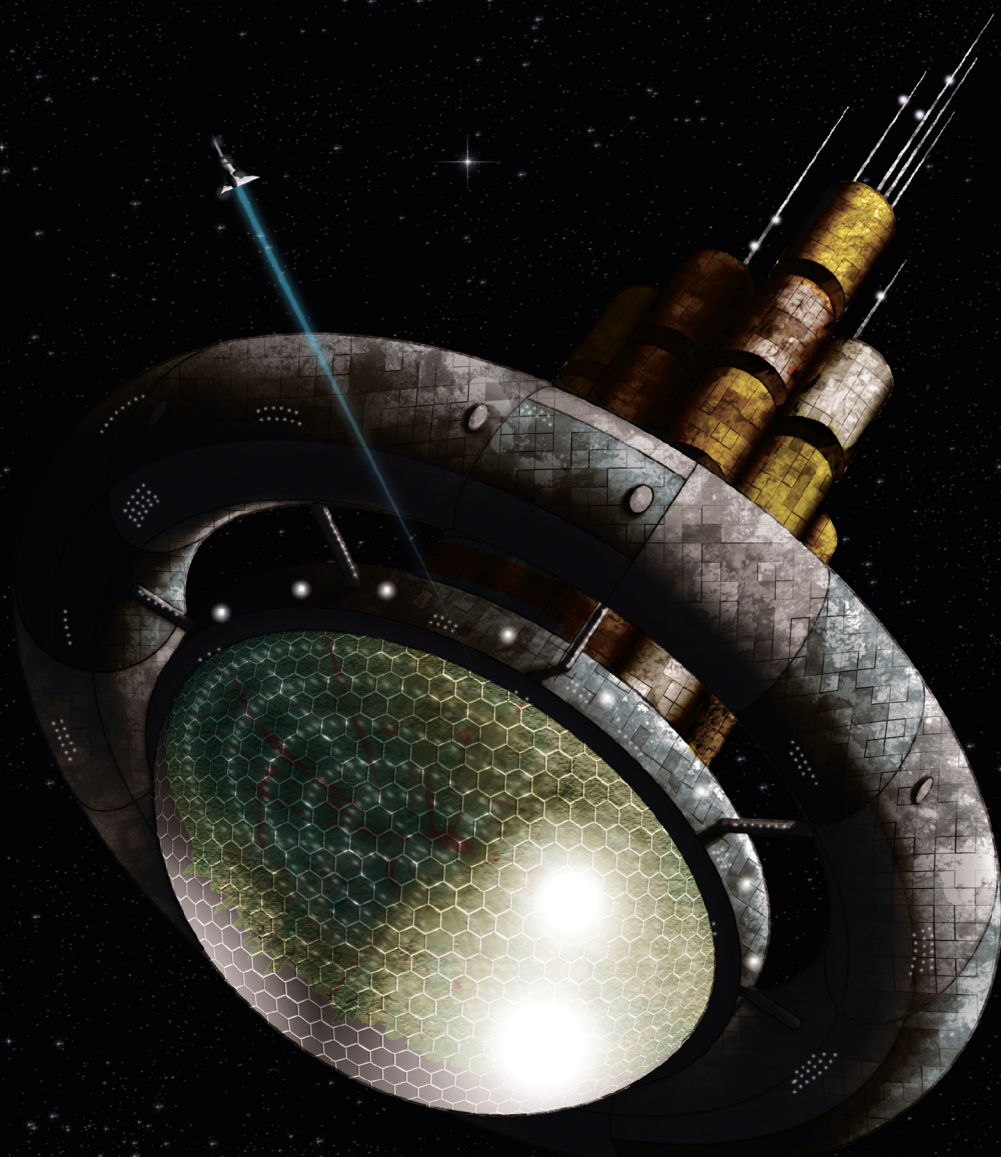


TRAVELLER

B O O K 2 : R E F T



SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE IN THE FAR FUTURE

TRAVELLER

BOOK 2: REFT

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T R A V E L L E R INTRODUCTION

Reft is an astrographical oddity. It contains two groups of stars, of relatively standard density, separated by a wide rift. These were settled by sublight expeditions from Earth and remained isolated from the rest of Charted Space for most of their history.

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

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

Since the Islands subsectors offer a route across the rift, cutting weeks of transit time from, say, Verge or Gushemege to the Spinward Marches or Deneb, events in the Islands are of interest to the Imperium, shipping corporations, mercenary groups and traders. There is money to be made in the Islands and via them, although the hazards are considerable.

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

Most of Reft is not Imperial territory, although it lies between two Imperial regions and has Imperial communications routes running through it. Those areas of the sector not under direct Imperial control are of interest and receive diplomatic visits, naval patrols and expeditions by Scout Service ships. However, Imperial citizenship is not a guarantee of safety on the worlds of the Rift and wise Travellers take precautions.

THE ISLANDS SUBSECTORS

The worlds of the Islands subsectors have been isolated from the rest of Charted Space for centuries. Recent contact has resulted in a certain amount of cultural pollution but many differences remain. Terminology is often subtly different from standard Imperial usage and many concepts differ. For example, the Islanders do not use the term "system defence boat" for a small defensive craft and do not make much distinction between jump-capable and non-jump-capable vessels. Centuries of sublight interstellar flight have resulted in a different mindset that the availability of jump drives has not yet erased.

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

Occasionally, psionic individuals within the Imperium have hit upon the idea of travelling to the Islands in the hope of escaping the blanket ban on psionic activity. Some have found others like them and founded tiny enclaves of psionics but the founders of these enclaves brought with them a fear of persecution and a tendency to be secretive.

Shipping

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

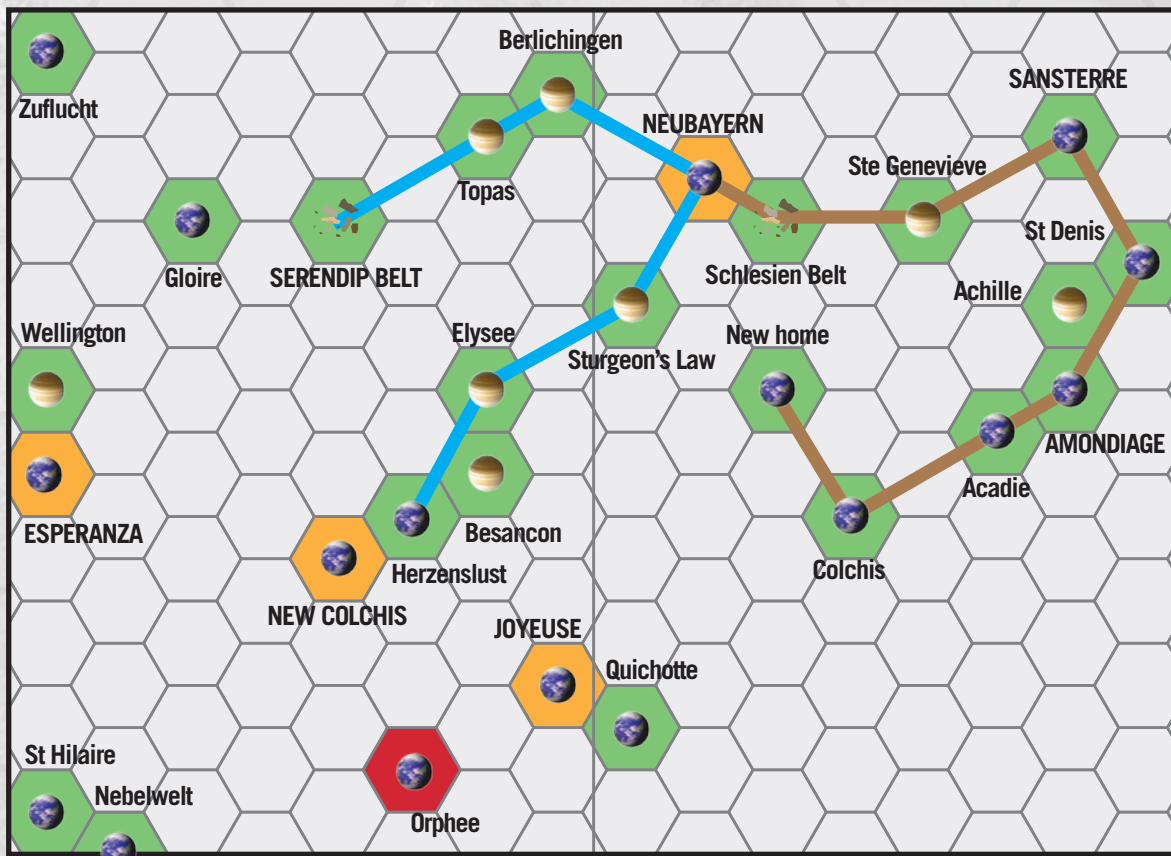
All but eight worlds of the Islands are accessible to jump-2 traffic via the Loop and Crescent Run or parts of them. The major powers of Joyeuse and Esperanza are

outside this trade zone and see less traffic as a result. The limited number of destinations available to a jump-2 ship make traffic movements predictable.

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

Imperial Free Traders have begun to make an appearance in the Islands. By using collapsible fuel tanks in the cargo hold, a jump-2 trader can make the long voyage out to the Islands and, once there, can revert to normal jump-2 trade operations. Several jump-2 trade ships are already operating on the Islands trade runs but much of the local trade moves by consecutive jump-1. Imperial jump-2 traders have found a niche for themselves, moving cargoes faster than most of the competition.

This has, of course, prompted local shipping operators to obtain jump-2 vessels but the process is slow and there remains an opportunity to command 'fast courier' and 'urgent cargo' rates for services.



				DENE B			
REF T SECTOR	TROJAN TREATCH	VESTUS	MACON	TWO LITTLE	BARKER	GUSHEMEGE	
		USHER	SAGITTARIAN	LOST WAY	GOME		
		VOID B	NEW ISLANDS	OLD ISLANDS	LIMON		
		ALONE	EVESTIN	ARCRANT	MOIBIN		
				VERGE			

- Planet
- Asteroid Belt
- Safe System
- Red Zone
- Amber Zone

TRADING ROUTES

- Crescent Run
- Loop

A HISTORY OF REFT

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

The Colony Missions

In 2050AD, the European Space Agency launched an extremely long-ranged colonial expedition. This is known to have consisted of three vessels: *Voyageur*, *C-Jammer* and *Marinus van der Lubbe*. A mix of personnel were present but each had a distinctly national character as their names suggest. Thus, *van der Lubbe* was dubbed the German ship and carried primarily German, Austrian and East European personnel. *C-Jammer* was British in character and drew its personnel largely from Britain, Scandinavia and some of the Russian republics. *Voyageur* was the French ship, crewed largely by French, Italian and Spanish personnel.

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

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

The population to found the colonies travelled in suspended animation. 100,000 colonists were carried aboard each ship, of whom 750 or so were awake at any given time. As a result, the population who disembarked from the ships retained strong cultural connections with their home countries on 21st century Earth. Even those born on the journey, to several generations of permanent crew, grew up in a recognisably 21st Century European culture.

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

The ships then began their deceleration, entering the Approach Phase and committing to the star group

ahead. If no suitable world was found, the ships could not accelerate to their previous speed and would have to crawl onwards for centuries more, hoping to find somewhere to land before their systems began to break down.

Finally, confirmation came in – one of the worlds ahead showed signs of habitability. It had breathable air, liquid water and the right temperature, and there were even indications of a healthy biosphere.

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

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

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

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

Colonising the Riftworlds

While some of the crews of the three colony ships joined the colonists on the surface of their new worlds, the majority did not. Their reasons varied considerably but the outcome was the same; they preferred to live aboard their vessels. Some colonists joined them and together they set off on a new voyage. This one was much shorter, although still prodigious in scope.

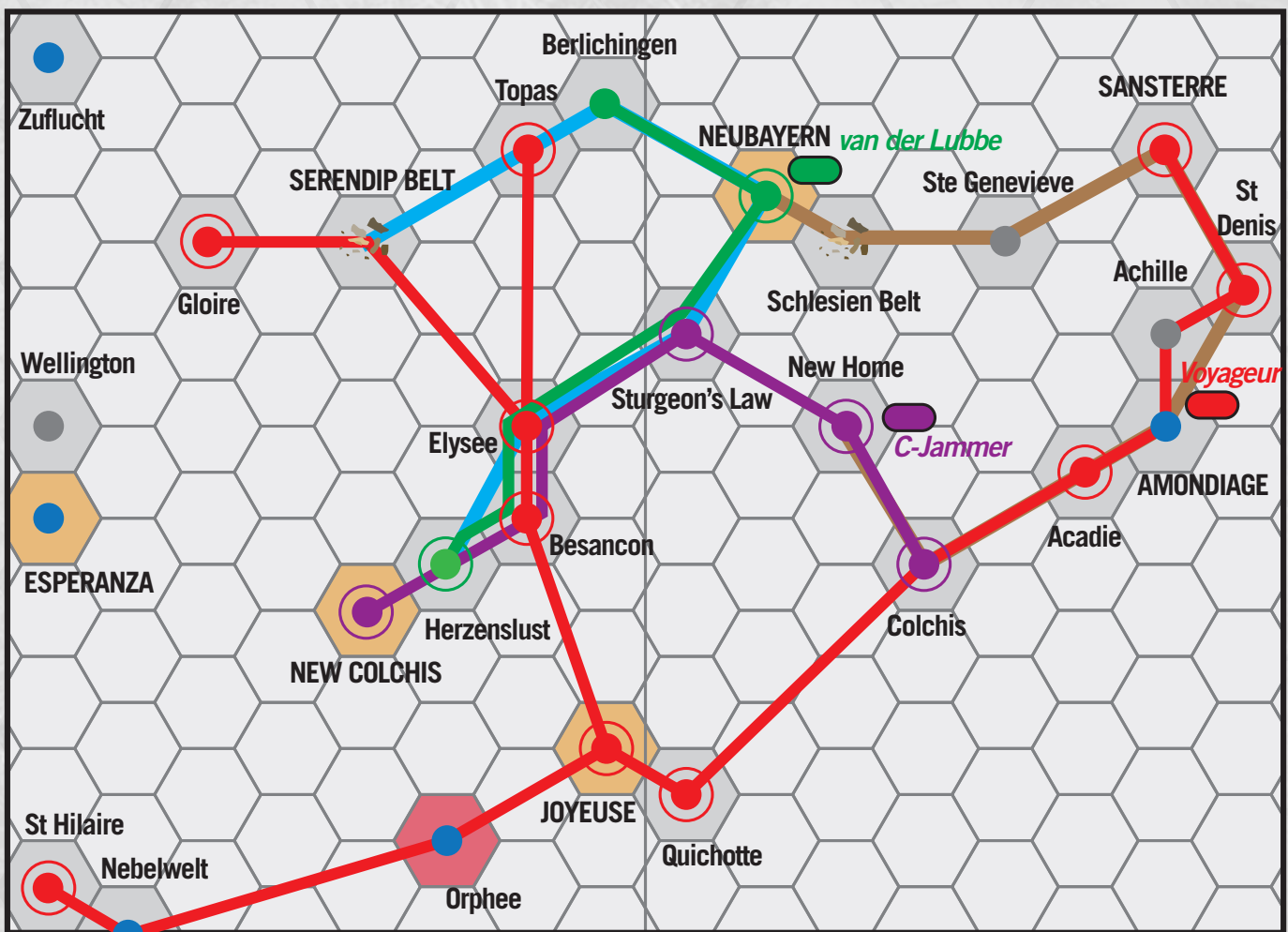
The three colony ships set about a sublight exploration of the local cluster. The colonists already knew they had entered a small group of stars isolated by many light-years of empty space. However, exploring even this limited region would take centuries at sublight speeds. The descendants of the crews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

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

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

C-Jammer was, like the other colony ships, an asteroid habitat that could propel itself through space. Its people were used to life aboard such a habitat, rather than a planetary existence. Thus, when a survey of an asteroid

PATH OF COLONY EXPANSION



- | | | |
|---------------|------------|---|
| Planet | Red Zone | New Home Colony (<i>C-Jammer</i>) |
| Asteroid Belt | Amber Zone | Neubayern Colony (<i>van der Lubbe</i>) |
| | | Amondiage Colony (<i>Voyageur</i>) |

belt showed rich resources, the decision was made to settle there. *C-Jammer* was guided into a stable orbit and its engines mothballed, becoming a new asteroid in the field and the first inhabited body in the system. Mining and industrial settlements were established throughout the belt and gradually habitation spread to other bodies in the system including gas giant moons and planetoids in distant orbits.

New Home was the first to build its own colony ship, which was launched in 4788AD. Like the original vessels, this was a hollowed-out asteroid. Although on a smaller scale than the earlier missions, colonists from New Home reached Colchis aboard this vessel. A second ship was launched towards what became *Esperanza* in 4810AD.

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

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

Infinité was the only one of the first- or second-generation vessels lost during the colonisation of the Riftworlds. Its crew and settlers were isolated on the distinctly inhospitable world of Sturgeon's Law for centuries and had to learn to live in their hazardous environment. The other ships plied among the colonies of the Old and New Islands, carrying personnel and cargo at an incredibly slow pace and maintaining tenuous contact among the people of the Riftworlds.

The Rise of the Third Imperium

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

the basis of the Imperial Charter. The planetary and business leaders of the Federation became the early nobility of the Imperium.

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

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

Contact with the Islands

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

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

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

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

The Scout Service commander on the spot was concerned at the results of the (understandable) interference in local affairs by the crew of the Eldorado and decided to distribute knowledge of the jump drive among other local powers. This was not so much out of a sense of fair play or desire to 'fix' interference as an attempt to restore the strategic balance of the region. It seemed possible that a regular route across the Great Rift via the Islands could be set up, and control of the region by a single power might jeopardise this. Thus, the decision to give the jump drive to the Islanders was made primarily for strategic reasons, in the hope of creating a patchwork of small states friendly to the Imperium rather than a single large power that might cost more to influence.

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

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

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

RECENT EVENTS IN THE ISLANDS SUBSECTORS

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

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

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

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

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

WORLDS OF REFT

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

As well as the Islands subsectors, several extremely isolated star systems also exist within the Great Rift. Some are home to populations of humans and non-humans, although these worlds see few visiting

starships; mainly Scout Service cruisers conducting research rather than trade vessels.

There are also all manner of wild tales about what lies hidden in the Great Rift. Most are variations on 'here be dragons' tales and many are the invention of drunks and braggarts. However, it is true that the Great Rift has never been thoroughly explored, so strange discoveries may await the intrepid (or foolish) starship crew taking a leap of faith into the deep night.



VESTUS



SUBSECTOR

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

Vestus subsector is Imperial territory. Lying behind the claw, it is very much a frontier region with the regional capital, such as it is, lying at Lintl. From here, a small bureaucratic apparatus oversees Imperial activities in the coreward region of Reft, answering to the sector capital in Deneb.

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

There is always the risk that an Aslan clan might be drawn into conflict with the Imperial authorities by process of escalation. Local residents might evict Aslan settlers by force, or the Imperial Navy might be forced to fire on their ships, and a clan might decide to push the issue. For the Imperials, the question is whether to risk conflict or allow Aslan to occupy parts of Imperial worlds.

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

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

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

The Imperial Navy maintains a modest Subsector Fleet in Vestus, built around two cruiser-class vessels.

One is a new light cruiser, while the other (the subsector flagship) is an obsolescent strike carrier. The latter represents a significant force at the head of its supporting task force as most threats to Imperial authority could be crushed by a single vessel of this size. A more serious threat would be dealt with by capital ships sent from Deneb sector.

Evidence has been found of Vilani settlements on some worlds in Vestus. There are no records of deliberate Vilani settlement in the region and archaeological finds suggest these were refugee colonies. Almost all finds date from between –2300 and –1700 in the Imperial calendar, although occasional earlier sites suggest crews of misjumped starships made the best life they could for themselves on these worlds.

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

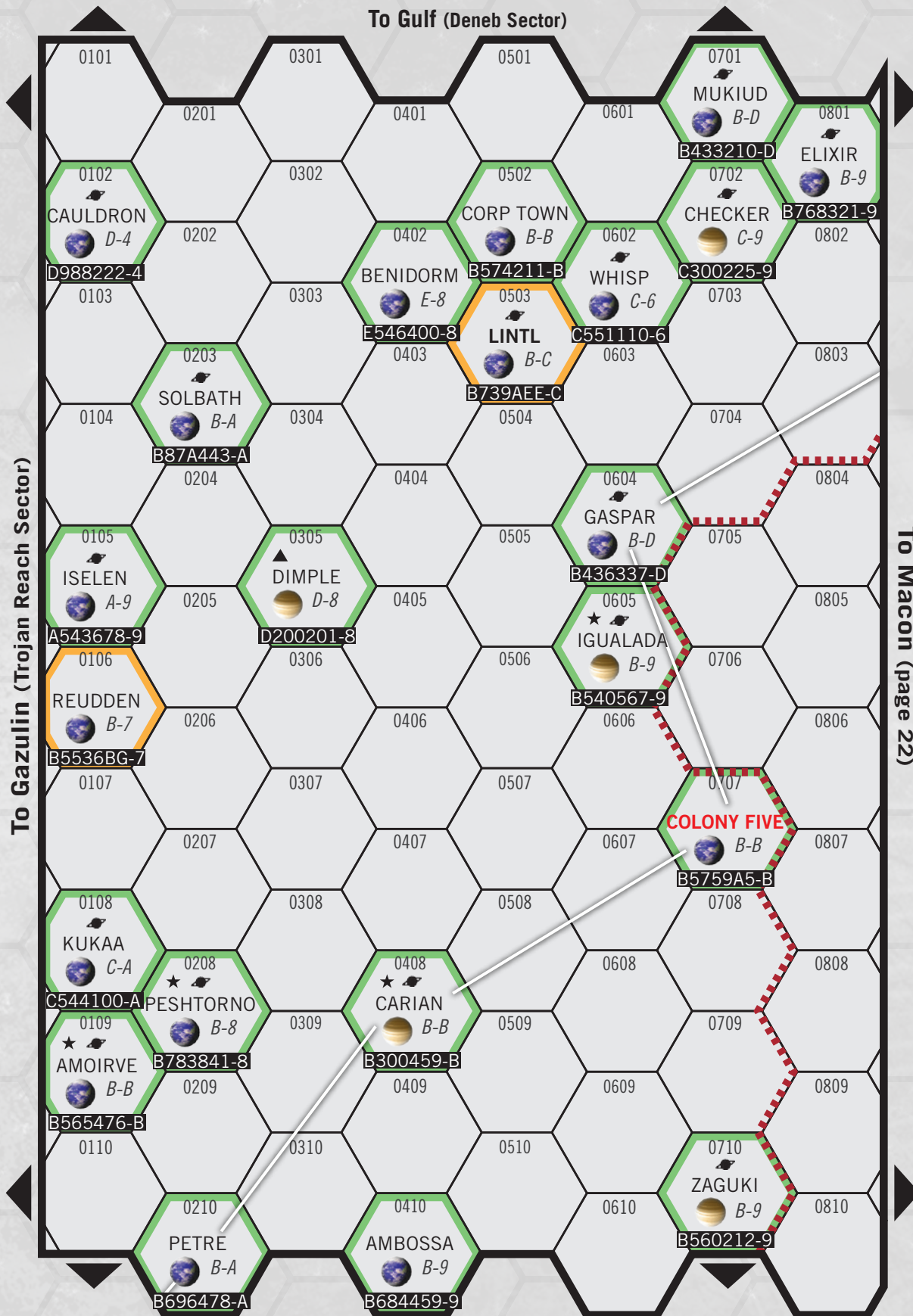
Some of these ad-hoc colony missions seem to have reached Vestus and settled there, although the majority died out before the coming of the Third Imperium. Those that survived were, for the most part, incorporated into the more successful later settlements.

AMBOSSA

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

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

This might have gone on forever but for a huge social upheaval that wrecked Ambossan society 300 years ago. It started with a string of natural disasters that affected all aspects of Ambossan life; food production was reduced by a series of major storms, while an



A			

Ref

VESTUS SUBSECTOR

- Gas Giant
- B-6 Starport Class & Tech Level
- ★ Imperial Naval Base
- ▲ Imperial Scout Base

- Secure System
- Amber Zone
- Imperial Border
- X-boat Route

- Planet (dry)
- Planet (water present)

earthquake severely damaged one of the subordinate settlements. These problems were serious but might have been surmountable, had not the government lost the confidence of the population. The result was wide-scale anarchy and destruction of resources that might have been used to deal with the disasters.

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

When the dust had settled, Ambossan society had changed considerably. The central city, site of the downport, capital and most major industry, was secured along with some of the outlying settlements. However, some settlements declared themselves independent of the new government, although they were careful to show continued loyalty to the Imperium. The Imperial Army declined to take part in forcible reintegration, considering this an internal matter. Once it pulled out altogether, fighting between the independents and central government began. This was small-scale, as both sides had no heavy equipment, little training and were fielding scraped-together militias. The superior numbers of the central government were counterbalanced by fervour and desperation on the part of the independents.

The Ambossan Civil War went on for nearly thirty years and was ended by the decision to mortgage the world's future in return for ending the conflict. Offworld mercenary units were hired and quickly demolished most opposition. Their superior discipline, weaponry and training was simply too much for the rebels. Some of the re-conquests were very bloody, although most ended in reconciliation or (more often) surrender in the face of overwhelming firepower. Soon the central government was in control of what remained of the outlying settlements. This did not end the war at once; significant urban guerrilla opposition continued, along with operations by forces based in the countryside.

Today, the central region of Ambossa is ruled by a Governing Council that controls important functions such as power generation, machinery construction and access to the starport. Laws are strict and the populace is kept in order by a force that still calls itself the Militia but is essentially a paramilitary police force with light-infantry capabilities.

Central government claims to own and control the outlying settlements and most accept this, although some pay lip service to their notion of independence.

The few that remain truly outside of mainstream Ambossan society are semi-ruined, with little industry. Technological capability is much lower than the TL9 enjoyed by the central region, with limited amounts of TL7 gear available in addition to whatever can be scavenged, traded or, occasionally, taken in a raid.

The upshot of Ambossa's troubled history is that the world became even less important on the cosmic stage than before. Resources, already limited, were wasted in paying for mercenaries or rebuilding settlements. The Governing Council satisfies itself with keeping order and enabling citizens to go about their daily business but it cannot offer them a bright future.

CAULDRON

Cauldron is a typical backwater Imperial world, colonised by a handful of people and then, more or less, forgotten about. It lies off the main trade routes and has too small a population to develop much of an economy. However, there are reasons why Travellers might visit this world.

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

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

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

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



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

There is also a growing interest in 'adventure retreat' type holidays, for which Cauldron is becoming a popular destination. The mildest of these involve a stay in the locals' village and tours of nearby wilderness areas for rafting or climbing expeditions. More robust parties head out into the wilderness, to try the life of a hunter or trapper for themselves, or fly to the mountains to go climbing.

There is little provision for safety or rescue, which deters many potential visitors but entices others. Bored, well-off workers and minor nobles thus come to Cauldron to live the rugged outdoors life for a couple of weeks before returning home with vids and the occasional scar to show what a tough guy they are. The locals are somewhat amused by the idea that people want to pay them for the privilege of sampling their lives and the dangers of the outback. A minority dislike the intrusion but most are happy enough to accept the extra Credits.

The locals have a sustainable Tech Level 4 but use a variety of low-maintenance imported items to add comfort to their lives. They are familiar with the use of many high-tech items such as holocameras and personal comm units and, in many cases, own them. However, little reliance is placed on these items. The locals distil a pretty good liquor out of their cereal crops using a high-tech fusion still but would not be dismayed if it

broke down. The distillation process could be carried on using lower-tech systems and, even if it could not, society would not collapse for lack of booze.

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

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

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

Most of Cauldron is unexplored. There are rumours of raider starships operating out of hidden bases in the outback and lost Ancients sites but those are common on any world with a significant wilderness. More credible is the persistent story that a modest population of Vilani made their way to Cauldron in the

last years of the First Imperium and built a settlement high on a mountain... or in a valley, or on an island, or somewhere suitably inaccessible.

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

COLONY FIVE

Colony Five is a high-population world, with a population of some eight billion or so. It is a dry but otherwise entirely habitable world and, with advanced farming techniques, the world supports a large population, who enjoy high living standards. The world's high Tech Level and large population allow considerable industrial output, much of which is exported. This brings offworld revenue and contributes to prosperity.

Despite these advantages, Colony Five has had a troubled political history, which has recently produced something of an oddity; a liberal dictatorship. Absolute power is vested in the hands of one individual, who enjoys massive popular support, in part because the recent transition from republic to dictatorship affected the general populace relatively little. There are few harsh laws and the dictatorship has directed its powers towards solving problems rather than oppression.

The origins of the name Colony Five are lost in antiquity but are generally thought to relate to the designation of the settlement that rose to dominance during the settlement phase as it is known that several seeder colonies were settled on-planet at that time. Some were unsuccessful while others grew and even thrived. Those that did well attracted additional investment and pulled in more settlers, expanding into cities.

Around 850 (Imperial Calendar), Colony Five was wracked by a period of internal conflict that stopped little short of civil war. Regions and cities broke away from central government, forming alliances that absorbed other polities and shed original members as the political wind shifted. The Scout Service re-designated Colony Five as balkanised as a new world government emerged but failed to create a lasting stability. Alliances stabilised and the rapid transfer of political support became less useful as a bargaining tool. This arrangement became entrenched for more than a century and it was not until the 1070s that

a move towards unification began in earnest. This happened gradually, with smaller alliances and free city-states flowing together until they had sufficient collective power to start bargaining with the larger polities.

A World Republic was declared in 1089, creating the first true world government on Colony Five in two centuries. However, after less than a decade the cracks began to show. Perhaps political dissolution had simply become a habit but for a range of trivial reasons, power blocs small and large began threatening to secede from the republic.

A solution appeared out of nowhere, in the form of a middle-aged civil servant, who had been running a political forum on the planetary datanet. A massive datanet campaign, run on a shoestring by enthusiastic amateurs, quickly emerged, with the civil servant becoming an overnight 'net sensation as 'the woman who thinks she has the answers'.

Apparently, she did. At the core of her ideas was the concept that states and cities were made of people who live there. If it were possible to ask everyone what was really going on around them, then it might be possible to determine just why Colony Five's world governments kept fragmenting. If they could figure out what was going wrong, maybe political leaders could create a workable solution.

What amounted to a giant viral campaign began, encouraging citizens worldwide to put forward their ideas, likes, dislikes and things they just could not live with. Much of this data was self-serving or shortsighted; some was downright idiotic. There was enough useful content, however, to build a very detailed picture of the political, social and economic conditions prevailing across the world. A group of political scientists and other academics, many of them undergraduates enthused by the project, collated and distilled the data, then fed it back into the datanet, with recommendations.

Nothing happened. Political leaders showed polite (and often genuine) interest in the data but were unable to make anything of it.

In 1091, that changed with the emergence of the Alliance for Unity, a political group whose members were not divided between different states. The AfU asked the question, 'what if we actually did these things?' and listed a set of policies it would implement when (not if) it became the world government. Although not always workable, the AfU manifesto was sufficiently appealing to gain massive worldwide support. Demonstrations, marches and even riots broke out, creating a state of emergency.

The shaky world government responded by placing emergency powers in the hands of the president and suspending many laws and customs that prevented decisive action. A frantic round of bargaining resulted in many political blocs agreeing to stop blocking one another's favoured policies in return for help with local problems or a reciprocal favour. The crisis did not produce a new government but forced the existing one to put its house in order and make deals that allowed a number of key policies to be pushed through. Among these were several that echoed the AfU manifesto, guaranteeing their popularity among much of the populace.

By 1092, the crisis was over. The government had addressed many problems and created workable compromises and the populace were generally appeased by seeing 'their' policies put into action. The government now enjoyed strong, but not overwhelming, popular support. However, there was one big change. The greatest act of democracy in the world's history had created a dictatorship.

Colony Five's government placed emergency powers in the hands of the president, who used this ability to force new legislation through and instigate compromise deals that either reduced tensions or the influence wielded by the more difficult elements of Colony Five's political structure. He also made his powers permanent.

The presidency became a lifetime office and what resistance remains has been marginalised. Most of the population are strongly behind their president and his government, with great strides towards true unification being made. It remains to be seen, however, whether the situation can be made truly permanent, as much depends on the ability of the government to maintain popular support. That in turn requires tangible results, which so far have been delivered.

IGUALADA

Settled originally as a stopover on the Rift-edge route, Iqualada is a desert world with a thin, tainted atmosphere. There is very little surface water; less than 2% of the planetary crust is covered with water of any sort and this includes regions of swampland that dry up every year.

The atmospheric taint is quite harmful to humans, a product of life in such an arid environment; the only native life on Iqualada is fungal and the air is filled with spores that drift on desert winds. These grow rapidly wherever they encounter moisture, normally along the fringes of a swamp or oasis. However, spores can anchor and grow in a human's mucous membranes, so

pose a hazard to anyone breathing them in. Complete protection requires sealed suits and decontamination systems, although a filter mask and goggles will reduce the chance of spore infection to virtually nil.

Conditions on the surface are of little interest to most of the population in any case, as the majority never leave their environmentally-controlled home, a subterranean city that is the only settlement on Iqualada.

Iqualada City is tunnelled into rock within an area of high ground that is one of the driest on the planet. It is supplied with water by deep artesian wells, and has excellent recycling facilities. Food is grown in huge garden complexes located on the top levels where they receive natural light through a glazed ceiling.

Being far from the nearest water, Iqualada City is not much troubled by airborne spores, although maintenance crews working outside are protected by coveralls, gloves and masks as a matter of routine. Decontamination procedures are effective and well-practiced.

This has not stopped the occasional fungal outbreaks in the city. If spores get in, they grow rapidly and can cause a serious problem. However, fungicides are effective against infestation as is, ironically, water. Too much water, or even excessive humidity, will kill most species of fungus and render spores unviable. The first line of defence against infestation is thus a good dousing with fire-suppression sprinkler systems, followed by steam-jet clean of the infested area.

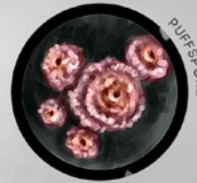
Individual infection is also easy to treat. It is rarely fatal but produces 'flu-like symptoms' that can kill weak or elderly individuals. More often, the victim is incapacitated for a few weeks then gradually recovers. Fungi growing in mucous membranes, such as the lungs or eyes tend to die off due to excess moisture, even if the body's own defences cannot cope. Antibiotics are ineffective against infection but several drugs are tailored to certain species of fungus, which rapidly kill an infection and allow rapid recovery. Most infections happen because someone was lazy or less than thorough, so there is a social stigma attached to becoming infected.

Disease	END check Difficulty	Damage	Interval
Iqualada Fungal Infection	Average (8+)	1D-1	1D weeks

Some of the fungal species found on-planet are used as the basis of a range of pharmaceuticals and are 'farmed'

NOTICE

**FUNGAL INFESTATION RISK.
IF YOU SEE IT, REPORT IT!**



THE DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY & SANITATION

in moist areas. This entails seeding an area with spores and then waiting a few weeks before coming back to harvest the crop. Seeder missions normally use grav craft, while collection is undertaken by protective-suited personnel operating from heavy crawlers.

Harvested fungal material is taken by crawler to segregated areas of the city, dried, and packaged for collection by starships out of Gaspar. Igalada could support a pharmaceutical industry of its own but this is not permitted by the government of Gaspar, which owns the world and operates the collection operations as part of a state-owned business.

Gaspar also dictates policy and is ultimately responsible for overseeing affairs on Igalada. Some, but by no means most, of Igalada's high officials are citizens of Gaspar sent to oversee the colony. The arrangement is accepted by most of the populace and is beneficial to Igalada. High-technology goods are imported, at affordable prices, from Gaspar and hard-working Igaladans can aspire to a job or university place on Gaspar, which can in turn lead to citizenship of that world.

Igalada has a good Class B starport, which is also owned and operated by businesses on Gaspar. Significant income is derived from service contracts to the Imperial Navy, which maintains a small base as an annex to the port and is home to two DesRons (destroyer squadrons) and a dozen small escort and patrol ships, in addition to much of the Vestus Subsector support flotilla. The Flag Squadron for Vestus, built around a small carrier with destroyer

escorts, is based out of nearby Carian but also obtains spares and supplies from businesses on Gaspar, staged through the base at Igalada.

As with many such worlds, there are really two entirely different planets called Igalada. One is a self-contained city of citizens going about comfortable, mundane lives. The other is a harsh desert environment with virtually no population. Most citizens would not be able to navigate, work or even survive in the desert, although they would be quite at home in almost any other city or starport. However, every citizen knows how to use a filter mask, recognise signs of fungal infection and effectively decontaminate a person, vehicle or item. Apart from being useful work skills and a way of avoiding social stigma, these activities are a staple plot device in entertainment vids. Igaladans grow up seeing how to do these things right (and wrong, which usually identifies the villain) almost every day of their lives.

PETRE

Petre is a mid-sized world whose atmosphere is rated by IISS surveys as 'dense, tainted'. In fact, it just barely qualifies as dense, with an average pressure of 1.52 Atmospheres at sea level. Sea level on Petre is very low compared to that of, say, Earth and although the world has roughly 60% coverage of surface water, this is shallow, as oceans go. The oceans tend to lie in the bottom of deep bowls, with surrounding coastal plain. Inland from this the land rises rapidly, in spectacular sheer cliffs hundreds of metres high. It has been suggested that Petre once had far more water and that the coastal plains are what was once the continental shelf.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Petre has a large and extensive highport, which is supported by downports at all the major settlements. The highport is also used as neutral ground for

delegations from the cities to discuss any issues that have arisen; these are far more likely to be commercial than territorial, as the cities are widely separated and not subject to population or resource pressure.

The highport is home to another Petren industry; the conversion of ex-naval fighters into one- and two-seater racing craft. The sport of small craft racing has been around for a long time but is enjoying an upsurge of interest from well-off individuals seeking to sponsor a team or compete directly. Events include manoeuvre challenges, straight speed courses, point-to-point and endurance races, and the Imperial Navy has shown an interest in recruiting racers as instructors or potential fighter jocks, maintaining a small recruiting office at the highport.

REUDDEN

Reudden is a medium-sized world with thin atmosphere and relatively little surface water. It lies in a sparse star system, which has no major planetoid belts or gas giants. Reudden Highport is thus the only ready source of fuel in the system.

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

The Imperium considers starports to be Imperial, rather than local, territory but allows operators considerable leeway in how their installation is run. Since Reudden Starport is owned and operated by an extremely high-law state, it shares some characteristics with the planetary society and while Imperial High Law places restrictions on how far the government can go, Reudden has been given an Amber Zone travel code.

Reudden Starport prohibits all weaponry, enforcing an effective Law Level 9. The usual penalty is a stiff fine and immediate deportation, which can cause problems if the offender does not have a berth on a ship awaiting him. In this event, the offender is given a short period to make arrangements (from a holding cell) and held until he boards a departing starship. If he cannot obtain transport offworld, he is considered guilty of further offences and passes into the planetside justice system until either someone pays for his passage or his sentence is completed.

Strict laws apply to all aspects of the port's activities. Customs and safety inspections are especially rigorous, and ships that fail a safety inspection must seek repairs before being allowed to leave; the only yards available are state-licensed and overpriced. This practice is monitored

STATESMAN LUXURY GRAV CAR

TL	10
SKILL	FLYER (GRAV)
AGILITY	+1
SPEED (CRUISE)	FAST (HIGH)
RANGE (CRUISE)	2000 (3000)
CREW	1
PASSENGERS	3
CARGO	0.5 TON
HULL	20
SHIPPING	5 TONS
COST	CR395000

ARMOUR

FRONT	3
REAR	3
SIDES	3



EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONS

Autopilot (enhanced), Communications System (improved, satellite uplink), Computer/2, Control System (improved), Entertainment System, Fire Extinguishers, Life Support (short term), Navigation System (improved), Sensor System (improved, increased fidelity), Wet Bar

No weapon

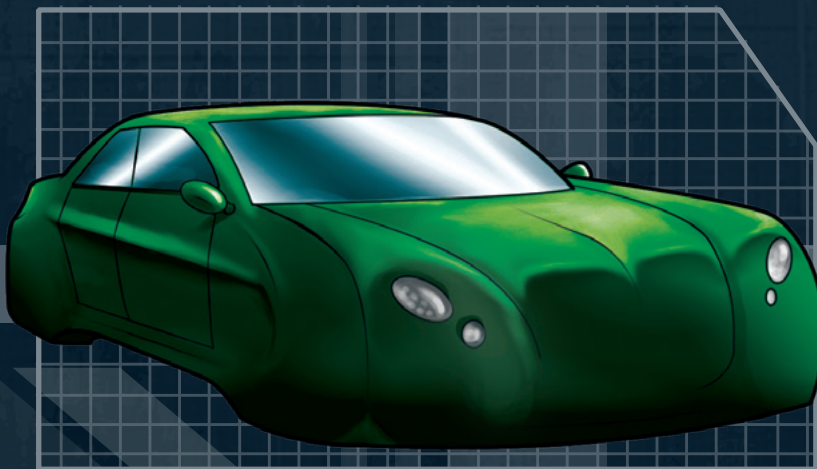
Autopilot (skill level)	2
Communications (range)	500 km
Navigation (Navigation DM)	+2
Sensors (Electronics (sensors) DM)	+2
Camouflage (Recon DM)	-
Stealth (Electronics (sensors) DM)	-

TRAITS

None

DESCRIPTION

Advertised as having all luxuries bound within an understated body, the Statesman is highly customisable and intended to be the last word in status among business executives and mid-ranking government officials. There is a saying that the word 'performance' is not allowed to be so much as mentioned in the factories, as everything in the Statesman's design is geared towards true luxury and comfort.



COSMIC MAKO-CLASS RACING CRAFT

TL12		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	50 tons, Streamlined, Lightweight	-	2.25
M-Drive	Thrust 3	1.5	3
High Burn	Thrust 12	12	2.4
Power Plant	Fusion (TL8), Power 30	3	1.5
Fuel Tanks	6 hours of operation, plus 1 hour burn	30	-
Bridge	Dual Cockpit	2.5	0.015
Computer	Computer/5	-	0.03
Sensors	Civilian	1	3
Software	Manoeuvre/0	-	-
TOTAL: MCR 12.195			

CREW
PILOT, NAVIGATOR

RUNNING COSTS
MAINTENANCE COST:
Cr1016/month
•••••
PURCHASE COST:
MCR12.195

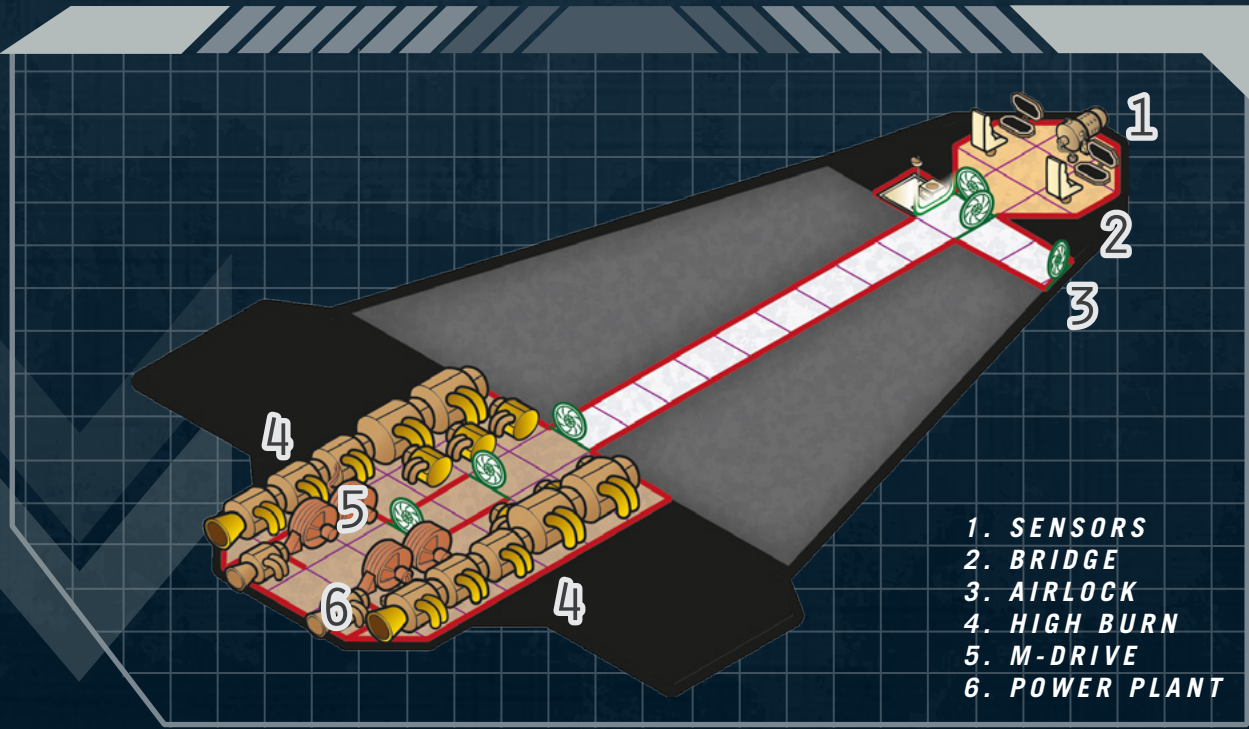
POWER REQUIREMENTS

15	10	1
MANOEUVRE DRIVE	BASIC SHIP SYSTEMS	SENSORS



18
HULL POINTS

Starting life as an Imperial heavy fighter, the Cosmic Mako is a one-off conversion built by the Cosmic Racers yard on Petre. Intended for the two-seater 'heavy' class of racers, the Cosmic Mako has had its hull thoroughly gutted and replaced with lightweight racing grade components and a massive high burn thruster, making it extremely fast and manoeuvrable, in both space and within atmospheres.



to ensure that it lies within the bounds of fair practice as the Imperium is prepared to tolerate overzealous interpretation of its regulations by high-law member states but will not accept blatant abuse of regulations to sucker ships into paying for unnecessary work.

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

Reudden Downport is not located at the planetary capital as deliberate care has been taken to isolate the downport from the rest of the world. There is a sizable town at the downport but it is entirely within the port's Extrality Line and therefore part of the port rather than a local facility. The port is surrounded by a high wall topped by a fence, with a ditch and then another fence outside that. Beyond is a region of desert, with the only settlement within 20km being the compound that houses customs and enforcement personnel employed at the port.

Access to the rest of the world is via a single underground monorail line for personnel and another for heavy goods, both well-guarded and subject to stringent controls. Grav and air vehicles are not permitted to approach or leave the port without special clearance, which is rarely granted. Even spacecraft are forced to keep to specified lanes on approach or departure. Craft have, in the past, been fired on for deviating from traffic control instructions.

The world itself is a dictatorship, run by the head of the Internal Security Forces. This is a paramilitary organisation that handles law enforcement, civil defence and some aspects of bureaucracy. Laws are incredibly strict, and pervade all aspects of everyday life, but are fairly applied. It is not clear why Reudden needs such strict law enforcement but the leaders seem to believe in following their own rules. As for the general populace, they are raised in a highly regimented environment and subjected from birth to propaganda that tells them their way of life is the only correct one.

The world's four million or so citizens dwell in modestly sized cities separated by large expanses of wilderness. Travel between communities is restricted and not common and only some settlements are eligible to provide highport or downport staff. Residents of these communities are barred from certain governmental jobs and cannot join the military or Internal Security Forces.

Sustainable Tech Level is 7, providing a comfortable basic standard of living for everyone. Access to luxuries is dependent as much on status as money and status is awarded for achievements within a strict code. Basically, the closer to a model citizen one is, the greater chance of promotion, which leads in turn to a better lifestyle and admiration of lesser citizens. This does, of course, promote a certain mediocrity as well as conformity.

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



MACON



SUBSECTOR

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Earl Center	1102		A998111-9	Lo		Imperium	G
Evet's World	0903	N	B201656-D	Ic Na Ni Va	A	Imperium	G
Gorod	1302		D6689CG-7	Hi	A	Imperium	G
Oleiros	1204		B000457-D	As Ni Va			
Sestao	1301	N	A420675-C	De Na Ni Po		Imperium	G
Ulnert	1002		B53769D-7	Ni	A	Imperium	G
Yvette	1103		A79A633-D	Ni Wa		Imperium	G

Macon subsector lies on the fringe of the Great Rift. It contains only seven star systems and, as such, is too small to have its own administrative apparatus. Bureaucratic functions are handled from Lintl, in Vestus. Macon faces little in the way of external threats; a serious problem, such as a world government rebelling against the Imperium, would be handled by major assets sent from Deneb sector while the subsector fleet, consisting of a couple of old escort destroyers and handful of patrol ships, shows the flag and deals with the occasional incident.

GOROD

Located right on the fringe of the Great Rift, Gorod was settled several times during early Imperial expansions. As a medium-sized world with a standard atmosphere and plenty of water, it was an excellent prospect for colonisation.

The first arrivals were during the early free-for-all and consisted largely of opportunistic land-grabbers who brought more weaponry than machinery. Their aim was to get there first and stake a claim. This could be enforced with legal writs and guns, forcing other groups to buy out the landgrabbers or offer them a stake in the new colony.

Some of the early colony missions were quite large, although none contained more than a few thousand people. The balance of equipment to personnel varied considerably from group-to-group, as did follow-up

support. Over the course of a century or so, a vast number of settlements sprang up over the globe. Some were large, some small, some high-tech and some little more than nomad camps. Some were visited, raided or scavenged from by ships out of Oleiros. Some vanished completely. Local conditions, unusual weather and random disasters shaped the fate of many.

From this cauldron, several distinct proto-nations developed as groups flowed together, conquered one another or were taken over by better equipped newcomers. What emerged over time were two almost entirely separate cultures on Gorod. The 'barbarian' nations tended to subsist at TL3-4, while more advanced societies progressed to the point where they could build their own grav vehicles. However, just as Gorod's more advanced regions reached a stable TL9, large-scale warfare broke out. This started as rivalry between the advanced states and developed into a free-for-all that the barbarians took advantage of. Some states were overrun or damaged to the point where they ceased to be players in the political arena.

From this period of conflict emerged an alliance, composed mainly of advanced states but also encompassing several large barbarian groups. Together, these forces crushed their opponents and created a stable nation based on their core territories. The cost was high, however, and among the casualties was the ability to support advanced technologies. Most areas fell to a sustainable TL5-6, with more advanced equipment treasured as it could not be replaced.

B			

Reft

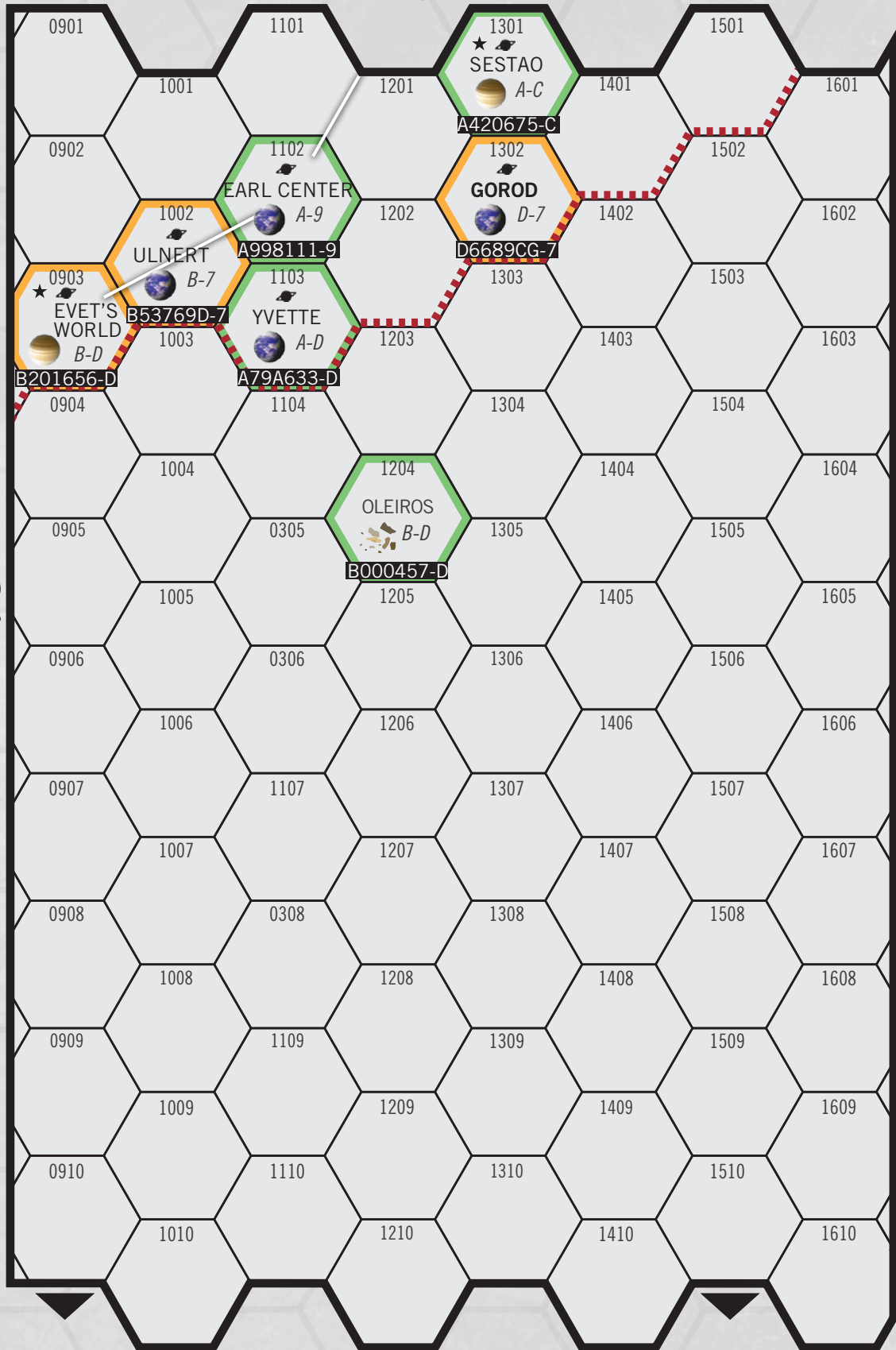
MACON SUBSECTOR

To Vestus (page 11)

To Two Little (page 27)

To Zeng (Deneb Sector)

To Sagittarian (page 38)



- Gas Giant
- B-6* Starport Class & Tech Level
- ★ Imperial Naval Base

- Secure System
- Amber Zone
- Imperial Border
- X-boat Route

- Planet (dry)
- Planet (water present)
- Asteroid Field

After centuries of border skirmishing against their less advanced neighbours and gradual rebuilding, the higher-tech states recovered to a stable TL7, which remains the case today. About half a billion people dwell under the governance of the Nation of Gorod, which claims dominance over the whole planet and all its peoples. Most of the land surface is of lesser value and here something like three billion people dwell in conditions ranging from primitive (TL1-2) to early technological (TL3-4). Most of these folk do not acknowledge the world government.

The Nation of Gorod is recognised as the sovereign government of Gorod by the Imperium, of which it is a member, and problems between the government and its subjects in the outback are an internal affair, which the Imperium does not get involved in. Such problems are common, with several brushfire wars and uprisings going on in various regions at any given time.

The world government prohibits contact with any planetary population other than at designated points, which means starfarers need special permits (virtually impossible to obtain) to leave the region around the starport. Checkpoints and police posts are common on all roads, with movement severely restricted.

Several offworld organisations are interested in Gorod. These range from mercenary units seeking government contracts to sentient rights groups and several activists and film-makers have recently been caught trying to slip on-planet.

OLEIROS

Although there are planets in the Oleiros system, it is the asteroid belt that was settled and became the mainworld. Outposts are maintained on other bodies in

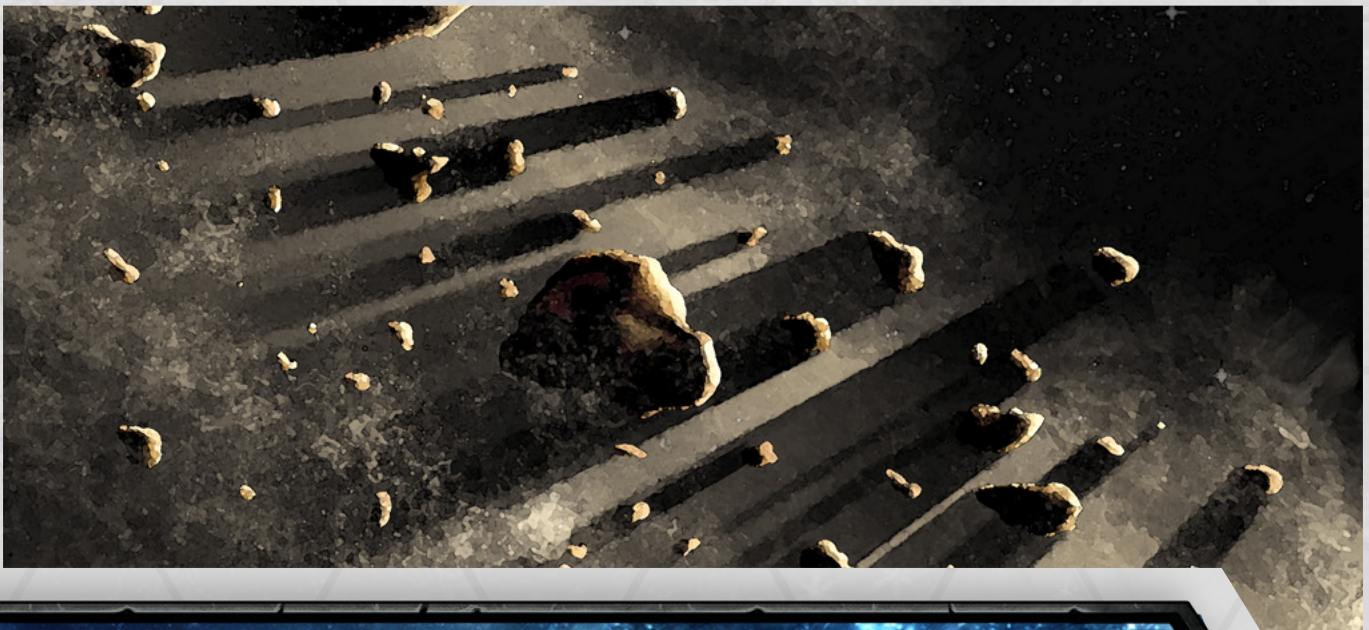
the system but the Oleiros belt is home to most of the population as well as all major industries.

Oleiros is independent of the Imperium but friendly to it. Occasional diplomatic overtures from Imperial officials tend to politely go nowhere and there is little interest in pushing the matter. The ruling council maintains tight control over technological functions, with the heads of the Oleiros University and Shipmakers' Guild wielding the most power.

The university is the only route into the ruling class; technology is the most important facet of Oleiran life. The Shipmakers build trade ships that ply the edges of the Rift in what is essentially a cottage industry; Oleiran ships are virtually hand-built and beautifully made, if slow to produce. Occasional outside contracts come in, mainly from rich nobles and corporate officials wanting prestigious craft to underline their status.

However, the most important products of the Shipmakers' berths are the agricultural-transfer vessels that cross the rift between Yvette and Oleiros, and support craft that refuel the deep-space depots. The latter are functional vessels, not much different to tankers and transports used elsewhere, but the former are quite special. These large vessels transport bulk agricultural produce like other grain ships but also carry herds of live farm animals to Oleiros, ensuring a supply of truly fresh meat for the well-off citizens of the asteroid habitats.

At least one agro-transport has been bought as a novelty liner by an Imperial entrepreneur, allowing rich passengers to take rides on animal-back through a little section of grassy countryside, whilst the glazed ceiling above allows them to admire the stars above. Even while in jump, with the glazed sections sealed, the experience is considered well worth the huge ticket price.



AGRICULTURAL-TRANSFER SHIP

BOVINE CLASS

TL13		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	2,500 tons, Dispersed Structure, Light Hull	-	46.875
M-Drive	Thrust 1	25	50
J-Drive	Jump 2	130	195
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 750	50	50
Fuel Tanks	J-2, 4 weeks of operation, plus Shuttle	506	-
Bridge	Small (DM-1)	40	12.5
Computer	Computer/5 bis	-	0.045
Sensors	Basic	-	-
Weapons	Double Turrets (beam lasers) x 6	6	9
Systems	Cargo Crane	7	7
	Loading Belt (TL12) x 8	8	0.08
	Docking Space (95 tons)	105	26.25
	Shuttle	-	15.167
	Stables	250	0.625
Staterooms	Standard x 12	48	6
Software	Manoeuvre/0	-	-
	Jump Control/2	-	0.2
	Library	-	-
Common Areas		40	4
Cargo		1266	-
TOTAL: MCR 422.742			

CREW

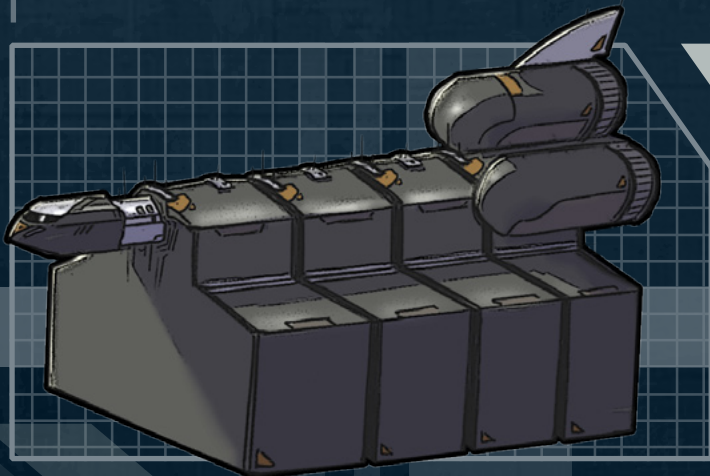
CAPTAIN, PILOT, ASTROGATOR,
ENGINEER X5, MAINTENANCE X2,
MEDIC, GUNNER X6, ADMINISTRATOR

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST:
Cr35229/month

• • • • •
PURCHASE COST:
MCR422.742

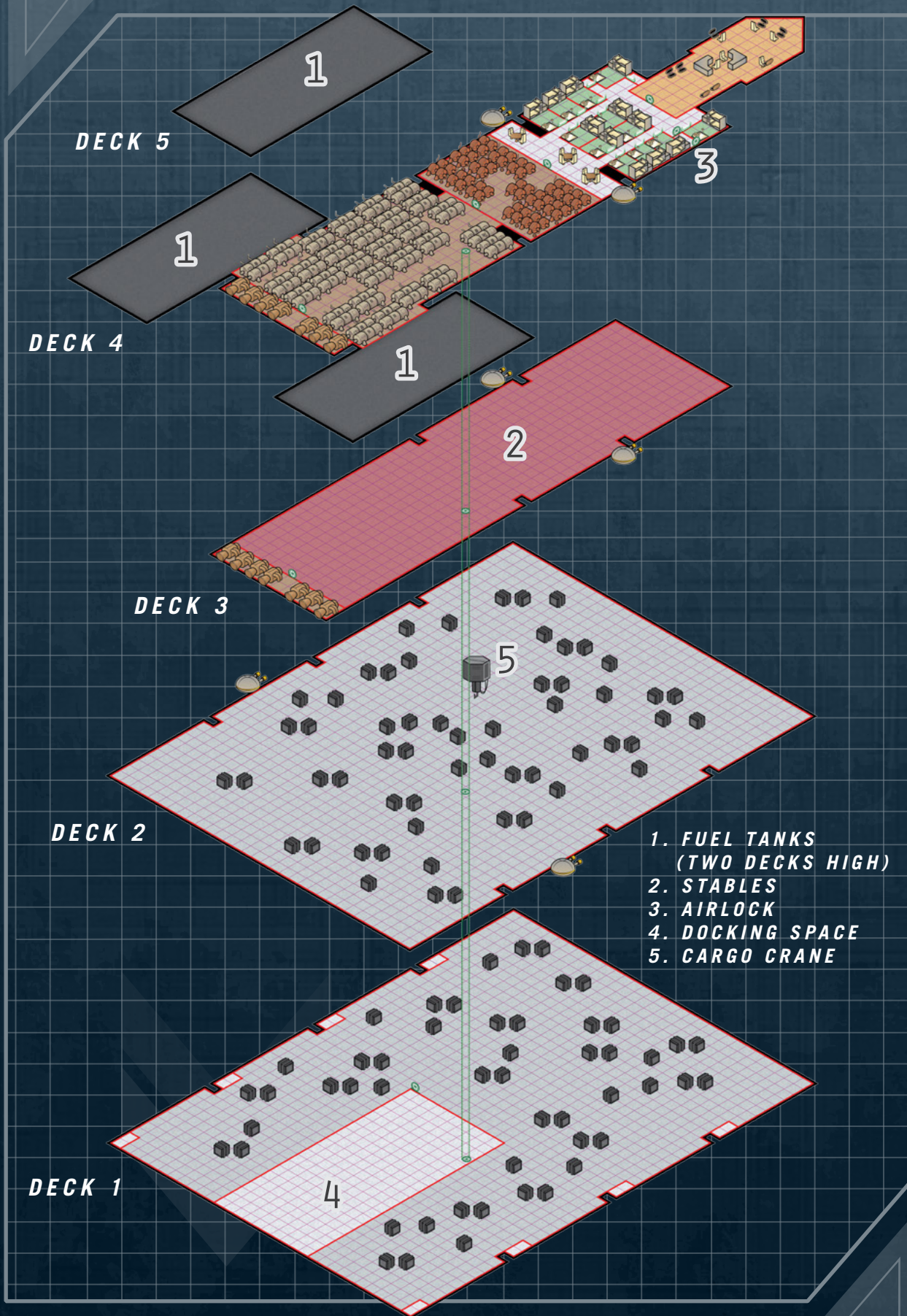
POWER REQUIREMENTS



810

HULL POINTS

The *Bovine*-class was specifically designed and built by the Shipmakers of the Oleiros shipyards to transport vast quantities of agricultural produce and livestock to feed the population of the asteroid belt. A small fleet of these ships can support tens of thousands of people and they are valued outside of the Oleiros system as versatile transport and merchant vessels that are readily adapted to any cargo. The dispersed structure of the *Bovine* is notoriously flimsy but captains quickly learn not to put the ship under any kind of risk.



TWO LITTLE



SUBSECTOR

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Aum-Rhar	1907		A857948-C	Hi Ga			G
Zamoran	2108	M	B674675-A	Ag Ni			G

Two Little subsector lies outside the Imperium. It contains just two star systems; Lemente and Zamoran. These are used as transit points for ships headed to Barker subsector.

ZAMORAN

Zamoran is an Earth-like world, if a little hot and dry. Only its location, far out in the Great Rift, would make it a less appealing prospect for colonisation. However, had a survey mission been launched or speculative colonists jumped into the system, a surprise would have awaited them, for there have been humans on Zamoran for millennia.

There are two populations on Zamoran, human and Droyne. It is not clear which, if either, is native or arrived first, and current thinking is that perhaps both were transplanted to the world by the Ancients. This ties in with the discovery of mysterious ruins in remote areas and on Zamoran's moon.

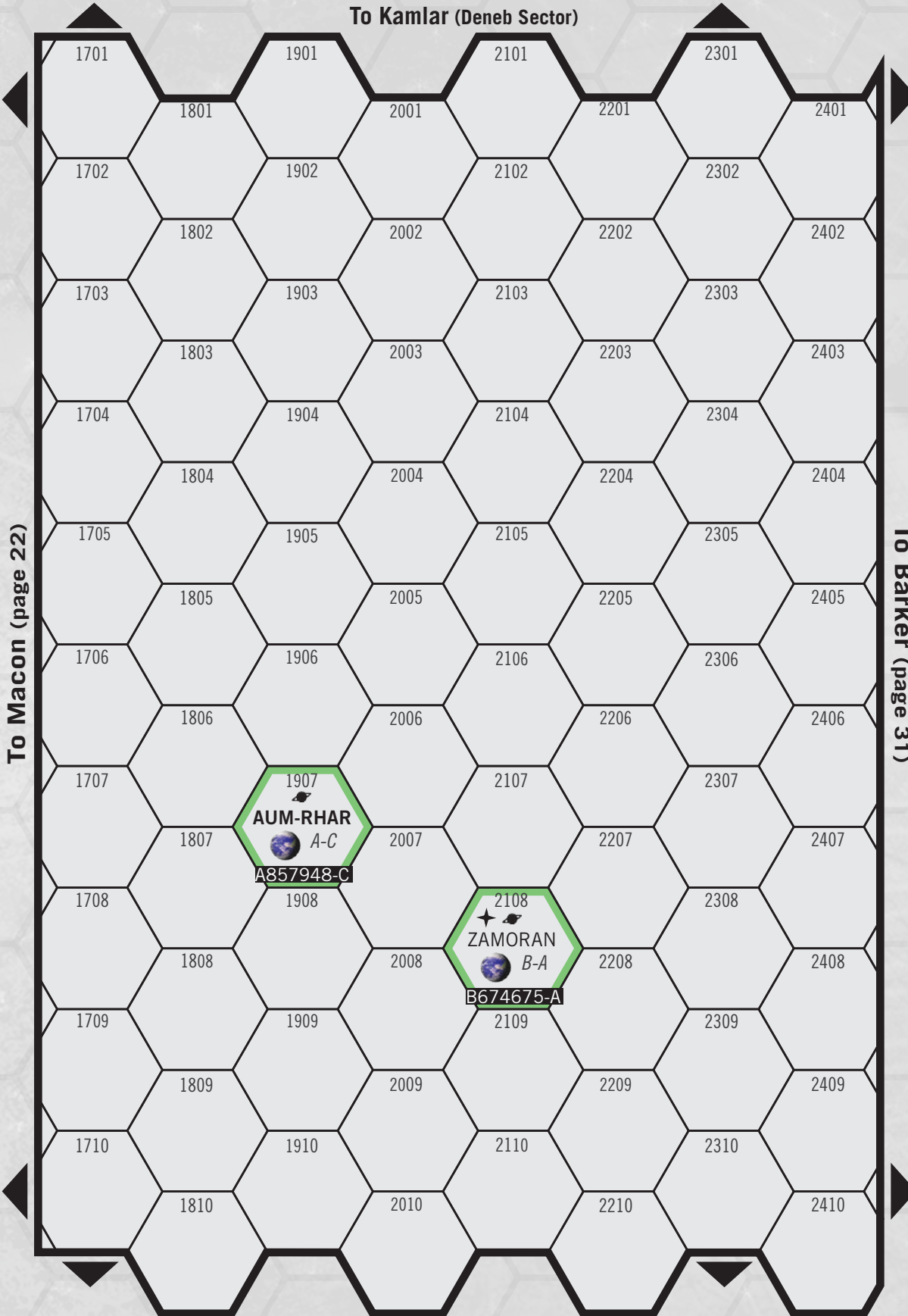
The two species live separately for the most part, without much conflict. Roughly 700,000 humans dwell mostly in the southern hemisphere, while the northern hemisphere has less useable land and is home to an estimated 400,000 Droyne. The world has a number of suspiciously radioactive depressions in the ground – almost certainly nuclear craters – and these are distributed in an interesting manner.

Analysis suggests that there are two sets of craters. The first are very old, perhaps several hundred thousand years or so. These are evenly distributed, more or less, between the northern and southern hemispheres, and tend to be large and deep, with some extensive enough to be mistaken for geographical features such as lakes or small inland seas. Radioactivity in most of these old craters has fallen back to normal levels, although a few remain dangerous to approach.

The later round of craters is much more recent – perhaps 10,000 years – and is unevenly distributed. Those in the southern hemisphere are a minority but tend to be either very wide, very deep or both. They are, on average, 'cleaner' than those in the northern hemisphere. There are also other sites that are not nuclear and, thus far, defy description. These include a couple of completely flat areas that look as if a perfectly circular area of rock and topsoil simply vanished, along with a mountain with a perfectly straight tunnel, 2.43 metres in diameter, drilled through it at a strange angle by some kind of beam weapon.

The damage to the northern hemisphere is more conventional and takes the form of saturation bombardment from large nuclear missiles. Radiation levels are no longer elevated but it is clear both hemispheres suffered extensive damage.

To Kamlar (Deneb Sector)



			C

Ref

TWO LITTLE SUBSECTOR

To Macon (page 22)

To Barker (page 31)

To Lost Way (page 40)

- Gas Giant
- Secure System
- Planet (water present)
- B-6 Starport Class & Tech Level
- Imperial Naval Base

The official history of Zamoran, as far as one exists, records a previous civilisation, some 10,000 years ago. The accepted theory is that this civilisation perished in a war of mutual destruction with the Droyne of the northern hemisphere. It is not known who started this war or what course it took but at some point, weapons of mass destruction were exchanged.

The humans deployed large numbers of crude nuclear weapons while the Droyne used more precise and 'cleaner' warheads plus weapons of unknown type that dated from 'the ancient and unthinkable past'. Civilisation (Droyne and human) was shattered and effectively finished off by an ice age. However, the entire population was not reduced to using stone tools; in warmer climes, it was possible for small communities to hang on to some vestiges of technology and from these the recovery began when the ice receded.

The ice age appears to have been fairly short; just a few thousand years, but between it and the war, populations of both humans and Droyne were vastly reduced. The global climate is still warming up, and the ice has not reached its final point of retreat, but communities of humans and Droyne close to the equator have made a fairly quick technological recovery, despite their populations not having expanded very fast. Notably, humans have spread south after the retreating ice and the Droyne have gone north. There are no records of an agreement but the two species seem to have decided there is plenty of land and resources to be had without getting into another war.

The modern human populace is balkanised, dwelling in a chain of city-states near the equator and progressively smaller communities further south. There is also a population of primitive humans in the harsh lands of the far south.

A few hundred years ago, exploration of the solar system began and today Zamoran has a decent orbital port capable of handling interstellar vessels. These come in, very occasionally, via Aum-Rhar. Although the humans of Zamoran have the theoretical science available to build jump-capable ships, they do not seem to know how to do it in practice and have not attempted the feat.

The city-states are self-governing, although they cooperate on local projects. The starport was a joint venture and the city-states agree on one other thing – war with the Droyne should be avoided. A treaty limiting contact with the Droyne is in place, whereby the city-states have agreed to maintain a joint embassy on an island just north of the equator and prevent civilians travelling into Droyne lands.

The Droyne seem happy enough with this arrangement, although most of the time they simply ignore the human population. Their numbers are an estimate at best, as they are secretive and uncommunicative about all aspects of their civilisation. There is no starport as such in the Droyne-held part of the planet, although Droyne ships have occasionally been seen landing both at city sites and remote locations where no settlement is thought to exist.

The Droyne do not allow non-Droyne ships to land in the northern hemisphere, broadcasting a curt warning and vectoring in attack craft to dissuade the vessel. Ships have been shot down for ignoring these warnings, although vessels on approach to the southern port are generally ignored.

Droyne naval forces operate out of a small installation on Zamoran's moon, which seems to be a naval base of sorts. It lies right on the edge of a huge crater, possibly the site of an earlier base. Craft based out of the installation are mostly sublight vessels used for local defence but at least a handful of jump-capable ships are known to exist.

Droyne ground forces, using grav vehicles, have in the past responded to ground incursions by humans coming up from the south but they are just as likely to completely ignore intruders, deliver a polite request via the embassy to remove the incursion or launch a large but non-nuclear missile from a craft in low orbit.

This unpredictability, coupled with uncertainty about the numbers, location and capabilities of the Droyne, inspires a certain paranoia among the human population.

DROYNE WARRIOR

Droyne can use the following two psionic talents.

STATS	STR 6 DEX 9 END 7 INT 4 PSI 6 SOC 3
SKILLS	Athletics 0, Clairvoyance 1, Electronics (computers) 1, Gun Combat (slug) 2, Melee 0, Recon 2, Telepathy 2, Vacc Suit 0 Weapons: Autopistol (3D-3), Advanced Combat Rifle (3D, Auto 3, Scope)
ARMOUR	Combat Armour (+17)
TRAITS	Flyer (Very Slow)

Invisibility

A defensive mechanism, invisibility allows Droyne to cloud the minds of every living thing close by. The talent is voluntary and can be turned on and off at will. It is not, however, selective; if in use, no one sees the Droyne and if not, everyone sees it. Invisibility also works against television cameras (including electronic image intensifiers and infra-red scopes), robots and the like. However, it is not effective against anyone with a natural or artificial psionic shield.

Check: Simple (2+) Telepathy check (immediate, PSI)

Reach: Very Long (cannot be increased)

PSI Cost: 0

Homing

This talent represents the Droyne ability to always know in which direction their oytryip (family or community) lies and how far away it is. If all members of the oytryip die, homing is no longer effective and the Droyne would be aware of the loss.

Check: Simple (2+) Clairvoyance check (immediate, PSI)

Reach: Continental (cannot be increased)

PSI Cost: 0



BARKER



SUBSECTOR

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Arnorac	2509	N	B581468-A	Ni		Imperium	G
Gordon	2609		B310776-A	Na			G
Schuuni	2904		BA9A599-D	Ni Wa			

Barker subsector contains three star systems, of which one (Arnorac) is an Imperial client state. Arnorac receives support from the Imperium and the occasional visit from naval ships. Exactly why such a remote world would feel the need for Imperial protection mystifies many but, in fact, the answer is simple – it does not. Arnorac came to be an Imperial client world for entirely different reasons.

ARNORAC

Arnorac is a client state of the Imperium for the simple reason that it is owned by the Imperial Navy. Some decades ago, Arnorac's government collapsed due to a series of economic and political disasters. Help arrived in the form of Naval ships out of Deneb sector, carrying Army engineers and a range of necessary personnel, from diplomats and doctors to technicians and administrators. Order was restored in full Imperial-intervention style, with Marines smashing centres of resistance and Army squads enforcing peace on the streets. Images of the Imperial Marine Corps storming the governmental complex in order to raise the fallen government's own banner made excellent propaganda for the Imperium.

Having rammed a stable government down the throats of the people of Arnorac at gunpoint, the Imperials expected to withdraw but instead were requested to stay. The Army was gradually withdrawn but naval personnel remained in key government positions. This suited Imperial intentions; a naval base was constructed and a small force of high-jump patrol ships deployed with tanker support.

Today, Arnorac's government is a curious thing, as it contains several personnel seconded from the Imperial

Navy. The planetary flag is always flown alongside an Imperial Navy sunburst and the world proclaims its loyalty not to the Imperium but the Imperial Navy itself.

GORDON

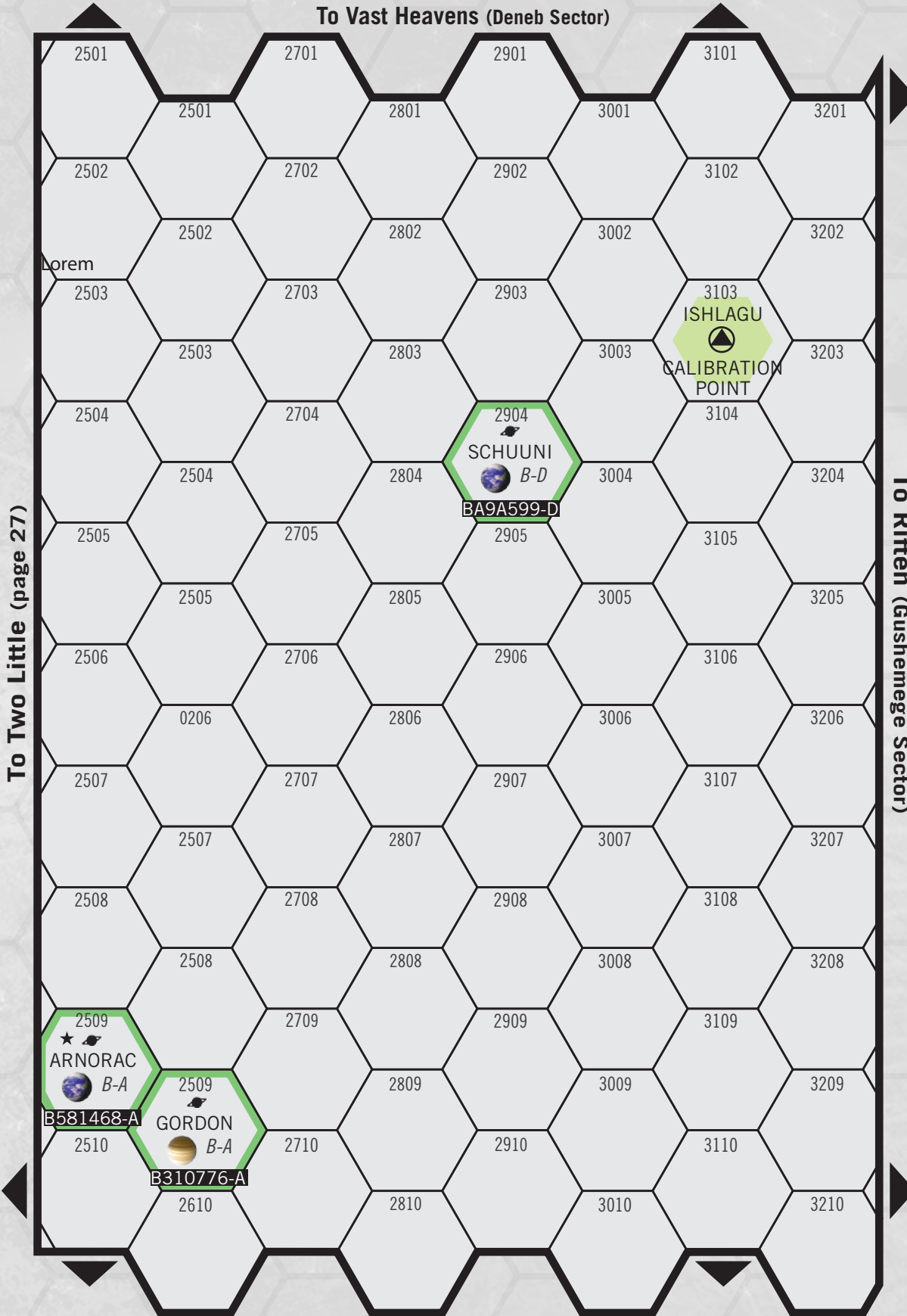
Gordon was settled during the Rule of Man by one of several groups who sought to leave the collapsing Second Imperium behind and seek a new home away from the infighting (political and actual), piracy and urban unrest that characterised the last years of the Twilight period before the Long Night set in.

A small world with only a trace atmosphere, Gordon presented the early colonists with severe problems. Water could be obtained from deep underground basins and ice, although not in great quantities, and useful gases could be compressed from the atmosphere. However, challenging conditions forced the colonists to spread out, building several communities that could be supported by locally-available resources.

It was several generations before the colonies became large enough to support a return to space. After a range of false starts, satellites were successfully launched and vessels put into orbit. Surveys from space uncovered sites for new settlements atop good resources, which could have resulted in conflict. It was a measure of the friendly relations between the settlements that they instead embarked upon a period of joint expansion, building new colonies and sending personnel without disagreement about ownership or profits.

For many years, transport between the various colonies had been accomplished by orbital craft making short hops, the low gravity of Gordon making this a cheap alternative to building roadways across virtually airless,

To Vast Heavens (Deneb Sector)



			D

Refit

BARKER SUBSECTOR

- Gas Giant
- Planet (dry)
- Planet (water present)
- B-6 Starport Class & Tech Level
- ★ Imperial Naval Base
- Secure System

meteor-blasted wastes. A new orbital port became a base for cargo and passenger transports, plus storage area for goods in transit; a sort of orbital rail yard.

Eventually, the port became the base for expansion through the rest of the system, with petrochemical-skimming installations set up at the gas giants and mining stations wherever minerals could be found. However, it remains an industrial facility rather than a settlement in its own right.

Today, Gordon has a population of some sixty million people divided between several large settlements and many small ones. Most are located underground and

have access to water sources but rely mainly on starship-style recycling and life support systems. Society is austere but not excessively so; recycling is important, and diet repetitive, but there are sufficient resources to produce luxury goods.

Contact with the Imperium has not changed anything. Occasional trade ships bring in Imperial goods and trade with Arnorac is now well established but Gordon remains a self-sufficient society in the midst of the Great Rift. There are those who say that if all the other stars went out, the folk of Gordon would go on with their lives as if nothing had happened.



USHER



SUBSECTOR

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Aldaya	0212	S	B885620-6	Ag Ni Ri Ga		Imperium	G
Banskono	0112		A582444-C	Ni		Imperium	G
Bastion	0118	N	B737532-B	Ni		Imperium	G
Cerebin	0217		B423662-C	Na Ni Po		Imperium	G
Fraaga	0511		B691420-B	Ni		Imperium	G
Grudovo	0111		B560453-C	De Ni		Imperium	G
Helifil	0313	RS	D310724-8	Na		Imperium	G
Neon	0216		D78227A-7	Lo		Imperium	G
Tonnurad	0416		B563695-7	Ni Ri		Imperium	G

Usher subsector contains nine star systems, of which all but one are Imperial territory. Ironically, that one system, Tonnurad, is the entry point for almost all trans-rift traffic into Imperial space.

Tonnurad is a mid-tech world whose population are friendly to the Imperium but have no interest in joining. The deals that the government of Tonnurad has negotiated with Imperial shipping corporation Riftshore Navigation LIC allow for tariffs to be imposed on goods moved through the highport, something not permitted under Imperial trade laws. Thus, although the world government subsidises some of the port's activities, it makes a profit from them.

Although it is in Tonnurad's interest to remain outside the Imperium, the rest of the subsector is firmly under Imperial control. There is no subsector capital; administrative functions are carried out through Lintl in Vestus.

The Imperial Navy and Scout Service maintain small bases at Bastion and Aldaya respectively. These are used mainly to support operations along the Rift fringe

and out into the Trojan Reach. The latter contains some Imperial worlds but is the outermost frontier of Imperial territory in the region and can be lawless.

Naval assets in Usher are mainly patrol vessels, with a couple of destroyers to deal with more serious threats. This force is entirely adequate for dealing with piracy and smuggling but could not handle a major threat.

ALDAYA

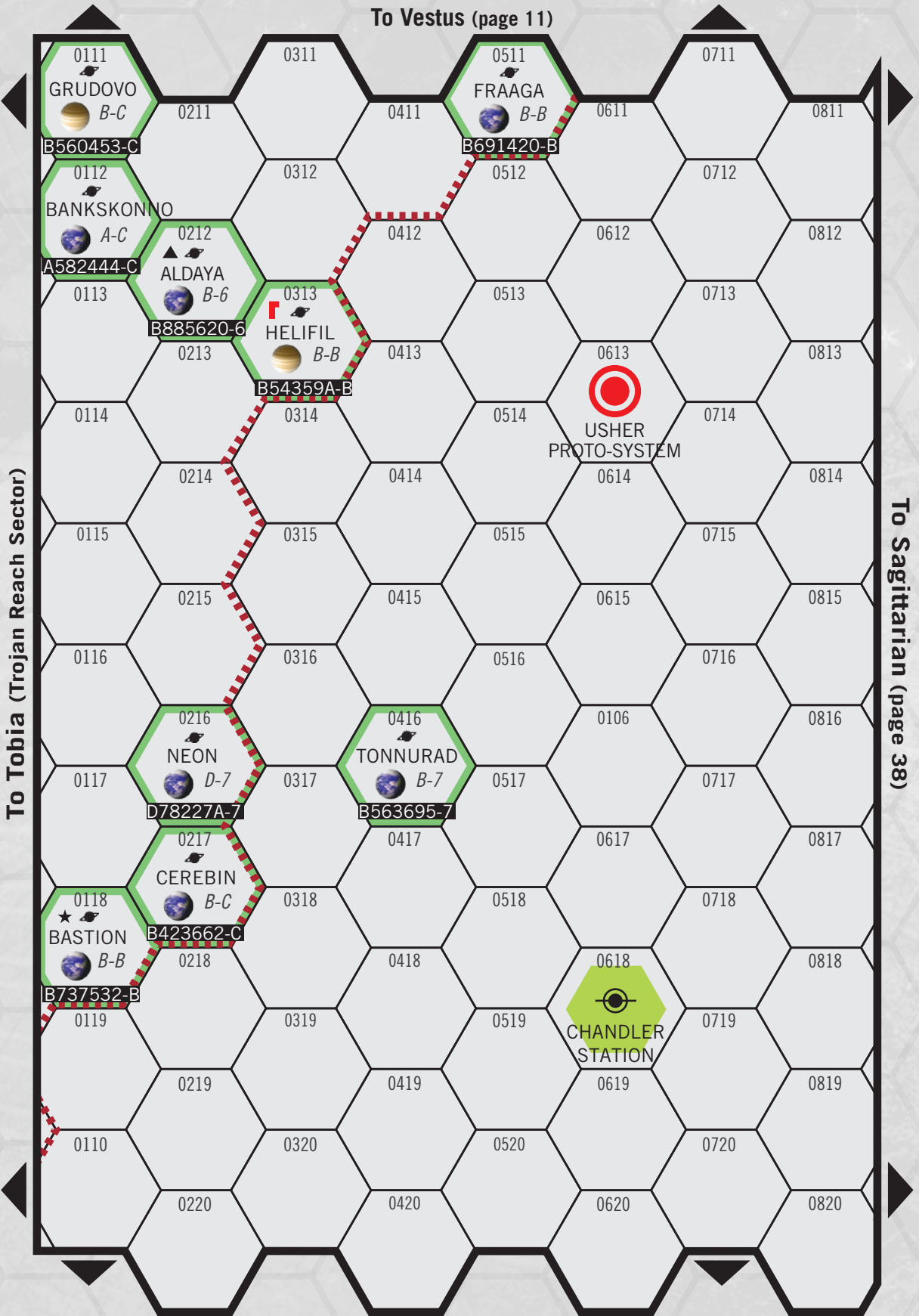
Aldaya is a temperate world with dense atmosphere and sufficient water to make a good prospect for habitation, so was colonised early during Imperial expansion into the sector. This was something of a hit-and-miss affair, with several small colonies set up in rapid succession, each in a different region. Some were successful and others less so.

The resulting mess was bought outright by a development corporation rather grandly named Imperial Colonial Development, LIC. ICD essentially bought all viable colonies and deployed assistance

F			

Reft

USHER SUBSECTOR



To Vestus (page 11)

To Tobia (Trojan Reach Sector)

To Sagittarian (page 38)

To Void 8

- Gas Giant
- Secure System
- Planet (dry)
- B-6 Starport Class & Tech Level
- Research Station
- Planet (water present)
- Imperial Naval Base
- Anomaly
- Imperial Scout Base

teams to those in the process of collapse. The intent was to coordinate these fledgling colonies and ensure steady, controlled development. Eventually the colonies of Aldya would become a functioning world state, with a branch of ICD as government.

It was a workable plan; it had been done successfully elsewhere and has been successful since. However, on Aldya the funding dried up. ICD had its fingers in too many pies and did not recognise the need to cut losses early enough. Striving to keep its assets, ICD lost everything.

The demise of ICD brought about a sordid affair on Aldya, in which the corporation's creditors tried to liquidate assets; goods made by the colonists, plus agricultural surpluses and any raw materials that were mined, were taken to offset the colony's debt but this proved unworkable as small, struggling colonies had no surplus. It was also illegal – ICD owned the land and machinery but the Imperium has laws that prohibit ownership of people; laws that the creditors came perilously close to breaking.

The creditors attempted to run colonists off their land or induce them to join a new colony project (usually in the same location) run by the creditors, while machinery and similar assets were taken. The colonists resisted.

In some cases, the colonists defended their holdings, while others were driven off and forced to scrape an existence in the countryside. These dispossessed colonists raided the new settlements; they were unable to drive off the newcomers but forced them to turn their settlements into fortresses. As costs of security spiralled and endless raids crippled the world's tiny economy, the creditors finally cut their losses and pulled out.

The fortress-colonies struggled for many years with inadequate resources and manpower, however they did eventually begin to expand. Population growth was not rapid and technological capability had dropped to a steam-power level. Gradually the colonies developed into a civilisation of sorts and clawed their way up to TL6.

Since most sites chosen for development were close to one another, it was not difficult to link the colonies – which had now become cities – together with rail and road transport and gradually evolve a world government. This took the form of a full democracy, every adult being eligible to vote.

However, Aldya's world-democracy has been gradually spiralling into anarchy, unable to reach consensus on

most issues. There has been violence but, for the most part, the problem is one of governmental paralysis rather than fighting in the streets. Dozens of tiny voting alliances and interest groups exist, all blocking one another's initiatives and making deals for the votes of other groups, only to be themselves blocked by someone else pursuing a different agenda.

While the planetary government is nearing collapse, the starport is doing well. The ground component is small and guarded by security troops; it is a little enclave of organisation and effective decision-making amid the general chaos on-planet. However, few visitors land at the downport. Most simply pass through the highport, which is large and efficient.

GRUDOVO

Grudovo is a desert world, with virtually no surface water. Many Travellers assume such a world must be an endless sea of sand dunes baked by an intense sun, yet this is not always the case. Grudovo's surface temperature is not especially high and most of its terrain is comprised of rocky badlands rather than sand. There are also extensive regions of hills and mountains, and a few small bodies of water. Most of these are seasonal; only about half are reliably present year-round.

Although extremely dry, Grudovo is not impossible to live on. The terrain can be difficult but presents less of a problem to vehicles, such as ATVs, than sand. Nevertheless, when it is necessary to travel outside the settlements, grav transport is favoured.

Grudovo is home to around five thousand people, of whom nearly half live in the main community. This is a comfortable, advanced-technology settlement co-located with the starport, lying on the shore of the largest permanent body of water and sheltered by high ground on three sides. To the north is a small region of plains, which ends abruptly at a huge volcanic escarpment, effectively sealing the inhabited region into a box surrounded by high lands.

The plains are dotted with small communities, mainly along the course of seasonal rivers, mostly mining outposts or agricultural sites. The latter use water extracted from the subsoil to ensure a year-round supply, even when rivers run dry. Farms, like the settlements themselves, are sealed off from the environment by high walls and glazed roofs.

Within the settlements, climate control ensures a shirtsleeves environment; the people of Grudovo are not

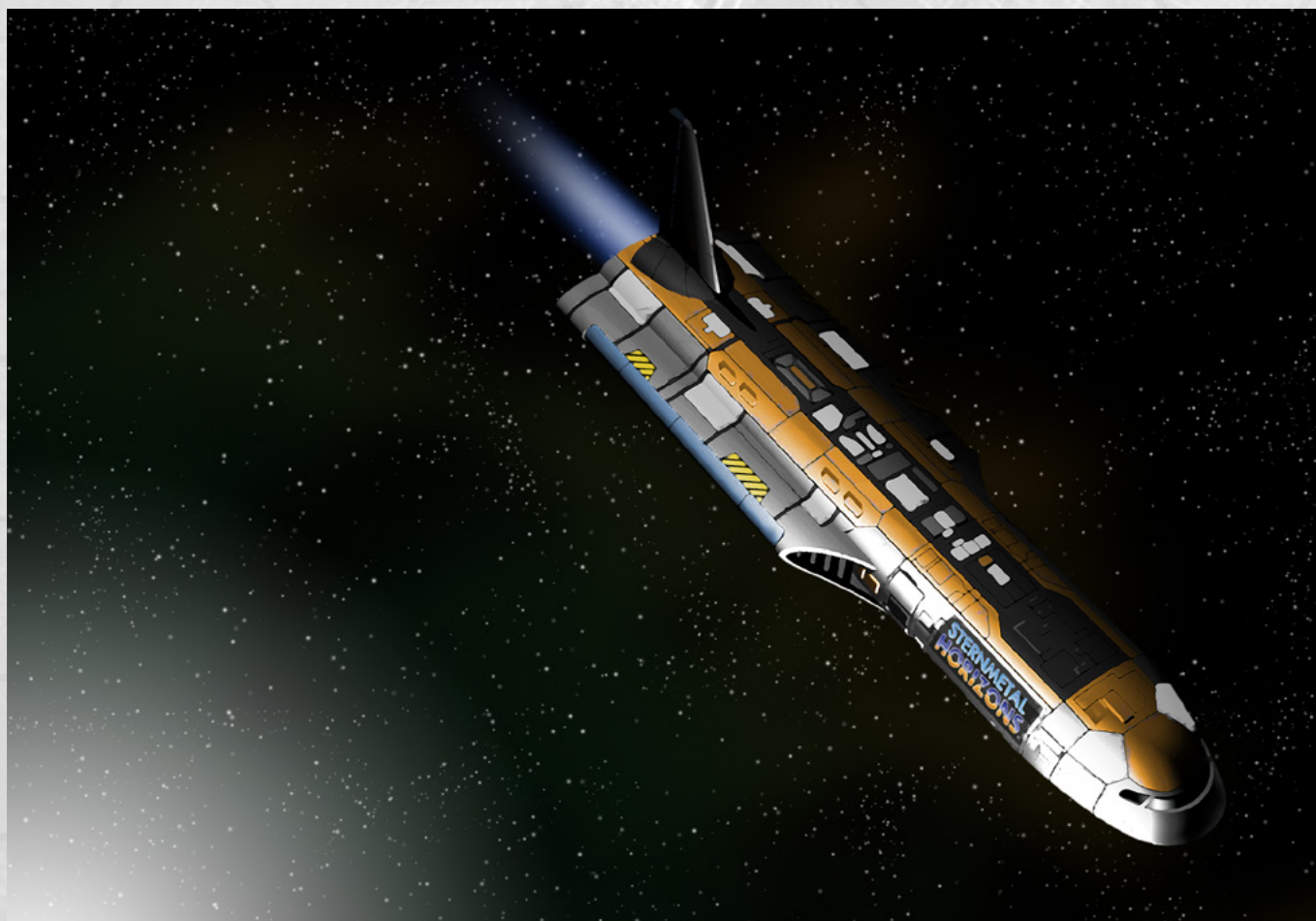
desert-dwellers at all. Many never go outside and might as well live in an orbital habitat or on a temperate planet. If they do travel, it is by air-conditioned grav vehicle, leaving one sealed settlement via an airlock and landing at another. Even those working on the starport landing apron or mining sites are not exposed to the full rigour of Grudovo's environment, thanks to the sheltering hills.

Grudovo's main source of income is its starport and what industry exists is primarily of a supportive nature. Most of the planet remains unexploited and, indeed, unexplored (other than by orbital survey). This creates a situation where offworld businesses have begun to claim, not without justification, that five thousand people cannot possibly need a whole planet of their own.

The Imperial charter recognises the government of Grudovo as a 'world government' holding sovereignty over the whole planet. The charter provides for enforcement of this sovereignty by legal means and even intervention of military forces and specifically prohibits offworld interests simply landing in a remote area and commencing operations. This does not suit Sternmetal Horizons LIC, a megacorporation that wants to establish a mining settlement atop what it believes to be a promising deposit.

Sternmetal is not known for doing things by halves; a mining operation would probably be supported by a 'corp town' housing workers' families and supporting industries. More importantly, it would be on such a scale that the existing population would be outnumbered. Concerned about the implications of this regarding planetary sovereignty, the government of Grudovo has refused to allow Sternmetal to develop its chosen site. For its part, Sternmetal contends that the world government should not be permitted to dictate who uses territory it has never even mapped, located on the far side of the planet. The Imperial charter, Sternmetal contends, assumes a world government has some means to enforce its laws and protect its territory over at least a majority of the useable planetary surface, whereas on this world the government's influence is confined to a single valley.

There are valid arguments on both sides, with neither willing to accept the obvious compromise whereby the world government licenses Sternmetal to develop its territory in return for a fee. In the meantime, while Sternmetal is observing the law and not attempting to set up a major installation, smaller mining outfits have begun to slip illegal and unlicensed prospecting teams onto Grudovo.



SAGITTARIAN



SUBSECTOR

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
R'Bak	1314		X587777-2	Ag Ri	R	-	G

Sagittarian subsector contains just one star system, R'Bak. Lying far out in the Great Rift, R'Bak is extremely isolated and its mainworld, although not the whole star system, is Red Zoned. The official reason for this is to protect the developing cultures of the mainworld.

The R'Bak star system is open to Travellers – at least as open as any isolated system can be. It is somewhat hazardous to navigate, with meteor swarms posing serious danger to ships in the inner system.

There are two distinct populations in the R'Bak system; the planetary dwellers and the people of the orbital habitats. These became separated during the Long Night, when the system's space travel capability was lost. The ground-dwellers, who had machinery and resources, gradually fell into barbarism and forgot about their cousins living above them in the orbital habitats. Meanwhile, the orbitals, who retained much of their technological base, lacked the materials and machinery to replace or maintain their spacecraft.

Imperial explorers arrived in time to help the orbital dwellers repair their homes and re-establish space travel. A spacefaring society quickly developed, supported by asteroid mining and machinery bought from the Imperium. The orbital dwellers now have the equivalent of a Class B starport and trade (very intermittently) with long-range vessels out of Imperial space. There is some talk of setting up a chain of deep space refuelling points to link R'Bak to Neubayern in the Islands with Imperial space to spinward-coreward, although thus far this has come to nothing.



Meteor Swarms

The meteor swarms of R'Bak present a serious hazard to any ship traversing the system and cautious captains maintain a constant crew watch on both sensor and pilot stations. A quick-witted crew can take pre-emptive steps to avoid a meteor swarm and a battered ship leaving the system is a sure sign of lax shipboard drills.

Checks should be made every 1D hours for ships within the R'Bak system, using a task chain of an Average (8+) Electronics (sensors) check (INT), followed by an Average (8+) Pilot check (DEX). A negative DM equal to the Thrust the ship is currently under is applied to both checks.

Failure will result in the ship being bombarded by a meteor swarm, inflicting 1D x 1D damage.

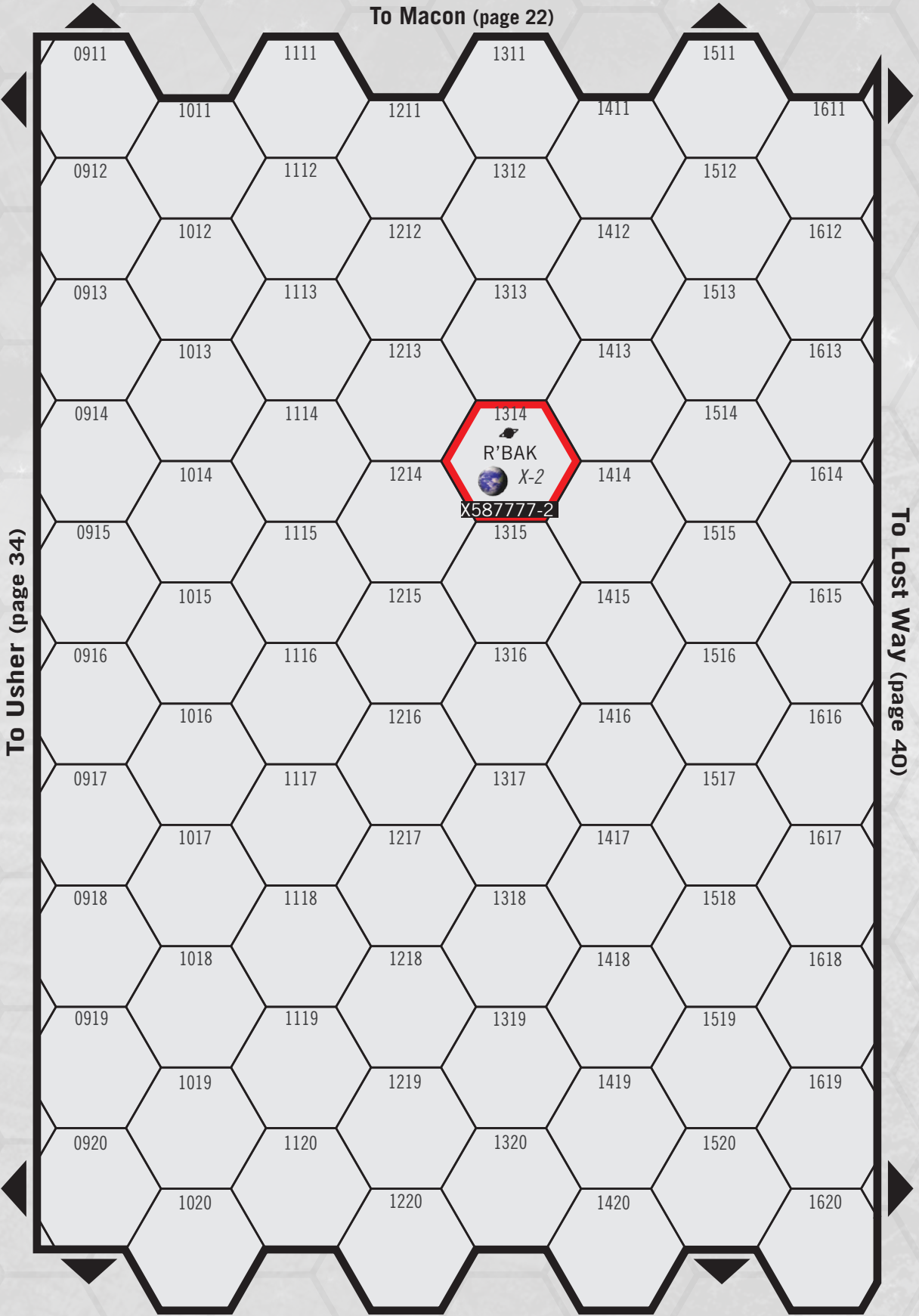


R'Bak itself is interdicted (Red Zoned) to protect the ground-dwellers as they rebuild their society. This is unusual; normally it is the Scout Service imposes Red Zones for such social reasons, while the navy uses them for economic, political or military purposes. This has given rise to speculation that R'Bak is home to a military research station looking into special combat techniques, psionic phenomena or other highly sensitive area of interest.

	7	

Reft

SAGITTARIAN SUBSECTOR



Gas Giant
 B-6 Starport Class & Tech Level

Red Zone

Planet (water present)

LOST WAY



SUBSECTOR

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Undrelyn	1812		B551433-6	Ni Po	A	-	G

Lost Way subsector contains just one star system; Undrelyn. In addition to its human population, the world has a significant Chirper community. Official estimates of the Chirper population range from about six thousand to nearer fifteen thousand, although it is difficult to obtain reliable figures.

The Chirpers of Undrelyn dwell in small villages, mostly in remote areas, and have little technology beyond a few crude metal tools. They are forcibly driven away from human communities and shun human contact wherever possible. The human population view them as primitive savages, little more than a nuisance to be brushed aside, and do not welcome enquiries about them.

CHIRPER

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Chirper	9	9 m
SKILLS	Athletics (dexterity) 2, Melee 0, Recon 1, Stealth 2, Survival 1	
ATTACKS	Claws (1D)	
TRAITS	Small (-1)	
BEHAVIOUR	Omnivore, Gatherer	



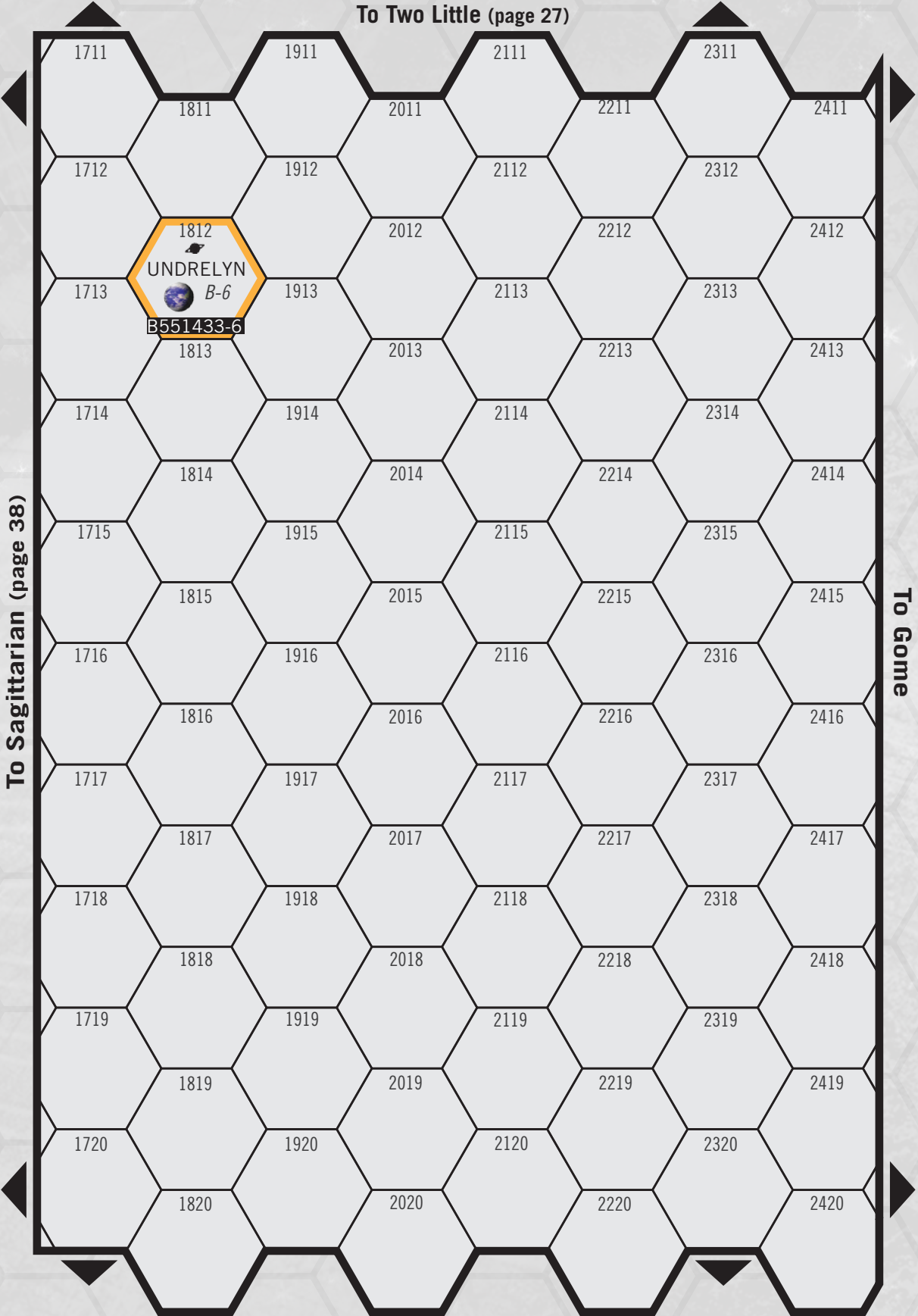
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Reft

LOST WAY SUBSECTOR

To Sagittarian (page 38)

To Two Little (page 27)



To Old Islands (page 47)

Gas Giant
B-6 Starport Class & Tech Level

Amber Zone

Planet (water present)

NEW ISLANDS



SUBSECTOR

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Berlichingen	1621		D500437-8	Ni Va			
Besancon	1526	M	C201341-9	Ic Lo Va			G
Elysee	1525	M	B502532-9	Ic Ni Va			
Esperanza	0926	M N	A674ABC-B	Hi In	A		G
Gloire	1123		C764567-9	Ag Ni			G
Herzenslust	1426		E995765-6	Ag			G
Joyeuse	1628	M N	A7899B9-C	Hi	A		G
Nebelwelt	1030		C879425-5	Ni			G
New Colchis	1327	M N	A8959AA-C	Hi In	A		
Orphee	1429		X885610-0	Ag Ni Ga Ri	R		
Serendip Belt	1323	M N	A000949-C	As Hi In Na Va			G
St. Hilaire	0930	M	B579763-A				
Topas	1522		D420899-7	De Na Po			
Wellington	0925		C8B0263-A	Lo			
Zuflucht	0921	M	C545720-8	Ag			

New Islands subsector lies entirely outside the Imperium, although there is a small naval presence at Zuflucht. There is no single dominant power; four high-population worlds (Esperanza, Serendip Belt, New Colchis and Joyeuse) jockey for position as the pre-eminent power in the region.

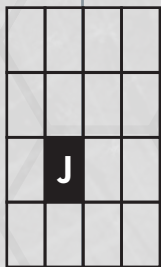
The world of Orphee is interdicted to protect its inhabitants, a race of herbivorous sentients who, it is theorised, might achieve a technological society in a few thousand years if left alone. Scientific parties are allowed on-planet to study the Orphee but access is supposedly controlled by a joint interdiction force. In practice, the interdiction is patchily enforced and violations are common.

BESANCON

Besancon is too small to retain an atmosphere but has water locked up in ice, which made it less of a challenge to settle than a bare rockball world. It was settled by a mission from Amondiage, although the original colony was more of a self-sufficient waypost than an attempt to establish a major economic power.

Besancon's population has always remained very small, only exceeding 10,000 during brief periods when colony missions were being marshalled. The entire world population dwells in a single town, mainly working at the starport or in supporting industries. A liberal representative democracy evolved many years ago and

To Sagittarian (page 38)

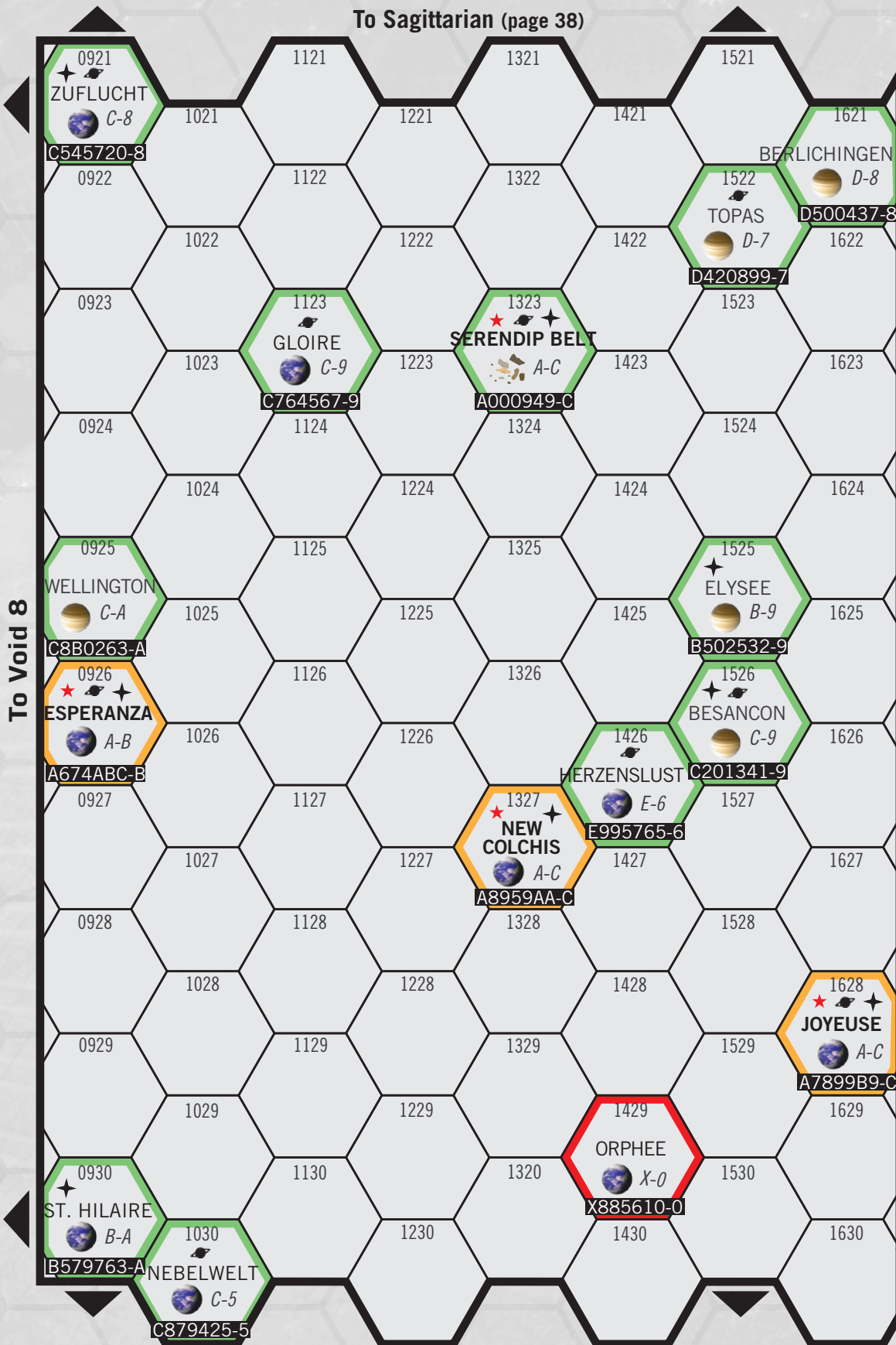


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NEW ISLANDS SUBSECTOR

To Void 8

To Old Islands (page 47)



To Evestin

- Gas Giant
- Secure System
- Planet (water present)
- B-6 Starport Class & Tech Level
- Amber Zone
- Planet (dry)
- Military Base/Garrison
- Red Zone
- Other Naval Base

has always been found satisfactory; in practice, the government does little but oversee public services and intrudes very little into the daily lives of citizens.

Besancon was annexed by Serendip Belt soon after jump drive technology was obtained but reverted to independent status after the Concordat of Topas, when it became a stopover on the trade route known as the Crescent. Small trade missions are maintained by various powers, with New Home, Joyeuse and New Colchis conducting most of their trade with one another in the neutral port of Besancon.

Other than as a refuelling stop, Besancon has little strategic importance. However, the fact that trade ships come through quite frequently has made it a place of interest for the navies of the Islands. Most maintain a token presence in the form of a sloop or corvette, or occasionally send a patrol to show the flag. This means the Besancon system is one of the few places where forces of any power can be encountered and makes combat a certainty in the event of war.

The central location of Besancon has encouraged an unusual breed of entrepreneur, independent couriers operating small starships capable of carrying light cargoes with a couple of passengers and, more importantly, messages. These messengers-for-hire are willing to carry despatches or urgent information to almost any destination. They tend to be trustworthy and reliable and make a cheaper alternative to stationing messenger boats at the port.

ORPHEE

Orphee is interdicted, with the equivalent of a Red Zone travel code. This is supposedly enforced by a joint force maintained by all the major Islands powers as the

Convention of Interdiction requires ships of at least two powers – and more normally three – must be on station to maintain the blockade at any given time. In practice, only Joyeuse maintains the blockade full-time while other powers send a ship at increasingly long intervals.

There are big gaps in the blockade and if permission can be obtained from the government of Joyeuse to visit the world then bypassing other blockading ships is a simple matter. Permission is granted to scientific parties from time-to-time but this comes from a joint commission based on New Home. It is usually quicker and simpler to just bypass the blockade, raising questions about whether there is any point in maintaining it.

The point of the blockade is to protect the Orpheides. It is unusual to encounter sentient herbivores, so these primitive people would be of interest anywhere. With non-human intelligent life so very rare in the Islands, they are of great interest to science. The Convention of Interdiction provided for the protection of the Orpheides from outside exploitation but permitted some scientific observation, although this has proceeded in fits and starts.

The Orpheides are cooperative herd people who have developed rudimentary tool use, amounting to little more than fashioning weapons from sticks and stones to ward off predators and obtain food. The Orpheides do not make much use of fire, although may know how to start one.



ORPHEIDES

ANIMAL	HITS	SPEED
Orpheides	24	6 m
SKILLS	Athletics (endurance), Melee 0, Recon 2, Stealth 1, Survival 2	
ATTACKS	Improvised tools (2D-2)	
TRAITS	Alarm, Armour (+2)	
BEHAVIOUR	Herbivore, Gatherer	

There are thought to be several million Orpheides on Orphee, generally in herds of 10-30 adults. Herds belong to larger groupings, creating a sort of over-herd. Individuals transfer between herds from time-to-time, but rarely outside their over-herd even where two or more are in proximity.

The Orpheides have a language of sorts, although it has not proven possible to decipher much other than general intent. Communication between humans and Orpheides has never been recorded but since that would constitute interference, something specifically forbidden by the Convention, this is not surprising.

Rumours persist that one or more of the Islands powers (usually it is Joyeuse that is accused) has removed a sizable population of Orpheides to a remote location, probably offworld, to conduct experiments. Conspiracy theorists have concocted all manner of plots around this rumour, the most common suggesting the Orpheides are being trained as shock troops or hazardous-environment slaves, or that they are psionic and being dissected to learn their secrets.

Whatever the truth of the various rumours surrounding the native people, the fact remains that Orphee is highly suitable for human habitation and if mineral wealth is discovered while the larger powers are distracted, say by a large-scale conflict, then it is certain that an attempt to exploit this wealth will be implemented. At best, encroachment on the Orpheides is inevitable. At worst, they may be trampled in a free-for-all mineral rush. Scientists predict the Orphee could achieve a technological society in a few thousand years but their chances of achieving this vanish if their world becomes the target for unregulated exploitation.

TOPAS

Topas is one of the less inviting worlds of the Islands cluster but was nevertheless colonised early on. Its atmosphere is too thin for humans to breathe unaided, although thick enough to allow survival without a pressure suit. Compressor masks or compressors feeding into sealed buildings are necessary and, in addition, what atmosphere there is suffers from a taint, mildly radioactive volcanic dust from the world's many active volcanoes. The dust itself is an irritant that can cause respiratory complications and its radioactivity also poses a slight long-term health risk (1D rads per month).

Despite this unhealthy background, the colonisation of Topas went well. Most construction was either underground or semi-subterranean and a city was soon carved out. Others followed as the population grew and spread out. For a time, it seemed that Topas could become a major power. However the outbreak of civil war put an end to that possibility.

The origins of the Topas Civil War were complex but among the critical factors was overcrowding in the cities. Competition over resources and even food were factors, eventually leading to a multi-way fight between the cities. Destruction of living space and food resources caused ever greater overcrowding and made further conflict over resources inevitable.

The situation was alleviated by the arrival of the colony ship *Voyageur*, which accepted large numbers of refugees into its low berths. These people eventually settled Zuflucht but after their departure the war went on for some years until exhaustion imposed an unspoken ceasefire.

Topas has lost its chance for rapid development but its people were able to build themselves a future from the wreckage. A world government did not emerge for several decades, while expansion and population growth were carefully controlled to avoid a repeat of the civil war, with the result that the original cluster of cities gradually flowed together into a giant metropolis. Other cities were founded but even today a full third of the world's 800 million inhabitants dwell in the central metropolis.

In between the cities are large areas of unused land, not much use to anyone due to the lack of air or water and the presence of active volcanoes. The rather basic starport is used as a refuelling stop for vessels transiting between Serendip Belt and Neubayern and, while some trade is carried out in the port, Topas' TL7 economy cannot produce much to export and there is little of natural value on-planet. The exception is a type of volcanic crystal which is prized as the basis of art objects, though harvesting the crystals is somewhat hazardous.

A growing community of sculptors craft the crystals into decorative objects that find a modest market offworld. Apart from this, Topas is something of an economic backwater and without funds to invest in development, it is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future.

ZUFLUCHT

Zuflucht lies at the far spinward-coreward corner of the Islands cluster and was colonised late in the spread of humanity through the Islands. The mission was, in many ways, poorly planned. The intent was to send *Voyageur* to the Zuflucht system to investigate its potential as a colony site. A powerful transmitter would beam news of a successful colony back, with the signal arriving long before *Voyageur* itself returned. At this point, another colony ship would be sent with more personnel. Those already in place would prepare for the arrival of the follow-up group, at which point the colony would be of a size suitable to support itself.

Voyageur stopped at Topas to resupply and pick up any personnel who wanted to join the mission. The expectation was that a few hundred people might come aboard; in the event it was tens of thousands for when *Voyageur* arrived, Topas was in the last stages of its civil war. Large numbers of refugees were eking out a fragile existence in camps on the fringes of the war zones and, with nothing left to lose, they set out for a new home far away, boarding shuttles dispatched from *Voyageur*.

Years of careful resource management was needed to ensure the colony was not swamped. The result was a group of rather oddball settlements, with a core of prefabricated buildings surrounded by log cabins. The seeder colony mission had included six self-contained fusion power units and another two were built from spares donated by *Voyageur's* crew. Each of these became the core of a settlement, separated by a few hundred kilometres to allow for expansion. *Voyageur* remained in orbit for thirty years, acting as a depot for supplies and spares, medical and training centre, and garage for the shuttles that took up the task of providing mobility. Workshops aboard the ship were used to repair items and fabricate new machinery.

Eventually, with much help from *Voyageur*, the colonists began producing their own items. The colony ship gathered up those of its worn-out shuttles, landed all the spares and machinery its crew thought could be spared and began its belated return to the central cluster.

Left alone, the colonists faced the future with resolution. Most of the first-generation settlers had escaped the horrors of a civil war and squalid existence in refugee camps; now they had real hope of a better future, with a wide-open world to tame. With so many people relative to the available infrastructure, there was never

any hope of maintaining the technological capability of the original mission. This was planned for and Zuflucht dipped down to a steam-powered technological base but retained more advanced knowledge, allowing for a recovery to a comfortable TL8.

Modern Zuflucht is home to some 50 million people spread out across the globe. Society is peaceful despite (or perhaps because of) a lack of formal laws. There is an unspoken code in place governing acceptable behaviour, and a strong sense of community; doing something your neighbours would disapprove of is a source of stigma while more serious crimes are dealt with informally but, vigorously, by parties of concerned citizens.

Governmental functions are handled by a small corps of professional clerks and bureaucrats, while decisions are made by participatory democracy, with everyone having a vote, including children. The votes of minors are cast by their parent or guardian until they reach adulthood. A worldwide datanet allows citizens to remain up to date with important issues and cast their votes on important matters.

The arrival of Imperial starships in the Islands was beneficial to Zuflucht. The orbital component of the starport is larger than usual for a Class C installation to accommodate a small military base. Here, patrol ships of the Imperial Navy receive maintenance while their crews take leave on the planetary surface.

The Imperial Navy is bound by treaty to defend Zuflucht and since firing on an Imperial warship inevitably results in war with the Imperium, it is a very good deterrent to annexation attempts by other Islands powers. The folk of Zuflucht are, overall, very friendly to 'The Fleet', as they call the Imperial Navy. Indeed, some try to sign up to join the navy, which does not normally recruit beyond the Imperial borders. The world is sometimes accorded unofficial status as an Imperial Client State to permit this.

Commercial vessels also come through Zuflucht on the trans-rift run, restocking at the port while their crews enjoy groundside time, a great relief after multiple jumps in the darkness of the Great Rift or a good way to prepare for the transit. Crew and passengers from these ships find themselves made welcome in a relaxed and friendly society that shows the cosmopolitan influences of the Imperium far more than the norm deeper into the Islands.

OLD ISLANDS



SUBSECTOR

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Acadie	2225		C868563-9	Ag Ni			
Achille	2324		E301335-9	Ic Lo Va			
Amondiage	2325	M N	A5629A9-C	Hi			G
Colchis	2026	M	B676898-9				G
Neubayern	1822	M N	A7889C9-C	Hi	A		
New Home	1925	M N	A565857-D	Ri			G
Quichotte	1729	M	E576667-6	Ag Ni			G
Sansterre	2322	M N	A87A943-C	Hi In Wa			G
Schlesien Belt	1923	M	C000367-B	As Lo Va			G
St. Denis	2423	M	D735764-7				G
St. Genevieve	2123	M	C560100-A	De Lo			G
Sturgeon's Law	1724		DAC1451-9	FI He			G

The Old Islands subsector lies entirely outside of the Third Imperium with the high-population worlds of Neubayern, New Home, Sansterre and Amondiage all vying for pre-eminence. Of these, New Home is, in some, ways the spiritual capital of the subsector (and indeed of the Islands cluster overall), this status is supported by a higher Tech Level than any of its rivals.

ACHILLE

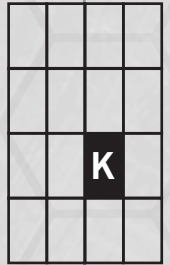
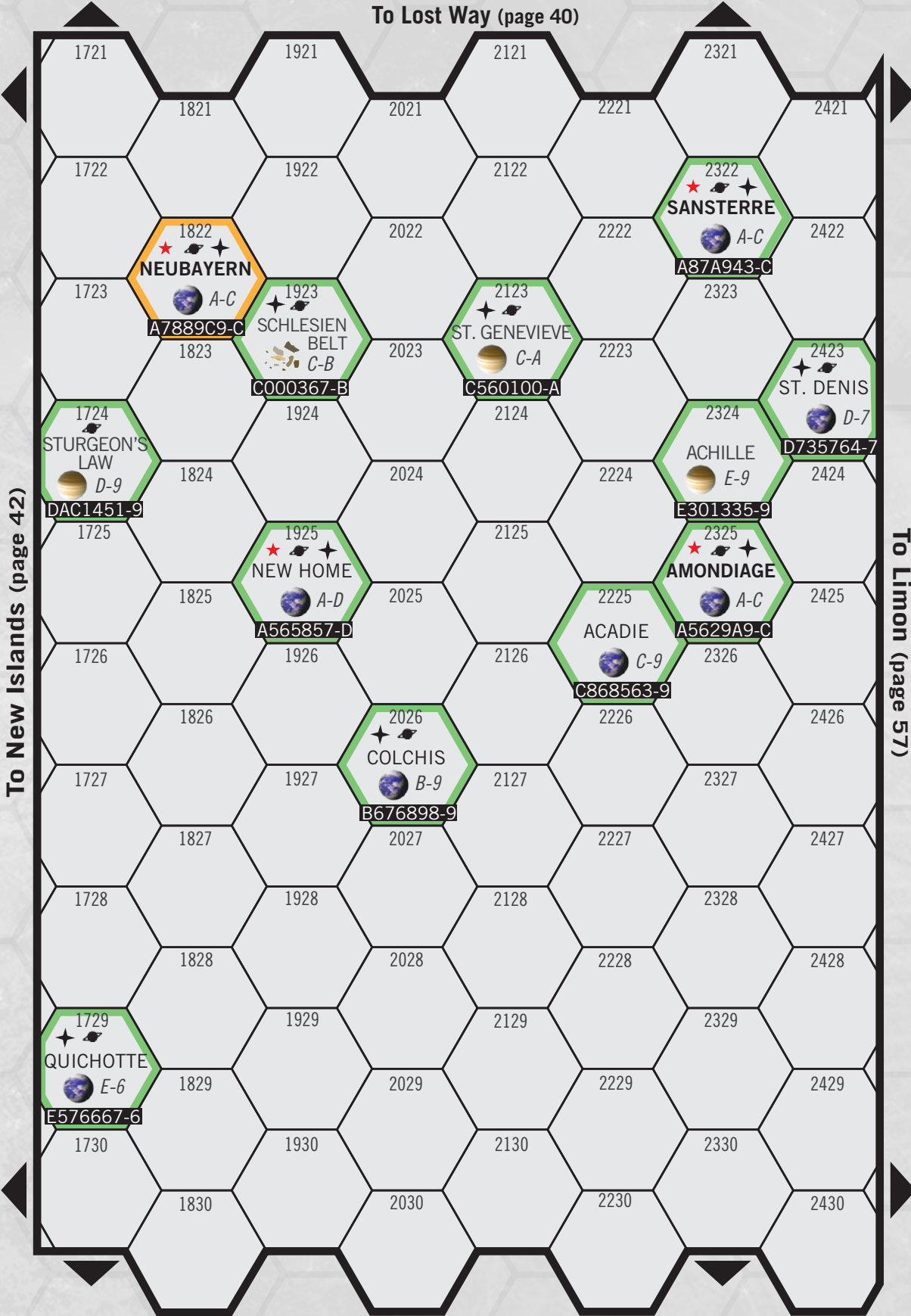
A small world with no atmosphere, Achille is one of the least habitable worlds in the Islands cluster and was passed over for colonisation for many years. Eventually, a group of idealists from Sansterre decided they would seek a new home and set out aboard one of the earliest jump-capable ships. After some difficulties, they reached Achille and set up a small colony.

There is just one settlement on Achille, a town of some two thousand people located in a crater close to the world's northern pole. The settlement is self-sufficient, using starship-style hydroponics and recycling equipment.

In the century or so since Achille was settled, the idealism of the first colonists has dissipated, although society remains committed to the basic precepts of the founders, a somewhat altered form of traditional French nobility; the rulers are heads of pseudo-noble households, with retainers and commoners lower in the social order. Each noble house bases its claim to high status on one of three functions. The 'nobility of the sword' are warriors, although in a small society like Achille this translates to law enforcement and security. The 'nobility of the cloth' are religious leaders, while the 'nobility of the ancient regime' hold their position by dint of property ownership. There is a technological society, so while the nobility of the sword still train with duelling swords, they enforce the law with body armour and automatic weapons.

Achille receives few visitors, which suits the locals. Most vessels plying between Amondiage and Sansterre go via St. Denis, not least because the port at Achille is so basic, little more than a flat area of bedrock. Fuel must be obtained by cracking ice but doing so in

To Lost Way (page 40)



Refit

OLD ISLANDS SUBSECTOR

- Gas Giant
- B-6 Starport Class & Tech Level
- Military Base/Garrison
- Other Naval Base

To Arcrant (page 64)

- Secure System
- Amber Zone

- Planet (dry)
- Planet (water present)

proximity to the settlement and port is forbidden. Thus, even the basic evolutions of starship operation are problematic on this world.

Visitors who do persevere and enter the sealed town find the locals have little interest in offworld contact and make no effort to welcome visitors nor make money from them. It is possible to find somewhere to stay and buy goods but prices are high and it becomes obvious that the locals find the whole business inconvenient.

Those who claim a noble connection, either to the invented-nobility of Achille or the Imperial nobility (which the Achillians are aware of), might be treated differently, as might a perceived kindred spirit. Thus, a member of a similar faith might find hospitality with the nobility of the cloth, a decorated soldier might be able to claim guest rights with the self-styled warriors and a well-off trader or respected diplomat would be well received by the political nobility.

Achille has virtually no industry and little economic worth, so might be entirely passed over by a general war in the Islands. It is of no strategic value to any faction and does not even possess gas giants for refuelling. It is possible that the original utopians picked an ideal spot to ride out future troubles, allowing their descendants to enjoy a peculiar political system while greater powers smash one another into oblivion.

COLCHIS

Colchis is something of an oddity within the Islands. It could be a second-tier power, although it cannot build starships of its own. However, Colchis is an extremely habitable world with high population and solid technological base, making it both a potential prize and battleground for first-tier powers.

As if this were not enough, beyond the mainworld the Colchis system contains several other populations and installations of interest to an invader. The Colchis system is something of a microcosmos, within which a thriving interplanetary community is linked by sublight vessels.

The system is named for the mainworld on star charts and its central star is called Colchis Prime, a type F7V, a yellow-white dwarf, orbited by a far companion star, known as Colchis Secondary. Colchis Secondary (ColSec to local astronavigators) is a type M5 red dwarf star, like Proxima Centauri. While red dwarf stars are extremely common, and binary systems of this sort not unusual, what makes the Colchis system special is that both stars have a planetary system. The ColSec system contains far less bodies than Colchis Prime but does possess a borderline habitable world.

The Colchis Prime System

Often referred to simply as the Colchis system, Colchis Prime contains seven rocky planets, a small gas giant and planetoid belt. The innermost two planets are too close to the star to be inhabitable but the remainder of the system offers several possibilities.

Aetes is the innermost planet. Little more than a scorched rock, it is too close to the star even for a research station.

Medea is next in orbit. A small, tidally-locked ball of rock following a somewhat eccentric orbit, it has little to offer. During the periods where Medea is at aphelion, it is occasionally visited by scientific parties who carry out experiments or set up automated laboratories that transmit their findings until destroyed when the planet makes its close pass to the star.

Samelegro is another small, tidally-locked planet. Too close to the star to have an atmosphere, it is uninhabitable on the bright side, which always faces Colchis Prime. The dark side always faces away and is exposed to the cold of space. Between the two there is a region of constant twilight, where the world is habitable and a few thousand people dwell in small communities.

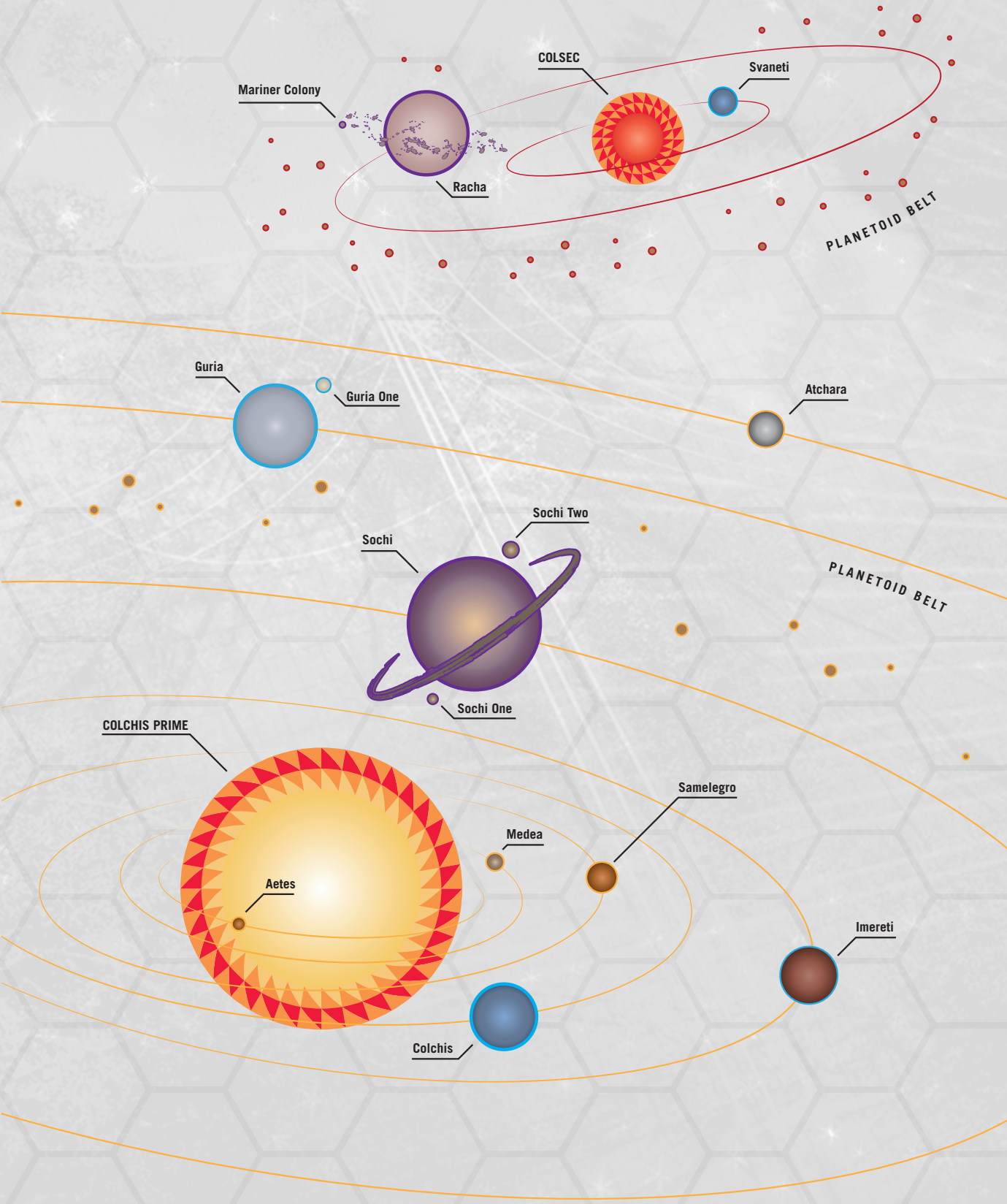
Most are mining communities, each located atop a deposit of minerals. Several stripped-out carcasses of settlements also exist, where a region has been played out and the population moved on. Each settlement has its own landing area – the term spaceport is a little grand – for ore and supply ships but the main port is at Samelegro Station, a town of about two thousand people that serves as an administrative capital and base for prospecting missions.

Samelegro Station receives few visitors other than scientists, prospectors and the families of miners, however occasionally a trade ship will come through with a cargo of necessities and luxury goods.

Colchis is the mainworld of the system and is detailed on page 51.

Imereti is a rockball world with only a trace atmosphere but nevertheless supports a population of several million people, dwelling in large city-colonies. The United Colonies of Imereti, as the world-state is known, is run by a complex pseudo-democratic system whereby the population vote on all manner of issues but wield no actual power. Instead, the results of each poll are used as an indicator of public opinion by a bureaucratic government that makes its decisions without direct popular input; the mass vote is sufficient to influence governmental decisions but rarely gets the populace exactly what they want.

COLCHIS SYSTEM



The United Colonies maintains a central spaceport equivalent to a small Class B. A small fleet of sublight trading vessels operates from here, along with a few orbital defence craft. However, although Imereti is theoretically independent from Colchis, it is bound by treaty to leave foreign affairs and large-scale defence to the government of Colchis.

Sochi is small and unimpressive as gas giants go but still big enough to have a modest ring system and a handful of moons. Most are little more than overgrown planetoids but two, Sochi One and Two, are significant enough to be inhabited. Sochi One is a gas-skimming base, from which automated shuttles skim petrochemical-rich gases from the upper atmosphere of the gas giant. These are then processed on site and shipped to the mainworld for industrial use.

Sochi Two is the largest of Sochi's moons and theoretically independent. Settled from the United Colonies of Imereti, the one community on Sochi Two is known as Sochi City, with a population of around 35,000. Standards of living are low and crime is rife. However, Sochi City offers a haven to people who cannot find a place elsewhere and receives a steady trickle of immigrants.

There is some industry but most of its output is consumed by subsistence or traded to keep the machinery and hydroponic gardens running. The best way to get rich in Sochi City is to find a way to part newcomers or visitors from their possessions. Overpriced liquor, gambling and dubious forms of entertainment are the most reputable, with straight-out robbery and extortion only slightly less common.

The Colchis Belt is a term that covers the system's main planetoid belt but also the small jumbles of planetoids that orbit at Sochi's leading and trailing Trojan points (i.e. 60° ahead and behind the gas giant in its orbit). The latter are kept stable by gravity, while the belt itself is patchy. Some areas are relatively dense as planetoid belts go; it would still be highly unlikely for a vessel to collide with a rock, even if flying blind through the densest part of the belt. Most of the belt is so sparse that were it not marked on the charts it could be mistaken for an area of open space.

Several small mining installations exist within the belt, most are owned by commercial firms based out of Colchis or the United Colonies but some are independent and Colchis has had a belter community almost since the system was settled. The number of beltters is not known and Colchis claims sovereignty over the belt, occasionally attempting to impose greater order on the beltters or conduct a census. This flounders in the face of passive resistance or utter indifference from the beltters and they are notoriously hard to keep track of.

Guria is an unusually large rocky planet located in the outer system with a high surface gravity that makes it unsuitable for human habitation. Its moon, Guria One, is the site of a small scientific outpost investigating the possibility of harvesting frozen gases and mining minerals from Guria's crust using robotic equipment.

Humans can work on Guria for extended periods without coming to harm but the high gravity is tiring and leads to accidents. If a robot-assisted mining system could be perfected, or if minerals of sufficient value to outweigh the risks were found, the world might be opened to exploitation. For now, Guria and its moon remain places that only supply ships go.

Atchara is the outermost planet in the Colchis Prime system, a rockball with no atmosphere. Such gases as exist are frozen to the rocky surface. Despite this, Atchara is home to a population of several thousand people, optimistic settlers who thought an outsystem rockball offered a good compromise between the life they knew aboard the colony ships and a planetary settlement.

Atchara's only city is carved into the rock of the crust in much the same manner as a planetoid-hulled starship. Society is austere and almost obsessive about recycling and conservation but for all that the Atcharans have made a reasonable life for themselves. Social activities that require little in the way of resources, such as singing, poetry and drama, are popular pursuits. Outsiders are sometimes astounded by the amount of joyful laughter emanating from the drab, austere homes of the populace.

Atchara operates several salvage vessels, usually offering assistance and rescue to shipping within the system, but illegal salvage operations have been recorded. Atcharans have lost their lives on several occasions, trying to 'salvage' (the owners would say loot or steal) remote mining or scientific equipment. Any abandoned installation will be stripped down to the foundations as soon as the Atcharans find out about it.

Atchara also possesses two jump-capable salvage ships. This is in defiance of rules imposed from Colchis about ownership of jump-capable vessels but so far nothing has been done about it. These vessels use their drives to get about the system quickly but occasionally will voyage to another system to seek salvage – or unattended objects they can steal, depending on the point of view.

The Colchis Secondary System

The ColSec system contains only one rocky planet plus a gas giant and scattering of planetoids. The star is a dim red dwarf orbiting far enough out from Colchis Prime that it exerts little effect on the main system either with gravity or heat.

Svaneti is the only rock planet orbiting ColSec, just close enough to be a borderline-habitable world. Svaneti has a breathable atmosphere and fair amount of surface water, although largely frozen. It is possible that Svaneti was at one time warmer, since the world has an advanced ecosystem.

The half-frozen oceans are home to a great variety of fish and other sea-dwelling creatures and land vegetation, although sparse, is sufficient to support many species. Some creatures are large, up to the size of a Terran dog.

The population of Svaneti numbers around a million, mainly dwelling around the more habitable equatorial regions and well supported by a mature TL9 industrial base. This can do little more than support the present population however; there is no surplus for grand projects or construction of space vessels.

Svaneti's towns are linked by an efficient rail system, which runs through tunnels as much as above ground, although it requires frequent maintenance to prevent cold-induced failures. The world's main industrial activities are fishing and seabed farming, which supply the populace with most of their diet as well as a surplus to be traded offworld.

Each town has a governor, elected from an eligible group for a 10-year term of office. Eligibility requires certain standards of education and time served in a relevant post that might be technical, social or bureaucratic. The town governors send a representative to a central body, which grandly calls itself the World Parliament, passing decisions on either to the affected town governors or its own small executive branch. Thus, the world has a representative democracy of sorts, although in practice towns are autonomous in most matters.

Svaneti maintains a spaceport equivalent to Class C, used mainly by sublight freighters out of Colchis. The time taken to transit between the secondary and primary systems is considerable for non-jump ships but to the Islanders such a voyage is a mere stroll down the street compared to the vast distances travelled by the first colonists.

Racha is a small gas giant orbited by a collection of planetoids captured by gravity over the millennia. None of these moons can support a colony but some are big enough to be worth mining; so thought the crew of the asteroid-hulled sublight colony ship ColSec Mariner when they arrived several centuries ago. ColSec Mariner was placed in a parking orbit around the gas giant and changed its name to Mariner Colony. From this artificial moon, colonists began to exploit the mineral deposits of the secondary system's scattered planetoids, obtaining hydrocarbons and petrochemicals from Racha's atmosphere.

Mariner Colony did well, reaching a population of about 100,000 at its peak and although this has declined, the colony remains entirely viable. There are no moons suitable for habitation orbiting Racha but the scattered planetoids of the secondary system include a number that could be and some have been, settled. These are self-governing, using the same system of semi-hereditary officers as the main colony.

Mariner's engines remain functional and are used to change orbit or visit a planetoid chosen for seeding a new colony. There is even talk of transferring most of the population to the planetoid colonies and loading up with minerals for a trading voyage back to the main system. While possible in terms of technology and practicalities, it would cause considerable disruption to the populace and may not be economically viable.

For the time being Mariner Colony remains a mobile planetoid habitat and temporary moon of Racha. The planetoid population (including that of Mariner) trade with Svaneti, mainly taking the form of raw materials for food but skills and experience are also traded and personnel will sometimes marry into another society. Relations are friendly, although there is nothing even resembling a formal government-to-government embassy.

Colchis

Colchis is the mainworld and, in theory, holds sovereignty over the entire star system. Some regions, such as the United Colonies of Imereti, are independent to a large degree but only at the sufferance of Colchis itself. While they do not possess the military capability to prevent a blockage or takeover, this would not suit the interests of Colchis, which finds it more effective to allow distant settlements to govern themselves so long as they remain within the bounds of acceptable behaviour.

Colchis itself is a mid-sized world with surface gravity a little lower than that of Terra; entirely within the comfortable range for humans. The atmosphere has a slightly unusual gas mix, which causes the Imperial Interstellar Scout Service to label it as 'standard, tainted' and recommend a filter mask. In practice, acclimatisation can be carried out over the course of a week with considerable discomfort or a couple of months with none.

Much of the land surface is composed of rocky plains, semi-desert and scrubby forest, none of which is conducive to extensive agriculture. However, coastal regions are more habitable. As a result, habitation patterns tend to follow major watercourses and coastal plains are good sites for cities. This gave rise to a reliance on water transport in the early history of the colony, which has continued to the present day.

MERCHANT CRUISER

STAR LANE CLASS

TL9		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	2,500 tons, Sphere	-	56
M-Drive	Thrust 1	14	28
J-Drive	Jump 1	40	60
Power Plant	Fusion (TL8), Power 430	43	21.5
Fuel Tanks	J-1 (four times), 4 weeks of operation, plus Slow Pinnacle	566	-
Bridge	Small (DM-1)	20	7
Computer	Computer/5	-	0.03
Sensors	Civilian	1	3
Weapons	Double Turrets (beam lasers) x 2	2	3
Systems	Fuel Processor (80 tons/day)	4	0.2
	Collapsible Fuel Tanks (140 tons) x 2	2.8	0.002
	Cargo Crane	4.5	4.5
	Loading Belt (TL7) x 3	3	0.009
	Docking Space (40 tons)	44	11
	Slow Pinnacle	-	7.227
Staterooms	Standard x 12	48	6
	Low Berths x 12	6	0.6
Software	Manoeuvre/0	-	-
	Jump Control/1	-	0.1
	Library	-	-
Common Areas		18	1.8
Cargo		583	-
TOTAL: MCR 210.011			

CREW

CAPTAIN, PILOT, ASTROGATOR,
ADMINISTRATOR, ENGINEERS X 2,
MAINTENANCE, GUNNERS X 2,
PINNACE PILOT

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST:
Cr17500/month

• • • • •
PURCHASE COST:
MCR422.742

POWER REQUIREMENTS

140

MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

280

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

140

JUMP DRIVE

1

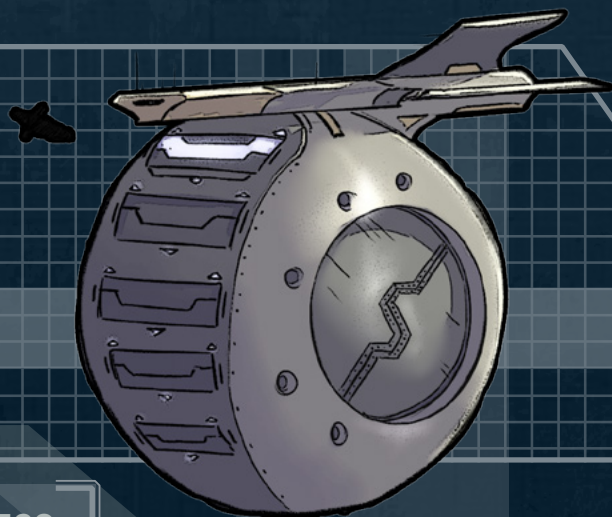
SENSORS

FUEL PROCESSOR

4

18

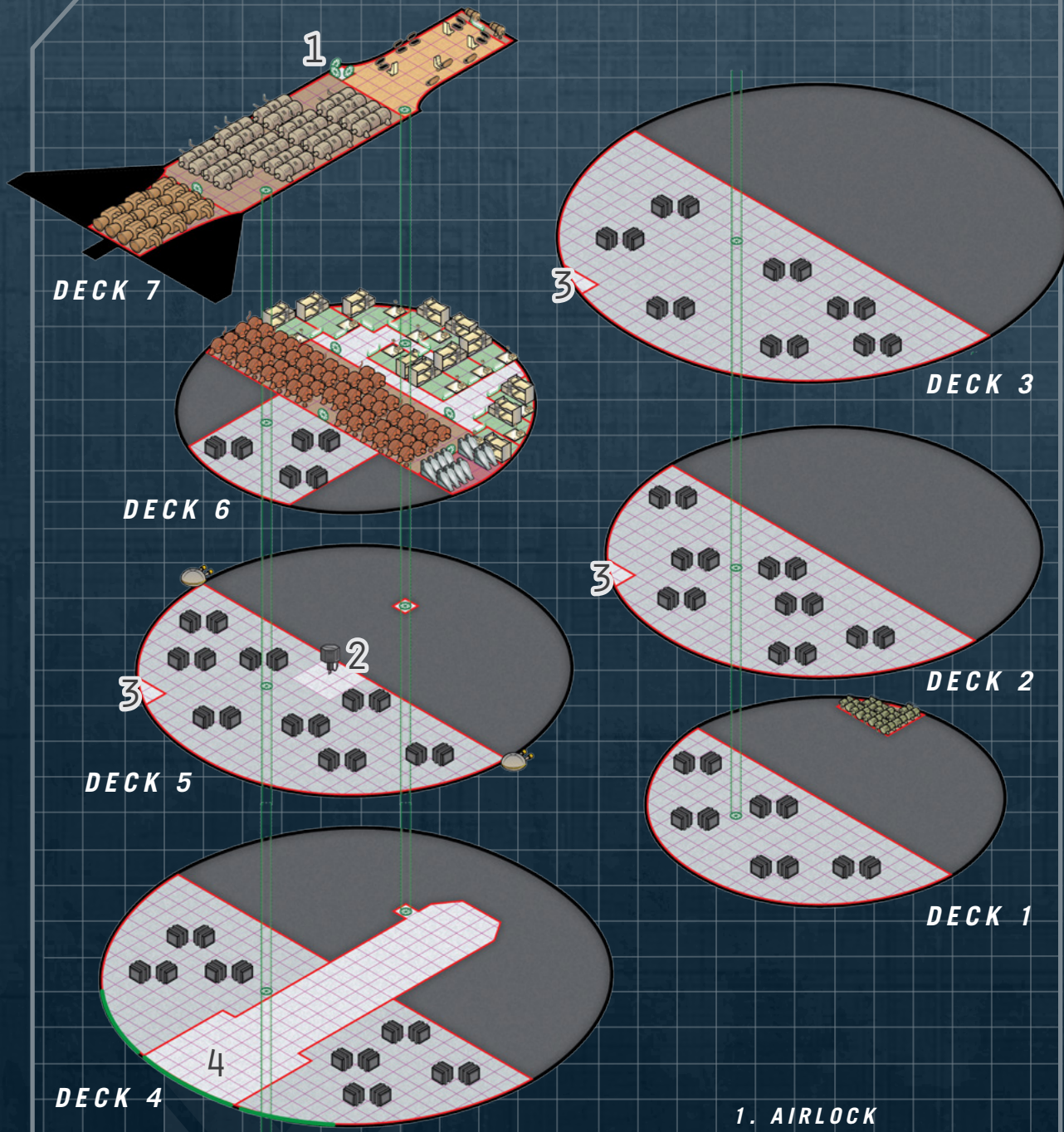
WEAPONS



560

HULL POINTS

Typical of medium-sized merchant ships throughout the Islands cluster, the Star Lane-class is built in the shipyards of Colchis. Like most merchants in this part of the Great Rift, it relies on jump-1 drives and large fuel tanks to make multiple jumps, occasionally supplemented with fuel bladders for particularly long voyages across gulfs of space. Although the Star Lane-class normally relies on starports for fuel, its slow pinnacle can be used to skim for fuel, which is then processed over the course of a week in-system to replenish its tanks completely.



- 1. AIRLOCK
- 2. CARGO CRANE
- 3. LOADING BELTS
- 5. DOCKING SPACE

Colchis has a unified world government descended from the original colonial apparatus set up when the world was settled. Towns, cities and important functions have appointed officers to oversee them and these officers report to regional and finally planetary governors. Functions that require a governor include the local transportation net, power generation for a region, major agricultural projects and so forth. As the centuries passed, the number of governors and officers, and the layers of authority required to accommodate them, has grown until Colchis all but stagnates under a mountain of red tape.

Colchis today is home to some seven hundred million inhabitants, who enjoy a uniform TL9. Standards of living are good and there are well-defined career paths for anyone seeking advancement. Here, the image of Colchis as a world-nation of mediocrities is challenged; the upper echelons of society are filled with individuals who clawed their way to success through a combination of talent and hard work.

Colchis is a major trade port and while vessels from New Home and Amondiage are most common, ships from almost anywhere in the Islands – plus the occasional Imperial vessel – can be encountered in port. Indeed, Colchis Starport is one of the most cosmopolitan places in the Islands and most powers maintain trade missions there. Not coincidentally, it is also a hotbed of politics and espionage.

Various powers would like to control Colchis, or at least its starport, and all manner of political and economic influence is brought to bear on the government. Thus far, Colchis has remained neutral and frequently offers to host conferences or mediate disputes. Its status as the only second-rate power in the Islands works in its favour to some extent – Colchis has sufficient status to be taken seriously but is not a threat to any major power.

Colchis maintains a trade fleet of its own, made up of ships capable of consecutive jump-1s, which is the industry-standard for shipping in the Islands. Colchis ships can thus compete on an equal footing with those of other powers in the mainstream shipping marketplace but the world's lower than average Tech Level makes its goods less attractive to first-tier powers. Colchis-made items find a ready market on lower-tech worlds but this does not bring in as much revenue as trade with the big players.

There are also a significant number of commercial ships serving the in-system trade lanes. Most are non jump-capable and undertake long voyages around the system, although a handful of jump-1 craft are used for VIP transport and urgent small-cargo runs.

Colchis' navy is almost entirely non-jump capable and dedicated to the defence of the home system. Although Colchis claims sovereignty over the entire Colchis Prime/Secondary system, warships are kept close to the homeworld and it is likely that everything but Colchis itself would be abandoned in the event of invasion. Even then, it is not likely that the TL9 warships of Colchis could prevent an invasion by one of the more advanced major powers. What they could do is to make the price tag high and this seems to be an effective deterrent.

As the possibility of war in the Islands increases, Colchis seeks to remain independent by a policy of armed neutrality on one hand and playing the big powers off against one another on the other; a risky approach but there seems to be no other way. The best policy is to see who is in a dominant position and then ally with them but until matters become clearer, Colchis is forced to tread a thin and, occasionally, convoluted line.

STURGEON'S LAW

Although obviously lacking in surface water, Sturgeon's Law does not, at first approach, seem unduly hostile. Indeed, most of the land surface is covered in greenery, suggesting a habitable world. To the crew of the colony ship *Infinité*, years out of Amondiage, first appearances seemed very promising.

There was little time for a more detailed study; *Infinité* had been suffering from serious failures during the last months of deceleration and as it entered orbit, the drives began to fail. *Infinité* was a constructed-hull ship, designed to land directly onto a planetary surface rather than shuttling personnel and equipment, which presented the crew with a stark choice – enter atmosphere immediately or die a slow death in orbit.

They intended to land on a plateau relatively free of vegetation but as the descent continued the pilots could barely keep *Infinité* under control. Coming in too fast and unable to slow down, the captain decided to use the last of the ship's thrust, slowing as much as possible before turning towards Sturgeon's Law's only sea. *Infinité* hit the surface hard enough to smash the bridge and its crew but the hull remained together as she sank in shallow water.

The ship finished up more or less level, about 20 metres below the surface of the sea, in an area of shallows surrounded by small islands. Her powerplants and life support systems still functioned, some of her engineers were alive and most important of all – although the survivors did not know this at the time – she was not on land.

Had *Infinité* come down on land, even in a perfect landing, there would have been no survivors of the colony mission. The greenery seen from orbit was indeed plant life but hostile to virtually all life. The most common plant on Sturgeon's Law is a moss-like growth capable of rapidly digesting both animal protoplasm and metal.

Stuck underwater, the few surviving crew decided to wake the colonists in batches, although many had not survived or were so badly hurt in the crash that the only option was to turn off their low berths without activating the waking cycle. The survivors set about repairing sections of the ship weakened by the crash and slowly converting their *Infinité* into an underwater city.

It was some months before a scouting party ventured outside and to the surface. There, they discovered they had come down in the only place on the planet humans could survive. With care, it was possible to explore nearby islands, and even the mainland, but contact with the moss was a deadly threat. Even the atmosphere turned out to be hostile, for a normally breathable gas carried spores of the corrosive moss, which slowly attacked flesh and equipment. The few environment suits available soon became non-functional and the colonists withdrew into their vessel.

The water covering the ship kept out both the atmosphere and deadly moss spores, so it was obvious the colonists' future lay underwater. The ship's workshops were used to build crude submersibles that ventured out in search of resources, while underwater construction robots were built out of machinery intended for use on land.



MOSS OF STURGEON'S LAW

Contact with the corrosive moss covering much of Sturgeon's Law will deal a cumulative 1D damage every round, to a maximum of 6D per round. Armour (whether personal or vehicle) left in contact with the moss will degrade by 1 point every day.

The moss also releases spores into the air, which can be treated as a disease.

Disease	END check Difficulty	Damage	Interval
Sturgeon's Law Moss	Difficult (10+)	2D	1D days



It was not until after the propagation of jump drive technology through the Islands cluster that Sturgeon's Law received offworld visitors. They discovered an underwater settlement housing 30,000 people, supported by seabed farming and minor industry. Perhaps more surprisingly, they also found a beacon in orbit warning of the general hostility of the world and offering guidance to an island cleared of vegetation for use as a landing field.

Providing they do not stay more than a few days, it is safe enough for vessels to land on the island. An oft-repaired bunker entrance leads via decontamination facilities to an underwater submarine dock and finally to the settlement. The locals do not receive a lot of visitors but are friendly enough to those who make the journey. They are strangely reverent of anyone who can claim to be part of a starship's bridge crew and will lionise anyone wearing pilot's insignia.

This reverence for the crew who brought *Infinité* down at the cost of their own lives, and the men and women who found a way to survive on such a harsh world, extends to the governmental system. Modern Sturgeon's Law has a ruling caste derived from the underwater engineering profession. This group elects a president, who is referred to as the Captain, and a vice-president who takes the title of Chief Engineer.

Society is liberal and surprisingly contented, with emigration low even among those who have the chance. Although TL9 items are available, resources are scarce, so there is little in the way of consumer goods to be bought. The population do not own personal comms but have never seen the need, for they are never more than a few steps from a wall communicator.

Likewise, most tools and electronic equipment are communal property, held in workshops or common areas for use by anyone who needs them. Most citizens possess at least a basic set of technical skills and can assist with routine maintenance. The ability to mobilise the whole population for big jobs has saved lives on many occasions and the citizenry are deeply suspicious of anyone who cannot use a soldering iron or spanner with at least basic competence.

LIMON



SUBSECTOR

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Bonn	3230		A8C578C-B	FI	A	Imperium	G
Cyclone	2930		B599347-9	Lo		Imperium	G
Eskandor	3028		C551499-9	Ni Po		Imperium	G
Hoilhapuli	3229		B76565A-8	Ag Ni Ga Ri		Imperium	G
Jokelyn	3128		B201469-B	Ic Ni Va		Imperium	G
Rampart	3030	N	A434200-F	Lo		Imperium	G
Sakaliin	3029		B857222-B	Lo Ga		Imperium	G

Limon subsector contains seven star systems, all of which are within the Third Imperium and lie 'beneath the claw', as the saying goes. Therefore, although Limon is located on the very edge of the Great Rift, it is in tune with mainstream Imperial territories and culturally well integrated.

Facing little in the way of external threats, Limon subsector has only a token presence from the Imperial Navy. This is based out of Rampart and deals mainly with customs and internal security operations. Vessels sometimes assist with inspections of ships coming in from or via the Islands cluster but the volume of traffic is sufficiently low that this is never a major drain on resources.

BONN

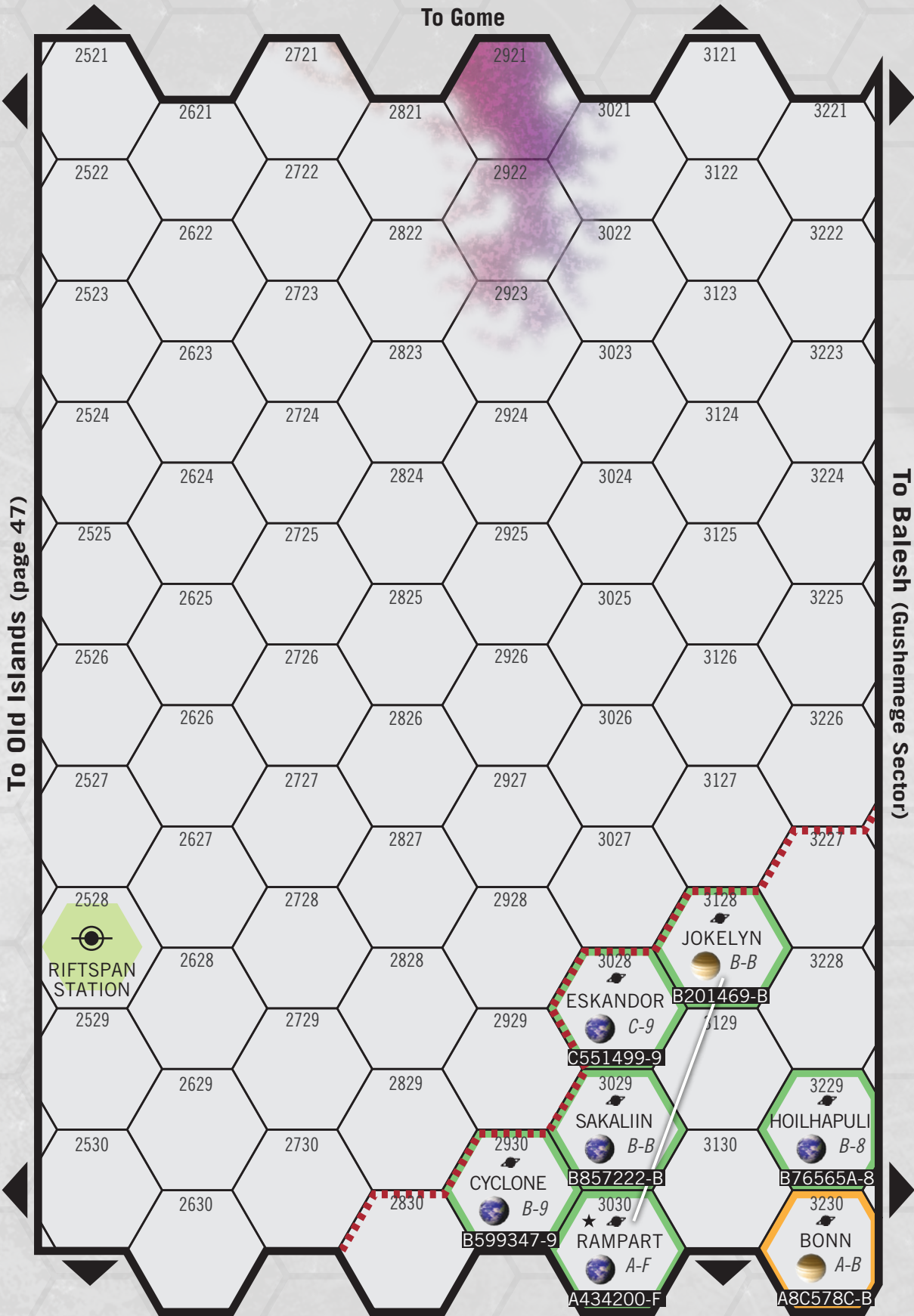
Bonn is primarily a trade port and many spacefarers think of it as an orbital port rather than a planet; few venture down to the hostile surface. The port itself is a large, advanced and highly capable installation, which more than justifies its Class A rating. It is owned and operated by the world government and represents the main source of income for the world.

Around 12,000 people live and work in the orbital component of the port and, of these, most are recruited offworld although the management staff and many long-service personnel are locals. After passing through

customs, visitors emerge onto the port concourse, with its vast array of retail outlets, restaurants and entertainment establishments. The port is busy and lively, decorated in a style that many find somewhat in-your-face but it is certainly vibrant. Helpful and polite staff are everywhere and smartly uniformed security rarely far away. The deliberate intent is to create a place where visitors feel welcome, safe and relaxed. This makes them more likely to spend money, which is what the port is all about.

In addition to private purses, Bonn Orbital caters to the interstellar trading community with several brokerages and megacorporate offices, and a lively freighting and cargo business. Free traders and similar single-ship operators are just as common as members of organised shipping lines, as there is a fair amount of cargo to be picked up by smaller operators.

Bonn Orbital is a major mail nexus and home to several private mail ships and couriers; some on contract for a single route, while others take whatever is left over. As a result, Bonn is known as a good place to charter a starship, with specialist vessels such as laboratory and safari ships, survey vessels and starmercenary escorts-for-hire also much in evidence. Bonn Orbital also has extensive starship maintenance, repair and construction yards. These are privately owned and cannot handle vessels over 5,000 tons, instead specialising in private construction.



Reft

LIMON SUBSECTOR

- Gas Giant
- Secure System
- Planet (dry)
- B-6 Starport Class & Tech Level
- Amber Zone
- Planet (water present)
- ★ Imperial Naval Base
- Imperium Border
- X-Boat Route

The yards do not build military ships, although they will overhaul privately owned combat vessels such as escort corvettes operated by shipping lines or noble houses. About half of the yards' capacity is dedicated to building or maintaining vessels for local small to medium merchant lines at any given time, the rest available to anyone with the money.

Bonn Downport is rather less impressive and sees few visiting ships. It is primarily a groundside port for the planetary population, although it has a few impressive features that are clearly never used. For example, to qualify for Class A status a port must be able to handle large starships such as bulk transports at both orbital and ground installations, so Bonn Downport has two landing areas capable of handling 15,000 ton freighters, even though one will never land there.

The smaller pads are used more often, especially those serving the ground-to-orbit shuttle fleet. These pads are located underground, with vessels taking off and landing through large doors, allowing atmosphere in the docking bay to be purged and preventing excessive damage to the vessel; Bonn's atmosphere is insidious and weakly corrosive.

Personnel venturing outside need hostile environment suits, so it makes sense to conduct maintenance and servicing of the shuttle fleet in environment-controlled bays. These lead into the rather modest downport concourse and thence to the planet's only city.

Apart from specialist outposts, Bonn's entire 60 million population live and work in this underground city, which grew because of the wealth to be had on Bonn. Initially this was industrial; Bonn is a mineral-rich world and heavy investment resulted in an economic powerhouse that exported its goods throughout the rest of the subsector and beyond. The port was initially built to support this trade but became a secondary source of wealth in a short time.

Although major industries are all located in the city, commercial outposts exist. These are mainly involved in resource extraction, which ranges from conventional mining to the extraction of rare compounds from the atmosphere and water. A few small experimental stations conduct research into further uses of these compounds.

Within Bonn City, laws are strict and enforcement harsh. This is in some ways necessary, given the hostility of the planet in general. Failure to observe correct procedures could allow toxic gases into the

city and cause widespread casualties. However, the same attitude applies to all regulations and laws, from littering to civil disputes.

The population are well off despite their rigidly controlled lives, with a high standard of living and plenty of luxury items. However, the ordinary folk do not live anything like as well as the elite. Those holding high office in the trade, industry or governmental sectors are fabulously wealthy by anyone's standards and guard their status carefully. There is a glass ceiling that limits how high anyone not born among the elite can climb, although exceptions do appear.

Bonn is very much a place that even people who pass through the orbital forget about, nevertheless its leaders are highly influential in local affairs. The elite of Bonn are so wealthy that once they literally bought a planet – the situation was more complex than that, but essentially the starport at Jokelyn went bust and was bailed out by funding from Bonn; as a result, Bonn acquired a dominant stake in the affairs of another world.

ESKANDOR

Eskandor is (in many ways) a typical Great Rift-fringe system, with a low population and basic starport. The port just barely qualifies as a Class C installation, with minimal ground facilities including control building, storage areas, small workshop, underground fuel tanks and support complex that contains little more than a couple of hostels and some shops. These are used more by the local population than offworlders, as the port backs on to the only major settlement on the entire planet.

The port's orbital component is little more than a mooring station for ships that cannot enter atmosphere, a small living area for staff and berths for the world's two transfer shuttles. There is nowhere for visitors to stay or to handle cargo; all business must be conducted groundside, meaning non-atmosphere-capable ships must send their cargo to the downport using their own shuttles or pay for transfer using those of the port.

This is not uncommon on backwater worlds, although it makes commercial activity somewhat fiddly for visitors, which in turn discourages trade. However, traffic volumes along the edge of the Great Rift tend to be low and Eskandor's population is not large enough to make it a profitable trade destination.

TRANSFER SHUTTLE

TL9		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	75 tons, Streamlined	-	4.5
M-Drive	Thrust 1	0.75	1.5
Power Plant	Fusion (TL8), Power 30	3	1.5
Fuel Tanks	4 weeks of operation	1	-
Bridge	Small (DM-1)	3	0.25
Computer	Computer/5	-	0.03
Sensors	Basic	-	-
Systems	Loading Belt (TL7)	1	0.003
Staterooms	Acceleration Seats x 18	9	0.54
Software	Manoeuvr/O	-	-
Common Areas		3	0.3
Cargo		53	
TOTAL: MCR 8.623			

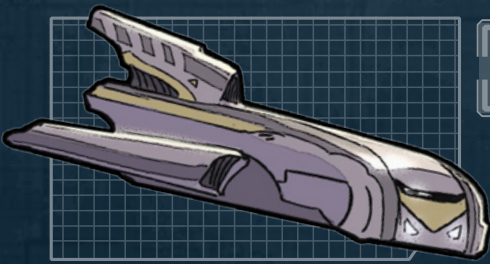
CREW
PILOT

RUNNING COSTS
MAINTENANCE COST:
Cr718/month
.....
PURCHASE COST:
MCR8.623

POWER REQUIREMENTS

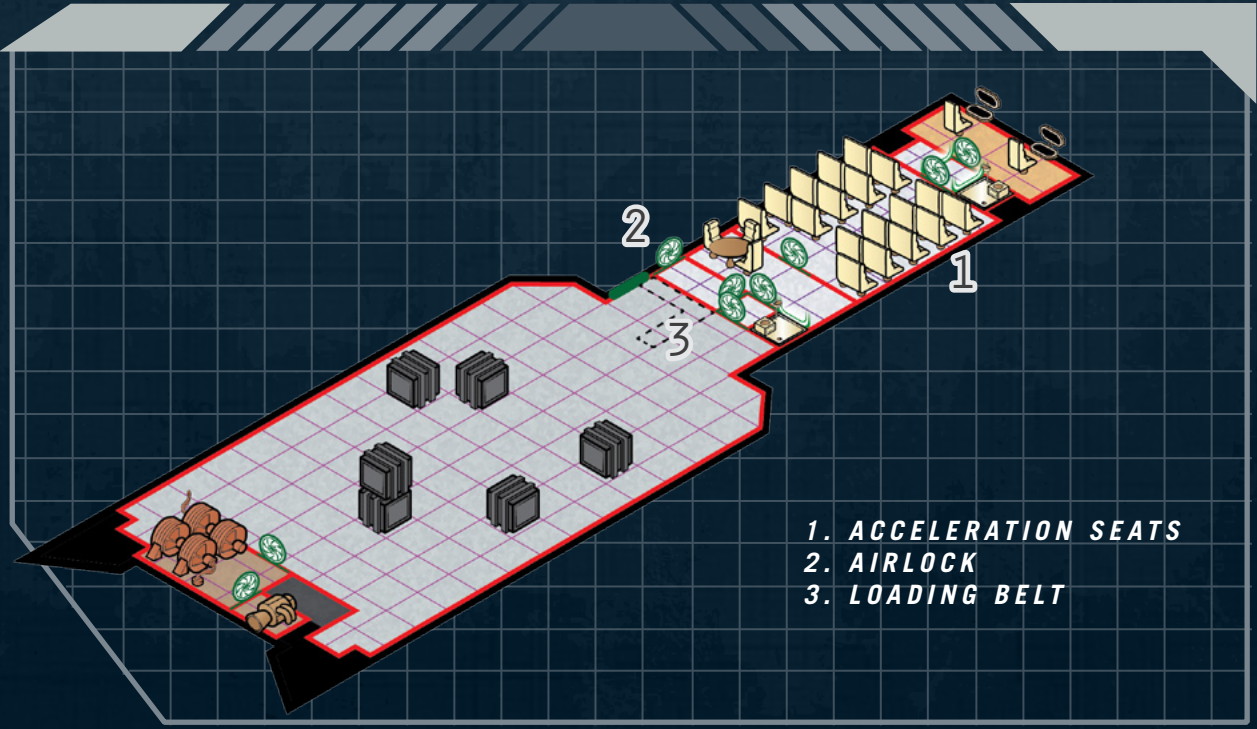
8
MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

15
BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS



30
HULL POINTS

Mid-sized shuttles like this are common in lower tech backwater systems that feature downports but underdeveloped orbital stations. With most business being conducted onplanet, a regular ferry of equipment and personnel requires the use of cheap and easily constructed shuttles that regularly climb to orbit and drop back again daily. An over-sized power plant means it is perfectly possible to weaponise these craft, although they lack the agility and speed to properly function as an effective defence once they leave orbit.



The tax contribution of minor worlds like Eskandor is negligible, and outweighed by the cost of sending naval patrol ships through the system. However, this is a necessity, as is keeping such worlds within the Imperium. By doing so, the Imperial authorities (to some extent) can prevent them from becoming a problem; non-Imperial worlds might become a haven for criminals or pirates, or forge links with foreign powers.

Eskandor itself is a marginal world, with a thin but breathable atmosphere. There is little surface water and what there is remains frozen for most of the year. Surface temperatures are, on average, on the low side of tolerable, with nights being very cold due to the thin atmosphere.

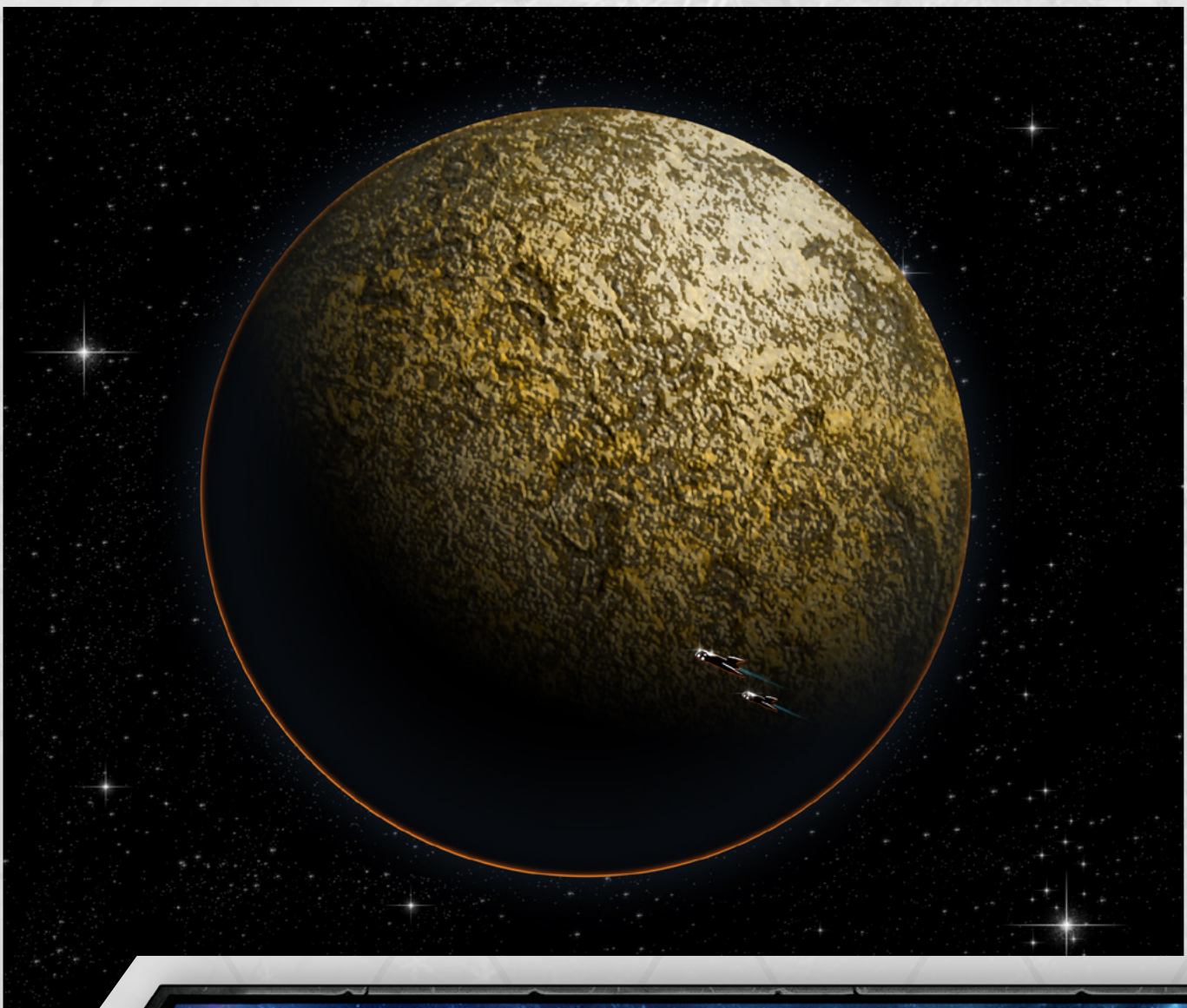
The entire planetary population, some 20,000 people, dwell within a 200km radius of the starport, most in the main settlement or close to it. The rest of the planet is unused apart from scattered meteorological monitoring stations and the occasional party of prospectors. At least, that is the official situation. A planet is a very big

place and it is entirely possible that other groups are present on Eskandor.

In the past, prospectors have found mineral veins that could not be exploited by local industry, so the world government granted licenses to small mining companies to develop them, in return for a percentage of the proceeds. Such operations tend to take what they can get too easily, using basic equipment, then move on. However, it is possible that unlicensed mining operations might be present.

There are other possibilities too. An entire planet offers plenty of hiding places for pirates or corsairs to use as a base or for illegal colonists to set up a home.

Overall, the people of Eskandor live quietly in the interstellar equivalent of a small town on the prairie, far from anywhere. Events in the wider universe rarely trouble them but there is no guarantee that something unusual is not going on in the outback without their knowledge.



ALONE



SUBSECTOR

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Garden	0435		B755578-A	Ag Ni Ga			G

The Alone subsector contains but one star system, a world now named Garden by its inhabitants. It once had a different name but little is known of the original inhabitants.

When colonists began to arrive on Garden in 1079, they were seeking a habitable world far from outside interference, where they could live a peaceful existence as farmers and ply subsistence trades. They found evidence of a previous civilisation, which ended abruptly around 1000 with a mass migration offworld, although where the original inhabitants went, or how, remains a total mystery. All that is known is that they were non-human and probably did not have access to jump drive technology.

The previous inhabitants may have left Garden to escape an environmental disaster, as the new colonists found the environment in a vulnerable and unstable condition. Pollution in the atmosphere was at the

point of becoming disastrous, while Garden's star was contributing to the problem. A long-period variable star, it was entering a bright phase and causing temperature increases.

With assistance from the Imperial Ministry of Colonisation, the Gardeners, as the new inhabitants styled themselves, stabilised the situation. Atmospheric terraforming and strict conservation measures reduced the temperature and allowed the colonists to begin living the lifestyle they sought. Use of technology outside the starport is kept to a minimum and environmental impact is carefully monitored.

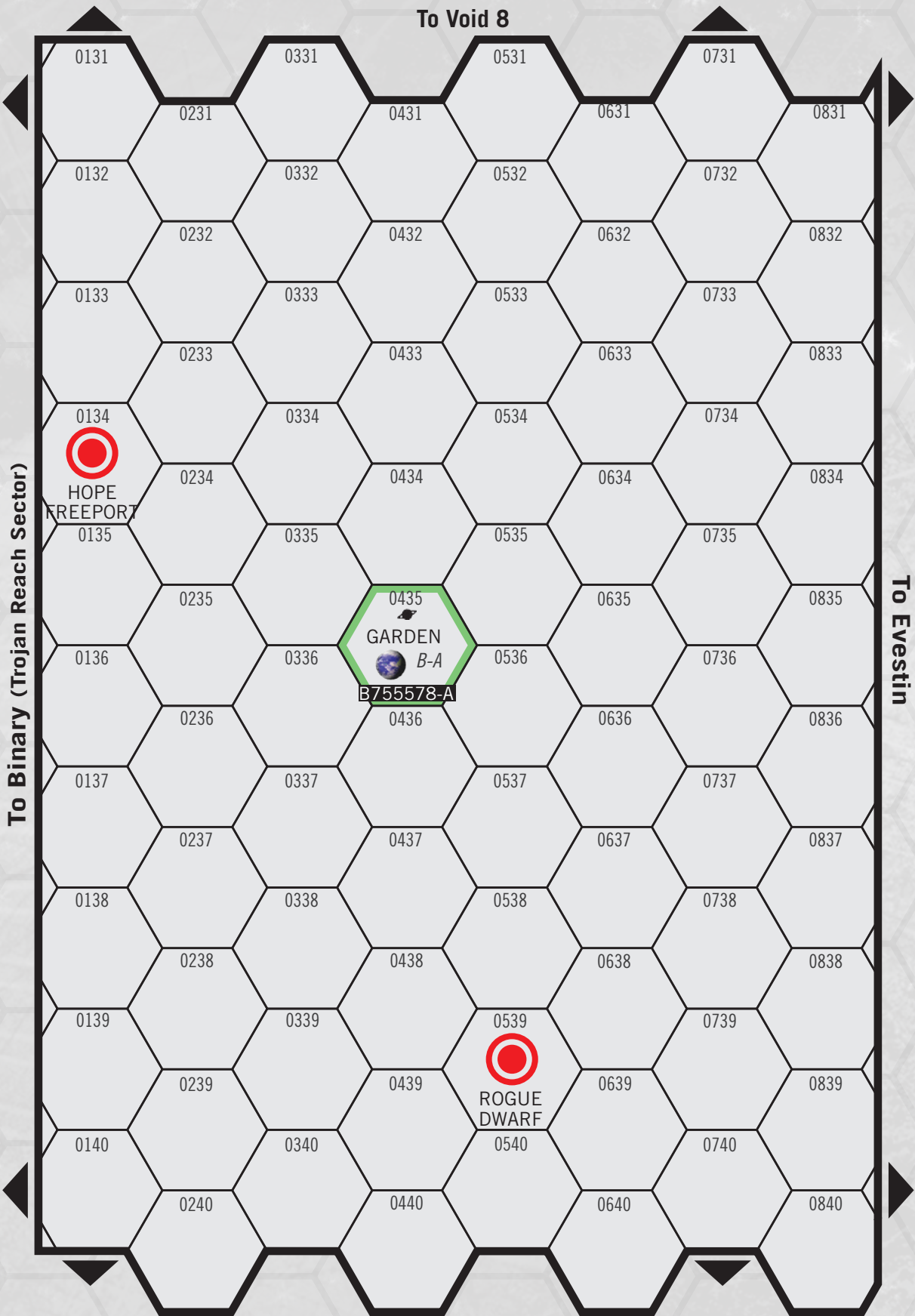
The Gardeners are not technophobes or barbarians but most technology is used for environmental control, power generation or communications and always with careful regard for the environment. Thus far, it seems to be working; Garden is not an idyllic paradise but is entirely liveable.



M			

Reft

ALONE SUBSECTOR



Gas Giant
B-6 Starport Class & Tech Level

To Piimigea (Verge Sector)

Secure System

Planet (water present)
 Anomaly

ARCRANT



SUBSECTOR

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Arraste	2139		B59368B-6	Ni		Imperium	G
Jacob	2239		B100400-E	Ni Va		Imperium	G
Fresneise	2240		B728512-A	Ni		Imperium	G
Pit Stop	2337	S	B593326-A	Lo		Imperium	G
Uxors	2435	S	BA97677-5	Ag Ni		Imperium	G
Mieniept	2436		B794454-B	Ni		Imperium	

The Arcrant subsector contains six star systems, all of which are Imperial territory. They all have good starports and see a lot of trade ships coming through, although little trans-rift traffic. The Imperial Navy maintains patrols from bases in other subsectors, while the Scout Base at Pit Stop is primarily concerned with supporting survey missions along the Great Rift fringe.

ARRASTE

Lying on the very fringe of the Great Rift, Arraste is an unpleasant world. The atmosphere is very dense, making breathing tiring for those not properly acclimatised, and it is heavily polluted with industrial waste, requiring a filter mask to avoid long-term health problems. As if this were not enough, Arraste has an eccentric orbit, resulting in significant climate changes over a 130-year cycle.

Socially, Arraste is also an unpleasant place. The four million inhabitants dwell in several large cities, surrounded by agricultural districts. The cities are overcrowded, polluted and heavily policed to keep the increasingly disaffected populace under control. The social elite enjoy a better lifestyle and it is the chance of elevation into this group – or at least its lower echelons – that motivates the population to support the regime.

There is a low-level insurgency ongoing within the cities, with rebel encampments beginning to appear in the outback. At present, it is well within the capabilities of

the police and military to maintain order and the rebels are little more than a nuisance. However, they have obtained better equipment and their operations have become more effective, suggesting offworld advisors have been brought in.

As with many such worlds, Arraste has a large area of outback that is totally uninhabited and rarely visited. Despite the atmospheric and climate conditions, it would not be difficult for a guerrilla force to hide in the countryside indefinitely. However, there is no rural population to support an insurgency, except very close to the cities. Thus, insurgencies are confined to a limited area.

The operation of the orbital port is not affected by conditions on the ground. Built with investment from the Colonial Office, it was intended to facilitate greater Rift-edge trade. In this, it was only marginally successful and the increased revenue did not justify the expense of building it; nor does it meet the running costs.

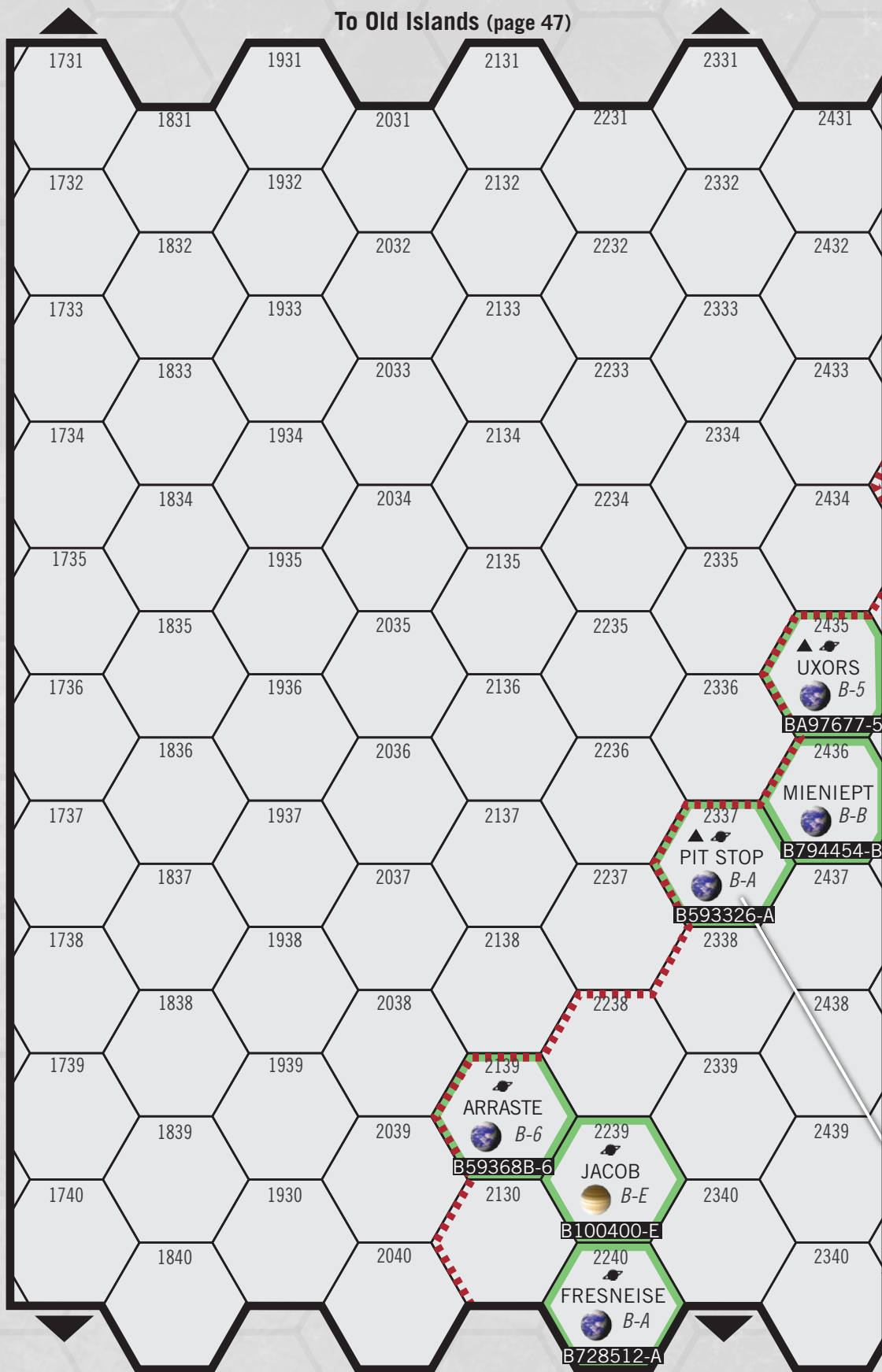
Although the port is large, if not in good repair. Segments are disused and closed off, while an illegal scavenger community has developed, slipping into these areas to remove items for sale. These become available on an ever-increasing black market, which the authorities have failed to do much about. There are concerns that the port's vital systems might be harmed by scavenging and security patrols are sent into the disused segments. Sometimes arrests are made but

To Old Islands (page 47)

Reft

To Evestin

To Moibin (page 70)



ARCRANT SUBSECTOR

To Mimiudlika (Verge Sector)

- Gas Giant
- Secure System
- Planet (dry)
- B-6* Starport Class & Tech Level
- X-boat Route
- Planet (water present)
- Imperial Scout Base
- Imperial Border

more often nothing is found and, very occasionally, the patrols become involved in gunfights with armed scavenger bands.

Meanwhile, the rest of the station continues to decline. This is obvious despite attempts to keep the main concourse presentable. A secure zone exists around the main terminal, with further reaches of the station becoming increasingly hazardous. Starships still receive maintenance and repairs but spares are in short supply and the work is often shoddy.

This situation is intolerable to major shipping operators, who have re-routed their vessels through less seedy ports. Smaller operators have less choice in the matter and there is a certain class of starship owner who prefers to operate out of a port whose owners are desperate for cash and regulations are rarely enforced. This has contributed to the generally bad reputation of Arraste Highport, although the Class B rating assigned years ago by the IISS has not been changed.

The Imperial Navy, with marine support, has more than once conducted a sweep of Arraste Highport. A flurry of served legal notices, impounded starships and arrested gang members followed each time. This has prevented the port from becoming overtly lawless and serves to keep overt pirates from using it as a base but it does nothing about the lack of funds.

The simple fact is that Arraste should never have had such a large or expensive installation. It cannot be supported by interstellar trade or the planetside government and became a money pit as soon as it was built. A plan is in place to try to sell off segments of the station – literally bringing in salvage crews to cut away parts of the station and break them for scrap and salvage. This, it is hoped, will enable a small orbital station to be constructed from the remains, with enough salvage left over to pay for the work.

PIT STOP

Pit Stop is an otherwise empty world annexed by the Imperium for use as an IISS base. In its history, the base has acted as a terminus and maintenance depot for express boats and courier ships, holding area for surplus scout vessels, training facility and support base for missions in the Great Rift.

Whimsically named by the IISS personnel first stationed there, Pit Stop is a medium-sized world with a dense, tainted atmosphere with seas that are small and shallow, and not very far apart. Between them are regions of not-quite-dry land, swamps, marshes and the occasional rainforest. There are dry areas but a large amount of the planetary surface is covered by wetlands.

Pit Stop is a warm world, making any venture out into the wetlands an unpleasant experience normally referred to as the Pit Stop Steam Bath. This is not necessary for day-to-day life but the Scout Service routinely sends personnel on survival courses or to gain experience in operating within difficult environments.

There is just one town on the surface of Pit Stop, surrounding the downport and Scout Service base itself. The population of this town is somewhat higher than the IISS profile indicates because the Scout Service Survey Branch, which deals with census information, only uses the permanent population of the planet.

The permanent population of a world like this is difficult to assess, since it does not include personnel assigned to bases or staffing starports. Thus, the Survey Branch pegs the planetary population at 6,000 residents. Even this figure varies from time-to-time but it is a reasonable estimate of the number of people who call the world home.

In addition, there are typically around 4,000 scouts at Pit Stop, including recruits, personnel undertaking refresher courses and technical personnel assigned to the base to look after vessels or the installation itself. Some live on the highport but most are resident on the surface.

The planetary government is listed as a participatory democracy, a nod to the IISS' traditionally loose command structure, whereby teams are formed and someone put in charge for the duration of a mission, then dissolved again. There is no permanent rank in IISS and none in the government of Pit Stop. All residents have a say in decisions affecting their home, except where orders from the Scout Service are concerned – these override the democratic discussion process where necessary.

Pit Stop has virtually no industry of its own. It is supplied with components and raw materials by freighter and uses small workshops to fashion anything that cannot be drawn from stores. Were the installation to be cut off from external shipping, it could not support its population. The only source of income is the port itself, which functions as a normal starport.

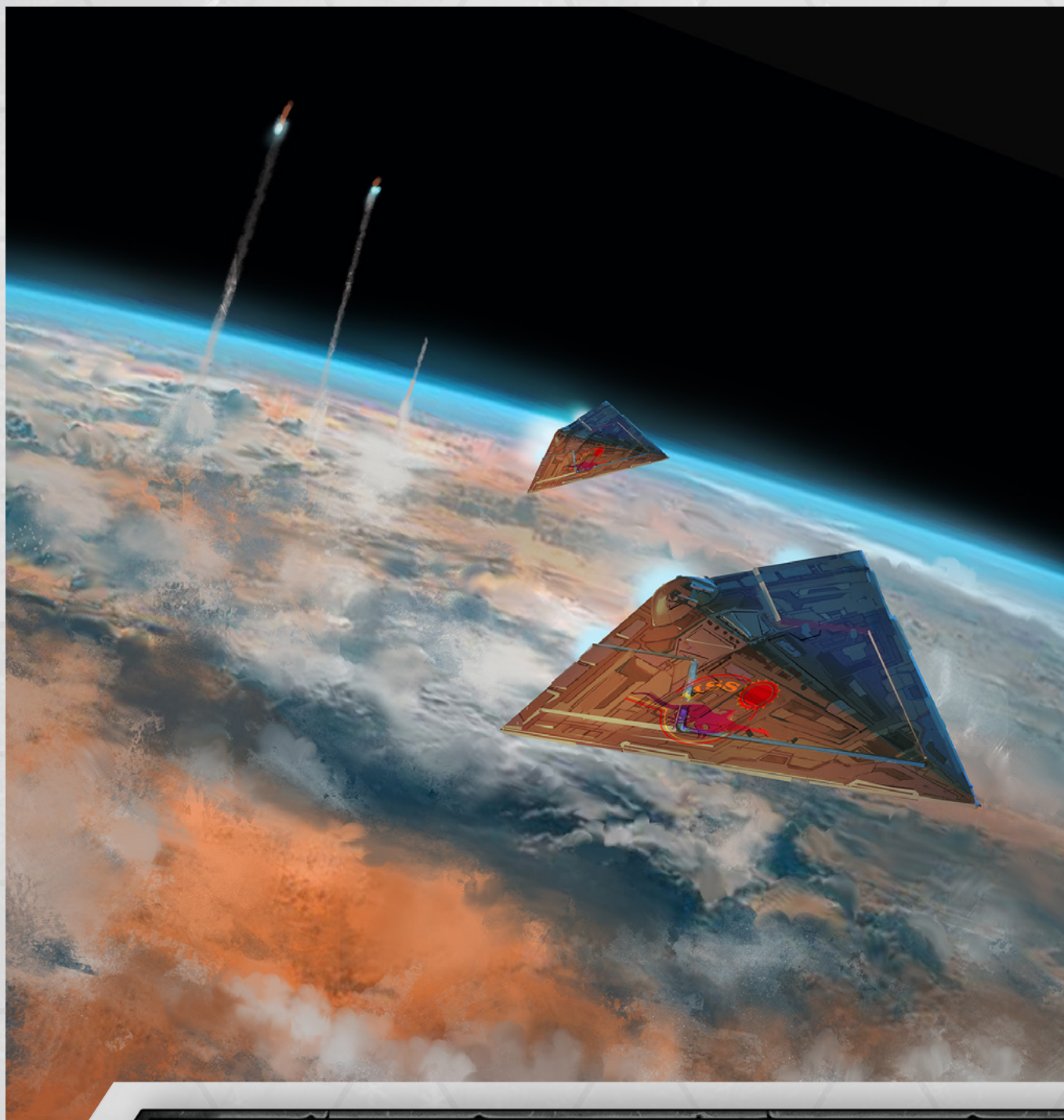
Few ships land on the surface but the highport sees a reasonable amount of shipping. The usual recreation, business and maintenance facilities are available to passing starfarers; the only real difference is the number of Scout Service uniforms on show. Most shops and bars are privately owned but customs, bureaucracy, maintenance, security and similar functions are carried out by IISS personnel.

Most of the Scout Service craft based at Pit Stop are smaller vessels such as survey scouts and scout/couriers. Those that can enter atmosphere are based on-planet, with the rest occupying berths in a secure area of the highport not accessible to non-Scouts. Several high-jump scout cruisers of varying sizes (starting at 800 tons and including 10,000+ ton vessels) are also based out of Pit Stop, although few are permanently assigned. Instead, they rotate through as their mission requires.

In addition, a sizable support flotilla is based out of Pit Stop. Crewed by scouts, these vessels carry out unglamorous but important jobs such as picking up

x-boats (express boats) at their arrival points. A mix of x-boat tenders, x-boats themselves, tankers and supply vessels are assigned to the base, again temporarily according to mission requirements.

Several high-capacity, high-jump tankers and supply ships are maintained at Pit Stop and refer to it as their home port. These vessels are used to support operations in the Great Rift, including the Trans-Islands run. The base has extremely good drive calibration facilities, which is an absolute necessity when attempting to rendezvous with another vessel or a deep-space refuelling point in the utter emptiness of the Great Rift.



MOIBIN



SUBSECTOR

Moibin subsector is in many ways an 'internal' subsector of the Imperium. All of its worlds are Imperial members

ALVERIK

Alverik orbits at the outer edge of its star's continuous habitable zone. Coupled with a thick atmosphere that reflects most of the sun's light, this makes Alverik a very cold world. Much of the surface is rocky desert, the rest dusty desert or mountains.

The Long Night was hard on Alverik. Without offworld trade, even survival was in doubt. The population crashed to almost zero and technology was forgotten by the small bands of nomads and mountain villagers who struggled to make a life on the harsh and unforgiving world.

The Third Imperium annexed Alverik almost in passing during the Pacification Campaigns. This meant nothing more than setting up a rudimentary landing area and stationing a few personnel on-planet to support the land grab. The Imperials were surprised to find the world was already inhabited, when bands of nomads began to arrive at the outpost to trade.

Over time, the outpost grew into a small town. A government of sorts grew out of the colonial administration that had been in place and was modelled upon it. Even today, the planetary president is referred to as the Colonial Governor and wields all the powers of a commander of a new colony, assisted by an appointed body of bureaucrats and executives, with little input from the general population.

The construction of a starport brought new prosperity to Alverik. The landing field had long since developed into a basic Class C port but investment enormously expanded the port. By the time work finished, the downport had become a sprawling complex and the highport was little smaller.

The downport is home to a number of starship-related businesses. There are extensive repair and construction yards, specialising in small military and civilian vessels of a utilitarian nature. General Products owns some of the yards, which build an endless stream of patrol corvettes and mercenary cruisers for the Imperial Navy and private clients. Component factories are also present, including a very successful business that

fabricates replacement parts for older vessels that have been out of production for many years. These parts are not cheap and often must be fabricated not only to fit an archaic ship design but a specific vessel that has been heavily modified.

The highport is a large installation but many feel it lacks character. Everything is middle-of-the-road and inoffensive, or as one astrogator's guide puts it 'bland, bland, bland, with a sprinkling of bland to not add variety'. This is mainly a result of the endless wrangling between investors over various aspects of the port's design, the end result a series of compromises that pleased none of the investors and will never inspire anyone.

However, the port does its job well enough, receiving and servicing a stream of traffic bound for the Great Rift fringe or heading either trailing to Gushemege sector or rimward into Verge and Ilelish. Revenue from the port and ground-based construction yards has enriched the planetary population, making Alverik more attractive to immigrants.

Today, small numbers of desert and mountain people remain, following their traditional way of life. Some dwell among the ruins of cities built before the Long Night and there are those who draw parallels with those days. Then, too, Alverik had a population too large for its natural resources to support and depended on interstellar trade. Were today's trade to be disrupted, a repeat of the collapse would be inevitable.

ARGUS

Argus is a habitable world, of medium size with thin atmosphere and a reasonable amount of surface water. It can happily support large numbers of settlers with its own resources and the current population has grown accordingly.

Argus is home to about 38 billion people, most of whom dwell in huge self-contained cities with layers delving deep underground and high towers rising above. The underground sections tend to be built in layers, often in blocks which have areas of bedrock between them for stability or support. This trend is continued above-ground, with vast blocky constructions rising tens, or even hundreds, of metres, all linked by tubeways. From the tops of these structures (and

Name	Location	Bases	Statistics	Trade Codes	Travel Code	Allegiance	Gas Giants
Alexander	3132		B42369A-B	Na Ni Po		Imperium	G
Alverik	3136		A550698-A	De Ni Po	A	Imperium	
Angsturm	2837		A545788-B	Ag		Imperium	G
Argus	2536	S	C755A96-8	Hi Ga		Imperium	G
Bokilborn	2834		B573552-C	Ni		Imperium	G
Boneyard	2537	N	B420310-A	De Lo Po		Imperium	
Bouvrier	2737		E430668-8	De Na Ni Po		Imperium	
Breezy	3133		B100544-C	Ni Va		Imperium	G
Chateau	2739		E450200-5	De Lo Po		Imperium	G
Cyril	2738	N S	A7969B9-E	Hi In	A	Imperium	G
Dagu	3037		B100362-C	Lo Va		Imperium	G
Dead End	2740		C576310-5	Lo		Imperium	G
Debica	2832	RS	D645688-6	Ag Ni		Imperium	
Delinski	2538		B55367A-8	Ni Po		Imperium	G
Dlaekan	3134		A583657-D	Ni Ri		Imperium	G
Elphintrax	3040		C574476-7	Ni Pa	A	Imperium	G
Filentred	2731	S	B548534-8	Ag Ni		Imperium	G
G'haenbaz	2733		C557558-A	Ag Ni		Imperium	
Good Home	3135	N	B745789-9	Ag		Imperium	G
Grecorn	2638		B79858C-B	Ag Ni	A	Imperium	
Gundamoor	2833		B311637-C	Ic Na Ni		Imperium	G
Haliburn	2540		B565777-7	Ag Ri		Imperium	G
Harmony	2935		E6538AF-4	Po	A	Imperium	G
Jeandrent	3237	N	BA7A666-8	Ni Wa		Imperium	G
Mynez	3035		E627989-8	Hi In		Imperium	
Numeron	2939		B432769-9	Na Po		Imperium	G
P'hakar	2934	S	C420456-B	De Ni Po		Imperium	G
Pamraeltan	2932	N	A537651-E	Ni		Imperium	G
Quiver	2534		B310405-D	Ni		Imperium	G
Roger	3231		B424200-B	Lo		Imperium	
Seville	3036		B657445-7	Ni Ga		Imperium	G
Stock Point 3	2636		A436110-F	Lo		Imperium	
Transit	3038		B987230-8	Lo		Imperium	
Unseren	3140	S	B552549-9	Ni Po		Imperium	G
Valentorn	2539		D556512-4	Ag Ni		Imperium	
Vlad	2838	N	A554844-C			Imperium	G
Vleek	2931		C762475-6	Ni		Imperium	G

sometimes between them) spring high, slender towers that house government offices, major business groups and the social elite.

Thus, the cities of Argus are essentially artificial caves, dug below ground and built above, within which are all homes, shops, restaurants, businesses and industrial areas of a typical city. Some blocks have a specific function, such as heavy industry, but most are self-contained with their own shopping areas, places of work and so forth.

Transport within a block tends to be pedestrian-oriented, with moving pathways and tram-like public vehicles on rails. Personal transport takes the form of small electric cart-like vehicles; there is little need for more powerful vehicles as no part of a block is far from any other. Besides, blocks are built in three dimensions making wheeled transport impractical when changing levels. Transit between blocks is normally via fast monorail trains, intended to move pedestrians around quickly and efficiently.

All citizens have a travel pass that allows free access to the trains and street transport, and subtly controls the movement of individuals by imposing a charge to enter some areas. This is justified as being necessary to pay for aspects of the transport system (usually 'essential maintenance' that never seems to be finished). Other areas are restricted and cannot be accessed using the normal civilian pass.

Movement using the pass can be monitored by law enforcement agencies and without one it is difficult to use the system. Starfarers can buy a short-duration pass for a few Credits; it comes with a free leaflet describing how excellent the public transport system is and how lucky the citizenry are to be able to use it for free.

Vehicles for use outside the cities, or capable of flying between them, are heavily restricted and difficult to obtain even with vast amounts of cash. In truth there is little need, as cities are much like one another, so there are few reasons to travel between them. If someone does have a need, a highly efficient monorail system is available. This, too, is available to the citizenry for a very small fee.

Control of movement is one of the tools used by the government of Argus to keep the populace in order. With so many people on the planet, most jammed into huge cities, population control is essential. Unfortunately, the government is losing that control.

There has always been disaffection on Argus but in recent years it has grown. Previously, a system of cheap entertainment, mild propaganda and strong law

enforcement was sufficient to keep crime and disorder within reasonable limits. However, social unrest has increased massively in the past few years and both politically motivated violence and simple crime have become serious problems.

In most cities, an increased presence of increasingly intolerant police has kept a lid on things but no-go zones have started appearing. Other areas have become unsafe and require ever more heavy-handed measures to keep them under control.

On top of a general increase in lawlessness, there is an organised insurrection ongoing in some cities. Control has been lost in some regions and even if there is no direct connection between rebels and the general rise in criminality, insurgents are creating ideal conditions for crime to flourish, which in turn diverts government resources from dealing with the political threat.

As yet, Imperial authorities have not imposed an Amber travel code but it seems likely this will happen soon. An intervention cannot be ruled out, although the Imperium tries to stay out of internal affairs. On a world like Argus, an intervention would be on a massive scale, a true multi-year effort.

Ironically, facilities to support an intervention are already in place, in the form of an Imperial Interstellar Scout Service base on Argus' moon. This is not a large facility, although more capable than Argus' own small starport. The facility is off-limits to non-official vessels and receives little traffic. Its primary function is to support the x-boat network in Moibin, although it is large enough to handle scout cruisers – or army troop transports.

There have been rumours that the Scout Service has agents on Argus, monitoring the situation. This is almost certainly likely to be true, as the IISS has a contact and liaison branch that deals with, among other things, problems like those on Argus. Less likely is the rumour that IISS security forces are already operating on Argus, eliminating the most dangerous criminal and political groups.

The Scout base itself is unlikely to be affected by the troubles on-planet and the government expends considerable effort to ensure the starport is secure. How long the lid can be kept on is an open question.

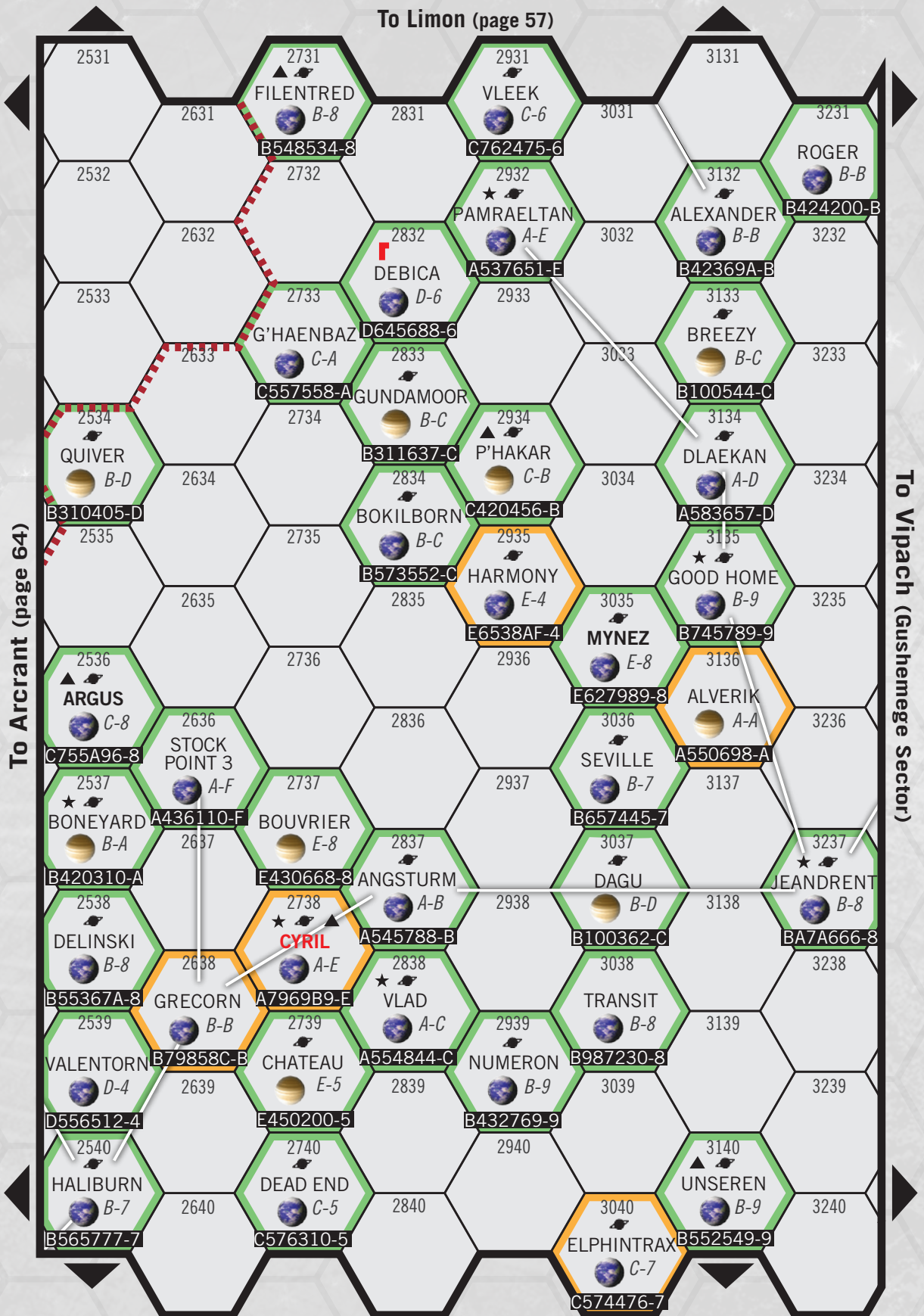
BONEYARD

Boneyard is as cheerful as its name suggests; a world of cold deserts whose dust is stirred by the winds of a thin, tainted atmosphere. According to local sources, the world is so named because Imperial colonists found the desiccated bones of the previous inhabitants when they arrived.

		P

Reft

MOIBIN SUBSECTOR



- Gas Giant
- Starport Class & Tech Level
- Imperial Scout Base
- Imperial Naval Base

- Secure System
- Amber Zone
- X-boat Route
- Imperium Border

- Planet (dry)
- Planet (water present)
- Research Station

Boneyard was inhabited, possibly by several million people, during the time of the First and Second Imperiums. At some point during the Long Night, the population died out. Water sources may well have literally dried up but other theories include a plague or biological warfare. The very lack of evidence is puzzling.

The inhabitants were human and they left behind cities half-buried under the desert. Their writings were in standard Vilani script and entirely intelligible to modern scholars. However, they make no mention of whatever disaster overcame the world. This suggests that whatever happened, it was sudden.

Today, the entire populace numbers 9,500 people who live and work at the downport. All are employees of the Boneyard branch of Interstellar Transit LIC, a mid-sized corporation that builds and runs starports on behalf of world governments who cannot afford the investment required to set one up. In this case, the firm was given a franchise to open and run a port by the Imperial authorities, effectively permitting the corporation to colonise an empty world.

A small 'corp town' surrounds the landing area, with its own agricultural system in glazed-roof sheds. Apart from being able to feed themselves, the people of Boneyard are not in any way self-sufficient. Most would call the world their home but in truth they are corporate employees. Even the world government is simply a group of company executives and the body of law is essentially the corporate handbook.

The rest of the planet is barren wasteland, visited by the occasional scientific party or band of ghoulish scavengers. The difference between the two lies only in intent and possession of a permit from the world government to conduct research and excavation in the lost cities of the outback. These still have considerable archaeological significance as well as equipment that can be scavenged by people willing to desecrate the graves of an entire planetary civilisation.

There is, realistically, no law anywhere outside the port and its associated town. Parties of corporation security personnel occasionally venture out to run off scavengers but for the most part the world is left as it was when the first Imperial settlers arrived. There has been little attempt to discover mineral wealth or create industry; these matters lie outside the field of interest of a starport-operations company.

The orbital component of the port, as is not uncommon with worlds of this type, sees much more traffic than the downport. It is a large and efficient establishment, with construction yards for small craft and repair and

maintenance facilities for larger craft. The highport is the home base for a small shipping line, Moibin Shipping LIC, which operates two medium sized freight ships and a flotilla of smaller vessels, mainly subsidised merchants.

Moibin Shipping has a deal with Interstellar Transit, which provides cut-price maintenance in return for using the port as a home base and therefore providing a regular source of income. Moibin Shipping vessels generally operate within 4-6 jumps of their home port, mostly on well-defined circular or there-and-back trade routes. The firm receives an Imperial subsidy to provide a mail and passenger service to systems that would otherwise not see a starship for weeks.

There is also a small naval base in the system, located on the moon of one of the gas giants and primarily supports small patrol ships of the subsector fleet. The base can handle vessels up to destroyer size but its complement of vessels are mostly patrol corvettes and close escorts. A communications squadron of naval couriers also operates out of the base and it is possible to determine if something unusual is going on in the region from their behaviour; every now and then the couriers start disappearing off in different directions with news.

FILENTRED

Filentred is a wet world with thin atmosphere whose taint makes it unbreatheable. It is a relatively simple matter to filter out the dangerous compounds, which are biological in origin. Much of the land surface is home to several species of plant whose pollen is a severe irritant to humans. For this reason, most of the population dwells at sea. This does not remove the taint completely but distance and moist air cause much of the pollen to drop to the surface, reducing the burden on filtration systems.

More than 80% of Filentred's surface is covered by oceans, with many small island chains. The 700,000 or so inhabitants live in cities of about 50,000-100,000 people located in shallow waters off the coasts of islands that have been cleared of natural vegetation. The land is used for agriculture, although most of Filentred's food comes from the sea.

The cities each have a governor who wields considerable power but answers to the world's ruling class, a group of wealthy individuals including industrialists, merchants and members of 'old money' families. Entry into the ruling class is on merit, which in a plutocracy like Filentred means having enough assets to merit a place. Offworlders are welcome providing they buy in with a suitably large investment into the world's economy and make Filentred their home.

The world has a sustainable TL8 but this applies only to the cities. The rulers live apart from their subjects, in a floating habitat that makes its stately way around the globe. The capital-habitat was built offworld using high-tech engineering and is outfitted at TL12, including its defence systems. It has workshops and factories capable of maintaining TL12 equipment but only on a very small scale. These items are not available to the populace, although imports can be bought on the open market.

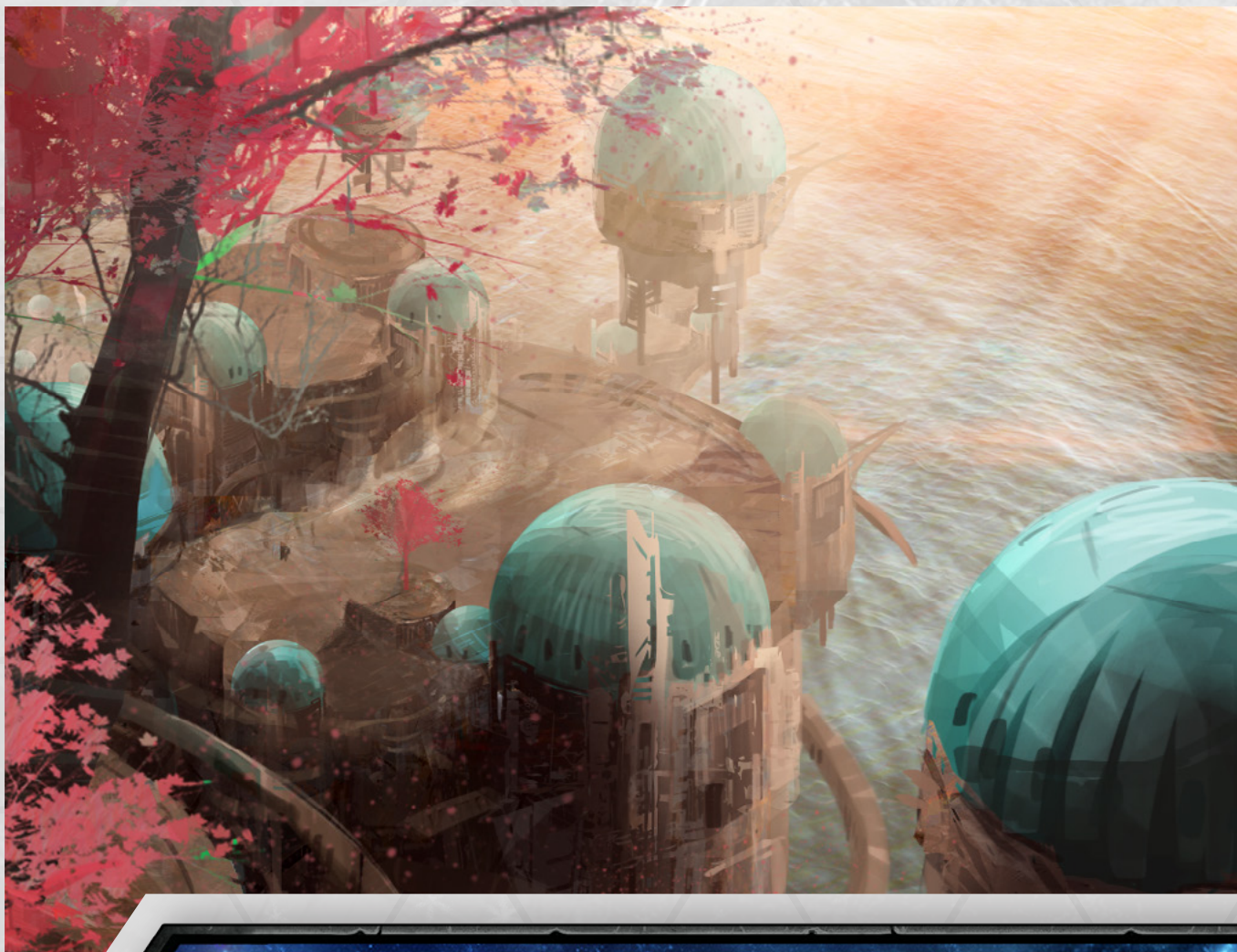
The rulers are supported by a large body of people, numbering over 8,000, who are not part of the ruling caste but enjoy some of its privileges. Competition is fierce for jobs on the capital-habitat, as salaries are generous and living conditions excellent. The rulers employ a full range of workers; everything from guards and pilots, through engineers and technicians, to janitors and waiters.

The capital-habitat has its own spaceport that is reserved for the use of the rulers, their guests and supply ships bringing in essentials and luxuries. Starfarers are sometimes invited to land as guests but this is usually only done when the visiting ship is a

noble's yacht or liner from a well-respected shipping corporation. One curious feature of the port is that all landing areas have retractable floors, allowing vessels to be lowered into sealed berths. This is partly for security and partly for weather protection. In truly severe weather, the habitat can 'button up' and submerge to ride out a storm in calmer waters a few dozen metres down. Its maximum depth is not advertised but not likely to be more than 100-150 metres at the most.

The cities are more modest in terms of technology and opulence than the capital but are clean, spacious and pleasant to live in. The atmospheric taint is kept out by polymer domes that cover sections of the city, making them look like a collection of bubbles from the air. Buildings have secondary filtration systems in case of dome rupture, which occasionally happens in very bad weather.

The city-folk are hard-working and have a strong entrepreneurial spirit. A surprisingly large number go offworld to join merchant shipping lines as brokers or pursers or take jobs in starport brokerages. This is not unconnected with the amount of business education available in schools and the existence of a College of



Commerce at the highport, which offers scholarships to promising students in return for a period of employment at the port and a small cut of their salary for the first ten years after graduation.

Each city has a slightly different flavour but there are distinct similarities all the same. Each has a small spaceport and sea dock from which a fleet of trawlers and underwater farming vessels operate. Ground transport is limited, as the cities are not large and surrounded by sea. Defence is handled by a small professional force who man missile batteries around the periphery of the city; military vehicles are few and mostly utility/transports.

Society is harmonious, although a spirit of competition pervades most activities. Status is conferred by wealth, so symbols such as clothing, electronic gadgets, size of dwelling and so forth are greatly valued. Filentred is one of the few places where a ship's purser is of more interest to the locals than a pilot or spacefaring mercenary. Tales of commercial success and offering insights into some aspect of the merchant business are as likely to impress the locals as sporting achievements, military decorations, or possession of a doctorate from the University of Sylea.

Filentred's orbital port is large, even by Class B standards. It is home to a small Scout Service base, whose personnel are mainly concerned with operations in the Great Rift and, particularly, the Islands cluster. The base supports several long-range Scout Service cruisers and the tankers that enable them to extend missions right into the depths of the Great Rift. These vessels are away from home for long periods and crews almost always have leave owing when they return.

Even if a crew does not take leave, a period of liberty will be granted while the ship refits and resupplies. Scouts blowing off steam after a long voyage are a common sight in the port and while serious excesses are frowned upon, their antics are generally viewed with fond amusement.

Filentred is also the main jumping-off station for trans-rift voyages and the point of arrival for those coming the other way. It is most economical to keep trans-rift ships on the Great Rift run and transfer cargo and passengers to other vessels for more mundane voyages to their destination. Trans-rift ships require meticulous safety checks, recalibration of drives and maintenance before their next trip, and Filentred Highport is well equipped to perform these functions. Indeed, supporting the trans-rift route is a major source of income for the port.

The highport is also an important link on Great Rift-edge trade routes and home to a major commercial exchange. This handles both stock-market transactions and speculative investment in cargoes or missions. In the former case, private investors purchase a share of a cargo being shipped through the port, receiving a proportionate cut of the profit, if any. Missions, both commercial and exploratory, are also funded in this way. The investors buy into the mission in return for either a straight cut of the profits or percentage of long-term benefits.

Investing in an exploration mission is a big risk; most find nothing of direct value. However, there is always the chance that a scientific vessel will locate something that results in a cash pay-out from the Imperial authorities or proportion of a science prize. A very lucky investor could be made for life if a new commercial market were opened or a new product brought into Imperial markets as a result of a mission he invested in.

The commercial college, located at the highport, is another good source of revenue. Some students are locals but many come from other systems to study at an increasingly prestigious institution. Fees are high for those who cannot obtain a scholarship but employment prospects are good. The megacorporation Tukera Lines has begun sponsoring aspects of the course and offering fast-track promotion to graduates. Although there have been accusations that the course is becoming biased, Tukera's involvement has been good for recruitment and the prestige of the institution.

HALIBURN

Haliburn is a balkanised world. Its 40 million or so inhabitants are divided among several powers of various sizes, plus a scattering of independent towns and regions. At present, there is a move towards unification of an alliance of medium-sized powers. Some smaller nations have been absorbed or joined the alliance as autonomous partners but now the alliance has run up against resistance.

The intent was to use economic and diplomatic means to gradually draw together the various nations of Haliburn into a world-state. However, while small countries and independent towns proved susceptible to influence, more established powers were harder to convince. Most of the larger nations were entirely willing to consider unification but only on terms that put them in charge.

This created a dispute that has escalated into military skirmishing. As yet, there has been no large-scale combat but accusations of sabotage and rabble-rousing are thrown

around by all parties. In at least some cases, these are justified. Border clashes are becoming more common as the various powers demonstrate their capabilities in the hope of influencing the diplomatic situation.

This conflict is not, by any means, universal and several regions are entirely untouched by it. However, travel from one state to another can be problematic due to tightened border controls and a general suspicion of strangers.

Haliburn has no central downport. Instead, each major and most of the minor powers have a spaceport linked to the highport by shuttles. Vessels rarely land on-planet but instead berth at the highport and transfer cargo or passengers by shuttle. This practice has been routine for many years but recently has been insisted upon, on the grounds that it allows the various powers to monitor what the others are importing.

The highport itself is a typical orbital facility, showing its age somewhat but maintained within acceptable limits and will continue to function for many more decades before requiring a major overhaul. However, while the facility is in good shape, the operators are becoming increasingly factionalised. Local merchants have always competed to buy goods from passing ships but the competition is cut-throat nowadays. It is not unknown for crews of ships dealing with one power to be harassed or intimidated by personnel working for another.

The alliance is currently producing a great deal of propaganda, which attempts to pin every skirmish or border incident on the larger powers. It is obvious that the alliance leaders hope to convince the Imperial authorities to support their bid for unity or at least not to censure them for their methods. Whether this will work remains to be seen but it has created an increasingly polarised situation, with some nations portrayed as 'the bad guys'. This in turn makes further escalation more likely.

Even the larger powers of Haliburn are relatively small; just a few million people at most. As a result, mass armies are not possible even if the funds to equip them existed. Instead, the usual pattern is a defensive force comprising reservists and militia, equipped with basic weapons and a strike force. This is much smaller but equipped with the best weaponry local industry can produce. Advanced weapon systems are obtained offworld to augment this force's capabilities wherever possible.

The nations of Haliburn have, in some cases, begun hiring mercenaries. These are mostly cadre forces to train the locals rather than units intended for direct action. The states using mercenaries hope to send

a message to their rivals that they are ready to play hardball, ideally strengthening their position without the need for either mercenaries or the troops they train to be used. Success has been mixed so far and it is thought that some of the cadre units hired are actually commandos. Rather than training a local defensive force to higher capabilities, these mercenaries may be engaged in sabotage and reconnaissance operations against potential enemies.

HARMONY

Harmony may be one of the least harmonious places in Charted Space. This somewhat dry but otherwise habitable world is home to about 950,000,000 people, half of whom are ruled by a singularly unpleasant low-tech military dictatorship. The remainder of the population have – thus far – successfully rejected the rulership of the dictator.

Within the regions controlled by the government, there is massive support for the dictator. This is mainly due to his successful restoration of order after the previous government collapsed. Faced with economic disaster and literal starvation, the populace rallied behind the man who offered them a solution and so far, have not been disappointed. However, the recovery was not uniform.

Those regions that showed the most support were rewarded with the greatest efforts to aid recovery. Attempts were made to assist other areas but without firm control the results were patchy at best. This served to further divide the population into pro- and anti-government factions.

Most of the functioning industry and infrastructure is concentrated in government-controlled areas under martial law, with large numbers of troops in the streets. Most locals find this reassuring, as memories of anarchy are still fresh. Besides, the citizenry are fed a constant diet of propaganda that depicts those who rejected the dictatorship as evil destroyers of civilisation just waiting to tear down what remains.

There is no shortage of volunteers for the armed forces, who swear a personal oath of loyalty to the dictator. Their mission, they are told, is to someday reunify Harmony and take back the wrecked cities from the rebels and anarchists. Although these troops enforce extremely harsh laws and often receive shoot-on-sight orders for violation of curfew, they are popular with the citizens. It is not uncommon to see uniformed troops chatting with civilians and even sitting together outside a pavement café.

The situation is rather different in the rebel areas. Here, all is not desolation and anarchy as the dictator's propagandists like to claim as several emergent factions and proto-nations are earnestly trying to make things better. However, skirmishes with brigands and criminal gangs weaken these groups. The dictator's troops are gradually re-integrating these areas, a process that may take decades but will eventually succeed unless the general populace loses faith in its jackbooted, militarised government.

Officially, the Imperium is not concerned with the internal affairs of member states. However, there are always concerns raised when a high-law state emerges from a chaotic situation. The Imperium recognises the current government as legitimate but has sent observers to Harmony to obtain a first-hand account of the situation. Their initial conclusion was that the extremely repressive government was popular and remaining within the bounds of High Law. The commission decided the measures taken were necessary and effective, although it did make a number of strongly-worded 'recommendations' to the government, which were ignored.

Despite this, rebel groups are receiving support from various sources. Some are well-meaning but useless,



such as the 'conscience groups' who occasionally turn up on-planet, trying all manner of gambits from picketing government buildings to secretly filming government troops engaged in repressive actions. If they are lucky, they are rounded up and deported. Many are shot as enemies of the state and their offworld origins offer no protection.

Others, who come to Harmony to reveal the fate of the conscience groups to the wider universe, fare no better. In any case, none of this is secret. It does not need to be – the government is acting within its own laws and entitled to do so by Imperial charter.

More direct action has been more successful. Groups of volunteers have managed to slip onto Harmony and join the fight to keep independent areas free from government control. The motivations of these Interstellar Brigades vary considerably but the locals will take whatever help they can get. Mercenaries have also been hired but tend to be low-quality units or forces of dubious background.

Reputable mercenary units are reluctant to take contracts on Harmony. The rebels cannot pay much, and the government does not need them. Ironically, mercenary forces openly fighting against the government have the best chance of survival if captured as there are laws governing their status, which makes it difficult for the government to simply shoot them as criminals. Deportation is not guaranteed however; many mercenaries have disappeared or been 'mistaken for terrorists' by the forces of the dictatorship.

The rebels have some political support offworld, which ranges from fundraising to buying weapons and hiring mercenaries, to political pressure towards recognition. Their main problem is that they are not unified. While the dictatorship is a monolithic organisation that can bring huge resources to bear on a problem then transfer them elsewhere, the rebels are simply a collection of independent regions, some are nothing more than refugee groups trying to get enough to eat. Even the best organised and equipped cannot compete with the armies of the government.

At present, the dictatorship's control over its territory is firm and additional areas are gradually being pacified. Forces are spread thin, but as pockets of resistance are reintegrated, ever greater resources can be allocated against the remaining rebel groups. Within a few years, the last of these proto-nations will have been crushed.

MYSTERIES OF REFT

Running right through Reft, the deep space of the Great Rift is rich with mystery. Hidden within its vast stretches of empty space lie treasures and oddities waiting to be discovered or rediscovered. Ambitious and brave Travellers might be in the position to benefit greatly if they can locate these places.

ROQUESTAR

Roguestar is a lone red dwarf star located within the Great Rift. It has no planetary system and therefore no mainworld. The only objects orbiting Roguestar are a collection of comets and planetoids, making obtaining fuel problematic. In such an empty system, the only way to refuel would be to find a comet, chase it down and then crack its frozen gases for hydrogen, a slow process at the best of times, and it is quite possible that a ship's supplies would run out before a suitable comet could be found.

If the location of a suitable comet were known, it would be possible to jump directly to it. An automated gas-cracking plant could be left running constantly or a small base might even be set up. This would make Roguestar an excellent base for covert activities or piracy. In fact, there is a rumour, which evolves constantly, that a pirate alliance operates out of Roguestar.

Not only does this rumour include a delightful pun on the star's name but it contains elements of the most far-fetched adventure vids. The common version is that somewhere in the space surrounding Roguestar (it is not accurate to refer to it as a star system) a pirate base was built from the hulls of captured vessels. The pirates sell off what they can of the prizes they take and use the remaining hulls to improve their base. Fuel is obtained by harvesting comets for gases that are slowly cracked and condensed into liquid hydrogen by automated installations, with the fuel picked up and ferried to the station. There, it is stored in fuel tanks ripped from the guts of captured ships.

This is all very fanciful of course and highly unlikely but many rumours have a kernel of truth so perhaps something like this does exist somewhere; perhaps there are indeed pirates at Roguestar.

THE ANUNDARLUU

Space is not entirely empty. Between star systems there are comets, chunks of ice and rock, and drifting clouds of interstellar gas. The latter are never very thick; many are scarcely denser than vacuum and in the Great Rift, there is even less interstellar debris.

However, a relatively dense gas cloud called the Anundarluu has been observed within the Great Rift. The key term is 'relatively' dense – an unprotected human would die within the cloud as quickly as if he were exposed to hard vacuum and ships travelling through it would encounter no appreciable resistance – but even so, the cloud is unusual and merits investigation.

The Anundarluu takes the form of a curved stream more than four parsecs long and about one parsec wide. It is faintly reflective and slightly radioactive, making it difficult for remote sensors to penetrate and discover out what is within. Observational evidence suggests something is in there, as the cloud has changed shape over centuries and exhibits areas of greater and lesser density, which move independently to the rest of the cloud.




The Anundarluu



GAS CLOUDS

Within Vilani mythology, an interstellar gas cloud is a place where unmeritorious souls live, prevented from seeing the progress of life on the world. The Anundarluu cloud is invisible to the naked eye from Vland but became more apparent in the latter days of the First Empire, as the Vilani used jump-1 technology to explore ever spinward.

They called the gas cloud Anundarluu, the place where bad ancestors live, hidden from sight. An Daluu means 'bad uncles' in original Vilani but the meaning becomes deeper than that.



According to Scout Service records, the Anundarluu has never been investigated directly. Remote instruments are constantly trained on it from observatories and laboratory ships stationed on the edge of the Great Rift but no-one has undertaken the vast expense of sending a mission into the depths of the Rift just to examine gas particles.

HEDLEY'S COMET

Hedley's comet is another anomaly of the Great Rift. There are probably trillions of cometary bodies drifting through the vast void and most will never be located. They are relatively tiny, cold, dark objects in a huge expanse of cold, dark space. Those that are located are logged into the Scout Service database and forgotten about. Once their location at a given time plus course, speed and gravitational influence are known, it is a simple matter to find them again.

Not so Hedley's Comet. This body, which is assumed to be a comet as it displays characteristics of one most of the time, advertises its presence by occasionally radiating in the visible, infrared and/or X-ray wavelengths. Having caught the attention of scientists and astronomers by 'flashing' in this manner, Hedley's Comet then behaves normally for an extended period before its next episode of activity.

Even more strangely, the Hedley's Comet seems to change course from time-to-time. Missions sent to investigate have never located it; whenever a vessel emerges from jump in the predicted location for, the comet is absent. Jump variance might explain this to an extent but advanced scientific sensors should be able to locate even a cold body within the limits of normal jump-emergence variations.

The course changes may prove to be more than simple alterations in vector. A small course change would theoretically place the comet within a predictable volume of space but this does not seem to be the case in practice. In fact, according to some papers, the Hedley's Comet has been relocated in places it could not possibly have reached in the observed time. The oddest observations suggest the comet sometimes skips back on its vector and is relocated by sensors either in a position it should have passed through years ago or somewhere it would have been had it made a course change several decades before.

This behaviour seems unconnected with the 'flashes' and might be explained by the existence of multiple bodies – but missions dispatched to predicted locations have never found any trace of Hedley's Comet itself... or any other object. At present, Hedley's Comet remains a mystery, which attracts attention by flashing, then vanishes only to reappear in an unexpected location. Scientists are equal parts fascinated, puzzled and frustrated by this mysterious phenomenon.

ROGUE DWARF

The dividing line between a large planetoid and true planet is something that astronomers have been arguing about for centuries. Definitions exist but none has ever remained in force for more than a couple of hundred years before a revision was put forward. The average Traveller need not worry about precise scientific definitions and generally accepts the concept that a dwarf planet is simply a very small planet or planetoid large enough to hold a faint trace of atmosphere.

The object specifically referred to as Rogue Dwarf is located within the Great Rift, apparently ejected by gravitational interactions from a star system many millennia ago. This happens from time-to-time; there are other rogue planets voyaging through interstellar space between systems or across the Great Rift, although locating them is extremely difficult even for high TL observatories. Rogue Dwarf is special simply because it is a deathtrap.

Several Imperial and independent vessels have approached Rogue Dwarf, ranging from scientific and scout vessels through warships, to opportunistic scavengers. In every case, the vessel's transmissions ceased abruptly. Relay ships standing clear of the planet remained unharmed unless they closed in to investigate or attempt a rescue.

The fate of the ships approaching Rogue Dwarf remains unknown, although transmissions from some indicate their crews observed objects on the surface that could

be downed starships or settlements. Some crews indicated an intention to land before going off air. Others were lost during a flyby or before even reaching visual range. Automated reconnaissance drones ceased transmitting.

Deep in the Great Rift, Rogue Dwarf poses no immediate threat but astronomers are eager to discover its secrets. Why do ships lose contact when they approach it? What system was the world ejected from? Was it natural phenomena that started its voyage? When did this happen? Does Rogue Dwarf carry with it some secret of the Ancients or could it even predate them?

Is Rogue Dwarf a curiosity, a fragment of an ancient civilisation or some kind of interstellar time bomb? The only way to find out would be to land on the surface and investigate... something that has proven fatal for everyone who has tried.

Or has it? All that is really known is that ships stop transmitting and never return. The demise of their crews is simply inferred because they were never heard from again.

WRECKS OF THE GREAT RIFT

Any ship that misjumps into the Great Rift is almost certainly doomed. It is conceivable that by an incredible stroke of luck the ship might come out close to a comet that can be used to obtain fuel or in one of the deep-Great Rift systems. This is what happened to the strike cruiser Eldorado and, in truth, it is so unlikely that it will probably never happen again. Even a slight misjump, bringing out a vessel just a half light-year from an inhabited system, is a death sentence unless the ship has enough fuel to jump to safety.

Thus, there are wrecked ships drifting through the Great Rift. Their passengers and crew died long ago, their systems gradually failed as the power ran down and they became artificial comets. Some used the last of their fuel to accelerate in the direction of inhabited space, perhaps as a final gesture of defiance. Perhaps the crew preferred to believe that someday their lifeless ship would be detected as it entered more inhabited space; at least that way their fate would be known.

The positions of some wrecks are known, although they are not in any publicly available database. Some have been salvaged or their cargoes removed but others left undisturbed as a monument to lost Travellers.

In theory, it might be possible to survive being stranded in deep space for a considerable time. A risky combination of fast drugs and low berths could prolong survival time to years or even decades. There is even a

(very faint) possibility of survival after power to the low berth runs out. According to popular vid entertainment, it is possible that a low-berth user can be further cooled, say by the cold of space, to a temperature where they will be preserved forever. A surprising number of fictional characters have survived betrayal and shipwreck in this manner.

Sadly, it does not work in real life. A Traveller in suspended animation is not entirely frozen and the low berth needs power to sustain life at minimal level. Without power, the low berth user will simply die.

Salvaging monument-wrecks, if they can be found, is illegal but that has not stopped scavengers from trying. Unlisted wrecks are covered by interstellar salvage laws – salvage rights are granted if no-one aboard is alive, although there is a special case where crew or passengers can be discovered alive but in a condition where they would not survive without the assistance of the salvagers. In that case, for example where a crew are in low berths with no-one awake to man the ship, salvage rights are still granted. This is mainly to remove the incentive to turn off the low berths and then claim the ship was deserted.

Salvaging Rift-wrecks is not a viable full-time business but if one were located, it might be successfully attempted. Not all wrecks are human. Droyne and Aslan ships have been recovered, along with a couple of very old vessels that either defied identification or – according to starport rumours – turned out to be less derelict than they appeared.

USHER PROTO-SYSTEM

Stars form from interstellar gas replenished by dying stars, gradually coalescing over millions of years into a central star (and often companion stars) orbited by rocky and gas giant planets, planetoids, comets and other bodies.

One such system is forming near the fringe of the Great Rift and is of great interest to the scientific community.

It is not especially hazardous to enter the coalescing gas cloud, except near its centre where radiation poses a threat to a vessel's electronics and crew (3D x 100 rads per hour). Elsewhere it is less dangerous, although jumping back out again can be a problem due to the density of the gas cloud (see page 9 of Deep Space Exploration). As a result, most ships studying the proto-system remain either above or below the thick rotating disc of the gas cloud. Above and below, the gas is much less dense and there is little threat.

Most of the ships studying the Usher proto-system are Imperial but for several years now the Darrian Confederation, based in the Spinward Marches, has maintained a scientific vessel in the system. It is occasionally withdrawn and replaced, although more often resupplied and recrewed in position. The Darrians have traditionally been interested in stellar physics, so their curiosity is natural. All the same, this causes concern for some Imperial observers – the Darrians did, after all, manage to cause their own star to go nova.

ANCIENTS SITES

It is known that the Ancients were active in Reft. They are thought to be responsible for transplanting humans and other species (including the Droyne and Chirpers) to worlds of the region, along with flora and fauna from Earth and other planets. This is why humans can find edible plant and animal life on so many worlds.

The Ancients are thought to have destroyed themselves in a cataclysmic war hundreds of thousands of years ago. Whatever the truth, the Ancients left remnants of their civilisation lying around for future sentients to find. Many artefacts are incomprehensible, broken or both, although every now and again something functional is found.

While vid shows are full of heroes armed with Ancient disintegrators, invisibility suits and teleport units, most artefacts are rather more mundane or only function as part of a larger unit, which may not be discovered, so most artefacts are valuable only to collectors or the scientific community. It is illegal to traffic in Ancients artefacts without a license, at least in the Imperium, and most of what is sold is fake anyway.

However, now and then a site, rather than isolated artefacts, is found. Again, while these sites contain powerful starships or weaponry in vid shows, their real purpose is often mundane (when finally deciphered). Any civilisation, no matter how advanced, has more private dwellings, farms, factories and offices than planetbusting weapons so sites are often 'of interest to scholars' rather than something that can change the universe.

The Imperium has a policy of paying a finder's fee to anyone locating a proven Ancients site (typically ranging from Cr20,000 to MCr5, depending on the size and value of the site) and then assigning a percentage of anything of worth later discovered there; often a site will provide payments for years as scholars continually discover something new. Notably, the fee comes with an extensive legal contract requiring the finder to stay away from the site and not discuss it with anyone. There are numerous reasons why the Imperium does not want private citizens clambering over Ancients sites or

conducting their own excavations and stiff penalties for not reporting an Ancients find.

The typical Ancients find (if any can be considered 'typical') is therefore lucrative but not life-changing. However, sometimes Travellers will stumble over something special and there is a small community of Ancients Hunters who have made it their life's work to try to do this. Ancients Hunters come from all kinds of background; some are scientists, some cranks, some both. Others are individuals who have had a brush with Ancients technology and want to discover more. Most work alone or in small groups and there is fierce competition between them.

Reft has the same rumours about Ancients sites as anywhere else as, according to starport scuttlebutt, every odd coincidence or strange happening is the work of the Ancients. Some claim the Great Rift is the result of a superweapon and there are claims of derelict Ancient spacecraft lying out in the Rift, or teleporter devices that will take an entire ship right across the Rift, into a pocket universe, or down a black hole. Conspiracy theorists seem to like the idea that the Imperium is covering up a giant Ancients site in the Rift, perhaps in the Islands subsectors.

Perhaps an Ancient settlement or wrecked starship really does await discovery. Perhaps there truly is a teleporter on an airless comet that will take intrepid Travellers... somewhere. Perhaps the claims that something older than the Ancients has been found are true. The only way to find out is to go and look.

HOPE FREEPORT

In the dark days of the Interstellar Wars, the Terrans dispatched hurried colony missions, including one called Shining Hope. Shining Hope carried early jump-capable ships, in addition to tens of thousands of colonists, but something had gone wrong when the shipboard computers awoke the crew from their long sleep during the voyage; the ship was in the middle of a huge void rather than approaching a habitable world.

Shining Hope had suffered a chain of linked malfunctions. The wake-up cycle for maintenance crews had been suspended, allowing systems to degrade, and this caused computer problems that resulted in the ship beginning its deceleration for approach to a star system when none lay ahead. The colonists had set out with equipment designed to let them settle a new world but most of this was traded away for essential spares. There was little else their jump-capable ships could trade and the list of needs was scarcely becoming shorter.

After consideration, the colonists realised they did indeed have something valuable to trade; trade itself.

They had a ready-made independent starport in a secure location on their hands. Word went out on the grapevine; Shining Hope – now reinvented as Hope Freeport – was open for business.

Gradually, ships began to arrive and with them came increasing prosperity, although at a price of moral integrity. A few items were placed off-limits, such as slaves and obvious pirate booty, but for the most part Hope Freeport was willing to trade in whatever visitors wanted, no questions asked.

Today, most visitors do not realise that Hope Freeport is a starship, assuming instead that it is a deep-space asteroid habitat.

As well as trading in all kinds of commodities, it is possible to obtain maintenance and repairs at the port, as the engineers can service most kinds of ship. They do not ask how combat damage was incurred, nor are they nosy about where owner-supplied spares come from.

The markets of Hope Freeport are bustling places, with all manner of goods on sale. In the quieter portside bars, it is possible to find almost any item, perhaps even nuclear weapons and Ancients artefacts; certainly, the vessel had nuclear weapons when it was launched during the Interstellar Wars but centuries later it is not likely they would still be operational.

Rumours of this sort have piqued the interest of the Imperium. Navy and Scout Service ships visit from time-to-time, and spies have been infiltrated among the population of the port district. Although Hope Freeport

is technically beyond the law of the Imperium, its leaders know this would not prevent the Imperial Marine Corps from storming their port if the need arose.

The general population dwell within the interior of the asteroid habitat, away from the port area, and remain culturally isolated. However, some influence from the more cosmopolitan port-town population does leak through; the people of Shining Hope are gradually moving into the 57th Century.

The asteroid itself is well defended with weaponry fitted during the preparations for flight from Terra. There is more than enough firepower to see off raiders or even a small naval ship. The jump-capable fleet is also lightly armed and its crews have developed a reputation for being a little trigger-happy; word is that ships out of Hope Freeport are not good targets for piracy. Their heavy-handed response may eventually lead to trouble with the Imperial authorities but in the meantime, it keeps opportunistic lowlifes at bay.

Long-term, Hope Freeport faces a difficult future. Its prosperity is based on a seedy reputation and willingness to trade in dubious, or outright illegal, items; this means dealing with criminals and crooked merchants. The port is on a long slide into total lawlessness and it is hard to see how this could be reversed.

At present, portside security can deal with problems that arise and the general population can be kept insulated from anything that happens near the docking areas, although this cannot go on forever. Shining Hope has become tarnished and may, in time, be entirely extinguished.



C H A P T E R - T H R E E

POWERS OF REFT SECTOR

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

The military forces and naval fleets of each major world vary considerably in design philosophy and tactical doctrine, because of local conditions. Several ship designs used in the Islands are unique to the world that designed them, although they can be found elsewhere due to the sale of vessels or their plans and capture of a repairable vessel after an incident.

There are also two ‘stateless powers’ in the region, which have holdings on various worlds and wield sufficient power to deal with world governments as equals. These organisations have been known to enter alliances with one world or another to gain political or economic concessions; their influence varies depending on the attitude of local governments. The stateless powers are, as a rule, influential rather than powerful. Their strength is subtler than that of battlefleets, and harder to estimate.

ESPERANZA

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

Esperanza is a three-system power, controlling Esperanza and neighbouring Wellington, as well as St. Hilaire. They can only be reached from the inner regions of the Islands by a long jump-3 transit via Serendip Belt, Gloire and Wellington, or by jump-2 using tanker refuelling to cross from New Colchis to Esperanza.

This ‘moat’ around the systems loyal to the Esperanza government influences both military and economic affairs and this, in turn, ensures Esperanza is somewhat isolated from the politics of the region. Esperanza itself is the most populous world in the Islands subsectors, with a high technological level. Its colony in the

Wellington system is little more than an outpost and is mainly used to facilitate the jump-3 link to Gloire. Far more important is the ‘second homeworld’ of St. Hilaire.

Social and Political

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

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

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

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

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

Esperanza also owns the St. Hilaire system, which is slowly being developed into a significant industrial

ESPERANZAN ORE BARGE

XX

TL11		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	6000 tons, Close Structure	-	270
M-Drive	Thrust 1	60	120
Power Plant	Fusion (TL8), Power 1800	180	90
Fuel Tanks	4 weeks of operation, plus Modular Cutter	25	-
Bridge		60	30
Computer	Computer/5	-	0.03
Sensors	Basic	-	-
Systems	Loading Belt (TL7) x 10	10	0.03
	Gaming Space	9	0.054
	Docking Space (50 tons)	55	13.75
	Modular Cutter	-	10.287
Staterooms	Standard x 15	60	7.5
	High	6	0.8
Software	Manoeuvre/0	-	-
	Library	-	-
Common Areas		120	12
Cargo		5415	-
TOTAL: MCR 552.151			

CREW

CAPTAIN, PILOT, ENGINEERS X 8,
MAINTENANCE X 6

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST:
Cr460125/month

•••••
PURCHASE COST:
MCR552.151

POWER REQUIREMENTS

600

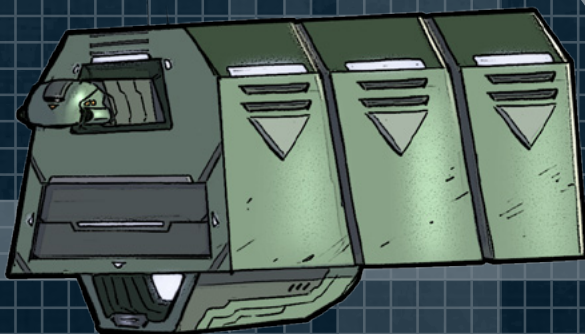
MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

1200

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

0

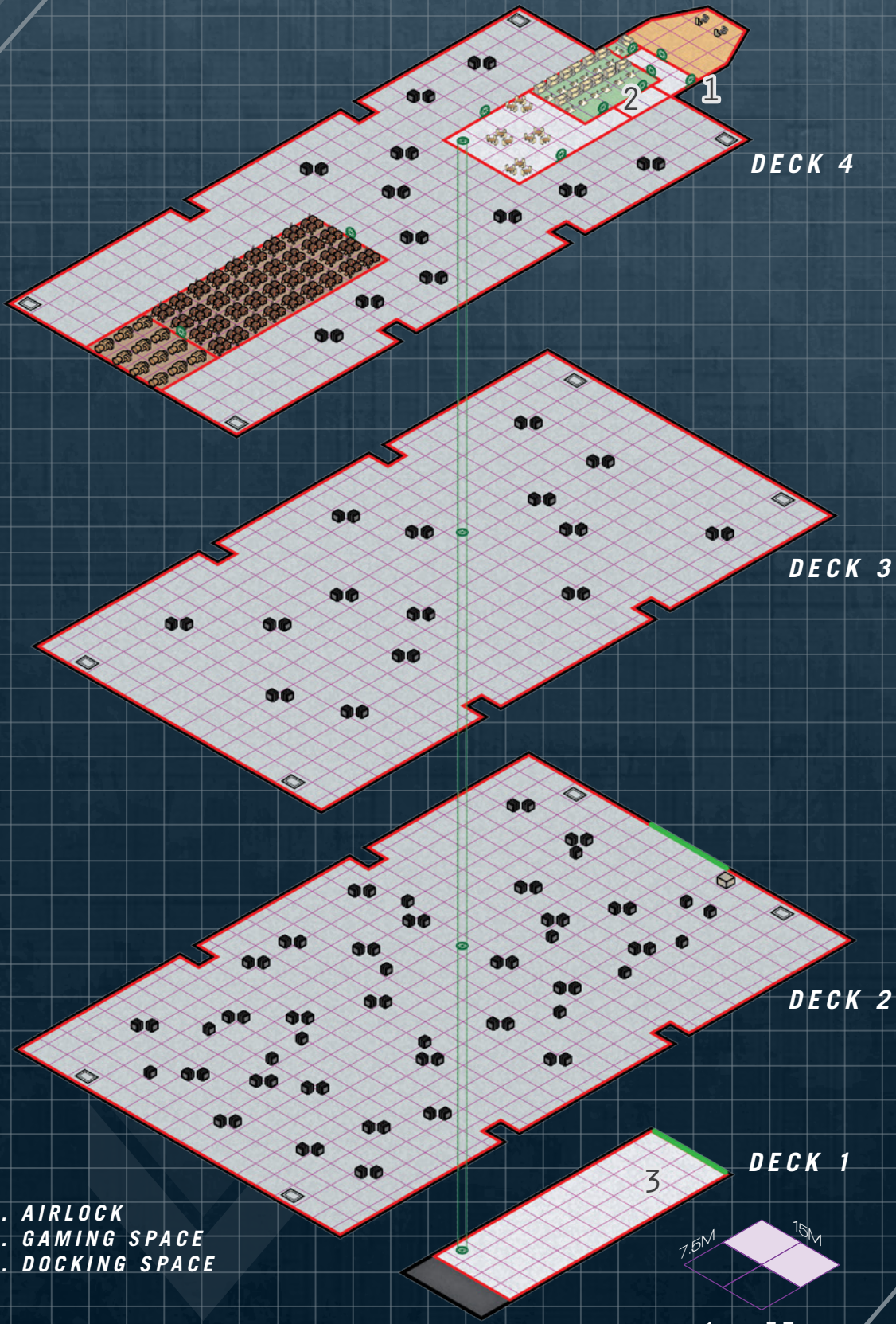
SENSORS



2640

HULL POINTS

Commonly seen within the Esperanzan system, these large sublight ore barges ply the space lanes, transporting huge mineral loads to industrial centres for refining and processing. Despite being utilitarian, they follow the Esperanzan design philosophies of having plenty of space for the crew. Because of their sheer size and lack of jump drives, ore barges built in the shipyards of Esperanza are almost never seen around other worlds, although related designs can be found throughout similar systems.



DECK 4

DECK 3

DECK 2

DECK 1

- 1. AIRLOCK
- 2. GAMING SPACE
- 3. DOCKING SPACE



1 sq. = 5 Tons

asset. This system is less dense than Esperanza, with no gas giants or concentrations of planetoids. Outposts are maintained on some moons and three of the system's rocky planets but they are small, specialist installations such as prisons, research facilities and deep-space observatories. Significant industrial assets are confined to the mainworld.

St. Hilaire itself has a modest industrial base concentrated into several large cities, each of which serves as a hub for smaller settlements. These cities are located on the world's few small land masses, widely separated by deep oceans, which provide considerable amounts of food to feed the homeworld and outsystem colonies in Esperanza.

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

Economic and Industrial

While all cities of Esperanza have support industries, education facilities and the like, some are primarily heavy-industrial sites, while others scientific or economic centres. Several asteroid mining facilities are in operation, along with petrochemical-harvesting plants in low orbit around the system's gas giants. Huge ore barges and commercial freighters ply regular runs within the system, moving raw materials and finished goods from the industrial centres to the end user.

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

Tanker assets and jump-2 ships have been reassigned from the New Colchis run at times, transiting directly to Serendip Belt to conduct large-scale trade. It has been suggested that additional jump-2 ships might be built and assigned to this route rather than purchasing more jump-3 drives from New Home when the existing ships become obsolete. This would require a shift in policy, from maintaining a trade mission on Gloire to trading direct with Serendip. The current arrangement is more efficient from the point of view of Esperanza, so will probably be maintained for the foreseeable future.

Military

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

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

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

Esperanza's ground forces are relatively light, consisting of a well-equipped naval infantry force for shipboard and station security, plus small conventional units for defence of key points on the homeworld. This is backed up by an extensive reserve system that could quickly field huge numbers of light infantry, with more heavily equipped formations.

Other Notes

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

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

The Esperanzan government refuses to discuss this history but it is an open secret that conflict between humans and Droyne was widespread in those two centuries. Whether the Droyne of Esperanza were

deliberately exterminated or died out as an unintended consequence of the conflict may or may not be known to the government of Esperanza; outside that small circle it is not even known how or why the conflict started.

NEW COLCHIS

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

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

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

New Colchis enjoys technological parity with most of the other major powers of the region, being inferior only to New Home. It manufactures considerable amounts of TL12 components for Esperanza when relations are good but steadfastly refuses to assist its spinward rival with a technological uplift programme.

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

Social and Political

New Colchis is a dictatorship, as it has always been since the colony was founded. At some point in the past, the dictatorship formally became hereditary. Once the ruling line was established and hereditary succession was written into the constitution of New Colchis, attempts were made to trace the genealogy of the ruling family back to Old Earth. Somewhat tenuous links were

found (some would say invented, as the only records are archived on New Colchis) to several noble houses of Earth's history including the Duchy of Wurttemberg and a number of Andalucian noble houses, prompting the rulers to take the title of king or queen.

The ruling house has several branches and inevitably other noble houses have come into being since the trappings of royalty were introduced. These great houses produce most of the political, military and economic leaders and are widely respected by the general populace. Indeed, the system enjoys considerable support and confidence among the citizenry. Mechanisms are in place for successful or meritorious individuals to be elevated to the nobility, a system that feels familiar and comfortable to Imperial citizens.

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

The New Colchis system has no gas giants or planetoids and only a handful of rocky planets. Consequently, its population is concentrated on the mainworld, with only small settlements on other worlds. Most of the population is concentrated into major cities, beyond which much of the land is unused and in virgin condition.

Herzenslust had a substantial population when settlers from New Colchis began arriving but was never a successful colony. Technology was limited and most endeavour was of a subsistence nature. The parties from New Colchis arrived with good equipment and money to spend and gradually became the foremost citizens of Herzenslust, owning and operating industry needed by the rest of the population.

As a result, a ruling class emerged on Herzenslust, dominated by the arrivals from New Colchis. Eventually, this group launched a bloodless coup, displacing the former government with one loyal to New Colchis.

Herzenslust's starport is listed as being Class E, a minimal installation. This is accurate for vessels coming in from anywhere but New Colchis. The original port is open to any passing ship, while vessels registered out of New Colchis can use the new purpose-built port completed in 5612AD. This installation would probably be rated as Class C were open to general traffic.

MERCHANT CRUISER

TL12		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	2500 tons, Standard	-	125
M-Drive	Thrust 1	25	50
J-Drive	Jump 2	130	195
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 1050	70	70
Fuel Tanks	J-2, 4 weeks of operation, plus Shuttles	509	-
Bridge		60	12.5
Computer	Computer/10	-	0.16
Sensors	Civilian	1	3
Weapons	Double Turrets (beam lasers) x 4	4	6
	Double Turrets (sandcasters) x 2	2	2
Ammunition	Sand Canisters x 20	1	-
Systems	Fuel Processor (300 tons/day)	15	0.75
	Cargo Crane	7	7
	Loading Belt (TL12) x 4	4	0.04
	Medical Bay	4	2
	Docking Space (95 tons) x 2 Shuttles x 2	209	52.25
		-	30.334
Staterooms	Standard x 28	112	14
	Low Berths x 20	10	1
Software	Manoeuvre/0	-	-
	Jump Control/2	-	0.2
	Library	-	-
Common Areas		72	7.2
Cargo		1264	-
TOTAL:		MCR 578.434	

QUEEN OF COLCHIS CLASS

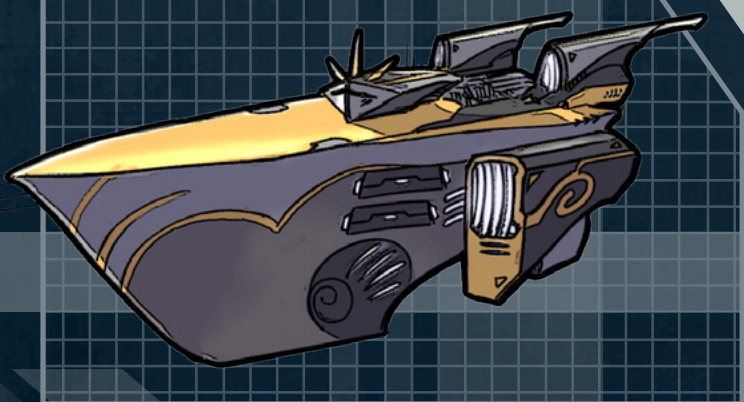
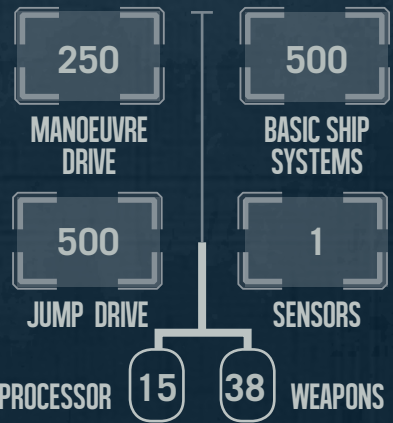
CREW

CAPTAIN, PILOT, ASTROGATOR, ADMINISTRATOR, ENGINEERS X 6, MAINTENANCE X 2, GUNNERS X 6, SHUTTLE PILOTS X 2

RUNNING COSTS

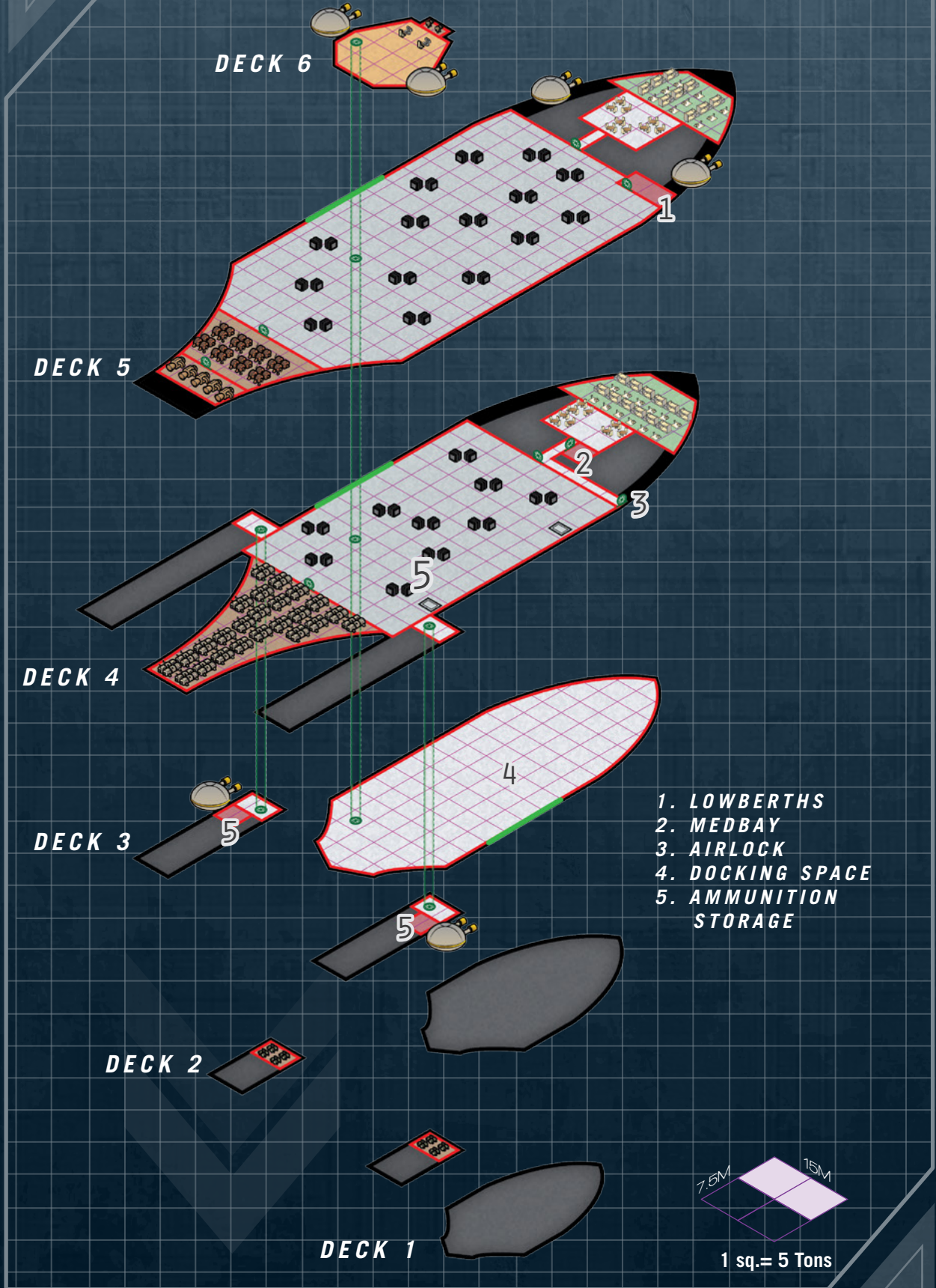
MAINTENANCE COST:
Cr48203/month
.....
PURCHASE COST:
MCR578.434

POWER REQUIREMENTS



1000
HULL POINTS

One of the standard designs of the New Colchis shipyards, examples of this merchant cruiser can be found throughout the Islands cluster. It is well appointed, although intended for safe space lanes as it possesses minimal armament and is unarmoured. Shuttles and an adequate fuel processing plant allow the Queen of Colchis to maintain a measure of self-sufficiency on voyages, although time constraints often mean it is more profitable to simply purchase fuel at starports.



DECK 6

DECK 5

DECK 4

DECK 3

DECK 2

DECK 1

- 1. LOWBERTHS
- 2. MEDBAY
- 3. AIRLOCK
- 4. DOCKING SPACE
- 5. AMMUNITION STORAGE



Economic and Industrial

Large, efficient industrial plants and complexes are favoured over smaller installations, so different cities tend to each have one major industrial focus and several secondary areas of interest.

New Colchis has traditionally built large numbers of commercial starships for export, often taking payment for these vessels in raw materials brought in by ships previously sold by its shipyards. New Colchis' larger moon is the site of an integrated starship-manufacturing process that begins with mining and processing installations. These work the moon's extensive nickel and iron deposits that feed into a factory complex that uses the products to build hull components.

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

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

Military

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

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

Jump-capable naval assets have never been important to New Colchis, although the present tense political situation requires a measure of power projection. Several armed merchant cruisers have always been maintained, recently augmented by gunship carriers converted from standard jump-2 freighters.

Ground forces consist mainly of city garrisons, who man aerospace defences and secure critical areas. These units are primarily equipped as light infantry, trained for urban combat. However, some forces exist that are more geared towards warfighting; small grav-cavalry battle groups using fast and lightly protected combat vehicles and troop transports. These can project power rapidly to any part of New Colchis or Herzenslust, well suited to fast strike-and-withdraw operations.

Other Notes

The capital of Herzenslust is defended by similar forces to the cities of New Colchis, although on a smaller scale, and there is now a small orbital defence installation in place, a converted freighter hull. It serves as a launch platform for a gunship squadron and missile salvos but is vulnerable to damage. Ground-based missile batteries secure the capital spaceport.

The rest of Herzenslust is not well defended, relying on local defence associations – essentially volunteer militia – equipped with small arms provided by the government. This concentration on protecting central assets is entirely in keeping with New Colchis' general philosophy but leaves the dwellers of outlying settlements feeling they have been abandoned.

JOYEUSE

'Charting our own path and defending our right to do so.'

Joyeuse is a heavily militarised two-system power whose only close neighbours are Quichotte and Orphee. Quichotte is a colonial possession, whilst Orphee is off-limits to development by agreement with the rest of the Islands powers.

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

Joyeuse enjoys technological parity with most other major powers of the region and is one of the few states to routinely build jump-3 capable vessels for trade, although its primary field of technological excellence is military; Joyeuse builds the best warships and weapons in the islands.

Joyeuse has always stood apart from the politics of the Islands. Its people have a traditional affinity with Amondiaage, from whence the world was colonised, but this is of low importance in political affairs. Even before the spread of jump drive technology, Joyeuse possessed a navy of sorts and the world has remained ahead of the curve as the trend towards militarisation in the cluster begins to accelerate.

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

Social and Political

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

The population of Joyeuse is centralised, with one truly enormous city and several large metropolises. The cities are located on the coasts of Joyeuse' small land masses and have spilled over onto the continental shelf nearby; a significant proportion of most cities are located underwater, with the tops of buildings emerging from the waves.

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

Quichotte was much less successful as a colony and despite determined efforts could never quite achieve the critical mass needed to become a credible interstellar economy. Assistance from Joyeuse helped colonists overcome a string of crises and finally a request was made to become a province of Joyeuse. Soon afterward, the union was agreed by the dictator and became a formality. The province is gradually turning into a smaller-scale version of Joyeuse, although the more dispersed population and smaller communities have slowed the process.

Economic and Industrial

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

The 'Approved' logo can push the price of any given item up +20-30% of identical products. This is nothing to do with the popularity of the ruling elite but more with a habit of conformity bred into generations of Joyeuse citizens.

Moving goods between the great cities of Joyeuse overland is possible in only a few cases, where cities are located on the same land mass. Even then, most trade goes around the coast. Grav transport is used for fast travel and transport of urgent items but for the most part Joyeuse uses submersibles for cargo transport. Once built, these are extremely cheap to operate, normally travelling on the surface and submerging to avoid bad weather and enter underwater docks of the cities.

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

Quichotte has low population density and little more than cottage industry except in the capital. This is a city of nearly half a million people with its own spaceport and differs considerably from the rest of the planet. While Quichotte has a local sustainable TL6, the capital has a limited amount of TL12 industry, dedicated to supporting the military forces on the planet but there is sufficient excess to provide the capital's citizens with a good standard of living.

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

ORBITAL DEFENSE SUBMARINE

TL	12
SKILL	SEAFARER (SUBMARINE)
AGILITY	-4
SPEED (CRUISE)	SLOW (VERY SLOW)
RANGE (CRUISE)	100 YEARS
CREW	12
PASSENGERS	-
CARGO	2 TONS
HULL	1200
SHIPPING	150 TONS
COST	MC 395000

ARMOUR

FRONT 30

REAR 30

SIDES 30

Missiles



EQUIPMENT AND WEAPONS

Autopilot (advanced), Bunks x 6, Camouflage (improved), Command Centre (6 man), Communications System (advanced, encrypted, increased range, satellite uplink), Computer/3, Crane (heavy), Electronic Countermeasures (advanced), Fire Extinguishers, Fresher x 2, Fusion Plant (advanced), Galley (10 man), Holo-Suite, Navigation System (improved), Nuclear Damper, Sensor System (improved, hardened, increased fidelity x 2, increased range x 2, sensor mast), Sensor System (improved, increased range, underwater), Stealth (improved)

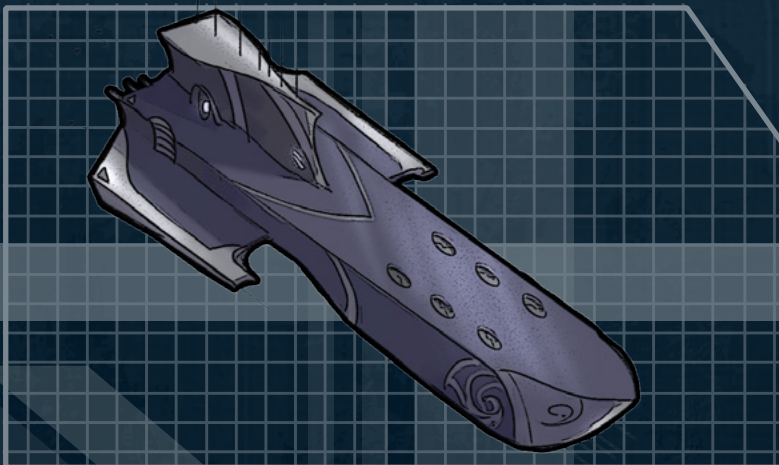
Fixed Mount (small missile bay, top)

Autopilot (skill level)	3
Communications (range)	2000 km
Navigation (Navigation DM)	+2
Sensors (Electronics (sensors) DM)	+3/+1
Camouflage (Recon DM)	-2
Stealth (Electronics (sensors) DM)	-2

TRAITS

None

Safe Depth: 2000 m - Crush Depth: 6000 m - Life Support: 400 days



DESCRIPTION

The orbital defence submarines of Joyeuse spend most of their time hidden beneath the waves and prying eyes of sensors in orbit, their locations classified at the highest levels of the military. Their purpose is one of defence, surfacing briefly to launch starship-grade missiles at attackers in orbit, before submerging once again to avoid counterattack. After redeploying, they are ready to surface and fire again, creating a planetary defence network that is almost impossible to neutralise from space.

Weapon	Range	Damage	Magazine	Magazine Cost	Traits	Fire Control
Small Missile Bay	Special	4D*	12	Mcr3	Smart	-

Military

The Joyeuse military includes a significant aerospace defence contingent, manning missile stations and grav-powered interceptors for atmospheric and orbital defence. Several hardened installations atop remote mountains act as tracking stations for missile batteries concealed in shallow water or dug into armoured pits on deserted islands.

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

Ground forces include a paramilitary police force trained to fight in urban terrain as well as local defence reserves armed with smallarms and light support weapons. The main military force has a distinctly maritime flavour; combat submersibles guard the sea lanes while troop-carrying versions provide strategic mobility. Most units are trained only to fight on land or inside underwater installations but a significant combat-diver force does exist, along with underwater-operations capable special forces units.

The development of a spacegoing military force posed no problem to the people of Joyeuse; combat diver units were in many cases retrained for battle aboard spacecraft or on the surface of moons, supported by an array of light grav vehicles and drone-mounted heavy weapons.

In addition to sublight gunships and system defence boats, Joyeuse operates three 'tiers' of naval assets. These are somewhat confusingly named Tier 1, Tier 3 and Tier 6. Tier 1 consists of jump-1 capable vessels, typically heavily armoured defensive units whose drives enable them to relocate between Quichotte and Joyeuse. Tier 3 vessels form the backbone of the navy of Joyeuse. Capable of a single jump-3, they can reach New Colchis and most of its associated cluster in a single jump but require deep space refuelling to get to New Home or New Colchis. The handful of Tier 6 vessels have enough fuel aboard for two consecutive jump-3s, enough to hit New Colchis and return without refuelling or to make a one-way trip to Serendip Belt or Nebelwelt. Support assets also exist, including tankers that give Tier 3 and 6 vessels a very impressive operating radius.

A small naval station is also maintained in orbit around Orphee, acting as a monitoring platform and base for small sublight craft enforcing the blockade of Orphee. Vessels from other powers are not permitted to use the station, reducing the duration any foreign vessel can

stay on-station over Orphee and pushing up costs of maintaining a presence. Unsurprisingly, coverage by other powers is intermittent and becoming less frequent with every passing year.

Other Notes

It is an open secret that an insurrection is going on in the outback of Quichotte. Although most wanted union with Joyeuse, there was always some resistance and disaffection has been growing over the past decades. Visitors from other powers are forbidden to use the capital spaceport but also prohibited from landing at any outlying settlement. Instead, they are directed to a barely adequate landing field near the capital and generally made to feel as unwelcome as possible.

A similar situation exists on Orphee. Various scientific groups are resident semi-permanently on the planet but only New Colchis and Esperanza make any real effort to monitor the blockade. Support ships for the scientific missions arrive at increasingly lengthy intervals and some study groups have returned home. It is obvious that Orphee is quietly becoming the sole preserve of Joyeuse, whatever the wording of the Convention of Interdiction may say.

SERENDIP BELT

'Dispersed yet united, pioneers of every frontier.'

Serendip Belt is, at present, a two-system power, although for a brief time it also controlled Topas, Elysee and Besancon. The first of the Islands powers to obtain jump drive technology, Serendip Belt used it to carve out an empire before pressure from other powers forced colonies to be relinquished.

The Serendip Belt system enjoys a somewhat fortunate location as cross-Rift travel increases, possessing the last (or first) major starport on the trans-Islands run. This is of increasing importance as Imperial courier vessels begin to make greater use of the crossing. There is a willingness to take risks and push the limits of possibility among the Serendips and this attitude drives explorers to the very edges of the system in search of asteroids and new mineral deposits.

Serendip Belt has parity with most of the other major powers (excepting New Home) and is the closest to breakthroughs in critical areas of research that lead to TL13. New Home has already achieved this, and the scientists of the Serendip Belt are redoubling their efforts to catch up.

Long content with ownership of Gloire as an agricultural colony, the acquisition of jump-capable ships sparked a wave of almost imperialistic sentiment that turned to

SERENDIP BELT CONSTRUCTION SHIP

XX

TL12		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	2800 tons, Planetoid	-	112
Armour	Planetoid, Armour 2	-	-
M-Drive	Thrust 2	56	112
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 2070	138	138
Fuel Tanks	12 weeks of operation, plus Slow Boat	44	-
Bridge		60	14
Computer	Computer/5	-	0.03
Sensors	Improved Mineral Detection Suite	3 -	4.3 -
Weapons	Single Turrets (laser drill) x 8	8	5
Systems	Solar Panels	13.8	2.8
	Mining Drones x 10	20	1.38
	Docking Clamp (type IV)	20	2
	Heavy Grappling Arm	6	4
	Construction Deck (750 tons)	1500	750
	Medical Bay	4	2
	Workshop	9	1.35
	Docking Space (30 tons)	33	8.25
	Slow Boat	-	4.842
Staterooms	Standard x 14	56	7
Software	Manoeuvre/O Library	- -	- -
Common Areas		120	12
Cargo		709	-
TOTAL: MCR 1083.152			

CREW

CAPTAIN, PILOT, ADMINISTRATOR,
ENGINEER X 12, MAINTENANCE X 2,
MEDIC, GUNNERS X 8

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST:
Cr902626/month

PURCHASE COST:
MCR1083.152

POWER REQUIREMENTS

560

MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

560

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

1500

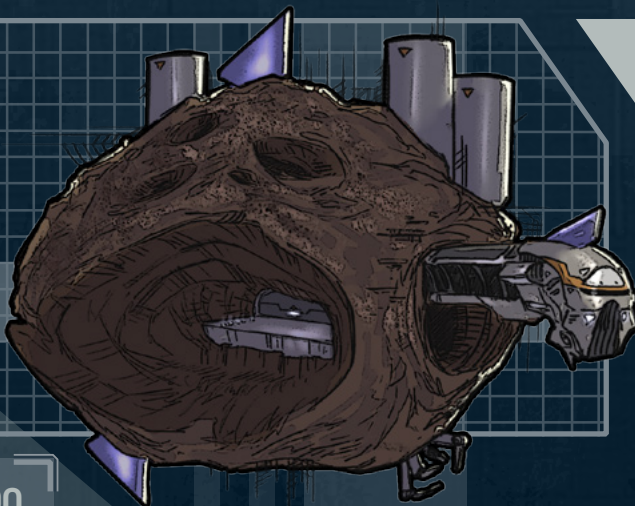
CONSTRUCTION
DECK

4

SENSORS

40

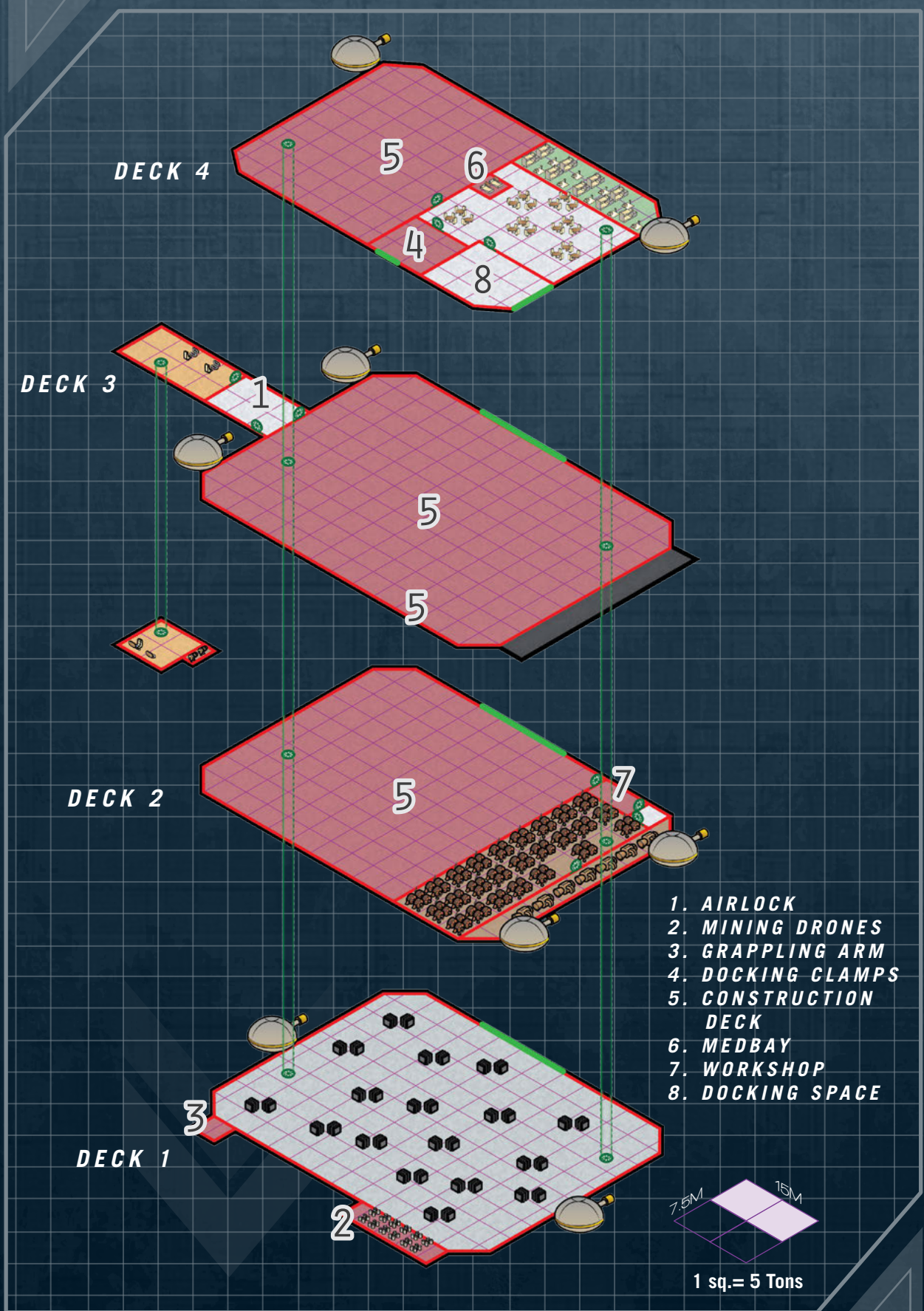
WEAPONS



1400

HULL POINTS

Hollowed out from asteroids, these construction ships are not an unusual sight in Serendip Belt. They work within the belts of the system, hunting suitable asteroids for spacecraft construction, hollowing them out and installing basic components. Capable of tackling anything from a ship's boat to a small warship (or even another construction ship), a construction ship can stay on station for extended missions, sending a constant stream of basic hulls to shipyards for final fitting, carrying large hulls back themselves with an oversized docking clamp or even building smaller vessels from start to finish within their own construction deck.



DECK 4

DECK 3

DECK 2

DECK 1

- 1. AIRLOCK
- 2. MINING DRONES
- 3. GRAPPLING ARM
- 4. DOCKING CLAMPS
- 5. CONSTRUCTION DECK
- 6. MEDBAY
- 7. WORKSHOP
- 8. DOCKING SPACE



1 sq. = 5 Tons

resentment when other regional powers forced Serendip Belt to relinquish its territories. Serendips now openly talk of regaining their colonies.

Social and Political

The population of Serendip Belt is the most dispersed in the Islands. Not only are habitats scattered throughout the main belt but the system's smaller belts are also extensively populated. Colonies exist among asteroid clusters at the Trojan points of the system's gas giants, on far distant planetoids in the system's Kupier belt and the few rocky planets and larger number of moons in the system.

The greatest population density is still in the main belt, with several large planetoids forming a central cluster. The seat of government is aboard the old colony ship *C-Jammer*, now long settled into a stable orbit in the depths of the main belt. The population of *C-Jammer* is low, only about 100,000 people and most are government employees or workers in support industries.

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

The ruling elite are those who control technological functions such as power generation and life-support. The route to power is, in most cases, one of study and field work. After a period as apprentice engineer in a critical field, the aspirant must make a name for himself as an engineer or scientist. From there, he will move into management and win promotion by overseeing successful projects. One who advances far enough up the ladder eventually becomes a technocrat, one of society's leaders.

In the smaller communities, the technocrats control a variety of technical functions – life support, hydroponic farming support, power generation, light engineering and any heavy industry that exists. Whatever their personal specialist area, the technocrats must learn other fields and are in many ways closer to political leaders found elsewhere than those they rule.

The Technocratic Council of each city appoints an executive body to implement its decisions, consisting of lawyers, social advocates, medical personnel and military advisors who carry out the policies of the Council through a corps of bureaucrats and labourers. Each Council answers to the government of Serendip Belt, comprising the most senior technocrats in each

area and advised by social, military, legal and political experts. The government, known as the Supreme Technocratic Council, has its own executive board, headed by an appointed president.

The President's role is to execute the directives of the government rather than lead it but he still wields considerable power as the head of the executive board. The role is well-respected and not normally held by a senior technocrat. Outsiders often assume the president of Serendip Belt is in overall charge and are amazed at the level of hands-on leadership.

The colony at Gloire is a smaller version of Serendip Belt. A few outsystem installations exist but for the most part the population is concentrated on Gloire itself. Other than a large city serving as the capital, settlements are modest sized towns surrounded by extensive agricultural lands. Gloire boasts a good Class C starport but use of it by foreign ships is discouraged.

Standards of living are quite high; Gloire is more developed than the colonies of most other powers in the region, with an overall TL9. Distribution of technology is quite even, with few backwater or undeveloped areas.

Economic and Industrial

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

Space transport is of vital importance to Serendip Belt, as almost everything must be moved from one asteroid habitat to another. Sublight transport is common, although jump-capable craft are becoming more prevalent on lengthy runs to distant outposts. Most Serendip ships are constructed from asteroids, with conventional shuttles used for cargo transfer.

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

Serendip Belt engineering is technologically advanced but components are almost always overbuilt, with failsafes and backups to prevent catastrophic failure, a trait important to a civilisation dwelling in space.

Military

Serendip Belt maintains an impressive fleet of warships, almost all of which are buffered planetoid in construction, making them very hard to kill. For local defence, there is a mix of planetoid-hull warships and concealed fortress asteroids from which gunboats and fighters are deployed. In addition, many in-system transport craft have the capability to be armed, allowing them to be brought to combat readiness in a matter of hours or days.

The defensive plan is to present an invader with a system full of rocks, some of which move and shoot. Scattered among the uninhabited asteroids are automated missile launchers which, once active, attack any vessel not transmitting the correct identification codes. The attacker's problem is further complicated by dummy emitters on many asteroids, mimicking electronic emissions of defence installations, mining settlements and habitats, causing an invader to waste time and ammunition attacking harmless rocks.

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

Serendip Belt maintains a significant force of space-capable infantry, plus a security force for combat within asteroid habitats. The bulk of its conventional ground forces are based on Gloire and conduct training for planetary combat in remote areas. This force has been gradually expanded for many years and now represents a very respectable military capability.

Other Notes

There is open discussion of reclaiming one or more of the 'stolen' colonies, with Topas and Berlichingen as likely candidates. A rather blatant economic programme has been put in place, dumping Serendip goods into the markets of Topas and Berlichingen in the hope of creating dependence.

Rather more ambiguous is a project which has been going on for over a century. Asteroid-hulled vessels, possibly colony ships, have departed Serendip Belt at long intervals. Most head to spinward, but once past Gloire there is nothing but empty space for many parsecs.

These craft were constructed after the acquisition of jump technology but do not use it. Instead, they proceed through a complex series of acceleration periods and

course changes which make them hard to track. As a result, these ships vanish from the sensors of foreign powers once they are a light-year or so from Serendip Belt. Their final destinations are unknown.

NEUBAYERN

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

Neubayern controls the Schlesien Belt in addition to the home system. However, although it claims to be a two-system power, Neubayern is really a single-system polity with a minor possession. The settlement at Schlesien Belt is very small, nothing more than a remote industrial asset.

Social and Political

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

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

Neubayerners are taught that the rights and privileges they enjoy exist only because their society upholds them and ensures, through law and custom, that they are extended to all citizens. Thus, it is the responsibility of each citizen to uphold and enforce the rights of others, out of self-interest if nothing else. Outsiders put labels on this system such as socialist fascism or a police state with enforced liberalism. Neubayerners just refer to their system as 'working very well, thank you'.

Neubayern has a large body of law and enforcement is surprisingly harsh. Those who reject the society that upholds their rights are considered to have also rejected their own rights. The state is not deliberately cruel to criminals but arrest procedures are vigorous, to put it mildly, although the average Naubayerner feels reassured at seeing a truckload of paramilitary police smash someone's door in and deliver a beating as they cart him off – it means the police are doing their job.

NEUBAYERN MOBILE BASE

XX

TL12		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	125,000 tons, Buffered Planetoid, Reinforced	-	750
Armour	Buffered Planetoid, Armour 4	-	-
	Crystaliron, Armour 8	12500	300
M-Drive	Thrust 1	1250	1250
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 41,010	2734	2734
Fuel Tanks	16 weeks of operation, plus Small Craft	1407	-
Bridge	Holographic controls	60	781.25
	Sensor Stations x 4	4	2
Computer	Core/70	-	80
Sensors	Improved, Distributed Arrays	9	12.9
	Improved Signal Processing	1	4
	Shallow Penetration Suite	10	5
Weapons	Triple Turrets (beam lasers) x 120	120	300
	Large Missile Bays x 30	15000	3750
	Large Torpedo Bays x 15	7500	450
Ammunition	Missile Storage (81,000 missiles)	6750	-
	Torpedo Storage (11,250 torpedoes)	3750	-
Screens	Nuclear Dampers x 10	100	100
Systems	Full Hangar	16260	3252
	Light Fighters x 250	-	2250
	Heavy Fighters x 100	-	4273
	Troop Transports x 2	-	81.88
	Shuttles x 4	-	60.668
	Modular Cutters x 3	-	30.861
	Launch Tubes (50 tons) x 4	2000	1000
	Solar Panels	274	27.4
	Armoury	80	20
	Briefing Room x 4	16	2
	Gaming Space	30	0.18
	Medical Bay	16	8
	Training Facilities	60	12
Workshop	30	4.5	
Staterooms	Standard x 600	2400	300
	High x 4	24	3.2
	Brig	8	0.5
Software	Manoeuvre/0	-	-
	Library	-	-
	Advanced Fire Control/2	-	15
	Battle System/2	-	24
	Electronic Warfare/1	-	15
	Launch Solution/3	-	16
Common Areas		2250	225
Cargo		6507	-

TOTAL: MCR 22132.839



137,500
HULL POINTS

CREW

CAPTAIN, PILOT X3, ASTROGATOR, ENGINEER
X1172, MAINTENACE X400, MEDIC X33,
GUNNER X1,724, ADMINISTRATOR X200,
OFFICER X353

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST
Mcr 18.444/month

• • • • •
PURCHASE COST
Mcr 22132.839

POWER REQUIREMENTS

12500

MANOEUVRE
DRIVE

25000

BASIC SHIP
SYSTEMS

3434

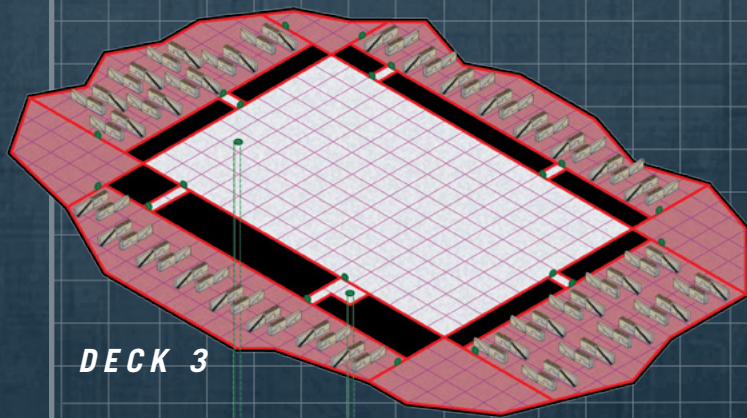
WEAPONS

10

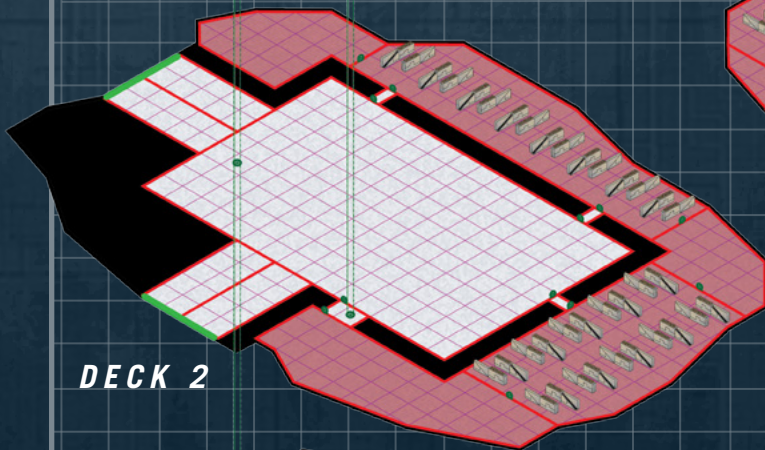
SENSORS

Intended to be permanently deployed in the outsystem of Neubayern, the construction of a mobile base represents a huge investment in resources but can be considered indestructible. Several mobile bases are already on patrol in the furthest reaches of the system and another is currently being built. Designed to absorb incoming fire while launching small craft and ordnance, a mobile base is a real bruiser and an attacker is usually better off avoiding them altogether.

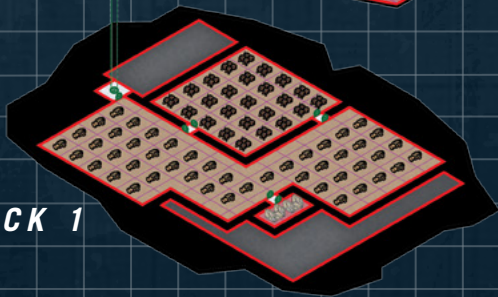




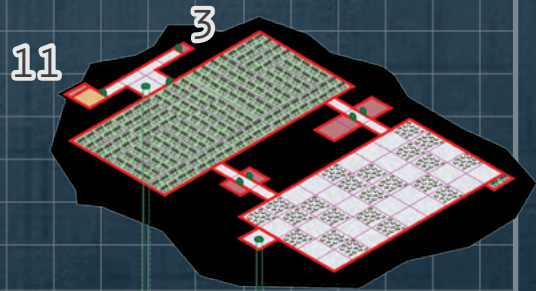
DECK 3



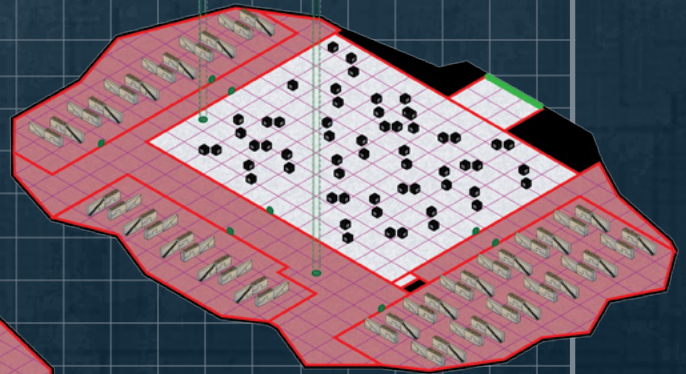
DECK 2



DECK 1



DECK 5



DECK 4

1. FULL HANGER
2. LAUNCH TUBES
3. MEDBAYS
4. ARMOURY
5. TRAINING FACILITIES
6. WORKSHOP
7. BRIEFING ROOMS
8. GAMING SPACE
9. MISSILE BAYS
10. TORPEDO BAYS
11. BRIDGE & SENSORS
12. AMMUNITION STORAGE

5



1 sq.= 50 Tons

High-security penal institutions are harsh enough that sentient rights groups in the Imperium would be horrified but they are balanced by an earnest attempt at rehabilitation. Again, the average Naubayerner is quite happy with this – criminals damage society, harming everyone by their actions and have turned their back on the body that grants them their basic rights. They have had fair warning.

The settlement pattern on Neubayern is typical, with very large cities forming a central region around the site of the original landings, and smaller cities scattered across the globe. Cities are subdivided into what amounts to villages, each having a strong community spirit and its own leaders who answer to the city government. This in turn sends representatives to the world government at the capital.

Economic and Industrial

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

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

The only major offworld installation (other than orbital forts) is a large research station located on a dwarf planet at the very outer edge of the Neubayern system. The nature of research is not disclosed but it seems likely that jump drives and associated technologies are at least part of the station's remit.

Neubayern maintains a sizable fleet of merchant vessels though less than most powers. Its main trading partners are Sansterre and New Home though accusations have been made that Neubayern's trade ships, when they do call, spend more time intelligence-gathering than trading.

Military

Neubayern has a small standing military primarily equipped for orbital and aerospace defence and to dislodge any toehold an enemy might obtain on the

homeworld. To this end, its forces deploy many ground-based interceptors and strike aircraft, backed up by dual-role aerospace fighters carried aboard orbital forts. The fighters can engage targets in close orbit or dive down into the atmosphere to strike at incursions.

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

For outsystem patrol, Neubayern uses another class of planetoid-based ships, the mobile bases. These are equipped with large numbers of small craft and never return to the homeworld, spending their entire career on patrol in the planetoid belts. The mobile bases are more like slow-moving fortresses than true warships.

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

Other Notes

There are persistent rumours that Neubayern has built two special projects, both planetoid-hulled vessels derived from the mobile base concept. The first has been given the fanciful name of the Devourer, a huge asteroid ship that contains an entire industrial city, with hordes of mining ships carried aboard.

If it exists, the Devourer could jump into a system with asteroid belts and conceal itself among them, using locally mined resources to build whatever seemed necessary; perhaps a horde of robotic combat ships or automated missile launchers seeded among planetoids to attack foreign vessels. Alternatively, the Devourer could strip-mine an asteroid field, denying its resources to the rightful owners, although this would take many, many years.

The other claimed special project is somewhat less far-fetched but equally unlikely. It has been claimed that Neubayern is building a super-capital ship out of a huge asteroid (or small moon, in some versions of the rumour, which also tend to include ideas of a massive spinal weapon). This jump-capable super-vessel would be indestructible due to its great mass and hugely well-armed.

NEW HOME

'Humanity's new homeworld.'

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

New Home also boasts the highest Tech Level in the Islands and exports considerable amounts of consumer goods for sale on other worlds; its culture exerts an influence far beyond its system. Traders and corporations tend to gravitate to New Home, treating the world as the de facto capital of the Islands cluster, the centre of local politics.

Social and Political

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

The settlement pattern of New Home is one of large cities surrounded by smaller settlements in a belt that includes agricultural lands and large areas of unspoiled countryside. New Home has several major downports rather than a single starport, so the location of the capital is not immediately apparent from a population distribution map.

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

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

Industrial and Economic

New Home's industrial output has always emphasised quality over quantity and augmented by a steady increase in technological capability evenly distributed with only a few backwater areas that have no access to a high-tech industrial centre. New Home exports considerable quantities of high-value goods to many destinations; exports far exceed imports, as New Home can always manufacture something equivalent or better than the goods its trading partners can offer. Most imports are therefore raw materials.

A large in-system commercial fleet exists, plying the lanes between the homeworld and outsystem colonies. Most ships on these runs are planetoid-hulled vessels supported by fleets of shuttles and cargo lighters. Some vessels have been on a given run for centuries, with occasional breaks for refits.

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

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

New Home does not, as a rule, export weapons, warships or military technologies on the open market but has at times entered into treaties that allow partners to buy advanced weapon systems; this is a strong political lever used by the government of New Home to obtain alliances and friendly relations.

Military

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

Ground forces make extensive use of semi-autonomous weapons and systems drones, grav-mobile platforms used for reconnaissance and combat missions in

support of human ground troops. They are not warbots, and tend to resemble small vehicles rather than humanoid robots. Nor are they fully autonomous; a remote operator remains in the loop to override the drone's programming. Most of the time, however, the drone follows a set of commands and procedures that cover most battlefield occurrences.

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

Infantry are, for the most part, equipped with combat armour. Even vehicle crews are protected by light armoured coveralls, which fix to sealed helmets and gloves, allowing them to operate in hostile environments using standard equipment.

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

All capital ships use constructed hulls rather than planetoids, mainly for reasons of efficiency when considering fuel tankage. Armoured planetoids are used for home defence, however, as jump fuel is not a consideration for such vessels.

Other Notes

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

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

Although New Home sees itself as the centre of the Islands, a wider world-view is gradually emerging. New Home goods are traded in the Imperium on both sides of the Great Rift and ships out of New Home are beginning to be sighted outside Reft.

AMONDIAGE

'First among equals.'

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

Amondiage is heavily involved in local politics, and enjoys considerable status as one of the first three colonies established in the cluster. Enjoying technological parity with most of the other major powers, Amondiage maintains its status as a major player in industrial and military terms by importing large quantities of raw materials. These come largely from Acadie and offworld trade.

Social and Political

Amondiage is a dictatorship and has been for its entire history. The director, as the world's ruler is termed, can trace lineage back to the first colony director who oversaw the original landings. This lineage is not hereditary as such, although it has passed from parent to child at times. More commonly, the director chooses a worthy successor who has distinguished themselves in military, commercial, industrial or political endeavours.

The director is advised by a council of four individuals, representing the military, commercial and industrial sectors as well as general populace. A fifth advisor, representing spiritual and religious matters, has also been appointed at times.

Amondiage is an arid world and settlements were constructed where abundant water was available. Relatively few suitable locations existed, so huge cities have grown up separated by wilderness. Even today, much of the planet is sparsely inhabited.

For the most part, the populace dwell in comfortable, high-technology arcologies, insulated from their harsh world by the efforts of a corps of environmental engineers. The environmental and recycling technologies of these arcologies were originally derived from the systems used aboard the sublight colony ships. They are extremely robust and overbuilt to a considerable

degree. Failures are so rare that they make headlines and provoke indignance among the populace, who tend to forget that the systems making their lives comfortable are even there at all.

The arcologies are linked by high-speed maglev rail systems that run in straight lines over desert and under mountains. Grav transport is available for the wealthy or those on government business but most citizens do not venture out of their home arcology and rely on excellent public transportation.

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

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

The colonists on Acadie are essentially offered a choice between liberal laws and cut-price consumer goods or periods of martial law and hardball enforcement. Either way, they are still vassals working to the good of Amondiage.

Economic and Industrial

Materials are recycled as far as possible and industrial processes are extremely efficient. Products are robust and often overbuilt, as Amondiage engineers believe it is better to pay a high initial cost for equipment that will last a long time than replace it or waste resources on frequent overhauls.

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

Amondiage depends more on trade for its basic requirements than most powers. Where possible, deals heavily biased in favour of Amondiage are brokered with lesser worlds. Sometimes these deals include a provision for the setup of mining or resource-extraction

installations by Amondiage-based companies. Where a heavily one-sided arrangement is not possible, Amondiage tries to bias the deal by insisting on providing shipping assets and building the costs into the deal; Amondiage maintains a very respectable trade fleet, using several efficient designs to transport different types of cargo. Non-perishable items such as minerals are often left at the point of sale until a specialist ship can make the pick-up.

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

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

Military

The military forces of Amondiage are a political instrument. While combat capability is important, the military can create political and even economic advantages as well. Thus, all units are smartly turned out, with impressive uniforms and equipment.

The armed forces of Amondiage, especially the navy, spend much of their time on flag-showing duties and the fleet contains a large complement of sloops and corvettes for this purpose. These small vessels undertake cruises around the Loop, calling at ports along the way to make sure everyone knows that Amondiage still has a navy.

Larger vessels follow a pattern; frigates for commerce protection plus large planetoid-hulled capital ships for warfighting, supported by a range of cruisers and destroyers. Space is left in most designs to allow upgrades during the lifetime of the vessel.

Ground forces are similarly smart and well turned out, with embassy guards being renowned for their gorgeous uniforms and immaculate drills. Troop types are conventional, with grav-mobile infantry brigades being the standard combat formation. These incorporate artillery and armoured support, grouped into ad-hoc divisions

PATROL FRIGATE

AMITY CLASS

TL12		TONS	COST (MCR)
Hull	1,200 tons, Standard	-	60
Armour	Crystaliron, Armour 3	45	9
M-Drive	Thrust 4	48	96
J-Drive	Jump 2	65	97.5
Power Plant	Fusion (TL12), Power 795	53	53
Fuel Tanks	J-2 (twice), 8 weeks of operation, plus Launches	493	-
Bridge	Holographic controls	40	7.5
Computer	Computer/10	-	0.16
Sensors	Improved	3	4.3
Weapons	Triple Turrets (beam lasers) x 4	4	10
	Triple Turrets (missile racks) x 4	4	13
	Triple Turrets (sandcasters) x 2	2	3.5
Ammunition	Missile Storage (120 missiles)	10	-
	Sand Barrel Storage (160 canisters)	8	-
Systems	Fuel Processor (240 tons/day)	12	0.6
	Fuel Scoops	-	1
	Briefing Room	4	0.5
	Gaming Space	7.5	0.045
	Library	4	4
	Medical Bay	4	2
	Docking Space (20 tons) x 2	44	11
	Launches x 2	-	4.734
Staterooms	Standard x 25	100	12.5
	High	6	0.8
Software	Manoeuvre/0	-	-
	Jump Control/2	-	0.2
	Library	-	-
	Virtual Crew/0	-	1
	Fire Control/1	-	2
	Anti-Hijack/1	-	6
Common Areas		180	18
Cargo		63	-

TOTAL: MCR 408.069

CREW

CAPTAIN, PILOT,
ASTROGATOR,
ADMINISTRATOR,
MEDIC, OFFICERS X 2,
ENGINEERS X 4,
MAINTENANCE X 2,
STEWARD,
GUNNERS X 10

RUNNING COSTS

MAINTENANCE COST

MCR 34006/month

•••••

PURCHASE COST

MCR 408.069

POWER REQUIREMENTS

240

BASIC SHIP SYSTEMS

480

MANOEUVRE DRIVE

240

JUMP DRIVE

4

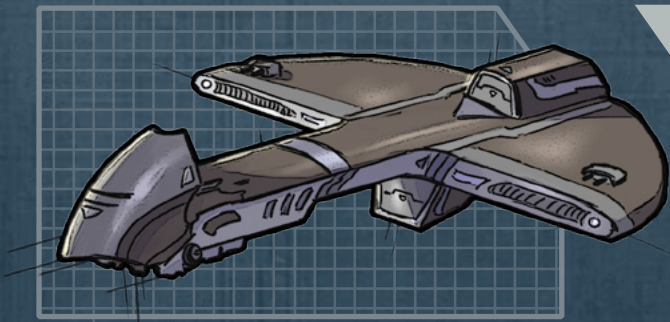
SENSORS

58

WEAPONS

12

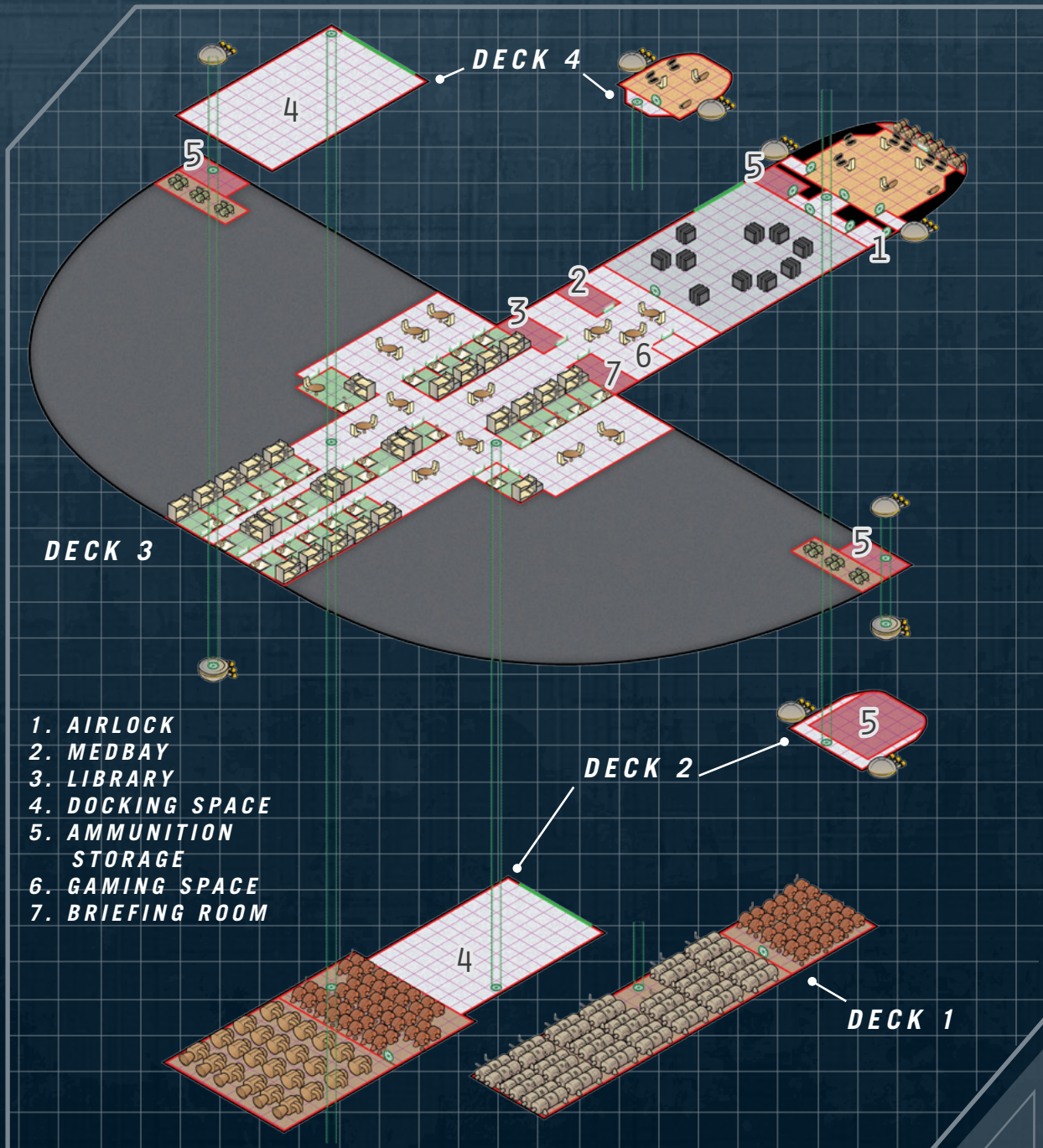
FUEL
PROCESSOR



480

HULL POINTS

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



with additional support as and when needed. Higher formations are routinely put together for exercises then broken up again, fostering a doctrine of flexibility.

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

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

Other Notes

Amondiage is openly expansionistic and the government seeks excuses to deploy forces to assist in any disaster on a nearby world and offers generous assistance packages to communities on Acadie, Achille, St. Genevieve and St. Denis. As some of these worlds are possessions of other powers, this can lead to tension.

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

SANSTERRE

'A haven of civilisation and liberal values.'

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

Lying on the Loop, Sansterre receives regular trade ships and has a sizable fleet of its own. However, it is often treated as second-class by Neubayern and particularly

Amondiage, as Sansterre was a second wave colony rather than one of the initial worlds chosen as the new cradle of humanity.

Sansterre owns St. Denis as a colony, peacefully acquired by means of economic domination many years ago and it is fully integrated into the Sansterre political system, with the populace having full voting rights and representation. However, St. Denis is kept dependent on Sansterre for high-tech items. Local industry is limited to TL7, with tech-enhancement projects proceeding at a very slow pace. There is some TL12 industry on St. Denis but this is owned and operated by firms based on Sansterre.

Social and Political

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

Each city (on St. Denis this includes outlying settlements) has an elected government, which sends representatives to the World Parliament; St Denis is so culturally dominated by Sansterre that its people think of themselves as Sansterrans who happen to dwell on St Denis.

Both worlds have liberal laws, other than some strict safety legislation on Sansterre. Most crimes carry civil penalties, mainly along the lines of supervised (and unpaid) work for the good of society, although persistent and dangerous offenders are incarcerated in custom-built penal institutions located on remote asteroids. Most of penal asteroids are also mining colonies, with inmates required to earn markers to pay for air, water, food and power. Those who do not or cannot are not deprived but time served against a sentence is only counted if the inmate paid his way. Thus, the only way to be released from prison is to work for it.

Sansterre has, at times, imported inmates for its prisons, offering other powers the chance to send dangerous criminals or annoying dissidents to its penal institutions in return for straight payment or as part of a trade deal.

Travellers may find it interesting that a nation that proclaims itself as a beacon for civilisation and liberalism operates a gulag-for-hire system. Sansterre justifies itself as only very dangerous or persistent

offenders are sent to asteroids and foreign prisoners-for-hire are offered extensive rehabilitation and even the chance to earn citizenship.

Economic and Industrial

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

Minerals come from asteroid mining – it is cheaper and easier to coast a block of semi-refined ore across the system and into a capture orbit than raising it up the planet's gravity well – and are processed, refined and utilised in large industrial orbital stations. One of the main exports of Sansterre's orbital shipyards is a line of jump-capable mining ships. These are sold to clients across the Islands cluster.

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

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

Military

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

In keeping with this strategic concept, major warships are generally not jump-capable and those deployed at St. Denis were built there using mobile construction vessels and local asteroids. These powerful craft are normally kept close to the main worlds, making a successful assault by an invader virtually impossible.

A handful of jump-capable major warships and cruisers are maintained but for the most part Sansterre's striking capability rests with its destroyer squadrons, four-ship groups, with three identical vessels and a fourth destroyer leader of slightly increased displacement

and equivalent performance, which carries enhanced command facilities as well as electronic warfare systems to support the whole squadron.

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

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

Other Notes

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

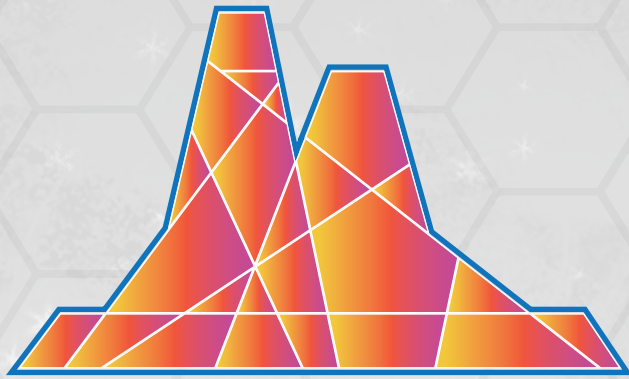
The extent of this infiltration is unknown but it seems likely that far more agents are in place on nearby worlds than in distant star systems. The agents generally supply information but in some active attempts have been made to stir disaffection or create revolutionary organisations.

Economic conquest is an overt aim of Sansterre's trade sector. Much is made of the way St. Denis was brought under Sansterre's control and is now a happy and prosperous place. This has increased tension with some powers but Sansterre claims that business is business and those who can compete are welcome to try.

ISLANDBRIDGE TRADING CORPORATION (ITC)

'The largest commercial conglomerate in the Islands subsectors.'

The Islandbridge Trading Corporation (ITC) is a stateless commercial organisation with offices and facilities on several worlds. Its registered headquarters are on



ITC

ISLANDBRIDGE TRADING CORPORATION

Elysee, a TL9 world with a Class B starport and liberal government that imposes few restrictions on trading operations. Access is easy to the shipping lanes of both the Loop and the Crescent and, above all, Elysee is neutral. ITC can therefore operate as its directors think best without political interference.

Political and Social

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

Within the company enclaves, living standards are high, even for low-grade workers, and social status is very much in evidence from an individual's quarters or housing and high-technology consumer goods are readily available. There are few rules against selling company-provided goods to non-company locals; after all, ITC is a trade organisation and accepts that an individual can do whatever he likes with his property, including making a profit by selling it. However, the laws of supply and demand make it impossible to maintain high-volume sales – if a large market exists, it will be sewn up by a branch of the company.

The corporation is, in theory, politically neutral. It will deal with anyone who wants to buy or sell on terms the company finds acceptable and will accept a deal that

precludes trading with a rival if the price is right. Money and commercial advantage can buy ITC's favour for as long as the deal remains sweet. This is no secret; powers that try to influence ITC officials are often told they do not need to play politics with the corporation. All they need do is offer something the company wants.

Economic and Industrial

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

ITC has gradually absorbed several specialist firms over the years and is in position to begin pushing for a monopoly on certain services. For example, ITC runs all deep asteroid mining operations extracting lanthanum for jump drives in the Elysee, Besancon, Herzenslust and New Colchis systems. New Colchis finds it cheaper to buy from ITC than develop its own Lanthanum mining industry, despite it being risky to rely on outsiders to provide a vital resource.

This is a typical ITC ploy; offering a necessary resource at a price far lower than the cost of developing the skills and equipment to get it direct. By making life easy for its trading partners, ITC makes itself indispensable.

Merchant factors are maintained at most starports and many outsystem spaceports and ITC brokers will source materials or goods for a client, arrange shipping and generally oil the wheels of interstellar commerce. However, suspicion is growing that ITC is more powerful and influential than it appears. Its web of deals and contracts makes it virtually impossible to get rid of ITC brokers undercutting local merchants, without losing access to some vital service.

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

ITC factors have made good deals with Imperial traders and in some cases strategic partnerships have been created. For example, the Ling Standard Products quickly decided the Islands market for its equipment

was not worth major investment. Rather than creating a web of offices and trade facilities, LSP simply cut a deal to supply ITC's large trade base on New Colchis with goods at a price acceptable to both parties and left the details of selling LSP goods to ITC factors who knew the market.

ITC owns and operates a fleet of trade ships, mostly freighters capable of the usual two-jump-two operations, although specialist ships are in operation for the Esperanza and Serendip Belt runs. ITC freighters rarely sell cargo space to outsiders; they are tasked with supporting ITC trade operations rather than making money from commercial shipping.

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

Other Notes

ITC is involved in joint projects with various powers, all bound by confidentiality agreements. However, most major projects are undertaken on worlds not connected with the main Islands powers, including infrastructure construction and uplift programmes to help local industry achieve higher technological levels. The extent of ITC involvement on minor worlds is unknown, and ITC may have more fingers in more pies than anyone suspects.

THE UNIVERSAL SIBLINGHOOD OF DISUNITY (USD)

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

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

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

significance of what has just been handed to them. Ironically, the average Sibling thinks this is just as well.

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

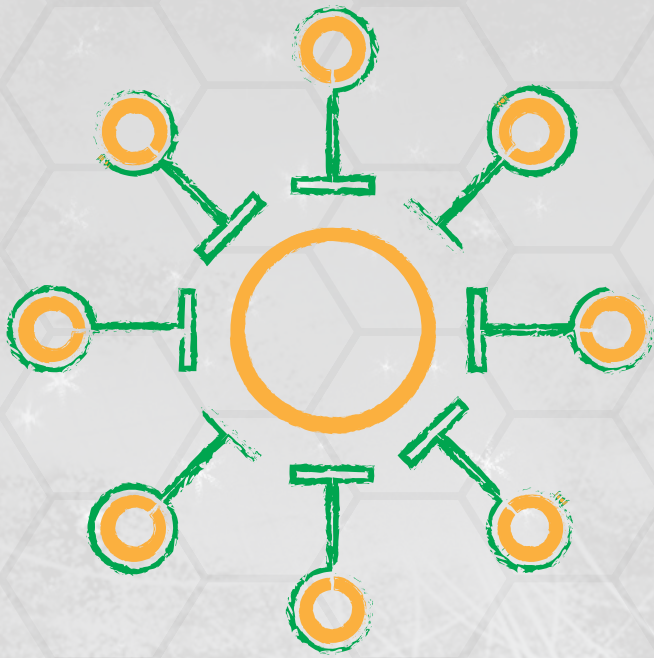
The USD preaches (if that is the right word) that everyone and everything is linked by a universal structure. Information passes along this structure, linking all the sentient beings in the universe. This is dangerous, say the Siblings, supporting their argument with a diatribe of badly mangled physics.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

According to real physics, energy tends to seek its lowest possible state, effectively spreading out evenly through the universe. The laws of thermodynamics state that energy tends to move from higher energy states to lower ones – so a hot cup of coffee gets colder as its energy (in the form of heat) is lost to cooler surroundings. Eventually all energy in the universe will reach an even state and with no uneven areas of energy there will be no interactions – literally, nothing at all will happen anywhere in the universe. This concept is known as the heat death; once it happens, the universe will exist forever but be inert and meaningless.

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

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

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



THE UNIVERSAL SIBLINGHOOD OF DISUNITY

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

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

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

Social and Political

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

Other Notes

There is no organisational structure to the USD but there are various charismatic leaders, each with their own unique style and following. There are others riding the coat-tails of the USD, including cranks who hate technology, anti-psionic groups and several organisations who oppose the growing Imperial presence in the Islands. The latter are happy to use the USD to garner support, citing the evils of fast information transfer by trans-rift courier and suggesting that Islanders are better off without informational pollution brought by Imperial ships. This has been successful on some worlds; anti-Imperial sentiment is spread with coffee-shop philosophy and suspicion towards telepaths.

THE THIRD IMPERIUM

While not originating in Reft, the Imperium significantly affects all aspects of life and commerce in the sector, having territories on both sides of the Great Rift. The region on the far side of the Great Rift (to coreward and spinward of the Islands subsectors) is generally referred to as lying 'behind the claw' while the region on the other side of the Rift (to trailing and rimward) is said to be 'beneath the claw'.

Beneath The Claw

To trailing and rimward lie some of the core sectors of the Imperium, such as Gushemege and Ilelish, an area with a long history of habitation by humans and other sentients. It was part of the Vilani Imperium, then the Rule of Man. The worlds of this region struggled through the Long Night and were eventually incorporated into the Third Imperium.

For the past millennium or so, the worlds of these sectors have been ruled by the Imperium. Each region has its own unique culture but almost all worlds have tended to move towards an Imperial-standard culture. The folk of this region think of themselves as living on the Imperial frontier, with the huge emptiness of the Great Rift as the outer border of their world, vaguely aware of outworlders in the Great Rift, and then a backwater region of the Imperium beyond that.

The Imperium maintains a full sector fleet in each sector bordering the Great Rift, except for Verge and Reft. The battleships and cruisers of these fleets are not expected to deal with a trans-rift invasion, instead functioning as a strategic reserve for other regions and putting down any rebellions that erupt.

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

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

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

There are no Rift cruisers based in this end of Reft, although one may occasionally be sent from Verge as a refuelling station makes transit into the Islands possible for a jump-4 vessel. This is fleet mobility standard for the Imperial Navy, so almost any ship can be used for an Islands cruise.

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

Imperial Navy vessels from beneath the claw generally operate in the Old Islands subsector, returning home after a lengthy cruise. Some proceed through the New Islands to the naval base at Zuflucht and back again after a stopover but this is not usual. More commonly, ships out of bases in the rimward-trailing end of Reft make a tour of worlds in the Old Islands then transit back home. Their main areas of responsibility are the protection of the transit route through to Amondiaage and flag-showing in the surrounding systems.

Behind the Claw

The region of the Third Imperium lying behind the claw is culturally and politically very different from those nearer the Imperial core. It is linked to the central sectors of the Imperium by a long transit via Deneb and Corridor, or via the trans-rift route. This is a distant fringe of the Imperium and has been part of it for only a short time. Local cultures are more varied than within the old-Imperium regions and the area is less stable. Disputes between worlds are not uncommon.

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

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

Thus, while the rimward-trailing systems of Reft fall under the auspices of the Verge sector fleet, and naval ships from that end of the sector do visit the Islands, the main responsibility for Imperial forces in the Islands (and the spinward-coreward part of the sector) lies with Reft Sector Command. Most Imperial Navy ships encountered in the Old Islands, and almost all in the New Islands, are based out of Zuflucht and assigned to Reft Sector Command rather than the Verge sector fleet. The base is a modest affair, capable of supporting only a handful of ships. At any given time, it will usually have 3-6 vessels assigned to it. Usually this will be one or two destroyers (usually escort destroyers but sometimes a larger and more powerful fleet destroyer), while others are usually escorts in the 400-1,000 ton range. Fleet auxiliaries and couriers also pass through, either with patrol ships or on solo missions.

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

The Imperial Interstellar Scout Service

The Imperial Interstellar Scout Service (IISS) has more of a presence in Reft than the navy, as might be expected. Although naval couriers make the trans-rift run when necessary, the Scout Service maintains a regular courier link across the Great Rift. Using jump-4 ships and making only short stopovers at each port, the IISS can typically get a small cargo and large amount of information from one side of the Great Rift to the other in 10 weeks. From there, whatever has been brought across is fed into the express boat routes and onward to its final destination. The trans-rift vessels undergo maintenance and are then sent back, usually with a different crew. The crew of one courier normally take the next one back, while the crew of that vessel enjoy a break from what has become one of the most unpopular duties of the IISS Communications branch.

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

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

The IISS also conducts long-range missions into the Great Rift from time to time. Even for a high-jump vessel, reaching many deep-Rift systems and phenomena requires support from tankers or prepositioned refuelling caches located in deep space. Large scout cruisers are normally used for these missions, which can be many months in duration.

The Scout Service also carries out its normal duties – communications, exploration and survey – within Imperial territory along the edge of the Great Rift, the web of x-boats and their support tenders, plus couriers and packet boats, extending right to its edge.

Megacorporations

Imperial megacorporations go where the money is and there is precious little to be had in the Islands cluster and the portion of Reft lying behind the claw. Frontier regions offer opportunities for smaller business groups to expand, although not without some risk, precisely because the megacorporations have a small presence. The region beneath the claw is part of the Imperial core territories,

so most megacorporations have a strong presence there. Some have interests in the rest of the sector and some use the trans-Islands route to speed communications with their branches in the Spinward Marches and Deneb.

Imperial megacorporations often use the suffix LIC after their name, which stands for Limited-liability Imperial Charter. Some older (or more pretentious) corporations use archaic terms, many derived from Terran usage.

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

As the youngest of the Imperial megacorporations, Delgado is active in seeking new markets and has made an effort to open up the Islands and the far part of Reft. Delgado Shipping, a subsidiary that incidentally is one of the worst offenders in terms of unfair employment practice, operates a trans-rift shipping service and routinely sends trade vessels into the Islands.

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

General Products has found a market niche in the Islands, notably supplying what would be basic items on a TL12-13 world in the Imperium but which are advanced compared to what is made in the Islands. TL12-13 items are built in General's factories in the region beneath the claw and shipped in bulk into the Islands, mainly to New Colchis from where they are sold. Even with shipping costs, General can make a good profit on these items. Scarcity makes it possible to charge high prices for items sourced quite cheaply in the Imperium. This creates friction with New Home, which is the only source of TL13 equipment within the Islands. Amondiage is also opposed to this trade, as it has a deal with Ling Standard Products and does not like the competition.

This has led to General Products-registered vessels being harassed as they passed through Amondiage, a practice that stopped quickly when an Imperial Navy task force arrived in system. The point was made bluntly but without violence; General Products is an Imperial

megacorporation and its ships have the protection of the Imperial Navy. Overt harassment of any Imperial-registered ship will not be tolerated. Since then, opposition has taken a more low-key form.

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

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

Instellarms, LIC: Instellarms is primarily a military hardware manufacturer and has found a ready market in the rapidly-militarising Islands powers. Although

Imperial export regulations forbid the sale of top-end hardware to non-member worlds, Instellarms has discovered that TL13 equipment, otherwise obtainable other than from New Home, is popular. However, there is a limit to what the Islanders can afford, so Instellarms has found itself shipping small amounts of gear to one power, then another, as each tries to maintain parity without overspending.

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

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

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

LING

S T A N D A R D P R O D U C T S LIC