MW7) Trained by the krl'osar and holding a rank of noth within the church, Arak Chela is the third child (and daughter) of the arnak. Due to various fights she had with her father, she is in disfavor as noted by her remote holdings out near the borders between I'krl and League space. She secretly allied with Vurhyr Barok Lhor, her teacher long ago, and dispatched her favored grandson along with him on the Exeat. She hopes that she'll gain knowledge and power enough from the I'krl's favor and the Exeat to kill her two sisters and claim the arnak's throne herself.

**Patnak Kiisa of the Khiir Cluster:** (Svf/Demesne-Trillaari/DFA8) Twenty-third in line for the ar-nak's throne, the golden-feathered Kiisa is the eldest daughter of Arnak Sota's only brother and thus the first indirect descendant to gain the throne should a bloody coup among the arakan develop. She rules the Khiir Cluster on the edge of evrem space and to all accounts appears loyal and dutiful (if not totally pious) to the Theocracy. Secretly, she allies with the Trillaari (see the sifarv entry in Section Two) in hopes of ending Theocracy rule and overthrowing many corrupt families in favor of a new sifarv ruling line.

**Triillyth Kaarsar:** (Svm/Trillaari/DCS10) The dashing young sifarv with raven-black feathers is among the most hunted of pirates in all Theocracy space. Kaarsar is the second-generation leader of the sifarv rebels openly fighting against the rule of the I'krl Theocracy. During a supply raid on the moon of Ptars IV, Kaarsar accidentally captured the visiting Patnak Kiisa, with whom he fell hopelessly in love (though she only mildly returns his favors for now). He considers it lucky that she agrees with his goals, if not his methods, but Kaarsar perseveres and hopes his roguish charm can win over the heart of a princess.

**Sennet Lhor of Keanthys:** (Gm/Exeat/MW16) Keanthys is a small Class 2 colony world deep within the Jhirpa Nebula and an abundant source of rare minerals and resources needed by the sifarv military. Despite his relatively low rank and his ecclesiastic responsibilities on Keanthys, Sennet Lhor acts as the direct krl'osar advisor to Arak Chela. Most realize the arak has known Sennet for decades when they both studied under his father, the now-Vurhyr Barok Lhor. Sennet is one of few relatives among the gardhyi, but the two share a distinctive birth-mark—a black stripe across their collarbones—proving he

is of Lhor blood. Sennet waits patiently for news from the Exeat, as his father promised him much for his aid and support of the Arak Chela as well as his falsifying resource reports to supply the Exeat fleet with fuel.

**Patnak Phurrgan Ghosh of the Grattan Wastes:** (Km/Demesne/TO27) One of the arnak's most loyal advisors and friends, Phurrgan spends much of his time either devising new biotechnologies to extend and improve the life of his arnak or simply nullifying new weapons created by his children seeking to gain the throne by assassination. Phurrgan also tries to create new communications or technologies to subvert or lessen the influence of the krl'osar among the ruling classes. An atheist kadaran who keeps his views strictly to himself, he regrets that his favored pupil Martis of Hurax fell in with the zealot Kadar and his Exeat, more for the fact that his genius serves only to further cement the I'krl in power over them all.

**Ythapsol Gaanyth Lyphaz of the *Korrch*:** (Kf/Theocracy/DCS13) Gaanyth commands the *Tyrant*-class battleship *Korrch*, and has made it her personal crusade to hunt down and destroy Kaarsar the Traitor and his Trillaari. Willfully ignorant of the politics around the arnak due to her ship's remote posting within the Khiir Cluster, Ythapsol Lyphaz and her lover Malak Vhoppol (Bm/Theocracy/MW10), a xenoth krl'osar, have their suspicions about more local rulers and traitors close to the Patnak Kiisa. For now, they continue their hunt for the elusive rebels in the hopes that they can move the *Korrch* into a more important battle group and posting.

## Life under the I'krl Theocracy

Foremost in the minds of nearly all citizens of the Theocracy is the religion that overshadows everything and everyone. The state religion of the I'krl Church dominates nearly all aspects of religion, though numerous enslaved peoples practice their outlawed native religions in secret (and risk death by doing so).

Secondary is the assumed social caste structure with certain species deemed superior to others. Above all are the I'krl as the gods they are, followed by the thaal. Next are the sifarv rulers, though any psionically active sifarv gain greater social status regardless of birth as it places them closer to the thaal. Strangely enough, the rare but powerful gardhyi outcasts share nearly as much social power as the sifarv for one simple reason: These spies and tricksters can be anywhere (and often are) and fear garners them their status. The kadarans and bareem rest on similar but lower social strata, as they are deemed servants and conquered species to be manipulated by the top three species who have finally risen above slave status to join those in power, albeit at the lowest rungs of

that. Beneath these considered among the leading species are the client species, those which exist in Theocracy space but are neither worth the effort of either full alliances or full enslavement. The teln and n'sss exist most often as clients of the gardhyi or others willing to pay these mercenary species. Lowest among the Theocratic castes are the slave species, those subjugated by either the Church or the sifarv military (and thus the bareem) and subject to hard labor, awful conditions, or forced military service. The only slave species seen by humans are the klicks, though there are dozens more under the heel of the Theocracy (though few of them are technologically advanced enough to escape).

People of the Theocracy (or Sifarv Demesne, depending on loyalties) prioritize and scrutinize people in the following way: Species determines initial reactions, then position or profession (which defines a person as much as species does) and ranks within those professions, then money. Having duplicate titles and ranks among the military or Church aids one's status immensely. However, such beings as kroath never advance socially or politically, as they are considered slaves at best. All told, one improves one's life in the Theocracy by joining the Church (if psionically active, this is mandatory) or the military. People can improve their lives and stations through commerce, though one's star (and one's contacts) rarely rises beyond one planet or system. Thus, many live their lives keeping their heads down and not being noticed by the upper classes; it is by far the safest way to live.

Rather than being overwhelmed by legions of oppressed peoples, the bulk of the Theocracy worlds are relatively pleasant, prosperous worlds whose primary conflicts and problems come as a result of money and trade among their sister worlds or continents. Granted, these systems and worlds tend to be under thaal or sifarv control, as the most powerful worlds are the most prosperous. There are slave worlds, such as the klick world they call Hivehome or the Class 3 world noted for its precious metals and its native species of living sentient neon, which are marred by the presence of bareem occupation forces and slavers. Still, in all, given all the restrictions of the state religion and the social strata, life among these worlds at least compares to life among the older stellar nations of the Stellar Ring—some benefits, some drawbacks, but life endures.

## BEYOND ORION'S ARM

We now take a brief look at the political entities and states from which the Exeat and many Externals have come. As all the information in this section is beyond the extent of human exploration, it obviously comes from the fraal and Aegis Rangers who carried on the psionic dis-

cussions with the evrem diplomats and refugees on Bluefall. While few if any human explorers have even penetrated the Lightning Nebula, let alone traversed the void into the Perseus Arm of the galaxy, future generations can travel there with some "lay of the land" ahead of time. While this section provides little direct information to affect the war, it helps put into context the many alien species and explain the political reality of the Verge and Old Space in relation to the galaxy. This information shows humans that they are even less alone than believed and that they are not the dominant space power. This section's true purpose is to extend the scope and politics of space to show other powers among the stars for humanity and its brother species to rival, challenge, or embrace in an extended STAR*DRIVE campaign.

The evrem never provided any solid references for the space claimed by all of these powers, for they noted that "knowing which borders were where and who claimed which stars matters little beyond your knowing that you have some hope beyond the Verge. The I'krl are an old menace risen again and they and their allies hunger. You are not yet an enemy to them. You are merely an opportunity, but for what we know not. They are as mystified as all of us by the preponderance of living worlds here, though they may seek to change that to whatever balance they seek."

### The Evrem Federation

Among the oldest of the sentient species, the evrem are a dying species in their twilight. They fought numerous wars against "the children of those you call Precursors" such as the original I'krl. In their youth, they helped create a confederation of species and worlds that spanned 5,000 light years and seventeen distinct sentient species. After over sixteen thousand years as a stellar power and colonizer of more than 125 worlds, this ancient species retains only four star systems in the Perseus Arm as their homes, having long since granted or lost many of their territories to the younger species as many evrem "passed on" (the specific nebulous phrase used, without a sense of loss or death to it). While no human or Verge alien has directly seen an evrem "pass on," no evrem corpses were ever seen in the space around Lucullus when one of their crystalline ships fell under the guns of the I'krl. Some people reported seeing flashes of bluish light around the exploding ship, though its wreckage also mysteriously disappeared after a bright explosion.

What was once the Evrem Federation has faded, its claims now given over to the League of Nine territories, if not conquered by the I'krl Theocracy. Most evrem bide their time in their Evremmar (their four claimed systems at the heart of League territories) teaching those who seek their wisdom. Those evrem still young at heart and

full of adventure explore the stars (like those evrem in the Verge), most often encountering other species peaceably through trade. Their true role (as they see it) is to shepherd and to educate the younger species, though their philosophical methods and mindsets confuse many younger species and anger others. The I'krl declared all evrem heretics centuries ago and have systematically hunted and slain as many as possible.

The Federation's technology level exceeds PL8 and PL9 in a number of ways, though most have to do with communications and propulsion (both of which are incompatible with any human, thaal, or kadaran technology). Evrem abandoned weapons more than a millennium ago, and only defend themselves with their psionics when necessary. How they defend their worlds is still a mystery, though some hint at rumored PL8 weapons stockpiles and psionic shields generated around their worlds by their people. Their best defense or power is that they claim to be immune to the fantastic powers wielded by the upper echelons of the krl'osar, known collectively as the krl'yth. Their limited numbers do not allow them the luxury of fighting without risking their species' certain extinction.

## The Gardh Technarchy

Nearly as old a stellar power as the evrem, the Gardh Technarchy made their first crude steps into space more than forteen thousand years ago. An early student species of the evrem, the gardh fought alongside them in the stars and in their homes as the I'krl sought to enslave them roughly ten thousand years ago. They remained at the side of the evrem for another four thousand years, half of that spent as a major player among the Federation powers. Eventually, internal revolts and problems among the gardh monarchy and their robotic servants created a schism that split them off from their stellar mentors.

While the evrem were short on the details, two major changes separated the gardh from the Federation worlds: Their AIs, robots, and starship computers achieved full sentience and independence, and they expanded their control over the trade lanes of Technarch space. In addition, their technology moved away from ship propulsion to warp fields and gates, which now allow planet-bound gardh to step through gates across worlds. Finally, all psionics became outlawed within Technarch space more than one thousand years ago under vague circumstances still unrevealed to those outside the gardh ruling classes.

Today, the gardh rules the Technarchy, an expanse of over 6,000 light years of space and more than three hundred systems and twenty-one sentient species among twenty-four Class 1 worlds. Robots, computer-driven ships, and artificial intelligences are all equal citizens of the Technarchy; their PL9 design simply make them technological rather than biological lifeforms. While the gardh and many other species remain planet-bound and use gate technology to teleport from place to place, "techanity" has remained among the stars and polices Technarchy space as the metar (a gardh-assigned racial designation for any artificial life).

The gardhyi—those gray, gaunt beings met in the Verge and Old Space as opposed to the vibrant blue hues of normal gardh—are all outcasts and criminals of Technarch society. Found guilty of various crimes abominable to the gardh (such as being born with psionic potential or abilities), these outcasts receive their starwebs as permanent implants that banish them from gardh and metar space and likewise render them sterile. Throughout the Technarchy are satellites that emit frequencies, which trigger the self-destruction of any starweb (and thus gardhyi), entering their space. While not the most efficient form of punishment, exile from the wonders of Technarchy space could seem interminable to any gardh. Over the millennia, individual gardhyi gained some control over their starwebs and found their ways across the stars to Earth and other worlds to become the tricksters of space they now are. More recently, the thaal took many gardhyi under their wings, teaching them ways to psionically control their starwebs and helping them integrate their power and knowledge into the I'krl Theocracy. In fact, the gardhyi always police the I'krl borders with gardh space, watching for new exiles to recruit into their ranks.

## The League of Nine

Of the nine aligned species that make up the League of Nine, only three have more of a history in space travel than humanity. Comprised of former species nurtured and watched over by the Evrem Federation, the League oversees twenty-three systems, of which seventeen have been colonized in the past 400 years. League technology hovers, like humanity's, between PL5 and PL7 with certain species bringing certain rare PL8 technologies as their dues for the League. While there are some internal difficulties among some of the species, the League stands firm in holding their territories against the oppression of the I'krl Theocracy. The League fleet and its evrem advisors saved its most recent inductee species from I'krl excommunication: The usual tactic of atmosphere poisoning did near-irreparable damage to Qualv IV's biosphere which will take centuries to repair, and many refugees fled to other League worlds. The League members consist of these species, in order of age and political weight in the League:

▶ The lugarites, a leonine species that still comprise many honor guards for their evrem benefactors,

SECTION TWO: EXTERNAL SPACE

forms the keystone of the League as the oldest species among them. They control four League systems entirely through their PL7 and PL8 technology and their hunters' cunning and patience.

► The ossim are an empathic species of cephalopods that have adapted to life on Class 1 and 2 worlds. Their communications tech links the League across its 400 light year expanse.

► The xarians sound like the mechalus—a seemingly natural melding of technology and biology. However, they are quadrupedal crustaceans living in "thinking seas" of salt water tinged with nanites (effectively, oceanic supercomputers or AIs with no sentience) and often in transparent hover-globes or battle suits containing their personal environments.

► The payan are bipedal primates (and some distant genetic relation to the bareem) with remarkable natural psionics (or F/X). Payans can mentally and physically fuse into collective beings, up to three of them merging into a massive 3-meter-high juggernaut of themselves! This ability works only among siblings, though payans deliver no fewer than three and up to nine children per pregnancy. Despite their obvious suitability toward combat, payans prefer more scientific pursuits with their group minds.

► The doln, gartese, and the anthons once warred among themselves in their rare tri-system cluster, each within four light years of the others and each with a Class 1 or 2 world among them. Long under the eye of the evrem and the lugarites, the three species and their systems came into the League after finally ending their conflicts peaceably and working together to move beyond their local systems more than two hundred years ago. All three species are similar to humans and mechalus (though dissimilar enough to evoke prejudices for two centuries), and the evrem suggest that perhaps the Precursors did more to some planets than simply terraform them for Class 1 life.

► The qualvans and the krosh come from the Qualv system, a binary star system with a massive gas giant supporting sixteen moons. From two of those moons come these young species which nearly died before ever reaching the stars. After centuries of bareem occupation, the avian krosh and the amphibious (and more technologically advanced) qualvans rebelled against the invaders with the aid of a doln fleet and xarian technology fifty-five years ago. Unfortunately, numerous atomic weapons detonated on the krosh moon of Qualv VIII clouded its atmosphere with a radioactive winter lasting to the present. Joining the League, the krosh now scatter among all the League worlds while some qualvans work to restore the two worlds to health.

The League, by the evrem estimations, could become as influential as the Vergers and the Galactic Concord in the future of space. Provided, that is, they can survive encroachment and attacks by both the Medurr Imperium and the I'krl Theocracy. The Technarchy refuses to recognize the League in the least, though some individual metar have some minor dealings with them. The medurr simply see any species that does not prevent its own enslavement as its property. Thus, like humanity, the League finds a number of peoples trying to survive among many enemies.

## The Medurr Imperium

First revealed in *Zero Point* and detailed in the *Alien Compendium II*, the medurr are an aggressive species of hexapedal saurids most aptly described by some humans as "dragons." A relatively young species, they have conquered nearly every species they contacted over the past millennia, absorbing them as slaves and their technologies into the Imperium's control. The evrem once traded with the Imperium, though contact fell off as the innate conflicts between the psionic species and the nonpsionic medurr led to many conflicts.

The Medurr Imperium's control spans more than 3000 light years, no fewer than 120 life-bearing systems, and at least twenty-five other species. Unlike other stellar powers, they do not encompass all systems among their borders. Their transportation technology allows them to create "starrifts" that create instantaneous wormholes between two locations, allowing them to cross amazing distances in an eyeblink. However, aside from their iron grips over individual systems, their ships do not have faster-than-light capability and thus remain within found systems or in sleeper ships traveling to unknown systems to take control of them. Thus, the Imperium holds individual systems but not necessarily all systems around or between them, leading to a map of "stepping stones" that dot the "western" parts of the Perseus Arm and a few isolated sites in the Orion Arm such as Cambria and Sage.

Matriarchal rule sets the Medurr Imperium apart from the other major stellar powers, the Aalnorum of the eleven High Matriarchs aiding the rule of the Great Matriarch (or Empress) of the medurr. These matriarchs control numerous systems each, though each can easily fall if a daughter finds a new species and new technologies that allow her to return to Medall III—the medurr homeworld—and take a High Matriarch's seat (or the Great Matriarch's throne) for herself. The most fearsome aspect of medurr society is its need for constant expansion until faced with a foe they cannot easily conquer. Their response then is always to reinforce and continue the fight until they win or lose all claims by the death of

each and every troop committed to the battle. They have fought the I'krl Exeat and the Theocracy in many battles, and they hold a particular hatred for the kroath due to some previous encounters. It is this hate alone that allows them to ally with humanity against the Externals, rather than trying to conquer the Verge immediately…

## Powers Past and Present

The evrem also hinted at legends and stories that linked with some of humanity's rumors and stories of space travel. Just as the early explorers reported strange sightings never confirmed, the evrem confessed that each of the starfaring species had similar encounters, all equally inexplicable after millennia. They too have their legendary Precursors, and in fact, they claim that at least four of the six recognized Precursor species came from the Perseus Arm and their space millions of years ago (as did other species just as old that never reached the Orion Arm). They support this theory with the argument that they, the gardh, and three other unnamed species trace their origins back to two Precursor species whom they collectively call (translated from their words into terms for human comprehension) "Starweavers" and "Those who Think." The evrem point out similarities between their crystalline technology and some things found at Glassmaker sites, though there are enough differences to make them incompatible.

When pressed for more information, the evrem acquiesced and spoke of ancient legends from their space. According to them, there may be no fewer than nine Precursor species, given the five discovered by humanity and others they knew. Existing millions of years ago, their travels, colonies, and wars spanned at least these two local arms of the galaxy, if not more. The evrem believe that psionics and what few F/X are available to the species today are the briefest hints of what they were capable of generating. Of all the species they know, only the blix, the deepfallen, the thaal, and they themselves come close to such powers.

The evrem classify species by ages: Child (non-starfaring), Young (starfaring for less than five centuries), Mature (starfarers for more than five centuries), Elder (starfarers for more than five millennia), and Ancient (starfarers of more than twenty millennia). The Precursors, given their distance from our history and time, do not exist to them as species except as legends (or gods to some younger species). They hint that the I'krl, the "gods" of the thaal and the Theocracy, are an Ancient species whose powers are unparalleled by any extant species; the Ancient species seem to be considered the children of the Precursors before their exodus from known space. They named only one other Ancient species—the Falkri—and claimed these beings of psionic energy helped them imprison the I'krl more than ten millennia ago. Of the Elder species, they count themselves, the gardh, the thaal, and the blix (though they provided no more explanation on these speechless fixers). Humanity and the t'sa are on the cusp of becoming Mature species in their eyes, and that is why they chose now to communicate with the Verge Alliance. While other alien species are still learning their way about the stars, the evrem need new allies to fight the other Elder and Mature species that seek to wreak havoc on what the Precursors built.

# SECTION THREE: EXTERNAL TECHNOLOGY

As has been mentioned elsewhere in this book, the technology of the Externals is very different from that of humankind. That being said, however, it is worth noting that the technology of both Externals and humans is similar in its results. Both sides go about things in different ways, although their results are more or less equivalent.

## STANDARD WEAPONS

As is almost always the case in war, the media and military intelligence personnel tend to focus their attention on the weapons of the enemy. With that in mind, we'll take a look at the weapons of the aliens before we move on to the rest of their technology.

### Blacklaser Weapons

The mainstay of the External arsenal is the blacklaser. Found primarily in the hands of klick warriors, this deadly weapon is more or less identical to a human-built laser. Unlike human lasers, the alien blacklaser operates at wavelengths between 4200 and 3500 angstroms, largely beyond the limit of the visible spectrum. Although the media often refers to these weapons as x-ray lasers, they are more correctly described as ultraviolet lasers.

The most commonly encountered examples of this technology are the blacklaser pistol, which many officers and noncombat troops carry, and the blacklaser submachine guns, which is the primary weapon of klick infantry. Crack troops often carry the heavier weapons, like the blacklaser rifle or machine guns. The blacklaser cannon is often mounted as an antipersonnel weapon on numerous vehicles or in pillboxes. There are larger versions of the blacklaser mounted on tanks, as field artillery and so on, but those are so powerful as to be beyond the scope of the individual combat system.

Two very rare versions of the blacklaser have been encountered since the advent of the External war; Gamemasters might consider the recovery of one of these weapons early in the war something of a breakthrough. If the weapon is turned over to the authorities, they certainly reward the heroes for the chance to examine this new weapon.

One of these is a small, easily concealed weapon about the size of a small billfold. Known as a *stinger,* it is carried by spies and others who do not wish to be visibly armed. A stinger is neither especially accurate nor powerful, but it can give the wielder a chance to avoid compromise or capture.

At the other extreme of the spectrum, so to speak, is the *sniper,* a heavy rifle. Equipped with enhanced computer sights and gyroscopic stabilizers, this highly accurate weapon is very deadly in the hands of a skilled marksman. In addition to deploying snipers on the battlefield, the Externals have been known to scatter them around occupied cities where they can enforce order from a distance.

### Dark Plasma Weapons

The primary weapon of kroath troops, dark plasma weapons lack the range of their blacklaser counterparts, but pack a powerful punch. While humankind has experimented with fusion and plasma weapons over the years, the only commonly encountered example of this technology is the plasma grenade. The Externals, however, have pursued this line of research in lieu of masers and other such weapons.

Dark plasma weapons employ a combined magnetic/gravity (gravimetic) field to rapidly compress a dark matter slug until it is converted to a plasma state. When the weapon is fired, the gravimetic field is hurled at the target. When it strikes, the containing field bursts and the dark plasma expands rapidly, releasing incredible amounts of heat, a concussive shockwave, and a fair amount of radiation.

In addition to the dark plasma rifle, which is the mainstay of kroath infantry, this technology has been encountered in other formats. The heavier dark plasma trigun, for example, is used as a support weapon on most large battlefields.

Alliance troops have encountered two other dark plasma weapons since the war started.

The first is a stocky weapon known as a pug gun. The blunt, stocky appearance of the pug gun is reminis-

| Weapon | Skill | Acc | Range | Md | Type | Damage | Actions | Clip Size | Hide | Mass |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Blacklaser, stinger | Mod–*pistol* | 0 | 5/10/20 | F | En/O | d4w/d4+1w/d4m | 3 | 6 | +5 | .5 |
| Blacklaser pistol | Mod–*pistol* | –1 | 20/40/200 | F | En/O | d4+2w/d6+2w/d4m | 4 | 10 | +3 | 1 |
| Blacklaser rifle | Mod–*rifle* | –1 | 100/400/1000 | B/A | En/O | d6+2w/d8+2w/d4+2m | 3 | 30/10 | – | 4 |
| Blacklaser sniper | Mod–*rifle* | –2 | 200/600/1500 | F | En/O | d6+2w/d8+2w/d4+2m | 2 | 10 | – | 5 |
| Blacklaser SMG | Mod–*SMG* | 0 | 20/80/200 | F/B/A | En/O | d6+1w/d6+3w/d4+1m | 4 | 18/6 | +1 | 3 |
| Blacklaser MG | Hvy–*direct* | 0 | 100/200/500 | B/A | En/O | d6+3w/d8+3w/d4+3m | 3 | 150/10 | – | 8 |
| Blacklaser cannon | Hvy–*direct* | 0 | 70/160/600 | A | En/G | d8+2w/d12+2w/d6+2m | 3 | 60/20 | n/a | 12 |

| Weapon | Skill | Acc | Range | Md | Type | Damage | Actions | Clip Size | Hide | Mass |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DP pistol | Mod–*pistol* | 0 | 20/40/200 | F | En/G | d6+1w/d8+1w/d8+3w | 3 | 5 | +1 | 3 |
| DP rifle | Mod–*rifle* | 0 | 80/200/400 | F | En/G | d8+1w/2d6w/2d6+3w | 2 | 10 | – | 4 |
| DP pug-gun | Mod–*rifle* | +1 | 10/20/40 | F | En/G | d8+1w/2d6w/2d6+3w | 2 | 12 | – | 4 |
| DP trigun | Hvy–*direct* | 0 | 100/250/600 | B/A | En/G | d8+1w/2d6w/2d6+3w | 4 | –/12 | – | 5 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| DF rifle | Mod–*rifle* | 0 | 80/200/400 | F | En/A | d8+3w/2d6+2w/3d6+2w | 2 | 10 | – | 5 |
| DF pug-gun | Mod–*rifle* | +1 | 10/20/40 | F | En/A | d8+3w/2d6+2w/3d6+2w | 2 | 12 | – | 5 |
| DF trigun | Hvy–*direct* | 0 | 100/250/600 | B/A | En/A | d8+3w/2d6+2w/3d6+2w | 4 | –/12 | – | 6 |

cent of a sawed-off shotgun. This weapon fires two plasma rounds with every pull of the trigger, sacrificing accuracy for enhanced stopping power. When this weapon is used, the attacker makes a single attack roll with success indicating that both rounds have found their mark and failure resulting in no damage to the target. The damage figures given on the table above are for a single slug of plasma.

The other newly encountered weapon is the dark plasma pistol. This is a bulky weapon that most military analysts believe to be a prototype. To date, it is a rare weapon.

## Dark Fusion Weapons

A more advanced version of the dark plasma weapon, this powerful weapons makes use of an even more powerful gravimetic bottle to further compress the dark matter slug until fusion begins to take place. This results in a weapon that inflicts even greater damage with almost identical accuracy and other characteristics.

Although dark fusion weapons have been encountered with some regularity, they do not appear to be in general distribution. As such, there is some reason to believe that they have only just become practical for battlefield use. Alliance military intelligence seeks to capture some of these weaspons for further study. Heroes who get hold of them can count on being well rewarded for turning them over to the authorities.

## Filament Weapons

Through an unknown process, the Externals are able to spin out strands of molecular filaments. These ultrafine fibers can slice through most solid matter with relative ease, but can be dangerous if used by the untrained. Anyone careless enough to touch the cutting strand of a filament weapon is likely to slice off his fingers.

The typical example of such weaponry is the kroath filament chain. This consists of two cylindrical grips linked together by a strand of filament roughly one meter in length. When the weapon is carried, the two grips are snugly secured together, making a tube about .3 meters long. When the power stud is activated, the filament unfurls until only an invisibly thin strand of faintly glowing filament connects the two grips. In order to make the weapon somewhat safer to use, the filament is given a faint charge that encases it in a soft glow; this makes the otherwise unseen filament visible.

In addition to this, the kroath have been known to employ knives and swords with filament blades. These are similar to the filament chain, but have only one grip. When the weapon is activated, the filament blade extends to a distance of .25 meters for the knife or 1 meter for the sword. In order to stiffen the blade and make it safe for use, the charge applied to it causes the filament to stiffen as well as glow. About the only thing a filament blade won't cut through is another filament blade.

The kroath have also been known to employ filament-based weapons similar to ancient terran bolos. These are tremendously dangerous weapons that can be thrown with great accuracy and deadly effect.

The kroath have been known to use their filament technology in other ways as well. They often string strands of this invisible wire across hallways and the like as booby traps. As often as not, the first sign an enemy has of such a trap is the sight of a forward scout or companion suddenly being decapitated.

## Neural Weapons

Few species among the ranks of the Externals are as strange as the Jovian-dwelling n'sss. It should come as little surprise, therefore, that the weapons and technology of these creatures is unlike any other. For reasons that

| Weapon | Skill | Acc | Range | Type | Damage | Actions | Size | Clip Hide | Mass |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Filament chain | Melee–*power* | –1 | Personal | LI/G | d6+1w/2d4+1w/3d4+2w | 3 | 20 | +1 | 2 |
| Filament knife | Melee–*power* | 0 | Personal | LI/G | d4+1w/d6+1w/d8+2w | 3 | 20 | +3 | 1 |
| Filament sword | Melee–*power* | 0 | Personal | LI/G | d6+1w/2d4+1w/3d4+2w | 3 | 20 | +1 | 2 |
| Filament bolo | Athletics–*throw* | 0 | Per Strength | LI/G | d4+1w/d6+1w/d8+1w | 2 | 20 | +1 | 3 |

| Weapon | Skill | Acc | Range | Type | Damage | Actions | Size | Clip Hide | Mass |
|--------|-------|-----|-------|------|--------|---------|------|-----------|------|
| Neural blade | Melee–*power* | 0 | Personal | En/O | d6w/d4+1m/2d4m | 3 | 10 | +2 | 2 |
| Neural net | Security–*devices* | 0 | See text | En/O | d8w/d6+2m/d6+4m | – | – | – | 10 |
| Neural lance | Melee–*power* | 0 | See text | En/O | d6+1w/d6+1m/d8+2m | 2 | 10 | +1 | 3 |

humankind can only guess at, they have an excellent understanding of nervous systems and living tissues.

The n'sss neural weapons are most commonly encountered in the shape of the neural blade. The grip/power pack of this weapon creates a spade-shaped field of ultrasonic vibrations. The slightest touch of this sonic blade causes extreme pain as tissues and nerves are literally torn apart.

In addition to the bayonetlike neural blade, this technology has also been adapted to other weapons, although Alliance troops do not encounter these with any frequency. The most interesting example of this technology is the neural lance. This weapon has a grip rather like the L-shaped stock of a traditional police baton. When the power stud is activated, it throws out a wedge of ultrasonic vibrations that breaks down living tissue. This field of deadly energy begins at the tip of the weapon and extends outward to form a cone some three meters long and wide.

Another deadly use of this technology is the neural net, a vibration field erected across hallways or other passages as a security measure. Anyone who passes through the ultrasonic energy is subject to its deadly effects. The table above provides information for the portable version of this device, which contains its own power plant and can operate for up to a month before it must be recharged. The field projected by this generator can cover a hallway or portal up as large as 10 meters by 10 meters. Larger, more powerful versions of the neural net exist, but these are generally fixed defenses.

## Render Weapons

Many of the External species employ gravity-based weapons similar to human renders. By rapidly strobing through a cycle of gravitic attraction and repulsion, these weapons can wrack a target and, in extreme cases, tear it apart. The aliens use lower frequencies than human societies, resulting in weapons ess powerful than their human counterparts but far more painful to the target. Whether this is the result of lesser gravity engineering technology or sadistic design remains to be seen.

The most commonly encountered examples of this technology are the render pistol and rifle. These are commonly carried by the n'sss and other powerful External species. In addition, battlefield render cannons have been encountered on a wide variety of armored vehicles or carried as support weapons by infantry units.

Recent rumors have surfaced hinting that the Externals are experimenting with massive, battlefield renders. To date, no direct encounters have been had with artillery of this type.

## Sliver Weapons

Another unusual weapon developed by the n'sss is the sliver gun. Using a powerful magnetic accelerator to throw a shower of tiny crystalline needles at an enemy, this weapon is similar in many respects to human rail guns and mass drivers.

The primary difference, however, is the nature of the projectiles hurled by the sliver gun. The most commonly encountered versions of this weapon throw crystalline shards. Examples of these devices have even been encountered as artillery capable of spraying a massive volley of shards with a high firing rate.

More unusual versions of the sliver gun have been encountered on rare occasions. The crystalline shards in these weapons differ from the usual ones. For example, some gardhyi agents have been known to employ sliver guns that fire slivers that dissolve inside the target, releasing various drugs. In many ways, these weapons are similar to the tranquilizer-firing rifles employed by game wardens and some police forces.

| Weapon | Skill | Acc | Range | Md | Type | Damage | Actions | Clip Size | Hide | Mass |
|--------|-------|-----|-------|-----|------|--------|---------|-----------|------|------|
| Render pistol | Mod–*pistol* | –1 | 20/40/100 | F | En/O | 2d4s/d6+3w/d4+1m | 3 | 10 | +3 | 1 |
| Render rifle | Mod–*rifle* | –1 | 60/120/500 | F | En/O | 2d4+1s/d6+4w/d4+2m | 3 | 10 | – | 3 |
| Render cannon | Hvy–*direct* | –1 | 100/300/500 | F | En/G | 2d6s/2d8w/2d4m | 3 | 6 | – | 4 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sliver gun | Mod–*SMG* | –2 | 20/40/60 | B/A | HI/G | d6w/d8+1w/d4+2m | 3 | –/6 | +1 | 2 |
| Sliver gun (tranq) | Mod–*SMG* | –2 | 20/40/60 | B/A | HI/O | d4w/d6w/d8w* | 3 | –/6 | +1 | 2 |
| Sliver cannon | Hvy–*direct* | 0 | 200/400/600 | F/B/A | HI/G | 2d4w/2d6w/2d4m | 3 | 15/150 | – | 10 |

* In addition to the damage inflicted by the weapon, the victim must deal with the effects of an insinuative paralytic poison with an onset time of 1 minute. Every hit by the weapon applies a +1 step penalty to the target's attempt to resist the action.

## Cluster Rockets

A common support weapon among the External military is the heavy and dangerous cluster rocket launcher. With the smallest of these weapons weighing in at 10 kilograms, they are normally encountered only on battlefields. Here, they serve to support normal infantry units and fill the air with clouds of terrifying projectiles. More than one observer has noted that the cluster rocket does as much damage to the enemy's morale as it does to their forces.

The cluster rocket launcher is a bulky affair with three launching rails affixed to the sides of a triangular housing. Two projectiles are mounted one atop the other on each rail. With a single pull of the trigger, three rockets are launched as one. A second pull discharges the next salvo, after which the weapon must be reloaded.

When the rockets take flight, they are guided to their target by a designating blacklaser beam. The accuracy of the weapon depends upon the firer's ability to paint his target with the laser designator until the moment of impact. If the attacker is unable to do this, apply a penalty to the attack roll. This might be as little as a +1 step penalty or much greater, depending on the situation.

As the rockets near their target, they burst into a salvo of three warheads. At this point, the guidance system is no longer active and the gunner may stop painting the target. A second or so after the rockets split apart, a shower of small dark matter bombs hammers the target, doing an incredible amount of damage.

Larger versions of the cluster rocket have been encountered, ranging in size from hopper-fed vehicle mounted cannons to field artillery pieces. In the latter case, target designation is often the task of a forward observer whose job is to remain out of sight and paint one enemy position after another.

## Cluster Missiles

The cluster missile is an improved version of the cluster rocket. While the weapon itself is very similar in design and construction, the major difference between the two lies in the guidance systems. While those using the cluster rocket must paint the target with a blacklaser designator, the missiles fired by this weapon are self-guided. At the moment the shooter pulls the trigger, and internal guidance system tracks the target and insures a solid hit.

The guidance system of the cluster missile is intended to track vehicles and other large targets. When attempting to lock onto a smaller target, especially one that is moving, they tend to lose the target and strike randomly. Thus, they are less accurate when employed against infantry or other small targets. Of course, a random shower of small matter bomblets is still nothing to laugh at.

## NEW WEAPONS

Although a long series of skirmishes and border clashes with the Externals had left both sides more or less familiar with the principle weapons of the enemy, there were surprises for both sides at the start of the External War.

While human analysts can only speculate about matters from the alien point of view, it seems certain that they had no idea humanity would unify against them. Their intelligence about the Verge and its countless bickering factions almost certainly led them to believe that no central government would rise to govern all of humanity's holdings. While the Verge Alliance may not have effected a full unification of the human colonies in the area, it was certainly much more so than the Externals might have been led to expect.

On the human side, there were numerous surprises in store. For the most part, these centered on a human tendency to underestimate the External biotechnology. Human arrogance led them to assume that their masses of technology must certainly be superior to the *squishy-tech* of the aliens. The battle at Hammer's Star appears to have proven just how wrong such thinkers were.

In addition to the weapons brought into the war by the Externals, a great deal of fear rose up from their seizure of the Mantebron system. Obviously, there was great speculation about their objectives there. Of course, the

| Weapon | Skill | Acc | Range | Md | Type | Damage | Actions | Clip Size | Hide | Mass |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CR launcher | Hvy–*indirect* | 0 | 200/400/1200 | A | HI/G | d6+3w/d4m/d4+3m* | 1 | –/6 | – | 10 |
| CR cannon | Hvy–*indirect* | 0 | 400/800/2400 | A | HI/G | 3d6w/3d4m/3d6m* | 1 | –/60 | – | 25 |

* CR launchers are area effect weapons inflicting amazing damage out to 2 meters from the impact point, good damage out to 4 meters, and ordinary damage out to 8 meters. These ranges are doubled for the CR cannon.

| Weapon | Skill | Acc | Range | Md | Type | Damage | Actions | Clip Size | Hide | Mass |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| CM launcher | Hvy–*indirect* | +/–2 | 200/400/1200 | A | HI/G | d6+3w/d4m/d4+3m* | 1 | –/6 | – | 10 |
| CM cannon | Hvy–*indirect* | +/–2 | 400/800/2400 | A | HI/G | 3d6w/3d4m/3d6m* | 1 | –/60 | – | 25 |

* CM launchers are area effect weapons inflicting amazing damage out to 2 meters from the impact point, good damage out to 4 meters, and ordinary damage out to 8 meters. These ranges are doubled for the CM cannon.

most commonly voiced opinion was that they were searching the Glassmaker ruins for technological relics that might be used as weapons. Their researches turned up a wide assortment of useful innovations. These, coupled with the virtual matter shield, have made for numerous surprises in the early months of the External War.

The following is a brief discussion of the weapons and systems that most surprised the Alliance during the first twelve months of the External War.

## Tachyon Cannon

Alliance military and scientific analysts have not yet determined the full extent of the External discoveries on Mantebron. To be sure, they have not been in control of that system long enough to open up vast new areas that were not previously explored by human scientists. That the aliens have managed to draw forth secrets with such seeming ease indicates that they must have a greater base understanding of Glassmaker technology than does humanity. Perhaps the most telling example of these discoveries is the powerful tachyon cannon that was deployed aboard the fortress ship *Phlegethon* in time for the battle at Aegis.

The tachyon cannon makes use of a powerful gravimetic snare to collect faster-than-light particles. These are held inside a gravimetic packet until the weapon is discharged. The targeting computer gives the packet a charge to sustain it until it reaches its target. By precisely controlling the strength of the gravimetic field, it can be made to decay when it reaches the target. As the field weakens, the tachyons within it are released. The drag created by their passage through the weakening bottle causes them to lose velocity, causing them to be slowed to well below the speed of light. This causes the particles to release a great amount of heat, a powerful concussive shock wave, and a storm of hard radiation.

The massive tachyon cannon mounted aboard the fortress ship *Phlegethon* is a piece of technology unlike any deployed by the humans or their allies. The weapon appears to have been built into the very structure of the ship itself. Indeed, so complete is this integration that dismounting the weapon would almost certainly require the deconstruction of the entire craft. It may well be that this weapon was discovered as a whole on Mantebron and was then mounted aboard *Phlegethon* after it had undergone restoration.

Because of its great size and power, it is far beyond the scope of the starship combat rules presented in the ALTERNITY game system. Gamemasters should assume that any craft smaller than a cruiser struck by that weapon is destroyed. Larger craft suffer damage more or less equivalent to that needed to annihilate a cruiser as determined by the Gamemaster.

It is presumed that the Externals are working hard to reverse engineer the technology of this ancient weapon. In due time, it is likely that they can mount smaller versions of this weapon aboard other ships. When this happens, the Verge will be hard pressed trying to compete with such weaponry. Fortunately, it is unlikely that they will be able to employ this technology to produce battle-field weapons anytime in the near future.

It is probable that the Glassmaker versions of this weapon were much more sturdy and reliable than those being deployed by the Externals. Because they are forced to replace some aspects of the lost Glassmaker technology with their own, they depend upon juryrigged systems. These have a tendency to break down more often than do other systems, making the tachyon cannon a less reliable system than might be expected.

It is important to keep in mind that this is a unique weapon, at least for now and the foreseeable future. The descriptions of the light and heavy tachyon gun given here are for reference only; if the Externals manage to reverse-engineer the technology successfully, these other weapons may appear. A light tachyon gun would require a battleship to mount it, while the heavy tachyon gun can fit only on a fortress or cathedral ship.

Assume the damage ranges given here are of a scale necessary to engage very large capital-class ships (fortress ships, dreadnoughts, battleships, and so on). Refer to the description above to determine the effects of a shot fired at any smaller ship (cruisers and smaller).

## Converter Guns

Despite its name, the External converter gun is not similar to the human *mass converter.* While that weapon causes the atoms of the target to strip themselves of particles, effectively disintegrating it, the converter weapon of the Externals fires a concentrated shot of antimatter. When this strikes the target, the gravimetic bottle decays and the minute quantity of antimatter within comes into contact with the target. This results in a massive release of energy and hard radiation.

The External converter guns are encountered both as artillery and starship weapons. Lighter versions are oc-

| Weapon | PL | Dur | Pow | Acc | Range | Type | Damage | Actions |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Light tachyon gun | 9? | 2 | 6 | 0 | 8/16/24 | En (e) | 2d6w/3d6w/2d6m | 2 |
| Tachyon gun | 9? | 3 | 8 | 0 | 10/20/30 | En (e) | 3d6w/4d6w/3d6m | 2 |
| Heavy tachyon gun | 9? | 4 | 10 | 0 | 15/30/45 | En (e) | 4d6w/5d6w/4d6m | 2 |

casionally encounter aboard the heaviest armored units like the *Longsword* or *Flamberge.* Examples of both are presented herein.

Examinations of converter guns have been captured, although not intact. Studies of these weapons have led military analysts to believe that they are Progress Level 8 developments. As the majority of the External Technology appears to be more or less equivalent to what humanity labels as Progress Level 6 or 7, the existence of these weapons is cause for concern. The most probable explanation is that the klicks, kroath, and other aliens are at least partially supplied by some force with a basic technology more sophisticated than that of humanity.

### Virtual Matter Shields

One of the most daunting systems developed by the Externals is the *virtual matter shield.* The technology behind these deflectors is unknown to humans although many theories have been put forward to explain their function.

Observation of these systems indicates that they appear to surround the vessel with a physical wall that acts much like armor. This barrier doesn't actually exist, raising more questions than it answers. Most technical analysts agree that they work by creating a force bubble around the ship, perhaps gravity induced, which is every bit as solid as the armor on the ship's hull. The damage caused to these shields is absorbed, either as kinetic or electromagnetic energy, and stored in a series of on-board capacitors. When these reach their limit, the shield collapses.

Presumably, these capacitors can be discharged and the shield raised again.

In game terms, these deflectors are treated just like normal armor. Exactly how long it takes the ship to raise its shields again appears to be a product of the damage it has absorbed. It requires one combat round to discharge 10 points of damage. Thus, a ship whose shields have absorbed 27 points of damage through its VM shields would be forced to spend three rounds without them active in order to completely recharge them. If it raised them again after only two minutes, the capacitors

would still have 7 points stored in them. Thus, the Gamemaster can treat VM shielding as armor that "grows back" between (or even in the midst of) battles.

The protection provided by these systems has yet to be solidly quantified by human analysts, but the following estimates seem to be more or less correct. It is probable that further advances will see the evolution of even more powerful virtual matter technology at Progress Level 9.

## OTHER TECHNOLOGY

By and large, the Externals have not followed the same road to the stars as humanity. While there are some exceptions among them, most notably the sifarv, they tend to accomplish their goals through the manipulation of living creatures. As might be imagined, the biotechnology of the Externals makes for some unusual equipment. While it is considered commonplace among the aliens, it is strange and sometimes horrific to humanity.

In most cases, the Gamemaster does not need to get caught up in the working specifics of these unusual devices. Assume, for example, that an alien *water purifier* has the same operational characteristics as its technological counterpart. The fact that an alien flashlight uses bioluminescent slime instead of a filament to generate light shouldn't affect game play.

However, this fact should not be forgotten. Whenever the Gamemaster is called upon to describe an alien piece of equipment, he should keep in mind the fact that most humans find the concept of biotechnology somewhat unnerving. This factor can be played up whenever the humans encounter Externals face to face. A scuba mask, for example, might look far too much like the face-hugger from *Alien* to make any hero willing to touch it. Creepy, crawly, and slimy are characteristics that can be attributed to almost anything the Externals design.

The following sections further illustrate the differences between human and External technology.

### Clothing and Equipment

Like humanity, the Externals wear a wide variety of

| Starship Weapon | PL | Dur | Pow | Acc | Range | Type | Damage | Actions |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Converter gun | 8 | 4 | 5 | 0 | 5/10/20 | En (e) | d6+1w/d6+3w/d6m | 2 |

| Vehicular Weapon | Skill | Acc | Range | Md | Type | Damage | Actions | Clip Size | Hide | Mass |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Converter gun | Hvy–*indirect* | 0 | 100/200/400 | F | En/G | d6+1w/d6+3w/d6m | 2 | * | — | 25 |

\* The weapon is fueled from the vehicle's power plant and has an effectively unlimited number of shots.

| VM Armor Type | PL | LI | HI | En | Availability | Cost per 10 Durability |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| VM Aura (light) | 6 | d4 | d6 | d6 | External Military | 1m? |
| VM Shell (moderate) | 7 | d6 | d8 | d8 | External Military | 2m? |
| VM Shield (heavy) | 8 | d6+2 | d8+2 | d8+2 | External Military | 4m? |

clothing. These range from light, casual things worn for comfort or style, to heavy survival gear donned to allow operation in hostile climates.

### Civilian Clothing

The lightest examples of External clothing are fine membranes generally found in one of two formats. The casual clothing worn by civilians appears to be fashioned from some manner of naturally spun fiber more or less akin to terrestrial silk.

Examinations of these garments seem to indicate that they are all single pieces of fabric. Indeed, many people have theorized that each article of clothing is individually tailored. It has even been suggested that the would-be customer visits the External equivalent of a tailor and has a small army of spiderlike creatures swarm over his body. As they move to and fro, they spin out their webs creating a new garment in the same way a caterpillar fashions a cocoon.

### Military Clothing

The common uniforms worn by military personnel appear to be some manner of living membrane. They appear to be created by immersing an individual in a bath of, for want of a better word, slime. When the person is removed from the solution, a thin film remains on the victim. This film, it appears, is a living creature that survives by feeding on such unwanted byproducts of life as perspiration and urine.

This living clothing acts to make its wearer more comfortable in many ways. First and foremost, it cleans itself by absorbing (perhaps feeding on?) stains and the like. It also serves to regulate the temperature around the wearer, warming or cooling the wearer by a few degrees at any given time. Minor tears or cuts in the fabric are mended overnight and larger ones in a few days as the artificial skin grows itself back together.

This same technology appears to be used for the manufacturing of cold weather clothing, hazardous material handling suits, or even as protection against unusually high levels of radiation. There is some evidence to indicate that many of their civilian space suits are created in much the same way.

### Computers and Electronics

Many scholars frown on the use of the term "computer" to describe External logic systems. They believe that the term "thinking machine" or, more simply, "brain" is more appropriate. In light of the biological nature of these things, the latter statement might be more correct.

One of the most interesting differences between human computers and Externals' brains involves the concept of artificial intelligence. For decades, human scientists built more and more powerful computers in an attempt to duplicate the thought processes of the human brain. They managed to create systems that could simulate almost every aspect of human intelligence.

The Externals, however, had no such problem. Even the most basic of their thinking machines was gifted with at least a modicum of self-awareness. The massive brains and nerve clusters that serve to guide their living starships between the stars are fully sentient creatures in their own right. They understand their lot and follow orders much as any other member of the crew is expected to do, but they are indeed sentient creatures. Whether an External spacecraft would refuse to obey commands that led it to certain doom is a question many have considered carefully. In the end, it is assumed they would act much like loyal soldiers, giving up their lives if duty and honor demands it.

This matter is likely to come up in a game situation only when heroes get their hands on an External artifact of some sort. In the case of a simple machine (the 26th-century equivalent of a calculator, for example), the intelligence of the device would be too limited to matter. If they have gotten their hands on something more sophisticated, perhaps a notebook computer, the device is likely to resent its new owners. It might not be obvious about such things, but could simply give them the wrong answers whenever they try to use it.

Despite these considerations, Gamemasters can assume that alien computer systems are more or less the equivalent of their human counterparts. As a rule, however, External brains are larger than human computers, but have slightly more active memory available to them. Gamemasters should multiply the mass of an External computer by 125% and increase the Active Memory by 1. Thus, an Ordinary-quality, PL 6 External desktop computer would mass 10 kilograms and have an Active Memory of 5.

### Cybertech and Mutations

The Externals do not use much cybertech. Because only a handful of the Externals use electronics and similar technology, the implanting of mechanical devices is mostly unknown to them. However, their superior medical skills allow them to shape living things as they desire. In many ways, this gives them the ability to mimic the cybernetic components described in the Alternity rules.

The line between mutations and cybertechnology has ceased to exist for the Externals. Would a creature manipulated so that it extends long, bony claws in combat be a mutant or a cyborg? Because much of what the Externals build doesn't fit into the human scheme of things, however, the matter is sometimes difficult to judge.

# SECTION FOUR: EXTERNAL MILITARY FORCES

Compared to the I'krl Theocracy, the stellar nations of humanity are really quite homogeneous. The difference between the men and women of Austrin-Ontis Unlimited and their counterparts in VoidCorp space or in the Solar Union are insignificant compared to the racial differences between the thaal and their sifarv underlings or the gardhyi and the n'sss who obey them. This makes it difficult for either side to truly understand the other.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the structure and deployment of military forces.

## SPACECRAFT

In very general terms, the spacecraft employed by the Externals can be said to have counterparts in the Verge Alliance Navy. This is true despite the fact that many of the craft employed by the Externals are the products of strange and exotic biotechnologies. In other words, the majority of the alien craft encountered during the External War are grown rather than constructed.

In game play, the organic nature of the External fleet matters little. They can be assumed to function very similarly to human-built craft in all ways. For roleplaying purposes, however, a skilled GM can make much of the soft edges and flowing contours of the alien craft.

One interesting aspect of the alien biotechnology is that no two External vessels are ever the same. While the shipyards of humanity often produce numerous vessels of a given class that are, for all intents and purposes, identical, every alien vessel is, in essence, an individual. Despite this, normal human convention has led military analysts to refer to ships of roughly identical characteristics as being of the same "class."

The major exceptions to this rule are the sifarv. These advanced creatures have a technology very much akin to that of their human enemies. Although their craft are clearly the work of alien shipyards, they are also very obviously the products of traditional technology.

The remarks made on the given pages are, obviously, intended for human readers. As such, they reflect human prejudices and assumptions. Because of this, readers should recognize the fact that, while a battleship of human design might be very different from one of External manufacture, the two have roughly similar capabilities.

## Fighters

The smallest true spacecraft employed by the Externals are their fighters. Although the Externals do not employ

## External Starships

| Class Name | Ship Type | Combat Strength |
|---|---|---|
| *Hornisse* | Light Fighter | 10 |
| *Wespe* | Fighter | 15 |
| *Beine* | Heavy Fighter | 20 |
| *Raptor* | Light Fighter | 15 |
| *Pato* | Troop Shuttle | 10 |
| *Augila* | Scout | 20 |
| *Halcon* | Cutter | 30 |
| *Riddare* | Light Destroyer | 50 |
| *Soldat* | Fleet Destroyer | 75 |
| *Ray* | Assault Escort | 100 |
| *Skate* | Escort | 125 |
| *Shark* | Fleet Escort | 150 |
| *Intruder* | Light Cruiser | 250 |
| *Violator* | Cruiser | 375 |
| *Invader* | Heavy Cruiser | 500 |
| *Saeta* | Light Carrier | 200* |
| *Lanza* | Carrier | 250* |
| *Bala* | Heavy Carrier | 300* |
| *Dictator* | Pocket Battleship | 1,000 |
| *Tyrant* | Battleship | 1,500 |
| *Behemoth* | Dreadnought | 2,500* |
| *Styx* | Fortress Ship | 10,000** |
| *Phlegethon* | Improved Fortress Ship | 12,500** |
| *Guardian* | Light Monitor | 500* |
| *Protector* | Monitor | 750* |
| *Defender* | Heavy Monitor | 1,000* |
| *Ascension* | Cathedral Ship | 20,000** |

\* The unit's combat strength does not take into account its fighter squadrons.

\*\* The unit's combat strength does not take into account its fighter squadrons and other internally carried ships.

ship classes like their human counterparts do, the Verge Alliance has grouped their craft into three distinct types, based wholly on the number of crewmen. In addition, there are sifarv fighters, but these are quite rare within the Exeat military forces.

***Hornisse:*** These light fighters have only a single pilot and are generally lightly armed. As a rule, they are very swift and often employed as scouts or interceptors. For the purposes of the shorthand combat system described above, *Hornisse* class fighters have a combat strength of 10. These light craft are not equipped with a stardrive and have only a limited endurance. They are seldom found far from a base or carrier.

# Quick Combat Resolution

Over the course of the war, a great many battles are fought between space fleets, armored divisions, and so on. In many cases, there are so many participants in these battles that it becomes impractical to resolve them using the normal combat rules. In such cases, the following system can be used to quickly determine the winners and losers of a given exchange. Gamemasters can use the same system for actions involving opposing spacecraft, ground forces, or combinations of the two.

This system is by no means exacting. It is meant to provide a general system to resolve large conflicts quickly and easily. Those who demand precise rules that take into account many variations in tactics and conditions should refer to *Warships*.

## Force Strength

The first step in resolving a large battle with this shorthand system is to assign a numerical rating reflecting the strength of each side.

**Individual Combat Strength:** Each of the vessels described in this section is given a combat strength. For small craft, these are quite low. For larger vessels, these might be much higher. An External Hornisse class fighter, for example, has a combat strength of 10, while a klick infantryman has a combat strength of 1. A thaal cathedral ship, the largest combat vessel known to man, has a combat strength of no less than 20,000.

**Force Strength:** In order to determine the total strength of a given side, the Gamemaster need only add up the combat strengths of its individual units. A flight of six Hornisse fighters would have a total combat strength of 60, as would twelve five-man klick fire teams.

## Tactical Advantage

Once the strength of both sides has been determined, the Gamemaster need only compare these numbers to determine which side has the tactical advantage. For the purposes of these rules, the side with the higher total Force Strength is termed the "attacker" while the other side is called the "defender." These terms are not meant to indicate which side is actually the aggressor and are used only for the sake of convenience.

Based on the relative strength of the attacker, the Gamemaster can determine a step modifier for the battle. In order to use the following table, the Gamemaster need only divide the defender's force strength by the attacker's to determine the "Tactical Advantage."

| Offensive Advantage | Step Modifier |
|---|---|
| Less than 0.2 | +5 |
| 0.2 to 0.39 | +4 |
| 0.4 to 0.59 | +3 |
| 0.6 to 0.79 | +2 |
| 0.8 or higher | +1 |

## Combat Resolution

After the tactical advantage has been determined, the Gamemaster should call upon the leader of the attacking fleet to make a skill check using his tactics skill. The outcome of this roll determines the course of the battle's initial phase as indicated on the following table.

| Check Result | Attacker Losses | Defender Losses |
|---|---|---|
| Critical Failure | 25% | 5% |
| Failure | 20% | 10% |
| Ordinary Success | 15% | 15% |
| Good Success | 10% | 20% |
| Amazing Success | 5% | 25% |

The number indicated on the table is a percentage of combat strength lost in the battle. For example, we're resolving a small fleet action in which the attacker's force strength is 12,500 points and the defender's is 10,000. If the attacking commander's tactics check indicates ordinary success, both sides would lose 15% of their combat strength. For the attacker, this would be 1,875 points, while the defender would lose 1,500 points.

A failure or critical failure can often indicate that the tide has turned in a close battle. In the above skirmish, a Critical Failure would cost the attacker 25% of his force (3,125 points) while the defender would lose only 5% (500 points). After these results are applied (see below), the original attacker would have a Force Strength of 9,375 and the defender's strength would be 9,500. When the next round of battle is resolved, the designation of "attacker" and "defender" would be reversed.

## Allocating Losses

After the combat results above are determined, both sides reduce their fleet strengths as indicated. For the most part, it isn't important to determine which vessels are lost or damaged at this juncture. Thus, both sides need only record their new totals.

GMs who wish to keep more careful track of the battle might require each side to "cross off" ships whose total combat strength is equal to the number indicated as lost. If this is done, the Gamemaster should allow both sides to determine their own losses and allow for a few points of leeway when trying to hit the exact point total.

It is possible for the side that begins a battle as the attacker to see his force diminish until it is smaller than that of his opponent. If this happens, the terms "attacker" and "defender" are swapped.

## Moving On

Once this is done, both sides have the option of withdrawing from combat and ending the battle. If neither wishes to do so, another round of combat is resolved as indicated above. This process continues until one side or the other is victorious or withdraws.

Although heroes are free to command their forces to continue fighting for as long as they deem wise, fleets controlled by the Gamemaster should be a little more practical. As a rule, any human-controlled fleet breaks off when it loses 40% of its original strength. The mentality of the Externals makes them more determined and less willing to admit defeat than would humans, so their forces usually fight on until they lose some 60% of their original fleet strength.

Of course, special considerations may alter these values. The human forces defending Hammer's Star, for example, vowed to fight to the death as they bought time for civilians to flee the system. As such, the order to withdraw was not given until the human force had been reduced to 10% of its original size.

**Wespe:** Slightly slower and more heavily armed than the one-man *Hornisse* fighters, the *Wespe* carries a crew of two. One of these acts as the pilot and navigator while the other is in charge of the craft's offensive and defensive systems. The *Wespe* has a combat strength of 15. These vehicles do not carry stardrives but have extended life support capabilities. As such, they can operate independently for extended periods of time and are often encountered far from any base or carrier.

**Beine***: The heaviest fighters employed by the Externals are the *Beine* three-man craft. These vessels are slower than their smaller counterparts, but carry heavy shielding and powerful weapons. Their crew consists of a pilot/navigator, a tactical officer, and an engineer. Equipped with both a stardrive and extended life support capabilities, these craft can operate very far from carriers or bases and are often used as high-speed couriers. A *Beine* fighter has a combat strength of 20.

**Raptor:** These sifarv fighters are quite possibly the best-designed fighters in existence. A pilot's dream to fly, the *Raptor* is small, highly maneuverable, fast, and well armed. Consider the *Raptor* to have the equivalent of a stabilizer system installed (at no cost); actually adding a stabilizer does not improve its maneuverability any further than its natural –1. Further, its speed is more than enough to overtake most ships, and its armaments give it a good punch when it catches its prey. Assume a combat strength of 15 for these agile, single-pilot craft.

## Cutters/Scouts

Although the largest of the External fighters are able to carry stardrives and might be considered starships, most reserve that designation for somewhat larger craft. The smallest of these craft are generally classed as cutters or scouts. This description covers a wide range of small craft, including the landing craft and other shuttles used to transport troops and supplies to the surface of an embattled world. The Verge Alliance recognizes three different types of ship in this class, each of which has a crew of up to a dozen.

**Pato***: The *Pato* is a small craft used primarily as a transport. Some of these might be used to carry troops while others are outfitted to haul ground vehicles or other cargo. In any case, however, these armed transports have a combat strength of 10. The typical *Pato*-class transport can carry a platoon (or *groush*) and its support gear.

**Augila***: These craft are lightly armed vessels equipped for extended duration missions and scientific investigations. They are seldom encountered in battle, al-

though they are more heavily armed than the *Pato* transports. The average *Augila* class ship has a combat strength of 20.

**Halcon**: When these craft are outfitted for battle, they sometimes serve as fleet escorts or light gunboats. While they can be useful for suppression of piracy or as commerce raiders themselves, they seldom play an important role in any real fleet action. The light armaments of these craft give them a combat strength of 30.

## Destroyers

With crews numbering a few dozen, these craft often serve to bolster the strength of a small fleet. Their superior firepower allows them to operate independently in some cases, patrolling trade lanes, policing ports, or the like. There are two general types of small ships in the External fleet.

**Riddare**: These craft are designed to serve as part of a larger squadron, relying on the presence of other ships to compensate for their own lesser firepower. They are often encountered as commerce raiders, operating in packs of between three and nine ships. The typical *Riddare*-class ship has a combat strength of 50.

**Soldat**: Heavier than their counterparts, these craft are sometimes given independent assignments at the fringes of explored space. While they certainly lack the firepower to move against any fortified position, they can be used to blockade civilian positions and otherwise exert pressure on the enemy. The typical *Soldat*-class vessel has a combat strength of 75.

## Escorts

The primary role of the escort is to flesh out the ranks of a large fleet and support the actions of cruisers or other craft. They generally have crews of several dozen and are designed to fill a specific role and can be defined by the types of weaponry they mount. The Verge Alliance recognizes three types of escorts in the service of the I'krl Theocracy.

**Ray**: These light escort craft are outfitted with powerful energy weapons, making them deadly opponents. They are by far the most commonly encountered examples of this type of ship, filling out many small battle fleets. When engaging in combat, their strength is 100.

**Skate**: Opting for a balanced mixture of energy weapons and projectiles, the *Skate* is a deadly craft that can serve equally well when attacking other ships or bombarding forces on the ground. It has a combat strength of 125.

**Shark**: The *Shark*-class vessel is designed along opposite lines from the *Ray*. Instead of being based around energy weapons, it employs missiles and other projectile

armaments. All in all, it is somewhat more powerful (having a combat strength of 150) but is less commonly encountered.

## Cruisers

The heart of most battle fleets is the cruiser. These massive ships have crews of several hundred and mount weapons heavy enough to pulverize smaller craft. Even the lightest of them is a truly formidable vessel. If called upon to deploy its ship's troops as a ground force, a cruiser can field a force equal to that of a regular seventy-five-man *groush*.

**Intruder**: These light cruisers are often employed as escorts for larger craft like battleships or carriers. They are seldom encountered on their own and are often accompanied by two or three smaller craft (usually destroyers). Ships of the *Intruder*-class have a combat strength of 250.

**Violator**: These craft are heavily armored and mount a wide assortment of weapons and defenses. Because they retain much of the maneuverability of the light cruiser, they are perhaps the most versatile craft in the External fleet. Although they're powerful enough to operate on their own, these craft are most often part of a larger fleet or in the company of a dreadnought or fortress ship. The average ship of this class has a combat strength of 375.

**Invader**: The heaviest of the alien cruisers, these craft mount enough firepower to reduce whole cities to rubble in short order. Although their greater bulk costs them something in terms of maneuverability, this is more than compensated for their increased arms and armor. *Invaders* often act on their own, serving as the main element of small fleets or task forces. *Invaders* have a combat strength of 500, making them a deadly menace.

## Carriers

In order to carry their complement of fighters, carriers are forced to give up a great deal of weaponry and armor. Despite this, however, the powerful armaments of the 26th century make even these craft deadly warships. The Verge Alliance classes carriers by the number of fighters they carry on them. In addition to their own crew, of course, these ships must carry pilots, technicians, and the like. All told, they can carry a crew of well over a thousand.

**Saeta**: The lightest of the External carriers, these ships carry a complement of forty fighters and their accompanying support teams. If forced to battle without its protective squadrons, the *Saeta*-class light carrier has a combat strength of 200.

**Lanza**: The most commonly encountered carrier in

the External fleet, the *Lanza*-class is able to carry up to eighty fighters. In addition, it mounts a wide assortment of weapons, giving it a combat strength of 250 even after all of its fighters have been lost.

**Bala**: The *Bala*-class carrier is a true juggernaut, capable of supporting no fewer than 100 fighter craft. Although not noted for its speed or maneuverability, the *Bala* carries enough weaponry to give it a combat strength of 300, making it a deadly vessel even when caught before it can deploy its fighter screen.

## Battleships

Battleships are the focal point of most major assault fleets. Huge and heavily armed, they make up for their lack of speed and maneuverability with heavy armor and shielding. To date, the Verge Alliance has cataloged two general types of battleship in the External fleet, both of which have crews numbering in the thousands. Battleships often carry a landing force as well, allowing them to insert an entire *ahmk* of 150 soldiers and their supporting equipment.

**Dictator**: The lighter or "pocket" battleship is best exemplified by the *Dictator*-class. Lacking the firepower of its heavier sisters, this craft is very well designed and can soak up an incredible amount of damage. *Dictator*-class ships are often deployed in groups of three so that their lighter weaponry is more than compensated for by the pooling of their resources. A typical *Dictator* has a combat rating of 1,000.

**Tyrant**: An excellent example of the full-fledged battleship is the *Tyrant*. A true behemoth, this massive battleship packs a tremendous offensive punch and can withstand incredible damage itself. While not especially swift or agile, it is still more maneuverable than most would expect. The *Dictator* has a combat strength of 1,500, making it one of the most deadly craft in the war.

## Dreadnoughts

There are only a handful of true dreadnoughts on either side of the External War. The alien *Behemoth* is the best example of this class of ship. Massive and heavily armed, these craft have the firepower to go toe-to-toe with an orbital fortress all by themselves. Whole fleets have broken themselves against a lone dreadnought, which is reflected in their combat strength of 2500.

The typical External dreadnought also acts as a carrier, able to deploy a screen of some thirty fighters to protect herself and act as advanced scouts. In addition, it carries two 150-man *ahmks* of ship's troops and the *Pato* landing craft needed to deploy them rapidly to a planet's surface.

## Fortress Ships

In human space, the fortress ship is considered the epitome of naval firepower. These massive craft are able to take on the defenses of even the most heavily fortified systems. Fortress ships are protected by an incredible array of screens and electronic warfare equipment that makes them difficult to hit despite their size and poor maneuverability. The typical fortress ship, as exemplified by the *Styx, Lethe,* and *Acheron,* has a combat strength of 10,000. (Note: After being refitted with the Glassmaker-based tachyon cannon, the *Phlegethon* has a combat strength of 12,500.)

A fortress ship has internal hangar space large enough to hold not only fighters, but also other large craft. As a rule, a fortress ship can field a squadron of 100 fighters as well as other craft with a total combat strength of 2,000. For example, the *Lethe* is currently believed to be carrying a pair of *Invader*-class cruisers (500 points each), three *Intruder*-class cruisers (250 points each), and five *Riddare*-class destroyers (50 points each). Fortress ships can also transport fighter carriers, allowing them to deploy these craft and greatly increase the number of fighters available to them.

Fortress ships also carry large numbers of ship's troops and the landing craft needed to deploy them rapidly. As a rule, a typical fortress ship carries an entire 600-soldier *ori-arami* and its support equipment.

## Monitors

Monitors are large space fortresses lacking stardrives and, often, even the ability to maneuver much within a system. As a rule, they are constructed in a given system or towed by stardrive equipped tugs. The star fortress assembled by the Externals in the Hammer's Star system is an example of such structures.

Because they do not have to allocate valuable space to stardrives and the like, these structures are more heavily armed and armored than a driveship of equal size. Although the Verge Alliance has not yet encountered an External monitor, it is assumed that they are roughly analogous to their human counterparts. As such, military intelligence analysts assume that External monitors fall into three categories.

**Guardian**: Often referred to simply as "space stations," these light monitors are intended primarily as commercial or scientific facilities. Although they are armed and armored, their weaponry is really not suited for anything more than piracy suppression and the like. A typical light monitor has a combat strength of 500 and hangar facilities for fifteen fighter craft.

**Protector**: This structure is a typical External monitor. It is heavily armored and mounts a wide array of weap-

ons. Although a *Protector* often has some commercial or scientific capabilities, it is clearly military in design. In addition to keeping pirates and other outlaws in line, a monitor has the firepower to bring order to rebellious systems. The typical monitor has a combat strength of 750 and hangar facilities for thirty fighters.

**Defender***:* Often called "battle stations," these massive structures make no pretense at being anything other than military structures. They are generally deployed in systems where armed conflict is not only possible, but also expected. The craft deployed in the Hammer's Star system is an example of the heavy monitor. These structures are assumed to have a combat strength of 1,000 with hangar facilities sufficient to house fifty fighters.

### Cathedral Ships

Although humankind has never been called upon to face one in combat, Verge Alliance intelligence has come to believe that the I'krl Theocracy fields a class of ship even more powerful than the fortress ship. To date, little is known about these craft, which appear to be roughly analogous to the city ships employed by fraal Wanderers. Based on the best guesses of Verge Alliance experts, these craft are assumed to have a combat strength of not less than 20,000.

### System Defenses

In Section Four of the STAR*DRIVE *Campaign Setting* book, a shorthand rating of system defenses is presented using a scale of Zero through Five. Although systems in Old Space may have higher ratings, the best defensive networks in the Verge are those at Aegis and, until recently, Hammer's Star.

It is possible to estimate the defensive combat strength of a system using this number. Simply square the combat rating (multiply it by itself) and then multiply the resulting number by 1,000.

For example, the Aegis system has Type Five defenses, among the best in the Verge. To convert this into a combat strength for use with the abstract combat system, we multiply 5 times 5 for a total of 25. This number is then multiplied by 1,000 for a grand total of 25,000 points. In other words, the Aegis system normally has defensive firepower equal to two fortress ships.

Of course, this strength can be bolstered by the addition of other ships and military forces. At the time of the External attack on Hammer's Star, for example, there were roughly 15,000 points worth of ships present in addition to the normal defenses of the system. This increased the overall combat strength of the system to some 40,000 points.

As impressive as this might sound, of course, it paled in comparison to the force that attacked it. After all, the trio of fortress ships combined for over 30,000 points all by themselves. All told, the alien fleet had a combat strength nearly twice that of the system's defenders.

It is further assumed that these massive craft have the ability to carry and deploy some 150 fighters. Further, many speculate that they can carry as many as 3500 combat points worth of other craft internally. Cathedral ships are also theoretically capable of carrying an entire brigade (1,500 troops) and their support equipment.

Reports have begun to trickle in that a cathedral ship, given the name *Ascension* by the Verge Alliance intelligence community, has recently arrived in the Hammer's Star system. Many believe that the *Ascension* is nothing more than a bit of disinformation leaked to the Verge Alliance in an effort to break morale.

## PLANETARY FORCES

In many cases, the stellar navies of the participants decide interstellar conflicts. After a major fleet action, which can often last for several days, the down and dirty task of securing a system's planets tends to be forgotten.

Often, this oversight is understandable. After all, once its defenses have been breached, a planet is often quite vulnerable to planetary bombardment and the destruction of its population centers. Faced with such a threat, any rational government surrenders rather than watch civilian casualties soar.

Whether or not the attacker opts to accept such a surrender is, of course, another matter. Repeated calls for mercy went unanswered on Spes as city after city was reduced to ash by heartless External commanders.

In some cases, however, a planet must be taken by force. When this happens, a long and bloody battle can result. If the Externals are able to crack the defenses at Alaundril in the Tendril system, this is likely the outcome there.

### Infantry

The backbone of the External army is the foot soldier. In most cases, these have proven to be klicks and kroath, although it is certain that this vast, multiracial empire makes use of other species when planetary conditions call for them. The Externals appear to divide their infantry as described below. Readers should note that the names given these units and their translations are best guesses based on sketchy information.

The two most commonly encountered types of soldier deployed by the Externals to date are klicks and kroath. Although they wear different types of armor and carry different weapons, they are roughly equal in terms of ability. The standard klick soldiers are equipped with a blacklaser SMG and armor appropriate to the environment in which they fight. Most kroath soldiers are armed with dark plasma rifles for ranged combat and many carry filament blades for use in melee.

For the purposes of the abstract quick resolution system, both are assumed to have a combat strength of 1 each. Thus, a group of six kroath and five klick soldiers would have a combined combat strength of 11. The Externals seem to organize their foot soldiers in a manner not unlike that employed by traditional human military units. Military intelligence officials briefly define these as follows:

**Hruth**: The standard External *hruth* or fire team is composed of six combat soldiers. Five of them carry the standard armament of their species (blacklaser SMGs in the case of a klick unit or darkplasma rifles for the kroath). The final member of the unit, who appears to command the others, carries a somewhat heavier weapon. For klick units, this is a blacklaser rifle and for kroath it is usually a dark plasma trigun. The leader of a hruth is a *kometh* (sergeant). The *hruth* is assumed to have a combat strength of 6 for the purposes of abstract combat resolution.

**Ta-hro**: A thirteen-soldier External *ta-hro* (or squad) is made up of two six-man fire teams and an additional leader. This leader—a *kometh* (sergeant)—is believed to handle all aspects of training and planning for both fire teams. Squads have a combat strength of 13.

**Chor**: An External *chor* is roughly equivalent to a human section and is also commanded by a *kometh*, al-

## Abstract Combat System

The abstract combat system presented earlier works just as well for surface battles. The same steps are followed and resolution proceeds almost exactly as above. The only real difference is that Tactics–*ground tactics* is used here in lieu of the Tactics–*space tactics* skill.

### Planetary Bombardment

It is also possible to resolve battles involving both land and space forces using this system. As a rule, any spacecraft can conduct orbital bombardment with a combat factor equal to 50% of its normal rating. Thus, a Ray-class assault escort (which normally has a combat rating of 100 in space combat) would have a combat rating of 50 when firing on ground forces.

Some spacecraft might be specially designed as planet bombers. If this is the case, the combat factor of the craft is halved when engaging other spacecraft and used at full strength when attacking ground targets. This is not a decision that can be made in the field, however, since it involves major design changes. The determination of whether a ship is constructed (or grown) as a bomber is made at the shipyard when it is first laid down. Thereafter, changes can be made only by expensive and time-consuming retrofits.

### Planetary Defense Batteries

Some ground forces can be used to attack orbiting spacecraft. As a rule, this ability is reserved for larger units only, although there are exceptions. In general, no armor unit lighter than the Broadsword may engage orbiting craft. Infantry units, even reinforced ones like the rummatek, are unable to target such craft. When a Broadsword, Longsword, Great Sword, or Flamberge attacks space forces, its combat strength is reduced by 50%.

Artillery units are far more deadly than their 20th-century counterparts. As such, they can also engage enemy craft, although at only 50% of their normal combat strength. It is possible to designate (at the time of construction only) that a given unit is going to serve as a planetary defense battery. When this is done, the artillery is able to use its full offensive strength against enemy spacecraft, but only half this value when engaging other ground forces.

Some fixed fortifications have the ability to fire on orbiting targets while others do not. None of the bunkers are equipped for such combat, while all heavier fortifications are. In addition, the nature of the weapons and fire control systems employed in these larger structures allows them to use their full combat strength when attacking both ground forces and space forces.

### Resolving Mixed Engagements

It is possible, although rare, for a given battle to have three different elements taking place at once. As two navies clash in space, other craft might be bombarding an enemy planet, while ground forces for both sides slug it out in the trenches. While this might seem a confusing situation at first, it is easy to resolve using the abstract system.

Instead of trying to pool all of these engagements into one massive exchange, the players and Gamemaster should allocate their available forces secretly into three (or two or however many are needed) groups. After this grouping is completed, both sides reveal their allocation and the battles are resolved separately.

### Common Sense and Imagination

The shorthand combat system presented above leaves a lot of things to the imagination of the Gamemaster. It isn't intended to be played out as an ongoing war game with contingencies for every possible strategy or battle result. Such an endeavor is clearly beyond the scope of this product. Because of this, the Gamemaster is frequently called on to make decisions about exactly what a given result means to the heroes.

As an example, consider the attack on Hammer's Star. The Concord fleet has been annihilated and the ship on which the heroes were serving has been swept out of existence. Does this mean that the heroes have all been killed? Not by a long shot. Instead, they might have been captured by the Externals and face terrible torture unless they escape. Alternately, they may have escaped their ship to crash on Spes in a lifeboat, leaving them to fend for themselves until they can find some other way off planet. The possibilities are endless, and a good Gamemaster makes the most of them.

Remember, this system is meant to provide background flavor for the campaign, not to dominate it.

though one who possesses greater command authority than a *kometh* leading a *ta-hro* (squad). Each section is composed of two squads and a handful of support personnel, bringing it to a total of some thirty troops. Such a unit has a combat strength of 30.

**Groush**: A rough counterpart to the human platoon is the alien *groush,* which is composed of two *chor* and a few administrative/support personnel. The leader of a *groush* is an *ythkometh* (lieutenant). Although senior noncommissioned officers (typically a *leading sergeant* or such) often command human platoons, this does not appear to be strictly true with either klick or kroath units. A *groush* has a combat strength of 75 when using the abstract resolution system.

It is worth noting that the Externals tend to employ large numbers of smaller landing craft when making their descents to planetary surfaces. This is best exemplified by the *Pato*-class landing craft, which can carry a platoon from orbit to the surface of planet (or vice versa) very rapidly. In this way, surface defenses are forced to fire on a great many targets. Even if the planet's defenders are able to destroy many of the landers, large numbers of troops can still make planetfall.

**Ahmk**: The alien equivalent to a company, the *ahmk* is composed of two *groush* and is commanded by a *komosar* (major). In combat, these units have a strength of 150. A scattering of heavier support weapons that allow it to secure and hold a large area against enemy advances reinforces the typical ahmk. When backed by heavier weapons, like armor or artillery, the *ahmk* is a formidable offensive unit.

**Matek**: Roughly the equivalent of the Concord battalion, the *matek* is commanded by a *komith* (lieutenant colonel). An External *matek* is generally composed of two companies and deployed along with some manner of heavy support (often armor). When using the abstract system, the typical *matek* has a combat strength of 300.

**Ru-matek**: When mixed with armor and other heavy support systems, the *matek* becomes a *ru-matek* (often called a *reinforced battalion* by Alliance analysts). In such cases, the combat strength of the unit is increased to 450. The leader of a *ru-matek* is also commanded by a *komith* (lieutenant colonel).

**Ori-arami**: One of the largest known groupings for External troops is the *ori-arami,* which many translate roughly as *brigade.* It is presumed that larger organizational units exist, but military intelligence has yet to find enough information to make any reliable guesses as to their structure or deployment. The *ori-arami* is composed of two *matek,* has a combat strength of 600 and is commanded by a *komyth* (colonel).

**Ru-arami**: The *ori arami* is often pooled with support systems like armor and artillery to form a more power-

ful unit known as a *ru-arami*. A *komyth* also commands a unit of this size. When using the abstract combat system, the *ru-arami* has an effective combat strength of 750.

## External Troop Units

| Unit Type | Basic Composition | Combat Strength |
|---|---|---|
| *Infantryman* | 1 klick or kroath | 1 |
| *Hruth* | 6 troops | 6 |
| *Ta-hro* | 13 troops | 13 |
| *Chor* | 30 troops | 30 |
| *Groush* | 75 troops | 75 |
| *Ahmk* | 150 troops | 150 |
| *Matek* | 300 troops | 300 |
| *Ru-matek* | 300 troops + armor | 450 |
| *Ori-arami* | 600 troops | 600 |
| *Ru-arami* | 600 troops + armor | 750 |

## Armor

The Externals do not limit themselves to the deployment of infantry alone. Like humanity, they have developed powerful engines of war. These range from armored personnel carriers to the massive *Broadsword* mobile fortresses. The following are typical examples of these gravitic propelled armored units:

**Stiletto**: The alien *Stiletto* is a light, fighting vehicle designed primarily to fill the same role as an armored personnel carrier. Under normal conditions, it can carry a ta-hro (13 troops). The *Stiletto* is lightly armored and generally mounts a heavy weapon of some sort, like a dark plasma or blacklaser cannon. Small gun ports give the troops inside a limited ability to fire out, although their accuracy is limited. All told, the *Stiletto* has a combat strength of 10 when using the abstract mass combat system.

**Gladius**: Roughly the equivalent of a light tank, the *Gladius* is small and agile. It has been known to mount a wide variety of weapons, but most seem to be equipped with blacklaser cannons. A few have been encountered equipped with heavy versions of cluster rockets employed by the n'sss. A *Gladius* has a combat strength of 30 when using the abstract combat system.

**Sabre**: The standard External main battle tank combines good speed with solid armor protection and very potent weaponry. Usually equipped with a heavy black-laser or accelerator cannon (similar to human railguns), these vehicles have a combat strength of 40. In addition to its main battery, the *Sabre* carries two secondary weapon systems, usually a missile or cluster rocket bank and some manner of antipersonnel gun.

**Cutlass**: The equivalent of terrestrial heavy tanks, the

alien *Cutlass* is somewhat slow and cumbersome, but makes up for this with thick armor and a massive main gun (usually a dark plasma gun). Three secondary turrets give the vehicle potent antipersonnel capabilities and often incorporate a limited antiaircraft system. Because of its powerful weapons and heavy armor, a *Cutlass* is assumed to have a combat strength of 60.

*Broadsword*: A true behemoth, the External *Broadsword* is larger than any armored vehicle found in the human military. Mounting a pair of massive main guns, usually dark fusion guns, and a half dozen secondary turrets, these grav-propelled fortifications have a crew of fifteen. Nothing like them exists in the human military. When using the shorthand combat system, a *Broadsword* has a combat strength of 100.

### External Armor Units

| Unit Type | Basic Composition | Combat Strength |
|---|---|---|
| *Stiletto* | Light personnel carrier | 10 |
| *Gladius* | Light tank | 30 |
| *Sabre* | Tank | 40 |
| *Cutlass* | Heavy tank | 60 |
| *Broadsword* | Light mobile fortress | 100 |

## Artillery

While alien armor and infantry are often sent to battle human forces head to head, the Externals also employ a wide assortment of heavy artillery pieces to support these units from behind the lines of battle. The most commonly encountered examples of this technology are listed below. The strength of each is that of a battery of guns, totalling some 18-24 guns.

*Sliver Cannons*: These deadly weapons are essentially giant versions of the sliver weapons employed by the n'sss and certain other External species. Making use of a powerful gravi-magnetic accelerator, this weapon throws out a stream of crystalline shards at speeds far greater than that of sound. In essence, it might be thought of a terribly powerful, futuristic machine gun. The typical sliver cannon battery has a combat strength of 125.

*Cluster Rocket Batteries:* These weapons fire massive salvos of rockets tipped with dark matter warheads. Although the individual rockets are not especially large, the sheer volume of the attack can overwhelm a target's defenses in short order. Cluster rockets are indirect fire weapons, so they can be positioned in gullies or other recessed locations and still strike effectively. A cluster

rocket battery has a combat strength of 175.

**Dark Matter Missile Batteries:** Like the cluster rockets described earlier, a dark matter missile battery employs salvos of deadly projectiles to destroy its targets. These more sophisticated weapons employ larger missiles with better guidance and more powerful warheads than their lesser cousins do. A typical dark matter missile battery has a combat strength of 225.

**Blacklaser Cannons**: Perhaps the most commonly encountered field guns employed by the Externals are their dreaded blacklaser cannons. These direct fire weapons are similar to the heavy weapons employed by many of their armor units, but are much more powerful. Because these are direct fire weapons, they are often mounted in elevated positions. A blacklaser battery has a combat strength of 150.

**Dark Plasma Cannons**: The dark plasma weapon is the mainstay of most External artillery units. By compressing a packet of superheated dark matter until it is on the verge of undergoing fusion, a great deal of heat and energy are released. When this is targeted at an enemy unit, tremendous damage is done. The combat strength of a dark plasma cannon battery is 200.

**Dark Fusion Cannons**: Dark fusion weapons operate on the same principle as the dark plasma cannon (see above), but generate even more damage by compressing a "packet" of dark matter until a fusion reaction begins to take place. A dark fusion cannon battery is a truly terrible weapon that has a combat strength of 250 when using the shorthand combat system provided earlier.

**Converter Cannons**: Only recently developed by the Externals, these weapons may be the ultimate development of direct fire field artillery. They operate by encasing a packet of antimatter in a magnetic stream and then releasing that deadly particle barrage at a target. The result of an attack by this weapon is terrible indeed, as explosions rip apart matter and streams of heat and hard radiation pour outward. Thankfully very rare, the typical converter cannon battery has a combat strength of 300.

## External Artillery

| Unit Type (Battery) | General Type | Combat Strength |
|---|---|---|
| *Sliver Cannon* | Direct Fire Projectile | 125 |
| *Cluster Rocket* | Indirect Fire Projectile | 175 |
| *Dark Matter Missile* | Indirect Fire Projectile | 225 |
| *Blacklaser Cannon* | Direct Fire Energy | 150 |
| *Dark Plasma Cannon* | Direct Fire Energy | 200 |
| *Dark Fusion Cannon* | Direct Fire Energy | 250 |
| *Converter Cannon* | Direct Fire Energy | 300 |

## Fixed Fortifications

Once the Externals claim a piece of land, they are no more willing to part with it than were the natives from whom it was taken. Because of this, they are quick to erect at least a basic series of fortifications once an area has been secured.

Where a human force would depend upon the skills of a construction battalion to throw up ramparts, erect shield generators, and so on, the Externals tend to make use of their own biotechnology to accomplish a similar result. Once an area is selected on which a fortification is to be erected, they position a series of seedlike pods and bombard them with certain frequencies of radiation. This causes the pods to sprout and grow very rapidly. Under the careful guidance of skilled "gardeners," the resulting growth rapidly takes the shape desired. All told, an External fortification grows in roughly the same amount of time it would take a skilled team of engineers to build a similar one.

For the purposes of the abstract combat system, use the following types of External fortifications. Each is assumed to be outfitted with weaponry and defenses suitable to the area in which it is deployed. This includes special demands based on the local conditions, like a sealed environment or additional radiation shielding. In especially dangerous places, a fixed fortification might be reinforced with additional artillery or armor. Also the combat strength indicated below includes the troops assigned to base security and an assortment of weapons built into the structure. Additional troops might be assigned to the base to increase its combat strength.

*Frontier Bunker*: The most basic type of defensive structure grown by the Externals, this facility is generally erected in a position where it can serve as a forward observation post. The weapons and armor of a frontier bunker give it a combat strength of 100.

*Fortified Bunker*: Somewhat more solid and better defended than the frontier bunker, this structure is often used to hold an important position against expected enemy advances. Although not strong enough to resist a major offensive, it can be counted on to give the enemy a few headaches before they overcome it. In battle, the fortified bunker has a combat strength of 200. These structures are often used as communication relays.

*Command Bunker*: An External command bunker is a secure facility designed to oversee military operations in a given area. In many cases, a network of fortified or frontier bunkers is established around a central command bunker. These structures are often erected in conjunction with an ammunition dump, landing field, or other important facility. A command bunker has a combat strength of 300.

*Stronghold*: While all of the bunkers described above are intended to be self-contained facilities, the stronghold is often built to secure a population center or other important area. In combat, they have a strength of 500. The guns of a stronghold are powerful enough to allow it to fire on spacecraft orbiting above the world.

*Citadel*: A citadel is a massive military complex with the ability to control an entire country or similar region through a network of strongholds and the like. They mount a sophisticated series of defenses and powerful weapons allowing them to actively engage enemy spacecraft engaged in planetary bombardment. All told, the citadel has a combat strength of 750.

*Fortress:* The largest structure deployed to date by the Externals, this structure has the power to control an entire continent if supported by a network of citadels, strongholds, and other facilities. When several fortresses are linked together, they are able to provide all the command and control facilities needed to dominate an entire planet. All told, a fortress has a combat strength of 1,000 and is fully equipped to return the fire of orbiting spacecraft.

### External Fortifications

| Unit Type | General Purpose | Combat Strength |
|---|---|---|
| *Frontier Bunker* | Forward Observation | 100 |
| *Fortified Bunker* | Front Line Comm-Station | 200 |
| *Command Bunker* | Battlefield Control | 300 |
| *Stronghold* | City Command | 500 |
| *Citadel* | National Command | 750 |
| *Fortress* | Continental Command | 1000 |

## STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Although it is impossible to quantify any given set of tactics and state that the Externals always follow a given course of action in a specific situation, the first several months of the war have taught humanity a number of valuable lessons. As a rule, the alien invaders seem to employ several basic strategies depending upon their objectives in a given battle. Taken as a whole, it is possible that a learned observer might be able to guess at the ultimate aim of the enemy by a careful study of their past tactics.

### Scorched Earth

When the Externals first attacked Spes and the Hammer's Star system, most military analysts expected to see hostilities confined to that system. Although they made ready for additional advances, it was believed that they would claim this system and then fortify it to make a

stronghold. With the human populace of the system held hostage, the Verge Alliance would be reluctant to mount an all-out offensive to reclaim the system.

This theory proved to be utterly wrong.

Instead of claiming the system for themselves and then clamping down on the human settlers, the Externals set about depopulating Spes and its neighbors. Wherever there was a trace of human life, alien ships rained dark matter warheads down. Population centers, industrial complexes, and military bases were all treated as primary targets. No quarter was given as total annihilation of the local populace was the one and only objective of the campaign.

Exactly why the Externals opted to undertake so radical a tactic is something analysts have debated since the first hours of the war. Perhaps they felt that such an overwhelming show of force might break the nerve of the Verge's human defenders. The Externals may have assumed that, faced with what might appear to be an overwhelming alien threat, humanity would surrender.

Of course, this did not happen. Indeed, the sheer ferocity and barbarism of the External attack seems to have galvanized public and government opinion. As it seems clear that no concept of mercy exists in the External mind, the general sentiment goes, it is better to go down fighting than simply surrender and be executed.

Whether or not the Externals would employ these same tactics again remains to be seen. Clearly, they were willing to accept the surrender of the Ignatius system prior to its liberation by the Verge Alliance fleet. So too do they make repeated offers of mercy for those willing to lay down their arms in the Tendril system. Although conditions in Lucullus and Ptolemy, both of which are currently occupied by External forces, remain harsh, it appears that the people there are suffering no greater hardships than they would under the hand of a human conqueror.

In order to employ these tactics, a number of conditions must be met. The most important of these, of course, is that the system's defenders must be swept aside. Before any planetary bombardment can begin in earnest, a space fleet must be certain that it is safe from further space attack while its efforts are focused planetward. In addition to space fleets, this includes the elimination of orbital defense stations or planetary defense batteries. While the former are engaged like spacecraft, the latter are generally targeted and destroyed via orbital bombardment. A more detailed description of the strategies and tactics of planetary bombardment is presented later in this section.

The advantages of carrying out a scorched earth campaign are more or less offset by the disadvantages. Perhaps the greatest strategic advantage of such tactics is

that the occupying armies need not worry about controlling a large civilian population in the wake it invasion. By employing enhanced radiation weapons and biochemical agents, an invader can almost guarantee that few if any of the planet's original inhabitants are left alive.

By the same token, however, these tactics often leave the embattled planet unfit for habitation by the newly arrived force. After all, any planet so riddled with disease and radioactive dust that humanity cannot survive there isn't going to be able to support External life either. In addition, these tactics often destroy all of planet's heavy industry, communications networks, and so on. If the system is to be used as a base in the wake of scorched earth attack, an army cannot expect to seize enemy facilities and use them for their own.

Of course, many military units are equipped to survive weapons of mass destruction. Hardened positions can often withstand anything short of a direct hit from a dark matter warhead. As such, a long period of hunting down and eliminating such forces often follows the initial bombardment of a target world. It is assumed that such elements are still active at Hammer's Star, perhaps even on Spes itself.

The biggest problem these survivors face, (beyond survival itself, of course) is avoiding detection. Any use of heavy equipment is likely to be detected by External sensors and, as such, they are often forced to depend upon only the most rudimentary tools. Matters are greatly simplified for such people if they opt to simply hide themselves away. Because the survivors tend to be military personnel, however, many devote themselves to making harassing attacks on the enemy when possible.

## Sieges

In lieu of an all-out attack on a planet, the enemy has been known to deploy naval elements in staggered positions around it. In so doing, they erect a blockade that prevents shipping from reaching or leaving the planet.

The most notable example of this action is the current stalemate in the Tendril system. Although the Externals clearly attacked here with every intention of either occupying the system for themselves or laying it waste as they did in Hammer's Star, things did not go according to plan. The timely arrival of Verge Alliance forces broke the alien armada and prevented them from either landing troops on Alaundril or bombarding it from orbit.

As things stand now, an uneasy truce holds sway in the system. The Externals clearly control the space lanes and have effectively cut off Alaundril from all outside contact. At the same time, however, they have been unable to break the defenses of the planet. As things stand, a radical change in the existing balance of power is very unlikely.

The ultimate purpose of a siege is to break the will of those on the planet and, with luck, force them to surrender. Primarily, a siege is an economic measure designed to cut the trade lines that link a planet to other worlds. This is most effective when a colony is unable to support itself, perhaps because it must import food or other vital supplies.

When the colony has the ability to exist without imports, the blockade is far less effective. While it might deprive the inhabitants of luxuries and gradually degrade the morale of the populace, they need not fear starvation or such. Indeed, in many cases the morale of a determined populace can be bolstered by the knowledge that they can't be starved out. Of course, much depends on the willingness of the citizenry to believe in their leaders and military.

One of the biggest problems with a space blockade or siege is the sheer volume of space that must be secured. Because planets are large and must be defended as massive spheres, even the tightest blockade is subject to minor leaks. A fast, well-defended ship can rush through the blockade with at least a fair chance of success. Because of this, important intelligence about the enemy can be smuggled out or vital supplies carried in. Even the best blockade is not perfectly secure.

Breaking a siege is a difficult proposition. After all, if the embattled colony had the firepower to turn away the defenders, a siege could never have been instigated. As a rule, the only way in which a planetary blockade like the one at Tendril can be broken is through outside help. If a relief force arrives to liberate the planet, the ships in the blockade can find themselves pinned between two enemies. As the newly arrived space fleet bears down on them, the defenders on the surface of the planet generally open fire as well. In the history of space warfare, such circumstances have often spelled the end for a major force.

## Occupation

In theory, the ultimate end of almost every military action is the occupation of enemy territory. Indeed, in Hammer's Star, the Externals made no attempt to take large numbers of prisoners or preserve existing structures; the system itself was occupied and converted into an External stronghold.

To date, the best example of an alien occupation can be found at Lucullus. Here, a couple of factions chose to ally themselves with the Externals. Although other factions chose to resist the system's new masters, those who opted to sell out the human species, like the Jamaican Syndicate and Union Penates, had the firepower to back up their decision. As such, after a brief clash of naval forces, the Externals occupied the planets of the Lucullus system. Despite minor opposition from the Technospiders and their kin and an ongoing problem with guerrilla forces, the occupation of this system went largely without incident.

When the Externals move into a system, they immediately appoint a military governor and institute martial law. As often as not, this ruler is a gardhyi, although it is not unknown for a sifarv or n'sss or exceptional merit to be awarded such a post. In almost every case, prominent citizens are brought before their new master. Thanks to the influence of the teln, these poor folk are transformed into loyal citizens of the new order.

Depending upon the exact conditions in the occupied state, the rule of the Externals is more or less severe. At Lucullus, on the world of Penates, the aliens have not been well received. Despite the fact that the planet's leaders have sworn fealty to their new masters, the general populace is kept under control only by force of arms. In this case, armed troopers, often bareem, patrol the city streets around the clock. These soldiers respond to any violation of External authority with lethal force.

Another common tactic employed by the Externals is the establishment of concentration camps in out-of-the-way places. Those who do not obey orders or who threaten the authority of the aliens are sent to these stockades. As often as not, their fate here is death. Mass executions are held every day as a steady influx of prisoners would otherwise overflow the capacity of these facilities.

In other cases, the fate of the prisoners is far worse. On Penates, for example, large numbers of citizens are being transformed into kroath. It may be that this pleases some twisted, alien sense of irony—transforming whole towns of enemies into faithful warriors who carry the External banner against their own kind.

# SECTION FIVE:
# INVASION–THE FIRST YEAR

## THE WAR: YEAR ONE

The war began with a lightning quick attack on the 15th of January in the year 2503. From there, it has proceeded to the point where the Galactic Concord is actually considering abandoning the Verge altogether.

Clearly, the alien civilization beyond the Lightning Nebula had learned much from their previous incursions into human space. The technology and prisoners they claimed in the destruction of the Silver Bell colony taught them many lessons. With an understanding of our technology and tactics, our physiology and psychology, they were far better equipped than were the men and women called upon to repel their advances.

The future of the Verge hangs in the balance. Will humanity be able to pull some manner of victory from the battle? Indeed, is it even possible for the Galactic Concord and its allies to establish a standoff with the Externals? The answers to these questions remain unknown. In order to plan for the future, it is vital that we understand the past.

This map on the previous page shows the first four months of the war. The following chronology lays out the critical elements of the war's opening months. Additional maps are presented to illustrate the ebb and flow of the war's progress.

## February 2501: Seeds of War

The first incursions of what was to become the External War began early in 2501. As Star Force Vice Admiral Adrianus Raastad was leading a relentless search for the pirate enclaves believed to dot the fringes of the Hammer's Star system, a small fleet of nineteen craft appeared inside the orbit of Bruelt. When reports of the incursion first reached him, Raastad felt that he had at last chased the renegade privateers into the open. In short order, however, countless sensor readings confirmed that these craft were unlike any built by humans.

Although his own command, the battleship *Vition*, was on the far side of the system, a number of Concord ships were in position to intercept the unidentified intruders. The light carrier *Inamorata* and the battlecruiser *Constitution* were quickly dispatched. Accompanied by a handful of escorts, they met the mysterious ships near the asteroid Rakke in the Vicek Belt.

Despite initial efforts at contact, the only response the Concord vessels received to their hails was a deadly barrage. The commander of *Constitution* reacted instantly,

replying in kind. In the short battle that followed, *Inamorata* and *Constitution* were both heavily damaged. In the end, however, the carrier's squadrons did their job with cold efficiency: The aliens were vanquished.

Before the last shot was fired, however, the Externals managed to land a trio of assault ships on Rakke. The Concord Marines stationed there met their attackers bravely, but were clearly overmatched from the outset. By the time the Star Force was able to rid themselves of the enemy fleet, there were few if any human beings left alive on Rakke.

By order of Vice Admiral Raastad, the Concord fleet bombarded the aliens. Only after a withering barrage were any of the ship's troops allowed to descend to the surface of the asteroid. They found a scene of unspeakable horrors there. The marines had been overmatched and many had been literally torn apart. There were alien remains scattered amid the human corpses and External weapons here and there.

Military forensic teams descended on the ruins immediately after the Concord Marines carried aboard *Constitution*. They learned a great deal about their enemy, the majority of which has been printed elsewhere. Many came away from the encounter believing that humanity was now safe. The aliens had been beaten back. But as subsequent events show, this was simply a probing mission. At least one of the External craft fired off a drive-

# The Course of the War MAP 1

READOUT: THE FIRST FOUR MONTHS

☐ = 25 light years

DIRECT/FAST LINK
WITH OLD SPACE
BROKEN (12/2093)

REFUGEES FLEE THE
DESTRUCTION OF SHEB
(10-12/2093)

DIVERGENT LANCE
RECONNAISSANCE
(12/2093)

DIVERGENT ALLIANCE
RECONNAISSANCE (09/2093)

THE
LIGHTNING
NEBULA

FIRST ATTACK ON HAVEN'S
STAR (03/2093)

capable torpedo before being destroyed. This was, there could be no doubt, a report on the resistance offered by the inhabitants of Hammer's Star.

Vice Admiral Raastad didn't believe for a moment that the system had seen the last of these alien invaders. He knew that the Externals had learned far more from their encounter with humankind than the other way around. The Externals would be back, Raastad was certain, and this time they would be back in force.

There are many who believe that Raastad acted improperly in ordering the Star Force ships to open fire on the asteroid. Much information about the attackers, their weapons, and their tactics may have been lost. Raastad has never responded to these criticisms, although it is quite likely that he was called upon to explain his orders to his superiors. Apparently, whatever answers he gave them were judged acceptable, for Raastad was promoted to Admiral in December 2502 and given full command over the Concord's forces in Hammer's Star.

Over the course of the next several months, Raastad lobbied for additional funding and defensive forces. While Hammer's Star boasted one of the most potent defensive arrays in the Verge, Raastad insisted that it must be much stronger. He fought his way through wall after wall of political opposition. Gradually, ships were dispatched to join *Vition, Constitution,* and *Inamorata* in the defensive fleet. In retrospect, it seems possible that Raastad might have been able turn aside the initial attacks of the External wars if he had been given another five years to prepare. As the old saying goes: *For want of a nail . . .*

## January 2503:
## Defeat at Hammer's Star

On 15 January 2503, the External War began in earnest.

Without warning, a massive alien fleet surged into the Hammer's Star system. The heart of the invading force was a trio of massive battlewagons roughly comparable to humanity's own fortress ships. The Concord admiralty has since named these monstrous craft for the rivers of Hell in Dante's *Inferno: Acheron, Styx,* and *Phlegethon.*

Instead of the nineteen ships that had tested the system's defenses a few years earlier, humanity was faced with an armada. In addition to the three fortress ships, a dozen dreadnoughts and a score of battle cruisers brought their guns to bear. Admiral Raastad had been proven right—much to his own dismay.

This time, Admiral Raastad wasn't cut off from the action. By chance or by choice, the alien fleet was bearing down on *Vition* and her escort fleet. Again, the Galactic Concord attempted to hail the alien ships. Aware that there was little chance his offers of peaceful negotiation would be acknowledged, however, the Admiral ordered his fleet to make ready for battle.

The majority of the ships advancing on Hammer's Star were of organic construction, similar to those that had been encountered countless times before along the External frontier. The three fortress ships, however, were something new. Much to the surprise of Admiral Raastad and his intelligence officers, these were clearly technological vehicles like the *Vition* and her fleet. For the first time, humans had encountered the works of the sifarv.

The outcome of the engagement was never in doubt. Long before the first shot was fired, Admiral Raastad knew he could never overcome the awesome battle fleet arrayed before him. Still, he was determined to do what he could. Without hesitation, he sent word of the looming disaster to Spes and the other human outposts in the system. His order was simple and unquestioned: *evacuate at once!* The Star Force would do what it could to delay the invaders, but that would be precious little.

The battle that followed was terrible indeed. One by one, the human ships were targeted and destroyed. In short order, there would be nothing left of the system's brave defenders. Despite overwhelming odds, not a single Concord vessel broke ranks. Time and time again, Admiral Raastad addressed his officers, reminding them that every minute of battle was another minute during which the citizens of Hammer's Star could escape.

Although there were no survivors from the *Vition's* battle group, stories of heroism were carried to the rest of humanity by the refugees who poured out of the system. Perhaps the most amazing of these involved the light carrier *Inamorata.* With her fighters deployed, she was left with only her own light armaments to defend herself. The alien fleet, recognizing the carrier as a fairly weak target, closed in for the kill. The damaged vessel began to retreat, limping away and drawing a handful of enemy craft with her. Just as she was overtaken, however, *Inamorata* showed her true colors. With a burst of speed, she made clear to one and all that her engines where not as badly damaged as she had led her attackers to believe.

Before the aliens knew what was happening, *Inamorata* had wheeled about and was bearing down on them. As cannon fire tore into her hull, the ship's power core was deliberately overloaded. The resulting explosion destroyed *Inamorata* and set off a series of chain reactions in which six enemy ships were crippled or destroyed.

The last ship to be lost was the flagship *Vition.* Badly damaged and with Admiral Raastad manning the helm himself, the dreadnought fought her way through the escort fleet and bore down upon *Styx.* With a last burst of speed, the system's last remaining defender slammed into the hull of the alien fortress ship. It was hoped, a last message explained, that *Vition's* sensors had pinpointed a vital control nexus.

SECTION FIVE: INVASION—THE FIRST YEAR

*Vition* exploded, ripping open the alien vessel. A huge fireball bloomed outward, feeding on the escaping atmosphere within until the airless vacuum starved it into submission. A series of secondary explosions ripped through *Styx* and, for a moment, it looked very much like *Vition's* kamikaze attack would prove successful. Apparently, however, the damage control parties and mechanisms aboard *Styx* were able to stabilize the damage.

In the end, Raastad managed only to slow *Styx* down. This meant that *Acheron* and *Phlegethon* reached Spes well ahead of their sister ship. By the time the wounded fortress ship limped into orbit, there were very few human beings left alive on the blue and green orb below them.

## February 2503: Isolation

While it was impossible for humanity to guess how much the Externals knew about the colonies in the Verge, early evidence pointed to a disturbing conclusion. Shortly after the attack on Hammer's Star, the drivesat relay at Tendril lost its connection with Old Space. At

### Adventure Idea: The Fall of Spes

Heroes visiting the colonies on Spes might learn of the approaching External fleet through sensors on their own starship or via a civil defense broadcast. As the heroic fleet fights a delaying action, the heroes might be called upon to undertake any number of hurried activities. The exact events here can be determined by the nature of the group.

If they lack a starship, the most obvious course of action for them is to find passage out of the system. Of course, with everyone on Spes doing everything they can to get away before the aliens arrive, starship owners extort all they can from potential passengers and panicked citizens fight for every possible seat.

Players with a starship might find themselves on the opposite end of the situation. Mobs might try to force their way onto the ship, possibly damaging it badly in the process. Others offer them wealth and other rewards. In the end, who or what they decide to take off the planet with them is wholly up to the players.

In all cases, the Gamemaster should make certain to allow the heroes plenty of chances for heroism and self-less acts. These might not be rewarded instantly, but word of their heroism should certainly accompany the heroes when they leave the planet. Sooner or later, they will be repaid in kind for their efforts at the Battle of Hammer's Star.

Of course, the same is true for those heroes who don't pay at least a little attention to the suffering around them. If they turn deaf ears on the cries of the helpless, the Gamemaster should make certain that such misdeeds come to the attention of others. Those who have been left to suffer and die at the hands of the Externals may certainly have friends outside the Hammer's Star system.

first, this seemed to be nothing more important than a technical failure somewhere in the chain or relay stations that bridged the several hundred light-year gap between the Verge and the realm of the stellar nations.

When word reached the StarMech settlers of Tendril, the truth became apparent. An alien task force had apparently circumnavigated the Verge, severing the vital communications link in at least one spot.

In time, of course, the stellar nations would realize what had happened. Presumably, they would send ships to defend their outposts in the Verge. Whether such relief efforts could come in time, however, and in sufficient force to repel the invaders, was something no one could guess.

It is important to note that this was an important turning point in the war, although many people did not recognize it as such. Most officers assumed that the aliens had sent only a small fleet or single cruiser on this mission around the Verge. To send a larger force would have been to risk detection and ruin the chances of surprise at Hammer's Star. Others speculated that sabotage and betrayal were indicated—they envisioned human agents of the Externals severing the Verge's link with Old Space to serve their alien masters. In truth, neither of these proved to be the case.

The Externals had indeed taken the risk of sending a massive fleet around the flanks of human civilization in the Verge. They chose to risk detection in order to ensure a victory in the event that their target was heavily fortified. Their gamble paid off. The External fortress ship that was to become known by the name *Lethe* was now positioned, along with her massive escort fleet, on the far side of the Verge from Hammer's Star. Although it would be many months before humanity encountered *Lethe*, she remained in the void between Old Space and the Verge, waiting for just the right moment to strike.

## March 2503: A Call To Arms

As news of the External attack filtered back through the rest of the Verge, fear gripped the populace. Just as countless people had poured out of the Hammer's Star system before the attacking aliens could reach them, so too did many others begin an exodus that would bring them ultimately to distant suns.

Every star system feared that it would be the next target of the alien invaders. Throughout the Verge, defenses were rushed into place. Those that did not flee armed themselves and formed militia, ready to offer whatever resistance they might to alien shock troopers. Ships in dry dock for routine repairs or maintenance were pressed back into service, armed and outfitted with whatever shielding and armor might be available.

No one knew if it would be enough.

At this same time, the Galactic Concord sent out a call for unity. When the war erupted, Undersecretary Michael Thayne was in the Verge, tending to Concord business on Aegis. As its highest-ranking official, he assumed command of all Concord operations in the Verge for the duration of the emergency. Some saw this as an ambitious play for power and questioned his motives. In the end, however, these objections went largely unheard. There was no doubt that a single hand must guide the ship of state if humanity was to offer any serious opposition to the aliens.

Thayne sent out a call for unity in the Verge. In a moving speech delivered from the Concord offices on Bluefall, he asked that every system in the region pool its resources under the banner of the Galactic Concord.

"For too many centuries," Thayne intoned, "our species has been contentious and divided. The nations of the Earth fought each other, the worlds of the solar system fought each other, and the stellar nations fought each other. So far, we have been lucky. As we dragged our own kind down, often hovering on the brink of extinction, there has never been anyone around to seize the opportunity to exploit our fratricidal nature. Now, things have changed. Humans either must put aside their ancient differences or learn to accept the merciless hand of an alien master. I know my choice and I call upon the rest of you to make yours. Survival or extinction: It is not a difficult decision."

## April 2503: The Verge Alliance

Reactions to Thayne's call for unity were mixed. It was clear from his words that he meant for Vergers to form more than a simple alliance.

The first response to Thayne's call came, quite predictably, from Regent Christopher Hale, ruler of the Bluefall Regency. While he stopped short of accepting the whole of Thayne's plan, he announced that the military forces of Bluefall would be merged into a single unified force with their counterparts in Galactic Concord. Thus it was that the Verge Alliance was first formed.

In addition to the Regency and its colonies on Rinstoke and Terivine, other major players saw the advantage of joining the fledgling Alliance. The StarMech allied government of Tendril, while refusing to break its ties with its distant parent state, announced that its fleet would now sail under the Verge Alliance colors. Similarly, the

### Adventure Idea: Panic in the Streets

The disruption of drivesat communications with the nations of Old Space is more than a little bit upsetting to the citizens of the Verge. Although the government insists that this was simply a coincidental technical failure, the general public won't believe it. The truth of the matter is obvious, and the more the government calls for calm, the more panicked the populace becomes.

The possibilities for adventure in a situation like this are manifold. With many powerful people fearing another long period of isolation, hoarding of food, medicine, and other essentials begins on a massive scale. The heroes might find themselves caught up in riots or tasked with carrying important supplies to isolated areas.

As word of the External invasion spreads, a mass exodus might begin. Civilian ships might begin to make their way back to Old Space in an effort to escape from the onslaught of the alien hordes. Certainly, the government is reluctant to dispatch any military vessels to escort these craft. The heroes, therefore, might be hired to ride shotgun with a convoy of civilian refugees.

Of course, many of those who flee the Tendril system and follow the chain of drivesat relays back to the realms of the stellar nations run smack into Lethe and her escort craft. This armada is more than a match for anything short of a main battle group and is likely to make short work of the refugees. Heroes who survive an encounter with these ships could gain valuable information greatly prized by the military in the Tendril system.

### Adventure Idea: Politics as Usual

Undersecretary Thayne's call for unity is certain to create a good deal of political uncertainty throughout the Verge. Some nations embrace it openly while others reject it as a blatant power play by the Galactic Concord. Neither of these groups is likely to create much call for adventurers, however, as their minds are made up. Far more useful to the Gamemaster are those planets sitting on the fence.

If the heroes are acting as representatives of the Galactic Concord or its close ally, the Bluefall Regency, they might be dispatched to sway the leaders of these worlds. If they have no formal ties to the government, situations can be created that enable the adventurers to expose an alien conspiracy or underground movement on the planet. In this way, the leaders of the world can accept the challenge of unity offered by Undersecretary Thayne.

For example, the Gamemaster might speculate that a given leader is about to renounce the Galactic Concord's effort. The heroes might discover that his actions were result of alien influence or the advice of a quisling. Exposing this traitor can be a very exciting adventure that wins the heroes the thanks of the local government as well as the Galactic Concord.

For those adventurers who dislike the subtle maneuverings of the political arena, more direct actions can be employed. The heroes might stumble upon a plot to assassinate a leader who wishes to side with Thayne and the Concord in order to usher in a replacement who would remain neutral or, worse yet, even side with the Exeat. Exposing these conspirators might involve a wild exchange of gunfire, frantic chase scenes through the streets of a major city, or the careful defusing of a ticking bomb. Or, perhaps, all three.

Orion colony on Mantebron officially cemented its already solid ties with the Regency and Concord. The worlds of Terivine and Corrivale, each governed by more than one power, became members of the new Alliance, as did the independent nation of Argos. Even the balkanized states of Lucullus agreed to put aside their differences and join with their neighbors.

The other systems of the Verge were reluctant to give up any measure of their sovereignty, even in the face of such a deadly menace. Most remained somewhat neutral, accepting the general ideals expressed by Thayne without making any move to join in.

Only two governments openly balked at the call for unity: The warring colonies of Algemron announced that they would have nothing to do with the Verge Alliance. Considering the viciousness of their decades-old war, few were surprised.

### May 2503: Anticipation

The nearest major systems to Hammer's Star seemed likely next targets. If the aliens wanted to strike at the heart of human civilization in the Verge, they must focus their attention on the major systems first. The rest, they would reason, could be mopped up after the war had been won.

Possible initial targets for the External intruders included Argos (31.68 light-years), Lucullus (32.31), Vieron (35.63), Rinstoke (36.18), and Oberon (39.37). Of these worlds, the most heavily defended were Lucullus and Oberon. For all their military might, however, these sys-

tems were far less sophisticated than those found at Hammer's Star or Aegis. If these systems were to be brought up to the point where they would stand a chance against the enemy, military fleets would have to reinforce the extant defenses. On the other hand, Vieron and Rinstoke were so poorly defended that it would be almost impossible to reinforce them to the point where they could repel an External attack. Argos fell somewhere in the middle. Clearly, stopping the aliens now would require careful deployment of military craft and more than a little luck.

The Concord Admiralty was now faced with a serious challenge. Exactly how much information the Externals had managed to acquire about the human defenses was unknown. Similarly, their military strength was impossible to determine. Clearly, they had been able to overwhelm the human defenses at Hammer's Star. While these were among the most potent in the Verge, they were caught unaware. Could an alert, ready system have fared better? These mysteries were certain to be answered, but how great a cost humanity would have to pay for this information remained to be seen.

### June 2503: Betrayal at Lucullus

For many weeks the aliens seemed content to hold their position in the Hammer's Star system. Presumably, this time was spent shoring up their defenses and making repairs to their fleet. Meanwhile, Undersecretary Thayne, Regent Hale, and the other members of the Verge Alliance's ruling council met to orchestrate their defenses.

They decided that the most likely targets for the Externals would be either Lucullus or Argos. Lucullus was better defended, something they assumed the aliens would know, but would make an excellent staging point for a follow-up attack on Aegis or Tendril (by way of the very lightly defended Ignatius). Argos, on the other hand, would offer less resistance, but offered a less attractive staging point. Although Aegis was easily assailed from Argos, it was too remote to provide easy access to any other major system.

The decision was made to split the majority of the Verge Alliance fleet into four groups. Each of these would move to a position where it might best support the existing defenses of a given system. With a little luck, the aliens would find themselves facing much stronger opposition than they expected.

The strongest of these task forces was the First Battle Group. Commanded by the massive *Lighthouse*, it would travel to Argos and prepare to make a stand should the aliens advance in that direction. Although Argos was not particularly well fortified, the armament of the 1st BG was nothing short of awesome. Even if the whole of the

### Adventure Idea: Into the Dark Unknown

During this phase of the war, the stage is set for further adventures involving political maneuvering and intrigue. Again, the party might be sent as representatives of the proposed Verge Alliance, hoping to convince some of the neutral states to join the fledgling organization. On the other hand, they might be tasked with attempting to sway the governments of Algemron and Oberon from their openly hostile stance.

There are also far less palatable adventures.

The heroes might find themselves sent on an intelligence-gathering mission into the Hammer's Star system or even the distant Lightning Nebula. In the former case, they encounter great devastation. An overview of conditions in the Hammer's Star system can be found in the States of War section.

In the latter instance, they work to discover the location of a theoretical staging area somewhere in the neighborhood of LN-1, the neutron star at the heart of the Lightning Nebula. An expedition into the clouds of the Lightning Nebula is an excellent way for the Gamemaster to pass out secrets about the Externals, their technology, and the hierarchy of their empire.

External fleet were sent to Argos, the battle would be a hotly contested one.

The Second Battle Group, centered on the Regency's flagship *Sanctuary,* would take up a position in the better defended Lucullus system. Alliance strategists believed that the combination of existing system defenses and naval power would be enough to turn away the External menace. Coordinating the addition of the local star fleet to the Alliance's own battle group proved troublesome, however. The balkanization of the Lucullus system made it difficult to coordinate the actions of ships and forces commanded by political rivals. In the end, the matter was resolved by forming the whole of the Lucullus navy into a second, independent force. While political positioning was still a problem, it became a matter to be dealt with locally by the more than capable Ramil ibn Beighur, whose light cruiser *Birmingham* became the flagship of the United Lucullan Defense Force (ULDF).

The Third and Fourth Battle Groups assumed defen-

sive positions at Tendril and Aegis. In the event that an External attack proved too much for either Lucullus or Argos, these forces would be called upon to protect those vital systems. Important secondary orders were issued to the ships of the 3rd BG. If they received word that the battle had gone well, they were to depart the Verge at best speed and bring word of recent events to Old Space.

The Alliance commanders knew their strategy was not without hazards. If the aliens opted to drive directly toward Aegis, they might be caught with only a secondary defense facing the main body of the External invaders. There were countless ways in which this strategy might fail, but it seemed the best defense possible considering the limited resources of the Verge Alliance.

In the end, the Admiralty guessed right. The aliens attacked where they were expected. That having been said, however, it must be noted that this insight on the part of the Verge Alliance military leaders didn't stop the battle from being an absolute defeat for the forces of humanity.

On June 7, the attack came. A large External armada, commanded by the fortress ships *Phlegethon* and *Acheron,* appeared at the edge of the Lucullus system. With the alien fleet moving relentlessly forward, *Sanctuary* and her escorts moved to intercept them. It was presumed, rightly, that *Styx* and her escorts had remained in the Hammer's Star system to secure it against a possible counterattack by the forces of humans and their allies.

On orders from the *Birmingham,* the ships of the ULDF formed a second rank, hanging back and assuming a defensive posture. If any of the invaders managed to break through the Verge Alliance ranks, this fleet would be charged with stopping them before they reached the inhabited worlds beyond.

As soon as the battle was joined, it became clear that the Verge Alliance had been betrayed. Many ships of the ULDF opened fire as soon as the aliens did. Their targets, however, were not the sinister shapes of the External fleet. Clearly, some of the local barons had decided to throw their lot in with the invaders. As *Birmingham* and the few loyal factions of the ULDF watched in horror, their sister ships targeted them and the ships of the Verge Alliance's Second Battle Group.

One of the earliest casualties in the battle was actually an innocent bystander. Shortly before hostilities broke out, an evrem trading vessel had entered the system. When the Externals arrived, the crystalline evrem ship was trapped between the two fleets. Despite repeated urgings from the Verge Alliance fleet, it was unwilling or unable to withdraw from the system. When the battle was joined, the hapless craft was targeted and destroyed by an External cruiser. Amazingly, Verge Alliance escorts were able to recover a handful of survivors in lifepods even as the battle raged around them.

## Adventure Idea: The Fifth Column

his is an uneasy time for the human civilizations of the Verge. There can be no doubt that the Externals are not content to stay where they are. Sooner or later, they will strike again. The question, of course, is when.

At this point in the war, the Verge Alliance has not yet come to expect that any real fifth column exists. The assumption is that the battle lines are drawn and clearly defined by species. On one side are the ranks of humanity and its allies: the fraal, mechalus, weren, and such. On the other are the masters of the Exeat and their allies and slaves. The concept of defectors, traitors, and turncoats on either side seems a lesser danger than that of open destruction at the hands of an enemy armada.

As both sides consider their next moves, however, the truth will soon become all too clear. Gamemasters should keep this in mind and use adventures set during this time to hint at the possibility of treachery. Heroes might stumble upon rings of terrorists headed up by gardhyi, n'sss, or even the parasitic teln. The more that can be done to set up an atmosphere of paranoia or intrigue, the better.

This is an excellent chance for the Gamemaster to begin hinting that some major faction of human society is having dealings with the Externals. Of course, it's too early for them to begin to learn the truth: VoidCorp is selling out the human species. Still, they might stumble into any number of unusual encounters that point them in that general direction.

It could be that the adventurers might come across a small corporation that has been selling information to the aliens. As they investigate it, the heroes might discover that it's a puppet of some larger entity. As they attempt to unravel the tangled web of ownership and investments behind the subsidiary, they take their first steps toward solving a mystery that shakes the entire fabric of human space.

Recognizing that the battle was certainly lost, the Verge Alliance forces sought to break off. As their numbers fell rapidly, an order to retreat was echoed from

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## Adventure Idea: The Resistance

To say that every one of Lucullus'ss factions sided with the enemy would be untrue. The Technospiders are the most notable exception. Always a thorn in the side of the other factions, they were intentionally cut out of the deal that bought the system a place in the Exeat. When the ULDF showed its true colors, ground forces from several factions moved against the Technospiders in Penates and their other enclaves. While these forces succeeded in breaking the power of the Technospiders, they were unable to conquer the spirit of these freedom-loving technocrats.

In the weeks following the battle at Lucullus, however, the Technospiders moved underground, forming a Grid-based resistance movement that seemed always to stay one step ahead of the enforcers. There are countless ways in which a Gamemaster can make use of the Lucullan resistance movement in his campaign.

The fact that the average citizen of Lucullus also had no love of the External overlords who now held sway over their lives made matters somewhat easier for the Technospider underground. People who might have considered them dangerous or subversive before the occupation now opened their doors to them. A Technospider operative being pursued by the Occupation Police could vanish in a thousand different ways.

If the heroes are in the Lucullus system when the battle breaks out, they can become founding members of the underground. This is especially well suited for campaigns that focus on Grid running and make the most of the 26th century's computer networks. Heroic shadows can find all sorts of work disrupting enemy lines of communication, stealing important data files, and otherwise causing problems for the Externals.

Indeed, it is important to note that the Technospider underground has undertaken a broadband approach to tormenting the enemy. To be sure, their most talented members attempt to crack the highest levels of External computer security, but only a small fraction of the Technospiders have the skills necessary to accomplish (or even attempt) such missions. These raids are even more difficult when considering the great difficulty in understanding the Externals' linguistic base. Most attacks, therefore, are directed against the human turncoats. What was once merely an avocation for up-and-coming Technospiders has become a deadly game of computer cat-and-mouse. Even less-experienced Technospiders tear through the computers of the turncoat factions, wreaking havoc. These infiltrations might result in anything from misdirected orders for office supplies to phantom messages that tie up system resources with page after page of gibberish.

Those heroes who do not reside in the Lucullus system may find contact with the Technospiders an exciting and lucrative proposition. They might be called upon to act as couriers, running the External blockade which now holds the system secure.

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ship to ship. By the time these instructions could be acted upon, however, fully 25% of the Verge Alliance fleet had been lost. Another quarter of the fleet was able to withdraw to Aegis, but was so badly damaged that the admiralty was forced to scrap them.

While the defeat at Lucullus was not nearly so complete as the one suffered at Hammer's Star, it taught the Verge Alliance a terrible lesson. As impossible as it might seem, there were men and women willing to sell out their own birthright for a place in alien pecking order of the I'krl Theocracy. After Lucullus, the Verge Alliance high command took seriously the idea of traitors and saboteurs.

In the weeks and months that followed the human defeat, the Externals and turncoat barons of Lucullus would come to know and fear the sight of *Birmingham*. Although badly damaged in the battle, she managed to slip away and effect repairs. Operating from a hidden base, presumably an offworld facility constructed under the auspices of the Technospiders, she conducted a series of brutal hit and run attacks. No enemy ship was safe. Indeed, the citizens of Lucullus, most of who felt no loyalty to their new alien masters, dubbed Ramil ibn Beighur the 26th century Robin Hood. Some even assumed that he was the de facto head of the Technospiders and christened them his merry men.

The major landing forces on Penates brought humans into close contact with the kadarans and bareem for the first time. As these aliens began to *grow* their fortifications, loyal human agents studied them and gathered information about them in hopes of passing it along to the Verge Alliance. More information about this can be found in the section *States of War*.

## July 2503: Pressing the Advantage

In the days after the defeat at Lucullus, it became clear that the aliens had also managed to assemble an alliance of sorts with the pirates and corsairs of the Ptolemy system. While those renegades were hardly a threat on their own, they increased the already staggering weight of the External forces. What information they might have been able to carry into the hands of the Externals was impossible to guess, but it was now certain that humanity would have few secrets from the alien marauders.

The month of July saw the aliens press their advantage. With the human fleet driven from the Lucullus system, they paused only briefly before moving on to attack other human strongholds.

Leaving the quisling ships of the ULDF behind to mop up resistance at Lucullus, the aliens divided their force and moved against Mantebron and Ignatius.

This tactic caused a great deal of confusion among the

Verge Alliance admiralty. Although many expected the aliens to move against Aegis in the wake of their victory, they chose to give this fortified world a wide berth. They were unable to determine the exact reason for this caution, but they assumed the Externals knew of the massive fortifications awaiting them at Bluefall.

The alien move against Mantebron was totally unexpected by the leaders of the Verge Alliance. They saw that remote system as next to useless strategically. Its resources were limited and it was too remote to serve as much of a staging point. Alliance intelligence assumed, quite rightly, that the Externals knew something about the system we didn't, likely associated with the Glassmaker ruins there.

Exactly what the aliens hoped to dredge up was impossible to guess. Perhaps they were simply fishing for something unknown even to them and hoping to get lucky. This theory was comforting, because it suggested that the occupation of Mantebron might serve to tie up important forces that might otherwise assail important Alliance positions.

This assumption also cast the quality of the alien intelligence in doubt. To date, the Externals had shown themselves keenly aware of human positions, technologies, and strategies. It was impossible for Undersecretary

Thayne and the other leaders of the Alliance to deny. If Kadar's Exeat had gone to the trouble of storming Mantebron, they almost certainly had an excellent reason for doing so.

Of course, the attack on Ignatius was not unexpected. Unaware that *Lethe* lay in wait just beyond the Verge, humanity assumed that the Externals would drive headlong toward Tendril and its vital drivesat connection with Old Space. Because of this, they have since assumed that the attack on Ignatius was a feint, intended to convince the human commanders that they had indeed deduced the alien strategy.

When the External fortress ship *Acheron* popped out of drive space at Ignatius, she found herself confronted by only a ragtag assortment of defending craft and fortifications. There was obviously no chance for the human defenders of the system. The inhabitants of Ignatius would have to take their chances with the untested mercy of their alien attackers. As such, the government of Ignatius signaled its unconditional surrender without firing a single shot.

## August 2503: Victory at Ignatius!

As the External fleet moved to take control of the Ignatius system, a veritable wall of Alliance vessels fell out of drivespace. After falling back to Aegis, *Sanctuary* and the surviving ships of the 2nd Battle Group had quickly regrouped and made their way to Ignatius. It was their intention to block any move against the Tendril system. If they were defeated, any alien ships that managed to get past their blockade would find the ships of the 3rd Battle Group allied against them at Tendril. Thanks far more to luck than military planning, the Verge Alliance fleet found itself with an immediate upper hand in the battle.

Although the fleet action that followed the arrival of *Sanctuary* in the Ignatius system was intense, it was also thankfully brief. While the Exeat ships fought bravely, some might even say suicidally, to the last, the odds were against them almost from the start. This was due largely to the quick destruction of the alien flagship *Acheron.* Trapped between the *Sanctuary* and the battle-ship *Pittsburgh,* she was subjected to a withering barrage of fire. Recognizing their advantage, squadrons of fighters from the carriers *Monarch* and *Patriarch* swept in to support the capital ships. After nearly an hour of sustained fire, *Pittsburgh's* main guns scored a critical hit on *Acheron's* drive section. This triggered a series of secondary, internal explosions that tore through the ship from stern to bow. With a visible shudder, the External craft broke in half amidships and tore itself apart in a matter of seconds.

Although the rest of the External fleet fought on for nearly two days, the destruction of *Acheron* effectively signaled the end of the Battle of Ignatius. For the first time in the war, the Verge Alliance had won a decisive victory. The fact that it was largely a product of good fortune was left out of the press releases, of course.

Meanwhile, Verge Alliance agents worked day and night to learn what they could of the Externals' interest in Mantebron. To date, no one had been able to determine why this fairly unimportant planet might be of such interest to the Exeat.

### Adventure Idea: The Shadow of Death

There is little that even the most valiant group of adventures can do to turn aside the gradually advancing fleet of alien vessels. This doesn't mean, however, that this situation is devoid of opportunities for adventuring. Indeed, the looming presence of this shadow of death can make an excellent backdrop for exciting scenarios of many kinds.

An excellent adventure might be staged around the creation of an underground movement. Weapons and other vital supplies would have to be gathered and stockpiled as the aliens draw ever closer. After all, none of the heroes is likely willing to simply sit back and welcome their new overlords. Some people, and the heroes are presumably among that number, are going to take up arms against the aliens.

The heroes might also be tasked with transporting something very important offworld. As the noose of alien ships tightens around Ignatius, local Alliance representatives assemble vital information place in the heroes' charge. It would then be their responsibility to get it to the Verge Alliance high command at Aegis.

### Adventure Idea: Alien Secrets at Mantebron

Exactly what the External fleets hoped to discover at Mantebron was something humanity could only guess. To be sure, the most frightening answer was also the most likely. Most people believed, including Verge Alliance leaders like Undersecretary Thayne and Bluefall's Regent Christopher Hale, that the Externals thought they could find some manner of new weapon among the ruined cities of the Externals.

To a certain extent, this speculation was true. However, there was more to the External plan than that. It was soon to become clear that they understood far more about the technology of both the Glassmakers and Stoneburners than humans did.

What they hoped to discover, it is now believed, was some way to harness the secret power of the deepfallen. Even as Verge leaders were slowly coming to grips with the knowledge that those aquatic creatures were artificial constructs of the long forgotten Glassmakers, the Externals were already planning to tap the deepfallen for their own uses.

To some extent, the aliens were successful. While they were apparently unable to learn anything useful about the deepfallen, External scientists found the ruins on Mantebron to be a wealth of alien secrets and forgotten technologies. Their superior understanding of the Precursor species allowed them to more fully understand things that humanity had to date been unable to comprehend or had dismissed as worthless.

Gradually, the aliens began to incorporate some of the secrets they found at Mantebron into their own technologies. It is known that they undertook a number of significant upgrades to the Phlegethon during this time. It would be several months, however, before the Verge Alliance encountered the newly outfitted Phlegethon with its recovered Glassmaker technology. When that day came, at the Battle of Aegis in December, things would seem dark indeed for the Verge Alliance.

Heroes could choose to take a ship into the Mantebron system and attempt to discover what the Externals are up to there. Such a mission is perilous indeed, for the External armada there is enough to threaten even an Alliance fleet. But a small ship rigged for stealth just might be able to get close enough to find out what they're doing, then sneak out and report to Alliance intelligence officers. Such information could prove invaluable later in the war.

# The Course of the War MAP 2

### READOUT: THE SECOND FOUR MONTHS
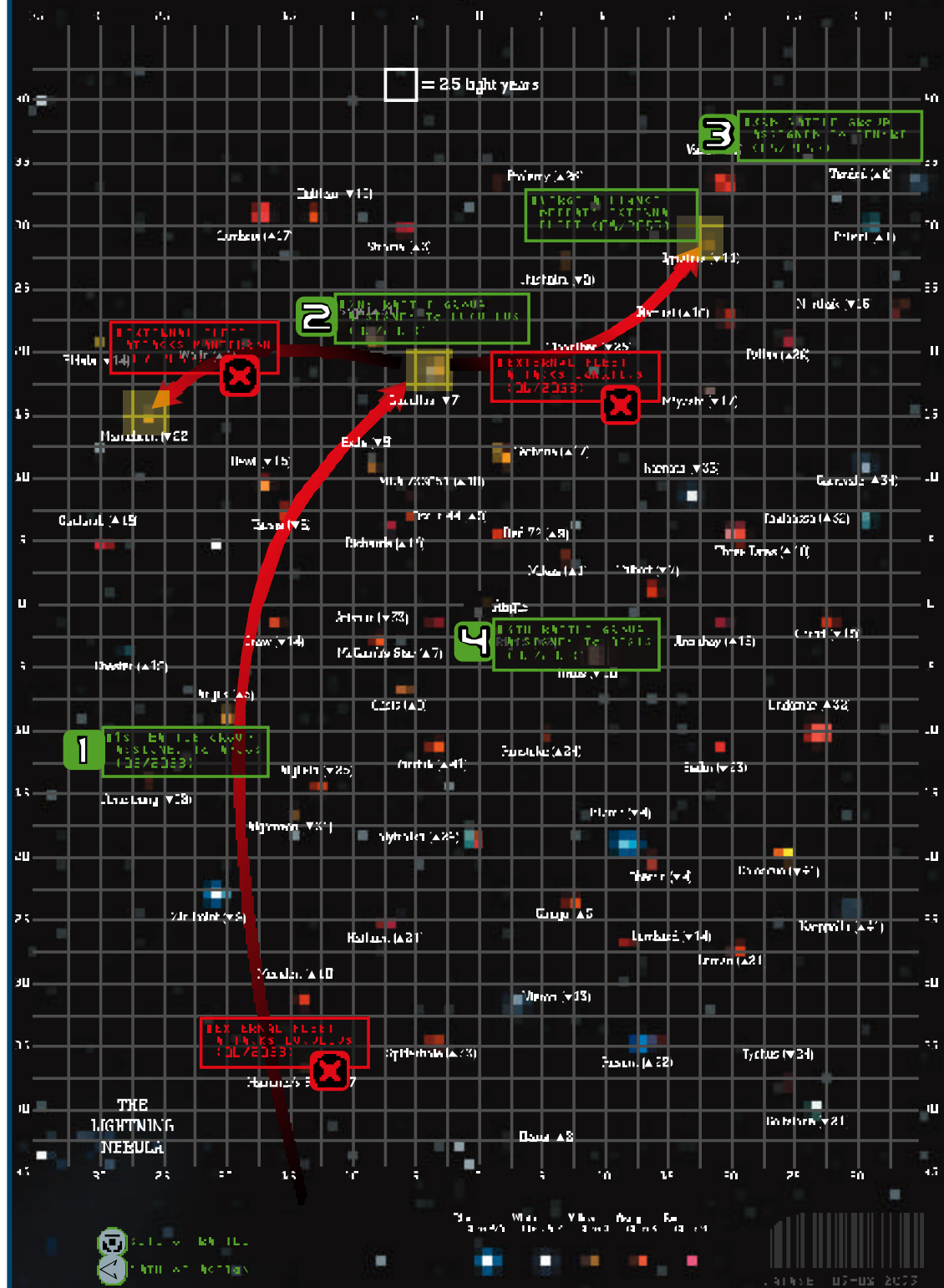
### September 2503: Defeat at Tendril

The Verge Alliance was still basking in the glow of its overwhelming victory at Ignatius when the high command received news of yet another crushing defeat.

On September 2, 2503, *Lethe* and her escort fleet appeared in the Tendril system. The Verge Alliance's 3rd Battle Group, commanded by the StarMech dreadnought *Gandolf* moved to intercept the aliens. Although the carriers *Princeton* and *Stormfront* flanked this massive ship, it was painfully obvious that the human defenders of Tendril were outnumbered and outgunned. Even the addition of elements of *Sanctuary's* 2nd Battle Group, including the battleship *Philadelphia*, which were undergoing repairs following the Battle of Ignatius, did little to even the odds.

Even before the first salvo of the battle was fired, the Verge Alliance was witness to an unexpected attack. As the two fleets neared each other, *Lethe* fired a single, large missile. This projectile drove itself slowly away from the fortress ship as *Gandolf's* sensor teams tried desperately to understand the weapon. Although its size suggested that the missile might carry a massive warhead, its rate of speed and almost complete lack of mobility meant that it could be easily destroyed or evaded.

Suddenly, the missile was gone. The reason was soon obvious: It had engaged a stardrive. Even before the implications of this development could be fully analyzed, a terrible explosion appeared on the sensors of the Alliance ships. Somehow, via mechanics humanity has yet to explain, the alien projectile had hit Tendril's drivesat station. Whether the explosion had occurred in normal space or, although it seemed impossible, in drivespace, was anybody's guess.

Lacking the ability or the time to fully understand what they had just witnessed, the Verge Alliance fleet engaged the enemy. As the battle raged, the longrange destroyer *Bonnie Brae* was dispatched to Aegis with as much information about the weapon as her computers could hold.

In the hours that followed, the human fleet was gradually torn apart. When the order to break off was given by *Philadelphia*, which had by then become the flagship of the fleet, fewer than a dozen ships were able to flee through drivespace toward Aegis.

The thousands of men and women who gave their lives in defense of Tendril did not do so in vain, however. For every human ship that was lost, an External vessel was also destroyed. In the end, the battle went to the invaders, but at a heavy cost. Indeed, so many alien craft were lost over the course of the Battle of Tendril, that many judge it a human victory.

At the end, *Lethe* commanded only a skeleton fleet. The Externals held the system, to be sure, but they lacked the firepower to move against the fortified colony on Alaundril. For their part, the people of Alaundril had reason to hope. It was unlikely, given the information they had about other External movement in the Verge, that *Lethe* and her remaining fleet would be reinforced anytime soon. On the other hand, however, Alaundril could hope for relief at any moment. Many believed that a fleet from Old Space would soon arrive in the system, crushing the Externals and liberating the system.

What the people of Alaundril didn't know, however, was that circumstances were conspiring against both of these hopes. The Verge Alliance was soon to find itself facing the prospect of fighting a two-front war and powerful forces in Old Space were taking steps to delay sending troops to the Verge frontier.

### October 2503: Occupied Space

Although minor skirmishes were fought throughout the Verge in the month of October, there were no major clashes between the two sides. It is important to note that the Externals were certainly not still during this period. Although they had lost one of their fortress ships during the battle at Ignatius, the two surviving vessels and the Ython Kadar's cathedral ship remained very real threats to the safety of every Verge citizen.

In Mantebron, the External fortress ship *Phlegethon* and her fleet had easily swept the scattered Concord defenders of the system out of existence. Now, she had absolute power over the system, with a broad sensor net thrown out to detect even the faintest sign of unwanted visitors. Although it is impossible to say for certain what might have transpired in the Mantebron system during this period, analysts drew some important conclusions from facts that surfaced later.

Clearly, the Externals had a far greater understanding of the Glassmakers than humans did. It appears that the *Phlegethon* counted among her escort fleet a large number of scientific vessels. Indeed, these were nothing less than massive scientific outposts with drive systems tacked on. One after another, these craft touched down at various points on Mantebron and went to work.

Intelligence agents have been able to determine a few things about the Exeat's interest in the Mantebron ruins. Perhaps the most important of these was the simple fact that many alien artifacts were being shipped offworld, through the base at Hammer's Star, and back into the heart of External Space. In addition, remote probes indicated that the aliens were making major modifications to the *Phlegethon* even as her escorts swept through the system.

In the Tendril system, a tense stalemate ensued. Throughout October, the people of Alaundril braced themselves for an alien attack that never came. Day and night, their sensor operators tracked the massive *Lethe* and the surviving members of her escort fleet, but these craft never came into range of their guns.

As the length of the siege stretched from days into weeks, the populace began to suspect that relief was not on its way. This caused a level of panic that spread through the general public. Clearly, the aliens had not crushed the Verge Alliance. If that had happened, there was no reason for them to stay their hand at Tendril. On the other hand, it was clear that the Alliance had not been able to drive out the Externals, for this would have seen relief arrive to break the blockade.

The greatest area of concern was the absence of traffic from Old Space. While it was clear that *Lethe* and her fleet had been intercepting much of the shipping heading for Tendril since severing the communications relay, this did not explain why no battle fleet had been dispatched to reinforce the Verge. As the days ticked by, it became clear that something was preventing the stellar nations from coming to their aid.

Gradually, the people of Alaundril began to suspect that one of two things had happened. Either a Third Galactic War had broken out, tying up the resources of Old Space or, far more terrible, the aliens had been able to attack both regions at the same time.

On Aegis, the leaders of the Verge Alliance met. They had many important matters to consider. In addition to the unusual situation at Mantebron, which was ominous but not immediately threatening, and fears that the Tendril system may already have been reduced to a smoking ruin, they had to consider the fate of Hammer's Star.

For a brief period of time after the initial invasion and the surge of refugees that accompanied it, stragglers from that system had made their way to nearby colony worlds. Within a month, however, that trickle of survivors had ceased and the stories of the last to leave the system were terrible indeed.

The Externals, it seemed, had no intention of conquering the human settlers at Hammer's Star. As soon as their ships reached Spes, they undertook a massive campaign of orbital bombardment. Cities, military bases, generators, and anything else that hinted at the presence of human inhabitants were blasted out of existence.

Even as they carried out this process of genocidal extermination, the Externals were digging in. Massive battle stations were being transported into the system piece by piece and assembled there. Supply lines from beyond the Lightning Nebula were being shored up, leaving little doubt that the Externals planned to make their stay in Hammer's Star a very long one indeed.

As October drew to a close, Thayne, Hale, and the other leaders of the Verge Alliance tried to coordinate their forces and stage some manner of counterattack. The remnants of the original four battle groups were now reassigned into three elements. The first of these, commanded by the *Lighthouse,* was stationed at Argos to shore up the defense of that vital crossroads. Although the Externals had bypassed it in their initial assault on the Verge, it remained a very likely target.

The newly reconstituted Second Battle Group, commanded by the Bluefall Regency's own *Sanctuary,* was positioned at Aegis, there to hold down the fort in the event of an External attack on the de facto capital of the Verge Alliance.

The Third Battle Group, commanded by the combat-hardened crew of the *Pittsburgh,* was designed to be a mobile response force. Although it was originally intended to strike at the External forces in Tendril and free that important system from the enemy's grip, circumstances would soon make that impossible. With numerous skirmishes breaking out along the medurr front, the Alliance

## Adventure Idea: Tendril and Beyond

The situation at Tendril is unique in the Verge. The Verge Alliance has an unshakable (for the moment) hold on Alaundril. The Externals, on the other hand, control the space lanes and all access to the world. Neither side has the ability to advance into the enemy's zone of control, so a very stable stalemate exists.

Both sides are hoping for quick reinforcements. The Externals, however, are far more likely to see this eventuality realized than their human counterparts.

For Gamemasters, this can be an excellent place in which to set adventures. This works best if the heroes are already on Alaundril, safe and secure for the moment, but surrounded by enemy craft. Both sides use small, probing attacks to harass the enemy and test his strength. The heroes can easily become a part of this action and, with luck, make a big difference in the war.

The Externals employ several tactics in their efforts to rattle the nerves of those of Alaundril. Some of these are more successful and effective than are others. The most common of these is the occasional loosing of a missile barrage to test the planetary defenses. As many as four times each day, the aliens loose a salvo of missiles at Alaundril. Without fail, the planetary defense network detects and destroys these projectiles before they become a threat. What do the aliens hope to gain with these tactics? If something happens on Alaundril to disable the defensive systems, the success of the missile attack would alert the Externals and prompt an immediate assault on the colony.

An excellent adventure could be staged around one of these probing attacks with the heroes being instrumental in restoring the defensive system to full operation in time to intercept the attackers. The failure in the system might be the result of External sabotage or even an accident caused by the heroes themselves.

commanders deemed it vital to put on a show of force in the Cambria system, a task that fell to the brave men and women of the *Pittsburgh*.

### November 2503: A Second Front?

In June 2502, humanity first came into contact with the alien medurr. The medurr seemed a warlike and aggressive species, and there seemed little chance of a lasting peace between humanity and these aliens. In the face of the External attacks, however, the leaders of the Verge Alliance were convinced that peace with the medurr must be maintained. There was no way that the nations of the Verge could hope to battle both the Exeat and the forces of the medurr at the same time.

In the months after first contact with the medurr it became clear that the aliens were sizing up the military might of the Alliance. Despite initially favorable negotia-

### Adventure Idea: Questions and Answers

This is a difficult time for the Verge Alliance. Militarily, they have their backs to a wall. Although still able to field three effective fleets, they have suffered a number of critical setbacks. As they begin to regroup and plan for the next phase of the war, they are desperate for information about the enemy. Of special concern to the Verge Alliance admiralty is External interest in the Mantebron system.

This is an excellent time for the heroes to be handed espionage missions. The Verge Alliance needs intelligence and it needs it quickly. With that in mind, the heroes might be sent behind enemy lines into the Mantebron system. In all probability, their best chance of success is to take the controls of a captured enemy ship. As only a few External craft have fallen into Alliance hands, the heroes might be given a ship whose markings and transponder signature might mark it as belonging to the traitors in Lucullus or the renegades in Ptolemy.

While the Gamemaster probably does not want the heroes to discover exactly what's going on at Mantebron, it might be possible for them to learn a great many important things. Among these might be that Phlegethon is undergoing some manner of upgrade. Another possible discovery is that the Externals have, for one reason or another, an inordinate interest in the deepfallen of the Aegis system. Again, exactly why they are seeking information about those aquatic sentients is something that ought to be kept secret. The mere fact that the Externals are trying to learn about them by studying the ruins on Mantebron should be a significant discovery.

Of course, the Mantebron system isn't the only place where the Verge Alliance has an interest. The medurr colony at Cambria is becoming more and more important as tensions increase with those reptilian creatures. Missions to Hammer's Star and the Lightning Nebula have already been suggested earlier in this section, and they continue to be viable sources of adventure ideas.

tions, the relationship between human representatives and the medurr deteriorated. Small skirmishes into human space, a continued campaign of commerce raiding, and a series of sharp, probing advances made their intentions obvious. Despite these provocations, however, Undersecretary Thayne was determined to have peace.

With that in mind, an expert operative name Virginia DuPree was placed in charge of the medurr negotiations. In addition to being a trusted confidant of Undersecretary Thayne, DuPree was the senior Concord Administrator in the Verge. The Alliance leaders hoped that her wisdom and experience would win the peace Thayne so desired. With a small, handpicked crew, she boarded the cutter *Prominence* and set course for the medurr base in the Cambria system.

DuPree was given complete authority to negotiate on behalf of the Verge Alliance. She was empowered to sign any treaty she deemed acceptable and instructed to bring about an end to hostilities with the medurr in almost any way possible. The leaders of the Verge Alliance placed only one restriction on her actions. Under no circumstances was DuPree to allow the medurr to discover that humanity was already fighting for its life. If the medurr learned this, Alliance Command believed, they would certainly take advantage of the situation to move against the Verge.

In November 2503, however, the chances for peaceful coexistence seemed remote when the medurr refused to acknowledge Virginia DuPree's hail. Without a word of warning, they opened fire on her vessel. *Prominence* was blasted out of existence and DuPree was killed. Undersecretary Thayne's dream of a peaceful settlement died with her.

On the advice of Christopher Hale, Regent of Bluefall, Undersecretary Thayne agreed to move against the medurr. It seemed certain that the only chance of averting a war with them now was to present them with a show of strength. If negotiations would accomplish nothing, perhaps a bloody nose would show the medurr that the Vergers were not going to roll over for them.

With that decision made, the Third Battle Group was assembled and dispatched to the Cambria system. Captain Hiraku Ting Sun, commander of the *Pittsburgh,* was awarded the rank of Admiral and ordered to shatter the medurr fleet at Cambria. While he was authorized to use his own judgment in almost every conceivable situation, he was ordered to minimize civilian casualties in the Cambria system. With that restriction in mind, his orders stated only that he was to undertake whatever operations might seem best suited to inflicting maximum damage to the medurr military installations at Cambria.

At the head of nearly three dozen ships, *Pittsburgh* made her way to the Cambria system. Instead of the

frontier fortifications Admiral Ting Sun expected to find there, however, he found a massive fleet. Clearly, the medurr were planning to move against the Verge Alliance in strength. Luckily, the appearance of the 3rd Battle Group had caught them off guard. Ting Sun ordered an attack and the battle was joined.

Hostilities in the Cambria system lasted nearly a full day. When the last shot was fired, the medurr had clearly been dealt a terrible defeat. For all their ferocity, it was apparent that their technology was somewhat less advanced than humankind's. Although *Pittsburgh* was badly damaged and lost a large number of her escort craft, the medurr lost two ships for every one they destroyed.

When he felt that the enemy had been given a sufficient show of human muscle, Ting Sun ordered a withdrawal from the system. Whether his actions would bring the medurr to the bargaining table or provoke and all out war was something Vergers would have to wait to see.

## December 2503: Battle at Aegis

As the first year of the External War drew to a close, the long feared Battle at Aegis took place. On December 9th, a massive alien fleet commanded by the refitted

### Secrets of the Medurr

The events at Cambria were a great puzzle for human analysts. Ever since May 2503, the medurr had been engaged in peace talks with representatives of the Galactic Concord and, when it was formed, the Verge Alliance. With efforts being made to resolve disputes with humanity peacefully, why should the medurr in Cambria react so violently to human envoys? If humans had a better understanding of the medurr, they might have guessed at the answer.

The incident at Cambria was, in fact, a power play by the medurr Teran. As her sister, Stykor, sought to hammer out a peace agreement with humanity, Teran was looking for a way to expand her own power. For her part, their mother (the Matriarch Tolvys) was willing to wait and see which of her children would be the most successful. It mattered little to her whether the medurr went to war with humanity or managed to come to peaceful terms with them.

Despite Teran's desire to weaken her mother and assume her place in the medurr hierarchy, she is limited in the tactics she can employ. Whether or not she is ultimately able to bring about a war with humanity remains to be seen.

For their part, the rulers of the Verge Alliance were forced to make guesses at the motivations of the medurr. Even as Stykor promises peace, her sister invites war. Lacking a complete understanding of the intricacies of medurr government and culture, human analysts must try to find answers even as they wonder if they are even asking the right questions.

*Phlegethon* and her sister ship *Styx* appeared near Jetsam, the outermost world in the Aegis system.

Elements of the Regency Interstellar Navy assigned to patrol the area around Jetsam and its moon, Flotsam, were vastly outgunned. Despite this, they engaged the enemy with valor and attempted to fight a delaying action. Their effort was in vain, however, as the superior numbers of the External fleet made short work of the Regency's fleet.

Even as the last few ships fought on, the aliens opened fire on Research Station Echo, the military/scientific observatory/listening post on Jetsam's moon. As soon as its meager defenses were overcome, waves of landing craft descended to the planet, loosing troops that quickly overcame the base's ground troops. Clearly, the Externals recognized the importance of the information stored in the station's computer banks.

As the ground troops secured the facility on Flotsam, missile boats opened fire on the defenseless Hatire monastery on Jetsam. A single salvo was all it took to annihilate the complex, killing every man and woman on the planet.

By the time the aliens had finished their work, the ships of the Verge Alliance's 2nd Battle Group were ready to engage them. This already considerable armada was reinforced by a large number of Thuldan ships stationed at their Lhop base near the gas giant Redcrown. A flotilla of VoidCorp ships, also maintaining station at Redcrown, remained there to defend the gas giant and its moons in the event that External raiders broke off from the main body to strike there.

At first, the advantage seemed to lie with the Verge Alliance. They outnumbered the External fleet by a con-

### Adventure Idea: Border Skirmishes

The medurr present an interesting problem for the Verge Alliance. Clearly, they are an aggressive species. If provoked or given reason to believe that humanity is too weak to defend itself, they almost certainly attack. The admiralty believes, quite rightly, that it lacks the military might to fight a two front war at this point. Because of this, peace with the medurr is essential.

Peace is not something the Verge Alliance finds easy to attain. This is a time of increasing hostility between the Alliance and the medurr. As such, the heroes could very easily find themselves confronted by commerce raiders and other medurr threats. Encounters with these aliens can be designed and resolved using the material presented in *Alien Compendium II.*

Heroes might also find themselves faced with the task of brokering a peace with the medurr. Considering what they did to the official envoys of the Verge Alliance, this may seem a suicide mission or, at the very least, extremely hazardous duty.

siderable margin. As the aliens bore down on Aegis, however, a disturbing report reached the commander of the *Sanctuary.* Long range readings from the intelligence vessel *Boron Wind* were indicating something unusual. The electromagnetic signature of *Phlegethon* was markedly different from that recorded during the Battle of Lucullus. Clearly, the craft had been heavily modified in the months since it was last encountered.

The reason for these variations would soon become clear. As the battle was joined, *Phlegethon* opened fire with a massive weapon the likes of which humanity had never seen. A single hit from this deadly weapon tore the battle cruiser *Viceroy* apart in a blinding explosion.

Analysis of the weapon conducted in the weeks following the attack on Aegis was daunting indeed. Apparently, the aliens' new weapon was able to create a small bubble in the fabric of space. This acted like a net or snare, capturing a quantity of tachyons. This packet of faster-than-light particles was then directed at a target and charged to a carefully selected level. When the weapon is fired, the field around the tachyons decayed rapidly. As it reached its target, the bubble became too weak to contain the tachyons inside it. As the tachyons were loosed, the residual effects of the bubble slowed them to below light speed. This transformation releases a great deal of energy both as hard radiation and heat. A more complete description of the External tachyon cannon can be found in the *New Weapons* section of the section on *External Technologies.*

Although the ships of the Verge Alliance fought bravely, the tachyon cannon was far too powerful for them to match. It seemed to pass through armor and shields without difficulty. Although the weapon required several minutes to recharge between firings, it was almost always fatal to its target. While the size of the alien armada was dwindling, *Phlegethon* was stripping away Bluefall's defenses at a far faster rate. In the end, it was only

a matter of time before the Externals would be in a position to use this new weapon on the cities of Bluefall.

The tide of battle turned suddenly, however, with the unexpected arrival of the *Lighthouse* and her 1st Battle Group. Intelligence received from a small band of elite operatives (including a Ranger, Concord Administrator, and Hatire Mind Knight) convinced the commander of the *Lighthouse,* Station Administrator Kyle Wakefield, that Aegis was about to be attacked. Leaving behind a third of his fleet to watch over the Argos system, he opted to gamble and move the bulk of his ships to Aegis. Luck was with him, as Wakefield and his ships arrived just in time to intercept the External fleet.

The 1st Battle Group attacked with great ferocity, hammering the alien fleet. This bought the heavily damaged ships remaining from the initial encounter, including the now badly damaged *Sanctuary,* time to withdraw from the battle. Moving at the best speed they could manage, which was often none too good, they made their way to the Thuldan Empire base at Lhop.

Recognizing that the tide of battle had turned against them, the Externals opted to break off their attack. As *Styx* and *Phlegethon* laid down a massive barrage of covering fire, their numbers began to slip away into drivespace. The newly arrived defenders of Aegis returned fire, focusing their efforts on *Phlegethon.* It was Wakefield's intention to cripple the ship and then board it. In this way, he hoped to deliver the alien tachyon cannon into the hands of the Verge alliance.

Sadly, this was not to be.

*Phlegethon* continued to employ her revolutionary new weaponry to great effectiveness. Ultimately, her commander turned his attention to the *Lighthouse* itself. Despite its incredible defenses, the pride of the Galactic Concord could do little to slow the devastating barrage of fire.
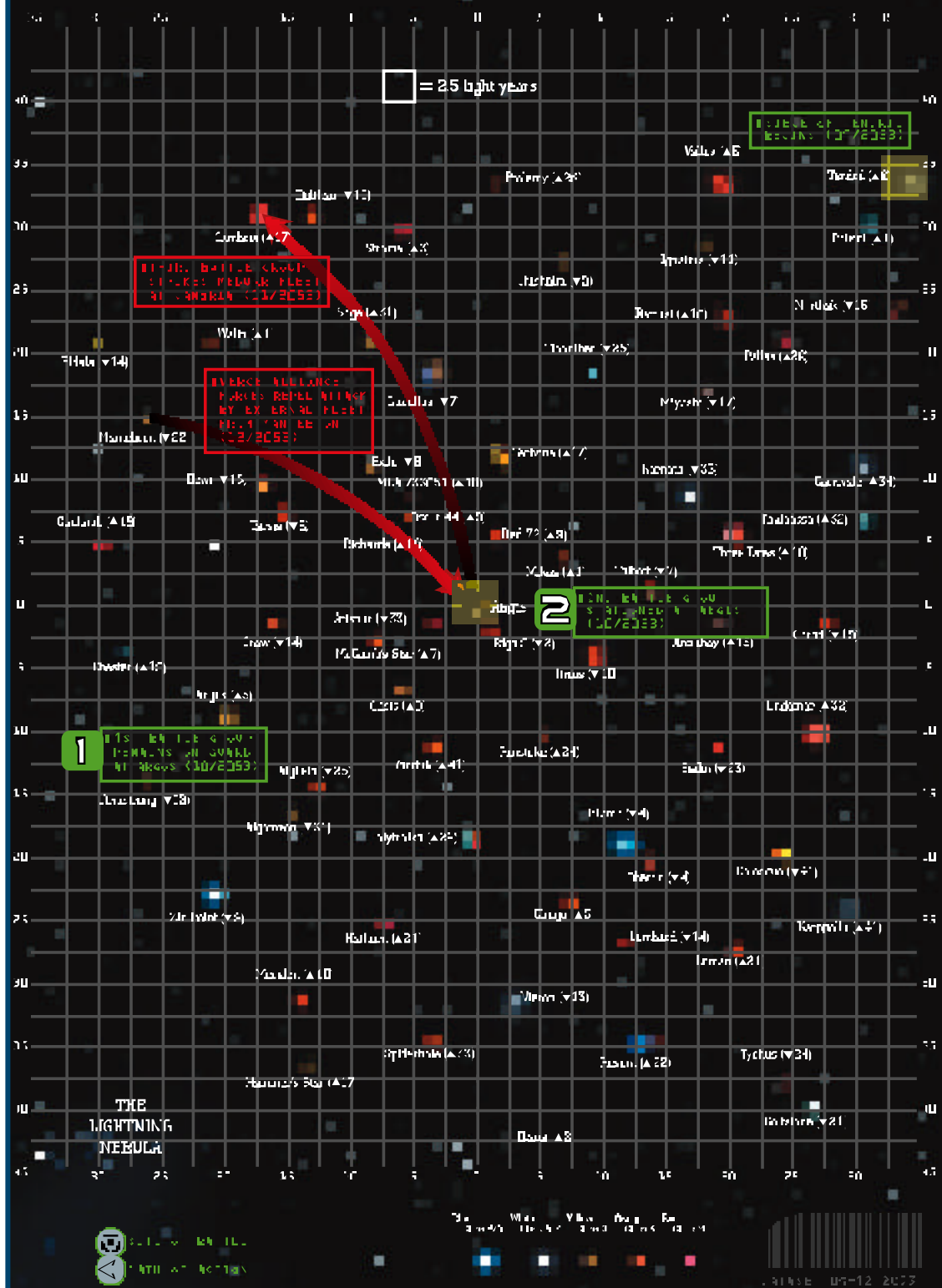
On Bluefall, the leaders of the Verge Alliance waited impatiently for news of the battle. Because of the positioning of the planets in the Aegis system at the time of the attack, direct observation of the encounter was blocked by the system's stars, Aegis and Phantasm. Although relay satellites would ordinarily have allowed them to follow the battle, alien jamming had shut these systems down. Indeed, many of them had been targeted and destroyed by the Externals.

Finally, the surviving ships began to emerge from the sensor blind spot. As the dreadnought *Decisive* appeared, it made contact with the Verge Alliance command on Bluefall. The message her commander, Commodore Julia van Buren, sent was one of mixed omens.

*The battle is won. The enemy has quit the system.* Lighthouse *lost.*

### Adventure Idea: Stand into Danger

Gamemasters may wish to involve their players' heroes in the biggest naval battle in Verge history (at least as humans know it). While it may be difficult for a Gamemaster to coordinate the complexity of a capital ship battle, there is plenty of opportunity for heroes to engage in small ship combats or commando boarding missions. Simply getting a small ship equipped with sophisticated sensors and stealth capability near the Phlegethon to get a look at the weapon it's carrying might prove critical in the months to come. If players are especially adventurous (or even suicidal!), a boarding mission onto the Externals' flagship designed to destroy the flag bridge could bring about a turning point in the battle. Gamemasters will undoubtedly come up with other possibilities as well.

SECTION FIVE: INVASION—THE FIRST YEAR

# SECTION SIX: STATES OF WAR

After twelve months of fighting, the war has taken its toll on the Verge. While no inhabited planet can truly claim to have been unaffected by the war, some have clearly suffered more than others have. Over the course of the next few pages, we'll take a brief look at the current conditions on several of the systems most affected by the battles of the External War.

## OLD SPACE

While not technically a part of the Verge, the ties of many worlds to the stellar nations of Old Space are so strong that no discussion of this sort would be complete without at least a passing mention of what's going on in and around Sol.

With the storm clouds of war sweeping across the Verge, there are many who seem ready to forget about the stellar nations. After all, powerful though they are, these governments are terribly remote. Further, they have sent no reinforcements, which makes many wonder whether or not the stellar nations care what happens to the Verge. Clearly, the Verge has been left to fend for itself, just as it was during the Second Galactic War.

The truth about what has happened in Old Space is far more terrible than that. The stellar nations have not opted to ignore their colonists, they have sold them out (at least, one has). The powers that be within the upper echelons of VoidCorp have struck a deal with the dreaded Externals. In the name of self-interest, profit, and corporate advancement, VoidCorp has been actively negotiating with the I'krl Theocracy for the past few decades.

The nature of this contact remains shrouded in secrecy, although its results are obvious to any who know where to look. In the Verge, VoidCorp appears to be a supporting member of the Verge Alliance. In truth, they are slow to respond to orders from the Alliance's commanders and pass along a great deal of intelligence to the Externals.

In Old Space, VoidCorp is being even more devious. They have taken a public position here that the Verge is a lost cause. They use the destruction of Tendril's drivesat and the reports of those refugees who have made it back to Old Space to support this position. VoidCorp has managed to persuade many of the other stellar nations to focus their attention on the defense of Old Space. After all, they say, with the aliens securely entrenched in the Verge, isn't it logical to assume their next target is the stellar nations themselves?

There are a few stellar nations who are not yet ready to dismiss their holdings in the Verge. Chief among these are the Galactic Concord, StarMech, and the Orion League. These nations have begun to organize a relief effort. Under the banner of *Operation: Rache,* ships, troops, and supplies have begun to arrive in the Kendai system. Ordinarily, this fleet would have set course for the Verge months ago. A series of delays and mishaps, all the result of VoidCorp's subtle influence, have resulted in numerous setbacks in this project. If things continue at this rate, it is several months more before *Rache* can be launched.

The leaders of Austrin-Ontis Unlimited agree with the statements made by VoidCorp that the Verge has been lost, but they aren't ready to forsake those distant worlds just yet. They argue against falling back and, as they put it, "pulling our heads into our shells like a turtle." Instead, Austrin-Ontis favors a full military assault on the aliens. Despite their best efforts, however, they have found little or no support for this drastic action among the other stellar nations. In light of this, they have recently begun to support *Operation: Rache.* When and if those ships do set sail for the Verge, it is likely that a major portion of the military force will fly the colors of Austrin-Ontis.

## MANTEBRON

The exact details of what the Externals are doing in the Mantebron system remains a great mystery in the eyes of the Verge Alliance. As speculation runs wild on the Grid and throughout the media, military intelligence strives to nail down exactly what it is that the aliens are searching for in the long cold ruins of this Glassmaker world.

The assumption being made by the Verge Alliance Intelligence is a simple one. Given the appearance of the tachyon cannon aboard *Phlegethon* in the closing months of 2503, they reason, the answer is obvious: The aliens are looking for lost technology so they can develop new weapons and defensive systems. While this is partially true, the fact of the matter is that such discoveries have been mere side effects of the actual course of investigations being conducted on Mantebron.

What the Externals hope to accomplish at Mantebron is something so beyond the realm of human understanding that the Verge Alliance can hardly be faulted for failing to suspect it. As has already been mentioned, the Externals know far more about the ancient technology of the Stoneburners and Glassmakers than humankind or any of its allies. In truth, the External interest in these ruins is tied directly to the deepfallen of the Aegis system.

Long ago, in the time of the Precursors, there was a minor species of Stoneburner scions known as the I'krl. Although insignificant in their own time, they were men-

tal and technological giants by the standards of the 26th century civilization of the Verge. Eons ago, the I'krl were banished to another dimension. Endless years of waiting have failed to slacken their desire to return to our universe and claim it for their own. Try as they might, however, these fell creatures have been locked tight in their ancient prison, unable to menace the new inhabitants of the Verge.

A few decades ago, something happened that caught the I'krl off guard. Without warning, something punched a hole in the fabric of the dimensions. Had the I'krl been ready for this unexpected breach, they could have maintained this opening in time and space long enough for them to make good their escape.

Through their agents, the dreaded thaal, the I'krl have sought to learn the cause of this fleeting rupture in the universe so that they might cause it to be opened anew. After much effort, the thaal have discovered that the cause of the momentary disruption was the "Vanishing" on Bluefall, when every intelligent being was swept out of existence through the power of the deepfallen.

Aware that the deepfallen are biological constructs of the Glassmakers, the Externals hope that they can find some manner of trigger on Mantebron. Exactly what form this might take is something they can't even begin to guess. In all likelihood, they expect to find some sort of transmitter that can be used to order the deepfallen to use their awesome power.

If the deepfallen are commanded to activate their unique racial ability while the I'krl are ready, that ancient and evil species will again be loosed upon the stars of the Milky Way.

## TENDRIL

Without question, the situation in the Tendril system is unique in the Verge. While the planet Sperous and its inhabited moon Alaundril are securely defended, the rest of the system is solidly in the hands of the Exeat. Both sides would like to see this stalemate broken, but neither has the strength to do so.

On Alaundril, life continues more or less normally for the citizens of Babel and the other cities. This is due entirely to the efforts of government propaganda agencies. While everyone is well aware of the fact that an armada of alien craft lurks just beyond the range of their guns, they are constantly reminded that the invaders pose no immediate danger to the human colonists.

Of course, this isn't entirely true. The Externals are constantly harassing the defenders of Alaundril. While they haven't been able to find a weakness or breach yet, they continue their efforts. In addition, the government's insistence that relief will soon arrive, either from Old Space or via the Verge Alliance, is beginning to wear

thin. Fear spreads through the population as they wonder whether or not they are the only remaining human colony in the Verge.

For their part, the sifarv commanders of the External forces at Tendril are no more pleased with the situation than their human counterparts. They insist that the continued existence of a valid human military unit at Tendril poses a threat to the continued success of the war effort. Unable to finish the job they started, they constantly call upon their thaal masters to send them additional forces. So far, their demands have gone unanswered as the thaal focus their attention on Aegis.

Long range scans from Alaundril's orbital defense stations indicate that the Externals are conducting some sort of operation deep within the clouds of Pox, the system's lone gas giant. Many theories have been put forth to explain their unusual interest in this distant world, but none of them has been convincing enough to win the support of Alaundril's military commanders.

## HAMMER'S STAR

When the Externals made their first probing attack against humanity on May 3, 2489, they utterly destroyed the colony of Silver Bell. They showed no mercy to the inhabitants of that thriving city then and they showed no mercy to anyone on Spes when they returned in 2503. After dispatching the Concord and Borealin fleets in the system, they loosed terrible weapons of destruction on the population centers of Spes and the other worlds of the Hammer's Star system.

One after another, beginning with the rebuilt Silver Bell and its nearly sixty thousand inhabitants, they razed the cities of Spes. Massive explosions threw gigatons of dust into the air and rained deadly radioactive dust over every corner of the world. This badly damaged the fragile planetary ecosystem, making it almost certain that anyone who survived the initial attack would perish in the days following. Never again will Spes be a world fit for human habitation.

The rest of the system fared little better. Outposts in the clouds of Platon or on the surfaces of Arist and the moons of Iniad were located, targeted, and annihilated. Even the scattered miners plying their trades in the Revik and Vicek Belts could not escape the notice of the system's new alien masters.

While it is possible that some pockets of human settlers or military personnel may have survived, time is certainly running out for these individuals. Unable to use any advanced equipment for fear of catching the ever-watchful eye of the Externals, they would have a very difficult time doing anything more than existing. For such people, hope of relief must certainly be fading with every passing hour.

For their part, the Externals have moved into Hammer's Star in force. Shortly after their initial attack, four massive tugs arrived in the system, each towing one-quarter of a massive battle station. These crawled slowly into orbit around Platon where their cargoes were secured together. With the completion of this structure, the External hold on Hammer's Star was complete.

Other large, prefabricated structures were quickly assembled under the protection of the battle station's guns. Many of these were staging areas, receiving shipments of vital supplies from beyond the Lightning Nebula and passing them along to the alien fleets in the Verge.

If the Verge Alliance is ever to rid the Verge of the External menace, they have to break the alien hold on this system. Even the combined might of the entire Verge Alliance fleet would hardly be up to that task.

## AEGIS

For many years, Bluefall has been the unofficial capital of the Verge. With the coming of the External War, it seemed only natural for the other systems to look toward the Regency of Bluefall for guidance. The quick decision of Regent Hale to join with the Galactic Concord and form the Verge Alliance was instrumental in the success of that venture.

Because of the alliance between the Regency of Bluefall and the Galactic Concord, their presence in the Aegis system grows stronger with every passing day. With the loss of Mantebron and the destruction of the *Lighthouse,* the Galactic Concord has been forced to shift many of its normal operations to Diandes, one of Bluefall's many islands. In essence, this honeycomb of government buildings and underground command bunkers has become the de facto capital of the Verge Alliance.

For many of Bluefall's half-billion citizens, life goes on more or less normally. To be sure, many local industries have retooled to support the war effort and rationing of vital commodities has put a great deal of stress on the local economy. Despite these changes, however, the entertainment industry continues to produce programming, and no one wants for the basic necessities of life.

The seemingly endless stream of refugees pouring into the system has added, at least temporarily, almost one hundred million people to the planet's population. This has put a great strain on the planet's social services. Sea farmers are working overtime to feed the planet's new settlers and medical facilities are hard pressed to meet the health needs of these often-destitute individuals.

The Thuldan Empire's presence in the Aegis system has always been a sore spot for the Bluefall Regency. Ever since their attack on Regency Island in 2498, the Thuldan Empire has been an unwelcome guest in the system—tolerated only because it was politically expedi-

ent to do so. The onset of the External War has proved the wisdom of this decision, as the military experience and technology of the Thuldans has been a valuable asset to the Verge Alliance admiralty. Given their national disdain for anything nonhuman and the generally high level of xenophobia present in Thuldan culture, there can be no doubt that the Empire proves to be a loyal ally to the other members of the Verge Alliance and an annoying thorn in the Exeat's side.

## LUCULLUS

The betrayal of the Verge Alliance by the ruling barons of Lucullus was one of the greatest surprises of the war's first twelve months. Some minor consolation might be taken in the fact that many of the system's human rulers now regret their decision.

So who were the traitors and what were they promised in exchange for their villainy?

The Jamaicans were very quick to deal with the Exeat's gardhyi representatives in the days just before and after the war began. They were concerned about the potential menace of the medurr and felt the Galactic Concord was doing little if anything to protect them. Faced with what they felt was an utter lack of support from their own kind, the Jamaicans were only too willing to accept the External offers.

Other factions had far less sympathetic motives. They wanted only one thing from the Externals: control of the system when all was done. This devil's bargain appears to have come to the traditional end for such deals. While the Barons of Penates might be the current rulers of the system in name, they are themselves crushed under the weight of their External overlords.

The motives of Helixtech are somewhat less clear. Unlike the Jamaicans, they seemed to have some faith in the ability of the Concord to protect them from the medurr. Indeed, there is a good deal of evidence to indicate that Karcen Borun, an important Helixtech officer, had even managed some manner of contact with the reptilians. Exactly why Helixtech decided to side with the Externals may never be fully understood. It appears that a number of senior officials, including Borun, argued against this decision. In the end, however, the faction favoring an alliance with the Externals carried the day.

As was stated above, the power in the Lucullus system these days is theoretically in the hands of Penates and its Barons. In truth, however, the gardhyi are the real powers here. Through them, the will of the I'krl Theocracy is done in the Lucullus system. And terrible indeed is that will.

On Penates, the fell kadarans have established consulates to better orchestrate dealings between the Externals and their human "allies." In truth, these are vile

places overseeing the gradual conversion of the planet's population into kroath. If they are left unchecked, the kadarans will leave few if any human beings alive on Penates—or elsewhere in the system.

# PTOLEMY

Conditions in the Ptolemy system are only marginally better than in neighboring Lucullus. Vardye Hellis, the iron fist who rules the system by sheer force of will and arms, struck a deal with the Externals even before the Barons of Lucullus were contacted by the gardhyi. He asked for only two things in exchange for the services of his men, his ships, and the other facilities of the Ptolemy system.

The first of these was simple power. Hellis was promised a leading role among in new Verge order. He was to be rewarded with one or more systems to call his own. Of course, the truth of the matter is not so cut and dried. The Externals speak in glowing terms of Hellis's power and military skills, but constantly keep him in check. In truth, he is no more the master of his fate than are the Barons of Lucullus. While the kadarans are not present in any great numbers at Ptolemy, the gardhyi make certain that every order Hellis gives is the will of the Exeat.

The other aspect of Hellis's bargain with the Externals was revenge. He has always plotted and schemed for some means to strike back at the Regency of Bluefall for the terrible defeat his forces suffered at their hands in 2466. By aiding the Externals, he is certain, he helps to bring about the destruction of the Bluefall Regency and the death of Christopher Hale.

# ALIEN WORLDS

At the time of the alien attack, the vast majority of the Verge's inhabitants were human. This is not to say, however, that the interests of humankind's alien allies are not worthy of mention. Indeed, if humans are to pull out any manner of victory in the Verge, it seems certain that the contributions of the fraal, t'sa, and other alien species will be nothing less than pivotal.

## Fraal

As always, any discussion of the fraal must take into account their divided society. The Builders have one set of goals while the elusive and mysterious Wanderers have another.

For their part, the Builders are as determined as anyone else is to see the External menace beaten back. Members of this sect can be found scattered throughout almost every human colony world in the Verge. As the long-time allies of humanity, they are often thought of as "one of the family" and not counted among the ranks of the aliens.

At the time of the External attack on Hammer's Star, there were two Wanderer cityships in the Verge. The largest of them, dubbed *Mirage One* by Galactic Concord Intelligence, has since vanished and its current whereabouts are unknown. There are some who speculate that it has jumped sides, forsaking humanity for the alien ranks of the Externals. This theory, although popular among the sensationalist media and uneducated, holds little water with the Verge Alliance admiralty.

The second Wanderer ship, referred to in military communiqués as *Mirage Two,* hangs in deep space at the edge of the Aegis system. Silent and brooding, it refuses to respond to any contacts, even those of fraal Builders. Exactly what, if any, notice this massive craft has taken of the war raging around it is impossible to guess.

## Weren

The weren, although relatively few in number, are well represented in the Verge Alliance. This is due largely to the presence of Cardinal Rashorra on the Alliance's ruling council. A cunning diplomat, learned theocrat, and fierce warrior, Rashorra is a fine example of everything the weren species has to offer the universe.

For the most part, weren citizens of the Verge are only too happy to take up arms against the Externals. Several Concord Marine units composed wholly of weren have seen battle on numerous worlds in the Verge. The most highly decorated of these are the *Jo-Rika,* a name that translated into Standard roughly as *Happy Bayonets.*

Thanks largely to the efforts of the Bluefall-based media conglomerates, the weren are being depicted as utterly loyal, unstoppable fighting machines. Often, this is done at the expense of their intelligence. As such, many Vergers are becoming convinced that the weren are more like faithful guard dogs than fellow sentients. This, of course, is not something the weren find overly flattering.

## Mechalus

Only a handful of mechalus can be found in the Verge, but their intelligence and technical understanding make them valuable additions to the war effort. Since the breakdown of communications with Old Space, the mechalus in the Verge can no longer depend on the auspices of their Rigunmor patrons. As such, many of them have entrusted themselves to the care of the Galactic Concord, often applying for citizenship.

The services of these unusual sentients has proven invaluable as the Verge Alliance labors to maintain its

equipment in wartime conditions without support from Old Space. Perhaps the best example of this can be found in the Aegis system. Long known for the appalling condition of the local Grid, the demands of war have made improvements to the system imperative. While commercial contractors were already making progress in this matter, the current situation calls for more radical measures.

With this in mind, a number of mechalus Grid techs have been placed in charge of the upgrade. Thanks largely to their understanding and experience, the upgrade to the Aegis Grid is proceeding with unprecedented speed. Whether or not this and similar projects can be completed in time to turn aside the External forces remains to be seen.

### Sesheyan

The best-known concentration of sesheyans in the Verge is found on Grith in the Corrivale system. Here, under the auspices of the Galactic Concord and their Hatire neighbors, they have established one of the few sesheyan colonies that is independent of VoidCorp control.

Of all the human-allied alien species found in the Verge, the sesheyans would appear to be the least important to the war effort. After all, they are uncomfortable with much of the advanced technology so vital to the war. Despite this, however, the sesheyan have a role to play that might, if all goes well, prove vital to defeat of the Externals.

Acting with great care, the sesheyans on Grith have sought out contacts with the Externals. Complaining of poor treatment at the hands of their human neighbors, they have made an effort to appear sympathetic to the External cause. Although they have yet to win the trust of the invaders, they are gradually easing the suspicions of the Exeat's agents.

Of course, the final outcome of these negotiations remains uncertain. At the very least, the Verge Alliance hopes to be able to feed the Externals false intelligence through the sesheyans. If things go better, they may be able to infiltrate the ranks of the invaders. With a great deal of luck, the often forgotten sesheyans may prove to be one of the greatest weapons in humanity's arsenal.

### T'sa

Because they have been cut off from their home stars in Old Space, the t'sa in the Verge have become de facto wards if the Galactic Concord. Like the mechalus, their keen minds and technical ingenuity have made them valuable members of the Verge Alliance.

T'sa are making two major contributions to the war effort. A great many of them have been drafted into military intelligence duty and are working on cryptography and related matters. A few, perhaps the best and brightest of the Verge's t'sa, have been charged with the task of understanding the technology of the Externals and finding ways to better defend human worlds against the attackers.

A good many t'sa who lack the technical training have enlisted in military units hoping to see actual combat against the enemies of man and t'sa alike. Others have joined the various navies, serving as pilots, gunners, and even simple deckhands. Of course, this is not to say that each and every t'sa found in the Verge has volunteered for military service. Many continue with their lives just like countless millions of others in the Verge.

One of the most interesting groups of t'sa fighting against the Externals is the clandestine *tliss ta klee* or *army of dissension.* This crack commando unit was trapped on Lucullus when the Externals claimed that system. Since then, they have used their skills and experience to wage a savage terrorist campaign against the occupying armies. Try as they might, the Externals have been unable to track down these tenacious warriors.

### Deepfallen

Of the fifty or so intelligent species known to man, none is more enigmatic than the deepfallen of Bluefall. Genetically engineered ages past no less a species than the Glassmakers themselves, these creatures are gifted with amazing mental powers. The greatest of these is the ability to open a portal through time and space, bridging dimensions, and thrust other creatures through it—whether they wish to make the journey or not.

It was this power that the deepfallen used to send the Glassmakers on their way to the next stage of their evolution uncounted centuries ago. When humanity came to the Aegis system, the deepfallen assumed that they wished to follow the Glassmakers on their mystical journey into the unknown. They used their power and swept every intelligent creature except themselves out of existence. Humans came to call this the Vanishing, and it was a mystery that remained unexplained until very recently. Indeed, even now the truth behind the Vanishing is a closely guarded secret known only to the highest levels of the Bluefall Regency and Galactic Concord.

What the deepfallen aren't aware of, however, is that their use of the power given them by the Glassmakers very nearly allowed the dreaded I'krl to escape the interdimensional prison into which they had been cast. If those aquatic sentients use their abilities again, now that the I'krl are watching for it, the opening will be secured and they will be able to return to our universe.

What the thaal rulers of the I'krl Theocracy fail to un-

## Verge Alliance Admiralty

A council of representatives from every member state heads up the Verge Alliance. The most important of these, naturally, are the representatives of the stellar nations and Bluefall Regency. All told, this body has twenty-three members, the most important of whom are described briefly below.

**Undersecretary Michael Thayne (Galactic Concord):** The de facto head of the Verge Alliance Admiralty and senior member of the Galactic Concord's diplomatic team in the Verge at the onset of the war, Thayne has been branded by many as power hungry politician. Nothing could be further from the truth, however. Thayne does everything in his power to keep human civilization in the Verge from being swallowed up by the Externals.

**Regent Christopher Hale (Bluefall Regency):** The ruler of Bluefall, Hale is an intelligent and driven man. He sees great things for the Verge Alliance. If the current menace can be defeated, he hopes to see the trend toward unification and cooperation continue unabated. In the wake of the External War, Hale dreams of a Verge governed by a single, central government. He has spent many years shaping Bluefall into the logical choice for the capital of such a government and, of course, would be only too happy to accept the office of President when such a union is officially established.

**Field Marshall Andrew Stott (Thuldan Empire):** An experienced diplomat, Stott was ordered to mend fences with the Bluefall Regency following the Empire's abortive attack in 2498. When contact was lost with the stellar nations, Stott used an extensive network of friends and contacts to seize control of the Thuldan Empire's holdings in the Verge. Although technically still acting under in the name of the Empire, he is doing everything he can to improve his own position in the Verge. If and when contact is reestablished with Old Space, Stott hopes to present the Empire with a fait accompli and be allowed to continue as the master of all things Thuldan in the Verge.

**Cardinal Rashorra (Orlamu Theocracy):** One of only three nonhumans holding a seat on the Verge Alliance's ruling body, the weren Rashorra has assumed control of the Orlamu Theocracy's holdings in the Verge, including the colony on Yellow Sky and, until recently, the temple aboard the Galactic Concord's famous Lighthouse. She is charismatic and forceful, a devout believer in the teachings of the Orlamu faith and well liked by the other members of the Admiralty (with the possible exception of Field Marshall Stott). Rashorra views the External War as nothing less than a holy crusade which must be won if the citizens of the Verge are to be granted favor in the eyes of God.

**Alad mir Scnee (Hatire Community):** As a stellar nation, the Hatire Community had relatively few holdings in the Verge at the start of the External War. The fraal Alad mir Scnee serves on the Verge Alliance Admiralty not as a representative of his government, but as the commander of a pseudo-independent company of Mind Knights. Recognizing the importance of victory in the External War, they opted to offer their services to the Verge Alliance. Mir Scnee is a calm and intelligent man whose wisdom has made him an important voice on the Admiralty.

**WC1O2 89TSR (VoidCorp):** Andoni Moriarty is an unusual citizen. Born on Earth, he left behind his Solar roots and joined the ranks of VoidCorp nearly twenty-five years ago. Through cutthroat corporate tactics and vicious office politics, Moriarty became the head of VoidCorp Security in the Verge. It was his cunning that allowed his corporate masters to strike their devil's bargain with the Externals. Although no other member of the Verge Admiralty suspects him, Moriarty is a traitor who passes a great deal of information through his agents and on to the Externals. He is careful, however, to give them only the knowledge he chooses. In this way, he maintains an upper hand in the traitorous relationship.

derstand, however, is the deepfallen attitude toward their powers. The thaal plan is to force the deepfallen into a situation where they must use their power to sweep an invading force out of existence or face destruction themselves. This might seem logical to the Externals, but it doesn't take into account the deepfallen philosophy.

The deepfallen are not creatures of evolution. They were made by the Glassmakers for one reason and one reason only, to send their creators on a mystical journey into unexplored dimensions. In their eyes, the Glassmak-

ers are nothing less than gods and the psychic powers bestowed upon them are a sacred blessing. They see the use of this power as the bestowing of a great gift, not as a weapon to be used against their enemies.

If the Externals are to prod the deepfallen into using their powers, they have to find another means. Exactly what this might be is impossible to guess, but if it can be found anywhere, the ruins on Mantebron are an excellent place to look—and that's just where the aliens are looking.

# SECTION SEVEN: WARTIME ADVENTURING

I watched Jackson scream into the commlink. His eyes were wide with fear, but he didn't know what else to do. "Hard hat, this is Rapier Seven, repeat, Rapier Seven, do you copy, Hard Hat?"

Stevenson tried to tell him it was no use. The bugs would be on us in a matter of minutes. His calls for support would go unanswered. The command center, along with everything else in Alcazar, was nothing more than a smoldering crater now. Our remotes had seen the flash and we'd even felt the shockwave. Without something on the order of divine intervention, we were all going to die here.

I swallowed hard and tried to hide the fear in my voice. "Everybody check your weapons. When the roaches show up, I want them to know what a bloody nose feels like. We might not be able to stop them, but we can sure as hell slow them down—even if it's only to reload."

Everyone but Jackson nodded and tried to look brave. A new salvo of explosions tore across the ground outside. The high, screaming sound of a missile engine could be heard just before each report. I waited, listening for a lull in the barrage. When it came, I kicked open the bunker door and we poured into the trenches outside. The banshee wail of supersonic aircraft was deafening. One after another, silver arrowheads shot over our position, loosing a torrent of missiles.

I stood motionless for a second, barely able to hear, let alone understand, the scratchy voice coming over Jackson's transceiver. "Rapier Seven, this is Archangel One, message received. Stand by for evac, repeat, stand by for evac. You've just got enough time to catch the last stage out of Dodge, boys."

*An excerpt from Assault on Hammer's Star*
*by Gunnery Sergeant Peter McAndres,*
*Concord Marine Corps*

## WARTIME ADVENTURES

Running a campaign against the backdrop of a massive interstellar war can be challenging task. Indeed, at first it might seem to be an impossible one. After all, what contribution can a single man or woman make in so great an undertaking as interstellar war?

The simple answer to that question would seem to be "not much." But we're not talking about ordinary people here. The players are not assuming the roles of accountants, farmers, or factory workers. They are heroes. By their actions are the fates of entire star systems decided.

Consider the place of the individual hero in science fiction history. Luke Skywalker, despite all outward appearances, was no mere farm boy. The clan Kinnison, immortalized in E. E. Smith's *Lensman* books were of far greater importance to the universe than could ever have

been imagined. Larry Niven's Louis Woo was, on the surface, a somewhat eccentric loner fond of spending months in deep space because he often grew weary of civilization. Yet this unassuming soul constantly found himself at the heart of events whose ramifications would not fully be felt for hundreds or thousands of years.

Time and again, the individual in a science fiction tale has proven himself to be more than a match for the most carefully laid plans of tyrants. At the last possible seconds, heroes snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. They discover the enemy's weakness, they disable their impenetrable defenses, or they develop a shield capable of deflecting the ultimate weapon of the enemy. The same must be true in your ALTERNITY campaign.

In order for the players to prove themselves equal to the heroic challenges set before them, however, the Gamemaster must have a full and complete understanding of the war, its origins, and its ultimate possible outcomes. These matters are discussed throughout the rest of this book. For the moment, we'll focus on the factors that make a wartime campaign different from other settings. With a little effort, the following techniques can be incorporated into any STAR*DRIVE campaign in order to make the heroes feel that they are very much a part of the External War.

## The War as a Backdrop

This can be tricky, however, especially if the Gamemaster wants to keep his campaign in tune with the "official" events portrayed in published game products. With a little care, however, the ebb and flow of events can be made to parallel the course laid down here. Indeed, with only a little effort, it can appear that the actions of the heroes have been the pivotal point on which the whole of the war turns.

Consider the betrayal of humanity in the Battle of Lucullus. An excellent adventure could be written about a group of heroes who discover what is about to happen even before the External fleet appears in the system. The culmination could be a race against time as they attempt to elude pursuers and stay alive long enough to contact the Verge Alliance fleet. Because the Gamemaster knows full well that the Externals and their Lucullan quislings must win this battle, he can't allow the heroes to warn the fleet too early.

This doesn't mean that a message can't reach the fleet at the last possible second, in time for the Verge Alliance ships to activate their defenses. When the Lucullan trai-

tors open fire, they won't have defenseless targets. As long as it is emphasized that hundreds, maybe even thousands, of lives have been saved by their actions, the heroes can feel that they have succeeded, even if the Externals ultimately win the battle.

Remember, spin control is just as important in Gamemastering as it is in politics.

## Command Decisions

Of course, the easiest way to make the heroes feel that they have an important role to play in the war effort is to place them in command of an important element of it. If the heroes are acting as important members of some government agency, they could very well find themselves given a position of authority.

Perhaps they find themselves acting as the command crew of a large ship, like a cruiser or battleship. Such a campaign would have the feel of a *Star Trek* episode. One player might fill the role of the ship's Captain, another serving as the Chief Weapons Officer, and so forth. While the heroes are free to delegate the less interesting aspects of these jobs (you never saw Captain Kirk filling out a whole lot of paperwork, did you?), they are the ones making the decisions upon which their lives and the fate of their ship depend. Such a setting also makes matters a little easier for the Gamemaster, who can simply hand out orders from the Admiralty at the start of each scenario. The heroes, despite their authority, go where they are told to go and do more or less what they are told to do.

Similarly, they might be in positions of overall authority, rather like the principal characters of the *Star Wars* films. While not acting as the commanders of a specific ship or military cadre, they would direct the deployment of fleets and such. A campaign like this is likely to make frequent use of the abstract mass combat system as the heroes allocate forces and then await reports on their success or failure.

## Critical Turning Points

By their very nature, wars are massive and confusing things. It is impossible, even with the communications technology of the 26th century, for the heroes to receive reliable reports about each and every aspect of the war. Information is often distorted or missing important pieces that make it difficult to interpret. The *fog of war* can be a major factor in such situations.

The best way for Gamemasters to administer wartime campaigns is to focus on key turning points. Consider the example of Earth's Second World War. The names of the most important battles are etched forever on the pages of history: Pearl Harbor, Midway, Normandy, Hiroshima,

and a dozen others. By focusing on these important battles, a Gamemaster could tell the whole tale of the war. History will remember the epic battles of the war far longer than the less important ones, and the heroes have a right to expect that their names are the ones held up and recognized much the way modern society remembers Eisenhower, Patton, MacArthur, or Churchill.

It is worth noting that the timeline presented elsewhere in this supplement is intended to do just this. The battles it presents are the most important ones. It must be assumed that numerous skirmishes are taking place throughout the Verge.

When running adventures based upon these major battles, the Gamemaster can allow the heroes to uncover all sorts of useful information about the rest of the war. This includes secrets of the External biotechnology, useful information about alien strategies or tactics, and data about key players in the enemy's high command.

## Luring the Players

An important aspect in any campaign is something that might be called *the lure*. The lure can take many forms, but it is an essential element of the campaign that draws the players ever onward. It might be a secret weapon of the ancient Stoneburners that could be used against the enemy or the key to understanding their coded transmissions. Whatever it is, the lure should give the heroes an advantage over everyone else in the campaign.

Consider the example of *the dagger*. Suppose that the heroes discover early on in the war that an enemy spy known only as *the dagger* has managed to infiltrate the Verge Alliance. Their first encounters with *the dagger* might reveal little more than his existence to the heroes. As their adventures continue, however, they manage to keep running across clues as to the true identity of the enemy agent and his ultimate plans. In the end, of course, they confront *the dagger* and stop his master plan seconds before it ensures victory for the Exeat.

The Gamemaster needs to keep in mind the fact that a lure serves as a motivating factor throughout the campaign, not just for a single game. While there is almost certainly some manner of lure in every scenario, these should be minor things compared to the grand draw of the campaign's big secret.

A skillful Gamemaster must take care to release information about the lure at a measured pace: a hint here, a hint there, never too much at any one time. In the end, when the heroes uncover the whole truth about the lure they'll have every right to feel full of pride.

Of course, the Gamemaster must make sure that the secret of the lure is worth all the buildup. The *Death Star* isn't just a big spaceship—it's a spaceship the size of a small moon that can annihilate whole planets in a single

shot! An excellent lure for the campaign presented in this supplement is the alien occupation of Mantebron and their gradual recovery and development of the tachyon cannon. A little research into the Manhattan Project can help the Gamemaster to capture the feel of intrigue and intense government security associated with the project.

## Driving the Players

The opposite of the *draw* is the *drive*. This is a force that moves the heroes on against their will. It can take many forms, but is used as a tool to make certain the heroes don't miss something important to the adventure.

The most basic form of *drive* is simple pursuit. On the ground, this could be a pack of External hunters with the alien equivalent of bloodhounds. In space, it could be a squadron of alien fighters sweeping the solar system in search of the party. The important thing about this sort of thing is that it must be something the heroes will absolutely want to avoid. If they have seen large concentration camps where prisoners are being transformed into kroath, for example, they will do everything they can to avoid capture.

Another very popular form of drive is the time limit. This might be self imposed or forced upon the party. Consider the case of a party that has been exposed to some deadly virus. They know time is of the essence, as they must keep moving if they are to find a cure or receive medical treatment before the virus claims them. The remorseless ticking of a time bomb or the looming threat of an alien attack can impose similar time limits.

Whatever form the drive takes, the Gamemaster must be careful in its use. They must always feel that it is their choice to move in a given direction, not that they are being forced there with no choice of their own. A drive can be a powerful tool, but it must not be overdone or the players will begin to feel that their heroes are pawns instead of heroes.

## Domestic Politics

Some players and Gamemasters prefer adventures that center on roleplaying and political intrigue. While they might enjoy the occasional exchange of gunfire with a ring of spies or traitors, the primary focus of the campaign isn't combat or battle-heavy adventures.

Many of the things we've already discussed have their place in these adventures as well. The primary difference, however, is in the forms they take. The *drive*, for example, might be the constant scheming of a political enemy who would be only too happy to see the heroes disgraced and, perhaps, imprisoned. The knowledge that someone is out to get them keeps the heroes on their toes. This sort of enemy can be particularly useful if the heroes are in a position where they can do little or nothing to rid themselves of this antagonist. Perhaps he is too well connected politically or, even worse, in a position of authority over them.

Characters in this sort of campaign can find themselves working to flush out spies, eliminate traitors, develop new weapons, crack enemy codes, and so on. They find themselves challenged mentally far more frequently than heroes in more military campaigns. Indeed, the heroes are almost certain to go around unarmed most of the time. After all, how many members of the President's cabinet carry firearms under their suits?

## Foreign Affairs

Another feature of wartime adventuring that deserves mention is the diplomatic campaign. This is similar to the political one mentioned above, but has some very important differences. Where the heroes in a diplomatic campaign are working primarily in friendly territory, those in these settings are in foreign settings.

As often as not, they are trying to win the favor of a foreign leader. Perhaps they hope to secure an ally in the war or, at the very least, convince a power considering an alliance with the Externals to remain neutral. This can call for the greatest care on the part of the heroes, for the slightest miscue could cost them success.

Less frequently, the heroes might be called upon to sway those who have already sided with the enemy. These missions are more dangerous as the heroes are likely to come into direct contact with their External counterparts.

## Space Battles

Of course, any interstellar war is going to be punctuated with space battles. These should always be depicted as titanic clashes with starships throwing incredibly destructive weapons back and forth against the backdrop of the stars. The important thing here is the sheer scope of such battles.

The exact role of the heroes in such conflicts depends upon their places in the campaign. If they are military officers, they could very well be directing the actions of whole fleets. In such cases, the abstract combat system can be used frequently and can be augmented with the normal starship combat rules.

If the heroes are fond of fighter combat, as depicted in films such as *Star Wars* or *Battlestar Galactica,* the heroes might be made pilots aboard space carriers. In most cases, these campaigns feature swift combat in which fighter sorties are conducted against large ships, ground targets, and so on. The abstract combat system can be used to provide backdrops for their missions, but the

Gamemaster can use the basic ship to ship combat rules presented in the ALTERNITY *Gamemaster Guide* to resolve specific missions.

Those who are fond of larger fleet actions may find massive battles like those depicted in *Star Trek* or the *Lensman* books to be much more to their liking. These battles should be depicted as more sweeping and epic than those centering on fighters. Gamemasters might find inspiration for such campaigns in the epic World War Two documentary *Victory At Sea*. Massive battlewagons exchanging broadside after broadside are the mainstay of such battles.

## Planetary Battles

Obviously, space battles can be de-emphasized for campaigns based around soldiers and similar characters. For these heroes, the space navies exist only to transport them from one battlefield to another. There is an old exchange that runs something like this:

*What are you?*
*MARINES!*
*And why are you Marines?*
*TO DIE!*
*And why is there a Navy?*
*TO TAKE US WHERE WE CAN DIE!*

Campaigns based around ground troops should capture the flavor of movies like *Aliens* or books such as *The Forever War* and *Starship Troopers.* The heroes are given incredibly powerful weapons and thrust into the face of a similarly armed foe. What follows can be nothing less than chaos itself.

Exactly what tone the Gamemaster chooses to give his campaign should be based on the likes and dislikes of the players. Some groups might prefer a more sanitized version of infantry engagements like those depicted in countless John Wayne movies. Others might favor a more brutal and realistic atmosphere similar to the one presented in movies such as *Saving Private Ryan.*

The most important thing to remember about campaigns that focus on ground battles is best summarized by the old saying: *War is Hell.* Naval officers might expect to sit down and enjoy a cup of tea while their craft drifts through the deep void of space. Campaigns featuring Marines and soldiers should be full of mud, rain, bad food, harsh conditions, and the constant threat of enemy snipers.

## Disturbing Information

Over the course of the External War, the Gamemaster may want to gradually release important bits of information. These tidbits can be handed out as rewards for successfully completed missions, discovered through careful research, or even learned through spying.

Exactly what sort of information the heroes might discover depends upon the type of campaign and their place in it. Some excellent possibilities for discoveries early in the war include horrific revelations like the true nature of the kroath. Later on, the heroes might learn more and more about the nature of the Externals and their dark history. By the end of the first year, the heroes are likely to have learned of the existence of the thaal, the betrayal of VoidCorp, and so on.

The important thing to remember here is that information is very valuable. It should be handed out carefully with each piece building upon those received earlier. If things are handled with care, the players may constantly try to put forth theories about how the things their heroes have learned come together. When the ultimate truth is revealed, however, it must come as a surprise.

With only a little effort, the Gamemaster can lay down little clues that won't be recognized by the players at the time. Later on, however, when some important secret is discovered, they'll snap their fingers and say: *Of course, that explains why…*

## Victory and Defeat

At the end of every successfully completed adventure, the Gamemaster must reward the heroes in some way. In many cases, the best reward might be the discovery of an important piece of information as described above.

Another very useful reward might be the capture of an enemy ship or weapon. The heroes might retain this item and used to give them an edge in future encounters with the Externals or medurr. Alternately, their newly acquired treasure might be turned over to the Verge Alliance authorities so that it can be torn apart and studied.

At the same time, however, the Gamemaster must accept the very real possibility that the heroes may drop the ball. Despite their best efforts, the players may simply fail to put together the pieces of the puzzle or overcome the alien menace. A good Gamemaster should make sure that the heroes don't come away from such an adventure feeling as if they have failed utterly.

After all, the heroes can almost certainly learn something from even the most terrible and crushing of defeats. While these rewards will certainly be smaller than might be had for the successful completion of their mission, they must nonetheless be useful. In all cases, of course, the Gamemaster must balance the hazards of the mission with nature of the rewards handed out, both for success and failure.